

PROCEEDINGS OF THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

The Philippine Local Government Election Dataset Project— Electoral Competition and Local Fiscal Governance

31 July 2024 | 9:00 AM – 12:00 Noon
UP CIDS Conference Hall Open Space

Compiled by Bonn Francis Mendoza



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
INTEGRATIVE AND
DEVELOPMENT
STUDIES

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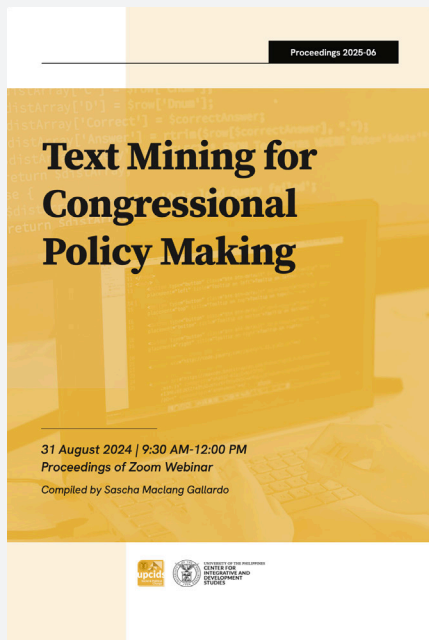
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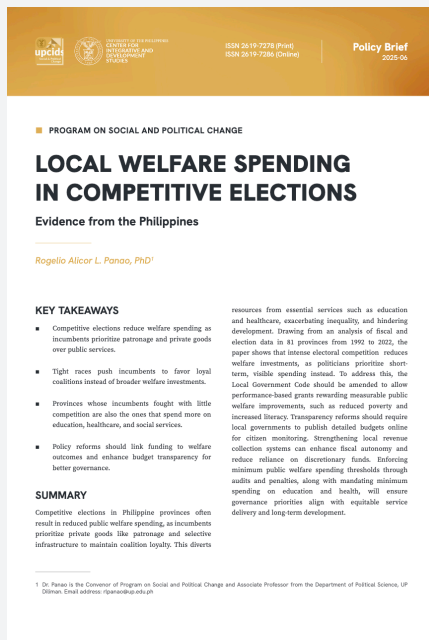
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About the Proceedings

The University of the Philippines Center of Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC) organized a roundtable discussion (RTD) titled “The Philippine Local Government Election Dataset Project: Electoral Competition and Local Fiscal Governance” on July 31, 2024.

This event served as the public consultation with stakeholders to explore the potential of the election and fiscal dataset of PSPC. Insights from the discussion were incorporated in the development of the website dashboard, in preparation for its launch on November 8, 2024. During the roundtable, speakers discussed the verification, sources, and interpretation of election and fiscal data.

This event was documented by PSPC staff members Maria Corazon C. Reyes and Bonn Francis Mendoza.

Welcome Remarks

Dr. Rosalie Arcala Hall

Executive Director, UP CIDS

Dr. Rosalie Arcala Hall, Executive Director UP CIDS, delivered the welcoming remarks. She emphasized that the RTD “has a crucial aim to explore the creation of a comprehensive data set encompassing local governance and electoral information in the Philippines.” Dr. Hall underscored that the initiative spearheaded by the PSPC, seeks to empower citizens, researchers, policy makers and the media with the information they need to make very good decisions and write ups, especially ahead the 2025 elections. In closing, she expressed hope that the discussion leads “to a more informed and empowered citizenry when it comes to discussing electoral politics.” She further noted that “data-driven insights” are essential in strengthening democracy and ensuring transparency in governance.

Presentations

Dr. Rogelio Alicor L. Panao

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

Dr. Panao's presentation draws upon the field of political science, where he introduced the concept of "retrospective voting." He explained this as the process of voters evaluating candidates based on the past performance and actions, rather than on campaign promises or proposed future plans. This model, it was argued, serves to hold politicians accountable throughout their tenure, rewarding those who demonstrate effective leadership and sanctioning those whose performance proves inadequate. Furthermore, according to Dr. Panao, retrospective voting empowers the electorate to leverage their firsthand experiences with governance to assess whether political leaders have fulfilled expectations, retained public trust, and effectively discharged their duties.

Dr. Panao referenced the 2016 presidential election as an example, showcasing a promising candidate who did not deliver his propositions. The then Duterte administration, it was noted, faced criticism for perceived failures to adequately deliver the promised solution to crime and corruption. Prior to being elected, the former mayor of Davao recognized the potential of gaining public sentiment, campaigned on various platforms by prominently declaring a commitment to combating crime and corruption. The subsequent electoral outcome, Dr. Panao concluded, is a matter of public record.

Dr. Panao then transitioned to a discussion of the assumptions underlying retrospective voting by reiterating that this presupposes voters are individuals who arrive at electoral decisions based on a logical and informed evaluation of candidates or parties. He added that voters engaged in a cost-benefit analysis of candidate options, seeking to maximize their own utility or satisfaction.

