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The ‘Garci Boys’ and the 2010 Elections

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., Jan. 5 (PinoyGlobal) - According to most accounts, the rigging of the 2004 and 2007 elections -- which resulted in the election of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and the 12-0 sweep of the administration’s senatorial slate in Mindanao -- was the work of the “Garci boys.”

In 2005, wiretapped conversations -- the “Hello Garci” tapes -- between Gloria and Virgilio “Garci” Garcillano revealed the extent of Garci’s fraudulent work to ensure that Gloria won the presidential election in 2004. Garci was caught on tape taking orders from Gloria who ordered him to manipulate the votes so she’ll win by more than one million votes over her opponent.

In an article written by Sheila S. Coronel, she described Garci as an expert in election fraud. She wrote: “Garcillano was an election technocrat, a career bureaucrat with specialized skills in a specific sphere of government. These skills are invaluable for the efficient administration of elections. But they can also be used for more sinister purposes. As the ‘Garci’ tapes revealed and as those who know him well say, the commissioner was a master fraud operator who used his knowledge of election laws and procedures, his long field experience, and his extensive network of contacts to rig the vote in favor of President Arroyo, Senator Robert Barbers, and a few other local politicians. ‘He was the plotter for electoral fraud, the overall supervisor and commander in chief,’ says a Comelec official who asked not to be named. ‘He was working for GMA.’”

Garci commanded a small band of operators who did what he told them to do. They’re known as the “Garci boys.” Although Garci was forced out of Comelec after the scandal was exposed, he and the “Garci boys” were unpunished. In fact, the “Garci boys” were rewarded -- they were promoted to higher positions.

Among those who were promoted were: Rey Sumalipao to Regional Director of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) which covers the “hot spot” provinces of Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Basilan; Renato Mabutay Regional Director for Northern Mindanao covering Misamis Oriental, Misamis Occidental, Camiguin, Bukidnon and Lanao del Norte; Francisco Pobe to Asst. Regional Director for the Caraga region; Renault Macarambon to Chief of the Comelec’s selection and barangay affairs in Manila.

In 2006, in a press release issued by Senate Minority Leader Aquilino “Nene” Pimentel Jr., he said, “the rewards being given to these election operators confirmed public suspicion that Commission on Elections Chairman Benjamin Abalos conducted moro moro or farcical investigation of these poll officials who were mentioned in the ‘Hello Garci’ tapes.” It was argued that the “smoking gun” evidence cannot be used because it was a wiretapped conversation and, therefore, illegal. Thus, Garci escaped indictment by technicality and Gloria got away with stealing the presidency.

Pimentel said that “the promotion of election officers who had a hand in 2004 poll cheating and failure to prosecute and

remove them from office means that the machinery for cheating remains intact for the 2007 polls.” Yes, indeed.

In the 2007 elections, the “Garci boys” became more powerful in their high-ranking positions. The whole of Mindanao was under their “absolute” control. And once again, they did what they do best, manipulate the election results to favor administration candidates.

Kontra Daya

, an election watchdog, reported: “The recently concluded polls again demonstrate a pattern of massive, deeply-rooted, systematic fraud and violence rivaling those in previous elections. The onslaught of cheating, threats and intimidation, brutality and bloodshed, could have been worse had it not been for the efforts of a vigilant citizenry, the mass media and various poll watchdogs.” Further, it said: “What is arguably the single most glaring example of systematic and wholesale cheating is the result of the elections in Maguindanao wherein a statistically improbable ‘0’ vote count was recorded for non-administration senatorial candidates amidst serious allegations of disenfranchisement and fabrication of election documents.”

Once again, the “Garci boys” got away with cheating.

In October 2009, thirteen “Garci boys” -- including relieved ARMM Regional Director Ray Sumalipao -- were charged with criminal violations and subjected to disciplinary actions connected to the election anomalies in 2007. Their cases are now pending before the Comelec. Some Comelec officials credited Jose Melo -- who took over the chairmanship from the disgraced Abalos -- for the revival of the cases. However, justice seems to be moving too slow.

Melo, in an attempt to allay fears that the “Garci boys” would once again rig the 2010 elections in favor of administration candidates -- particularly presidential candidate Gilbert

Teodoro -- gave assurances that the “Garci boys” would not be allowed to participate in next year’s elections. He said that the 13 “Garci boys” currently under investigation are being kept on “floating status.”

Melo said that he is confident that the “Garci boys” would not have the chance to manipulate the election results because of the implementation of the Automated Election System (AES). “Everything will be automated, untouched by human hands. They could no longer do anything about it. They cannot invade all the machines. Many will lose their sideline,” he said.

In a press release Pimentel issued last December 28, 2009, Pimentel “urged the Commission on Elections to neutralize the so-called ‘Garci’ boys who were involved in fraud operations in past elections particularly those holding sensitive positions in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.” He decried that the “Garci boys” who conspired with Garci in the massive “dagdag-bawas” (add-subtract) operations in the 2004 elections have remained unpunished and many of them have even been promoted to higher positions.

Contrary to Melo’s assertion that nobody can invade the AES machines to do their “dagdag-bawas” manipulations, it can be done and done so without paper trail -- only the end results. Like any other automated system, regardless of the application, AES will only perform what it is programmed to do. And if the system programmers were bribed to program AES to do certain things based on certain sets of codified instructions, then the results would be favorable to certain candidates.

In this age of automation, the next generation of “Garci boys” might be unlike their “dinosaur” predecessors. They could be high-tech specialists who know how to manipulate numbers at the touch of the keyboard.