

**Stability and Performance of Political Parties in Southeast Asia
Philippines, Party-Less No More?
(Emerging Practices of Party Politics in the Philippines)**

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Background

The role of political parties in making democracy work is well-discoursed and, at least in theory, is also well-accepted. Worldwide, however, there is growing dissatisfaction towards parties and party politics. This is more apparent in countries where democracy is weak and parties serve other un-democratic purposes. Parties are supposed to serve the purpose of interest aggregation, leadership formation and candidate-selection. However, in some countries like the Philippines, parties have largely been a mechanism to facilitate patronage and personality-oriented politics.

In the Philippines, much of the studies on political parties discuss how the lack of functioning political parties and under-developed or mal-developed party system weakens democratic practice. Studies on political parties have established the negative impact of wrongly-developed and underperforming political parties on democratization. Almonte would observe that “because of its weaknesses, the party system has failed to offer meaningful policy choices—and so to provide for orderly change” (2007; 66). In the same vein, Hutchcroft and Rocamora note that “Philippine-style democracy provides a convenient system by which power can be rotated at the top without effective participation of those below” (2003; 274).

Other Philippine literature on political parties focus on explaining mal-development and under-performance of political parties (Timberman 1991; Lande 1965; Aceron, et.al. 2009) and point to several reasons for the lack of development or mal-development of political parties, namely: (1) the legal-institutional environment which is not conducive to the development of democratic and full-fledged political parties; (2) the weak linkage of political parties to citizens; (3) the failure to pass legislative measures to reform political parties; and (4) the prevailing political culture of patronage and personality-based.

** This article is written in collaboration with the Ateneo School of Government – Political Democracy and Reforms (PODER) research team for this study who wrote the party profiles of the five featured parties on which this paper is based. They are Rafaela David, Glenford Leonillo, Hansley Juliano and Philip Recentes.*

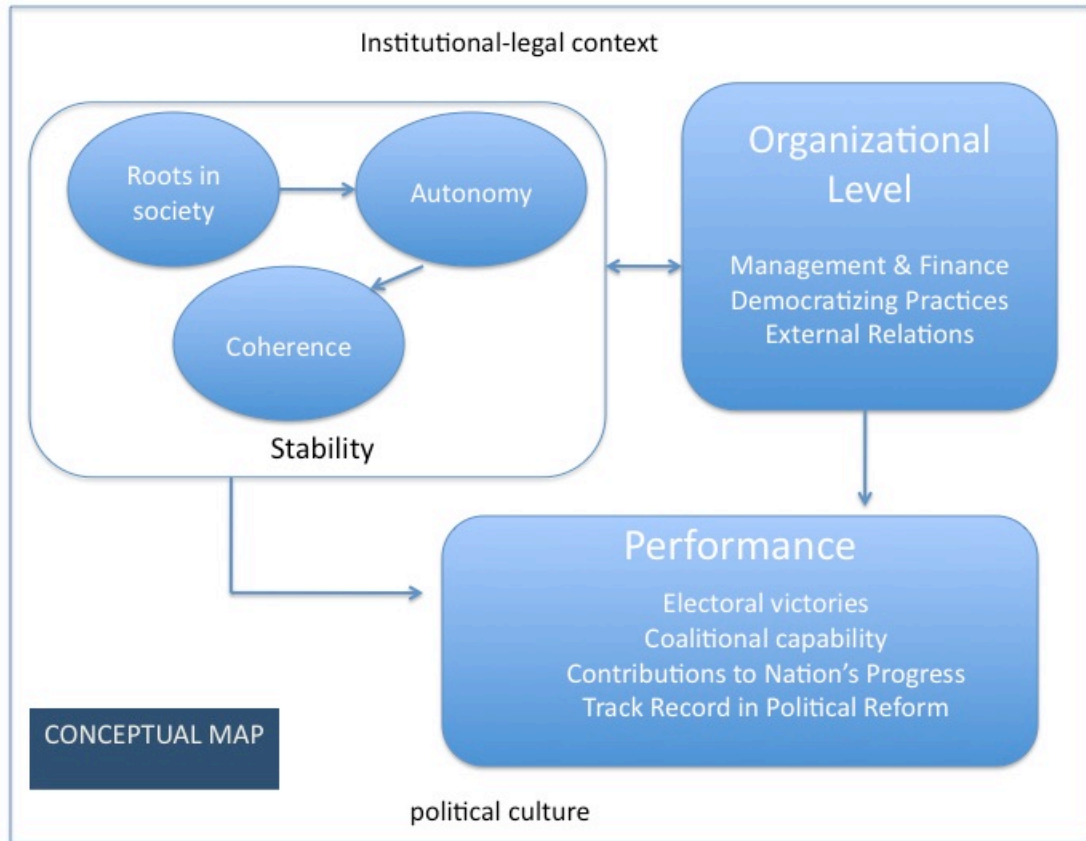
There is very little attention given to how exactly political parties operate organizationally. In a way, this is attributable to hasty generalization and reputation preceding reality. The generally-accepted notion of parties hardly stressed any need for solid organizational life; hence, there is no need to study them. Parties also hardly perform the functions of genuine political parties, further positing the futility of looking at their performance. With the absence of baseline on party performance, assessments on political parties are sweeping and are not properly nuanced to include scattered and varying efforts to make party politics work. As a result, proposed measures to develop political parties are often drastic or long-term, such as passing of a law or change in political culture. Short-term or medium-term solutions such as organizational capacity building or leadership formation have been largely unexplored by advocates of political party reform.