However, Dr. Panao posed a critical question: if voters indeed behave rationally and cast their votes retrospectively, why then is there a recurring

pattern of mediocre performance from the same set of incumbents? This, Dr. Panao acknowledged, is a puzzle that has preoccupied scholars for years.

He noted, however, that while retrospective voting is logical in theory, in practice, voter behavior is irrational. According to Dr. Panao, economic factors such as poverty can drive voters to choose short-term survival versus long-term political considerations. This renders voters susceptible to vote-buying or to campaign promises that provide immediate relief, disregarding actual candidate competence and integrity. Meanwhile, patronage politics, where politicians provide goods, can also push voters to choose candidates offering immediate and tangible benefits rather than long-term policy solutions. Dr. Panao also highlighted the tendency of voters in the Philippines to prioritize charisma, personality, or emotional appeal over policy platforms and competency qualifications, as evident in the election of celebrities and political dynasties. Lastly, Dr. Panao stated that limited political awareness coupled with limited or lack of information lead voters to make biased decisions based on incomplete information.

Dr. Panao then asked the audience a hypothetical question: what if individuals had access to information that could guide how they choose electoral candidates? He then introduced the Philippine Local Government Election Dataset Project. Dr. Panao explained that the dataset is the PSPC's contribution to public access for informed decision-making aspirations previously outlined. He then explained that the project aims to make electoral and fiscal data accessible to the public through an online portal, enabling citizens and stakeholders to conduct independent assessment of their local incumbents without requiring expert opinion or analysis. The portal also caters to experts and researchers by allowing them to examine local election and fiscal data, specify parameters, and download complete datasets free of charge.

Dr. Panao acknowledged that the Philippine Local Government Election Dataset Project remains a work in progress. While a comprehensive output was not yet available for presentation, Dr. Panao detailed that as of the day the event was held, electoral and fiscal data had been collected for all 81 provinces and 144 cities, including their corresponding legislative districts, covering the period from 1992 to 2022.

Dr. Panao explained that a previous project conducted in collaboration with UP CIDS was published in the International Journal of Public Administration, and which provided the foundational data spanning from 1992 to 2013, builds upon this foundation with the aim of becoming a multi-year initiative involving continuous data updates. Dr. Panao also stated that the ongoing effort would benefit from the contributions of attendees, underscoring the purpose of the round-table discussion meeting. Dr. Panao outlined plans for future expansion. This included the addition of electoral data and annual local fiscal data for municipalities, covering the same timeline as the existing data. And beyond these he expressed a desire to include audit reports as a potential proxy for corruption and the possibility of incorporating disaster spending data for select LGUs, hopefully by the end of the year. Dr. Panao also invited suggestions from the audience on how to make this data visible and accessible.

Dr. Panao closed by articulating the twofold purpose of the RTD. First, it was an opportunity to learn from partners and stakeholders on how the data could be useful in their advocacy, research, instruction, or media coverage. Second, the discussion served as a platform to identify, evaluate, and uncover additional local government data that could benefit citizens, interest groups, and journalists.

Mr. Angel S. Averia, Jr.

*National Chairperson, National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections
President, Philippine Computer Emergency Response Team*

Mr. Angel S. Averia, Jr. began by introducing the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), established in 1983. It is the first citizen-led, nonpartisan election monitoring organization worldwide. NAMFREL's pioneering role in election monitoring, he noted, predated the existence of many similar organizations worldwide today.

Mr. Averia then emphasized NAMFREL's vision and its commitment to strengthening democracy by ensuring clean, honest, and credible elections which empowers the electorate to elect competent and honest public officials dedicated to public service. He outlined NAMFREL's fourfold mission, which involves:

1. Advocating for meaningful election reform through legislative engagement, which they conduct through active participation of Congress hearings in the Committee on Suffrage and Electoral reforms of both houses;
2. Supporting and participating in citizen oversight of elections alongside other election monitoring organizations such as Legal Network For Truthful Elections (LENTE);
3. Conducting voter education initiatives, helping citizens realize the power of their votes as well as assessing and selecting better candidates;
4. Assessing and evaluating the performance of elected officials, underscoring the concept of accountability.

On election-related datasets, Mr. Averia enumerated important sources of data from the COMELEC, local registrars, COMELEC-provided precincts, the list of individuals applying for voter registration and data on population statistics and financial history, particularly for electoral exercises such as plebiscites.

He explained that these data are crucial for analyzing the rationale behind proposed actions like creating new barangays or splitting existing LGUs. Mr. Averia stated that the threshold that LGUs in the province or LGU's in Manila must reach to split a barangay differ quantitatively, with the former only requiring a population of 2000 residents per barangay while the latter requiring a population of 5000 residents per barangay. Because of the adjustment of barangay and municipality jurisdictions, Mr. Averia emphasized NAMFREL's efforts to map election results geographically, to obtain the bounds of LGU jurisdictions.

