

Infusing Reform in Elections: The Partisan Electoral Engagement of Reform Movements in Post-EDSA Philippines

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Reform Movements in Post-EDSA Philippines

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with

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Political Democracy and Reform (PODER)



Ateneo School of Government  
The Graduate School of Leadership and Public Service  
*10 years of transforming communities and building the nation*

Acheron et al. PODER

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**FRIEDRICH  
EBERT  
STIFTUNG**



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# Infusing Reform in Elections

The Partisan Electoral Engagement of Reform Movements in Post-Martial Law Philippines

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## Foreword

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In 2008, the Ateneo School of Government through its program Political Democracy and Reform (PODER) partnered with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung to convene a discussion series we called the *Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series*. The objective of the discussion series was to document the experience of civil society engagement in partisan politics, particularly the presidential elections after Martial Law, for lessons that can be used for academic and practical purposes.

The Discussion Series turned out to be a worthwhile endeavor. It provided a rare space for key leaders in civil society and relevant social movements with diverse perspectives and experience to step back and reflect on their involvement in the past presidential elections of 1992, 1998 and 2004 to inform their analyses of the then current political situation.

The space served as an opportunity to link the practice to theories and concepts, which became critical in elucidating understanding and appreciation, and in framing interventions for the upcoming 2010 elections. Up to some extent, the discussions served as sounding board of ideas, thinking and experience that, we in ASoG would like to believe, contributed to the convergence and integration of varied efforts and agenda of critical players in reform movements in the 2010 elections. Convergence is most critical, for ASoG believes that efforts for change in the country, if they remain scattered, even though they are vibrant and many, would not create significant impact on the country's development and democracy.

This book took off from the documentation of the *Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series*. The PODER Team further developed the materials available by conducting key informant interviews and research of secondary materials to come up with this book that hopefully academicians and practitioners alike would find worth reading.

The discussion series initially looked into how civil society engages partisan politics – what are its implications and considerations, and

what are the results and outcomes. The framing evolved to looking at how forces from social movements that are new in mainstream politics made use of the limited democratic space that became available when the country transitioned to democracy to advance an alternative governance and development agenda. In particular, the book focuses on the contestation in presidential elections and delved on how actors and groups from social movements, which the book refers to as “reform movements,” “cross-over” from the terrain of civil society to the partisan electoral field—the key debates and issues they delved in and how they tackled and confronted the realities of traditional politics and political culture to be effective mainstream players in contesting for state power.

With this account, the book contributes in telling another colorful part of Philippine history, which centers on those who persistently struggle to democratize access to power towards a more substantive democracy.

The book ends with a positive tone, pointing to “progression in history,” given the improvement in the results of the engagement of reform movements in electoral politics, presidential elections after presidential elections. It recounts the victory of the new president, President Benigno ‘Noynoy’ Aquino and attributes it to the improving effectiveness of the reform movements in engaging mainstream electoral politics. With this book, it is my hope that this forward movement can be sustained and broadened to finally make a difference in the lives of ordinary Filipinos towards a more just and democratic Philippines.

**ANTONIO G.M. LA VIÑA**

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## Introduction

# Democratization, Civil Society and Electoral Partisanship for Reforms

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The Philippine presidency is one of the most powerful presidencies in the world. The Philippine President is both the Head of Government and the Chief of State. The presidency has enormous legal and organizational resources with the entire bureaucracy at its disposal. It appoints the heads of the Supreme Court and the constitutional offices. Though it is theoretically, Congress holds the power of the purse, in practice the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) under the Office of the President which has the last say who gets how much and when. Needless to say, there is an imbalance in the system of check-and-balance of the Philippine government because of the overly powerful presidency.

Just as the Philippine presidency can wreak havoc, it is also a powerful institution that has the capacity to introduce structural reforms in Philippine politics, including the power to correct itself. To be a significant political player, one has to position one's self in the presidential race.

This explains why the presidency has been a fierce ground for political contestation as the country transitions to democracy. Throughout post-Martial Law electoral history, there would be a duel between the old and the new—the old referring to the traditional forces that have been engaging mainstream politics before and during the Martial Law period and the new, which refers to those who only emerged in mainstream politics during the period of democratization and have largely been pushing for their advocacy outside the state.

The traditional forces of Philippine society learned about the importance of the presidency far ahead and arguably were the masters behind the centralization of power in the presidency (perhaps to make

their dealings with the government much more efficient). Hence, they have extensive experience in the business of electing a president. Arguably, the electoral system has been engineered in such a way that their enterprise operates in a stable and predictable environment. Political culture is molded in a way that threats are assimilated without these threats knowing that the status quo is already absorbing them.

The new forces come from many sources, such as the social movements, forces that offer an alternative political and economic order but have largely kept themselves out of the formal structure of the state. As the country transitions to democracy, these new forces eventually realized the need to seriously engage elections, particularly the presidential elections, and go beyond engagements outside the state or through civil society.

What can be considered as the first attempt of these new forces was in 1992 when they supported the Salonga-Pimentel ticket. The experiment was a political massacre for these groups. In 1998, albeit divided, a number of these groups and individuals campaigned for ERAP. While the engagement was victorious, this electoral engagement divided these new forces into several factions and political leanings that their configuration would never be the same again since then. In 2004, some leaders from these forces decided to back Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. The election of 2004 was a victory for them. However, barely over a year after the elections, these same leaders left the President they had elected. Most of those who left GMA in 2005 came back with a vengeance in the 2010 elections supporting Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino, eager to come closer than ever to attaining state power for themselves.

This book is about these groups and actors from the social movements that decided to go beyond civil society engagement and went partisan in the previous presidential elections as part of their efforts for reforms. In the course of their partisan electoral engagement, including their cross-over to government, these actors would claim to still embody and exhibit the qualities, values and behaviors of civil society actors, which led to complications in delineating the space between state and civil society and the role played by civil society vis-à-vis the state. Instead of courting their agenda and claims through political parties that are supposed to be the institutions for the electoral participation

of citizens, these forces formed groups, networks, coalitions or alliances that were temporary and informal (largely for electoral purposes only), exhibiting features common to civil society or social movement actors.

The book forms the narrative of this phenomenon of actors from the social movements going beyond civil society engagement and crossing-over to the partisan electoral arena as part of the democratization process. It chronicles the 1992, 1998, 2004 and 2010 presidential engagement of these new forces. Each case study presents a comprehensive narrative of what transpired in the engagements and identifies key lessons learned from the experience for two purposes:

- To gain insights on the implications of this political development on the discourse of democratization and the strengthening of institutions, particularly political parties; and
- To offer lessons and insights for possible future actions of new forces that wish to engage mainstream politics, particularly presidential elections.

The case studies answer the following general guide questions:

- What was the political and socio-economic condition of the country when the electoral engagement happened?
- Who were involved? Who were the key actors?
- What were the major factors that directed the movements toward partisan electoral engagement?
- What were the key events and factors that shaped the engagement?
- What were the debates and the agreements?
- What was the significance of the reform agenda?
- How was the presidential candidate selected?
- What was the result and outcome of the engagement?
- What happened to the groups after their partisan electoral engagement?
- What are the key lessons learned from the experience, particularly in terms of achieving the desired result?

The book situates this political engagement in the discourse and practice of democratic consolidation.

## **Democratization and Civil Society**

The end of Martial Law in 1986 marked the beginning of democratization in the Philippines. Democratization is generally known as a process of transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. It consists of three overlapping stages, namely: (1) the breakdown of old regime as a result of the crisis of legitimacy; (2) 'democratic transition,' which involves the setting up and institutionalization of democratic institutions like elections, Constitution and political rights; and (3) 'democratic consolidation,' which refers to the embedding of the institutions and processes of democracy to the extent that it becomes "the only game in town" (Przeworski 1991).

Most of the earlier studies of democratic consolidation have largely focused on the functioning of democratic institutions, particularly the conduct of competitive and regular elections. These studies presuppose that consolidation would lead to "stabilization, routinization, institutionalization and legitimization of political activities" (Gunther et.al. 1996: 151). According to this view, this is achieved through institutionalization and the rule of law (O'Donnell 2004 in Hee Yeon 2008: 9).

However, the continuing crisis and instability in countries undergoing consolidation led to an alternative view of consolidation, which looks at democratic consolidation as a conflict-ridden process. Consolidation is but a "new dimension of conflict processes" involving contestation between "former monopolistic groups," which "resist the dismantling and transformation of the monopolistic structure" and the new forces that were excluded, marginalized and even suppressed in the old political order (Hee Yeon 2008: 10-12).

The latter view of democratic consolidation, which recognizes the entry of previously marginalized and excluded forces in the political arena, is consistent with the experience of the Philippines. The transition to democracy of the Philippines provided a "democratic space" for the entry of groups, movements and actors (previously resisting engagement with the state or were opposition to the government) to mainstream politics. In the post-Marcos dispensation, these forces have incorporated the identity of civil society, which has become a critical factor in Philippine democratization.

This is akin to Nathan Quimpo's (2008) framework called *Contested Democracy*, which he uses to explain democratization in the Philippines. According to Quimpo, the meaning of Philippine democracy is being contested by the forces on top which intend to keep the "truncated procedural democracy" in the country and those below, the mass movements, that have been continuously pushing for improving substantive democracy (p. 17).

In the same book, Quimpo presents the three main "civil society arguments" on its roles in democratization, namely: (1) associational civil society based on Tocqueville and Putnam's argument about social capital or strong civil society as a critical element of democratization; (2) counterweight civil society that presents a dichotomy between society and state, and civil society serving as a force that guards against a tyrannical or predatory state; and (3) hegemonic civil society which looks at civil society as a space for political contestations (Chapter 3).

The book argues that the civil society argument which is democratizing is the third argument; while the two can be threatening to democracy and the democratization process for they espouse a "harmony" model of politics, which according to the book, is "one that downplay the very real conflict between the country's oligarchic elite and the poor and marginalized classes, sectors and communities" (p. 95). In particular, associational civil society as a project of "revisionist neoliberals" disregards or neutralizes the differences in power position among social groups; while counterweight democracy idealizes civil society as the defender of freedom against state abuses. Both views marginalize political organizations—especially parties—for they obscure attempts to gain state power to shape relationship in civil society and conceptually conceal the ambiguous but significant relationship between the state and society (p. 103).

Given the historical origins of civil society in the Philippines—which emerged from exclusion during the previous dispensation and the historical evolution of the state as being largely elitist and predatory—it can be argued that the dominant understanding and appreciation of the term civil society in the Philippines has been that of a countervailing force to the state. As such, civil society is viewed as non-partisan actors that work "in the public arena" but remain "outside of government." Its efforts are merely limited to

non-partisan initiatives such as service-delivery and policy advocacy. Under this interpretation, civil society cannot contest state power and/or engage in partisan elections for by doing so they lose their “civil society-ness” and instead automatically incorporates the character of a political party.

This conception of what civil society ought to be has made the involvement of civil society actors in partisan electoral politics an issue in Philippine politics. By engaging in partisan politics, some segments of the civil society are actually trying to break away from the narrow characterization stated above and are instead attempting to redefine “civil society” perhaps more towards Gramsci’s idea of a space of contestation by actors that can both engage that space called civil society and the state through elections and political parties.

The view of democratic consolidation as conflict-ridden would tend to agree with this characterization of civil society. In fact, this view would go to the extent of determining the level of democratization in terms of the ability of the new forces (those coming from the marginalized segments of the society in the old political order) to create hegemony in civil society against the old forces that aim to keep the country from democratizing (Hee Yeon et al. 2008: 14-15).

Looking at civil society as a space of contestation of actors from varying forces, there is now a need to clarify what comprises this space or entity called civil society.

There are three main typologies in the definition of civil society:

- Based on the entities/ groups composing it (civil society as an entity composed of sets of entities)<sup>1</sup> ;

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the definitions under this typology: Anderson: Institutions that are ‘private’ in pursuit of their own ends such as autonomous bodies, businesses, trade unions, clubs, families, etc.; Cariffo: Consists of the complex of citizens and groups outside government but working in the public arena.; Wikipedia: totality of voluntary civic and social organizations and institutions that form the basis of a functioning society, David: organizations that intersect with the domain of the state but are not part of the state apparatus, they operate within existing structures but contest state power.; Korbonski (in Ferrer): web of autonomous associations independent of the state, bringing citizens together in pursuit of their common interests.; Doronilla (in Ferrer): covers all institutions and groups engaging each other in the democratization process.; Ruechemeyer, et.al. (in Ferrer): totality of social institutions and associations, both formal and informal, that are not strictly production-related nor governmental and familial in character.; Silliman and Noble: voluntary, rule abiding and politically active sector of society, autonomous/ independent from the state but seek benefits, policy changes or accountability from the state.; Paez: non-state actors or to those who by election or appointment do not form part of the formal state apparatus that includes the executive, legislative and judiciary.

- Based on its boundaries in the political-social environment (civil society as a space/ sphere)<sup>2</sup>; and
- Based on what it is and what it does (civil society as a phenomenon/ occasion)<sup>3</sup>.

Hence, in conceptually and operationally defining civil society, one has to determine the following components or answer the following questions:

- Who or what are the entities (institutions, organizations, etc.) comprising civil society? [actors]
- What is its boundaries and scope of operation? [space/ sphere]
- How does it behave? What are the activities/ actions/ behaviors/ events that comprise it? [actions/ behaviors]
- What role does it play in politics and in governance? [role it plays/ argument]

The London School of Economics' Center for Civil Society, for instance, recently provided this definition: "Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collection action around shared interest, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market; though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power."

<sup>2</sup> Some of the definitions under this typology: Anderson: realm of autonomous groups and associations; a private sphere independent from public authority; Ferrer/ TWSC: public sphere where autonomous groups and individuals interact with each other on matters of collective concern; space that covers all other groups including business except the state; includes but not limited to market relations. UNDP: being a link between people and government, these civil society organizations have mass membership and consistently strengthen their grassroots consultation, advocacy and organizing. Cariño: sphere between the market and the state embodying neither self-interest nor coercive authority; act as mediator or "intermediary sector" that reconciles public good with pursuit of self-interest. Ake, Pearce (in Ferrer): space where groups of people live; the entire spectrum of associational life; and the constellation of power centers and countervailing forces. Cramer (in Ferrer): social space that encompass even the broad activities of the state and the political activities of the society.

<sup>3</sup> Cariño: state is public action for public interest; market is private action for private profit; civil society is private action for public good. 19th century liberal theories: phenomenon that defines the space for personal autonomy distinct from the state but where individuals are bound to a large society with moral and ethical codes; civil society as market society. Hegel: moment of particularity mediating between the unity of the family and the universality of the state in the sphere of ethical life. Diokno: social and political phenomenon that entails self-organization of society; it is determined effort on the part of society to maintain democratic political order, with a number of supporting social and cultural phenomena which keep democracy intact and meaningful. O'Connell: exists at the intersection where the community, voluntary sector, government and business come together to protect and nurture the rights granted to individuals and to ensure that the responsibilities required of citizens to maintain those rights are observed; civil society is the meeting of the perspective of the different elements of society.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines civil society as groups and formation that collectively serve as “a link between people and government, have mass membership and consistently strengthen their grassroots consultation, advocacy and organizing.” Hague and Harrop, on the other hand, define civil society as “groups, which are ‘above’ the personal realm of the family but ‘beneath’ the state” (Hague and Harrop 2004: 127).

These definitions point to one critical characteristic of civil society: while it may refer to entities and actors, it is not homogenous. “Civil society actors” may therefore refer to civic organizations, the academe, media, business foundations and others, which are in between the market and the state, bridging the government and the citizens, using private means to achieve public ends.

For the purpose of this book, the civil society actors being referred to are those coming largely from what is referred to as the Left movement, which provides for an alternative vision of society and which (re-)engages<sup>4</sup> the state to push for changes in the system. These are a diverse set of actors coming from the different traditions and schools of thought of the Left—from the most radical that calls for the establishment of a Communist state to the moderates such as socialist democrats or democratic socialists. The book further focuses on the moderate Left because of their more active and more successful engagement in mainstream politics in post-Marcos Philippines.

## **Civil Society and the Rise of “Reformers” in the Electoral Arena**

Since the end of Martial Law, civil society has been hailed as “the savior of governance,” with actors playing varied and diverse roles: filling the gaps in the service-delivery, fulfilling the functions needed for a democratic system to work, and providing the moral and political suasion to inspire people to serve the public interest. Since the start of the transition to democracy in 1986 and up to the present, civil society actors continue to perform all these roles.

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<sup>4</sup> There have been efforts in the past for the Left to take part in the state (early 1900s and 1940s), but these were curtailed by the ruling forces then.

The concept civil society became popularly used in the 1990s. With the new political dispensation, working within the bounds of the legal-institutional order seemed a viable option for social movements and some of those formerly from revolutionary groups, hence their engagement in civil society. Since these groups continue to espouse an alternative form of politics and continue to pose systematic critique to the prevailing political order (at least in their discourse), reform has become the main focus of their work.

Reform work in the Philippines largely refers to the efforts in many arenas, including civil society, to gradually and incrementally transform the way governing is done through changes in policies, mechanisms and processes. Referring to its root words is instructive of its meaning: re and form, which means redoing or reworking of the form.

Up to some extent, it may also refer to efforts to make a difference in the political and socio-economic condition of the country, but through certain limited means. All these changes are sought within the existing legal framework or political system, using means and measures that legitimate authority legalizes and binds. It is different from what may be considered traditionally as revolutionary efforts, which would use means that are outside the bounds of the law, including the use of arms and other unconstitutional means. While reform generally emphasizes gradual change, revolution would tend to see change happening in a sudden moment of upheaval using drastic measures.

Reform work in civil society, in particular, has largely pertained broadly to propose changes by actors and groups outside the state on the existing policies, institutions, programs and priorities of the government under the prevailing political system to make governance more responsive to the needs and concerns of the people.

Reformers emerged as a response to the limitations and flaws of the status quo. They are part of a movement that pose a challenge to the existing system critique, opposition or action and providing an alternative through their reform agenda and advocacy. The reformers would banner new politics as their cause to rebuke and oppose traditional politics.

New politics is a negation of traditional politics. A moralistic standpoint is provided in a leaflet by the National Youth Commission (NYC) for youth leaders:

one where a new breed of leaders [,] committed to the national vision of a just society, virtuous communities and ecologically-sound development assume posts of responsibility and power. The principle of new politics rejects corruption as the goal of power and restores public service as the motive for political involvement. New politics seeks to restore moral integrity to our communities and is animated by the desire to empower all citizens, so that democracy becomes meaningful to all and not just to [a] few. New politics implies selfless and patriotic political engagement by a new generation of leaders seeking to end the old politics of greed.

To differentiate itself from traditional politics that subscribes to the Machiavellian principle of “the end justifies the means,” new politics emphasizes that “the end does not justify the means,” and that truth and justice must be sought at all times. It also emphasizes people empowerment serve as its key theme and direction. For traditional politics, corrupt or unlawful acts are justified so long as these protect and expand power. In elections, the usual means of winning for traditional politics is the 4Gs, namely: goons, guns, gold and good looks.

From an institutional perspective, traditional politics is patronage-based. It breeds disempowerment and dependency by creating and reproducing patron-client relationships, where the patron (a person or a family) provides services and resources to clients who are in turn expected to throw their political support to the patron due to fear of losing the services and resources that the patron provides them. This relationship undermines institutions for it creates dependency on personal ties in accessing public goods and services, instead of using institutional means.

To differentiate them from the extreme or the revolutionary Left and go beyond the conceptual limits of civil society, the term *reformers* or *reform movements* serves as a better alternative to refer to groups and individuals that are pushing for reforms in politics through different spaces and avenues. The name automatically proclaims a critic to the status quo, as evidenced by its call for reform. Secondly, it does not

constrict actors or actions to a particular sphere, for reforms can be achieved by engaging either civil society, the political arena or even the market using varied and multi-faceted means and expressions of power. However, its point of impact or what the reformers want to reform remains political (i.e., government and public affairs).

Because of the seemingly insurmountable challenges in development and governance posted by the transition, some actors and groups in the reform movements realized that engagement in civil society or outside the state alone is not enough to achieve reforms and make a difference. There is a need to expand its engagement to include contestation for formal power. It is but crucial to also engage the arena that determines what constitutes power in government, the elections.

The engagement of reformers in partisan electoral arena can be understood as an attempt of “new forces” in mainstream politics to address two challenges in democratic consolidation in the Philippines: (1) the limits of the “EDSA democracy” in furthering the democratization process; and (2) the threat of democratic backsliding.

### *Limits of EDSA Democracy*

The EDSA uprising of 1986 has brought down a dictator but it stops there. It supposedly installed a democratic government; yet this is only partly true in form, but not at all in substance.

Several years since the democratization process began, poverty and underdevelopment continue to persist in the country, with a significant portion of the population hardly eating three times a day. The gap between the rich and poor continues to widen. Only a few people have access to economic and political power. Government, though showing some signs of improvement, is still highly perceived as corrupt, with numerous public officials having unexplained wealth. Though now enjoying constitutionally-guaranteed rights, cases of violations and non-observance of human rights remain pervasive. Access to and quality of health, education and social services, while persistently have been the priority of the government, continue to be a big challenge of governance.

Nathan Quimpo has a term for it: “truncated procedural democracy.” EDSA installed a procedural democracy that is truncated with key

institutions such as political and electoral systems that are inadequately defined and are under-developed or mal-developed.

Other political scientists call it a “weak state,” where the state is captured by particularistic elite interests and hardly determines the course of politics. State machineries could hardly stand the onslaught of pressures from powerful elite families and hence, can hardly protect, defend, and advance the public interest and general welfare resulting in rampant and systemic graft and corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies, which eventually lead to inadequate and poor services for the people.

Other political scientists use many other terms to describe Philippine politics such as **elite democracy** (Walden Bello), **cacique democracy** (Benedict Anderson), **less-than-democratic** (Jenny Franco), **democratic deficit** (Joel Rocamora and Paul Hutchcroft), **oligarchic democracy** (Paul Hutchcroft), **contested democracy** (Nathan Quimpo) and **democratic rollback** (Larry Diamond)—all pointing to the lack of substantive democracy in the country with the continued rule of the same powerful families through patronage politics.

Partisan electoral work becomes an imperative for reform movements given the seemingly insignificant democratic change in the country’s power structure. Significant political power remains in the hands of the same privileged few, despite the active and vibrant work of different groups and forces in civil society. This proves the limit of associational and counterweight civil society work, that in general does not contest state power. As lamented by some people involved in reform work, “why guard power if you would just end up guarding the same abusive powerholders?” As evidenced by history, this only leads to a self-perpetuating cycle where the engagement of citizens even becomes a deodorizing or legitimizing elements for the perpetuation of the status quo.

Meanwhile, the electoral spaces that have been provided to reformers such as the party-list system have proven to be limited and limiting in providing an alternative. These spaces are structurally constricting that the reformers who engage them are left in isolated and contained spaces,

which effectively keep them off the mainstream, hence perpetuating their marginalization.

Ideally, the party-list is supposed to provide that breeding ground for parties; but instead of being national political parties with a national development agenda, party-list groups have become very sectoral, thereby losing the prospect of party development through the party-list. And instead of further consolidating so as to become a major political force, party-list groups continuously split in order to gain more seats. (Aceron 2009: 15)

Another means of marginalization of the party-list system is how it is structured. It would be most difficult for the 20% of one of the two legislative chambers to be decisive in legislative decision-making, especially if this 20% is not fully-occupied and is hardly united due to deep political and ideological cleavages among groups, that were brought about by past political engagements brought on one hand, and due to the affinity of some of the other party-list representatives to traditional politics on the other.

### *Threat of Democratic Backsliding*

The presidency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, which was a product of the EDSA regime, best demonstrates the weakness and flaws of the political order installed by EDSA. Rocamora provides a vivid image of how the Arroyo administration displayed the worst in the present regime:

GMA has been such a disaster that she has single handed[ly] turned reform from a necessity to an imperative. She has returned corruption to Marcos-era ubiquity and proportions. She has worsened ongoing rebellions, one with extra-judicial killings, another with consummate ineptness. She has trampled on already weak political institutions. If, as unpopular as GMA is, she remains in power, there is clearly something wrong with the presidency whose power and resources is all that's left that sustains her.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Joel Rocamora, transcripts from the Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

Surprisingly, even GMA has acknowledged this in her 2005 State of the Nation Address after the infamous “Hello Garci” scandal: “...our political system has degenerated to such an extent that it’s very difficult to live within the system with hands totally untainted.” While this could be a statement to divert accountability to the system rather than to her leadership, objectively speaking, it is telling of the imperative for change in Philippine politics.

The seeming “democratic rollback” in the country under the Arroyo administration posed serious threats to civil liberties and political rights as these constrict the space for non-partisan and “harmonious” civil society work. This in turn made partisan electoral engagement of reformers an imperative. The political condition called for actions that not only complement governance or guard against abuses. The Arroyo presidency necessitated a direct challenge to the existing political order, starting with the change of who was holding the presidency.

