



**The Partisan Civil Society:
Analyzing Civil Society Engagement in Partisan Politics**

Session 3: Selecting a Presidential Bet
3 October 2008, Social Development Complex
Ateneo de Manila University

Summary and Synthesis

By Jennifer Santiago-Oreta

Faculty, Department of Political Science, Ateneo de Manila University

Synthesis of Major Points

The session aims to:

1. Discuss the standards used in the selection of candidates, and check if there is/are distinguishing trend/s,
2. Evaluate how much of the support (given to candidates) is patronage-based
3. Assess what are the possible implications (of the selection process and patronage) to the coming elections.

Speaker 1: Mr. Patrick Patino

1. CS has engaged in electoral exercise since 1992. Since then until now, the dilemma or lack of consensus among civil society groups are: (a) form of electoral participation, (b) a common candidate, (c) agenda (reform agenda vs winnability of candidate or reconciling 'pragmatism' with 'change' discourse), and (d) there were groups who simply made money during elections.
2. Local election engagement has proven to be useful for some civil society groups, i.e. strengthen the local engagement in order to influence national level political coalitions. Thus, there is an obvious push and pull as regards the strategy and framing of local and national engagements.
3. In 2001, structural and reform demands return in the negotiating table. There was already wide and deep negotiations between politicians and social movement networks, which had the consequent effect of pushing the internal dynamics (of respective movement/ groups) faster.
4. There were CS groups (in 2004) that, while apprehensive in supporting GMA, also recognized that some of the projects and/or community-based programs are

contingent to her winning.

5. The 2010 elections is very important. More than issues, the challenge for CS is expanding the network, and improving governance values of Malacanang. In other words, for the 2010 elections, maybe the 'criteria' will not be the issue but more the reform agenda.
6. The challenge for civil society groups, thus, are:
 - Do civil society groups have the capacity to be politically engaged without being biased with just one candidate?
 - Can civil society groups form political movements (to support a candidate) and resolve/ put aside ideological differences?

Speaker 2: Butch Abad

(Disclosed that he's a long standing member of the Liberal Party and is part of the campaign group of Mar Roxas)

1. The 2010 election is important because of the political situation: there is high distrust in politics (and politicians); poverty and social conflicts have worsened; institutions are severely weakened; there are talks of coup d'etat and martial law; and everybody is concerned about the narrowing (political-democratic) space.
2. In a presidential system, the Office of the president is very powerful, more powerful even than the US President. Thus, a good or bad president can really make a lot of difference. With business down (Phil. business has not grown significantly), and the global financial meltdown, government will be more pervasive in generating employment.
3. In the past, NGOs have a long list of ideal criteria for candidates. It's not a bad exercise but by setting standards too high, many NGOs decided to just watch the elections. Also, NGOs present a broad multisectoral platform of government that looks good on paper, and everybody gives their respectful support for agenda – but since it's too general without a keen sense of the profile of legislature and bureaucracy, the agenda end up not resonating with any candidate. Most of time, no choice is made. The selection process is so detached from real selection process that happens in election.
4. It is thus important to recognize the possibilities and limits in selecting a Presidential candidate. But the process is very different from what NGOs would want the process to be.
5. Political parties in the Philippines are not like that of the US – they are not the main vehicle in the electoral campaign but simply a part of a broader coalition.

The party selection process is the result of various interests coming together to support a candidate.

6. Party conventions become a coronation process. The party is just a faction within a coalition that supports a candidate – along with family, business, and volunteers – a very diverse coalition with interests that may be in conflict with each other. The agreement is very tactical. The candidate is the glue that binds the coalition.
7. Access to media is (now) the key.
8. At present, the challenge to civil society is to make sure that we get to 2010. There are attempts of charter change and martial law and we should take them seriously. If we get to 2010, expect more cheating from the Palace.
9. This coming 2010 elections, there will be at least 3 candidates – Mar Roxas, Manny Villar and another backed by palace. Maybe Villar will be endorsed by the Palace; Noli lacks money and machinery – thus he can slide down to VP of Villar; If Villar wants to run alone -- the govt can entertain Loren and Cheese Escudero. In a recent survey, Villar is ranking very high. Partnership between Noli and Villar with support from palace is a tandem to watch.
10. Erap is also going all over (the country) and Sec. Puno is trying actively to broker relation with palace – it can happen – but Erap can be humbled by legal questions.
11. The tendency of a presidential system is to create a bipolar race – the administration and the opposition. The way (the presidential race) is being framed now is 'pro-GMA' and 'anti-GMA' (and to a large extent, Erap figures prominently among the anti-GMA groups).
12. 2010 is also an opportunity. There is a huge constituency for reform (or people looking for reforms) but it is dispersed and disorganized. The experience of the 2007 elections conveys that 'incumbency' (of being identified with the incumbent) is a liability, especially in a context where people are hungry for change. Voters have exhibited independence in choosing national candidates.
13. So the more crucial issue now is “*how*” (to mobilize the constituency for reform) rather than “*why*” (engage in elections). Likewise, the other challenge is *are CSOs prepared to work with people/ groups whose interests maybe diametrically oppose to theirs?*
14. It must be recognized, too, that CSO may not be a big faction in a (political) coalition with multi-sectoral interests. The challenge, thus, is to make CSOs significant player/s in the coalition. CSOs must be able to have the capacity to engage the people and ensure that votes are counted. To do this, CSOs need a