The study conducted by the Philippine research team aims to baseline the organizational performance and stability of selected political parties in the Philippines. From the parties' profiles, we extracted some comparative points that will allow elucidation on the overall picture of party performance and stability in the Philippines.

Key informant interviews were conducted with three to six representatives of each party. Official party documents were analyzed, related literature reviewed and up to some extent actual party functions were observed mainly through media monitoring.

The research design and data-gathering tool used was the model developed by Dr. Wolfgang Sachsenroeder for the regional study on **Stability and Performance of Political Parties in Southeast Asia**, which the study is part of.

The diagram below organizes and synthesizes the relationship of variables that were studied for this research. It is designed inductively from the findings on the five parties profiled.



The political party's roots in society determine its autonomy from personality or particularistic capture, which in turn determines its level of coherence. These three factors constitute the level of stability of political parties, which affects (and is affected by) the organizational level of political parties. This includes the parties' management and finance, democratizing/ democratic practices and relating with the public. Both the stability and organizational level determine the performance of a political party: its coalitional capability, the effectiveness of its strategies, contribution to nation's progress and track record in political reform.

There are five parties profiled selected purposively. The parties are a combination of what are perceived as mainstream or major and non-mainstream parties. In brief, mainstream parties are those with (1) members in highest elected positions in the government, (2) they became once a majority party, and (3) normally, they field in almost a complete slate of national candidates in the elections. The non-mainstream parties are usually those with (1) a few members holding elected posts in the government (in this case, only in party-list and local governments), (2) cannot field a complete slate in the national elections, but are with national prominence through advocacies and coalition-building. There is also perceived distinct ideological tendencies among these parties, at least on paper.

In considering the choice of parties to observe for case studies, the common knowledge that there is hardly any acknowledgment of the necessity of organizational processes or structures when mainstream parties are involved became the rule of thumb. The conduct of alternative parties was explored, with *Bayan Muna* and *Akbayan* chosen, as they project to be espousing a counterculture among political parties (if common knowledge applies).

The idea is to establish, as accurate as possible, hard facts and data serving to validate/invalidate the claims of (and regarding) parties as concerned. It must be acknowledged that reform-oriented leaders are present in *Lakas-Kampi* and the *Liberal Party* (two of the older and “traditional” parties), and it would be interesting to note if marks of modernization or development will manifest soon. In the same manner, the *Nacionalista Party* (being the earliest party to be organized) stimulates interest, as it seems to re-emerge in the transition between party presidents Salvador H. Laurel and Manuel B. Villar, Jr.

