

PROCEEDINGS OF THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE LAUNCH EVENT

Empowering Citizens through Data

**The Launch of the Philippine Local
Government Interactive Dataset**

8 November 2024 | 9:00 AM -12:00 Noon

UP CIDS Conference Hall Open Space (CHOS) (Face-to-face)

Compiled by Bonn Francis Mendoza



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
**CENTER FOR
INTEGRATIVE AND
DEVELOPMENT
STUDIES**



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cids.up.edu.ph

Telephone: (02) 8981-8500 loc. 4266 to 4268 / (02) 8426-0955

Email: cidspublications@up.edu.ph

Website: cids.up.edu.ph

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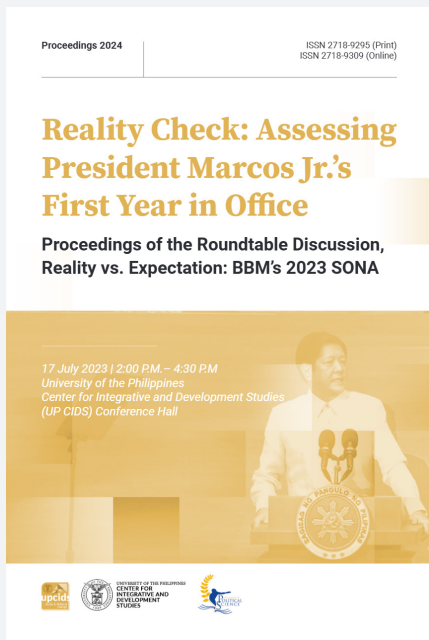
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About the Proceedings

The University of the Philippines Center of Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC) held an official launch and mini-forum of their website named “Philippine Local Government Interactive Dataset,” on November 8, 2024. This project aims to provide open access to a comprehensive dataset on local government elections and fiscal performance in the Philippines. The dataset spans from 1992, when the Local Government Code was enacted, to 2022, and is designed to empower citizens, researchers, policymakers, and media practitioners with data-driven insights to promote transparency, accountability, and informed decision-making.

The event featured a diverse panel of experts, including academics, researchers, and representatives from the Commission on Elections (COMELEC). The discussions revolved around the potential of the dataset to enhance citizen engagement, improve governance, and foster a more informed electorate, especially in preparation for the upcoming 2025 elections. The launch also highlighted the beta version of the interactive dashboard, which allows users to explore election and fiscal data through visualizations and downloadable datasets. The event was moderated by Prof. Nathaniel Candalaria of the UP Department of Political Science.

This event was documented by PSPC's Junior Project Assistant, Bonn Francis A. Mendoza.

Welcome Remarks

Dr. Rosalie Arcala Hall

Executive Director, UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies

Dr. Rosalie Arcala Hall, Executive Director of UP CIDS delivered the welcome remarks for the event. She highlighted the goal of CIDS in “generating knowledge that contributes to national development.” Dr. Hall further noted the event, organized by the Program on Social and Political Change, “exemplifies UP CIDS’ commitment to fostering insightful dialogue and impactful research.” The PSPC, as Dr. Hall described, “plays a crucial role in understanding the complexities of Philippine politics and societies.” She underscored the importance of the dataset the PSPC has created, especially in the context of elections. Concluding her remarks, Dr. Hall invited the participants to visit the UP CIDS website.

Presentations

Dr. Rogelio Alicor L. Panao

*Associate Professor, Department of Political Science
University of the Philippines Diliman*

Dr. Panao began with an overview of the PSPC, which he currently leads as convenor. The essence of PSPC functions, he explained, is to serve as a platform for understanding the modern complex social and political challenges confronting the Philippines.

Dr. Panao then proceeded to contextualize it within a theoretical framework commonly used in political science: the principal-agent model, with voters as the principals and elected officials as their agents. Through voting, principals delegate authority to agents, who are then tasked with implementing policies and producing observable outcomes. These outcomes, in turn, provide the basis for voters to evaluate the performance of their agents. If the agents perform well and align their actions with the interests of the principals, they are likely to be rewarded with reelection. Conversely, if the agents fail to meet expectations or act contrary to the voters' interests, they risk being punished by losing their positions in subsequent elections. This dynamic creates a system of accountability, where agents are incentivized to act in the best interests of their principals, knowing that their actions will be scrutinized in future electoral cycles.

Under this framework, voters reward leaders who have effectively fulfilled their duties and met public expectations, while punishing those who have failed to do so. This approach allows voters to rely on their firsthand experiences of governance to evaluate whether elected officials have delivered on their responsibilities. Dr. Panao gave an example of retrospective voting at play, citing the previous 2016 Philippine presidential elections. He stated that administrations prior to 2016 faced widespread criticism for their perceived shortcomings in addressing corruption. As a result, voters, based on their retrospective assessments, elected former President Rodrigo Duterte, whose

decisive victory underscored the significant influence of retrospective voting on electoral outcomes.

Dr. Panao then proceeded to elaborate further on retrospective voting in practice. Retrospective voting operates on the assumption that voters are rational individuals who make electoral decisions based on a logical framework and informed evaluations of candidates or political parties, weighing the costs and benefits of each option, and using past performance as a key criterion for their choices. He then clarified that in practice, voters often act irrationally, frequently resulting in suboptimal electoral choices due to a lack of information or incomplete knowledge about their options.

Considering retrospective voting in practice, Dr. Panao then presented a new question: what if voters had access to comprehensive, understandable, and user-friendly information about their candidates? He stated that access to data could significantly enhance informed decision-making by enabling voters to have access to data themselves. These, in turn, would foster greater transparency and accountability, as citizens are enabled to assess the performance of public officials more effectively and encourage public officials to act responsibly, knowing their actions are being scrutinized. Additionally, access to information would promote greater citizen engagement and participation in local governance by providing informed feedback and suggestions to local authorities, thereby contributing to more effective and responsive governance.