lot of institution building, e.g. can they bring warm bodies? can they generate volunteers (ala Obama campaign). The main capital of CSOs is its credibility – how can this be translated to votes? Regarding the CSOs reform agenda – how realistic are they to be adopted by candidates?

15. Finally, it must be stressed that CSOs and political parties are oriented and structured for different purposes. Personalities thus should not take the lead role in both CSO work and political party work at the same time.

Open discussion

1. Civil society is not a monolith - thus we cannot entertain the idea of having a single CS participation in the coming electoral exercise. But there was agreement that the 2010 elections is important and that CS should engage in the exercise.

In 1985, there was no issue on whether or not to engage – everyone did. The forms of engagement differed but all efforts were focused on making Cory win. In 1992, a lot of CS groups also commit to the Salonga-Pimentel tandem. Thus, it is the context that determines the extent of CS participation.

2. Pol. parties and civil society groups are different, thus, electoral engagement must be differently nuanced. Pol parties have more authority when it comes to engagement to secure power. Hence, what should be the CS's *framework of engagement* in the coming 2010 elections?
3. This coming 2010 elections, there are two main determinants (on who will win) – a) which candidate will local politicians support; and b) which candidate has the most money to spend for media ads
4. The challenge for CSOs is to prove that there's a big reform constituency, and that they can be translated into votes. Also, how can CSOs motivate especially those reluctant to engage in the electoral exercise. There is a portion of the population with changing behavior and values. Thus, maybe CS can engage in activities that will (on the minimum) make people understand the importance of campaign and elections.

Civil society groups must go beyond itself. It cannot, by itself, popularize its reform agenda since it is not too big. But it has the capacity to reach others who are interested in reform. How to do that is the question.

In this regard, the following issues were raised:

- CS is not ready/ have difficulty in engaging in electoral exercise because it is too idealistic. But CS has to move to some form of aggregation, it has

to graduate from issue-based to a higher level. There should be an exercise that would allow CS to aggregate its concerns and discuss governance issues.

- CSOs must agree on what political outcome in 2010 is (the most) important: (a) an administration with a legitimate electoral mandate, and/or (b) an administration with ambition, capacity, and willingness to take risks for reform?
- This 2010, *symbols* will have a big role. People want somebody who will animate their despair and hope. In past elections, CS groups did not bother to create a 'brand' based on enduring causes/ issues that goes beyond the campaign. Maybe this has to be done now - set up mechanism(s) where CS coalition can support a candidate based on his/her support for their cause. Thus, CS electoral-participation or joining a campaign is based on issue/s rather than personalities.
- While it is true that CS is not as strong in the national level, maybe the “big tent, small tent” approach can be done, i.e. have a bargaining chip through the local level (by actively participating and becoming decisive force in the local level), thus, joining the national campaign is based on the 'power' one has on the local level.
- CSOs need to have competency-based training in the area of electoral engagement.
- Should CS support a singular candidate or many candidates (“Binondo” tactic – where all candidates are supported so that whoever wins remains friends with CSO groups)
- There are deals and takes that take place before, during elections, and esp. when the candidate wins. If CSOs don't come in as a significant bloc, they lose the leverage to bargain. So the question is *how will CSOs do it?*
- Should Civil society groups “cross-over” (i.e. actively participate in an electoral campaign)? There should be a process of consensus building for those who are interested to go partisan.
- Likewise, it is important that the sectors we deal with go beyond 'party list' engagement and understand and appreciate the value of election and the Office of the President.
- CSOs need to challenge the pol parties even more – we can join pol parties and/or be an active citizen. Part of the reason why there's no (political interests) aggregation is because people don't identify with pol parties. It's still a personality-based politics.