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Philippine Elections - Marcos' party victory

PRESIDENT'S PARTY GAINS IN PHILIPPINE ELECTIONS

The Nacionalista Party of President Marcos has won sweeping victories in the recent off-year elections, an unexpected achievement that should strengthen Marcos' prospects for re-election in 1969.

Nacionalista candidates have captured six of the eight Senate seats being contested, as well as over two thirds of the nation's governorships, mayoralties, and other local offices. A pro-administration independent and a Liberal took the remaining two Senate seats.

Liberal Benigno Aquino's outstanding showing was a major setback for the administration. Aquino, a former governor, is a vigorous opponent of Marcos and is now regarded as future presidential material. His victory is being challenged in the Supreme Court on technical grounds. Marcos also failed to block the re-election of the incumbent Liberal mayor of Manila, Antonio Villegas, whose political stock in trade has been baiting the US. His opponent had been personally chosen and vigorously supported by the President.

Marcos will now have nominal control of the Senate, but the progress of his economic programs

will depend in part on his ability to enforce party discipline. Philippine politicians frequently cross party lines for personal advancement, and a defection of several Nacionalistas last January threw control of the Senate to the Liberals. It also remains to be seen whether Marcos will have any greater success in overcoming the Senate's long-standing opposition to economic reforms.

The Nacionalistas' impressive gains in the provinces may well prove more significant than the senatorial victories. Marcos' increased local control will give him greater leverage in implementing development projects and in mustering support for the 1969 presidential elections. Marcos spent far more effort campaigning for provincial candidates than for the Senate hopefuls, who are elected at large.

Election day was generally peaceful after the widespread violence of the campaigns. The Election Commission, however, has come under severe criticism for inefficient voter registration. Possibly ten percent of the electorate was disenfranchised in the general confusion of drawing up new voter lists.

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