Dr. Panao introduced the dataset's rationale: The Philippine Local Government Interactive Dataset Project represents PSPC's significant contribution to advancing transparency and accessibility in governance. Its primary objective is to make electoral and fiscal data readily accessible to the public through an online platform, enabling citizens and stakeholders to independently examine the performance of their local incumbents without requiring expert analysis or interpretation. The project achieves this goal through two ways. First, it provides a user-friendly dashboard that allows users to conduct quick descriptive analyses of the data. Second, for advanced users such as researchers and experts, the platform offers downloadable datasets that can be analyzed using specialized software. He explained that the project mainly involved the compilation of electoral and fiscal data from multiple reliable sources, including the Bureau of Local Government Finance (BLGF) and COMELEC. The dataset was designed to include tools that will help users to

explore historical data and assess local government performance. Dr. Panao also emphasized that the data is entirely free and unrestricted, requiring no personal information from users. Whether one is an incumbent official or an ordinary citizen, the platform is accessible to all, offering opportunities to engage with and utilize the data. Dr. Panao then stated that the dataset spans from 1992, the year the Local Government Code was enacted, to the most recent elections in 2022.

Dr. Jan Robert Go¹

Associate Professor, UPD Department of Political Science

Dr. Go began by remarking that the dataset is a big contribution not just for those interested in local politics but specifically for local governance studies. By exploring the dataset, users could identify relevant information or even stumble upon unexpected insights that might inspire new research questions. The last point that he made regarding the dataset's use for policy assessment, Dr. Go emphasized that the dataset could be utilized to evaluate whether additional funding is needed for specific sectors or social services, or to determine if adjustments in policies, such as electoral reforms, are necessary. This highlights the broader direction that the project could take, particularly in supporting evidence-based policymaking.

Dr. Go then proceeded to address a question that was given for all panelists to answer: how does the increasing availability of election data impact the ability of ordinary citizens to engage in the political process and hold elected officials accountable? Dr. Go remarked on this critical question, that while it is a difficult question, it can be answered by looking at key concepts that the questions presents. The first, he pointed out, is the "increasing availability of data," which assumes that there is a need to expand the amount of data accessible to the public. As previously noted by Dr. Panao, voters require access to diverse sources of information to make informed choices. However, according to Dr. Go, voters often rely on a variety of information sources, which may include, misinformation, disinformation, or simply "fake news." While these sources may lack credibility, voters can nonetheless perceive them as legitimate. As argued by Dr. Go, through PSPC's dataset, providing accurate and legitimate information derived from official sources to citizens becomes crucial.

However, Dr. Go delved into the second concept, which is the challenge of the ordinary citizen. While making data openly available is commendable, Dr.

¹ Dr. Jan Robert Go is also the President of Philippine Political Science Association at the time of this event.

Go asked whether this type of data will be accessible and understandable to the general public. A critical issue lies in how the term "ordinary citizens" is operationalized: who exactly are the "ordinary citizens" being referred to? He then gave an example, if the target audience includes individuals such as street vendors or taho sellers, how would they be able to comprehend technical concepts like the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) when accessing the website? Dr. Go encapsulated his argument in this manner: while increasing the availability of data is a positive step, the challenge lies in ensuring that the data is digestible for a general audience. If the intent of the project is to empower ordinary citizens to make informed decisions and engage in political processes—whether through electoral participation or non-formal means such as attending barangay assemblies, participating in public consultations, or even engaging directly with local politicians—then the presentation of the data must be tailored to their level of understanding. Dr. Go acknowledged that the question of how the data can be effectively "packaged" to meet the needs of this audience is something that needs to be addressed. The visualizations and graphs presented earlier, such as those by Dr. Panao, are undoubtedly engaging and demonstrate the potential of the platform. However, a key challenge Dr. Go perceives is in ensuring that these tools are comprehensible for its intended audience without oversimplifying the information. As he understood it, the project's aim is to empower citizens to make rational, informed decisions and encourage them to participate in politics whether through electoral participation or other forms of non-formal participation. Examples of this participation can be seen by citizens attending their barangay assemblies, being active in public consultations, or as simple as talking to their local politicians. Hence, Dr. Go makes the connection between packaging the data for citizens to utilize it in evaluating public officials. Ideally, this would result in the election of officials who deliver on their promises and perform effectively, while holding underperforming officials accountable. If this assumption holds, the project seeks to encourage voters to act rationally by equipping them with the tools necessary to make intelligent choices—not only in the immediate electoral cycle but in future elections as well. This highlights the critical importance of ensuring that the data is not only accessible but also understandable and actionable for a wide audience.

Dr. Go also suggested that those in attendance reconfigure their conceptual assumptions underlying the project, particularly regarding the notion of rationality. What constitutes rationality in this context of informed-decision

making within political processes? Is rationality defined by the outcomes of decisions, or is it more about the process through which decisions are made? These are complex issues that require further reflection and analysis, as they shape the way the project's goals are framed and pursued.

To conclude his talk, he discussed the responsibility of having electoral and fiscal information, which entails making people more aware, not more educated, in order for them to use that information to engage in deeper political processes, potentially initiating movements to hold public officials accountable. That said, making information available is only the first step. The true impact of the project lies in ensuring that the information is digestible and accessible to its intended audience.

Prof. Cleve Arguelles²

Assistant Professional Lecturer, De La Salle University

For the first part of his talk, Prof. Arguelles laid out three assumptions. The first is that if voters have access to good information, it influences their decisions, which drives voting accountability. This assumption raises critical questions about the nature of the information provided: Should it be neutral or partisan and action-driven? The first assumption relates to how information and data should be used to influence political behavior.

He then presented the second assumption and asked: “what specific changes do we expect to occur when voters are provided with meaningful data?” One possibility is that voters may update their stances. Alternatively, according to Prof. Arguelles, access to information might alter the voting considerations of citizens by changing the salience of certain issues. Voters may begin to evaluate candidates based on their use of fiscal resources, now available to them, asking questions like, “How has the incumbent managed the local government’s budget compared to the opposition?” Prof. Arguelles also suggested that it is essential to consider the type of voter action that the project aims to influence. Are we seeking to encourage voters to prioritize different criteria when making decisions, or are we aiming to foster a deeper engagement with governance issues? These questions emphasize the intended effect of giving information publicly and how it shapes perception and response of citizens to pressing issues in their locality.

Finally, Prof. Arguelles highlighted the importance of examining the accountability mechanism in a democracy like the Philippines. According to him, while the standard democratic model assumes that access to information enhances accountability, the dynamics in a clientelistic system may differ significantly. Prof. Arguelles gave examples to elaborate this point: if voters in a barangay learn that their mayor has neglected education spending, and this leads to widespread dissatisfaction, how might the politician respond?

