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## **Enabling Party System and Elections as Mechanisms of Accountability**

Election is a process of legitimization where citizens who hold the power in democracy to select who will be their leaders. It is also a way for citizens to hold leaders to account -- with only those who performed well and have gained public satisfaction being given another mandate by the people to stay in office.

However, elections in the country have become personality-oriented and money-based. Performance and track record are hardly taken into account.

Political parties are critical mechanisms to ensure that elections become accountable. Parties are supposed to serve as a screening ground of prospective candidates where selection takes into account track record vis-a-vis the party's platform. Parties ensure that candidates follow electoral laws during campaigns. They make sure that while in office, elected officials of the party would be mindful of party platform and program. The party also serves as a link to the people informing the people of what the party, through its elected and appointed officials, has achieved.

According to World Bank, "Electoral systems shape the incentives of both the elected officials and the citizens and make the elected officials more responsive to citizen's preferences." Through elections, citizens can elect the persons that best represent their preferences and hold them accountable through the possibility of re-election. Mechanisms like safeguard in electoral systems – recall, a faster way (than re-elections) of holding government officials accountable, and term limits -- and improving local council oversight make an "effective, political accountability system."

However, World Bank also noted that, while the Philippines have the recall elections and term limits, among the countries they studied, Philippines is the only country "where executive has complete veto authority over the decisions of the country." Further, the country's local council lacks the power to create ad hoc committees that will watch over the executive's actions and cannot remove "executives by no-confidence vote."

The passage of a party law is the most effective way to institutionalize parties that can make elections and elected leaders accountable.

A party law supports the institutionalization of parties as it:

- determines what constitutes a political party: who qualifies for ballot access, who benefits from public resources, who participates in government and how;
- regulates the form of activity in which parties may engage; and
- ensures appropriate forms of party organization and behavior (Katz 2005).

One of the most critical provisions in a party law is the state subsidy provided to parties.

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Secondary materials on experience abroad in the implementation of party laws identified the following as the actual benefits of state subsidy:

- Increased party strength because these resources would give party leaders leverage in inducing rank-and file members to vote the party line (La Raja 2006);
- Reduced incentives for choosing leaders based on fundraising prowess (instead of other kinds of leadership skills is looked at) (La Raja 2006);
- Freed political parties and candidates from soliciting money, hence freeing them from influence [capture] by wealthy donors (La Raja 2006);
- Furthered the overall levelness of the electoral playing field (Poire 2006) since this “compensates for the disadvantages that some parties may suffer because they are not being supported by economically powerful groups” (O’Donnell 2004);
- Oriented towards supplementing parties’ research, education and minority-inclusion efforts. (Poire, 2006); and
- Diminished the likelihood that representatives will betray their constituents’ preferences because of a bribe from a lobby or campaign contributor (Ackerman and Ayres 2002).

It is therefore resolved that:

Congress and Senate pass the pending party bills (House Bills 49, 159, and 403 in the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress) as these will help address the weak and underdeveloped parties and the party system, addressing the flaws in the current political party system – absence of state support in terms of financing political parties, lack of accountability and transparency in party financing and expenditures, turncoatism, and patronage culture of political parties based on financial contributions – and enabling the party system and parties to be more accountable;

Commission on Elections push for the passage of the bill and prepare for its implementation;

Parties push for the passage of the bill and prepare for its implementation;

Civil society organizations push for the passage of the bill and help inform the public of the merits of the law, as well of parties in elections in general.

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We, the undersigned, hereby support this resolution and call on appropriate authorities and actors to respond swiftly and appropriately on the proposed actions articulated therein.

Signed on this 19<sup>th</sup> day of November 2014 during the National Conference on Strengthening Accountability to Sustain Reforms held at Astoria Plaza Hotel, Escriva Drive, Ortigas Business District, Pasig City.

**MR. PAUL RAFAEL**  
COUNCIL OF ASIAN LIBERALS AND DEMOCRATS

**MR. JOHNNY O. CARDENAS**  
PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL FOR RESPONSIBLE VOTING

**MR. ANTHONY OROZCO**  
POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES



**MR. SALVADOR P. SUBLA**  
I-WATCH



**MR. RAMON P. LIGASON**  
I-WATCH