For purposes of classification, *Lakas-Kampi-CMD Party*, *Liberal Party* and *Nacionalista Party* are marked as the three mainstream parties. The two non-mainstream parties are *Akbayan Party-list* and *Bayan Muna Party-list*.

The Philippine Political System

On paper, the Philippines is classified as a “democratic and republican State.” Power is supposed to emanate from the people. The people elect leaders who in turn govern as representatives of the people. Public office is considered a public trust; hence, there are ways through which public officials are made accountable for their decisions and actions. The Constitution guarantees political rights such as freedom of speech, right to assembly and universal suffrage. Mechanisms for direct involvement of people in governance are provided by the Constitution and laws. The State is supposed to guarantee equal opportunities as it also ensures that all citizens are equal under the law (I rephrased it since it’s always advisable to use the active voice in writing aka avoid using “by”).

Among academic studies conducted throughout the years, however, the Philippines is considered an “elite democracy,” with the contestation of power virtually limited to a few families and political personalities (and where there is a strong fusion between the economic and political power). Political rights are frequently threatened by several policies passed by the government, with accountability measures weak to ensure the responsible exercise of power.

The Philippines adopts a presidential form of government. The government is divided into the usual three main branches, namely, *executive, legislative and judiciary*, each mandated to check and balance each other as they perform their functions and exercise powers that are independent and separate.

The President exercises enormous powers including the power over the military as Commander-in-Chief and the bureaucracy, the budget and the appointments as Head of the government. The presidency is filled up every six years, with the incumbent restricted to run for a re-election. The Vice-President may come from a different party. The legislature is divided into two houses: the Upper House or Senate whose 24 members are elected at-large with the whole country as a single constituency and the House of Representatives whose members are elected by district (single member district) and, since 1998, through a party-list system.

The Philippine legislature holds the power to pass laws and the national budget, among others. Half of the senators (12 of the 24 senators) are replaced every six years, while members of the Lower House end their term every three years. Senators could seek a re-election once; while members of the lower house could be re-elected for three consecutive terms. The judiciary interprets the laws and administers the justice system. The Supreme Court, the highest court of the land, consists of 14 Associated Justices and 1 Chief Justice who are appointed by the President on a seven-year term basis.

The Philippines has a plurality/ majority or first-past-the-post electoral system. Winners of elections are determined based on who got the highest number of votes among a potentially infinite number of candidates. The Constitution also provides for a party-list system, i.e., a system of proportional representation in the Lower House. Republic Act 7941 or the Party-List Act defines a system of elections by which winners are determined based on the percentage of votes a party gets out of the total number of votes casted for the party-list. 20% of the 283 seats of the lower house are filled up through the Party-List System.

The 1987 Philippine Constitution (Article IX-C, Section 6) provides that,

“a free and open party system shall be allowed to evolve according to the free choice of the people, subject to the provisions of this Article.”

According to Constitutional legal luminary Fr. Joaquin Bernas, S.J., (2007; 200-201),

“The 1935 Constitution and the Philippine election law up to the 1987 Election Code gave a preferred position to the two major political parties. This was the two-party system. The clear impression, which had emerged from the constitutional scheme prior to the 1987 Constitution was that the electoral system planned and plotted to insure the perpetuation of the party in power. The 1987 Constitution once again makes a try at promoting a multi-party system or open party system...The party-list system, already discussed under Article VI, is meant to be an instrument for fostering the multi-party system.”

The Party-List System is based on the principle of proportional representation (PR) wherein parties are represented in parliament “in direct proportion to their overall electoral strength, their percentage of seats equaling their percentage of votes.” (Heywood 2002; 232). *The Party-List System Act* defines the party-list system as “a mechanism of proportional representation in the election of representatives in the House of Representatives from national, regional and sectoral parties or organizations or coalitions registered with the COMELEC.”

The said piece of legislation primarily seeks to ensure the participation of marginalized and/or underrepresented groups or sectors in the legislative process. As stipulated in its Declaration of Policy, the party-list system “will enable Filipino citizens belonging to marginalized and underrepresented sectors, organizations and parties, and who lack well-defined political constituencies but who could contribute to the formulation and enactment of appropriate legislation that will benefit the nation as a whole, to become members of the House of Representatives.”