² Prof. Arguelles is also the Head of Research and Fellow of WR Numero.

Will they implement corrective measures to address the issue? Or will they resort to counterstrategies, such as disseminating counter-information or increasing vote-buying efforts to secure electoral support? These questions underscore the complexity of fostering accountability in a political system where clientelism remains deeply entrenched.

Prof. Arguelles then moved the second part of his talk, focusing on field experiments. In his field experiments, access to information can prompt voters to adopt more programmatic voting behaviors. This means that, rather than relying on traditional considerations such as family ties, social networks, or patronage, voters are encouraged to think critically about governance issues when provided with relevant data. However, a significant challenge arises in clientelistic democracies, such as the Philippines. In such contexts, incumbents often respond to the dissemination of information with countermeasures, including increased vote-buying. In some cases, incumbents intensified vote-buying efforts to neutralize the potential impact of the information. This underscores the dual role of vote brokers in clientelistic systems—not only as conduits of goods and services but also as conduits of information.

He then focused on the characteristics of the Filipino voter. He reflected on the cognitive demands placed on ordinary voters in the Philippine electoral system, particularly in a clientelistic, party-less democracy. An example of the overwhelming cognitive demand, he stated, is the sheer number of candidates voters must evaluate in a single election—ranging from the president and vice president to 12 senators, governors, vice governors, and local officials. He acknowledged that even well-informed individuals struggle to thoroughly evaluate all candidates, making it unreasonable to expect voters to make fully informed decisions under such conditions.

To address these challenges, Prof. Arguelles proposed introducing interventions to reduce the cognitive demands on voters. Against the notion of the Filipino voter who “does not think,” Prof. Arguelles opined that perhaps the complexity of the electoral system plays a role in increased cognitive demands. He first proposes to distribute accessible and relevant information, as emphasized by the previous speaker, Dr. Go. To Prof. Arguelles, PSPC must ensure that the dataset itself must be accurate, comprehensive, and regularly updated, while the responsibility of distributing it to ordinary citizens falls

on various stakeholders, including researchers, election watchdogs, and civil society organizations, representative of which were in attendance.

Prof. Arguelles suggested that different interventions could be employed depending on the context. For partisan organizations, particularly those in the local opposition, the data could be used in a more action-driven, partisan manner to challenge incumbents. On the other hand, nonpartisan groups, such as election watchdogs, could use the data to provide neutral information that encourages voters to adopt programmatic considerations. Prof. Arguelles also discussed how the media, in disseminating information to voters, responded to a common question raised by journalists: “Do voters even want this kind of information? We publish it on Facebook, but no one views it. They seem more interested in gossip.” This question, he argued, misses the fundamental purpose of providing information to voters. The goal is not merely to cater to existing demand, but to empower voters by helping them solve a problem—namely, the challenge of making informed voting decisions. According to him, the dissemination of electoral and governance data requires saturation and strategic framing to influence voting considerations effectively.

Prof. Arguelles then turned to the persistent challenge of clientelism, emphasizing the importance of building long-term relationships with voters. Unlike clientelistic politicians, who cultivate their networks over years or even decades, one-off interventions by researchers or civil society groups are unlikely to have a lasting impact. Information against clientelistic politicians can be quickly countered through vote-buying, counter-information campaigns, or even disinformation.

In closing, Prof. Arguelles noted a critical lesson. While information can help shape voter behavior, its impact depends its framing and delivery. Prof. Arguelles stressed the importance of being strategic in disseminating information, ensuring that it is both relevant and capable of “moving the needle” in terms of voter decision-making. This requires not only providing data but also listening to voters and understanding their concerns.

Prof. Ranjit Singh Rye³

*Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science
University of the Philippines Diliman*

Prof. Rye emphasized the significance of the dataset, describing it as a welcome development. He cited the example of OCTA Research, which often relies on the COMELEC website for election-related data. However, he noted that the COMELEC website is not always accessible, and having multiple platforms to provide such information would be beneficial. He also mentioned the Philippine Political Science Association (PPSA), which holds a wealth of datasets that could potentially be integrated into the platform.

Moving forward, Prof. Rye summarized the platform's utility in two key points: first, its role in providing accessible data, and second, its potential to enhance citizen participation. He argued that the more informed citizens are, the more empowered they become.

Speaking on how access to information shapes public behavior, Prof. Rye contrasted the Philippine context with that of the United States, where the former has numerous portals for election-related information, many of which are partisan, while the latter lacks centralized and accessible repositories for such data. He pointed out that while some sources, such as Rappler, provide election-related information, they do so in a way that is not systematic or comprehensive. The COMELEC website, while a repository of election data, is often described as unengaging and difficult for the average citizen to navigate. This, he argued, underscores the need for academics to systematize data and make it accessible to the public, not just for academic purposes but to educate the citizenry.

Prof. Rye expressed the importance of transparency and the role of the platform in enhancing information and awareness to improve participation. He also recognized the platform's potential, noting that while it is currently in its beta version, it already shows promise as a tool for accountability.

3 Prof. Rye is also the founder and current President of OCTA Research and Development, INC.

He highlighted the inclusion of fiscal and election data as a significant achievement and suggested that integrating additional datasets, such as those related to human development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), could further enhance its utility. He noted that such data, while not provided by governments, is often made available by civil society organizations and international bodies like the United Nations, even when not provided by governments.

Drawing a comparison to the American website RealClearPolitics, Prof. Rye described it as a partisan aggregator of complete election data but praised its model of centralizing and systematizing information. He suggested that CIDS could adopt a similar approach, serving as an aggregator of election-related data at the local level. Referencing Dr. Go and Prof. Arguelles' talk, Prof. Rye reiterated that systematizing and presenting the data in an easily-digestible manner, the platform could increase awareness and empower citizens to make informed decisions.

Prof. Rye also stated that beyond informing public debate, the platform has the potential to serve as a foundation for advocating reforms, whether in the realm of electoral processes or in promoting good governance. According to him, in the Philippine context, unlike in the United States, the field of election studies remains underdeveloped and lacks the systematization seen in other democracies. While some studies exist, particularly from the last five to ten years, they remain fragmented, failing to provide a cohesive framework. Prof. Rye noted that the persistent challenge in election studies has always been access to reliable and comprehensive data, and therefore this is precisely why the creation of the Philippine Local Government Interactive Dataset is a significant achievement. Simply making this data available to educators, researchers, and advocates is already a major step forward, according to him.

