G.R. No. 201271. September 20, 2017 (Case Brief / Digest)

Title:
Teves vs. Commission on Elections, et al.

Facts:
1. **October 7-8, 2021**: Roel R. Degamo (Roel) and Ruel Gaudia Degamo (Ruel) filed their Certificates of Candidacy (COC) for Governor of Negros Oriental.
2. **October 13, 2021**: Roel filed a petition before the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) to declare Ruel a nuisance candidate, asserting confusion among voters due to the similarity of their names.
3. **December 16, 2021**: COMELEC Second Division granted Roel's petition, declaring Ruel a nuisance candidate and canceling his COC.
4. **December 21, 2021**: Ruel filed a Motion for Reconsideration against the COMELEC Second Division's decision.
5. **December 28, 2021**: Roel filed an Opposition to Ruel's Motion for Reconsideration.
6. **May 9, 2022**: Elections were held; Teves received the highest votes, Roel came second, and Ruel third.
7. **June 20, 2022**: Roel filed a Petition for Mandamus compelling COMELEC En Banc to resolve the pending Motion for Reconsideration.
8. **August 16, 2022**: Supreme Court granted the Petition for Mandamus directing COMELEC En Banc to resolve the Motion for Reconsideration.
9. **September 1, 2022**: COMELEC En Banc denied Ruel's Motion for Reconsideration.
10. **September 5-6, 2022**: Teves and Ruel filed separate Petitions for Certiorari with requests for a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) and/or Preliminary Injunction.
11. **September 27, 2022**: COMELEC En Banc issued an order of execution enforcing the decision to declare Ruel's votes in favor of Roel.
12. **October 3, 2022**: Roel was proclaimed and took his oath as the duly elected Governor of Negros Oriental.

Issues:
1. **Nuisance Candidacy**: Whether COMELEC erred in declaring Ruel as a nuisance candidate.
2. **Due Process**: Whether Teves' right to due process was violated as he was not impleaded in the nuisance candidate proceedings.
3. **Crediting Votes**: Whether votes cast for Ruel should be credited to Roel.

Court's Decision:
1. **Nuisance Candidacy**:

– The Court upheld COMELEC's finding that Ruel was a nuisance candidate. It found substantial evidence showing that Ruel opportunistically used the "Degamo" surname to confuse voters.

– COMELEC's factual findings, such as Ruel's failure to produce a birth certificate proving his use of "Degamo," were given deference.

2. **Due Process**:

– The Court ruled that Teves' due process was not violated. Statutes and jurisprudence, particularly Santos v. COMELEC, established that only the alleged nuisance candidate and the petitioning legitimate candidate are real parties-in-interest in nuisance proceedings. Teves, as a winning candidate with no name confusion, was considered a passive observer.

3. **Crediting Votes**:

– The Court sustained COMELEC's decision to count votes cast for Ruel in favor of Roel. This ruling was rooted in jurisprudence such as Martinez and Zapanta, which prioritize reflecting the electorate's true will.

Doctrine:

– **Nuisance Candidates**: Section 69 of the Omnibus Election Code allows COMELEC to declare a candidate as a nuisance motu proprio or on petition when a COC is filed to mock the election process or confuse voters.

– **Crediting Votes**: Votes cast for a nuisance candidate may be credited to the legitimate candidate with a similar name to uphold the electorate's intent, as established in Bautista, Martinez, and Zapanta.

Class Notes:

1. **Nuisance Candidate**:

– Section 69 Omnibus Election Code: Nuisance candidates mock the electoral process or create voter confusion.

– Requirements: (a) No bona fide intent to run, (b) Confusing similar names with registered candidates.

2. **Due Process in Electoral Cases**:

– Only the legitimate and alleged nuisance candidates need to be parties to proceedings on nuisance candidacy.

– Winning candidates unrelated to name confusion remain observers (Santos Doctrine).

3. **Crediting Votes of Nuisance Candidates**:

– Automated and manual election systems should credit votes for a nuisance candidate to the legitimate candidate with a similar name (Martinez, Zapanta).

Historical Background:
– **Electoral Law Evolution**:
– 1907: Act No. 1582 established election contest mechanisms focusing on manual vote recount and ballot validity.
– 1927: Act No. 3387 introduced the quo warranto proceedings.
– Current: Omnibus Election Code provides detailed procedures for resolving election-related disputes, including disqualification of candidates.

This progression reflects legislative efforts to ensure electoral integrity, addressing emerging complexities such as nuisance candidacies.