Given the limitation of resources, the narrow ranks of reformers and reform-oriented groups and with formidable forces whose interest lies on keeping the status quo, there has been a need to prioritize and to concentrate efforts. Both the conjuncture and the organizational/ institutional capacity of reform and progressive movements create a situation where partisan political work, particularly in the election of the most important political post in the land, becomes an imperative strategy to effect change and usher democratization.<sup>6</sup>

## **A Brief History of the Reform Movements in the Philippines**

The discourse of reform in politics is not as extensively delved in the Philippines as that of revolution. In a way, reform was just a strategy that evolved as a reaction to the limits and flaws of the dominant revolutionary strategy, National Democracy, that is arguably more well discoursed and developed.

In tracing the history of reform movements in the Philippines, one has to trace the history of the social movements in general. Heywood (2002: 284) defines social movements as

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<sup>6</sup> Concept note, The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

...a particular form of collective behavior in which the motive to act spring largely from the attitudes and aspirations of members, typically acting within a loose organizational framework. Being part of a social movement requires a level of commitment and political activism rather than formal or card-carrying membership; above all, movements move. Not uncommonly, social movements embrace interest groups and may even spawn political parties.

The Katipunan was the first social movement in the Philippines. Its organization was largely national in scope. Most of its members were either landless farmers or Manila artisans. It fought for the interests of the entire nation, unlike previous revolts which were parochial in nature and were primarily motivated by personal resentment against the colonial administration. The Katipunan's objective was to achieve national independence through armed Revolution. Since they all trace their origins to the Katipunan, social movements in the Philippines often exhibit revolutionary characteristics. By and large, the history of the social movement is a history of Revolution.

The demise of the Katipunan during the American occupation led to the emergence of new social movements. Workers' unions and peasant organizations kept the Katipunan's revolutionary tradition by fighting for social justice and equality.

In 1901, the first labor union called the Union Obrero Democrata (UOD) was formed in Manila under the leadership of Isabelo delos Reyes. The American government immediately crushed UOD. The *Union Obrero Democratica de Filipinas* (UODF) and the *Kongreso ng mga Anakpawis ng Pilipinas* (KAP) eventually succeeded UOD.

These working class efforts eventually led to the formation of the *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) in 1930, headed by Crisanto Evangelista. It was the largest working class organization prior to the Second World War.

Meanwhile, concerned about the condition of the farmers, Pedro Abad Santos formed the *Partido Sosyalista ng Pilipinas* (PSP). Compared to the PKP, the PSP was not as radical as calling for the overthrow of the government, hence it was never outlawed.

The PKP and PSP later merged in 1938. This was done to strengthen the struggle of the poor for higher wages, land redistribution, and better living conditions. The new party was called PKP-1930, which then fielded local candidates and had several mayors and councilors in Manila and Pampanga.

When Japan occupied the Philippines, PKP-1930 formed the *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon* (HUKBALAHAP). HUK forces were able to liberate several towns in Central Luzon. The landholdings and haciendas in these liberated zones were then redistributed to the farmers.

With the end of the Second World War and the return of General Douglas MacArthur to the Philippines, PKP-1930 laid down their arms and joined the 1946 Congressional elections. They were able to win six (6) seats in the Lower House. However, Manuel Roxas prevented the six Congressmen from taking their seats and began a crackdown against the Left.

Forced to go back to the hills, PKP-1930 formed the *Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* (HMB). However, by the mid-1950s, PKP-1930 was already a spent political force.

The defeat of PKP-1930 prompted the youth and students of the 1960s to take a more active role in advancing the interests of the poor. This youth-initiated movement was later called the *National Democratic Movement* or ND, which arguably continued the discourse of revolution in the Philippines with its Marxist-Leninist-Maoist framework. On November 30, 1964, UP Teaching Assistant Jose Maria Sison, formed the *Kabataang Makabayan* (KM) that took the lead in the creation of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) four years later.

Meanwhile, a “Left of Center” force among labor unions then emerged alongside the NDs. These included the Philippine Association of Free Labor Unions (PAFLU), Federation of Free Workers (FFW) and Federation of Free Farmers (FFF). Arguably, this force started the discourse of reform—of working in critical collaboration with the government or what is now referred to as taking part in governance, instead of calling for the overthrow of the entire system. Some would refer to this as the Democratic Socialist alternative.

This force became mainstream in 1969 with the creation of the Christian Social Movement by Raul Manglapus, *Lakas Diwa* by Ed Garcia and *Kilusan ng mga Anak ng Kalayaan* (KAK) by Romeo Intengan, to name a few. Labeling themselves as moderates in contrast to the ND, this Social Democrat-Democratic Socialist (SD-DS) group participated in the electoral exercise in 1970, winning seats in Congress. The ideological framework of the group became clearer with the formation of the *Katipunan ng mga Demokratiko Sosyalistang Pilipino* (KDSP), the predecessor of the *Partido Demokratikong Sosyalista ng Pilipinas* (PDSP).

While the SD-DS continued to go mainstream, the NDs strengthened its revolutionary armed struggle with the creation of the New People's Army (NPA) on 30 March 1969. However, the growing distance and difference in strategy between the two forces suddenly became insignificant with the declaration of Martial Law in 1971, with both camps needing to respond to and contend with the repression and abuses of the dictator.

With reported abuses, a fledgling economy and a discredited leadership, the power and mandate of the Marcos dictatorship began to decline by the beginning of the 1980s. Both the efforts of the NDs at the grassroots and the communities, and the above-ground organizing and advocacy work of the SD-DS weakened the dictatorship's hold on power.

The assassination of Ninoy Aquino triggered the definitive downfall of the dictatorship. The NDs consolidated its above-ground forces to face the dictatorship head-on with the creation of a broad movement called the *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (BAYAN) in 1984. The SD-DS force continued to broaden and consolidate with the formation of broader networks and coalitions such as Filipino Social Democratic Movement (FDSM) and *Bansang Nagkaisa sa Diwa at Layunin* (BANDILA) in 1985.

The 1986 revolution left the NDs and its revolutionary strategy isolated with its decision not to take part in the EDSA uprising; while the pivotal role of the SD-DS and its alliance with mainstream players like the Liberal Democrats poised it to be in mainstream politics in the new dispensation. Hence, while the NDs continued their revolutionary struggle, the SD-DS took the lead in the reform struggle in early post-Marcos Philippines.

However, the difference in how the SD-DS would engage the new dispensation (or in particular, who to ally with in the crop of emerging or re-emerging traditional politicians) led to the split in PDSP that created a new SD-DS formation called *Pandayan para sa Sosyalistang Pilipinas* (PANDAYAN). Under the leadership of Bert Gonzales, PDSP became closely affiliated with Fidel Ramos and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. On the other hand, Pandayan opted to stay with the social movement with some of its leaders becoming Cabinet members. Butch Abad became Secretary of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) while Chito Gascon became part of the Constitutional Commission as Youth Representative. The two eventually turned totally mainstream with their membership in the Liberal Party.

In 1993, a split occurred within the ND movement between the *Reaffirmists* (RAs) who continued to recognize Sison's leadership and the *Rejectionists* (RJs) who eventually left the CPP. This led to new Left formations such as *Sanlakas*, *Partido ng Manggawa* (PM), *Alab Katipunan*, *Anak Mindanao* (AMIN), *SIGLAYA*, etc. This paved the way for segments of the ND discoursing, engaging and taking part in reform politics, hence broadening the reform movements in the Philippines.

With the democratic space available after EDSA 1, civil society engagement in Philippine politics became most viable and vibrant. The many groups and formations from the SD-DS tradition and the ND-RJs provided the leaders and key actors of post-EDSA 1 Philippine civil society that assumed various roles in governance and politics. Engaging civil society was a default mode of the political engagement of the reform movements. Their engagement, however, did not stop there; electoral participation also turned out to be an engagement worth exploring.

In early 1990s, *SIGLAYA* joined forces with UP-based *Bukluran para sa Ikaunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa* (BISIG), some key leaders of which like Francisco Nemenzo were from the PKP-1930, while some were from the SD-DS tradition and PANDAYAN to form AKBAYAN (Citizens' Action Party). Hence, AKBAYAN marked the convergence of forces from the parallel reform and revolutionary movements that have been leading the struggle for change in Philippine politics. It marked the

fusion of strategies of engaging both the civil society and electoral arena to effect change. Its means are reform-oriented with its participation in elections and governance; but its end is revolutionary with the vision of changing and transforming the traditional political structures of the Philippines and further deepening democracy and people empowerment towards a participatory and social democratic state.

In 1992, with mainstream political parties whose leaders can also be traced from the SD-DS tradition, the Liberal Party, *Partido Demokratikong Pilipino Lakas ng Bayan* (PDP) and AKBAYAN joined forces; and with great optimism towards the new dispensation, supported the candidacy of Jovito Salonga.

This is the beginning of the electoral struggle of what is now referred to as reformers in Philippine politics—of those who acknowledge the limits of the current political dispensation, but utilize its available spaces to push for reforms to further advance the democratization process.

## Chapter 1

# Testing the Waters of a Newly Restored Democracy

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Despite the “restoration of democracy” in 1986 and the subsequent rise to power of President Corazon Aquino, Philippine politics has largely been the same. Personality, and money, politics as well as the perceived elitism of the Aquino government had defined the political landscape, despite the restoration of democratic institutions. Traditional politicians remained dominant. Despite the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, many still believed that the structures of authoritarianism were still in place. There was a general feeling that the opportunities for building a democratic society had not been maximized. These, among others, resulted in grave public disenchantment.

Hence, the closing months of President Aquino’s term and the 1992 national polls spurred high hopes for reform. It was the first election that would elect a president after Martial Law. It was also seen as a new opening, which could allow progressives to seize and “control” the state’s various institutions, and if successful, would enable them to push for much needed reform measures.

This new situation created new opportunities that prompted the social movement to rethink how they would push their agenda for reform. Most of them were identified with revolutionary movements, using a very radical framework for political engagement. This spurred serious debates among the progressives, which they found hard to resolve. Eventually, a segment of the social movement decided to explore the prospects of engaging the electoral arena.

The progressives who seriously considered adopting an “election strategy” believed that this would later pave the way for “revolutionary

change.” They argued that by engaging the state, reforms (however limited) would eventually lead to a change in the “balance of forces” (Rivera 1991: 7). This was the thinking when the Left movement, despite being harassed by other political forces, set-up a slate of candidates under the *Partido ng Bayan* (PnB) to contest Senatorial and House seats in the 1987 elections. Unfortunately, the slate fared badly.

The debates notwithstanding, progressives and other groups that shared the same sentiment of engaging the elections found themselves in a community called the “mass movement.”

The generic term “mass movement” was used to characterize the wide variety of groups that engaged the 1992 elections, which included cause-oriented groups and other ideological political formations (even those who have traditionally shunned active involvement in elections). All these groups from the mass movement wanted to demonstrate their clout, i.e., their ability to influence elections. The mass movement came in full force, representing a wider section of the political spectrum (Macuja, 1992: 3).

Progressive groups who termed themselves as the wiser brand of “New Politics” were prepped up to deliver votes, and adopted strategies for such purpose. They were convinced that they must abandon the habit of making grand political statements; and instead, pour their energies in making themselves significant as a political bloc (Arquiza 1992: 246).

For certain, the mass movement understood that it was crucial that they advance the much-needed reforms as a response to the the widespread disenchantment over the Aquino administration that left critical social, political and economic issues and problems unaddressed. The elections, which meant a chance to change the country’s leadership, was for them an important opportunity to achieve significant reforms, provided that they are able to put into power leaders who would carry their reform agenda. It was therefore important for the mass movement to elect candidates, particularly a president who they could come to terms with; a president who is capable of bringing and carrying the reforms they wanted.

With that in mind, the involvement of the mass movement in the electoral contest became far-reaching. They launched a wide array of

education programs and crafted a people's agenda. They also fielded and/or supported reform-minded candidates for national and local posts, which was a significant breakthrough at that time (Macuja 1992: 2).

## **The Excruciating Take on Partisanship**

However, the idea of openly supporting candidates was met with reservation by some members of the mass movements, especially those engaging civil society. Should they really engage the political electoral arena, and should they do, will they express support and back certain candidates?

This situation can be partly attributed to the disdain that NGO and PO activists had towards partisan politics. Overt forms of partisanship such as the outright endorsement and campaigning for candidates received heavy disapproval from NGO and PO circles. On the other hand, subtle levels of partisanship such as voters' education and people's agenda building activities became the highly favored, preferred and acceptable forms of engagement (Macuja 1992: 13).

For instance, there was a strong clamor for civil society members to take respective leaves of absence from their work as NGO and PO workers should they decide to take more overt partisan positions. COMPEL (a civil society-led election monitoring group) for one required its members to temporarily leave their respective posts if they decided to engage in partisan activities in the election. As a consequence, very few NGOs and POs took the leap and graduated from voters' education and reform agenda building to outright endorsement and campaigning for candidates.

In the same token, CODE-NGO threatened to disown Project 2001 when it tried to conduct a simultaneous straw voting in March 1992 to gauge the pulse of the NGO and PO community. To prevent further disintegration brought about by misunderstandings, contests and debates on the issue of partisanship, Project 2001 continued encouraging the active electoral participation of the NGO and PO community, by telling those deciding to go partisan to join appropriate groups, e.g. Akbayan for pro-Salonga-Pimentel, Friends of Butch Abad, Tanada para sa Tao and others.

Corazon “Dinky” Soliman explained this as part of the need for the mass movement to first discern the implications and risks of “crossing over” to partisan politics.<sup>5</sup>

## The Resolve of Going Partisan

After all the intense debates and the necessary adjustments, the imperative of pushing for reforms in the new dispensation prevailed. The reservation were dealt with and ultimately brushed aside. The mass movement resolved that their active involvement in electoral contests could only mean a stronger prospect for alternative politics. For them, elections can be a window for introducing reforms, and that it was crucial to elect a president who they could come to terms with.

Project 2001 was a coalition formed in 1991 that tried to start a discussion among NGOs and POs about the promises of taking the path towards electoral politics. It made a statement that NGOs and POs must go partisan. A member of that coalition, Henedina Abad, was convinced of the growing sentiment among their ranks to go partisan, primarily because they had realized that they can be viable players in the electoral arena. Members of NGOs and POs who were open to the idea believed that the democratic election after the Marcos dictatorship was an opportunity, as it was viewed as an opening where reforms could be introduced. The only way that they can be significant players was to engage in electoral politics.<sup>6</sup>

As it came to pass, the 1992 presidential elections showed the emergence of broad coalitions representing a wide spectrum of NGOs, POs, civic groups, church institutions and other popular ideological movements, linking up with each other to demonstrate their strength in building and showing an electoral constituency for reforms (Macuja 1992: 4).

The shared frustration with the government and the belief that the elections can give them a fighting chance to overhaul the political system brought about the easy coalescing of the reform groups. This called for a proactive attitude in influencing the election of public officials. It is most critical to take note that the mass movements at that time believed on

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<sup>5</sup> Corazon “Dinky” Soliman, transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

their prowess as catalysts in reforming the electoral process because of what they accounted as their influence and their massive reach up to the grassroots level (Arquiza 1992: 246-247).

NGOs, POs and other social actors consolidated their electoral reform efforts through the *Citizens for Orderly, Meaningful and Peaceful Elections* (COMPEL), which they launched in September 1991. COMPEL served as the coordinating body to synchronize the efforts of civil society on voters' education, poll watching, and voters' assistance activities. Still, others consolidated their ranks to speak for sectoral votes such as 'labor vote,' 'youth vote,' 'peasant vote,' 'women's vote,' and the like. Meanwhile, issue-oriented coalitions such as the Coalition for Peace and Freedom from Debt Coalition claimed the 'peace vote' and the 'debt vote,' respectively (Macuja 1992: 3).

In November of 1991, negotiations began to form a 'center-left coalition' that will be the 'winnable progressive pole' for the 1992 elections. This was a time when political formations which has been active in united front building, namely *Pandayan para sa Sosyalistang Pilipinas* (PANDAYAN), *Bukluran sa Ikaunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa* (BISIG) and Movement for Popular Democracy (MPD), met with the representatives of the Liberal Party (LP), *Partido Demokratiko ng Pilipinas-Lakas ng Bayan* (PDP-Laban) and *Partido ng Masang Pilipino* (PMP). This eventually led to the formation of *Koalisyonang Pambansa* in January 1992, or the LP-PDP-Akbayan 'progressive mainstream.' PANDAYAN actively supported the coalition and fielded presidential and vice-presidential candidates (p. 4).

## Developing the Reform Agenda: Project 2001

In February 1991, the electoral arm of the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO), Project 2001, was launched. Aside from developing a reform agenda, Project 2001 was an initiative to form an urban-rural electoral coalition consisting of one million members, with the goal of making the NGO and PO community a formidable political force by year 2001 and capacitating them for future engagement in the elections.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Corazon "Dinky" Soliman and Patrick Patiño, transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

Project 2001 represented the general agreement among NGOs that they should begin taking elections seriously and assume an active role in the election of public officials (Arquiza 1992:247). Since they see that crossing over to the political arena was unavoidable, they had to confront the issue of being partisan. In his address to Project 2001's founding assembly, Atty. Florencio "Butch" Abad said NGOs would have to come to grips with the consequences of partisanship (Macuja 1992:13).

In its inception, Project 2001 consisted of NGOs and POs representing the length of the political spectrum, providing a venue for the convergence of various ideologies. It included diverse networks of NGOs under its wing, ranging from the Left-leaning Council for People's Development (CPD) to the more modest National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA) of the Roman Catholic Church. Though a variety of political tendencies were part of that movement, the overall vision was to strengthen the grassroots so they can become significant players in the political stage (Arquiza 1992:247-248).

The goal of Project 2001 was to simply facilitate the formal entry of NGOs and POs to what they termed at that time as the "new world of electoral politics," which would eventually test their capacity for mobilization (p.247). The project further aimed to actively involve itself in the next four elections, while in the process, creating a bloc of voters that can significantly influence and affect the result of elections by year 2001 and achieve key electoral victories along the way.<sup>8</sup>

Project 2001 outlined key activities wherein the NGO and PO community must be actively involved in order to reach its goals. These included voters' education, people's agenda building and fielding and/or supporting candidates.

In terms of voters' education, NGOs and POs exerted efforts in getting their constituents involved in the electoral process. They pushed for issue-based politics and promoted clear criteria for candidate selection. They also pushed for the people's agenda to be incorporated into the platform of candidates in the hope that it will be implemented once those candidates win the elections. In other words, alternative candidates running against

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<sup>8</sup> Corazon "Dinky" Soliman, transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

the tide of traditional politics were strongly backed up in the campaigns (Macuja 1992: 2).

The mass movement's reform agenda was primarily a reaction to the growing disenchantment with the Aquino government. The seemingly grandiose reform agenda reflected the high hopes of the mass movement that the next administration will bring about new opportunities.

Project 2001 came up with a platform containing a list of agenda for change and development to address what the mass movement thought to be the most pressing issues at that time (Arquiza 1992: 253). The people's agenda, abbreviated as SPES URGES for easy recall, revolves around nine (9) points as follows:

- Social justice and poverty alleviation
- Peace and political settlement of armed conflicts
- Economic viability
- Socio-cultural transformation
- Unity, empowerment and participation of citizens
- Responsiveness and accountability of government
- Gender sensitivity
- Environmental integrity
- Sovereignty

The agenda was mainly a compilation from three multi-sectoral groupings, namely, the largely centrist National Peace-Conference, a progressive group called People's Caucus, and the economics-and-environment-inclined Green Forum (p. 254).

With the reform agenda at hand, the mass movement felt that it was their chance to change the system and undertake the necessary political, social, and economic reforms that would stun the status quo and somehow alter the "balance of forces" (Rivera 1991: 7). To make this happen, they were one in saying that all the more they should play an active role in pushing for the next government to undertake, carry and execute all the reforms that they think are necessary.

And so, they must find and elect a president whom they think can make all these possible. They must support who they think is a “reform candidate.”

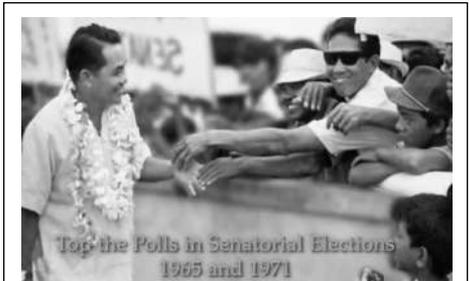
## Selecting a Presidential Bet: Who Would Carry the People’s Agenda?

The search for possible reform candidates was not so difficult, since there were candidates who, in one way or another, seemed to veer away from the traditional politics of patronage, pay-off, personality and money.

The reform movement placed its support behind Jovito Salonga as president, Aquilino Pimentel as vice president, and among others, Florencio Abad as Senator. It was a big leap for the mass movement as this move was the first attempt of reformers to openly support candidates, especially one running for the presidency.<sup>9</sup>

Salonga was the favorite among the NGO and PO community as he was seen as the alternative and reform candidate running against the dominant politics of ‘guns, goons and gold’ and the prevailing ‘personalities, patronage and pay-offs’. His perceived non-traditional character became prominent among the reformers.

The mass movement was seemingly mesmerized by Salonga and Pimentel’s



**The Real Alternative.** A former Congressman of the 2nd district of Rizal, Jovito Salonga topped the Senatorial Elections in 1965 and 1971. He became one of the prominent opposition leaders during Martial Law. After Martial Law, President Corazon Aquino appointed Salonga as the first Chairman of the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG). In the 1987 Elections, Salonga topped the senatorial race for the third time. *Photos taken from youtube.com (screen grab, uploaded by user epalma09).*

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Dalawang Tapat – Para sa Lahat! Two brilliant lawyers and outstanding Senators to make up a Presidential Team.

Two men of honesty and Integrity. Whose public service records are unblemished by scam or scandal. God-loving and with impeccable morals and solid family lives.

Two men who fought longest and hardest to rid the nation of the Marcos dictatorship. SALONGA was bombed in Plaza Miranda, then imprisoned in the same cell as Ninoy Aquino. PIMENTEL was repeatedly jailed and harassed. Two patriots who fought on and held fast.

Two simple men with a single dream.

“THE WEAK SHALL BE STRONG - THE STRONG SHALL BE JUST.”

So that every Filipino may stand tall and proud and free. With a government that is responsive and a society that is just.

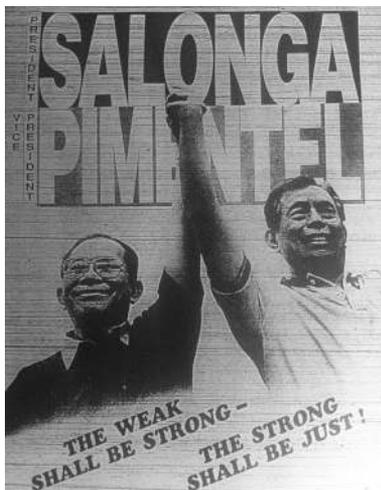
Jovy SALONGA and Nene PIMENTEL have joined hands and minds and strength to serve you and our nation. They represent the merger of two parties – the LP and PDP-Laban – plus support of cause-oriented NGOs.

WHAT THE NATION NEEDS NOW ARE LEADERS WHO ARE CAPABLE, TRUSTWORTHY AND MEN OF VISION.

YOU HAVE A CHOICE.

SALONGA for President.  
PIMENTEL for Vice-President.

**Political advertisement. Malaya, May 7, 1992.**



attributes. They were regarded as the tandem for reform, which earned them the label “real alternative” (by the Philippine Free Press) and “intellectual’s choice.” They were seen to represent genuine alternative politics, which led the mass movement to gamble on their winnability. Indeed, the Salonga-Pimentel ticket obtained a countable support from the reformers in the mass movement and a strong backing from the *Koalisyon Pambansa* (Macuja 1992: 5).

Evidently, track record became the mass movement’s standard in selecting their bet for the presidency. It was a strong basis of support. But living with the ideals came to a halt, as the painful bite of reality would hit them as the results of the 1992 elections revealed the winners.

## The Devastating Outcome

As the results of the 1992 elections would show, candidates backed by reformers or the bearers of alternative politics fared poorly in the race. The so-called ‘real alternative’ and ‘intellectual choice’ tandem was not appealing to the electorate, as Salonga landed on the sixth place while the popular Joseph Estrada beat Pimentel. Abad, being one of the senatorial candidates strongly endorsed by Project 2001, hardly made it to the top 40. In the local elections, many of those who were supported by NGOs and POs lost to traditional candidates (Macuja 1992: 5-8).