Prof. Rye then talked about making data available and understandable. He drew a parallel to their experience with OCTA Research, an organization they co-founded, which gained national prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic. He related that OCTA's success stemmed from its ability to systematize data provided by the Department of Health (DOH) and present it in a way that was accessible and actionable. This data-driven approach, based from his experience, influenced how local governments managed their pandemic responses, demonstrating the transformative power of well-

organized and interpreted data. Prof. Rye underscored that systematizing data is only the first step; advocacy and public service are equally critical. He then pointed at UP as an example, noting that as a public service institution, it has a moral and ethical responsibility to ensure that data is not only accessible but also meaningful and actionable for the public. And because of the principle of academic freedom, he argued, UP is allowed to interpret and present data in ways that serve the public good. He then reiterated his main point that OCTA achieved success because they gave citizens access to understandable data, an act that he hopes PSPC's dashboard website will also imitate. Prof. Rye hammered on the importance of making raw data available without restrictions, allowing anyone—whether researchers, advocates, or ordinary citizens—to analyze and use it. For instance, OCTA has datasets on public perceptions of elections, including issues like vote-buying and electoral fraud, which could be shared to enrich the platform. Similarly, he pointed out that other organizations such as Social Weather Stations (SWS) and Pulse Asia possess valuable datasets that could be integrated into the platform. By consolidating these resources, the platform could become a centralized repository for election-related data, reducing the need to access multiple, often fragmented, sources.

Prof. Rye also noted the potential to expand the platform beyond fiscal data. Drawing from their experience working with the Cayetano family in Taguig, they observed that while fiscal targets were being met, political dynasties remained entrenched. According to him, Taguig's context highlights the need for datasets that go beyond financial metrics to include indicators of human development and governance quality. However, they cautioned that while data can reveal trends and patterns, it may not necessarily lead to immediate political change. In the Taguig example, despite fiscal achievements, the political landscape remains dominated by the same family, suggesting that data alone may not disrupt entrenched power structures.

Prof. Rye concluded by advocating for additional datasets from other organizations and researchers, which can be transformed by researchers to be accessible and impactful for the everyday Filipino voter. He also expressed their hope that UP would take the lead in this effort, becoming the primary repository for election-related data in the Philippines. By adopting a model similar to RealClearPolitics in the United States, Prof. Rye argued that the platform could serve as a one-stop resource for media, researchers, and the

public, offering systematized and comprehensive election data. This would eliminate the need to rely on partisan or fragmented sources, ensuring that the information is both reliable and accessible.

Reactions from the COMELEC Representatives

Teresita Belen, representing the Election Records and Statistics Department of COMELEC, began her remarks by expressing gratitude for the initiative to create the dashboard, which can be useful for COMELEC in promoting their election statistics. She noted that the project aligns with her professional background and advocacy for data accessibility, since prior to joining COMELEC, she worked as a researcher at the University of the Philippines School of Statistics and the Philippine Statistical Research and Training Institute. Reflecting on her experience, she highlighted the mantra that “data is useless if it is not published.” In her current tenure with COMELEC, she shared the struggle of providing access to election data, as their website is frequently targeted by hackers. The attacks often result in downtime and limit the availability of data. Ms. Belen also stated that while the department strives to provide disaggregated data in accessible formats, such as Excel files down to the municipal level, internal policies sometimes restrict the release of such information. To address these constraints, COMELEC requires formal requests for data, which must be submitted through a letter addressed to the Executive Director, which is then pending approval for release of data. She assured the audience that while the process may seem cumbersome, repeated requests for data can be accommodated more efficiently through email, allowing for quicker responses. Belen concluded by thanking the audience for their patience and understanding of COMELEC’s processes, reiterating her appreciation for the initiative to create the dashboard and its role in advancing the accessibility of election statistics.

Adding to the discussion on open access data, Prof. Rye expressed their gratitude for COMELEC’s support of open access to data, which they knew prior to the event as he had a brief conversation with COMELEC’s chairman. However, they pointed out that such a policy is not yet uniformly implemented across the government, despite its stated commitment to transparency. In

contrast, he pointed out that UP operates under a theoretical, fundamental, and philosophical position of open access, not only from a data management perspective but also as a research standard. He then suggested that establishing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a more expansive Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between UP and COMELEC could further strengthen collaboration. Such agreements would allow for the seamless sharing of information without the need for repeated permissions, ensuring that data could be readily disseminated through UP. He concluded by expressing their appreciation for COMELEC's support and its contributions to UP's initiatives.

Leo Lim, from the Education and Information Department of COMELEC, reflected on the discussion and shared insights informed by his usage of his ChatGPT application. According to his ChatGPT:

"The increasing availability of election data significantly enhances the capacity of ordinary citizens to engage in political processes and hold elected officials accountable. This impact manifests in several key ways: (1) improved transparency and accountability, (2) data-driven civic engagement, (3) empowerment through education, (4) enhanced communication between voters and elected officials, and (5) increased influence on policy and reforms."

Quickly praising what he read, afterwards, he referenced a question that was previously presented by the panelist: how can this data be effectively packaged to resonate with voters? He emphasized that since their department is actively engaged in voter education, it is essential to tailor the presentation of data to address the diverse social classes and concerns of the electorate.

He then highlighted that while the datasets available are robust and valuable, particularly for academic research, they seem to offer greater benefits to political parties and candidates because such data allows for the analysis of voter behavior and even provides insights into candidates' expenditures. Acknowledging Dr. Go's earlier point, he reiterated the challenge of making data relatable and digestible for ordinary voters. He further emphasized the department's consistent message that there is no "right" or "wrong" vote. Voting decisions are shaped by individual needs and circumstances, which vary significantly—for instance, between students and businesspeople. The critical issue, he argued, is how voters can relate to and make sense of the

data. While the data itself is valuable, the challenge lies in presenting it in a way that ordinary voters can understand and use effectively.