Under the law, national, regional, and sectoral parties or organizations or coalitions registered with the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) can participate in the party-list elections. “Each registered party-list group has five nominees but is only allowed to have three (3) seats maximum. For them to achieve a seat, the law requires them to get two percent (2%) of the total votes cast for the party-list. If it is able to reach the 2% threshold or achieve the required number of votes, the representatives of the party-list group would come from the list of their nominees. It is the name of the Party that the voters should indicate on the ballot and not the name of the nominee. The elected party-list representatives have the same powers and functions as the district representative.

The main election law, the Omnibus Election Code of the Philippines or Batas Pambansa 881, enacted during the time of former President Ferdinand Marcos and approved in 1985, defines political parties as:

organized group of persons pursuing the same ideology, political ideas or platforms of government and includes its branches and divisions. To acquire juridical personality, qualify it for subsequent accreditation, and to entitle it to the rights and privileges herein granted to political parties, a political party shall first be duly registered with the Commission... (Omnibus Election Code, Article VIII, Sec 60)

To be registered, a verified petition must be filed with the Comelec with the following attachments:

- constitution and by-laws;
- platform or program of government; and

- such other relevant information as may be required by the Commission (Section 61)

The Code further provides that:

The Commission shall, after due notice and hearing, resolve the petition within ten days from the date it is submitted for decision. No religious sect shall be registered as a political party and no political party which seeks to achieve its goal through violence shall be entitled to accreditation (Section 61).

The Commission shall require publication of the petition for registration or accreditation in at least three newspapers of general circulation and shall, after due notice and hearing, resolve the petition within fifteen days from the date it is submitted for decision (Section 62).

No further requirement is provided by the Omnibus Election Code, although it does qualify that:

“Any registered political party that, singly or in coalition with others, fails to obtain at least ten percent of the votes cast in the constituency in which it nominated and supported a candidate or candidates in the election next following its registration shall, after notice and hearing be deemed to have forfeited such status as a registered political party in such constituency.” (Sec. 60)

To date, no political party has been disqualified in account of this provision.

No law clearly defines the exact functions of political parties. For politicians, the immediate function is to fill up the requirement of political parties in registering to run for public office. The Omnibus Election Code has the following provisions that somehow define political party functions during elections:

- must be furnished a copy of COMELEC directives and orders in pursuant to the provisions of the Omnibus Election Code (Article VIII)
- notified by COMELEC in using technological and electronic devices (Article VIII)
- provided guidelines for campaign spending (Article X)
- limited to spending 1.50 pesos per voter for its candidates (Article X Section 101)
- the two major parties have a representative each in the board of election inspectors in every precinct (Article XIV) and board of canvassers
- all parties can have a watcher in every polling place (Article XV)
- may hold party conventions or meetings to nominate their official candidates 30 days before the campaign period and forty-days for presidential and vice-presidential candidates (Article X)

- should be notified by COMELEC before the printing of emergency ballots (Article XVI)
- the two major parties send representatives to verify the content of ballot boxes and shall be given a copy of the statement of election result (Article XVI)
- may raise a pre-proclamation controversy, i.e., any question pertaining to or affecting the proceedings of the board of canvassers (Article XX)

Aside from the Omnibus Election Code, election spending in the Philippines is governed by the following laws and regulations: Fair Election Act or Republic Act 9006, the Synchronized Election Law or Republic Act 7166 and Comelec Resolution No. 7794. These policy documents provide the limit and prohibitions of campaign financing, but hardly provide guidelines on campaign contribution.

Kasuya (2009), in a book that looks at how the terms for presidential elections affect the development of parties, identifies some of the changes in the party and electoral system that affect party development. According to Kasuya, basic electoral rules were fundamentally the same during the pre-Martial Law and post-EDSA 1 periods. However, the 1987 Constitution altered the electoral cycle. House elections were always held concurrently with presidential elections in the pre-Martial Law era (congressmen had a four-year term). Today, the cycles have been mixed, with mid-term elections that do not overlap with the presidential race.