With the growing disenchantment towards traditional politicians among the populace, the mass movement thought that providing an alternative by itself would be enough and would automatically translate to winnability. Their confidence stems from the fact that Salonga, the politician perceived to be non-traditional, was the number one unbeatable senator during that time, and was even the Senate President in 1992. His lagging in the presidential race was so surprising. Former First Lady and wife of dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Imelda Marcos, was even ahead of him.<sup>10</sup>

The realization dawned after all is said and done and the reform movements have already been beaten to the ground. The old players were back and continued to dominate Philippine elections with the support of an electorate that continued to be under the command and spell of the old and traditional players.

The political playing field was still traditional



**The Winner.** Popularly known as FVR, Fidel Valdez Ramos won the seat as the 12th President of the Republic of the Philippines. Ramos had previously served as Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and later on as Secretary of National Defense under the administration of President Corazon Aquino. *Photo taken from youtube.com (screen grab, from GMA Network Inc).*

<sup>10</sup> Loretta Ann “Etta” Rosales, transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

in character, so were majority of the candidates who vied for elective posts. The traditional formula of winning the elections—from the classic guns, goons and gold to personality-based campaigning—was still at play. The candidate who fits the bill of traditional political engagement—the traditional ways and means for winning an election—emerged as the runaway winner. The popular actor Joseph Estrada resonated well with the masses, thereby resulting in his victory. Fidel Ramos, who won as president, is not necessarily a traditional politician since he came from the ranks of the military; but he utilized traditional means to win the elections, such as garnering the help of his party-mates who were mostly seasoned politicians.

## Salonga hits big poll spenders during Plaza Miranda rally

By Socorro Salcedo  
The Philippine Star  
May 9, 1992

About 10,000 people, mostly students and farmers attended the "miting de avance" of the LP-PDP Laban coalition carrying the tandem of former Senate President Jovito Salonga and Sen. Aquilino Pimentel for president and vice-president respectively, at the historic Plaza Miranda yesterday.

Mar Canonigo, a spokesperson for the LP-PDP Laban coalition, said the Salonga-Pimentel tandem "repudiated the traditional money politics" that was used by other political parties in their campaigns.

About 60 percent of those who attended the Salonga-Pimentel "miting de avance" were students, while the rest were composed of farmers and fisherfolk, non-government organizations, workers, and religious groups.

Salonga and Pimentel told the crowd they would increase the participation of the people in government if elected to office.

"The Salonga-Pimentel ticket campaigned 'on issues,'" Canonigo also said.

The LP-PDP Laban "miting de avance" was a sharp contrast to the pre-election rally for NPC standard-bearer Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco. The Salonga-Pimentel rally did not have "an entertainment package" as what was present in Cojuangco's "miting de avance" held at the Quirino Grandstand yesterday.

"This is an indication that Salonga and Pimentel did not enrich themselves when they are in power," supporters claimed.

The attempt to provide an alternative to traditional politics, to espouse track record versus popularity, to encourage issue-based rather than personality-based campaigning, all ended in defeat.

## **Shortcomings**

The failure of the mass movement to elect a reform president put to question the claim that there is a constituency rallying behind their cause and agenda, and that they had strong support and a broad network. It also put doubt to the real strength and clout of the mass movements as a political force (Macuja 1992: 16).

The mass movement is said to have miscalculated their strength given the performance of its candidates in the national slate. The outcome of the elections did not warrant the actual voting behavior of the masses (p. 14).

Evidently, the mass movement also lacked organizational strength. Sectors were strong in some areas but their presence in other parts of the country was inconsistent. As a result, alternative bets like Florencio Abad did well in barangays controlled by organized groups like the peasantry, but did poorly in the municipal aggregate (p. 16).

More importantly, the debate on the issue of partisanship had eaten a lot of time, particularly among the ranks of NGOs and POs. The NGO and PO community had difficulty in ascertaining what form of engagement to take. This led them to lose focus during their engagement (p. 17).

## **It's All Too Big and Ideal**

The obvious realization from the experience was that the mass movements were biting something they did not know too well, therefore they had difficulty chewing it. But they had learned their lessons well.

The electoral engagement of the mass movements in the 1992 elections was largely shaped by the post-Martial Law democratization euphoria, which made the new progressive forces optimistic and expectant of the big changes in Philippine political culture and oblivious of the realities before their very eyes.

They learned their lesson well, which would turn out to be useful for their succeeding electoral engagements.

First, given the existing political terrain at that time, a careful consideration and honest assessment of their forms of engagement, as well as the new dispensation, and their reform agenda must be taken into account.

Understandably, because of the people's growing disenchantment, the alternative reform agenda the mass movement had put forward were radical and would lead to substantial changes in the country's development and democracy. Either this did not resonate well with the

### Salonga to rivals: Stop lying on role in martial law enforcement

Malaya, May 1, 1992

Jovito Salonga, presidential bet of the LP-PDP Laban coalition, yesterday asked his rivals Fidel V. Ramos, Eduardo Cojuangco Jr., and Ramon V. Mitra Jr. to admit their roles in implementing martial law.

"It is appalling how Ramos and Cojuangco could lie about their active roles in the Marcos dictatorship," Salonga said.

He said as Marcos friend, Cojuangco enjoyed "almost all the powers he wanted to advance his economic pursuits.

"The wealth he now flaunts is evidence of his martial law activities," Salonga said.

Salonga said Mitra gained "instant wealth" through his friendship with Cojuangco. "Mitra loves to talk about his poor beginnings but this is inconsistent with the wealth he now possesses," he said.

"No less than his business associate and godfather, Danding has exposed his (Mitra's) participation in the coconut monopoly," Salonga added.

Salonga, on the other hand, described as "unbelievable" Ramos claim that he was marginalized during the martial law period.

"No amount of denials could wash away his sins of omission when he failed to protect the people from human rights abuses."

He said people should not believe that Mitra, Ramos and Cojuangco had already made reparations for their "sins" during martial law.

public or the public still had to be educated on these agenda before they could appreciate it as an alternative. The context and the terrain were not objectively scanned, hence the framing as well as the language of the reform agenda and how it was offered to the public was not done accordingly.

Second, candidate-selection needs to take into account the realities of the context to have a chance at victory.

The mass movement's high optimism and radical agenda undoubtedly influenced their choice of candidates. They went on choosing the candidates whom they thought could represent their grand reform agenda.

However, as can be seen in the events that unfolded, both the presidential and vice-presidential candidates (and even most of the candidates for other elective posts) that the mass movement had supported failed to the prevailing context and realities. They were thus extremely disadvantaged from the very beginning with little to no chance of attaining victory.

Furthermore, the result of the elections revealed that the so-called "intellectual choice" and the "real alternative" did not resonate with the electorate. The concept was too abstract and so out-there that it became indigestible with the "masa." Some of the realities were not taken into account such as popularity, the other candidates and their game plan and the prevailing "rules" of the electoral exercise.

Third, there are ways and means of campaigning, which are effective given the current realities on the ground. The campaign strategies of the mass movement were simply ill-fitted to the situation. Their inability to speak the "masa" language greatly contributed in their failure to capture the sympathy of the masses (Macuja 1992: 17). Hence, their idea was not properly communicated to the people. For instance, their candidates who are so-called reformist and alternative candidates were not identified as "anti-trapos" by the people (p. 19).

This was the very same predicament of the *Partido ng Bayan* (PnB) when it lost miserably in the 1987 elections—it failed to grasp the dynamics of electoral politics (Arquiza 1992:246). The real capacity (political clout

and strength) of the mass movement vis-à-vis their opponents was not taken into consideration. In other words, they failed to size up their opponents, which in turn beaten them badly.

## Concluding Remarks

It was the era immediately after Martial Law, but traditional politics still held sway. Traditional politicians regained their positions and solidified their rule, making it very difficult to undertake reforms. For instance, agrarian reform was hardly supported by the Aquino administration, because President Aquino was a “creature of her own class.” The mass movement realized that it was difficult to carry reforms when they were not in a position of power or if they do not possess formal authority.<sup>11</sup> And so they supported a presidential candidate who they thought they could come to terms with and carry their agenda and advocacies. But to their great disappointment, their chosen reform candidate did not win.

Perhaps for the mass movement, it was worth a try. Their engagement in the electoral arena taught them the realities they needed to confront and take into consideration in navigating the realm of the electoral. It also gave them insights on what has to be done to prepare for the next electoral battle.

The engagement of the mass movement in the 1992 elections made them realize that local support is necessary as a backbone of the national campaign, which means that sustained participation at the local level—in local governance—must be harnessed. Electoral engagement must not be treated as a seasonal game. The electoral agenda must be integrated into training and conscientization activities as well as in the electorate’s mainstream activities (Macuja 1992: 19).

The mass movement also recognized the need to organize, increase their numbers and translate those warm bodies to votes (p. 18). “A ‘countable support’ is necessary, because in the end, the capacity to promise and deliver votes is the only valid currency for traditional, reform, and new politicians alike.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Joel Rocamora, transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

More importantly, the 1992 elections re-affirmed the sentiment that election is an opening to introduce reforms. The clamor for change from the people is high during elections. The imperative therefore under the current dispensation is for the reform-oriented groups to enter this field and to take advantage of the situation where people are expectant of change to advance the alternatives they offer. There is no turning back.

However, civil society needs to build and accumulate power for it to be a significant electoral force. It is therefore imperative to “learn and understand the language of power as well as the language of reform.” The reform content of the engagement must be properly communicated as well: it must be translated into a language that the majority of the electorate appreciates and that there must be the “right” candidate to carry the message based on current realities.<sup>13</sup>

The 1992 elections was, in a way, a wake up call. It informed the mass movements that though the new dispensation opened new opportunities, the situation is pretty much unchanged. The socio-economic conditions, as well as the political culture are largely the same. The currencies in the elections were still guns, goons and gold, as well as pay-offs and personalities. Politics and elections are still filled with traditional actors playing a game that they had mastered and with rules that they themselves had made.

The democratic space was just an opening; the contest has yet to be won.

Overall, the end of Martial Law did not change the realities of politics in the country and the reform movements had to buckle up to advance their reform agenda and alternative politics forward. In their next engagement, they would no longer be first-timers. They had the lessons from this devastating experience to back them up.

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<sup>13</sup> Patrick Patiño, transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

## Chapter 2

# Back to the Grassroots, Forward to the Mainstream

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## The Emerging Divide

The reform movements' failure to elect a reform candidate to the presidency during the 1992 elections pushed the society to pose an important question regarding strategy: *What should be withheld for the sake of reform?*

Inherent to this question are three interrelated concerns: (1) Choosing the battles: where should the battle be (or not be)?; (2) Placing the bets: what should be the non-negotiables and what should be compromised in selecting candidates?; and, (3) Winning the elections: what strategies will get you into public office?. These three things, in many respects had defined how reform groups have engaged the 1998 elections. The dissenting opinions and answers to these questions brought about a parting of ways of individuals and organizations that have once coalesced to support Jovito Salonga in the 1992 elections.

Thus, there emerged three major strands of reform movements by 1998 that engaged the elections with different strategies framed on different rationales.

The first one traces its roots from the National Democratic movement—the Popular Democratic Strand, which is anchored on populism and the belief in the participation of the masses. They believed that one has to “listen to the masses”. These are the reform movements that supported Estrada, being the more popular and mass-based candidate.

After the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, coalitions of organizations and individuals under this tradition established the Movement for Popular Democracy (MPD) to link emerging organizations that wished to engage the new democratic space.

Also known as the PopDem Coalition, the movement began training barangay leaders and developing barangay-level policies and programs for people's participation. The Movement's engagement in partisan electoral politics further evolved when it decided to carry reformists and progressives including Congressmen Bobby Tañada and Oscar F. Santos in the congressional race. By 1992, the Coalition decided to support a presidential candidate—then Senator Jovito Salonga, who was commonly believed to be the reform candidate at that time.

However, with the defeat of Jovito Salonga in 1992, the PopDem Coalition came to believe that one cannot win on reforms alone and that one had to think about the candidate's winnability as well. Thus, the movement decided to support Joseph Estrada who won the presidency with the largest margin in the history of Philippine elections.

The PopDem Coalition entered the ERAP campaign through the Citizen's Movement for ERAP, more popularly known as *JEEP ni ERAP*. According to Boy Morales, *JEEP ni ERAP* was a non-party mechanism where non-party civil society can participate in the Erap campaign. Many contest this description saying that *JEEP* was highly partisan and cannot be considered as civil society. Nonetheless, it worked as a mass movement manned by many actors from civil society.

The second strand of reformists on the other hand, were the democratic socialists, who recognized the need to engage the traditional elite to gain entry into the government. After the defeat of Jovito Salonga in the 1992 elections, many reform groups realized that although democratic institutions were put in place, Philippine politics is still largely characterized as an elite democracy.

That is why a certain segment of the Social Democratic/Democratic Socialist movement (SD-DS) formed the Partido Demokratiko Sosyalista ng Pilipinas (PDSF). This party subsequently supported the

ruling party Lakas NUCD-UMDP, which fielded Jose de Venecia and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo as President and Vice President, respectively in 1998.

Another bloc coming from the SD-DS tradition was led by Butch Abad, Chito Gascon, et.al. who joined one of the two oldest parties in the Philippines, the Liberal Party, also with the recognition that they had to engage traditional political forces to push for reforms. The Liberal Party would eventually support Alfredo Lim in his bid for the presidency.

However, not all reform-oriented civil society organizations engaged in the mainstream electoral arena. Some opted to engage in the first ever party-list election instead. These reform groups believed that there should be a return to the ground instead of going mainstream, like what the PDSP or the Liberal Party opted to do. Thus, they decided to engage the party-list system. *Pandayan para sa Sosyalistang Pilipinas* (PANDAYAN), another bloc from the SD-DS movement allied and supported five party-list groups, which included AKBAYAN Citizens' Action Party, *Abanse Pinay*, Coop-NATCCO and *Sanlakas*. In the case of AKBAYAN, *Pandayan* coalesced with democratic Left groups like *Bukluran para sa Ikaunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa* (BISIG) and PADAYON, which came from the National Democratic tradition.

## **Betting on the Winning Side**

The difference between the two main contenders for the presidency was evident. On the one hand, there was Jose de Venecia, Jr., the traditional politician and entrepreneur, coming from an elite political family from Pangasinan. On the other hand, there was Joseph Ejercito Estrada, a renowned Tondo-grown actor-turned-politician, endeared as the “*pare*” of the masses, hence his nickname ERAP.

Indeed, the reform movements recognized the need to compromise. Do they put their bets on a candidate who is close to the masses and highly winnable, but whose competencies and values were questionable, or on someone who has a well-fueled political machinery, not to mention the administration's support, but has popularly been perceived as a “*trapo*”? Who, between these two, would allow the entry of reform initiatives in the government was a critical question.



Former House Speaker Jose de Venecia, on the other hand, offered a more rational choice, albeit arguably also the most conservative. The reform groups of PDSP, which was headed by Norberto Gonzales became more and more associated with Fidel V. Ramos and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Eventually, these actors from the social movement were perceived as less and less reformist given their principals' behavior and political actions.

Their campaign strategy ranged from traditional political "networking"—that is, taking advantage of the administration party, which has in its folds the incumbent governors, mayors and congressmen. De Venecia's political machinery however was no match to the mass appeal of Estrada. Indeed, JDV had a stronger institutional base (well-fueled by patron-client relationship), but Estrada still had the numbers.

## The Party-List: A New Battlefield

The lack of real or rather winnable reform choices in the presidential race indeed had a divisive effect on the reform movement in 1998. However, there was one historical electoral transformation that offered "countervailing cohesive effects" on an otherwise fragmenting



**Party-lists.** A number of mass-based organizations would engage the 1998 national elections through the party-list system. New party-lists include Akbayan Citizens' Action Party, Sanlakas and Abanse Pinay, among others. *Photos taken from farm1.static.flickr.com, sanlakasonline.blogspot.com and chrispforr.net.*



## New Rules, New Players

(Abridged Version)

By Alan G. Alegre  
February 1998

For the last couple of months, the Philippines will again hold a national election – its largest nationwide fiesta – that promises an endless parade of colorful characters, non-stop circuses, gimmicks and big bucks.

Hardly anyone is taking a second look at a radical poll-related reform measure that will be implemented for the first time in the May 11 elections. Replacing the current system of president-appointed sectoral representatives in Congress, the party-list voting system seeks to provide congressional seats to basic sectors and constituencies by direct election. This will have a profound effect in Philippine politics in the long term.

The Party-list law (RA 7941) seeks to give smaller and lesser-known political parties and coalitions in the country the chance to win Congressional seats. Under the law, they are allowed to campaign for their organizations as “candidates” in special elections. The process is similar to the German model of proportional representation, where parties or coalitions are allotted up to three seats in the legislature in accordance with the number of national votes they get.

A large section of the country’s major mass movements considers the party-list elections as a good opportunity to flex their political muscle. For many small and young alternative parties, it is a challenge worth taking because it would complement their electoral campaigns to capture various local positions.

However, with only 52 seats up for grabs and the ceiling of three slots per party, it is obvious that many of these parties will be shut out of congressional representation.

Exacerbating this problem is the proliferation of the so-called “satellites” of existing political parties (especially the five dominant ones barred from participating). Other parties that applied for registration were also obviously mere vehicles of particular candidates aspiring for national office. The traditional parties were quick to see the potential of maximizing their votes by having their own party-list vehicles that can ride on the campaign of their local and national candidates.

The registration of vehicles such as Jeep ni Erap (Estrada) or Gloria’s (Arroyo) League of Women (GLOW) indicate how the partisan campaign machineries of some of the presidential candidates have converted into party-list vehicles that would serve as additional vote-getting mechanisms.

New political parties such as the Akbayan! (Citizen's Action Party), with a core of cadres from four moderate leftist blocs (Bukluran ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa or Bisig, Pandayan Para sa Sosyalistang Pilipinas, Siglaya and Movement for Popular Democracy) have been set-up as strategic electoral vehicles for the party-list voting system. Akbayan! wants to have an impact on the electoral terrain like the original Philippine Democratic Party (PDP) of the early 1980s. Sanlakas, the political formation identified with former guerilla leader Filemon "Popoy" Lagman, has also registered as a party. It has a strong base in the urban labor movement in Metro Manila. Other regional groups in Mindanao and Central Luzon also have links to local activists.

Many of the more autonomous social movements have also thrown their hats in the electoral ring. For example, the Alyansa ng Batayang Sektor (ABS), a coalition of basic sectors organizations identified with the National Peace Conference, has been formed specifically for the party list election. It has a strong base of peasant, fisherfolk, informal sector and urban poor organizations. In addition, the country's traditionally strong cooperative movement has given birth to a number of parties - two of the most significant being, the Cooperative Party of the Philippines (COOP) identified with the mainstream Cooperative Union of the Philippines, and the nongovernment COOP-NATCCO (or National Confederation of Cooperatives).

Traditionally "under-represented" sectors with large constituencies also consider the party-list system as a viable opportunity to push their interests. A serious player operating in this mode is the Abanse Pinay! womens' party, which seeks to bring out women's vote in politically significant numbers. Labor based parties identified with the large national trade union federations, such as the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines and the Federation of Free Workers, have also set-up parties and peasant-based groups (e.g. ABA or Alyansang Bayanihan ng mga Magsasaka and Mangagawang Bukid at Mangingisda, which is identified with the Federation of Free Farmers). A number of urban poor parties are also counting on their organized communities in vote-rich cities, honed by continuous anti-demolition campaigns and advocacies for land and housing reforms.

But the reality of these parties cancelling each other out is likely, given their oftentimes overlapping constituencies. This has broad implications on the general public's perception of how effective this type of electoral reform really is.

reformist civil society: the first party-list election (Franco 2004:117).

With the party-list system, the reform movement was given the opportunity to bring back focus on grassroots-level organizing and campaigning where most CSO actors can find common points of convergence. Through this opening, social movements were able to consolidate their sectoral collectives and the particular reform agenda each were carrying through their respective political organizations.

The party-list system also allowed smaller marginalized political groups to gain entry to the House of Representatives. These were relatively small victories that in theory should help transform party-list groups into fully-fledged national political parties. The party-list system also veers away from personalistic politics as the electorate will have to look for and vote for the party-list group listed on the ballot, and that nominees only serve to represent their party-list group.

Nonetheless, the first party-list experiment of 1998 was not as successful as was hoped for. Out of the 123 organizations which participated in the elections, only 14 representatives out of 13 party-list groups were able to gain seats in Congress—far from the 52 reserved seats. The cap for the congressional seat for each party-list forced some groups to fragment though some were able to coalesce. Political bloc PANDAYAN, for instance, formed and/or joined a number of party-list organizations, such as AKBAYAN and Coop-NATCCO, among others. MPD also left AKBAYAN and formed their own party-list, *Pinatubo* Party. Other organizations affiliated with the revolutionary Left also participated in the party-list system.

Thus, there was wide recognition that sectoral and multi-sectoral parties must further consolidate their vote base, especially among the sectors they wish to represent. This should account for more than enough votes to gain seats in Congress in the succeeding elections.

Nonetheless, a new battlefield was opened for reform groups which do not have enough political and economic power to contest the mainstream political arena. At present, this space has evidently been used as a stepping-stone, albeit, only a few party-list groups have used it as such, and none at present have already succeeded in transforming themselves into mainstream parties.

## Losing the Winning Candidate

Erap came out as the unmistakable winner in the 1998 elections. It should be noted however that in retrospect, it was popularity that placed Estrada to the presidency, with organized civic groups and associations having very minimal impact on the electoral outcome. Certainly, Estrada, as a popular actor-turned-politician, already had a large base of mass support besides his organized network of supporters which PRRM harnessed and unified into a social movement. Indeed, Mrs. Rebecca Malay, current Assistant Vice President of PRRM and also an active member of Estrada's campaign, said that there was no other winnable candidate. Being on Erap's side meant being on the winning side.<sup>14</sup>

The extent to which organized civil society can claim their contribution to his ascent to the presidency remains unclear. What is clear, however, is that their contribution was not substantial enough for these set of civil society groups to put their candidate on a leash.

After the 1998 elections, civil society became increasingly disenchanted with President Estrada, who they believed had failed to fulfill his reform agenda, which supposedly focused on the poor. They were unsatisfied with his performance, specifically on his "limited attention to NGOs-people's organizations (POs)-government partnerships," issues regarding "foreign investment regulations, charter change, cronyism, inept governance, poor economic performance, corruption, and limitations on press freedom" (Asian Development Bank [ADB] 2007: 3).

This was more frustrating given that selected civil society actors ventured to cross over to the government, due to the Estrada administration's seeming openness to people's participation. Boy Morales was appointed Secretary of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), while Fr. Ed Dela Torre was appointed as TESDA Director General. Other civil society actors who made the crossover to partisan politics included Leonor Briones from the Freedom from Debt Coalition (an NGO which PRRM also co-founded) and Karina Constantino-David, a progressive academic and activist, who became the head of the Housing and Urban Development Coordination Council (HUDCC).

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Rebecca Malay, July 7, 2009.

Considered experts in their field, these leaders were highly respected in the reform community and were expected to carry the reform agenda to Malacañang. However, Estrada did not give ample support to these leaders and to the policy agenda that he championed during the elections under the *JEEP* campaign. CSO actors-turned-government officials became mere “faces” that served to maintain Estrada’s “pro-poor” image, which in fact contradicted with many of Estrada’s commitment to other political and economic elites (Reid 2008: 19).

Political analyst Ramon Casiple shared his sympathy with Boy Morales who had come face to face with the limits of power as DAR Secretary. “It was a constant dilemma of compromising with economic tycoons such as Danding Cojuangco regarding policies, which may compromise reform in an effort to maintain Morales’ hold on power and serve inside the government.”<sup>15</sup>

Reid (2008), in his paper on how the Estrada administration created a deceptive image of people participation in government, quoted another renowned political scientist and civil society actor, Joel Rocamora:

“You are not even going to be in the second stream. You’re going to be the water boy. You won’t have any overall impact on the thrust of the administration. What’s going to happen is that you’ll just get used. You’ll get used to drum up some kind of organized manifestation of mass support for Estrada from the poor supporters of Estrada. You’ll be given small chunks of the bureaucracy. I’m not going to say don’t join. On the contrary, do as good a job as you can in your little corners of the bureaucracy (p. 25).”

Estrada supported many questionable policies, and at the same time, issues of corruption began to come out. He would further appoint politicians known to be counter-reformist and traditional. Many of his officials eventually left the Estrada administration, with the notable exception of Boy Morales.

Even civil society actors who crossed over to the government and engaged in the party-list system experienced discouraging defeats

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<sup>15</sup> Ramon Casiple, transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

The *Pare* Principle: Estrada has a keen sense of the prerogatives of the presidency and has used them to favor his friends  
(Abridged Version)

By Sheila S. Coronel  
Public Eye Vol. IV No.4  
Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism

**JOSEPH ESTRADA** is a casual man. He squirms in a barong and mumbles incoherently when asked to speak before a well-heeled crowd. He is most at home in the company of his kind: Scotch-guzzling men who grunt rather than talk, who are happiest when backslapping, wheeling-dealing and trading jokes. In short, he is the quintessential Pinoy macho: kind to his friends, cavalier with his women, and generous to his drinking buddies. He takes nothing terribly seriously, including perhaps the presidency.