Prof. Rye then took the opportunity to acknowledge that efforts are already being undertaken by COMELEC to produce fact-based voter education materials, such as infographics. He then inquired if it was possible to share these systematized data and materials on the website dashboard. This approach would align with COMELEC's mandates while ensuring proper attribution and sourcing, as the materials originate from COMELEC, and not from external institutions like UP. However, Prof. Rye clarified that UP could play a significant role in voter education, which is a core mandate of COMELEC. According to him, by integrating these materials into the proposed portal, the platform could evolve from being a mere repository of election-related information into a comprehensive voter education portal. The idea draws inspiration from platforms like RealClearPolitics, but unlike RCP, which aggregates articles from various columnists, this portal would feature articles and analyses authored by academics from UP, showcasing how election data can be utilized effectively with a distinct academic focus. This curated approach would cater to researchers, scholars, and those studying democracy and elections, creating a sustainable model for the platform over the long term. To achieve this vision, Prof. Rye also proposed collaboration with institutions such as COMELEC, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), and international organizations like the UN and its SDG initiatives. These entities could provide the necessary datasets, which researchers from UP would then synthesize and present. This model envisions the portal as a curated, academic resource that not only informs but also fosters deeper engagement with election data and democratic processes.

Leo Lim responded with his personal opinion, not in his capacity as a COMELEC employee, stating that he envisions open access to data as a method of showing Filipino voters that elections can be truly representative and protective of the Filipino will.

Adding to the discussion, Renel Tatlonghari, representing the COMELEC Law Department, provided an update on the department's role and recent initiatives. He clarified that while the Law Department does not directly present information for public consumption, it serves as a supplier of critical data. He announced that, for the first time, the Commission will upload redacted Certificates of Candidacy (COCs) and Certificates of Nomination and Acceptance (CONAs)

for all candidates nationwide. He further explained that the Law Department is actively evaluating COCs to prepare the tentative list of candidates. This list, which is also being uploaded to the website, includes the candidates' names as they will appear on the ballot, their real names, and their political party affiliations. Renel Tatlonghari also highlighted an important innovation in the COC process. The coming 2025 elections will be the third consecutive election where candidates are required to declare whether they have been found guilty of an offense carrying the accessory penalty of perpetual disqualification from holding public office. This declaration is made by ticking a box on the COC, indicating "yes" or "no." If a candidate selects "yes," they must provide details on the status of the case, such as whether it is pending, dismissed, or otherwise resolved. He emphasized that this initiative aligns with the broader goal of voter education, as it increases public awareness about candidates. Renel Tatlonghari clarified that while COMELEC does not instruct voters on who to vote, it provides essential information to help them make informed decisions. He also noted that COMELEC's voter education efforts extend to practical aspects of the voting process, such as teaching voters how to use the voting machines, identifying their precincts, understanding voting procedures, and knowing the appropriate time to vote. By making these resources and data publicly available in their website, including information on local candidates, senatorial candidates, and party-list nominees, COMELEC aims to empower voters to scrutinize their choices and participate more effectively in the democratic process.

Atty. Bernadette Guingona, representing the Political Finance and Affairs Department of COMELEC, affirmed the previously stated insights on the importance of making election data accessible and relevant to stakeholders, but raised a critical question: how can stakeholders be made to understand the significance and relevance of the data published through the system developed by UP CIDS? Why does it need to be publicly available? She stressed the importance of communicating why such data is essential for public awareness and accountability. To illustrate her point, Atty. Guingona provided examples from her department's work. She suggested that, in addition to disclosing information on public spending by local government units (LGUs), the system could also include data on which LGUs released public funds during the campaign period to determine whether public funds were used for political activities, which should be subject to strict regulations. She emphasized that there are proper processes governing the release and use of public funds during the campaign period, and monitoring this would enhance

accountability. She also highlighted the department's role in monitoring candidates' compliance with the submission of Statements of Contributions and Expenditures (SoCE). She explained that the SoCE is critical not only for ensuring compliance but also for holding stakeholders accountable. For instance, candidates who fail to submit their SoCE may face penalties, such as fines, and repeated non-compliance could disqualify them from running for any government position in future elections. This underscores how election data can directly impact a candidate's qualifications to hold public office. Atty. Guingona further emphasized the importance of tracking campaign spending and identifying the sources of funding for candidates. This information is crucial because it can influence governance. For example, contributors to a candidate's campaign may be prohibited donors, or their contributions could create obligations for the candidate, such as appointing them to government positions. Violations of election laws related to campaign financing could also result in legal consequences for both candidates and contributors. Additionally, she noted the importance of compliance with other reports required by COMELEC, such as the annual reports submitted by political parties. Failure to comply with these requirements could result in penalties or sanctions that may affect the candidate or party's qualifications in future elections.

Dr. Panao then asked about the accessibility of SoCEs, which Atty. Guingona clarified that SoCEs and certain other reports are considered public records. According to her, stakeholders can request access to these documents by addressing their requests to the appropriate committee and then to the Political Finance and Affairs Department. To expedite the process, she recommended that requesters provide specific details, such as the name of the candidate or political party, the position they ran for, and the location of their candidacy.

Dr. Panao asked a second question regarding if a user requests a complete listing of incumbents. Atty. Guingona acknowledged the challenges in processing such requests, particularly due to the need to comply with the Data Privacy Act. She explained that the department is currently undergoing digitalization efforts to streamline the processing and production of election-related data. By digitizing reports submitted by candidates, the department aims to make data more accessible to stakeholders while ensuring compliance with legal and procedural requirements.

Dir. Doma extended his congratulations to the UP CIDS for developing the election data dashboard. He then offered comments on a point raised earlier by Prof. Arguelles regarding how to package the information in a way that benefits ordinary citizens. He acknowledged the challenge of making such data relevant to the public, particularly to those who may not immediately see its significance in their daily lives. However, he emphasized the importance of guiding ordinary citizens on how to maximize the use of this data, ensuring that its value and contribution are recognized.

Dir. Doma also noted that, in the current digital age, almost everyone has access to social media, which could serve as a platform for disseminating election-related data for ordinary citizens. He also referenced a study from the School of Economics, which highlighted the dual benefits of election data. On the part of political parties and candidates, such data can help craft effective campaign strategies. By identifying areas of weakness, candidates can focus their efforts on strengthening their campaigns in those areas. Dir. Doma argued that for voters, however, the availability of data can have mixed effects. For instance, if a candidate or political party performs poorly in surveys, voters may feel discouraged from supporting them. Conversely, the "bandwagon effect" may occur, where voters are more likely to support a leading candidate or party. Alternatively, Dr. Doma stated that the "boomerang effect" may arise, where voters view a leading candidate or party unfavorably and instead support those perceived as underdogs. These dynamics underscore the importance of the information being provided, as it can influence both campaign strategies and voter behavior.