She also noted the change in representation of parties in the Board of Elections Inspectors (BEIs):

“In pre-Marcos elections, the two political parties that scored the highest and second highest number of votes in the last election was represented at the precinct level by the Board of Elections Inspectors (BEI), which was in charge of canvassing. Having representatives at the Board expectedly reduced the chances of fraud during the counting of ballots. Thus candidates had a strong incentive to run under either of the two major parties. In post-Marcos elections, the rule that required party representatives in the BEI was eliminated.” (Kasuya 2009; 23)

The Commission on Elections (COMELEC), which has the function of registering parties, is a Constitutionally-created body mandated to administer elections and resolve election disputes. It envisions an “empowered, independent and fully modernized institution ensuring credible elections in strong partnership with enlightened citizenry.” However, it is weakened by “legal, political, environmental and financial constraints resulting in negative public perception, low credibility and low morale of its employees, thus hindering it to perform its function effectively and efficiently.” (COMELEC Resolution No. 7669, 24 May 2006)

In 2007, COMELEC was heavily criticized in registering party-list groups. Aside from inaccessibility of the documents about the party-list groups, its operationalization of the term “marginalized groups” was highly questionable.

History of Philippine Political Parties

The earliest parties emerged in the Philippines during the early part of American occupation, with the holding of municipal elections in 1901. But the country’s two oldest surviving political parties would only be born several years later with the formation of the *Nacionalista Party* (NP) in 1907 and the *Liberal Party* (LP) in 1946.

NP was formed through the merger of the *Partido Independista* and the *Partido Union Nacionalista*. Calling for the attainment of “immediate independence”, the NP easily defeated the once formidable *Partido Federalista* (which ran under a platform of annexation and statehood status under the United States), during the 1907 general elections. The *Nacionalistas’* success was so sweeping that it was able to elect 59 out of the total 80 members of the Philippine Assembly.

This victory enabled the NP to eventually become the dominant political party throughout the American colonial period and the entire length of the Commonwealth era. It also catapulted the careers of legendary figures Manuel L. Quezon and Sergio Osmeña, Jr., who both became presidents of the Commonwealth government.

The Nacionalista’s continued domination, however, was interrupted with the outbreak of the Second World War and Japan’s invasion of the Philippines. Party politics was only resumed after the liberation of the Philippines and the granting of independence on July 4, 1946.

This period, however, witnessed the erosion of the NP’s political dominance, with the election of *Liberal Party* candidate Manuel Roxas as president of the newly independent Republic of the Philippines. Roxas’ victory also resulted in the establishment of a two-party system with the *Liberals* and *Nacionalistas* alternating as the party in power from 1946 to 1972.

But despite their intense rivalry, both the LP and the NP failed to develop divergent political programs since their members were drawn from the same elite circles and were unable to develop any grassroots base.

With the declaration of Martial Law on September 21, 1972, then-President Ferdinand Marcos suspended the holding of elections and replaced the 1935 Constitution with the 1973 Constitution, which was ratified not through the usual plebiscite, but through hastily organized citizens’ assemblies. In 1978, Marcos formed the *Kilusang Bagong Lipunan* (KBL), which became the country’s dominant party during the Martial Law period.

With Cory Aquino's assumption of power after the first People Power Revolution in February 1986, a new Constitution was promulgated in 1987, which replaced the Constitution of 1973. The said document provided for the establishment of a multi-party system within a presidential form of government.

This constitutional provision has greatly altered the dynamics of Philippine politics that during the 1992 presidential elections, eight parties were able to field their respective candidates for the highest position in the country. These were the *People's Reform Party* of Miriam Defensor-Santiago; the *Nationalist People's Coalition* (NPC) of Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco; *Partido ng Masang Pilipino* (PMP) of Joseph "Erap" Estrada; the *Liberal Party/PDP-Laban* coalition which fielded former Senate President Jovito Salonga as its standard bearer; the KBL which was headed by the former dictator's wife Imelda Marcos; and *Lakas-NUCD* (Lakas ng Bayan-Union of Christian Democrats) of Fidel Ramos.