Aside from the aforementioned datasets, Mr. Averia identified additional datasets that can be obtained from COMELEC, including lists of political parties and candidates running for various positions. He also discussed the importance of having access to candidates' Statements of Contributions and Expenditures (SOCES), emphasizing the need to monitor campaign spending even outside the official campaign period. Mr. Averia cited examples of politicians having tarpaulins printed with greetings to increase visibility even before the official campaign period. These expenditures, he noted, evade scrutiny due to limited access to SOCES. Mr. Averia mentioned automated election system (AES)-related datasets, which was just implemented during the 2022 elections. He notes that the electronic transmission method has obscured various election processes. Mr. Averia reiterated the challenges faced in obtaining said datasets from COMELEC, despite some limited data, such as transmission logs from telcos, being released after the 2022 elections. Moreover, Mr. Averia also discussed NAMFREL's involvement in good governance activities, such as monitoring procurement processes. A training program initiated in June of the previous year was mentioned, wherein 50 youth participants in Batangas were trained to observe local government projects and procurement processes.

Finally, Mr. Averia reiterated the importance of performance evaluation of local elected officials, wherein he stated that NAMFREL is also doing two things. First is developing a dataset to track campaign promises and assess the performance of officials preferred by voters. This data collection effort relies on crowdsourcing, engaging citizens to provide information about their preferred candidates' promises and their subsequent actions in office. The second, he added, is also a crowd-sourced dataset of elected officials and their campaign promises and their actual performance.

Mr. Averia concluded his talk by giving additional examples of how election datasets can be utilized. One observation drawn from the COMELEC-obtained election dataset revealed that 25 percent of candidates across various positions were women, and this proportion held true for those who won their elections. NAMFREL also inspected the dataset for occurrences of political dynasties in the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) elections. Citing an example from Baguio, Mr. Averia highlighted challenges in filling SK candidate rosters due to restrictions on familial relationships among candidates, as some SK rosters only had 3 or four candidates while some had none. This has led NAMFREL to seek cross-reference COMELEC data with data from the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) on the number of barangays with full SK slates, as the DILG possesses comprehensive data on barangay governance.

Dr. Christopher C. Mantillas

*Associate Professor and Associate Dean, Political Science
and International Studies*

Polytechnic University of the Philippines

Dr. Mantillas opened his presentation and contrasted its structured approach to data usage within academia to other sectors. He emphasized that in the academe, there are specific processes when integrating data into the curriculum, particularly in the context of educating future generations of responsible citizens and leaders. Dr. Mantillas highlighted the importance of evidence-based teaching, underscoring the shift from purely theoretical instruction to one that utilizes data and official documents from various government agencies.

Dr. Mantillas proceeded to discuss that PUP's Bachelor of Arts in Political Science (BAPS) requires a total of 152 units for completion with 52 courses, of which 20 are directly related to the teaching of politics, including the electoral system. The 20 politics-related courses, he emphasized, represents a significant portion of the curriculum, equivalent to 60 units. Dr. Mantillas stressed the importance of ensuring that these politics-related courses are informed by reliable sources.

Dr. Mantillas then emphasized the Department of Political Science and International Studies' (DPSIS) role as a key provider of general education courses, specifically a course on Politics, Governance, and Citizenship (POLGOV). This course, he explained, is unique to their institution and includes instruction on elections and the electoral system. It is a required course for all students across the university's 17 colleges, serving a population of 83,000 students. Dr. Mantillas stressed that this course has played a vital role in countering criticisms directed at social science disciplines and their contribution in combating fake news.

He stated that specific courses within their curriculum incorporate information related to the Philippine electoral system, referencing courses such as Readings in Philippine History, Fundamentals of Political Science, The Contemporary World, Philippine Constitution, and Introduction to Philippine

Politics and Governance. Dr. Mantillas also further elaborated on courses offered in the second, third, and fourth years, including those focused on public administration, political theory, comparative politics, political analysis, research methods, and ethics. Dr. Mantillas explained that their current practices were compliance with accreditation requirements and changes in higher education standards requiring outcome-based syllabus (OBP). He also contrasted with his tenure as a student in the University of the Philippines Los Baños, wherein he and his fellow students were only given course outlines. Dr. Mantillas elaborated that complying with standards required them to explicitly cite sources in course materials serving including data from COMELEC, NAMFREL, and the PSA. These data serve as initial resources teachers utilize for classroom instruction.

Dr. Mantillas also highlighted the role of community strategies embedded in their political curriculum in training and equipping students. In PUP's curriculum, students are required to conduct PESTLE (Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal, and Environmental) analyses of their local government units, encouraging them to gather data on various dimensions of development. The PESTLE exercise, he explained, aims to equip students with a foundational and holistic understanding of their LGUs, as compared to applying foreign-based data without contextualization. Dr. Mantillas argued that the PESTLE approach, which he acquired during a community development stint in UPLB, enables students aspiring to be trained for leadership positions within their communities. By familiarizing themselves with the realities of their LGUs, students can make more informed decisions and contribute effectively to local governance.