Dir. Doma also referenced Prof. Arguelles' mention of the recent 2024 U.S. elections, citing an example they had read about. According to him, Republicans focused on the states of North Carolina and Pennsylvania, as these are areas where the race was particularly close based on available data. This, he explained, demonstrates how election data can be valuable not only to political parties but also to voters, as it shapes campaign strategies and electoral outcomes.

Finally, the participant highlighted the role of their department, the Election Records and Statistics Department (ERSD), in providing election data for the general public, researchers, political parties, and candidates. He emphasized that their work is geared toward ensuring that such information is accessible and useful to all stakeholders.

Open Forum



ON ANARCHISM AND USER INTERFACE (UI) DESIGN

A participant, who is a public-school teacher and a self-identified anarchist opened the discussion. Based on the presentations earlier in the event, he observed that voter education initiatives led by COMELEC often focus on procedural aspects of voting. In contrast, their approach as an educator is to challenge the system from within by presenting alternative political theories, including anarchism, to their students. This, they believe, contributes to fostering critical thinking and encouraging students to explore diverse political ideologies.

The teacher expressed optimism about the development of the election data platform by COMELEC and UP CIDS, viewing it as a potential step forward for anarchism. They drew parallels to discussions within anarchist circles in the United States, where some argue that developments in U.S. politics demonstrate the limitations of traditional electoral systems and validate anarchist critiques. For the teacher, the platform represents an opportunity to expand their understanding and bring new insights back to their students, particularly first-

time voters. They emphasized the importance of showing students that voting is not the only option for political engagement, aligning with their advocacy for anarchism.

Meanwhile, a political science student from Ateneo De Manila University raised a question to Dr. Panao, asking what was the reason why political affiliations as a variable was omitted in the dataset as of the day of the event. The student also directed a question for all panelists, inquiring on the possible implications of party affiliation as a variable in the dataset to voter behavior. Specifically, the student wanted to know if it can make voters vote more “programmatically” or more leaning to personality and charisma.

Lastly, a B.A. Political Science from UP Diliman, who is also one of Dr. Panao’s undergraduate students, inquired whether the dashboard website can render different translations for users who are not native to the English language. The student also asked what was the consideration for the user interface (UI) of the website as most users are more interested in graphics or other features. His last question pertained to what efforts can be made to cater to the considerations he presented.

Dr. Panao first addressed the question of his student, explaining that initially, the content was written in English, but feedback from a roundtable discussion suggested that translating it into Filipino would make it more accessible and understandable. This feedback was incorporated into the design process, but he acknowledged that even with this adjustment, the language used may not fully resonate with all audiences. For instance, he noted that their formal tone may not align with the conversational style preferred by younger generations, such as Gen Z. Despite efforts to adapt, Dr. Panao admitted that it is challenging to completely accommodate all linguistic and stylistic preferences.

Still addressing his student’s question, this time on UI, Dr. Panao also discussed the technical limitations of the website. The dashboard was created within the structure of the UP System, which posed certain constraints. For example, there were instances when the dashboard could not be accessed through the university’s network infrastructure, such as DilNet. While efforts have been made to address these issues, including hosting the dashboard on alternative platforms, he emphasized that such improvements require additional funding. As it stands, the dashboard remains in its beta version, with accessible data

but limited functionality. Dr. Panao encouraged students and users to provide suggestions for improvement and even to create their own content tailored to their specific audiences, as the current design is constrained by resource limitations.

Moreover, in response to a question from a colleague at Ateneo regarding the inclusion of political party data, Dr. Panao clarified that while such data exists in the actual dataset, it was not included in the dashboard. This decision, according to Dr. Panao, was informed by a theoretical perspective suggesting that political parties are not particularly determinant in the Philippine context, unlike in countries such as the United States, where partisanship plays a significant role. However, he noted that users can access the raw dataset and treat political party affiliation as a variable for analysis. They also acknowledged that feedback could prompt the inclusion of such data in the future, but they expressed skepticism about its relevance in certain contexts, such as analyzing local government spending, where political party affiliation may not be a significant factor. Dr. Panao clarified that while the dataset currently has no party affiliation as a variable, what is important to the team is maintaining neutrality in the presentation of data, impartiality, and unbiased reporting, aligning with the principles upheld by COMELEC. Just as COMELEC does not dictate how individuals should vote, PSPC aims to present data without imposing their personal views. While he, as a faculty member and researcher, may hold personal perspectives, he stressed that these cannot influence the design or content of the platform.

Finally, in response to a question about anarchism, Dr. Panao candidly admitted their limitations, stating that they are not a political theorist and, therefore, unable to provide a definitive answer.

Prof. Rye also responded to all first three questions. On the question raised by the colleague from Ateneo, he suggested that the inclusion of political party data could be reconsidered. While it may remain muted or hidden on the dashboard for now, it is already available in the dataset and can be utilized by researchers as a variable for analysis. He also addressed the question of Dr. Panao's student on the use of language in the platform, expressing no objection to the use of Filipino. However, he emphasized the importance of providing an English version of the platform as well. Prof. Rye noted that many researchers from outside the Philippines would find this resource invaluable,

as they primarily seek access to data, which they consider a highly valuable asset.

Prof. Rye also addressed a technical issue not addressed in the earlier questions, highlighting a broader challenge within the UP system: the lack of interdepartmental collaboration. He proposed a potential solution for Dr. Panao and Dr. Hall, by suggesting collaboration with Dean Gani Tapang of the College of Science. The College of Science reportedly is part of a large global consortium engaged in nuclear research, and possesses massive storage and computational capacity. This infrastructure is already being shared with state universities and colleges (SUCs), and he claimed that it could similarly be extended to the UP CIDS. He also recommended that CIDS collaborate with the College of Science to leverage these resources and suggested that this initiative be elevated as a long-term project of the UP System. Such an approach, he stated, could secure additional resources, including not only storage and servers but also funding to support research efforts aimed at populating the platform with systematized data. This ensures that the platform becomes a valuable resource, particularly for younger generations, such as Gen Z, by creating a user-friendly and engaging space. Finally, drawing from their experience with OCTA Research, they observed that while their Facebook page receives significant engagement—both in terms of visits and reactions, including negative feedback—their website attracts far less traffic, aside from frequent hacking attempts. For Prof. Rye, this underscores the need for a dual approach: maintaining the dashboard while also leveraging social media platforms to reach and engage a wider audience, particularly younger users who are more likely to interact with content on such platforms.