Later renamed as *Lakas-Christian and Muslim Democrats* (Lakas-CMD) by former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Lakas-NUCD was first launched on February 7, 1992, after the merger of several minor parties composed of Partido Lakas Tao, National Union of Christian Democrats (NUCD) headed by former senator Raul Mangalapus, and Ramos' breakaway faction from the *Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino* (LDP).

Initially composed of those from the nouveau rich and a number of reform advocates, Mangalapus saw the new merger party as an alternative political force intent on achieving its vision of modernizing Philippine politics and governance. It even stated in its 1992 platform that the party will "demolish the entire structure of patronage that enables people possessing political influence to extract wealth without effort from the economic system."

But after Ramos' electoral victory in 1992, Lakas-NUCD was found itself deeply overwhelmed as numerous traditional politicians (*trapos*) began joining its ranks. It was soon perceived as a party of traditional rent-seeking politicians.

With the enactment of Republic Act 7941 or the Party-List System Act enabled progressive political organizations, most of which are from the Left, to enter the electoral arena. Framed as breeding ground for real political parties to eventually develop, the party-list system seeks to address the apparent absence programmatic parties in the country.

The Party-List Law since it has a mechanism that allows for Leftwing grassroots organizations with a national constituency, and possessing distinct platforms and ideological frameworks and platform such as *Akbayan* and *Bayan Muna* to enter into Congress and have their voices heard.

Akbayan was founded in 1998 as the coming together of distinct traditions in the Left movement to engage the electoral arena. It participated in the Party-List elections starting 1998 and was winning seats in Congress since then. *Bayan Muna* was founded in 1999 to also participate in the Party-List elections. Its mass base can be traced back to the *Communist Party of the Philippines* with its analysis of Philippine society consistent with that of the CPP. However, until now, *Bayan Muna* seems ambivalent in communicating this link to the public.

Meanwhile, the traditional parties are also shaping up and are beginning to push for honest-to-goodness reform measures. Certain reform-oriented politicians, for instance, have gravitated around LP in order to prevent corruption and advance governance reforms and. These would include Butch Abad, Chito Gascon, Neric Acosta, and Erin Tañada. Their successes, however, remain due to constraints and possible resistance from their own party.

On the other hand, the tradition of reform inside Lakas-CMD is somehow kept alive through the efforts and writings of Francis Manglapus (son of Raul Manglapus), as well as allied NGOs mostly focusing on peace and Mindanao issues. Ironically, some of its most prominent leaders who are often considered as trapos such as Ramos and de Venecia are strong proponents of a shift towards a parliamentary form of government with real programmatic parties.

The landscape of Philippine politics was further altered in 2010 when, for the first time, Leftist parties have openly endorsed certain presidential candidates (Aquino for *Akbayan* and Manuel Villar for *Bayan Muna*). It was also the first time in 64 years that the Left has actually fielded candidates for the Senate. Unfortunately, none of them ever made it to the winning circle—though one of them almost won a seat.

With these party-list parties moving to the direction of getting a foothold in mainstream politics and with some leaders of mainstream parties continuing to push for real party-based processes in their parties, the next chapter of party politics in the country might just offer a different story.

Elite-Based Stability vs. Rootedness in the Grassroots

Historical underpinnings served as catalysts for the establishment of the political parties profiled, which situates them as historical agents that are or were supposed to play a role in Philippine politics and society.

The historical context of the *Nacionalista Party* (NP) was the clamor for an independent Republic. Founded in 1907, it is the oldest existing political party in the country. It was created to push for Philippine independence from USA against the Federalist Party. It was the dominant party in the pre-war era virtually leading a one-party system. It was only after the war did the party find a worthy rival party when Manuel Roxas split from

the party in the late 1940s. The party was to finally lose its dominance during the Martial Law and went into hiatus after the 1992 elections, emerging only again when Senator Manuel Villar took over the party reins from the Laurel family. Villar, a consistent presidential front-runner during the early stage of the 2010 campaigns, would go on to lose the elections to *Liberal's* Noynoy Aquino in May 2010.