Thus, when under criticism recently for appointing assorted buddies to various government posts, Estrada was incredulous, feeling that he was, again, unfairly being targeted by a trigger-happy press. Neither could his friends understand what the furor was all about. Their collective reaction was best summed up by Rolando T. Meyer, known in the movie world as a sidekick of action star and presidential pal Fernando Poe Jr. In a television interview after taking his oath as a member of the board of the government-owned casino company, the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. (Pagcor), a post that carries with it some P2 million a year in director's fees, Meyer said, nonplussed: "Weather-weather lang 'yan."

It was a typical response. Erap and Co. have perfected this lumpen mockery of the English tongue and put it to effective use whenever they are held to account. "Weather-weather" is the kanto boy translation of the Tagalog "pana-panahon," meaning to each his own time. What it essentially meant was this: Everyone knows each administration leads its retinue to feast on the public trough. It's our turn now, so what's the fuss all about?

It was a statement that was both refreshingly honest and horribly cynical, simultaneously subversive (because it mocks elite pretensions to a delicadeza they never actually practice) and sensible (because if all past presidents had appointed their friends, why shouldn't Estrada?). It sums up Erap's unique contribution to Philippine public life: he translates the prerogatives of power into the language of the streets, making them seem acceptable and normal. After all, he challenges everyone, who among the most righteous have not favored their friends? Or for that matter, who among them have not cheated on their wives?

By speaking plainly, Estrada exposes the hypocrisy of political discourse, thereby depriving his critics of the moral high ground. The president does not deny his sins; he merely cracks jokes about them. On one hand, this is such a relief after the deathless denials at which politicians have become so adept. But on the other hand, the jocular, offhand way he turns conventional morality on its head and makes his version seem eminently sensible and acceptable makes no morality possible. That is why the Catholic Church and the other vanguards of public morals do not know how to react. How do

you deal with a sinner who makes you laugh? Who confesses to his sins with devastating nonchalance?

WITH ERAP ESTRADA, what you see is what you get. He is, essentially, as he has always said, *pare*, a charming rascal who expects to get away with his rascality as he always had. In two decades of his political life, he has never been called to account: not for his association with underworld characters nor for the dubious business practices of his cohorts, not even for the murders perpetrated by his men when he was head of the Presidential Anti-Crime Commission (PACC).

Erap, after five months in office, has appointed over 60 people to such positions, so many in fact that the Office of the President has trouble keeping track of them, so many it has become laughable, like invitations to a wedding party that got out of hand. The list of presidential consultants, assistants and advisers includes some really worthwhile individuals whose talents can be put to good use, but also a lot of other hangers-on from business, politics, the movies and, Malacañang insiders swear, God knows where else.

Many of the appointments were predictable. Former racecar champion Roberto Aventajado, for example, a long-time and influential Erap aide, was made presidential adviser on economic affairs and head of the presidential committee on flagship programs and projects. Aventajado, however, is consulted on a wide range of issues, most of them only marginally economic. Among other things, he negotiated for the release of Italian priest Luciano Benedetti who was kidnapped in Mindanao. Together with the powerful brothers whom Estrada had known from his San Juan boyhood – Executive Secretary Ronaldo and businessman Manuel Zamora – Aventajado also played a role brokering the transfer of Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT) shares from the Cojuangco family to various interested parties.

Beyond his inner circle, Estrada awarded party favors to the likes of plastics tycoon William Gatchalian, who was appointed presidential consultant on the welfare of overseas Filipino workers and Julio Tan, the uncle of one of taipan Lucio Tan's wives, who was appointed presidential consultant on Chinese affairs. It is well known that Erap has the support of the ethnic Chinese business community. Lucio Tan was the biggest contributor to his presidential campaign. Another Chinese-Filipino contributor, wealthy Zamboanga businessman Wee Dee Ping, was made presidential adviser on Mindanao.

These posts bring with them little or no remuneration. But they have a certain cachet, especially in the business community, where the perception of closeness to Malacañang is an invaluable asset as it opens doors to contracts, licenses, tax cuts and other forms of preferential treatment from government entities. As every businessman knows, a reputation for being “malakas” or “malapit sa poder” (close to the powerful) makes many things possible in a country where politics and business are so intimately intertwined.

BUT BECAUSE Estrada has a keen understanding of the prerogatives of presidential power, he doesn't really care. There is a certain in-your-faceness about the casualness with which he makes his appointments. To be sure, the choices for top Cabinet posts were made with evident care, in terms not only of appeasing the various blocs that supported Estrada's candidacy but also in terms of choosing men and women who had professional qualifications for their posts (even if they come from the same San Juan neighborhood or the same class at the Ateneo as the president's). The notable exception is Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Antonio Cerilles, who was named largely for his role in mustering Mindanao votes for the president, rather than an expertise in environmental issues.

Below Cabinet level, however, the appointments have been a bit more helter-skelter. On the one hand, there were the concessions to the "Chinoy" business community. On the other hand, there were appointments from the Left flank, with former communist Horacio Morales heading the agrarian reform department, long-time NGO activist Karina David being appointed presidential assistant on housing and chief of the Housing and Urban Development Council, and environmental lawyer Donna Gasgonia being named presidential assistant for poverty alleviation. To the cynical, these appointments may seem like sops to the Left, but they make sense as far as the fit between appointee and position is concerned.

Others are more difficult to fathom; for example, the mingling of movie personalities and serious scholars in the same government boards. In one case, Estrada's brother-in-law Raul de Guzman, former dean of the University of the Philippines College of Public Administration, sits as a government nominee on the San Miguel Corp. board together with film producer Espiridion Laxa.

It can be said that this diversity is typical of the rainbow coalition—ranging from former Marcos cronies to former communists, from frivolous movie stars to dead-serious academics—that brought Estrada to Malacañang. This diversity is most evident in Erap's eclectic Cabinet, which is made up of individuals who are such polar opposites they cancel each other out. Such diversity in turn is a natural outcome of a party system that is rooted not in platform or ideology but in family, popularity, personality and convenience.

At any rate, the current crop of appointments also betray a mischievous, Erapesque sense of humor. For how else can one explain the little-known Rodolfo Balmori, who was appointed last September as presidential adviser on dairy, cattle and carabao development, except as the personal choice of a president whose most memorable bill as senator was one on protecting the carabao? Or Adelaida "Baby" Magsaysay, wife of Zambales politico Gene Magsaysay, whose title simply says "presidential assistant" but whose real function, Palace insiders say, is to book dance instructors for presidential parties? Or, for that matter, one Danter Sullivan, appointed "presidential assistant to the presidential consultant on computer education"?

in Congress. Out of the 485 bills which party-list representatives primarily sponsored, none were passed into laws during the Estrada administration. Only 20 bills got to second reading, while only 16

reached third reading. None were passed because the ruling party did not consider them as priority bills.

This shows the low political clout of party-list organizations and the low priority of the current administration to the sectoral agenda that party-list organizations were fighting for. These groups remained at the mercy of traditional *politicos* who composed the majority of the seats in Congress (Fermin 2001: 4).

In retrospect, Estrada's short-lived administration was unable to realize the agenda of civil society, despite the contribution of CSOs to his campaign and the crossovers during his term. In the area of agrarian reform for instance, the Estrada administration promised but failed to complete the Land Acquisition and Distribution (LAD) under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program and intensify support for CARP beneficiaries.

Moreover, his pro-poor program called *Lingap para sa Mahirap*, which aimed to provide services to the 100 poorest families in every province and city, was far from being effective. This was mainly because the identification mechanism of the program allowed political interference and inefficient allocation of resources. Firstly, the program authorized the governors and mayors to identify the depressed areas where the program will be implemented, making the identification process highly politicized: 32% of the *Lingap* funds were given to the DILG and LGUs, whereas the other 68% were distributed to congressmen. Moreover, the families were usually far apart from each other, which resulted in high administrative costs (ADB 2005: 114).

Indeed, according to Miriam Coronel-Ferrer (1999) of the Third World Studies Center, University of the Philippines, in her article "*A Reading of the Estrada Administration – One Year After*":

"It is easily given to politization and reinforces patronage: The key role given to government officials and legislators in identifying beneficiaries builds up their role as benefactors; obviously, they will use this power to promote their political careers. As noted, these funds could easily end up as pork-barrel funds. The selection scheme, notably, provides very little role for the NGOs and POs (internet material)."

Even the then newly formed National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) which was specifically tasked to convene sectoral representatives to inform government programs for poverty alleviation, became highly politicized, becoming a venue for the granting of political favors. The selection of NAPC representatives was largely left to the discretion of the President, despite earlier promises that sectoral consultations shall be respected.

## Civil Society vs. President ERAP

With the emerging deficiencies of the Erap administration and the issues of corruption and abuse of power, the divided reformist movement soon found itself reunited in the year 2000 when controversies sprouted left and right. These reform organizations indeed recognized the legitimate claim of Estrada to the presidency with the overwhelming votes he received in the 1998 elections. Nonetheless, the reformists allied with Lakas-NUCD-UMDP under then Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo became more vocal in their critique of the Erap presidency. Even reformists in the Liberal Party, and former allies of Erap also jumped ship to the anti-administration side.



**ERAP Ouster.** Civil society groups, activists, the academe and businessmen rallied in EDSA in mid-January of 2001 in what is to be called the 2nd People Power Revolution or EDSA 2. On January 20, 2001, the crowd marched to Mendiola to force Estrada out of office. *Photo taken from [upload.wikimedia.org](http://upload.wikimedia.org).*

## Opposing groups Converge in Senate

(Abridged Version)

By Jennee Grace Rubrico, et. al.  
Business World Internet Edition

Groups pushing for the ouster of impeached President Joseph E. Estrada and those supporting his stay in office yesterday converged to form a mammoth rally of sorts at the Senate grounds and surrounding areas. They each held their own preliminary activities before converging near the Senate building, as the police said the rallies were generally peaceful.

The Senate tribunal yesterday started formal hearing on the articles of impeachment against Mr. Estrada, with the prosecution and defense panels presenting their preliminary statements. Manila Archbishop Jaime L. Cardinal Sin yesterday reiterated his call for President Joseph E. Estrada's resignation.

In a homily delivered before a crowd of 20,000 at the Panalangin Para sa Bayan (Prayer for the Country) rally in Roxas Boulevard yesterday, Cardinal Sin said Mr. Estrada should not be afraid to resign as "God will take care of him." The Cardinal also said that while he is being criticized for being "too frank," it is part of his duty as a priest to be so.

Meanwhile, in a speech delivered before the mass at the Malate church, former president Corazon C. Aquino chided Mr. Estrada for blaming the opposition in the worsening political and economic situation. "Instead of admitting the error of his ways, President Estrada chose to shift the blame for this worsening crisis to those of us who have found the courage to stand up to his abuses," she said.

She said Mr. Estrada brought the crisis upon himself when he chose to remain silent on the charges against him. Yesterday's mass started the day-long prayer rally organized by the Roman Catholic Church, united opposition, Ms. Aquino and the Kongreso ng Mamamayang Pilipino (Congress of Filipino People) II to ask that the senators to be impartial and fair in the impeachment trial.

Vice-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who also delivered a speech before the mass, was present and was hailed by Ms. Aquino as the successor of Mr. Estrada. For her part, Ms. Arroyo dismissed the results of a survey which showed less Metro Manila residents who trusted her. In a talk with reporters at the sidelines of the prayer rally at the Senate yesterday, Ms. Arroyo said she has lost her interest in competing with other politicians for ratings.

Earlier, a survey on trust was conducted by Pulse Asia. The survey, which was conducted on Nov. 26 and 27, was taken from 500 adults residing in Metro Manila. Results of the survey showed Ms. Arroyo's trust ratings went down to 23% from the previous 26%.

In a related development, after a deadlock which lasted for about 30 minutes, anti-Estrada rallyists were able to get through a police barricade at the Senate grounds to complete their version of the biblical Jericho march through the intervention of two senators. Senators Teofisto Guingona, Jr. and Franklin Drilon stepped out of the impeachment trial to let through the participants of the Jericho March, who were blocked by policemen.

However, the group which entered the Senate grounds numbered only 2,000 despite an estimated turnout of more than 100,000. In a telephone interview with BusinessWorld, Kompil II media director Teddy Lopez said, "We consider it a success because we were able to make our point. We delivered our message. And since the purpose of the march was primarily for prayer, and everyone was able to give his or her prayer, then it was not a failure."

He said that they could not blame the policemen for restricting their entry as pro-Estrada rallyists were demanding the same privilege. The Jericho march was part of yesterday's day-long prayer rally organized by Kompil, Makati Business Club, united opposition, Roman Catholic Church, and the labor groups.

At 2 p.m. yesterday, three rally participants blew ram's horns to signal the start of the march, which began at the Film Center. Participants, led by Misses Arroyo and Aquino marched to the Senate to light the flame of truth, which was stationed in front of the Senate's front door, through a torch carried by Kompil II convener Fr. Robert Reyes, S. J. Following the lighting of the flame of truth, the ram's horns were again blown to signify the start of a five-minute "grand silence." At the signal of one of the rally leaders, rallyists then shouted their supplications together to God. The noise they created was reported to have reached the Senate session hall.

Thus by 2000, the *Kongreso ng Mamamayang Pilipino II* or KOMPIL II was formed, uniting not only rival Left-leaning organizations but also civic, religious and even business groups such as CBCP-NASSA and Makati Business Club (MBC) in advocating for the ouster of Erap. KOMPIL II included party-list groups such as AKBAYAN, Coop-NATCCO, AKO Party-list, *Abanse Pinay*, among others, and sectoral groups such as *Pambansang Kilusan ng Samahang Magsasaka* (PAKISAMA), Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL), as well as networks and coalitions such as CODE NGO, National Peace Conference (NPC) and Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC). This coalition would hold anti-administration rallies and demonstrations, which would eventually lead to EDSA II in January 2001.

Apart from exacting accountability from then President Estrada, these groups had several issues impinging on the very engagement of civil society in partisan politics.

Firstly, they asked whether CSOs should accept positions in public office, thus crossing over to government. Secondly, KOMPIL II even questioned whether civil society should still endorse aspirants in the elections.

Albeit KOMPIL II posed these questions, allied organizations answered it in several ways. For instance, the PRRM network had a certain *disgusto* in engaging the presidential elections, strengthening the organization's bias of engaging in local elections, instead. According to Ms. Malay, the organization itself had wider latitude in the local arena rather than in the national sphere where Estrada's successor, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo had a monopoly of power, which alienated several civil society organizations. Moreover, the activities of PRRM have been largely local in nature: their integrated local development agenda for rural communities specifically looks at the kind of ecosystems present in the area that requires them to engage the local rather than the national level.<sup>16</sup> Thus, local politics provides a wider democratic space where PRRM can more effectively maneuver.

On the other hand, some progressive blocs still believe that CSOs should seriously take up the project of party-building. Some of these included AKBAYAN, which instead of focusing on simply local politics, is also now engaging mainstream politics. Reformists who have joined the Liberal Party have also pledged to bring their reform agenda into government policies by strengthening the reform content of their traditional party.

## The Road to Reform: What Went Wrong?

"Civil society organizations are being impelled by [the] absence of parties to wade into territory for which they are not equipped."<sup>17</sup>

Civil society has been in many ways naive that their participation in the elections and their subsequent entry into government gives them ample leverage over the presidency. This is because trans-partisan associations and mechanisms can serve to push a candidate very much like a political

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Rebecca Malay, July 7, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Randy David, November 11, 2009.

party, but they are without the ample accountability mechanisms that operate outside of election time.

With no structures or mechanisms that binded Estrada to the PopDem coalition, there was no means that would compel him to deliver on his campaign promises. Moreover, when anomalies began surfacing, civil society supporters were unequipped in exercising control over Estrada and his decisions. There were no formal means through which they could impose sanctions or make Estrada answer for his decisions through formal means.

Moreover, CSO leaders who crossed over to the electoral-political terrain without being part of any genuine political party institutions had no bargaining power, and thus became mere accessories who served to legitimize the existing regime. These actors continued wearing their civil society identities, and thus were perceived to perform inadequately as political animals.<sup>18</sup>

Ramon Casiple further said that a reform agenda is only significant when the reformers have an equally significant power in relation to a presidential candidate. Getting the reform candidate into the presidency is only the beginning of the battle. Getting the reform agenda converted into genuine policies and programs is a more problematic and challenging task for CSO actors—both for the ones who have transitioned to the political sphere and those who chose to stay as part of civil society.<sup>19</sup>

At present, political parties still remain ineffective in pushing many civil society actors to transcend to partisan electoral engagements. If these engagements are to have any substantial impact on Philippine politics, certain proposals are herein surfaced to equip civil society in their effort to influence the national political terrain.

One of the lessons from civil society's partisan engagement in the 1998 elections is that civil society's engagement should traverse the direction of party building in increasing the negotiating power of these associations during the post-election period.

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Randy David, November 11, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Ramon Casiple, November 15, 2009.

Rocamora has this to say about Morales' invitation for him to join government:

*“Ayokong pumasok sa gobyerno na mag-isa, as an individual. Dahil mahina talaga ang negotiating power mo kung mag-isa ka lang. And then ang problema, no matter how good a job you do in whatever section of the bureaucracy you are driven, you will be made responsible for the overall thrust of the government, and a thrust that you will have no saying in, so sabi ko, ayaw kong pumasok, bahala kayo kung gusto niyong pumasok pero ako sabi ko, I'm focused on building a political party. So that in the future, baka naman puede na akong pumasok but as part of a political party rather than as an individual.”<sup>20</sup> (I don't want to enter government as an individual because your negotiating power will be weak. The problem is no matter how good a job you do in whatever section of the bureaucracy you are driven, you will be made responsible for the overall thrust of the government where you will have no say. So I said, you may enter government if you like, but I'm focused on building a political party, so that in the future I may enter government but as part of a political party rather than as an individual.)”*

Another proposal is that civil society should maintain their autonomy from political organizations during and after elections if they choose not to continue in the project of party-building. Fr. Dela Torre said that, “My first preference after election was to say *JEEP* [must] remain a social movement so we could give social support and pressure [on ERAP].”<sup>21</sup> When many civil society actors began crossing over to the government, he said he hoped someone would stay behind to remain critical and independent from the Estrada campaign.

*“We need reformers in government, but [it is a mistake] if you expect that because you're there you can define the overall [terrain]. Mahirap (it's hard), you can't dissent openly unless you resign. And the whole point, even if its reform-oriented, [there will still be] compromise-government and negotiations. The dream of progressives to get into government [is a] formula for disappointment. [Getting into government] opens new arena but shouldn't substitute [for civil society participation].”<sup>22</sup>*

<sup>20</sup> Joel Rocamora, transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Edicio Dela Torre, November 13, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Civil society wanting to join partisan electoral projects need to “play a balancing act of maintaining their own autonomy,” that is, civil society organizations should still be able to “make decisions entirely on its own rather than from the center of the political organization.”<sup>23</sup> Once CSOs become co-opted into the political organization of the candidate that they are supporting, they fail to be critical on the political system that they are part of, therefore losing an essential function they have as civil society.

One promising option that civil society has been exploring is its engagement in the party-list system. The 1998 party-list elections allowed civil society actors to crossover to the government, and theoretically lay down the foundations of a mainstream political party. The party-list system was recognized as both a space for political competition and thus as an entry point for reform and marginalized political groups, as well as a training ground where aspirants can build upon their competencies as a political organization and thus, later on compete in the national elections.

Since then, the appreciation of this new space has been debated upon, re-forged, and has been used by both reform advocates and even unfortunately, by traditional *políticos*. Even though party-list groups have not been too successful in trying to enter and make an impact inside the state during the Erap presidency, there remains much optimism at present, especially with the increasing success by party-list groups to win campaigns inside the halls of Congress in the succeeding post-ERAP administrations.

If civil society opts to take this path, they must strategize how to claim, maximize and protect the political space provided to them, especially since the party-list system is now starting to be colonized by traditional and non-progressive forces.

## Concluding Remarks

The 1998 elections showed the different choices available for civil society in their effort to engage in partisan politics and how these choices were weighed down and decided upon. On the one hand, some

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<sup>23</sup> | Interview with Randy David, November 11, 2009.

civil society groups had to choose winnability over capability. On the other, some decided to choose the tried and tested traditional route.

For some, the question was not on which presidential candidate to choose but on where the battle should be. These reformers decided that the presidential race might not be the contest they would engage in, at least not yet. These groups chose to focus instead on organizing sectoral organizations and compete in the party-list elections.

After the elections, civil society could not just disengage as well. Just like in every game where winning requires losers, players must either reap the rewards or pay for the price of the bets they have made. Civil society who wagered on Estrada had to take responsibility for the stake they have put in the elections, the primary goal of which is not to get someone elected, but to get the reform agenda on top. Some thus decided to enter government, others chose to remain outside, fighting for reforms in the political spaces afforded them.

These spaces, however, have been proven to be insufficient in getting substantial reforms passed and implemented. Reform movements were not strong enough to engage the government and traditional politicians during post-election time. Even if they had the power to carry Estrada to the presidency, they were unable to make him account and to keep his promises.

## Chapter 3

# The Compromise that Binds

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The participation of reform groups during the 2004 presidential elections cannot be understood by simply looking at how their members chose and supported their respective candidates. The political context surrounding the 2004 presidential elections, the diversity of the reform actors that were active during that time, and the relatively novel phenomenon of a civil society reformists *crossing-over* to government after the 2001 ouster of President Joseph Estrada make it impossible to do that. To understand the extent and breadth of their participation, the context, perception, and dynamics of reform groups and some of its more popular leaders should be reviewed all together.

This chapter tries to describe the state of civil society during the 2004 elections. It begins by explaining (1) the context of the 2004 elections, and proceeds to discuss (2) the main actors and the depth of their participation during the 2004 elections in order to establish the premise for (3) the identified highlights of the participation of reformists in the elections. Part four analyzes the engagement of the reformists in 2004 and its effects. The chapter ends with a summation.

## The 2004 Political Plateau

The 2004 elections succeeded the 2001 ouster of what, to the eyes of many, was a morally bankrupt administration under former President Joseph Estrada. Many consider the swiftness with which he was removed as one of the major successes of civil society who sided against Erap. The movement was called EDSA Dos—the only act of direct democracy in recent Philippine history, which had earned for itself the EDSA stamp after the ouster of the dictator, President Ferdinand Marcos.

The reformists took part in rebuilding the government after President Estrada left office. They were welcomed either as Cabinet members of the newly installed President, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, or as active negotiators in the formation of her new administration. EDSA Dos had effectively eased civil society into a new world of opportunity.

The triumph of these civil society groups also came with a renewed and reinvigorated resolve against the likes of President Estrada—charming personalities from the film industry, who used their on-screen persona to empathize with the poor, and to promise them the moon. This had, of course, been brewing for a long time. When he emerged victorious in the 1998 presidential elections, many civil society groups, which did not favor him felt “frustrated that he won with very little in terms of an electoral platform, much less a plan for poverty alleviation” (The International Center for Innovation, Transformation and Excellence in Governance [INCITE-Gov] 2008: 27).



**Breaking Her Promise.** Gloria runs for the presidency despite her promise that she will inhibit from running in the 2004 elections. Photo taken from [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org).

This worked well for President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo when she decided to run for President in 2004. She benefitted from the reluctance of a number of reform groups to support Ferdinand Poe, Jr., another charming actor who was publicly endorsed by former President Estrada. According to Institute for

Popular Democracy Fellow and former Akbayan President Joel Rocamora, Poe’s campaign was primarily led by the same people who ran President Estrada’s, or by people who were closely affiliated with Eduardo “Danding” Cojuangco and former President Fidel V. Ramos.<sup>24</sup>

The 2004 presidential elections was eventually perceived as a choice between the incumbent, President Arroyo, and her most viable contender, Fernando Poe, Jr. The other contenders, which included Panfilo

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Joel Rocamora, November 10, 2009.

## The Bomb in a Populist Lamp

By Joel Rocamora

Whether or not Fernando Poe Jr. (popularly known as "FPJ" or "Da King" of Philippine Movies) wins the presidency in May, he is a harbinger of disaster. FPJ is the toughest rival of incumbent Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. His candidacy to the highest post in the country can be compared to the bomb that Jose Rizal's character Simoun in the novel "El Filibusterismo" planted on his lamp. In the novel, the explosion is the signal awaited by the revolutionaries to start the uprising in Manila against the colonial rule of Spain. In today's Philippine politics, FPJ is the bomb hidden in a populist lamp. If he is disqualified by the Supreme Court, on claims that he is an American and not a natural-born Filipino, his supporters will attempt to bring down the government. If he loses in May and there is even the slightest doubt about his defeat, destabilization attempts will intensify. If he wins, destabilization will follow in the wake of an economic collapse and an orgy of revenge by displaced Marcos and Erap forces.