Prof. Arguelles also responded to the first set of questions, including the one on anarchism. As highlighted several times during the event, he restated the implications of making data publicly accessible and open access. He argued that once data becomes public, it effectively belongs to the commons, allowing it to be shaped and utilized in multiple ways. This openness, while empowering, also introduces new challenges and responsibilities. He cautioned against relying solely on the same group of political scientists or data scientists to address these challenges, as this could lead to inefficiencies due to the law of diminishing returns. For instance, while some users may prefer a clean and simple UI, others might favor a more dynamic, interactive design akin to a shopping website. Prof. Arguelles then emphasized that addressing these challenges, requires

collaborative initiatives, since the data now belongs to the public, and it is up to the community to decide how to shape and utilize it. This collaborative nature should also include translation, according to him. Prof. Arguelles mentioned asking the programmer of the website about the code used for the project and suggested integrating tools like R Shiny, which would allow for easier scaling and the addition of features such as multilingual support. He then proposed that a group of volunteers could work on translating the platform into different languages, further enhancing its accessibility.

Relating this to the question on anarchism, Prof. Arguelles noted that the principle of open access aligns with the idea of collective ownership and solidarity. He argued that the availability of data allows for diverse uses, depending on the goals and values of the users. For instance, while the creators of the platform may have employed a principal-agent model in its development, users are not bound to that framework and can adapt the data to their own needs. However, he also acknowledged the potential risks of open access, noting that such data could be exploited for nefarious purposes. This, Prof. Arguelles argued, is an inherent risk of the commons, referencing the “Tragedy of the Commons” as a cautionary example. They posed the question of whether the public would take responsibility for nurturing and enriching this shared resource.

Prof. Arguelles also reflected on the differing needs and specifics of various audiences. They noted that, as a researcher, they prioritize data formats that allow for further analysis and find visuals less useful. However, public engagement often requires a different approach. For example, their communication department, which is composed of younger individuals, has experimented with platforms like TikTok to reach broader audiences. While he admitted to having limited involvement in such efforts, they recognized the value of leveraging expertise in communication and engagement to meet the needs of the public. He also highlighted the productive tension that can arise in collaborations. For instance, in his company, while the data team may prioritize methodological rigor, the communication team may advocate for simplifying complex discussions to make them more accessible to the public. These healthy disagreements, he argued, reflect the differing goals of each team and the need to balance methodological robustness with effective communication.

UTILITY TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND THE SECTORAL APPLICATION

The next set of questions focused on the utility of the dataset to specific social groups. An audience member, who only identified as being affiliated with the UP Administration, asked how the dataset's utility can be communicated to pique the interest of the public? He cited the US as an example, where data might say that inflation for rice and gas prices are improving, but some will question whether the conditions make the public happy.

A behavioral researcher from NetData also addressed Dr. Panao, asking if the dataset includes data on national government spending. He also asked if the dataset can yield data on preferences and behavior that can be used to inform non-government organizations and civil society to make better political choices.

For the last question for their set, a representative from Asia Foundation shared that in the Asia Foundation, data is analyzed to identify the needs of society and improve the design of their policies and programs. Drawing further from his experience from the Asia Foundation, the representative asked how election and fiscal data can be unpacked to the public, specifically tailored to a specific sector. His question is based on how the Asia Foundation identified the five key issues of the youth and subsequently identified the Top 25 Youth programs to check if the services offered by these programs address the afore-mentioned issues. In the spirit of this rigor of translating the data to sectors such as women, fisherfolk or farmers, for example, the representative asked if this can be applied also for the dataset without spoon feeding.

Dr. Panao acknowledged the complexity of the questions raised, noting that these challenges, particularly those related to effectively communicating research findings to the general public, are not new. He identified two primary difficulties faced by researchers: first, how to package information in a way that resonates with the audience, especially when the intended recipients may not fully understand the message; and second, how to address the varying levels of comprehension among different groups of people.

To address these challenges, Dr. Panao explained that efforts are being made to simplify the processing of data, which is why the project includes a

dashboard component. However, he observed that researchers often bypass the dashboard in favor of raw data files, such as Excel spreadsheets, which are more suited to their needs. While the dashboard is a step toward accessibility, Dr. Panao admitted that it is not yet perfect. Feedback from discussions like this one, as well as from roundtable discussions (RTDs), is systematically collected to identify areas for improvement and guide the development of the platform.

Dr. Panao also shared plans to expand the dataset to include national variables, which they identified as the next phase of the project. He noted that this expansion has already increased the scope and cost of their data requests to COMELEC. Processing data, they emphasized, is not an easy task, and they highlighted a specific challenge: The data provided is in PDF format, which requires text-mining to extract usable information. This labor-intensive process underscores the ongoing nature of the project and the significant work still required to refine the dataset.

Despite these challenges, Dr. Panao expressed confidence in the framework guiding the project, drawing on their prior experience in writing about local government. He explained that the current focus on local government data is due to its relative simplicity as an indicator. Over time, they hope to incorporate additional data, such as surveys addressing the early concerns of Filipinos or sector-specific information. Dr. Panao concluded that these developments will take time and cannot be delivered immediately.

