

# Philippines: Election primer

## Summary

- Some 45.6mn Filipinos will vote in the mid-term elections on Monday, May 14. A strong performance of the anti-Arroyo coalition could pave the way for another impeachment attempt against the President in July. Currently, the risks to policy and markets from such appear moderate although political unrest could escalate in the near-term. So far, unrest has largely been related to local rather than legislative or senatorial seats. A brief description of what will be happening at the polls follows.

## Seats up for grabs

- Local positions: 17,000 governors, city/municipal council seats
- Congressional:
  - House of Representatives (lower house): All 212 district seats and up to 50 sectoral seats.
  - Senate (upper house): 12 seats out of a total of 24.

## How it works

- First-past-the-post system, except for sectoral representation.
- Each legislative district has around 250,000 voters.
- Sectoral representation:
  - For minorities that are not adequately represented through geographical district
  - Sectoral seats cannot constitute more than 20% of the House of Reps
  - Candidates elected through "party list" system (proportional representation); each 2% of votes gives party one seat; party can have a maximum of three seats.

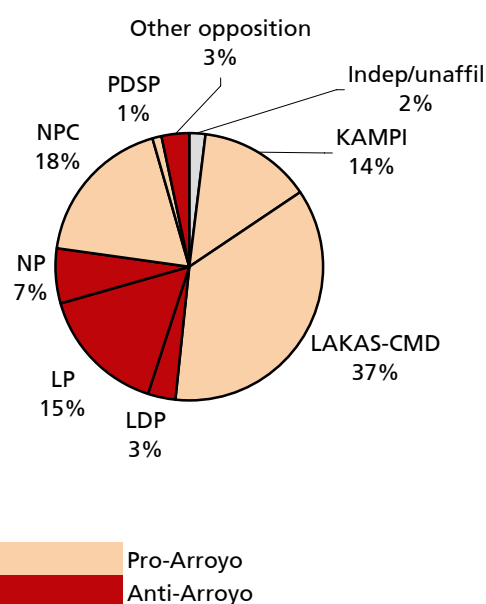
## Key parties/coalitions

- House of Reps legislative seats:
  - Pro-Arroyo bloc dominates, led by Lakas-Christian Democrats (Lakas-CMD), National People's Coalition (NPC) and Kampi.
  - Anti-Arroyo bloc led by Liberal Party (LP), Nacionalista Party (NP) and Struggle of Democratic Filipinos (LDP).
- Senate seats:
  - Two main opposing coalitions: The pro-Arroyo TEAM Unity and anti-Arroyo Genuine Opposition (GO).
  - Under this split, GO dominates slightly in current Senate representation.

## Developments to watch

- **Performance of anti-Arroyo camp:** Impeachment requires approval of only one-third of the lower house. If met, further approval would be required in the Senate, where a 2/3rds majority would be required. The earliest an attempt would likely come would be in July when the legislature convenes.
- **Escalation of political unrest:** Conflicts between rival militias of political opponents and intimidation of voters have seen authorities record 102 election-related deaths since campaigning began in February, with over half being candidates. This compares to 149 in 2004, and 111 in 2001.

Chart 1: Current division of 207-seat House of Representatives by affiliation



Source: Philippines' Congress website, [www.congress.gov.ph](http://www.congress.gov.ph); DBS

### Balance of risks

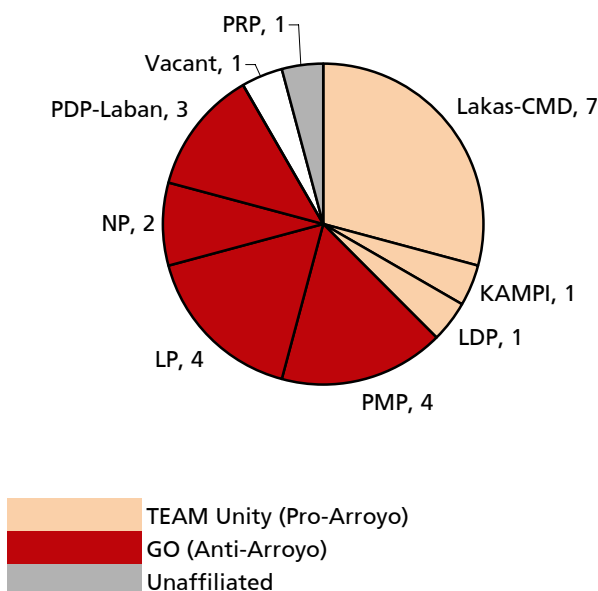
- Impeachment:** Risks appear low. In the lower house, it appears likely that the pro-Arroyo coalition will retain its overwhelming majority. Moreover, political loyalties are also weak, so even if the opposition were to win 1/3 of the lower house (or more), opposition lawmakers may not vote for impeachment. In 2005, 51 lawmakers voted to impeach Arroyo; this fell to 32 in 2006.
 

In the senate, opposition candidates may gain a further edge, with voter surveys placing most of the GO candidates in the top ranks of the 25 most popular senatorial candidates (see **Table 1**). Nevertheless, given the way things are likely to shape up in the lower house, impeachment proceedings appear unlikely to reach the Senate in the first place.
- Policy risk:** Stronger opposition in the Senate implies a marginally greater probability of legislative stalemates.
- Political unrest:** Typically, unrest intensifies during the vote counting period, which usually takes two weeks or more. Clashes to date have been related to local elections, where 87,000 candidates are vying for 17,000 posts. Candidates for higher positions have so far faced few threats. Taking no chances, the Philippine National Police (PNP) reported that as of this morning its 115,000-strong force was on Full Alert.

### Release of results

- Official results of the election will probably be released in staggered dates over a time span of at least two weeks. Delays may arise from complaints or protests, but the presence of 219 international observers could help smooth the process. Most local positions will be declared first, followed by Senatorial and party-list representatives. At the 2004 election, the poll was held on May 10 and the results were made official 14 days later, on May 24.

**Chart 2: Current representation in 24-seat Senate by affiliation**



Source: Philippines' Congress website, [www.congress.gov.ph](http://www.congress.gov.ph), DBS

**Table 1: Survey rankings of 25 most popular Senatorial candidates**

GO	Party	Ranking	TEAM Unity	Party	Ranking
Benigno Aquino III	LP	6	Edgardo J. Angara	LDP	11
Alan P. Cayetano	NP	8	Teresa Aquino-Oreta	NPC	23
Anna D. Coseteng	Independent	22	Joker P. Arroyo	KAMPI	12
Francis Escudero	NPC	3	Michael T. Defensor	Lakas-CMD	15
Panfilo Lacson	UNO	5	Jamalul D. Kiram	PDSP	--
Loren Legarda	NPC	1	Vicente P. Magsaysay	Lakas-CMD	21
John Henry Osmena	UNO	20	Cesar Montano	Lakas-CMD	19
Aquilino Pimentel III	PDP-Laban	14	Prospero A. Pichay, Jr.	Lakas-CMD	17
Sonia Roco	AD	18	Ralph G. Recto	Lakas-CMD	7
Antonio Trillanes Iv	UNO	16	Luis C. Singson	Lakas-CMD	25
Manuel Villar Jr.	NP	2	Vicente Sotto III	NPC	13
			Juan Miguel F. Zubiri	Lakas-CMD	10

Grey denotes incumbent

Sources: Surveys conducted by Pulse Asia, Social Weather Station, April & May, 2007

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