Disaster can be averted only if enough of the forces for political and economic reform - if those who mobilized for EDSA 1 and EDSA 2 understand what is happening and mobilize to prevent an FPJ victory. FPJ has to be 'defeated' before the May elections. This can be done only if the political meaning of the FPJ candidacy is exposed. FPJ can be 'defeated' before May 2004 only if we can break the debilitating hesitations which have effectively tied our hands behind our backs.

### FPJ and the Populist Temptation

FPJ will win if people believe he will win. More than anything else that is the campaign line of his party KNP. "Get on the bandwagon. Our candidate is a sure winner". This is based on nothing more than the assumption that FPJ's movie popularity is automatically translatable to votes. But there is no evidence that this is true because FPJ has never run for anything. The only way to test this before the May election is to compare him to other movie personalities, most importantly his bosom buddy - the impeached President Joseph Estrada.

Because of the way Philippine movies are made, the more popular actors get to shape their roles according to how they see themselves. Reel colonizes real. Joseph Estrada becomes Erap (Filipino slang for the word friend), FPJ is the messianic 'Da King'. Erap is the upper class man/boy who enjoys the company of kanto boys (unemployed stand-by men) who love to drink, gamble, fool around with women. When Erap and his friends see that oppression is too much, they say "Tama na, sobra na" (Stop, Enough already) and they fight. Erap fights together with his lower class friends. He becomes not just their leader. He is their intermediary, a bridge across the class divide.

People equate FPJ and Erap. If Erap won elections because of his movie popularity, FPJ will also win. But FPJ's movie persona is actually radically different from that of Erap. Erap is quintessentially 'human'; flawed but willing to admit, even boast about his flaws. So it is easy for his fans to

identify with him. The FPJ of his movies is radically different. The Aguila (Eagle), the Panday (Blacksmith) is 'supra-human'. He is a demigod, an archetype. He appears from out of nowhere, returns just as suddenly to god knows where. When he fights, he fights alone. People watch, but from hastily closed windows. I cannot imagine Erap agreeing to becoming a 'savior'. FPJ was reportedly persuaded to run for president by politicians because they convinced him that he is the only one who can 'save' the country.

FPJ's movie popularity apparently can be converted to votes if the surveys are to be believed. The question is whether the demigod FPJ image can stand the rough and tumble of campaign politics. It appears that FPJ understands this problem. That's why he has so far chosen not to say very much. Demigods do not have platforms. They come from heaven with tablets of stone. The platform issue can probably be papered over by his advisers once they are identified. Besides people do not pay attention to platforms in elections for the simple reason that voters know platforms are almost never followed.

What could be damaging are issues which show the saint/messiah has feet of clay. FPJ movies have no sex. The non-issue of FPJ's out-of-wedlock son, and reportedly two other daughters might be more damaging than his not knowing how the peso loses its value. Indian gods had lots of it, but can demigods in our Christian tradition have sex? Whether FPJ likes it or not, his personal life and habits will be trotted out for all to see. There is no such thing as a private, shy presidential candidate. Erap was not vulnerable to this kind of attack because he would just laugh them off. If FPJ gets obviously impatient, this will work against him.

### **FPJ, His Handlers and Machinery**

The FPJ camp would have us believe he is his own man. They are even circulating stories about his having chewed out campaign manager Tito Sotto (another actor turned Senator) for making public statements without clearing it with him. This is his Movement of United Filipinos (KNP) party's response to FPJ's gaping vulnerability: the company he keeps. The KNP's Senate slate says it all. It is made up of recycled Marcos cronies from former Ministry of Defense Juan Ponce Enrile, to former Energy Minister Ernesto Maceda, to former Information Minister Francisco Tatad. An attempt to distance FPJ from Erap backfired when FPJ ended up getting Jinggy Estrada on his Senate slate after all. Even Jamby Madrigal and Boots Anson Roa have Marcos and Erap in their past.

Lets say it like it is. An FPJ presidency would restore the people behind both Marcos and Estrada. These are the two presidents that the Filipinos kicked out in EDSA 1 and EDSA 2. In all of our history, these two presidents are the most corrupt. Marcos still holds the record for human rights violations. There is a chance that after 18 years there will be a judicial accounting for Marcos era crimes. Erap will likely be convicted of gross corruption. All this will be reversed if FPJ becomes president.

What little we have achieved in our fight against human rights violations and corruption will be wiped out in an FPJ presidency.

We hesitate to use FPJ's lack of education and experience against him. We feel that doing so would somehow betray our rural and urban poor because they too do not have the education and experience. But they are not the ones running for president. They are not the ones who will have to preside over cabinet meetings to discuss monetary policy. It is obvious that FPJ does not understand even the basics of economic and other policies he will have to deal with as president. What will happen then is that the Marcos and Erap cronies who have decades of experience manipulating the government for their own ends will run rings around FPJ. An FPJ administration will be an Enrile-Maceda administration.

Even if we grant that cinema popularity is translatable to votes, machinery is needed to do the translating. The KNP (Movement of United Filipinos) is a ragtag coalition of three parties, two of them small: PDP (Party of Democratic Filipinos), and PMP (Party of the Filipino Masses), the third, the LDP (League of Democratic Filipinos), is divided between FPJ and another opposition presidential candidate Panfilo Lacson. Lacson was Armed Forces chief under Estrada. The three parties in the KNP have reportedly not quite meshed yet. Organization can be built if you have the money. But reliable reports indicate that the KNP has not yet attracted the kind of money needed for a presidential campaign. Part of the reason is that big business is afraid of an FPJ presidency. Another is the possibility that FPJ might get disqualified on the citizenship issue.

FPJ's biggest disadvantage in building local machinery, which, of necessity must include a large number of elected and appointed local officials, is that he is running against an incumbent president. Dependent on the central government for timely releases of Internal Revenue Allotments, pork barrel and other line agencies project funds, local executives have flocked to the Macapagal-Arroyo camp. Appointive officials will also be under pressure to support the president. Because there are too many people in the Macapagal-Arroyo camp, many competing for the same positions, some of these people will go to the FPJ camp. But only if FPJ can provide campaign resources.

There is yet another aspect to a possible FPJ victory that we should worry about. When it was already clear that Erap would win in 1998, business was willing to factor him into their business plans. This time it is already clear that an FPJ victory will result in a severe economic downturn. Media, the academe, and church groups will subject a new FPJ administration to immediate criticism. This will create conditions that will tempt groups who are just waiting for an excuse to seize power through extra constitutional means. How will a president who thinks of himself as a 'savior' react? 'Saviors' make poor democrats. They are easily tempted by authoritarian solutions.

### **Crisis and Reform**

There are groups on the Left who are negotiating coalitions, varieties of accommodation with the KNP. They use waiting for FPJ to tell them what his platform is as a cover for discreet negotiations. Other more well meaning

individuals are helping to craft such a platform. But they all know that it is a rare politician who pays attention to platforms. The experience in the Erap administration does not exactly encourage thinking that progressives will be able to overcome the well honed skills of the Enriles and Macedas to secure reform.

We are indeed deep in crisis. Our electoral system and form of government has lost its capacity to elect our leaders, to mobilize the requirements of governance and political reform in the coming years. I challenge those who support FPJ to explain how FPJ will lead us towards solutions to these severe problems. Whoever the real FPJ is, it is clear that he is being used by Marcos and Erap cronies to get back into power. Electing yet another movie actor, especially one without even the experience of his friend Erap, is not a solution. A President FPJ will push our crumbling political system over the brink.

Whoever the Philippine Left support for president, I believe that we should work together to prevent the looming disaster of an FPJ presidency. We have worked to make Marcos and Erap accountable for human rights violations and for corruption. We need to continue this work by preventing an FPJ presidency. We have worked for economic and political reform. We can only have these reforms in a future without a President FPJ. Decisions on who to support can be a matter of personal and organizational decisions. But preventing an FPJ presidency is work we have to do for our country, and for our people.

“Ping” Lacson, evangelist Brother Eddie Villanueva and former Senator and Secretary Raul Roco, no longer posed any significant threat at the latter part of the campaigns. Among these other presidential candidates, Roco had the potential of being a reform candidate and was initially the front-runner in the surveys conducted as early as 2002. However, he was not able to expand his base of supporters to include reform and progressive groups. Thus, when Fernando Poe, Jr. announced his presidential bid, these reform and progressive groups were easily attracted to a “winnable” alternative to FPJ: Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

For most reformists who had a role in dismantling the Estrada administration, supporting Fernando Poe, Jr. was tantamount to reinstating his best friend, former President Estrada into power, whom they just helped oust. There was no other rational choice but to support the incumbent President. Supporting any of the other less winnable candidates was tantamount to handing over the presidency to Fernando Poe, Jr.



**The Contender.** Fernando Poe, Jr. became a formidable candidate that made the 2004 elections a choice between another actor-turned-politician or Arroyo. Photo taken from *barriosiete.com*

For some groups, there was also the significant recognition, at times even amounting to resignation, that projects and community-based programs were contingent upon the reelection of the sitting President.<sup>25</sup> This was an advantage peculiar to President Arroyo, considering that ours is a democracy, which

had, (since the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos), been wary of term extensions of any sort.

Big businesses and the intellectual elite, who were not necessarily actively involved in civil society, shared in the triumph of President Arroyo (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs [NDIIA] 2004). It seems that the general aversion towards Fernando Poe, Jr. was not brought about by the fear of putting an Estrada ally in Malacañang. This aversion was also possibly symptomatic of a natural discomfort against “outsiders,” who supposedly supported the “masa.” The fear was no longer unfounded, thanks to Estrada’s scandal-filled stint in office.

Victory, however, was short lived. Soon after the 2004 elections, reformists from both civil society and the intellectual elite who campaigned for President Macapagal-Arroyo, found themselves betrayed beyond imagination. Strong allegations that the incumbent had cheated her way to her second term compromised the authenticity of her electoral victory.

This was the political climate at the time. Inevitably, the participation of reformists in the 2004 elections can only be understood with the election of President Joseph Estrada in 1998, and his subsequent ouster in 2001. The elections took place at a period which can best be described as a political plateau for a certain segment of civil society.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Patiño, transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

## Wielding Power from Within: Crossovers

The ouster of President Joseph Estrada in 2001 breathed new life and empowered the reform movement. As has been mentioned earlier, key figures from civil society were appointed to the Cabinet of the newly installed Arroyo administration, largely due to their active participation in 2001. After 2001, the time finally seemed most ripe for reform.

In 2001, the new administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was perceived as most open to change. Thus, at the beginning of her term, the new President asked a select few from the ranks of civil society (known reformists) to give their recommendations to fill up the seats that the Estrada appointees had vacated.

According to Joel Rocamora, who was then part of the nominating group, the likes of Corazon “Dinky” Soliman, Teresita “Ging” Deles, Henedina Abad and Vicky Garchitorena were appointed, as had been recommended. He narrates that there were, as expected, appointees who were not on their list. The most controversial among them was Jocelyn “Jocjoc” Bolante, who was appointed Undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture. He would later on be tagged as the architect of the fertilizer fund scam, which was used to rechannel money allocated for farm inputs and implements to President Arroyo’s election fund for 2004.

Rocamora characterized the Arroyo cabinet in this wise: “In the end, the Cabinet was formed by three components—appointees by Jose Miguel “Mike” Arroyo (the First Gentleman), the technocrats, and the reform wing, which came from civil society.”

The years following Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo’s election victory in 2004 were not as smooth



**Crossover.** Dinky Soliman side by side with GMA as Secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development. *Photo taken from donavictorina.blogspot.com.*

sailing as hoped. The reform wing in the “Cabinet” had witnessed many transgressions from the inside. Rocamora says that when controversial issues like the coconut levy fund would come to the fore, the members of the reform wing in the Cabinet, who had maintained their close ties with their grassroots groups outside the government, would call on their allies to mobilize and register their opposition. Ultimately however, the influence the reform wing wielded remained contingent on other factors beyond their control. Rocamora recalls that the balance of power between the reformists and the Mike Arroyo appointees within the Cabinet depended on the discernment of the more or less neutral technocrats.

Meanwhile, palace appointees who belonged to the reform wing struggled to keep one foot in while another foot stayed out. They were still considered by civil society, as comrades or *kasama* who were already inside, and who could lobby for sectoral interests, while still being bound by the obligations and responsibilities of being palace appointees with expected loyalty to their principal. While there were times they felt discomfort with the decisions the President made, they could not act in the same way that they did when they were still outside of government. In effect, there were some decisions that they had to stomach, though they found them reprehensible.

## **Making the Choice**

Even during its early years, however, many have already recognized that the Arroyo administration had failed to live up to the dream of reform. Of course, critics may say that it was not as bad as the reformists claimed it to be, and that they were simply ill prepared for their new role as government officials.

Whatever it was, there was already discontent brewing among the reformists in the Arroyo government. While some Erap appointees from the ranks of civil society earned the ire of groups who had remained outside of government for failing to deliver reforms,<sup>26</sup> the 2001 cross-overs were not faulted for that, at least not as often in the beginning. Their ties with civil society groups had more or less been kept intact. The real ambiguity came as the 2004 elections approached.

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Socrates Banzuela, November 25, 2009.

The reform wing of the Cabinet eventually participated in the re-election campaign of President Arroyo. Journalist Luz Rimban says that Dinky Soliman herself admitted that the DSWD, using the funds provided by the Office of the President, organized town hall meetings dubbed “Pulong Bayan” for the Arroyo campaign (Rimban 2005). However, in an interview by ASoG, Soliman clarified her (and the DSWD’s) participation in the campaign:

“[First of all], there were no DSWD funds used for elections. Philhealth and some of our programs were moved to areas that were poor but were for FPJ. In that sense it is wrong... To me that was the mistake, you didn’t want FPJ to be President, but at the same time, you were correcting a wrong by another wrong thing... We did not do anything illegal. We were giving to the poor, which was part of my charge. The only thing unethical was you were influencing the minds of people to support government who happen to be a candidate, as opposed to supporting another candidate who might have had the kind of resources we were giving.”<sup>28</sup>

Ging Deles, who was then a government peace negotiator, was also part of the Executive Council that was formed to direct Arroyo’s campaign, along with Soliman.

Both Soliman and Deles came from the Caucus of Development NGOs (CODE-NGO), which had an active role in the ouster of the former President Estrada. CODE-NGO convened *Kongreso ng Mamayang Pilipino* (Kompil II), the backbone of People Power II (Caucus of Development NGO Networks [CODE-NGO] 2009). Incidentally, the group has been accused of obtaining a profit of P1.4 billion through the unethical flotation of treasury bonds. Critics of CODE-NGO claim that this had a lot to do with the fact that Marissa Camacho-Reyes, the new Executive Director that replaced Soliman after her appointment, is the sister of then Finance Secretary Jose Isidro Camacho (Puyat 2010).

In an interview with Liberal Party President Florencio “Butch” Abad, he used the peace bonds issue to illustrate the framework of patronage that was at play during his time in the Arroyo Cabinet.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Joel Rocamora, November 10, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Corazon “Dinky” Soliman, July 22, 2010.

“Instead of using the relationship (with those in government) to empower, it became like, *may konek na tayo diyan* (we have the connection) so we can get what we want. The most classic form of that was the peace bonds—that more than a billion peso fund. CODE-NGO was able to secure (it) from government using its connection. That’s why it was criticized severely because it was attained not because of a struggle but because of a connection. So they took advantage of their closeness with the administration, instead of competing for it in a level playing field that would have been the proper way.”<sup>29</sup>

The participation of crossovers such as Soliman and Deles was significant because as known leaders of civil society, their actions were perceived as representative of the temperament of civil society as a whole. They themselves recognized in the book *Crossover Leadership in Asia* that their reassurances and guarantees were responsible for convincing a number of civil society groups to keep supporting the incumbent (INCITE-Gov 2008).

Although some groups and individuals had chosen to stick with the Arroyo campaign in 2004, there were some who, early on, had decided against supporting the incumbent President on the basis of her earlier transgressions and policies. Socrates Banzuela, who was then Secretary General of the Citizens Movement for Federal Philippines (CMFP), resigned from his post. His organization was at the forefront of the movement for constitutional reform at the time of his resignation. Banzuela recalls,

“In the 2004 elections, *kay GMA sila*, CMFP was for GMA. Personally, *di ko maatim magkampa* for GMA, I had problems with how she was leading the social reform agenda, especially as regards agrarian reform. *Kahit na sabi niya game siya* for the federal system (which was the thrust of the CMFP), *sabi ko iba na lang magkampanya*. So, I left the campaign trail, *para makapagkampanya sila fully*.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Florencio “Butch” Abad, November 11, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Socrates Banzuela, November 25, 2009.

“(In the 2004 elections, they were with GMA, CMFP was for GMA. Personally, I cannot stomach campaigning for GMA, I had problems with how she was leading the social reform agenda, especially as regards agrarian reform. Though she said that she is game for a federal system [which was at the thrust of the CMFP], I said let others campaign for her. So, I left the campaign trail so they can campaign fully.)”

Banzuela, of course, was not a Cabinet member or a palace appointee.

There were party-list groups that had close ties with civil society, whose members opted to support Arroyo’s candidacy in 2004, like Rocamora. In an interview with *Akbayan* President Ronald Llamas, he states that *Akbayan* did not officially support a presidential candidate in 2004, “*pero yung ibang* individual members, *hinayaan namin*”.

## **Winnability and the Understated Role of Civil Society**

While notable civil society leaders supported Arroyo’s presidential bid in 2004, believing that she was far from being the reform candidate that they were looking for, some had decided instead to support Roco and Villanueva, people who were also tagged with the label “reform candidates,” but the majority of reform groups who had taken part in EDSA Dos still chose to remain with President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Nonetheless, civil society leaders and crossover officials who supported the incumbent’s candidacy still felt ill at ease over some of her earlier decisions and the alliances that she has made. But the fear of an FPJ victory was simply overwhelming. For them, FPJ could only be defeated by the incumbent. There were other candidates to choose from, but to many groups, they were not real options, since winnability has become an important criterion, if not the only criterion in determining their bet. Dinky Soliman clearly stated their sentiment at the time:

## “Yung dagdag, yung dagdag”

By The PCIJ Blog  
June 13, 2005

THE president’s voice sounded urgent. She was muttering under her breath. This morning, using sound enhancement, we listened again to the “Hello, Garci” recording and heard clearly for the first time what Mrs. Arroyo told election commissioner Virgilio Garcillano in a conversation that took place at 11:17 p.m. on May 31, 2004.

That phone call began with the President relaying to Garcillano the information that the opposition was trying to get Namfrel (National Citizens Movement for Free Elections) copies of municipal certificates of canvass. Garcillano reassured her that Namfrel is “now sympathetic to us.”

The president’s reply is garbled in the recording, as she lowered her voice and muttered. We asked a sound engineer to enhance the sound for us. We listened again and this is what we heard her telling Garcillano: “... Namfrel does not tally...pero yun nga, yung dagdag, yung dagdag (but you know, the padding, the padding).”

[PCIJ didn’t put this in earlier versions of the transcript because we were not sure until now.]

This is the only time in all the 15 phone calls that Mrs. Arroyo made to Garcillano between May 26 and June 10 that she actually used the word, dagdag.

Some of the president’s calls dealt with her anxiety about the count and her winning margin (“Will I still get more than 1 M?” she famously asked “Garci” at 9:23 a.m. on May 29).

The May 31 phone call was more direct. She actually referred to votes being padded. While she did not directly say that she had directed the padding or that she knew her votes had been padded, the purpose of the conversation appears to be to assuage her worry that the padding would be discovered if the Namfrel documents did not tally with the certificates of canvass.

Many of the presidential calls in the Hello Garci tapes dealt with Mrs. Arroyo’s concern that the count reflected in various election documents — statements of votes and certificates of canvass — did not match. She expressed this worry about the documents from Basilan, Lanao del Sur and Sulu. She was worried because the mismatch in the figures might be seen by the opposition and used by them in alleging fraud by the ruling party.

The particular conversation where she talked about dagdag seems to be along the same lines. She was fretting about the possibility that the opposition would get hold of Namfrel documents (Namfrel gets the sixth copy of the precinct-level election returns) and discover that these do not match with the certificates of canvass, which contain the aggregated counts of all the precincts in a municipality, city or province.

This is why Garcillano had to reassure the president that Namfrel is “now sympathetic to us.”

In her reply, she wanted more reassurance. “Pero yun nga, yung dagdag, yung dagdag,” she said.

When this call was made on May 31, most of the certificates of canvass had already been submitted to Congress. It would have meant trouble if the count reflected in these certificates were questioned either by Namfrel or the opposition, based on their own copies of the election returns. At this point, the president seemed to be concerned about two things: 1) that the spurious documents would be discovered; and 2) that the counts in the places where special elections were held and the counting delayed would not show her as the winner.

Special elections were conducted in late May in some towns and barangays in Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte. Some of the president’s phone calls dealt with the counting in Lanao del Sur, as well as in Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Maguindanao.

The content of those phone calls was previously reported in this blog. Here are the transcript and enhanced audio of the “dagdag” phone call.

***Conversation between Gary (V. Garcillano) and an unidentified female believed to be GMA (Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo) on 31 May 2004***

*Garcillano: Hello, ma’am.*

*GMA: Hello, tsaka ano yung kabila, they’re trying to get the Namfrel copies of the Municipal COCs.*

*Garcillano: Namfrel copies ho?*

*GMA: Uhm-um.*

*Garcillano: Ay wala naman, ok naman ang Namfrel sa atin. They are now sympathetic to us.*

*GMA (mumbling): Oo, oo ... (garbled) ... Namfrel does not tally.*

*Pero yun nga, yung dagdag, yung dagdag.*

*Garcillano: Oho, we will get an advance copy ho natin kung ano hong kwan nila.*

*GMA: Oo, oo.*

*Garcillano: Sigge po.*

“I knew that what the president was doing was wrong, and that I should not support it. But I was chagrined by the fact that actor Fernando Poe, Jr. was running for president, and that he could certainly win. After Erap, how could I possibly let that happen? But again, the important thing for me then was to ensure that Poe did not win. In order to do that, I had to support the strongest candidate, which was Macapagal-Arroyo. I did, and that was the beginning of the end (INCITE-Gov 2008: 172-173).”

Soliman's view is shared by Butch Abad, then Secretary of the Department of Education:

"When GMA put the idea of running for reelection in her head, with it went aspirations for reform. Then she started to behave like a re-electionist and not a reformist. But we were forced to choose in a difficult situation between her, who was more competent, and him (Fernando Poe, Jr.) who was a recast of Erap. *Siguro may class bias pa nga dun* (We probably had a class bias). So we went for her. And after she won, it was revealed she cheated. That's how difficult it was in 2004, because really although I believe that political choices are always imperfect, because you can never find the perfect candidate, in that instance, we have underlined imperfect so many times."

Even Chito Gascon of the Liberal Party has his misgivings in hindsight:

"In the end, LP wasn't able to field our own candidate, so we became part of the K4 coalition. I think that was a mistake, in hindsight. But it went through that process. There were many CS groups afraid of the prospect of FPJ and supported GMA. Or at the very least, private sector people, they closed their eyes and didn't want to see the truth—okay they might be cheating, just don't tell me about it. It's important FPJ doesn't win."

This often understated criterion of winnability puts to the fore an important question about the real role of civil society in elections. It would be interesting to find out how much the choice of most civil society groups to support the incumbent President for the 2004 elections actually influenced the results of the elections, especially with strong allegations of massive cheating in May 2004. But whether or not they made her win is not an issue at this point. Regardless of how many votes civil society had delivered, the fact remains that until the Garci tapes, President Arroyo was recognized as the smart, middle-class candidate. It seems that more than the actual influencing of votes, civil society legitimizes popular opinion, at least among the sectors or the classes which propel the civil society reform agenda.

## After the Love is Gone: Events Immediately Following the 2004 Elections

A year after the 2004 elections, alleged taped conversations between President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and COMELEC Commissioner Virgilio Garcilliano were leaked to the press. The conversations were about the rigging votes in the 2004 elections. The book by INCITE-Gov narrates the experience of crossovers post-Garci tapes.

At that time, Dinky Soliman and other reformist members of the Cabinet, who had earlier helped Arroyo's 2004 presidential bid tried to control the situation from within. The group had first lobbied for the First Gentleman and the First Son's exile abroad, as well as the removal of appointees they had installed in the President's Cabinet, like Efen Genuino of PAGCOR and Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Jocelyn Bolante. The President refused.

But the reformists within the Cabinet were not to be defeated just yet. They tried to convince Vice President Noli de Castro to side with them while he was away on vacation in Hong Kong, but he refused and preferred to continue shopping with his wife. The Church, through CBCP's Cardinal Rosales and former President Corazon Aquino also tried to talk to the President, but to no avail. Cardinal Rosales would later deny the trip to Malacañang.