Prof. Arguelles also added to the discussion, stating that publishing data is one of the poorest ways to communicate, and that published data does not automatically entail communication. The challenge lies in finding ways to communicate data effectively so that it resonates with the ordinary citizen. To him, beyond making information available, there is a need to educate the public to ensure that voters are informed and capable of critical engagement. He also requested that ordinary citizens should not be treated as hollow or incapable of learning, as there are varying degrees of “ordinariness.” Drawing from their experiences with WR Numero, he highlighted their work with diverse organizations, including development organizations, government agencies, and the private sector. From these experiences, they observed that communicating data is a societal-level challenge and not limited to any one group. While the availability of data is a key issue, the pipeline of individuals

capable of producing and communicating data-driven insights remains small. This challenge, he reported, cuts across sectors and affects various groups, including ordinary citizens, professionals, and even policymakers. He also rejected the notion that difficulties in understanding data are confined to the poor or uneducated, sharing an example from their work with financial institutions, where even middle-class consumers often struggle to interpret dashboards on banking apps. Policymakers, too, often need support in understanding data, as their ability to interpret it is shaped by personal preferences and varying levels of expertise. This demonstrates that the challenge of data communication is not exclusive to any socioeconomic class, but a broader issue that requires improving data literacy and communication across all sectors.

To address the challenge of communicating data, Prof. Arguelles shared an example of working with a large child advocacy organization that sought to present survey data in an engaging way. Recognizing the difficulty of communicating such data, especially to younger audiences, they collaborated with game developers to create a mobile app that is heavily animated. The app presented the top 25 concerns of Filipino youth in an interactive, game-like format. For instance, users could guess the top concerns of children, such as “high heat classrooms,” and compare their guesses to the actual rankings. This approach demonstrated how experimental but creative and interactive methods can make data more accessible and engaging.

Prof. Arguelles also proposed other innovative approaches to data communication. For example, they suggested using traditional bulletin-style displays, which remain effective and relevant. Drawing a parallel to COVID-19 trackers displayed outside convenience stores like 7-11, he proposed creating similar trackers for local government spending. These could be placed in public spaces, making fiscal data accessible to citizens. To enhance accessibility, such displays could include QR codes for those with QR-enabled devices, allowing for more sophisticated and interactive engagement.

Another suggestion by Prof. Arguelles involved leveraging existing networks, such as election watchdogs like the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) and their volunteers. He proposed partnering with the Catholic Church and parish priests to publicly display local fiscal data, such as how incumbents use public funds. This approach could make data more

visible and relevant at the community level, fostering greater transparency and accountability.

Prof. Arguelles concluded by emphasizing that many of the efforts in this space are already focused on voter education and awareness. Integrating data communication into these initiatives could address some of the challenges discussed and further empower citizens to engage with election-related information.

Prof. Rye gave some more insights, and began by highlighting the difficulty of sourcing data, particularly from institutions like COMELEC, which does not always provide easy access to its datasets, or lacks the data. UP also currently lacks a mirror system for such data, which could streamline access. They also shared an example from OCTA Research, where municipal clients often request voting data. He pointed out that the largest consumers of COMELEC data are political parties, which is not necessarily a negative development. On the contrary, he acknowledged it reflective of a shift toward data-driven campaigns. However, they argued that the next step is to empower citizens to make decisions based on data as well. In today's digital age, data has become a critical resource that affects everyone. Thus, addressing the challenge of sourcing data and converting it into actionable insights is essential.

After introducing the gap in data sources, Prof. Rye commended UP's initiative to collect and centralize data, noting its value for researchers who can now skip long logistical processes. For example, in contrast to how researchers must first check with COMELEC, now, with the dashboard website, they can access the data to calculate sample sizes, price services for clients, and conduct analyses. However, they acknowledged the question from the Asia Foundation regarding expanding the data, and clarified that the current dataset could answer more complex questions, as this would depend on the level of detail provided by COMELEC. For instance, disaggregated data by demographics could enable more nuanced analyses, such as understanding voter behavior across different groups.

Prof. Rye once again emphasized the importance of collaboration and partnerships to enhance the dataset. They suggested that organizations like WR Numero, OCTA Research, Pulse Asia, and SWS could provide additional data and analyses. These organizations, they noted, are often willing to share

their databases with groups that can systematize and utilize the information effectively. For example, understanding the number of registered voters, voter behavior over the last two election cycles, or how specific demographics (e.g., gender, youth, ethnicity, religion) vote could provide critical insights. While some of these analyses are relatively straightforward, such as descriptive statistics, cross-referencing them with COMELEC data could yield more meaningful results.

Regardless of the dataset's status, Prof. Rye praised the current initiative as a strong first step but challenged the group to expand its scope by incorporating data from other sources. They emphasized that the true value lies in having the data in a format that allows for exploration and analysis. To this end, they proposed several solutions to enhance the project's capacity and utility.

First, Prof. Rye suggested leveraging UP's existing resources, such as partnerships with the College of Science and the Information Technology Development Center (ITDC). The ITDC, he noted, subscribes to advanced software like Power BI, which could be used to generate creative and user-friendly visualizations of the data. AI-based tools like Power BI could address questions about how to present and release the data effectively. Additionally, software like SPSS, already in use at UP, could further support data analysis, he stated. These tools, which are already funded and available within the university, could significantly augment the project without incurring additional costs.

Second, Prof. Rye proposed exploring partnerships with external organizations, such as OCTA Research, WR Numero, Pulse Asia, and SWS, to access their datasets and analyses. These collaborations could provide valuable supplementary data to enrich the project.

Third, Prof. Rye addressed the issue of data storage, which they described as a critical and resource-intensive aspect of the initiative. They suggested that UP, with its extensive storage capacity, could serve as a repository for COMELEC data. The College of Science has the infrastructure to support large-scale data storage and is already collaborating with SUCs through memorandums of understanding (MOUs). By partnering with UP, COMELEC could ensure the secure and efficient storage of its data, enabling broader access and use.

Prof. Rye concluded by emphasizing the importance of having the necessary infrastructure—servers, storage, and networks—to manage and expand the project. He reiterated that UP has the capacity to support such an endeavor and encouraged the group to take advantage of these resources. Without adequate infrastructure, Prof. Rye warned, the project's potential impact would be limited. However, with the right partnerships and tools, the initiative could become a powerful platform for data-driven research, voter education, and public engagement.

Some more photos of the website and the event



■ **Source:** Mr. Misael Bacani, OVPPA-UP Media and Public Relations Office (MPRO) University of the Philippines - System

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Established in 1985 by University of the Philippines (UP) President Edgardo J. Angara, the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) is the policy research unit of the University that connects disciplines and scholars across the several units of the UP System. It is mandated to encourage collaborative and rigorous research addressing issues of national significance by supporting scholars and securing funding, enabling them to produce outputs and recommendations for public policy.

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