Dr. Mantillas then presented how faculty members incorporate election-related data into their teaching. One faculty member teaches political perspectives by teaching it as a spectrum: from traditionalism, patronage, and dynasties to progressivism. The faculty member suggested reviewing all the guidelines of COMELEC to broaden participation and candidacy, particularly by addressing the issue of nuisance candidates. The second faculty member focused on electoral reforms to enhance the quality of democracy, linking this to the broader goal of strengthening strategic thinking in international relations, particularly in relation to China. This faculty member shared their approach of grounding discussions and complementing ideological perspectives.

The third faculty member used comparative politics where data from other countries is used to provide context and contrast with the Philippine context. The fourth faculty member related the use of diverse resources, including jurisprudence, news articles, free webinars from COMELEC, and programs by COMELEC and NAMFREL. These resources, he explained, provide students with firsthand insights into the electoral process and showcase the dedication of those involved in ensuring free and fair elections. Dr. Mantillas stated that the fifth faculty member's approach of using specific issue-based information for teaching. Dr. Mantillas expressed confidence that the audience, as fellow educators, could relate to these approaches.

Dr. Danilo A. Arao

*Associate Professor of Journalism, College of Mass Communication
University of the Philippines Diliman*

Dr. Arao focused on the role of media in the 2025 elections and the potential utility of the PSPC's initiative. He argues that media responsibility extends beyond factual accuracy to encompass contextual accuracy. Dr. Arao explained that the media's role is critical analysis, helping audiences make sense of data. He cautioned against simply presenting data without interpretation, characterizing this as a practice of hyper-partisan content creators rather than responsible journalists. The reason for the caution, Dr. Arao stressed, is to cultivate a critical mass of informed voters who can make wise decisions. Critical analysis of data is done to help facilitate informed decision making.

Dr. Arao then mentioned the context of the 2025 national and local elections. While acknowledging the progress made through automated elections, he pointed out its drawbacks, such as concerns about the accuracy and integrity of electronic vote counting despite its ability to give fast results. He highlighted the media's role in striking the balance between embracing technological advancements and addressing anxieties surrounding their implementation. By doing so, the media's responsibility is to challenge prevailing norms and expose unacceptable practices, questioning what is seen as acceptable and preventing the normalization of problematic behaviors.

Dr. Arao urged the audience to treat the 2025 midterm polls as a precursor to the 2028 election. He reiterated the recurring issue of political dynasties, and introduced the concept of "Mega Dynasties," echoing Dr. Aries Arugay's notion of "dynastic cartels." This term captures the consolidation of political clans, highlighting shifts in allegiances among prominent families.

Turning to the influence of social media, Dr. Arao highlighted the growing dominance of online platforms, particularly social media, as sources of news and entertainment, especially among young people. He expressed uncertainty on this trend's benefits, and deferred further discussion to a later point. Dr. Arao noted the shift from Facebook, previously the dominant platform, to TikTok as the primary source of news and entertainment in 2023. Journalists

now need to adapt to the evolving media landscape and engage audiences where they are. Aside from being a news and entertainment source, Dr. Arao claimed that social media can be used as a campaign tool. He recognized the prevalence of sponsored posts and targeted advertising by political candidates, pointing out how candidates, particularly those from political dynasties respective to audience members locality, utilize social media to establish a presence and subtly promote themselves, even outside the official campaign period.

Dr. Arao continued highlighting social media's function as a platform for communication, feedback, and engagement between candidates and the public. The communication aspect is already utilized since there has been a surge of spam messages and online campaigning leading up to the October 1st candidacy filing deadline. He then addressed the double-edged nature of social media, contrasting its potential for positivity with its capacity for fostering toxicity. These can be observed in the form of online bashing and red-tagging, particularly toward students and academics of UP and PUP. Recognizing their parallel experiences, he emphasized the importance of activism in fostering critical thinking and liberal education, and that any decline in activism within universities should be viewed as a sign of diminishing critical engagement. Dr. Arao reiterated the importance of critical thinking in journalism, and the previously emphasized factual accuracy with contextual accuracy to make sense of complex issues and challenge prevailing narratives, particularly when societal realities do not seem to make sense.

Dr. Arao then addressed the pervasive issue of disinformation, noting its prevalence to the extent that "disinformation studies" has emerged as a field of academic inquiry. In his observation, the need for journalism has evolved from primarily truth-telling to systematic fact-checking. The complexities of disinformation today require a deeper understanding of its systematic nature. He expressed concern about the involvement of government media in state-sponsored disinformation, citing PTV 4 and the Philippine News Agency (PNA) as examples. Dr. Arao then shared a personal anecdote of being red-tagged by PNA despite previously being consulted on ensuring editorial independence, which it chose not to implement.

Dr. Arao then clarified the culture of impunity and repression faced by media organizations and journalists. He presented two potential responses: resisting

this repression through a culture of pushback and defiance, or succumbing to the chilling effect and becoming co-opted by the administration as its mouthpiece. Without hesitation, Dr. Arao acknowledged the diversity within the media landscape, recognizing that not all organizations or journalists actively resist pressure, and that the media is not entirely homogeneous in its integrity.

