



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

**Session 4: Approach to Reform Agenda**  
7 November 2008, Pacifico Ortiz Hall  
**Ateneo de Manila University**

**Summary and Synthesis**

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**Session Objectives**

1. The session tried to look into the significance of reform agenda in the past presidential elections and the upcoming 2010 elections;
2. It attempted to evaluate the successes of civil society in pushing for reforms through electoral engagement and float some reform agenda that will resonate to the public in the 2010 elections; and,
3. The discussions tried to look at how the civil society groups engaging the 2010 elections should approach their reform agenda given the existing line-up of candidates.

**Summary of Inputs**

There were two presentations. The first is from Mr. Mon Casiple of the Institute for Political and Electoral Reforms (IPER) and the other is from Mayor Jesse Robredo of Naga City through his representative, Mr. Willy Prilles.

**Presenter 1: Mr. Mon Casiple**

1. The reform agenda is still relevant in the Philippines. However, pursuing the agenda the way Barack Obama did in the 2008 US Presidential elections is not feasible. This is because of the following:
  - 1.1. The Filipinos have a different level of political consciousness as voters base their electoral decisions on personal concerns and on what the candidates can do to address said concerns;
  - 1.2. Filipino politicians do not reveal their real policies until after the elections as they would always express their support to reform proposals before the voting day and pursue their own policies after they won the elections;
  - 1.3. The Philippines lacks strong political parties; and,

- 1.4. The civil society does not recognize the politics of power nor consider that pushing the reform agenda is linked to the idea of power relations.
2. The Philippine record in pursuing the reform agenda is dismal though there are minor gains. These gains include:
  - 2.1. The candidacies of Grace Padaca of Isabela in 2004 and 2007, and Ed Panlilio of Pampanga in 2007;
  - 2.2. The candidacy of Senator Antonio Trillanes IV; and,
  - 2.3. The passage of the Political Party Reform Bill to reach at least the Second Reading.
3. Despite the dismal record, the minor gains provided practical relevance in the rise of the reform constituency. They also laid bare the fact that the people are beginning to want for change – openings that are necessary in advancing the reform agenda.
4. The openings, however, will remain meaningless if the civil society will not be able to address the following challenges:
  - 4.1. Recognition by the civil society of the need to engage in the politics of power;
  - 4.2. Recognition of the need to build and accumulate power; and,
  - 4.3. Eventual engagement and building/accumulation of power that can be used as a leverage in advancing the reform agenda.

**Presenter 2. Mayor Jesse Robredo thru Mr. Willy Prilles**

1. 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.
2. Corollary with the need to select a candidate that will carry the reform agenda in his policy basket is the question: What reform agenda should be pushed for the next administration?
3. The Naga City experience in pushing for a vision of “Maogmang Lugar” (Happy Place) can serve as a model.
  - 3.1. To arrive at a local reform agenda, the city officials formulated first a vision and this is the vision of a happy place. In the case of the Philippines, the vision could be a government practicing good governance and working for the citizenry.
  - 3.2. Next, the officials and the civil society groups of Naga City defined the components of its vision and these were later known as the “12 Elements of Maogmang Lugar”. A similar exercise can also be done the result of which should be a sort of “12 Things that the Government will do for the Filipinos.”
  - 3.3. These components should then translated to a message that can be understood even by an ordinary individual. In the case of the national government, these could be policy or program support.
4. Crucial, however, in doing these are the following:

- 4.1. Looking for a credible person or presidential candidate who can “walk the talk” – that is, someone who is most likely to pursue the reform agenda;
- 4.2. Communicating the reform agenda to the people in a manner that the message will be easily understood;
- 4.3. Ensuring that the focus of the reform agenda is good governance led by a government that is accountable and responsive to its citizens.

## Open Discussion

1. The civil society has a wide experience in electoral engagement. In the post-Marcos period, this includes:
  - 1.1. The presidential campaign of Jovito Salonga in 1992;
  - 1.2. The passage of the Party-list Act and eventual participation in party-list elections,
  - 1.3. The involvement in the campaigns of local candidates such as Grace Padaca in 2004, and Ed Panlilio as well as Sabas Mabulo in 2007.
2. The civil society must reflect on its past engagements.
  - 2.1. Why is it that politicians would talk to the “other groups” (i.e., political clans, non-civil society groups) and not the civil society groups? The reason is simple: Power. The “other groups” are being considered as “more powerful” than the civil society groups. Therefore, the latter should consider accumulating power and engaging itself in the politics of power. Without power which is translatable to “countable support”, it is hard to engage with politicians who can carry the civil society reform agenda.
  - 2.2. There is no doubt that the civil society has a reform agenda but what is really the architectural plan of agenda? How is the agenda being translated into a message that can easily be understood by the “masa”?
  - 2.3. And, what is the mode of the civil society in advancing its agenda? Should it be in a “civil society mode” – meaning, detached from the rest of the citizens – or in a “citizenship mode” – meaning, the agenda is not just an exclusive domain of the civil society but of the whole citizenry?
3. As the agenda is being “translated” to a message that can easily be understood by the citizenry, choosing the “messenger” should also be considered. There is a recognition though that looking for a “face” to carry the message is very hard and a long process.
4. The past elections had also provided openings for the civil society to maximize. These included:
  - 4.1. The wanting of the people for change;
  - 4.2. The availability of the social media; and,
  - 4.3. The impacts of the initial successes especially from the candidacies of the civil society-backed candidates.

The 2010 elections is opening another avenue for a civil society engagement. Advancing the civil society's reform agenda can either speed-up or slow down depending on how this avenue is utilized. Initially, however, the following can be done:

1. The civil society must understand the language of power. This is a precursor in engaging in the politics of power and building and/or accumulating power that can produce strong and countable support.
2. Alongside the understanding of the language of power, the civil society must also understand the language of reform. This is important in communicating the civil society reform agenda to a language understandable by the "masa" as well as the language understandable by other groups.
3. Raising the consciousness of citizens and voters towards reform should also continue. This, however, should be done in a "citizen mode" and not on the "civil society mode" so that the citizens will feel that they are "stakeholders" in advancing, and not just "mere beneficiaries" of, the reform agenda.
4. Lastly, the message of reform as well as the carrier should go together. The civil society should continue to look or develop a "face" that will serve as the "carrier" to facilitate communicating the message to the citizens and voters.

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