It was through the initiative of the reformists that the President was convinced to make the now infamous "I am sorry" video in response to the leaked tapes. The video, however, did not contain the admission and genuine remorse the reformists were hoping for.



**Hyatt Ten.** Hyatt Ten members dramatize their protest against the GMA administration. Above are Agrarian Reform Secretary Rene Villa, former Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima, former Education Secretary Florencio Abad, former Anti-Poverty Commission Chief Imelda Nicolas, former head of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Teresita Quintos Deles and former Social Welfare Secretary Corazon Soliman. Photo taken from *barriosiete.com* (Philstar).



**I am Sorry.** Gloria delivers her "I am Sorry" speech after the Garci tapes were released. *Photo taken from [janelee20.files.wordpress.com](http://janelee20.files.wordpress.com).*

On July 8, 2005, Cabinet members Dinky Soliman, Florencio Abad, Cesar Purisima, Emilia Boncodin, Juan Santos, Ging Deles, Imelda Nicolas, Rene Villa, Alberto Lina and Guillermo Parayno left the government. They came to be known as the *Hyatt Ten* after holding a press conference in Hyatt Hotel to

explain their resignation. Key technocrats who often sided with the reformists likewise left the government soon after.

Notably, the resignation of the *Hyatt Ten* followed the infamous Cabinet meeting, where President Macapagal-Arroyo presented her new framework for governance: national security. Soliman also narrates that during this meeting, the President mandated an increase in the budget of DSWD to win over the poor. They were planning on selling Philhealth cards at Php 200 (INCITE-Gov 2008). This was the second attempt to use DSWD for the President's political survival.

## **A Rock and a Hard Place: Was Inaction an Option?**

Had it been better for reformists to remain non-partisan during the 2004 elections?

Reformists, especially those at the frontline of EDSA Dos, did not have a choice but to participate in the 2004 elections. Wittingly or otherwise, by joining EDSA Dos, they had chosen to make good governance their primary agenda. The part they played in Estrada's ouster made them duty-bound to participate in the 2004 elections. The absence of the EDSA street parties required less gusto perhaps, but they were all expected to stay accountable for what had happened just the same.

If during the EDSA Uno in 1986, the battle cry was the restoration of democracy, primary reform agenda during and after EDSA Dos was good governance. The Second People Power Revolution had united many groups of different ideological inclinations, and persuasions against Estrada who was perceived as the personification of bad governance. This was precisely the reform agenda that had compelled many to campaign in the 2004 elections. Seen against that light, the ERAP-influenced camp of Fernando Poe, Jr. did seem most unpalatable.

It cannot be stressed enough how President Arroyo became the “lesser evil” for a substantial number of civil society groups: she was not Fernando Poe, Jr., and she was winnable.

She had enough groups supporting her bid although her 2004 candidacy was not supported by an organized umbrella force, such as *JEEP ni ERAP*, which consolidated the various efforts of civil society groups during the 1998 presidential elections. There was a relatively large constituency from the EDSA Dos movement that left the Arroyo camp, but all in all, it maintained a decent, substantial number. There were also separate support groups that remained behind the incumbent, believing that an Arroyo victory was imperative if their programs and projects were to continue. Although some groups chose to support the President quietly, the general feeling was that there was no other logical choice but Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

In truth, civil society was placed between a rock and a hard place, and they chose what was less painful.

## **Taking the Cudgels and Taking it Well**

The years after the 2004 elections were tough for civil society groups that supported President Arroyo's presidential bid. The failure of reform groups to deliver victory for Senator Jovito Salonga in 1992 was truly heartbreaking. However, in 2004, while the candidate that civil society had tepidly endorsed actually won, victory was short-lived because of the Garci tapes that came out soon after.

Yearly impeachment complaints were filed against the President until she completed her second term, all to no avail. The ease with which EDSA Dos unfolded would lead one to assume that at least lodging a sound impeachment complaint against the President would be just as easy. But because she had been in power for far too long, she had effectively co-opted many of the country's democratic institutions. There was a procedural roadblock to just about every initiative towards her removal. Extra-constitutional means also proved to be unfruitful. A repeat of EDSA Dos was close to impossible, as civil society groups could no longer put together a massive demonstration similar to 2001. Attempts at any movement resembling EDSA Dos failed to garner the necessary support from the public. When asked why there hasn't been another EDSA since the one in 2001, Butch Abad had this to say:

"In both instances, the high expectations were just not met. Of course in EDSA 1, there were basic failures in social reform... in the first EDSA, the problem is that the government had to survive. There were three things which Cory did well as transition leader: (1) provide leadership to the anti-dictatorship campaign, (2) she was very conscious of, although some say too fast, at least she restored formal institutions of democracy—local government courts, Congress, the Constitution...(3) there was a lot of debate here, but she was able to transfer power peacefully to her successor. Meaning, she refused all temptations to stay in power... It's another case for EDSA 2, because apart from removing Erap, I don't see anything beneficial to society that took place after, especially after Garci. In fact, after that, it was downhill for the President. After Garci, she was forced to spend her whole presidency trying to survive."<sup>31</sup>

Civil society legitimized the presidency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo twice. The first one was during EDSA Dos, the second one was during the 2004 presidential elections. Naturally, the restoration of democratic institutions, which President Arroyo quickly co-opted during her second term, reached a standstill. This paved the way for the extension of the political crisis from the President's re-election to the end of her term.

During this period, the reformists have had to work for its credibility and reliability to regain the public's trust and confidence. The experience

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Florencio "Butch" Abad, November 11, 2009.

has not been any different for civil society leaders who joined the Arroyo government, especially those who were most visible.

As soon as President Arroyo's term turned sour, civil society's credibility and reliability were immediately subjected to intense criticism. True, this has not effectively prevented the creation of new reform groups, neither has it hindered the functioning of others. There are still some, which the public had warmly received as representatives of their sentiments against the Arroyo government. However, the fact that people have become wary of acts of direct democracy cannot be denied, nor taken for granted. To be certain, the damage is not irreparable, as there remains an active, substantial base of civil society supporters. However, this was certainly a backward step for the reform movement, one that should be accepted as such, if lessons were to be derived from the experience.

## Concluding Remarks

Civil society has been instrumental in the ouster of Estrada and in Arroyo's assumption to the presidency. Optimistic that the new administration would finally fulfill the reform agenda, many civil society leaders joined the new government, without completely shedding off their identities as civil society leaders.

However, from then on, pushing the reform agenda, became increasingly difficult: what looked like a historic moment for genuine reform soon showed itself to be an uneasy compromise between reformers and traditional forces, with the latter having a huge advantage over the former. Unfortunately, the reformers who chose to crossover to the government unwittingly became Arroyo's legitimizing proof in her effort to keep the presidency.

During the 2004 elections, the competition was clearly between Fernando Poe, Jr. and President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and reformers still saw themselves pushed to a corner: Do they choose someone much like the one they have just ousted or the economist who had the best chance of winning against a very popular candidate? The choice was not an easy one, but it appeared to many as the only choice available. They

## The president says, 'I am sorry; I want to close this chapter.'

By The PCIJ Blog  
June 28, 2005

READING from a prompter, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at 7 pm Monday made the following statement about the wiretapping controversy.

*Mga minamahal kong kababayan.*

*For the last several weeks, the issue of the tape recordings has spun out of control. Tonight, I want to set the record straight. You deserve an explanation from me, because you are the people I was elected to serve.*

*As you recall, the election canvassing process was unnecessarily slow even after the election results were already in and the votes had been counted.*

*I was anxious to protect my votes and during that time had conversations with many people, including a Comelec official. My intent was not to influence the outcome of the election, and it did not. As I mentioned, the election has already been decided and the votes counted. And as you remember, the outcome had been predicted by every major public opinion poll, and adjudged free, fair and decisive by international election observers, and our own Namfrel.*

*That said, let me tell you how I personally feel. I recognize that making any such call was a lapse in judgment. I am sorry. I also regret taking so long to speak before you on this matter. I take full responsibility for my actions and to you and to all those good citizens who may have had their faith shaken by these events. I want to assure you that I have redoubled my efforts to serve the nation and earn your trust.*

*Nagagambala ako. Maliwagan na may kakulangan sa wastong pagpapasya ang nangyaring pagtawag sa telepono. Pinagsisisihan ko ito nang lubos. Pinananagutan ko nang lubusan ang aking ginawa, at humihingi ako ng tawad sa inyo, sa lahat ng mga butihing mamamayan na nabawasan ng tiwala dahil sa mga pangyayaring ito. Ibig kong tiyakin sa inyo na lalo pa akong magsisikap upang maglingkod sa bayan at matamo ang inyong tiwala.*

*I took office with a mandate to carry out a plan for the nation. Since that time, I have focused on making the tough but necessary decisions to make up for years of economic neglect. We passed a comprehensive, fiscally responsible national budget; raised new and necessary revenues to invest in the people; and implemented new anti-corruption measures that have led to the highest collection of taxes in history.*

*Nothing should stand in the way of this work, or the next phase of my reform agenda, which includes new investments in education and social services with our new revenues; and an expansion of our successful, anti-corruption and lifestyle checks.*

*That is why I want to close this chapter and move on with the business of governing. I ask each and everyone of you to join hands with me in a show of unity, to help forge one Philippines, where everyone is equal under the law, and everybody has the opportunity to use their God-given talents to make a better life.*

*Our nation is strong and getting stronger. The progress is steady and I ask you to walk with me on this journey to rebuild our great nation. I remain your humble servant and promise you that I will fulfill my constitutional oath of office to serve the people to the best of my ability.*

*God bless the Philippines.*

had to support GMA not only to have a better chance at the electoral arena but to prevent another Erap.

Reformers, however, were placed in a dilemma shortly after the elections after allegations had surfaced that Arroyo cheated her way to office in 2004. At first, they tried to help the President survive the crisis, but the reformers eventually left the government altogether. After their resignation, they reconsolidated their forces and campaigned for Arroyo's removal.

But what was most interesting in 2004 was that the line separating the state and civil society has truly become blurred as the latter began engaging in partisan politics. Historical circumstances had forced them to make tough decisions - decisions that they too must be held accountable for.

## Chapter 4

# The Clash Echoes through History

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The 2010 elections took place in a political context where the outgoing Chief Executive was the most unpopular President the country has ever had. With many failed attempts to remove then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo from office and despite the numerous cases of corruption hounding her, the 2010 elections had become the only way out of a long period of political crisis.

Controversy immediately hounded President Arroyo after the 2004 presidential elections. A long list of scandals rocked the Arroyo administration: the “Hello Garci” controversy, the overpriced Northrail project, the ZTE-NBN contract, the ZTE-Diwalwal scandal and the Swine Scandal. Every year, opposition lawmakers lodged one impeachment complaint after another in the Lower House. A House dominated by the President’s partymates made a successful impeachment process almost impossible. Investigations by a more-or-less opposition-friendly Senate were also made difficult by the President’s issuance of Executive Order 464, which prevented executive officers such as Cabinet members, police and military generals, as well as senior national security officials to attend Congressional hearings unless otherwise given permission by the President herself.

The public became largely disenchanted with the Arroyo administration. Although disenchantment has not reached a level that could replicate the 2001 EDSA uprising that ousted former President Estrada, the public’s morale was very low. Since the third quarter of 2004, Arroyo had received negative net satisfaction ratings per SWS data. In October 2009, she was tagged as the most unpopular President since Marcos.

In August 2009, controversies such as lavish dinner spendings (at *Le Cirque* and Bobby Vans in New York), and the misappropriation of funds to accommodate her foreign travels from 2003 to 2008 made the headlines. This was a few days before the winning candidate of the 2010 elections, Benigno 'Noynoy' Aquino III, announced his bid for the presidency.

This chapter focuses on reform groups that were involved in the successful campaign of President Aquino, the reform candidate, who, at the last minute, was able to draw a majority of the Filipino people together. The substantial participation of these groups and its clash with a formidable force that emerged in the course of the campaigns made the 2010 presidential elections a riveting moment in the Philippine democratization process.

## **Because Good Things Come to Those Who Wait**

With the death of former President Corazon Aquino on August 1, 2009, calls for her son, Noynoy Aquino to run for president began to gain momentum. The former President had become a symbol of democracy even long after the ouster of Ferdinand Marcos, as she constantly supported civil society-led actions calling for greater transparency and accountability during the Arroyo administration.

On the morning of September 9, 2010 at 9:00AM, at the historic Kalayaan Hall in Club Filipino (in the very same place where his mother took her oath as President), Noynoy Aquino finally announced his candidacy as standard bearer of the Liberal Party. Noynoy believed that he had to take the responsibility of continuing the “fight for the country,” and that he had to accept the challenge of leading the battle. “I cannot forgive myself if I know I could have done something but didn’t,” he said (Hofileña and Go 2011: 18).

Aquino filed his certificate of candidacy with Mar Roxas as vice-presidential candidate. Roxas was originally the Liberal Party’s standard-bearer but had to give way in favor of Aquino. Apparently, the widespread clamor for Noynoy to run for President was becoming increasingly difficult

## “Tinatangap ko ang hiling ng sambayanan”

Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III  
September 9, 2009

Transcribed from a recorded live TV coverage retrieved from youtube.com (<http://youtu.be/bjf0oYGpYkl>).

*Mga kapatid, mga kababayan.*

*Apatnapung araw na po ang lumipas simula nang pumanaw ang ating ina. Noong araw pong iyon marami pong tanong na bumabalot sa ating kaisipan. Unang una na nga ho doon, nawala yung haligi ng aming pamilya. Nawala yung aming pinuno, nawala yung masasabi nating tanglaw sa aming mga dapat tahakin. Maraming tanong: tanong na una, paano ba natin itutuloy ang laban? Siguro, may kaakibat ring tanong – gusto pa kaya ng tao na ituloy natin ang laban?*

*Ang sagot po nakuha ko na rin sa taumbayan. Doon po sa kanyang burol, doon po sa kanyang libing. Nakita po natin – palagay ko naman walang kadudaduda – na talagang nagnanais muli ang ating mga kababayan na maibalik ang panahon na talagang ganap na ganap ang ating demokrasya at tunay ang ating kalayaan. Nakita po natin ang pagbabalik ng pagmamahal sa bawat isa – ang handa sa pagsasakripisyo sa ikabubuti ng nakararami.*

*Talaga naman pong maraming boses na ang ating narinig sa mga araw matapos po ang paglibing ng ating ina. [...] Dumami nang dumami nang dumami ang boses. May nakikiusap, may nagsusumamo. Meron na rin pong nagagalit at meron na rin pong nagsabi, “sana dalawin ka ng nanay at tatay mo ‘pag pinalampas mo ang pagkakataong ito.”*

*Sa dami nga ng boses na iyon ay ako po’y tumungo na sa kumbento ng mga Carmelite sa Zamboanga. [...] Doon nag-umpisa ang maraming kalinawan sa mga dapat nating pag-isipan. Sinundan pa, at bago pa nga po nun, ay may nagsabi sa akin, na kung tama ang desisyon mo, madali na lang ang lahat ng kailangan mong tahakin.*

*Isa po doon sa dapat nating tahakin ay mayroon po kaming pangulo sa partido. Ito po ay inilalahad at iminungkahi na siyang manguna sa atin pong bansa. At tinawag po tayo sa isang pagpupulong, at doon sa pagpupulong po na iyon, hinanda ko na po ang sarili ko kung ano po ang magiging debate, pakiusap, mungkahi na ating maririnig.*

*Ngunit ano po ang natanggap natin doon? Ang nakita ko po doon, ay isang taong tunay na naglilingkod sa bayan, at iniisip ang kapakanan ng nakakararami bago ang sarili.*

*Talagang kakaiba ang ginawa ni Mar Roxas lalo na kung ikukumpara natin sa mga nagsasabing pinuno sila ng sambayanan pero nakikita lang po parati ay sarili. Si Mar, iba ang tinitingnan: bayan bago ang sarili.*

*Nung tayo po ay nakabalik [mula] sa makabuluhang pagpunta sa mga Carmelite, marami pa rin tayong nakausap. [...] Tinatanong po [nila], “tatako na po ba*

*kayo?" Sabi ko sa [kanila], "pag tumakbo ba ako iboboto mo ba ko? [...] Ikakampanya mo ba ko?" Ang sagot [nila] sakin, "kinakampanya ko na ho kayo."*

....

*Mga kapatid matagal-tagal ko na rin naman pong tinalakay itong tanong na ito. Ako po minsan, sinasabi ko sa sarili ko: parang hindi pa ganoon kahaba yung panahon pero talagang kailangan na nga pong mag deklarasyon sa araw na ito.*

*Unang una po, tinatanggap ko ang hiling ng sambayanan. Tinatanggap ko rin po ang bilin at habilin, tagubilin ng aking mga magulang. Tinatanggap ko ang responsibilidad na ituloy ang laban para sa bayan.*

*Tinatanggap ko ang hamong mamuno sa labang ito. Bayang Pilipinas, tatakbo po ako sa pagka-Pangulo sa darating na halalan. Itutuloy po natin ang laban! Mabuhay ang Pilipinas!*

*Nawa'y pagpalain tayo ng Poong Maykapal. Maraming, maraming salamat po sa inyong lahat.*

for Roxas to disregard (p. 10). When Aquino finally agreed to “carry the torch of leadership”, he had to step down from the presidential race (p. 13).

The announcement was not made with ease. Early on, Noytoy Aquino expressed hesitation, especially as Senator Roxas was already poised to run as the Liberal Party’s presidential candidate. Aquino made the decision on the 40th day after his mother’s passing, after a period of reflection in a spiritual retreat. The members of the Aquino family are known to be devout Catholics.

It became obvious to some that these political developments was brought about by the outpour of support and sympathy for the Aquinos after President Cory’s death. In his announcement on September 1, 2010, Roxas even attributed his decision to step down to the former President:

*“The passing of our beloved former President Aquino has reawakened a passion among us. I acknowledge this as fuel to bring us to the realization of our dream: good will triumph over evil.” (abs-cbnNEWS.com 2009: internet material)*

In early August, Noytoy started figuring out in the presidential surveys. This, to some, was clear indication of a “yellow fever” that was

already beginning to spread (Hofileña and Go 2011: 20). Seasoned politicians from the Liberal Party noticed that the survey ratings of Aquino looked promising. Eventually, the Party was torn between whether to continue supporting Roxas or to field Aquino instead (p. 4).

Groups not comfortable with Noynoy pointed to his lack of executive experience and lackluster performance as legislator, with no major legislative achievements despite having served for nine years as Congressman and two years as a Senator. For some, the Liberal Party's choice of Noynoy as its standard bearer was traditional politics at its worst—riding on the personality-charged atmosphere of Philippine politics (Philippine Daily Inquirer [PDI] 2009: internet material).

Aquino himself is a product of the old political order. He belongs to the country's political elite. His family belongs to the landed few that have long ruled Philippine society (Tharoor 2009: internet material). This brings forth another issue against Noynoy: Hacienda Luisita—the sprawling landholding in Tarlac, which has yet to be redistributed to its farm-workers (gmanews.tv 2010: internet material).

Another issue that was thrown against Aquino is the fear that *Kamag-anak, Inc.* will be resurrected in case he wins in the polls. The term “*Kamag-anak, Inc.*” was used to refer to Aquino relatives who had benefited under Cory Aquino's administration by cornering big business deals with the government (Cacho-Olivares 2010: internet material).

On the other hand, those who supported Noynoy, including various reform groups, banked on his character of being “untarnished by the corruption that pervades domestic politics” (PDI 2009: internet material). The winnability factor also attracted support from civil society leaders, as they have learned a lot from their previous engagements in the presidential elections. More importantly, Aquino was able to create the perception that he has the



**The Chosen One.** Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III, popularly called 'Noynoy', became the candidate the reformers could rally around. Photo taken from [cdn6.wn.com](http://cdn6.wn.com).

support of reformers, and that he was surrounded with “good people” with sound political judgment, good intensions and a progressive social agenda.

Because of these factors, many believed that he could never be “corrupt” unlike his predecessors. Moreover,

many believed that a reform-oriented party was supporting him (Dionisio 2010: internet material). As political analyst Ramon Casiple puts it, “[Aquino] may not be the ultimate architect of change, but he could push open the door for real reform” (Tharoor 2009: internet material). This made it a lot easier for some groups, like the Black and White Movement, who were initially supporting the presidential bid of Mar Roxas, to shift their support to Noynoy.<sup>32</sup>

Some reformers, however, still objected to the idea of going all out for Noynoy; but these objections were easily resolved. In fact, by the end of 2009, it became clear that the reform movement was firmly standing behind Aquino who, at the last minute appeared to have answered the reform movement’s prayers, as in Noynoy’s theme song:

“Siya na ba? Siya na nga! Siya nawa.  
Tapos na sana ang matinding pighati  
Siya na ba? Siya na nga! Harinawa.  
Tanggalin ang tiwali. Itatama ang maili!”

Prior to the announcement of Aquino’s candidacy, Senator Manuel Villar led the rest of the candidates in most election polls. His spectacular performance in the surveys, managing to overtake all other presidential prospects on his way to the top by August 2009 was attributable to his higher media spending (Hofileña and Go 2011:95). His political advertisements on radio and television played constantly—his campaign jingle was (in)famous.



**Outpour of Support.** People Power Volunteers in Bulacan rally in support of Noynoy’s candidacy. Photo taken from [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com) (posted by user ederic).

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Leah Navarro, November 14, 2009.

Other candidates included former President Joseph Estrada of *Pwersa ng Masang Pilipino*, Senator Richard Gordon of *Bagumbayan-VNP*, Gilbert Teodoro of *Lakas-Kampi-CMD*, Brother Eddie Villanueva of *Bangon Pilipinas*, John Carlos delos Reyes of *Ang Kapatiran* and independents Senator Jamby Madrigal and Nicanor Perlas.

In spite of his head start in the surveys and his catchy campaign jingle, Villar found himself ranking lower as the elections drew closer. A few weeks before the May 2010 elections, Aquino had overtaken Villar's ratings as well as other opponents in the race. In the very last survey pollster Pedro Laylo Jr. conducted before the elections (from May 1-4, 2010), Aquino registered a mark of 38%, way ahead of Estrada (22%) and Villar (20%) (p. 50).

Aquino won the elections with 15,208,678 votes. Estrada placed second with 9,487,837. Villar trailed at third with 5,573,835. Villar, delos Reyes, Gordon, Teodoro and Villanueva conceded victory to Aquino before his victory was declared.

## **The Architecture of the Aquino Campaign**

After Aquino's declaration that he would run for the presidency and with barely eight months to go before Election Day, campaign operations needed to be set-up and organized as quickly as possible. Roxas, as a gesture of goodwill, volunteered to offer his already operating campaign machinery. Since Roxas had prepared for the presidential race ahead of time, it was just a matter of transplanting the staffed campaign machinery, with all the working political, communications, logistics, administrative and research units for Aquino's use. Unfortunately, this, along with the campaign operations being pressed with time, would later on give rise to both foreseen and unforeseen complications, rendering the organization of the presidential campaign rather chaotic. The chaotic nature of the campaign structure gave rise to a division between the "conventionals" (pertaining to party members) and the "non-conventionals" (pertaining to organized volunteer groups) (Hofileña and Go 2011: 19).

At first, there were attempts to set-up a formal organizational structure by which an Executive Committee (ExeCom) was supposed

to lead and be on-top of the campaigns. The ExeCom included Liberal Party President and presidential campaign manager Butch Abad and former DSWD Secretary Dinky Soliman. Abad's task was to get things going quickly in time for the start of the official campaign period and to get everyone to work together. However, because the organizational structure was not well set-up due to time constraints, it tended to be flat and fluid; thus it became very difficult to reconcile the contrasting standpoints of the forces involved (p. 20). This was what campaign insiders referred to as "structural struggle" as the confusing configuration of the organizational structure of the campaign became apparent, to the effect that nobody knew who the final decision-maker was (p. 21).

As the campaign went on, Abad's post was eventually taken over by Serge Osmeña, and then by the vice-presidential candidate himself, Mar Roxas (p. 31, 45).

### *The Conventional Component*

The conventional component of the Aquino campaign was composed largely by the Liberal Party and other allied political organizations which, apart from agreeing to support Aquino's bid for the presidency, were also vying for government positions in the elections.

It is thus observable that the slate of the Liberal Party included candidates from its political allies: *Aksyon Demokratiko*, *Akbayan*, and some independent candidates.

*Aksyon Demokratiko* was founded by the late Raul Roco when he ran for President in 1998. After he passed away in 2004, the party fielded his wife and *Aksyon* chair, Sonia Roco for the 2011 elections as a senatorial candidate.

By end of August, *Aksyon Demokratiko* would be one of many organizations to push for Noynoy's bid for the presidency. In a press conference, Roco formally asked Noynoy to be their party's standard-bearer and proclaimed: "The fast-changing turn of events have affected the political landscape as it were. There has been an awakening, a new burst of hope. And Senator Noynoy is the answer. Wala nang iba [There is no other]" (Danao 2009:internet material).