Dr. Arao highlighted the discrepancy between legal provisions and the reality of censorship, introducing the concept of a "democratator," coined by Joel Simon, to describe dictatorships operating within democratic frameworks. This concept highlights the illusory nature of democracy not just in the Philippines, but also globally, where authoritarian characteristics persist despite democratic institutions. This is seen, he reflected, in the World Press Freedom Index ranking, from 132nd to 134th, despite constitutional guarantees of press freedom. He also shared the broader censorship of 27 websites for alleged links to communist and terrorist groups, despite a lack of evidence provided by the National Security Council. He alleged that if pressed for evidence, the National Security Council does not provide any. He would go on to state that because of this, the democracy we have is a form of "democracy in quotation marks."

Returning to the topic of election coverage, Dr. Arao identified key areas of focus, including the misuse and abuse of government resources, the mockery of election rules through premature campaigning, and the last-minute substitution of candidates, particularly in party-list elections. These key areas, he pointed, are where the dataset project would be particularly useful. To provide further context on substitution of candidates, he shared his experience as convener of Kontra Daya, an election watchdog, describing how some party-list groups act as an entry point for members of political dynasties. This led to a reassessment of their initial findings and flagging 70 percent of these groups. He even claimed that 90 percent of party members who won the elections are part of political dynasties, big businesses, and related to incumbent officials. In contrast, without identifying the names, Dr. Arao noted that only three party-lists are truly representative of marginalized groups.

Dr. Arao then discussed the internal challenges faced by media organizations, such as fake news, political ads, and the potential biases associated with

embedded reporting. He argued that embedded reporting can encourage complacency and hinder critical analysis, particularly when journalists become closely aligned with specific political parties or candidates. In the context of embedded reporting, he also criticized the media's tendency to favor either popular celebrities, or those from the incumbent administration, while underreporting on party-list groups representing marginalized sectors, unless that party list is involved in a controversy or if a celebrity joined the party-list. Dr. Arao then stated that it is important to understand the media agenda of the media, suggesting that this is an underreported aspect of election coverage. He briefly acknowledged time constraints before moving on to the next slide.

He proceeded to reiterate the role of journalism in facilitating informed decision-making based on candidates' platforms, which is difficult in the field. He expressed hope that the PSPC dataset could encourage voter participation and awareness of the opportunities and limitations of Philippine elections. Dr. Arao argued that elections in the Philippines primarily result in leadership changes rather than structural transformations, resulting from the inherent limitations of electoral processes. The speaker concluded with a humorous analogy, comparing choices between political dynasties to choosing between television channels, suggesting a lack of meaningful alternatives in some contexts.

Open Forum

The forum was moderated by Dr. Dennis Blanco. To open the forum, Dr. Panao took the opportunity to reiterate that the ultimate goal of the project is to create a comprehensive dashboard and dataset. However, he acknowledged that the project is still under development with a beta version of the dashboard available for preview.

Dr. Panao explained that the dashboard displays the candidate's electoral history and expressed a desire to improve the visual representation of this information. Dr. Panao emphasized the project's commitment to neutrality, stating that it will not explicitly label candidates as dynastic, leaving users to draw their own conclusions based on the presented data. He also highlighted the potential for advanced users, such as those familiar with econometric analysis, to utilize the dataset for research purposes, including downloading the complete dataset and running econometric models. However, he emphasized that the primary target audience is ordinary citizens, who can benefit from the readily available descriptive data for informed decision-making. With this overview of the dashboard and its functionalities, Dr. Panao handed back the floor to moderator Dr. Blanco for further discussion and feedback.

DISASTER-RELATED LGU DATA

Dr. Apple Kate Sabar, an alumna of the UP National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG), began her inquiry by expressing her interest in exploring local government unit (LGU) budgets allocated for flood control. She referenced a TikTok video that explained how Bonifacio Global City (BGC) in Taguig has effectively prevented flooding through an underpass system inspired by Japanese technology, which includes large water tankers located beneath the city. Dr. Sabar raised the question of whether similar infrastructure projects could be implemented in municipalities, particularly considering the financial constraints faced by many LGUs. She highlighted the importance of funding for such projects, especially in disaster-prone areas, and inquired about the possibility of collaboration between the national

government and LGUs to finance these initiatives. Dr. Sabar emphasized the need for prioritizing flood control projects, especially in remote areas with limited resources.

Dr. Panao responded to Dr. Sabar's inquiry, confirming that disaster spending data will be included in the dataset and explained that this data is mandated by law, requiring LGUs to allocate a specific portion of their budget for disaster management. However, such readily available data only goes back to 2012, following the passage of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act, which made this allocation mandatory. He indicated that this data would be sourced from the Commission on Audit (COA) rather than the Bureau of Local Government Finance. Dr. Panao further emphasized that the project team has allocated time for gathering COA data, recognizing the importance of audit reports as indicators of good governance. However, he cautioned that this data may not be complete for all LGUs and might lack disaggregation at the municipal level. Finally, Dr. Panao offered his personal perspective, suggesting that the issue of disaster preparedness goes beyond budget allocation, as it is already mandated by law. He framed it as a "leadership issue," implying that effective disaster management hinges on leadership commitment and proactive measures rather than solely on budgetary considerations.