Liberal Party's birth, while largely personality-based (as it was mainly to pursue the candidacy of Manuel Roxas), also has historical weight. It could be viewed as a manifestation of the influence of the United States in Philippine politics as well as the limits of a dominant party system in accommodating an emerging discourse, in this case the “mongrel liberal-nationalist” discourse in the *Nacionalista Party*. When it was formed in 1946 as a supposed liberal splinter group of the *Nacionalista Party*, the party swept the elections, winning the presidency and establishing dominance in the legislature. From then on, from its ranks came Senate Presidents, House Speakers and local government officials. For the past 65 years, the party has withered, shifted and adapted in the political and economic milieu of the times in order to stay in the political scene.

Lakas was established as a reaction to the growing force of the *Communist Party of the Philippines* (CPP). Such presence of extreme Left resulted in actions aimed to neutralize and insulate reformist traditional politicians and moderate leftists from the extreme alternatives. Founded in 1991, *Lakas* is one of the youngest parties in the Philippines. Its founding roughly coincided with the establishment of the multi-party political system under the 1987 Constitution. Despite its relatively young age, the party has outmaneuvered the older parties and has “gamed” the multi-party system quite well through forging “rainbow” coalitions and astute strategic alliances with disparate aggruppations for electoral purpose only. Herein, *Lakas* has managed to become the most dominant political party in the post-Marcos era.

The enactment of the Party List law in 1995 gave opportunity for “alternative” parties to participate in electoral politics. After the first Party List elections in 1998, a Movement called *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (BAYAN), which traces its ideological roots to the Communist movement, decided to enter into the electoral arena. The establishment of *Bayan Muna* and its engagement in the Party-List System can be viewed as an effort of some elements affiliated with the CPP to engage the current political dispensation. The difference between the analyses of CPP and *Bayan Muna* on the ills and problems of Philippine society and the strategy to achieve national democracy remains unclear, making the intention of *Bayan Muna's* electoral engagement raising doubts and questions up to this time.

In contrast, *Akbayan* was established by progressives recognizing the need to engage the Post-EDSA 1 democratic space, which according to them, accommodates participatory politics up to some extent. Formally known as the *Akbayan Citizen's Action Party*, the party was founded on January 18, 1998. Its founding was a product of more

than three years of coming together by major progressive political blocs, non-government organizations and people’s organizations. The process of its party development began in 1994 when mass political and ideological movements formed the initial platforms and programs of *Akbayan*. These “political blocs” include *Bisig*, a socialist political bloc that traces its roots from the old *Communist Party of the Philippines*, *Padayon*, a split from the national democracy tradition and *Pandayan*, a social democratic group.

While all the parties, mainstream and non-mainstream, are clearly historically rooted, they differ in terms of their link to society. The mainstream parties are largely linked to the economic and political elites.

The link of mainstream parties to elites or the elitist composition of the mainstream parties is one strong reason for their stability in terms of electoral victory.

In recent years, the mainstream parties have been relatively stable with their members winning consistently seats in the Senate and the House of Representatives, as shown in the tables below.

The *Nacionalista Party* has had two (2) seats in the Senate in 2004, three (3) in 2007 and four (4) in 2010. The members of the House of Representatives (HoR) from the *Nacionalista Party* increased two (2) in 2001 to 25 in 2007, then declined to 19 in 2010.

For the *Liberal Party*, from one (1) seat in 1998, it steadily increased its share in the Senate, with five (5) senators affiliated with the party in 2010. Its members in the House of Representatives drastically increased from 10 in 1998 and 31 in 2004 to 74 immediately after the 2010 elections when it became the administration party.

Lakas-Kampi-NUCD has had the best showing in the senatorial race among the three mainstream parties, with seven (7) senators identifying with *Lakas* in 1998, eight (8) in 2001 and six (6) in 2004. However, their seats declined to four (4) in 2007 and 2010. From 1998 to 2007, it also has the highest number of seats in the House of Representatives from among the parties: 34 in 1998, 84 in 2001, 79 in 2004 and 119 in 2007 after its merger. However, after the 2010 elections, their membership base in the HoR is slowly declining.