The 2010 presidential elections was the first time Akbayan supported a presidential candidate. After its relatively dismal performance in the 2007 polls (it won only two congressional seats, compared to the three it got the prior election year), it had decided to engage the elections at both the national and local levels. Not only did it focus on fielding Risa Hontiveros for senator, they also supported the presidential candidacy of Aquino.

While the earlier decision to side with the Liberal Party for the presidential campaign was rigorous and contentious, the new decision to support Noynoy Aquino was made without much difficulty or delay.

*“Ang napagkasunduan was, nung si Mar pa, the decision was really made with Mar. Nung nagstep down siya for Noy madali, no big debate, may objections, pero di matindi. Leaders of the national council voted 68 for yes, and 2 no.”<sup>33</sup>*

When asked about the mandate of Akbayan to engage in the elections, Rocamora had this to say:

*“It registered as a national political party. Ang ambition talaga mag-start sa party-list, pinakaconducive to party building, tapos local politics, tapos pag kaya, national. So dito, nagkasundo na si Risa as senador. Kailangan mo ng ulo pag nagpatakbo kang senador, so dun pumasok yung debate sa loob ng Akbayan initially to support Mar, tapos within months of making that decision, nilipat kay Noynoy.”<sup>34</sup>*

Members of Akbayan joined the policy team that crafted Aquino’s political platform. Eventually, Akbayan was also made in charge of a number of operations for the elections, with Ronald Llamas as point-person.<sup>35</sup>

## *The Non-Conventional Component*

The “yellow fever” that came as an unintended consequence of Cory’s death heightened and spread in August, attracting a large number

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Joel Rocamora, November 10, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Ronald Llamas, June 19, 2010.

of volunteers to the campaign with varied persuasions, some of which coming from reform movements, others coming from the EDSA middle class constituency, and others coming from friends and family who refuse to stand behind party lines.

These groups included the Black and White Movement, Batch 77, *PNoy-Pinay*, *Pinoy Power Tayo ang Taumbayan Tayo ang Pagbabago Inc.*, Noynoy Aquino for President Movement (NAPM) and members of the *Hyatt Ten* (pertaining to the group of Cabinet secretaries such as Dinky Soliman and several bureau chiefs during the Arroyo administration who resigned following the series of controversies involving the former president) (Hofileña and Go 2011: 20). These volunteers labeled Aquino to be the “people’s candidate.” These groups comprised the “non-conventional” component of the campaign (p. 21).

Aquino himself asked Soliman to head the “non-conventional” component of the campaign the very afternoon that he announced his presidency. According to Soliman, Aquino felt that to be able to win against other candidates who have begun preparing for the campaign much earlier than him, his campaign would have to be run differently.<sup>36</sup>

Prior to supporting Aquino’s candidacy, Soliman was convener and chair of the Change Politics Movement, which was supposed to select and endorse candidates from the “womb of the people’s movements.” The Executive Committee of CPM was composed of Dodo Macasaet, Cezar “Ange” Belangel, Jing Karaos, Oman Jiao, Ging Deles, Marlene Ramirez, and Soliman herself. As early as 2008, CPM had already been convened. According to Soliman, the vision was to have a significant number of candidates in 2022 by mobilizing a reform constituency which can assert its power in choosing national and local candidates who carry the reform agenda. Thus, as early as 2009, they were holding forums and activities that would hopefully surface the agenda of possible candidates, specifically for the presidential elections (Change Politics Movement [CPM] 2009: internet material).

For some new groups like the Black and White Movement, with convenors Leah Navarro and Enteng Romano, the decision to support

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Corazon “Dinky” Soliman, July 22, 2010.

Aquino's bid was most natural. They were initially helping out with Roxas' bid, and their group had close ties with Former President Cory Aquino.<sup>37</sup>

Enteng Romano was the pioneer of *e-Lagda*, an online protest against then President Erap Estrada, which was able to collect 120,000 signatures online asking him to resign. After the "Hello Garci" tapes surfaced, he joined with Leah Navarro and a convener group of about 25 individuals. In 2007, they got together with other groups to convince the Genuine Opposition to accept two reform candidates, Sonny Trillanes and Sonia Roco.

The Aquino campaign was Black and White's first foray into the presidential elections. Leah Navarro specifically was part of the new media campaign for Aquino. In an interview in November, Navarro said that one of their plans was to launch a youth volunteer movement for the campaign.

The non-conventional component was intended to run parallel to the LP-led conventional campaign. The former was meant to harness the different groups towards a successful campaign. These groups were organized (or were attempted to be organized) under an umbrella organization called "People Power Volunteers", headed by no other than Soliman (Hofileña and Go 2011: 20).

Soliman's leadership of the non-conventional component meant bringing in the development NGOs and activists that were already part of her network. Under her leadership, the component was able to organize sixty-two provincial coordinating mechanisms, which included chambers of commerce, people's organizations, members of the academe and the religious community. These development organizations and activists, she says, formed the backbone of the non-conventional movement.

However, within the space of the non-conventional component, a formidable force emerged that challenged Soliman's leadership. While Soliman's leadership enjoyed a substantial level of support, it had to co-exist with the leadership of other groups within the non-conventional component.

For instance, Herminio Aquino, former Congressman and grand-uncle of Aquino notes that the campaign's organization was rather

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Leah Navarro, November 14, 2009.

fluid.<sup>38</sup> NoyPi Ako or the “Noynoy for President Initiative,” was organized by Hermie Aquino and Conrado de Quiros. The initial aim was to get a signature campaign running to convince the formerly reluctant Aquino to run for President. They were with Juvey Catahoy (who headed their daily operations) and Renato Yap. Their operations involved the tapping of existing groups in the campaign.

In the same token, Maria Montelibano and fellow members of Gawad Kalinga (a non-profit organization composed mainly of Couples for Christ members which helps poor communities build houses) formed *Tuloy Pinoy*. *Tuloy Pinoy* also included Aquino’s cousin, Mikee Cojuangco (the daughter of Peping Cojuangco). Meanwhile, Peping Cojuangco organized *Tunay na Pinoy Patriots*. Its membership included *Partido ng Mangagawa and Magsasaka*, some members of the 8th Congress, *Tuloy Pinoy*, *NoyPi Ako* and *Uncle Joe*.<sup>39</sup>

According to Hermie Aquino, on the day of the elections, these groups were somewhat consolidated as the “Yellow Forces.” The Yellow Forces would later on become a non-conventional force to challenge those organized by Dinky Soliman under the People Power Volunteers group or the Yellow Army.

## The Polarization

As the campaign proceeded, it became apparent that the groups in the Aquino camp were polarizing into two major forces, which would eventually form the two competing blocs in the Aquino administration. On the one end was the force led by Butch Abad and Dinky Soliman.<sup>40</sup> On the other end, the force backed up by Peping Cojuangco. The divide went beyond the style of campaigning, although some of the leading personalities of the Liberal Party like Chito Gascon did have complaints about how the non-conventional component was competing with party-based/conventional campaigns. The divide involved bigger, strategic and substantive issues such as the vice presidency and campaign content, and later on, even in terms of governance agenda.

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Herminio Aquino, June 26, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Peping Cojuangco, July 17, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> The two competing forces that later on emerged in the Aquino presidency would eventually be referred to as Balay and Samar camps. Balay would be the camp of Abad, Soliman, Roxas et.al. who would meet at Balay na Puti or White House of the Araneta Family in Cubao. The other camp, backed by Peping will be called Samar for operating in an old mansion in Samar Avenue in Quezon City .

Originally, the Abad and Soliman camp led the campaign of Noynoy. The group of Peping came into the campaign picture through the non-conventional component. Their reason for running their own campaign (and their seeming lack of cooperation with Soliman's group) was initially personality differences.<sup>41</sup> Soliman also acknowledged this. She felt that from the onset the leadership of some groups like *NoyPi Ako*, *Mabuting Pilipino* and NAPM did not recognize her leadership. Soliman also admitted that there were disagreements between her and Montelibano.

"A schism was created because there was a sense from their end that they were not included. They were all invited to non-conventional activities—and records will bear me out—but there were issues with personalities. My basic attitude was, those who can work, let's work, those who can't, *maggalangan tayo*. There was never a verbal clash."<sup>42</sup>

Upon Noynoy's request, Montelibano joined the team to head the communications initiatives of the campaign (Hofileña and Go 2011: 27). Pressed with time to set up her media group for the campaign, Montelibano cooperated with Chiz Escudero (p.30), who already set up his media team for his presidential bid that he later on aborted to support Noynoy's presidential bid. Later on, Chiz Escudero would come out to endorse Jejomar Binay for vice president. Before joining the campaign team, Montelibano had a pre-existing consultancy with Binay, who was up against Mar Roxas for vice-president.

Thus, when the *NoyBi* (Noynoy-Binay) advertisements came out, Montelibano and Peping were pointed as the people behind it. From the very start, many believed that Cojuangco was not in favor of the Noy-Mar tandem (Zamora 2010:internet material). There were also others in Peping's who had been vocal against the Liberal Party, which Roxas



<sup>41</sup> Interview with Herminio Aquino, June 26, 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Corazon "Dinky" Soliman, July 22, 2010.

## Quite another story

By Conrado de Quiros  
Philippine Daily Inquirer  
May 16, 2010

I read with much interest Fe Zamora's "Inside Story: Hyatt 10 vs. Kamag-anak Inc." My impression was that the people Fe spoke with were practicing revisionism and were already starting to rewrite history. While the idea of those two factions in the Aquino campaign squabbling makes for a riveting headline, there is another deeper, truer and ultimately more riveting one.

Fe's story suggests two things. One is that the rift in the Aquino ranks was between a group associated with reform (Hyatt 10) and a group associated with conservatism, or indeed with corruption (Kamag-anak Inc.), which birthed the Noy-Bi campaign. Two is that the hijacking of the campaign, or the betrayal of the dream, consisted of the junking of Mar Roxas. Neither is true.

But first off, let me be clear about how I know these things.

I know these things because I kept track of these things. I was never uncomfortable taking an active interest in the Aquino campaign while being with media not just because I urged Noynoy to run but because I never saw myself as participating in a very partisan way in an election. I saw myself as participating in a very partisan way in a project vaster and grander than an election. That was the project of ending nine years of misrule, or indeed illegitimate rule, and ushering in the hope or possibility of a better world. From the start I kept saying that Noynoy was more than an ordinary candidate - no one comes from out of the blue to get the numbers that he did in an ordinary election - and this was more than an ordinary election - his mandate was not to win for himself the presidency but to win for the people their liberty.

From the start I kept saying that this was an Edsa masquerading as an election, which was plain to see in the funeral procession that accompanied Cory to her final resting place, which guaranteed Noynoy, more than any party caucus to decide the standard-bearer, the right, honor and duty to lead a campaign that only incidentally had to do with becoming president. Till the end, I kept saying this was an Edsa masquerading as an election, which was proven by the people massing to the elementary public schools even as an angry sun beat upon the earth, as they massed during Cory's funeral even as a grieving sky let fall its tears upon the earth.

The rift was never between the Kamag-anak Inc. and the Hyatt 10. From the start, the rift was between the reformist volunteer groups and the trapo political party.

The political party went beyond the Liberal Party. It consisted of, one, the Liberal Party itself, represented by Mar Roxas and Butch Abad, last seen before Cory died and Noynoy became the presidential bet busily organizing the "Mar for President" campaign and getting nowhere. Two, the "Hyatt

10," represented by Cesar Purisima and Dinky Soliman, last seen the eve before Cory asked GMA to resign in the wake of "Hello Garci" singing fervently in support of GMA "If We Hold On Together," in lieu of "Ring around the rosie/ A pocketful of posies/ Ashes! Ashes!/ We all fall down!" They too, showing a horrendous sense of entitlement instead of a shameful show of contrition, were last seen before Cory died and Noynoy became the presidential bet busily organizing the "Mar for President" campaign and getting nowhere. Three, "The Firm," represented by Nonong Cruz, last seen before Cory died and Noynoy became the presidential bet busily organizing the "Mar for President" campaign and getting nowhere.

No way in hell these people represented reform. These groups merely went from busily organizing the "Mar for President" campaign to busily organizing the "Noynoy for President" campaign. They got very far busily organizing the "We kick out the people around Noy" campaign but got nowhere busily organizing the "Noynoy for President" campaign. It was under their watch Noynoy's numbers tumbled. That was the source of the rift, that was the origin of the rift, that was the beginning, middle and end of the rift. For a simple reason:

The people around Noynoy they alienated, pissed off and ejected like flotsam were the volunteer groups.

Mae Paner, better known as "Juana Change," expressed the frustration and anger of the volunteer groups who were responsible for Noynoy running for president to begin with, who were the heart and soul of "the people's campaign" to begin with, who were not being paid but were working their asses off to usher change simply because they believed in it to begin with, when she challenged a grand gathering of the Noy-Mar forces last Christmas to recognize one thing. That thing was that it was not the Liberal Party the campaign owed itself to first and last, it was the people, as represented by the volunteer forces. Without that fundamental recognition, she proposed, there was little hope for change. Without that elemental recognition, she suggested, no one would juana change.

There was silence after she spoke. It was broken by Butch Abad giving his usual blithe reply that you needed both the volunteer groups and the politicians to succeed. Which was all very well, except that the volunteer groups never got their due. Not then, not now. Their successes - and they were huge successes - the other side took credit for, and the other side's failure - and they were huge failures - it blamed them for.

In November last year, after I wrote a couple of columns criticizing the Liberal Party for making Noynoy appear just like another trapo, warning that his numbers could tumble from the tarnished image (which they did), someone called me up to tell me that that camp was asking "Is Conrad still with us?" I replied: "What the hell do they mean "us"?"

In fact they were the ones who ought to have been asked: "Are you still with Cory?" "Are you still with Noynoy?"

"Are you still with Edsa?"

headed as president. Peping, however, had denied this. According to him, Noy-Bi is like a ghost that the party and all its allies created to cover up their shortcomings and even wrongdoings during the campaign.<sup>43</sup>

While in the surface the issue raised was personality differences, the divide that emerged had a much deeper, historical reason and is rooted in the country's democratization process.

Abad and Soliman's camp, along with their allies like *Akbayan* and *CPM* came from the social movements. These groups were mostly part of the social movement that supported the candidacy of Jovito Salonga under the banner of Project 2001 in the 1992 elections. In the succeeding Presidential elections of 1998 and 2004, they continued to transition from movement politics in the margins to partisan electoral politics in the mainstream, albeit not always united. It came to pass that Noynoy Aquino in the 2010 elections was able to bring most of the 1992 forces from the social movements together and arguably, this made this force stronger than ever.

Those in the camp of Peping and Montelibano were from the old landed elite, particularly the President's family. Peping has been identified as among the so-called *Kamag-Anak, Inc.* (Zamora 2010: internet material).

It is important to note at this point that the two camps are not homogenous. For instance, belonging to the camp of Abad are Roxas, who is also an old elite and Drilon, who is not from the social movements. But they arguably represent elements from the modernizing section of the elite. Also, by and large, the values and stance of social movements and reform movements have shaped and influenced the character of this camp, perhaps because of constant engagement with the latter.

Similarly, the camp of Peping is also not homogenous with new faces and actors who can be classified to belong to this camp and with some like de Quiros who had been allies of the social movements for many years. However, in terms of leadership, the ones most recognizable and arguably decisive in determining the character and values of the camp are Peping, Montelibano and to some extent, Escudero and Ochoa.

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Peping Cojuangco, July 17, 2010.

## Yet Another Story: A Response to Conrado de Quiros

By Eleanor Dionisio

June 1, 2010

Conrado de Quiros's columns on rifts in the Aquino camp (Quite Another Story, Philippine Daily Inquirer, 17 and 18 May 2010) make entertaining reading, but not sound political prescription.

I voted for Aquino because he was backed by, among others, Butch Abad and Dinky Soliman, whose political judgment, good intentions, and social agenda I trust; because the others were unacceptable; and because Roxas gave way for him. Mar or Noynoy, it didn't matter; what I wanted was a reform-oriented candidate backed by a reform-oriented party. Since no reform-oriented party list group could carry a candidate to the presidency, the LP, for all its speckled history, seemed as good as we could get. That Akbayan had entered the LP coalition, and that Butch, Dinky, and others I trusted were in the campaign, gave me some confidence a platform I could support would congeal. Even if that platform might not contain all I wanted, there would be a plan for the nation, which few Filipino politicians have; and a coalition which could, maybe, hold their candidates accountable to that plan.

In short, I wanted something as close to institutionalized party politics as the Philippines can get right now -- because, call me old-fashioned, that seems to me the only way our democracy will mature. Hence I am troubled that De Quiros invokes the episodic, uninstitutionalized, voluntaristic politics of EDSA as the democratic ideal. Movement politics and voluntarism are vital components of democracy, making civil society flourish and constituting a potential anchor to party politics. But they are not systematic bases for political accountability. We needed EDSA in 1986, because our democratic institutions had been hijacked by a dictatorship. Now we need to institutionalize democracy. We need a working party system -- one linked and accountable to social movements, but which social movements cannot supplant.

When De Quiros says Noynoy's presidency "should succeed not because of the Liberal Party, the Hyatt 10 and the Firm but because of the volunteer groups," which volunteer groups does he mean? The "Yellow Forces" are not monolithic. Some voted for Noynoy because of nostalgia for EDSA; some because he was the heir to Cory's charisma; some because he was not known as corrupt; some because he was, like themselves, and unlike Villar or Erap, of the old elite; some because he was an Atenean; some because social democrats and socialists backed him; some because they found his receding hairline and lopsided smile endearingly sexy.

This lack of consensus about what Noynoy represents is why the Noynoy-Mar public platform was in the end reduced to the anti-corruption issue, which no one could openly refuse to support. Those who blame Roxas or the Hyatt 10 for that reduction should realize that too many issues might have fragmented the Yellow Forces.

But besides unity against corruption, Noynoy's Yellow Forces are a cacophony of conflicting interests, just as was the movement that brought his mother to power. In 1992, the Ateneo's Prof. Benjamin Tolosa wrote about a 1990 clash of interests in Corazon Aquino's coalition. He discussed how Abad, then the darling of the press as the valiant and beleaguered Agrarian Reform Secretary, could not win a particularly strategic battle against the conversion of agricultural land to industrial use (a strategy to avoid agrarian reform), because Cory simply let the various forces play themselves out -- which meant those with more power at the outset, landowners and capitalists, carried the day. Will it be any different if Noynoy frees himself of his supposed cordon sanitaire of advisers? If his leadership style is anything like his mother's, we know who will win. Not the "volunteer groups," unless they represent the economic elite.

De Quiros portrays the rift as one between calculating *trapos* -- the Hyatt 10, Roxas, the LP -- and virtuous volunteers. The LP establishment might be considered *trapos*. But the Hyatt 10 are not -- especially not those most vilified by De Quiros, Abad and Soliman, who have worked with the poor more than many who pride themselves on their membership in the Yellow Forces. How many of the "volunteers" who criticize them have organized labor unions like Butch did? How many were arrested twice during the dictatorship like Butch was? How many left a comfortable life to work for a diocesan social action center in Mindanao, like Dinky did as a young social worker, at a time when, for the dictatorship, diocesan social action centers were the enemy? Perhaps they compromised too much for some people's taste. Perhaps they made errors of judgment, supported the wrong people, supported them too long. Perhaps they have developed the habit -- not always contemptible -- of identifying and using political opportunities. But unlike *trapos*, they are not out to advance their own interests. Their objective is to advance a social agenda. That is a major difference between them and the *trapos*.

Closer to a real *trapo* is the politician with whom De Quiros unfavorably compares Roxas (Scars, PDI 18 May 2010). Perhaps Binay is a socialist at heart; that may be his saving grace. But his political practices are *trapo* to the core. That doesn't mean he will make a terrible vice-president. But if anyone suggests Binay is a better fit than Roxas with the Noynoy era's "new politics," they must be in an altered state of consciousness.

The difference in character and values can be seen with how the two camps selected the candidate whom they would support as presidential bet. Due largely to the peculiar set of constituencies they needed to organize and convince to join the Aquino campaign, the Abad and Soliman camp had to grapple with the usual tedious process of balancing the reform agenda developed by actors and groups from the social movements, on the one hand, and the winnability of the candidate, on the other hand. This statement from Butch Abad shows how he painstakingly convinced the social movements to face the realities of candidate selection vis-à-vis the reform agenda:

“Thinking about the idea of NGOs selecting a president in the past, we have been pre-occupied with setting a long list of criteria, [with] very ideal characteristics of what a president should be.... The same is true for agenda setting, we present [a] multi-sectoral platform of government, which hardly get noticed from the candidate.... [S]ince they are so general and have not really been formulated, with [no] key sense of what the legislature profile will be and the nature of bureaucracy, many of the agenda end up so nice, clean statements, but they in fact do not resonate among the candidates.... So our selection process has been really detached from the real selection process that happens in Philippine presidential election. And I think it is important for us to recognize the realities and accept the possibilities, as well as more importantly, the limits when we engage the process of selecting a presidential candidate.... The point of unity is the candidate.... The selection process is really a result of values, diverged social, political and economic interests coming together to support the candidate.”<sup>44</sup>

While this statement seems succumbing to *realpolitik*, it also shows how the camp needs to address and tackle the reform agenda in selecting for the candidates. At the end of the day, the social movements that supported Noynoy and later joined Abad and Soliman’s camp still came up with their reform agenda, which tackled themes such as good governance, social justice, anti-poverty and even sustainable development—and Noynoy’s campaign team had to respond to their agenda to get these groups’ support.

Peping’s camp, on the other hand, hardly articulated any reform or development agenda. When asked about his participation in Noynoy’s presidential campaign, Peping would answer in general terms about helping to bring about change that the country deserves and by supporting the people who have organized themselves for his nephew’s candidacy.<sup>45</sup> Most of the groups they organized gravitated around the person, Noynoy, with their individualized rationalities and reasons for supporting Noynoy. This arguably showed a personality-oriented way of engaging politics.

While this was not presented by Peping’s camp, one critical agenda that spelled the difference between the former and the Abad-

<sup>44</sup> Florencio “Butch” Abad, transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Peping Cojuangco, July 17, 2010.

Soliman camp was agrarian reform. This issue is one of the focal agenda of the reform movements that Abad and Soliman had organized. Peping, and the Cojuangcos, on the other hand, own Hacienda Luisita, one of the strongholds of landed power in the country that has been able to withstand the government's land redistribution policy.



**NoyNoy Cabinet.** Aquino appoints members of his Cabinet, some of which came from the civil society and others from the business sector. *Photo from Inp.org.*

Secondly, while the camp of Abad and Soliman had track records on good governance to speak of, Peping's camp has yet to articulate their stand and show concrete action against corruption. Furthermore, while Abad and Soliman's camp was generally supportive of party-based politics, especially since Roxas was their ally and Abad is a Liberal Party leader, Peping's camp would strongly undermine party-based processes of the Liberal Party and would even go to the extent of discrediting party politics in general.

Peping had been open about his criticisms against Abad and Soliman's group, whom he referred to as "people who claim themselves to be reformers."<sup>46</sup> This statement was indicative that he is critical of this labeling. Particularly, Peping was against the re-appointment of former Cabinet officials (referring to some members of *Hyatt Ten*) in the administration of Noynoy (Bayos 2010: internet material).

An article of Eleanor Dionisio (2010) (a veteran foot-soldier of the anti-dictatorship movement during the mid-1980s) captures this perspective of competing interests in the camp of Aquino:

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Peping Cojuangco, July 17, 2010.

“... Noynoy’s Yellow Forces are a cacophony of conflicting interests, just as was the movement that brought his mother to power. In 1992, the Ateneo’s Prof. Benjamin Tolosa wrote about a 1990 clash of interests in Corazon Aquino’s coalition. He discussed how Abad, then the darling of the press as the valiant and beleaguered Agrarian Reform Secretary, could not win a particularly strategic battle against the conversion of agricultural land to industrial use (a strategy to avoid agrarian reform), because Cory simply let the various forces play themselves out—which meant those with more power at the outset, landowners and capitalists, carried the day. Will it be any different if Noynoy frees himself of his supposed cordon sanitaire of advisers? If his leadership style is anything like his mother’s, we know who will win. Not the “volunteer groups,” unless they represent the economic élite... “(internet material).

## **Emerging Trends and Critical Issues**

The campaign of Noynoy Aquino in the 2010 elections is extremely interesting in the study of Philippine electoral politics and democratization because of its elements that suggest historical progression.

By and large, it was able to bring together various reform movements that were first mobilized and consolidated during the 1992 elections. This time, this “reform constituency” showed more sophistication and maturity in engaging mainstream politics and tackling traditional political culture. While they still presented what was supposedly an alternative reform agenda, this was already tempered and balanced by the realities of Philippine politics and culture.