Dr. Arao added to the discussion, suggesting a potential research avenue related to the allocation of the "flood tax" levied on movie tickets. He explained that this tax, alongside amusement tax and other levies, contributes to the high cost of movie tickets. Dr. Arao highlighted the authority of some LGUs to remove certain taxes, including the flood tax, resulting in lower movie ticket prices in specific provinces. He questioned the rationale behind imposing this tax on moviegoers, pointing out the lack of a direct link between movie watching and flood control. Dr. Arao contrasted this with taxes like road-users tax, which have a clear connection to the activity being taxed. He concluded by suggesting this as a worthwhile research topic for students in public administration or political science.

Dr. Mantillas discussed a study he conducted with his advisee on flood control programs, emphasizing the importance of research in understanding these issues. He highlighted that their study revealed firsthand information about the challenges facing flood control programs in the Philippines. One

primary challenge identified was political intervention, which can lead to manipulation in various aspects of these projects, including design, materials, and procurement processes. Dr. Mantillas stressed the need for reduced political interference in flood control initiatives. He then drew a comparison with BGC's successful flood control system, highlighting its development by Ayala, a private entity. Dr. Mantillas questioned the consistency of flood control programs across the country and emphasized the need for harmonization between various environmental initiatives, such as flood control, solid waste management, and clean air programs. He also stressed the importance of aligning comprehensive land use plans with flood control programs, ensuring that zoning regulations for commercial, residential, and leisure areas complement flood mitigation efforts. He argued that even with a large number of flood control programs, success is unlikely without harmonization with national land use plans. He cautioned against relying solely on specific models or good practices from individual LGUs, as not all have the capacity to implement such programs. He highlighted the role of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) in initiating large-scale projects and contrasted this with the ability of private developers like Ayala to create smart cities. Dr. Mantillas questioned the feasibility of replicating such models across the country's diverse LGUs. He concluded by advocating for a comprehensive land use plan that synchronizes various projects and initiatives, acknowledging the need for strong political will to achieve this. Dr. Mantillas cited examples of urbanization challenges in Cavite and Laguna, emphasizing the need for better land use planning and regular updating of these plans by LGUs.

Mr. Averia joined the conversation by sharing an anecdote about a project in Pangasinan that challenged common assumptions about the source of flooding in Dagupan and Lingayen. While the release of water from dams like San Roque was often blamed, their mapping of hazard areas revealed that the flooding originated from a different source. Mr. Averia clarified that this was his personal project, not a NAMFREL initiative. From this project, he raised a critical point about the limitations of localized flood control measures. While LGUs are required to allocate funds for flood control, he emphasized the need for inter-LGU collaboration, as floodwaters do not stop at municipal boundaries. Mr. Averia concluded by stressing the need for greater oversight and coordination in infrastructure projects to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

PRE- AND POST-LGU CODE COMPARISON STUDY

Ronald Bernardo from the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) raised a question about the impact of the Local Government Code of 1991. The question was whether the Code has inadvertently fostered a myopic outlook among LGUs, limiting their ability to think systemically and address issues that extend beyond their borders.

In response, Dr. Panao suggested a comparative analysis of local governance before and after the 1991 Local Government Code to assess its impact. He highlighted the need to examine relevant indicators across these periods like how he executed this in his previous study, which revealed a counterintuitive trend: LGUs with larger Internal Revenue Allotments (IRAs) tend to become more dependent on these funds. This, he argued, contradicts the arguments often used to advocate for charter change and increased IRA allocations. Dr. Panao emphasized the importance of empirical evidence in policy-making, citing the example of increased IRAs not necessarily leading to greater financial self-sufficiency among LGUs, thereby undermining the spirit of local autonomy enshrined in the Constitution and the Local Government Code. Dr. Panao reiterated the importance of data-driven research to challenge assumptions and inform policy actions. He expressed hope that the project's dataset would facilitate such research and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of local governance.

Dr. Mantillas agreed with the previous points and added another dimension to the discussion: the realization among LGUs of the need for collaboration. He cited the example of Bulacan and Pampanga, where frequent flooding prompted joint action to address the issue of water flowing from Candaba to Hagonoy and other low-lying areas. Dr. Mantillas also highlighted the initiative to create the Metro Calamba Development Authority in Laguna, aiming to address common concerns such as traffic and air pollution among LGUs like Calamba, Los Baños, Cabuyao, Santa Rosa, Biñan, and San Pedro.

Dr. Mantillas noted that these LGUs, despite being among the richest in the Philippines with significant tax revenues and national tax allotments, recognized the limitations of acting in isolation. Dr. Mantillas emphasized the need for collaboration and a broader perspective that extends beyond

individual LGU boundaries. He suggested that this collaborative approach is encouraged even within the Constitution and predates the 1991 Local Government Code.

Dr. Mantillas acknowledged that this is an ongoing process, with LGUs gradually realizing the need for coordinated action. He expressed optimism about the future development of policies promoting collaboration and clustering among LGUs, while also recognizing the current emphasis on decentralization. He stressed the importance of balancing local autonomy with inter-LGU collaboration to address shared challenges effectively.

In response, Dr. Blanco also noted that since LGUs operate under decentralization and devolution, there are policies that require harmonization.

OPEN DATA AND ACCESSIBILITY SUGGESTIONS

The next question came from a UP Manila Political Science instructor Claire Berja. She asked about the efforts of CIDS to make the data set more accessible and understandable to voters, given that one of its major goals is to provide a basis for informed decision-making in the upcoming election.

Dr. Panao acknowledged the importance of such input and considered whether the data should be presented in Filipino and include more graphics. He then deferred to Prof. Berja for further clarification.

Prof. Berja highlighted the importance of familiarizing students with available datasets related to elections. She emphasized the significance of upcoming elections and the challenges faced by both teachers and students in making sense of these datasets, echoing Dr. Arao's earlier point. Prof. Berja expressed her enthusiasm for the ability to download raw data from the platform, as mentioned by Dr. Panao, explaining that she teaches quantitative research methods and could integrate this data into her classes. She proposed submitting her students' output to the project team, suggesting that it could be transformed into a more accessible format for wider dissemination and engagement with the target audience.

Dr. Panao responded to Prof. Berja's suggestion, characterizing the project as a multi-level, multi-year endeavor that requires sustained effort. He

highlighted the challenge of processing raw data from COMELEC, which is often in PDF format, necessitating manual extraction and encoding. Dr. Panao acknowledged the need for student assistance in this process and encouraged Prof. Berja to contribute by correcting and aligning the data. He then revealed plans to issue a call for papers, inviting researchers to utilize the dataset for their research questions. Dr. Panao explained that the project has a platform for disseminating discussion papers and policy briefs, offering a small honorarium for accepted submissions.

Dr. Arao offered a brief comment. He highlighted the emerging field of data journalism, which leverages quantitative research methods to visualize and popularize data. Dr. Arao then suggested that the CIDS team consider taking a more active role in popularizing the data, rather than solely relying on media or academics. He proposed creating downloadable resources with suggested ways to popularize the data, thereby facilitating broader discourse and engagement.

Dr. Arao also emphasized the importance of translating the project's outputs into Filipino languages. While acknowledging that raw data is language-neutral, he stressed the need to make explanations and interpretations accessible to a wider audience. Dr. Arao suggested translating key terms and concepts into major Philippine languages like Tagalog and Bisaya, advocating for inclusivity and broader dissemination of the project's findings.

Mr. Averia addressed the challenges of data accessibility, recalling the earlier days when election data from COMELEC was provided in printed format rather than electronic copies. He suggested advocating for COMELEC to adopt open data standards, citing the existence of ten principles for open data, including granularity and processability. Mr. Averia noted that COMELEC is a member of the Open Government Portal and has commitments to institutionalize voter verification. However, he also acknowledged the challenge posed by the Data Privacy Act, which could restrict the open availability of voter data.

Dr. Arao, in response to the earlier discussion on data processing and translation, highlighted the potential of artificial intelligence (AI). He suggested that AI could be used for summarizing and visualizing data, reducing the labor intensiveness of these tasks. While acknowledging that AI can also translate languages, Dr. Arao emphasized the need for human oversight to

ensure accuracy and quality. He noted the significant improvements in AI's ability to process and communicate in Filipino languages, citing the example of ChatGPT's progress in recent years. Dr. Arao recommended CIDS to explore the use of AI while maintaining human editors to refine and finalize outputs before dissemination.

An audience member then raised a question about the use of AI and its potential for data analysis and presentation. The person shared their experience of encountering limitations with AI tools like Microsoft Copilot and ChatGPT, which were unresponsive to prompts related to government data. The audience member expressed concern about the feasibility of utilizing AI for the project's dataset, given these limitations.

Dr. Arao acknowledged the validity of the question, attributing the limitations of open AI datasets to the "garbage in, garbage out" principle. He explained that AI models, whether ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, or Gen AI, rely on the data they are trained on, and if that data contains inaccuracies or biases, the output will reflect those flaws. Dr. Arao attributed some responsibility to Elon Musk for this situation, highlighting the inherent limitations of AI's ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood. He emphasized the need for human intervention to ensure accuracy and address potential biases in AI-generated outputs.

Dr. Arao acknowledged that the specificity of prompts plays a crucial role in the quality of AI responses. While not blaming users for inaccurate outputs, he encouraged them to be as specific as possible in their prompts to improve the accuracy of AI-generated responses. However, he also cautioned that there is no guarantee of accuracy, regardless of the AI software used. Dr. Arao emphasized the importance of independent research and critical evaluation of AI-generated outputs, rather than solely relying on them. He concluded by acknowledging the unpredictable nature of AI, comparing its behavior to human mood swings, and reiterating the need for human oversight and verification.

Mr. Averia added to this by explaining the limitations of generative AI, emphasizing its dependence on the vast amount of data available on the internet, which includes both truths and falsehoods. He highlighted that AI models do not inherently distinguish between accurate and inaccurate

information, raising concerns about their potential for misuse. Mr. Averia then shared a recommendation from a recent forum on the use of AI in elections, where the COMELEC and other stakeholders agreed on the need for disclosure when AI is used in election campaigns. This disclosure, he explained, would require specifying the type of AI used and ensuring transparency from political candidates, strategists, and advertising firms.