This reform force ended up being seriously challenged and opposed by forces that can be traced back to the traditional interests of the landed elite.

The clash between these forces in the campaigns showed how the contrasting ways of politics are utilized with one force (Peping, et.al.) leaning to the traditional ways of doing politics (personality-oriented, personal network-based), while the other force (Abad, Soliman, et.al.) having a higher propensity to use modernizing/ new ways (agenda-based politics, party-based), but tempered by the realities of prevailing political culture learned from the past experience.

There is also the apparent contrast in the governance and development agenda of the two forces, owing to the different social interests that they represent. The camp of Peping, et al. would likely oppose social reform policies such as agrarian reform and has an unclear stance on corruption. The camp of Abad and Soliman, or at least the constituencies they have organized, would have a strong stand on redistributive policies and would likely to have a stronger, more definitive, and elaborate program to fight corruption or to advance good governance.

By and large, this development in Philippine politics demonstrates conflicts that happen in the process of democratic consolidation—wherein opposing interests with varying agenda (with respect to what development and governance direction the government should take) clash and compete for power. In this case, the battleground was the presidency and the prize is the direction that the presidency will take and the manner by which the next step will be taken.

This, therefore, makes the presidential candidate and now president also enormously interesting. Noynoy is from the class of the Yellow Forces camp. He is the nephew of Peping. But he has been exposed and has worked with the other camp. Butch Abad was his campaign manager when he vied for the Senate in 2007 and Julia Abad, Butch's daughter, was his chief-of-staff in the Senate. Noynoy is also a member of the Liberal Party and has worked with the representatives of *Akbayan* on some legislation when he was in Congress.

Where Noynoy will lean will certainly be determined by the interplay of these forces and the possible entry of other players that can tilt the balance of forces. How the reform groups tackle the challenges that come their way would be most critical.

To date, a number of reformers have already been appointed to office after Noynoy won the presidency: Dinky Soliman (DSWD), Butch Abad (DBM), Joel Rocamora (NAPC), Chito Gascon and Ronald Llamas (Office of the Political Affairs), Ging Deles (Peace Adviser), Vicente Romano (DOT), and Etta Rosales (CHR).

Whether this new batch of crossovers and re-crossovers from the reform movement will bring forth change in politics and governance is a big question that involves other issues and questions. Indeed, how well

would they fair in keeping their candidate in check to ensure that reforms are realized would be most critical.

The same could be said for those who stayed outside of government, and remains to be part of the civil society: How do they engage the new government now that they form part of the force that brought Noynoy to Malacañang? Can the reform groups who opted to remain outside of government effectively exact accountability from the leaders that they had to let go of for the purpose of carrying the torch of reform inside the administration?

Another major challenge that the reform movements are facing is one of reconsolidation and leadership. With the number of civil society leaders now in government, substantial changes are also happening in the organizations from which they came from—leadership has passed on to younger personalities. Organizations like the International Center for Innovation, Transformation and Excellence in Governance (INCITE-Gov), many of whose founders have been appointed to government, now have younger leaders who are forced to step up and fill in the organization's ranks.

Political allies that supported Noynoy Aquino are also experiencing this. For instance, with the appointment of many veteran leaders of *Akbayan*, the party leadership has now passed on to a younger set of leaders that rose from the ranks of student leadership to national party leadership. Clearly, the space that has opened for reform groups in government has likewise opened up leadership positions within the reform groups themselves, paving the way for a new generation of thinkers and development workers alike.

Finally, can the victory of the reform movement usher a real alternative in Philippine politics? Will the cross-overs finally get to implement the reforms and effect the political transformation that pushed them to be in politics in the first place? Will this agenda and transformation ultimately lead to the consolidation and deepening of Philippine democracy?

## Synthesis

# Reform in Elections and Institution-Building

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In their recent book entitled *'The Politics of Change,'* editors Yuko Kasuya and Nathan Quimpo revisited David Timberman's (1992) description of Philippine politics as "a changeless land". While the book provides yet another validation of Timberman's thesis, it also daringly acknowledges some indications of brewing movements towards substantive change in the Philippines; more remarkable of which is due to the optimism and hope that was brought about by the 2010 elections. In fact, according to Joel Rocamora, it provides "a real possibility for a significant lead in the reform process in the Philippines after the 2010 elections."

Whether indeed this kind of political engagement of societal forces has led to further democratization is a question worth pondering on. As the country institutionalizes mechanisms for competitive contestations for power it should be asked if the new forces with alternative/ reform-oriented agenda were successful in making use of these mechanisms to transform power and make a dent in the development and democracy of the country.

## **Tracing the Discourse of Reform in the Post-Martial Law Electoral Engagements of Reformers**

Since the end of Martial Law, social movement actors have debated whether or not they should go partisan, crossover from civil society to state politics and participate in the electoral process. On the one hand, adopting the strategy of electoral engagement has been viewed as too compromising and even destructive to the cause of those clamoring for

political change. This has been viewed as yielding to, hence accepting and deodorizing, the inadequate and elitist democracy that was installed after EDSA 1. On the other hand, electoral engagement has been viewed as a necessary strategy to win minimum gains, given the current process of democratic consolidation.

It can be argued that the electoral engagement of the social movements in 1992 and 1998 centered on this debate. In 1992, the question was whether they should or should not. The answer that prevailed, obviously, was that they should; and they did. After the miserable defeat of these movements in 1992 which supported an “ideal” presidential candidate, the same question resurfaced. In 1998, the issue was more nuanced. While social movements acknowledged the need to engage the electoral space as an arena for contestation to effect change, the question was which spaces in the electoral arena would give them best results in pushing for their alternative politics.

There was a seeming consensus that the presidential and national elections remain exclusive to traditional politicians. The means and rules in these electoral contests continue to be favorable to the same elite who have benefited from the system since the birth of the Philippine Republic. The same elite have learned the game so well that new players like those from the social movements would end up slaughtered to pieces when they face the old players head on in these spaces.

The only way to relatively gain success in these spheres would be to engage the traditional players, and some opted to do so. Meanwhile, others thought of another strategy. They opted to work in small spaces such as local government units, as well as the new mechanism that was specifically created to accommodate those who are politically marginalized: the party-list system. By 1998, key actors and groups in the reform movements were taking different directions. There was no presidential candidate who could exclusively claim of having the reform movements’ backing. There were those from the social movements who supported Erap Estrada because he had the support of the *masa*; while there were a few with some other presidential candidate. Meanwhile, most of those in the reform movements maximized the party-list elections. With the victory of Erap, the phenomenon of crossovers started, those actors jumping from civil society to the bureaucracy. The

first ones would be Boy Morales and Ed dela Torre during the Estrada presidency.

The underpinnings of EDSA 2 largely affected the behavior and decisions of actors and players in the 2004 elections, including those from the reform movement. Erap Estrada's presidency was short-lived; and along with his fall was the discrediting of those leaders from the social movements/civil society who became part of his Cabinet and opted to stick with him despite the corruption scandals which hounded his regime. Meanwhile, there were those from the reform movement who became part of the Cabinet of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo after EDSA 2. Some of them included Dinky Soliman, Ging Deles and Butch Abad. Their engagement with a traditional politician like GMA was for the same reason—it was necessary in order to have minimum gains for reform.

Given the growing dominance of the issue of corruption as a major problem facing the country, the discourse of change among these reformers became sharper and more focused. Reform or change in politics then became closely related to addressing the problem of corruption. The discourse of good governance—the need for transparency, accountability and participation in governance to address problems of poverty and underdevelopment—highly influenced the Cabinet's reform agenda since these reformers became Cabinet members. Meanwhile, there were those like *Akbayan* whose electoral engagement remained in the party-list system and whose discourse of reform was still largely premised on social justice and socio-economic reforms. Arguably, this subtle difference in framing on how to achieve reform perpetuated the continuing divide among the reform groups since after EDSA 2.

What is worth highlighting during the reformers' engagement in the Arroyo administration was their relationship with the mass movements. While engaging traditional political players at the top in their own game of power politics (such engagement requiring much elucidation and regrettably was not extensively tackled in the cases), they also had to engage their bases in civil society and social movements who had a wide variety of demands and discourse as well. In a way, since their bases were their political capital (especially given the brewing electoral fever as early as 2002), maintaining it was a must. The other way of understanding it was that at a time when significant reforms and

structural changes were hardly visible and attainable, their continued linkage with their mass base was the clearest manifestation of their reform-oriented character, of what set them apart from other politicians in the Cabinet. This allowed them to exercise leadership over these movements.

The dominant discourse of reform then in the social movements was *Bibingka Strategy*, a term agrarian reform expert Saturnino Borras coined based on the agrarian reform advocacy under the Ramos presidency. The premise of *Bibingka Strategy* was that to win reforms in a system with democratic deficit, there should be fire from below (organizing and movements at the grassroots) and fire on top (champions inside the government). Given this framework, the reformers in the Arroyo Cabinet became champions of the grassroots for their advocacies that range from lobbying for legislative agenda, to pushing for the implementation of critical policies (like agrarian reform), to claiming support and assistance through specific programs and service-delivery.

This strategy was seemingly effective in delivering results in terms of policies, programs and logistical support and with no complication, until the 2004 elections when the Arroyo administration was hounded by allegations of corruption and abuses, including the Fertilizer Scam (the alleged malversation of funds meant for the farmers). This created a situation wherein the ability of reformers to deliver their constituencies depended on Arroyo staying in power. Arguably, this was one of the reasons the reformers had to stay with GMA in 2004.

The other related reason was the threat of the comeback of Erap through his bosom buddy and fellow actor Fernando Poe, Jr. He was an immensely popular candidate and the prevailing analysis was that only GMA (with her machinery) could defeat FPJ. Even a clear reform-oriented candidate like Raul Roco was overlooked or dismissed by mainstream political analysts. Given that the reformers had to protect the gains of their engagement and the commitments to their constituencies, as well as the corruption baggage of the Estrada administration, they feared losing the elections to FPJ. Hence, they supported GMA, knowing or not knowing that she would use the government to secure victory.

Later on, when the controversy on the 2004 elections came out, the reformers simply explained their support for GMA in 2004 as another case of traditional politics winning over and crippling the efforts of reform forces. Some of the reformers in the Arroyo administration, said that all along they thought they were part of the inner circle, only to find out that they were wrong. Dinky Soliman quipped it as her “*mea culpa*,” and so were the rest.

As what seemed to be an attempt to make up for this “fault,” these reformers posted a staunch opposition to GMA in 2005 when they resigned from the Cabinet, and joined the rest of the reform movements that had already taken an opposition stance against the Arroyo administration even before the 2004 elections. From 2005 to 2010, these reformers, along with the emerging reform-oriented groups and individuals from anti-corruption groups, the businesses and the Church, served as leaders of the reform-oriented opposition to GMA, while politicians like Erap Estrada, Manny Villar and eventually Fidel Ramos and Jose de Venecia serving as the traditional opposition.

The GMA administration utilized the powers of the presidency to stay in power— by using State resources like pork and contracts to control traditional politicians and to punish the opposition, by abusing the state’s security machinery to quell opposition and controlling the entire government to serve its own partisan political ends. It was a period of democratic rollback and the emergence of a new “predatory state” (Hutchcroft 2010). The dismal result of the party-list elections for reform-oriented party-list groups like *Akbayan* in 2007 showed the extent of damage that the presidency could create.

By and large, Arroyo did something good for the reform movements in the country. She reunited them and even broadened their base. At the start of the 2010 presidential elections, there were emerging consensus points on the political situation of the country and consequently the framing of the need for electoral engagement among old and new reform movements. First and most important was the recognition of the imperative of going partisan in the elections, particularly in the presidential elections, given the importance of the post in the viability of many reform engagements, including the party-list. Second, is the issue

of corruption or abuse of government powers that must be addressed to protect democracy. Third, unless there is unity among the reform groups in their electoral engagement, no victory against GMA or her allies would be possible. Fourth, while the reform agenda is critical, focusing on the generation of votes is just as critical. Fifth, to win reforms after elections, organizing politically is most critical.

It is unclear whether the new reform movements that emerged in the 2010 elections shared the last two conclusions; but surely, the older actors and players knew it too well. This paved the way for their support of Noynoy Aquino and their political follow-through after the elections.

In looking at the reformers' engagement in 2010, there is now a stronger recognition of the discourse that partisan electoral politics is something linked to, and not divorced from the rest of their political and developmental work. It is no longer viewed as conflicting to the advocacies in the social movement and in civil society. In fact, partisan electoral engagement became an imperative for reforms, given how formal power affects the wielding and exercise of non-formal or by the social movements and civil society.

## **Lessons from the Electoral Campaign Engagements of the Reformers**

With the process of democratic consolidation, new or renewed spaces like elections become politically palatable for social movements offering an alternative to the prevailing political order. However, their engagement in these spaces is done while the old and traditional way of politics remain as the default rule of the game. To engage in such system, the social movements will have to learn practical ways of subverting the old system and neutralizing the "old guards" in order to advance reforms.

The Philippine experience in post-Martial Law elections has generally been characterized by this dynamic. It has shown that the new forces, i.e., the social movements, have lost many times to the old guards that have wielded to their advantage the old ways of politics. However, there is seemingly a progression in history as the new forces learn from their mistakes. This results in improved outcomes every after

election. However, the game has been full of surprises and every step forward brought forth different sets of challenges that needed to be learned and mastered. Whether the reform movement can overcome and bring about meaningful change is something to be determined as the story unfolds. What is certain is that the experience has given rich practical lessons about how reform movements can successfully subvert the system.

### *Interfacing Candidate-Selection and Reform Agenda*

In a presidential system, the Office of the President is very powerful. Especially in countries like the Philippines where institutions are weak, the political and economic condition is generally on survival mode and where a large portion of the population is impoverished and disempowered, there is no other choice but to rely heavily on leaders. Thus, the incumbent president can really make a lot of difference. The president's performance and support largely determines the success of reforms.

"The language of reform is the language of power;" hence to be effective in pushing their agenda, the reformers must speak the language of power. Jesse Robredo best describes the interface of candidate selection and reform agenda with this statement: "Whoever wins the presidency in 2010 will determine the kind of reform agenda. It is crucial therefore to find and elect a candidate who can challenge the status quo and push reforms for the country."<sup>47</sup>

Previous electoral participation of reformers has been largely issue-based and agenda-driven with no clear post-election political project. That is why civil society tended to just talk to politicians, ask them to support their issues and agenda and hope that these politicians will carry them when they become public officials.

Butch Abad gave a very good observation on the pitfalls that agenda-building reformers had done during past elections:

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<sup>47</sup> Jesse Robredo, transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

“Reformers present a broad multi-sectoral platform of government that looks good on paper, and everybody gives their respectful support for the agenda. But since it is too general without a keen sense of the profile of the legislature and bureaucracy, the agenda end up not resonating with any candidate. Most of the time, no choice is made. The selection process is so detached from real selection process that happens in election.”<sup>48</sup>

Ramon Casiple, on the other hand, highlights the meaning of “the language of reform is the language of power:”

“To be effective in pushing for their agenda, citizen reform groups need to speak the language of power. When you engage politicians, you have to understand the basis for his decision and when you push for your agenda, the content of your agenda should also be power, e.i. Cabinet positions.”<sup>49</sup>

There has been also a tendency for reformers to set an ideal criteria for candidates. As shared by Butch Abad, it is not a bad exercise, but by setting standards too high, many reformers including those within their spheres of influence decided to just watch the elections.

It is thus important to recognize the possibilities and limits in selecting a presidential candidate. In identifying who to support, there is a need not only to look at who will say ‘I support your issues’ but more importantly, to look at the networks of friends and allies of the candidates; and most importantly, those who would help in contributing to their campaign funds. These information are hardly accessible but these are important in coming up with the decision on who to support.

Aside from the qualifications and credentials of the candidates, it is also crucial for reform actors to agree on the immediate political goals of their engagement. Examples of immediate political outcome in the 2010 elections were: a legitimate mandate for the next administration and an administration with a vision, capacity, and willingness to pursue reforms.

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<sup>48</sup> Butch Abad, transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Ramon Casiple, transcripts from The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

One of the most crucial parts of the interface of the reform agenda and candidate-selection in partisan electoral engagement is the need to translate reform constituencies into vote base. Reformers cannot be effective in pushing for reforms unless they are able to convert clamor for change to actual electoral power: votes. The big question is how can reformers muster a vote base large enough for them to be significant players in the presidential campaigns.<sup>50</sup>

### *Organizing Politically, Critical Cues Forward*

The most immediate challenge for reformers engaging partisan electoral politics is the broadening and consolidation of the reformers' voting constituency. As discussed in the Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, "electoral politics requires a different process from what civil society knows either by tradition or by training. Engagement in electoral politics requires a 'mass base' for one, and transactional engagement for another."

La Viña and Akeron (Agenda for Hope 2009) attempts to describe what constitute these reform constituencies:

"These forces are the reform and radical democratic movements in the local government units, within the bureaucracy, in the civil society and social movements and perhaps even among the circles of a few modernizing elites. These movements, which continue to be vibrant and alive, are characterized by the strong fervor for change with its anti-traditional politics brand, thus providing its modernizing and reformist element. These movements are democratic for they live by and breathe the democratic values that enabled them in the first place."

In the 2010 elections, three (3) segments of the population have shown great potential of becoming part of the reform constituencies that must be organized and mobilized for a successful engagement of reform-oriented groups in future elections. These are: overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), the youth and students sector, and the existing reform-oriented advocacy groups. These are the potential political actors that are not yet entirely immersed and integrated into the patronage-based

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<sup>50</sup> Discussion Highlights, The Partisan Civil Society Discussion Series, 2008.

political system of the country. They also have the numbers, the capacity and most likely the desire for radical changes in politics of the country.

In order to further hone the potential of the youth and student sector (which constitutes the majority of the country's population), they must be mobilized and educated using the language and methods they are accustomed to. The OFWs have seen different political systems abroad that could give them new and fresh perspectives. The reform-minded, though few and scattered, would provide the experience in engaging the traditional political landscape.

Finally, the limits in terms of impact of the engagement of reformers in partisan electoral politics point to the need to extend the logic of electoral engagement of reform actors to political party or party coalition formation—organization, political strategy formulation, platform development and governance preparation. Reformers organizing partisan movements in elections should be appreciated as just a temporary solution to the underperforming political parties and barely existing party system in the Philippines. Hence it is just the beginning of serious electoral engagements.

The previous discussions show the limits of civil society's previous partisan electoral engagements. Problems include the lack of any effective machinery for converting mass base to votes and the absence of a permanent collective that could support those who "crossover" to government, particularly in dealing with the balance of power within and outside the government. These lessons point to the need to consider serious political party building efforts. There has been enough explaining of why there has been little progress on this, which brings the challenge of how to finally make it work as the call of the time.

## **Social Movements to Electoral Engagement towards Party Politics?**

What is the trajectory of this engagement? If the objective is to attain power in order to push for reforms, what specific reforms in the system for power contestation must be achieved in order to further advance the democratization process?

Transforming the electoral system, i.e. replacing the old ways of politics with new, would require not only new players, but would also require a continuing and sustained process for the following: solidifying and expanding the constituency for reforms inside and outside of government, building expertise (i.e. knowledge, skills and up-to-date information about the players and the political environment) and organizational effectiveness of the new players in electoral contests and enriching the reform agenda and the alternatives through continuous agenda-setting, interest aggregation and strategy development to push for reforms, to name a few. All of these pre-requisites for sustaining the electoral victory of new players can be addressed by a modern mechanism for political contestation, a political party. Party development hence becomes the logical step forward for social movements engaging the elections.

Before the 2010 elections, party-building was considered highly suspect. After every election, social movement actors who joined the campaign would revert back to being civil society. A few of the leaders would join government (the cross-overs), but with no clear party accountabilities. Meanwhile, the groups and the actors that returned to the social movements would have no capacity and orientation to build and strengthen party politics.

Four presidential elections after Martial Law the country's political party system is still underdeveloped with any hardly full-fledged national mainstream political party.

One clear explanation for this is the absence of a conducive environment that supports the development and strengthening of party politics. The article of Aseron in the book *Reforming Philippine Political Party* (2009) published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung attributes this to the prevailing legal-institutional environment that favors the development of patronage-based politics, rather than platform-based and mass-based parties.

In the same book, Julia Teehankee attributes the underdevelopment of parties and the party system to the weak link between citizens and parties. Given this premise, the questions that begs to be answered are:

How would the reformers' electoral engagement contribute in creating the link between citizens and parties? Why could they not convert this link to building of parties to make their electoral engagement more effective?

Two interpretations of the electoral engagement of the reformers can possibly provide an answer to this critical interrogation. The first interpretation of the action and behavior of the reformers vis-à-vis the task of party-building is pessimistic; while the second one points to a promising end, although the two are not necessarily contradicting.

The first interpretation asserts that reformers, once they engage the electoral arena get overwhelmed by the system. As reformers engage the traditional political processes, they get overwhelmed by battling at all fronts just to stay reform-oriented in a traditional, corruption-conducive system they are in. Hence, turning the task of working for more fundamental reforms such as party-building becomes costly if not almost impossible task. In such a situation, the first one to go or to be set aside is the most difficult agenda—it is the most difficult because it is the most fundamental and substantive. Reformers in government would often argue that only when their power position is stabilized can they push and work for substantive and fundamental reforms. Given their weakness vis-à-vis traditional political actors, consolidating their power is hardly achieved.

The second interpretation acknowledges the small gains that seem to form a logical pattern towards the strengthening of party politics. By looking at individual actors or specific groups from the reform movement, we can see that there are some of them who are now engaging party politics and are pushing the boundaries and expanding the space for more party-based politics. Some like Butch Abad, Dina Abad and Chito Gascon are now in the Liberal Party (LP). There are a lot of party-list groups that emerged from the reform movement. *Akbayan* is arguably the most successful, given its relatively successful engagement in mainstream partisan electoral politics in 2010. The alliance in the 2010 elections of the reform wing of the Liberal Party and *Akbayan* also proved promising in terms of building a coalition towards a more party-based political engagement.

These two interpretations are not necessarily incompatible. Because of the small spaces for substantive political reform, the gains in

party-building is only minimal. The point though to further push the gains, no matter how small, and moving towards the direction of party politics.

In the case of LP, it had a few individual reformers in 1998 but their actions arguably became more party-based in 2010. There is of course much nuancing required here such as the relative weakness of the party vis-à-vis its allied collectives or constituencies and the recognition that the victory of Noynoy was hardly attributable to the Liberal Party alone. Yet, it cannot be denied that party-based processes and actions had relatively bigger roles and party-attributable outcomes in the 2010 elections than in past elections.

In the case of *Akbayan*, from its experimental engagement in the 1992 presidential campaign, it withdrew to the limited space of party-list and local elections in order to build on its roots and broaden its ranks. It was finally able to break through mainstream politics in 2010. Its direction is rather obvious—to be in the mainstream as a key political player in Philippine politics through party-based politics. There have been some drawbacks in their engagement and the threat of totally losing one's identity in engaging mainstream politics is as pressing as ever, but the point of direction seems crystal-clear to its leadership and to its mass base: strengthening party-based politics to win electoral contests towards the attainment of social justice and political reforms. If successful, *Akbayan* can be a living testimony of the effectiveness of party-based politics in achieving, maintaining and expanding power that offers an alternative.

## Final Remarks

The Philippines began its transition to democracy more than a quarter of century ago through a direct and decisive action by the people called People Power. The country arguably has the most dynamic and active social movement and civil society actor in the region and they have been playing varied roles for over a century now.

Yet, to date, public institutions continue to be generally 'captured' by old interests and forces that date back from the colonial period; and these institutions continue to advance and protect the interests of a few.

The decision of social movements to engage electoral politics in 1992 shortly after the country's transition from authoritarianism and go

beyond civil society engagement to being outrightly partisan is a step towards infusing reforms in the government. This development provides golden opportunities for new players with an alternative agenda to finally enter the mainstream while posing threats to the old players that resist reforms.

The experience shows varying but largely promising results. The engagement of social movements in the 1992, 1998, 2004 and 2010 elections provided these new players with rich experience and valuable lessons. Perhaps, due to this experience, these social movements became pivotal in the victory of Aquino in 2010 and their coming to power in the new administration.

How these reformers respond to the challenges facing them now, including how they would consolidate their power will determine how they can advance their reform agenda and build a more substantive democracy for the Philippines.

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**Infusing Reform in Elections:  
The Partisan Electoral Engagement of Reform  
Movements in Post-EDSA Philippines**

documents the experience of groups, networks and individuals from the social movements who decided to go beyond civil society action to push for reforms in the partisan electoral arena, particularly by supporting a presidential candidate. It situates this political development in the democratization process that the Philippines went through after the end of Martial Law where forces new in mainstream politics emerge and take advantage of the democratic space to offer an alternative - a set of reform agenda and a reform-oriented way of politics in the electoral exercise.



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