Dr. Arao followed up on Mr. Averia's point and explained that Musk's "free speech absolutism," which promotes unrestricted expression regardless of truthfulness, has implications for data curation. He argued that this absolutist approach undermines the concept of gatekeeping in journalism, where traditionally, journalists prioritize credible sources and expert opinions.

Dr. Arao also questioned the inclusion of historically inaccurate information or denialist perspectives in campaign materials. He emphasized the need for gatekeeping mechanisms in datasets, similar to those used in journalism, to ensure accuracy and prevent the spread of misinformation. Dr. Arao stressed the importance of gatekeeping in the CIDS project, urging the team to critically evaluate data from local governments and exclude any inaccurate or misleading information.

Another question was raised by Jayjay from Arellano University. He inquired about alternative plans for disseminating the Philippine Local Government Interactive Dataset, beyond the online portal. They highlighted the issue of digital literacy and accessibility for individuals who may be unable to access or utilize the online platform. The audience member emphasized the project's stated goal of making the dataset accessible to everyone and sought clarification on how this would be achieved for those with limited digital literacy or visual impairments.

Dr. Panao responded by acknowledging that the current dissemination plan is primarily focused on the online platform, with no immediate plans for alternative formats like mobile versions, Braille-enabled versions, or audio versions. He explained that the project is still in its early stages and is envisioned as a multi-year endeavor that will evolve based on feedback and user needs. Dr. Panao expressed hope that future iterations of the project would address accessibility concerns, recognizing the importance of making the dataset available to diverse audiences. However, he acknowledged that the

current focus is on establishing the online platform and gathering feedback before exploring alternative dissemination strategies.

Mr. Averia discussed a project in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and mentioned the involvement of their communications group. Initially, the plan was centered around social media, but due to the low penetration rate in BARMM, they decided to consider traditional means. Radio was identified as the most prevalent medium for disseminating information to the masses, with television being a secondary option if feasible. The messaging would be formulated for broadcasters, who would then disseminate the information. Another method of delivering information to voters in BARMM involved engaging with associations of ulama and imams. These religious leaders agreed to deliver the information during Friday afternoon prayers, ensuring it reached the masses in remote areas.

Mr. Bernardo from the PPCRV suggested coordinating with two nationwide organizations, NAMFREL and PPCRV, to disseminate information during voter education initiatives. Dr. Arao expressed his desire for partnership, mentioning his involvement with Kontra Daya and their shared experience in collaborating on election-related education programs.

RESEARCH DISSEMINATION AND COLLABORATION

The last question came from Dr. Sabar, which was about the potential for translating the project's findings into community-level initiatives. She suggested the creation of an LGU network in partnership with CIDS to promote evidence-based governance, scientific administration, and new public management principles.

Dr. Panao acknowledged the value of the question and deferred to Dr. Rosalie Hall, suggesting that she would be better equipped to address it. He explained that while the current project has a specific focus, other programs within CIDS, such as those focused on urban sustainability, might be more directly relevant to Dr. Sabar's inquiry.

Dr. Hall affirmed CIDS's commitment to encouraging the use of the dataset across its various programs. She specifically mentioned the potential for the

Urban Studies program to utilize the fiscal performance measures within the dataset to analyze social service expenditures, personnel costs, and revenue generation in local governments. Dr. Hall highlighted the dataset's coverage of 144 cities, making it particularly relevant for urban studies research.

She further mentioned other CIDS programs with a local government focus, such as the Local Regional Studies Network, which typically concentrates on specific localities. Dr. Hall emphasized that the dataset could be a valuable resource for these programs, especially as it expands to include more granular data at the municipal level. She expressed hope that this expansion would facilitate comparative analyses and clustering of LGUs based on their tendencies and characteristics.

Dr. Hall reiterated CIDS's commitment to fostering collaboration across its programs, suggesting potential partnerships between the Data Science for Public Policy program and the project team to explore policy implications of the dataset. She highlighted the importance of inter-program collaboration to maximize the utilization of the dataset and ensure its relevance for various research initiatives.

Finally, Dr. Hall announced an upcoming collaboration with the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), revealing plans to mirror PSA data within the year. This initiative, she explained, would provide access to a vast array of PSA data, including household surveys and archival data, through the UP Data Commons, a powerful data infrastructure with extensive storage capacity. She emphasized the commitment to accessibility, aiming to make this mirrored PSA data available to researchers, journalists, students, and the general public, further expanding access to critical data for research and informed decision-making.

Photos of the Event



- **Source:** Kevin Christian Roque, 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.

The UP CIDS currently has twelve research programs that are clustered under the areas of education and capacity building, development, and social, political, and cultural studies. It publishes policy briefs, monographs, webinar/conference/forum proceedings, and the Philippine Journal for Public Policy, all of which can be downloaded free from the UP CIDS website.

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