Seats in the Senate

Party/Year of Election	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010
Nacionalista	None	None	2	3	4
Liberal	1	1	4	4	5
Lakas-Kampi-NUCD	7	8	6	4	4

Source: Comelec

Seats in the House of Representatives

Party/Year of Election	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010
Nacionalista	None	2	14	25	19
Liberal	10	25	35	31	74
Lakas-Kampi-NUCD	34	84	79	119*	46**
Akbayan	1	2	3	2	2
Bayan Muna		3	3	3	2

Source: Comelec

* After merger of LAKAS and KAMPI. Lakas: 95, KAMPI: 51.

** As of December 2010 (90, after elections)

On the other hand, the non-mainstream parties are more linked to grassroots and civil society. *Akbayan's* membership and support base includes people's organizations, organized women, labor unions like the *Alliance of Progressive Labor*, youth organizations like *Mass Movement for the Advancement of Student Power* and *Akbayan Youth*, LGBT (lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders) organizations, urban poor groups and other sectoral organizations. Similarly, *Bayan Muna* caters to the marginalized and under-represented sector, and it is actively working in grassroots communities.

Though with strong grassroots link, the two parties have largely been constrained in winning a few seats, 2-3 seats, in the House of Representatives as they only participate in the Party-List System. The expensive elections outside the Party-List System is one of the reasons preventing the two from joining elections of other national posts, which remain to be dominated by traditional political families, nouveau riche and mainstream parties.

Mainstream Parties

The mainstream parties have been stable largely due to their base of political elites. For the *Nacionalista* and *Liberal* Parties, their elected members have been mostly from families who have held positions of power in the country since the early age of the Philippine Republic: the Quezons, Osmeñas and Laurels for the *Nacionalista Party* and Roxases and Aquinos for the *Liberal Party*. For *Lakas*, its elected members are mostly from the nouveau riche (mainly capitalists) and new political class (with military background) as epitomized by its longtime Party Chair, former President Fidel Ramos.

A link of mainstream parties to society and grassroots hardly exists, with temporary utilitarian engagement happening only during elections when the parties try to mobilize the populace to vote.

However, it is significant to note that in recent years, owing to reform-oriented leaders, there are efforts to somehow create that party link to civil society for some of the mainstream parties. Both the *Liberal Party* and *Lakas Party* have shown, up to some

extent, their engagement and connection with some civil society organizations with governance advocacies and political reform agenda.

With the political elites as their main base and with lack of other sources of support (no state funding, and membership fee collection from none to failing), the institutional capacity of the party vis-à-vis the political elites that dominate them is weak. Autonomy of the party from personalities and even particularistic demands are hardly existent. More often than not, the identity, direction and performance of the mainstream parties are dependent on their most famous members.

It is important to highlight, though, that the level of autonomy of the mainstream parties varies. In the case of the *Nacionalista Party*, there seems to be no effort to make the party independent of the personalities/ leaders. In fact, the only time they were able to show themselves as a standing political party that makes their fielded politicians accountable was during the Party presidency of Eulogio “Amang” Rodriguez (1933-1969). Even so, more often than not, the Party’s direction is determined by the most bankable candidate for the Presidency.

For the *Liberal Party*, because of the presence of leaders who understand party politics and recognize the importance of party politics, there is an effort to assert the party’s autonomy from personalities or to defy being captured by one or a few personalities. It also has relatively numerous emerging new leaders and hence no single personality appropriates the party. Since 1946, there have been 14 alternations in the party’s top leadership position. Each of these leaders has served for an average of three to four years. Up to some extent, *Lakas* also has several members who are asserting independence of the party from personalities, although they do not hold as many key posts as that of the *Liberal Party*.

The *Liberal* and *Lakas* Parties have key leaders proclaiming their ideology. There is also a relatively decent work in these two parties to solidify their ideological base, at least through their partner civil society organizations (CSOs), with the *Liberal Party* ahead, given the number of key leaders identifying themselves as Liberal and pursuing the Liberal discourse. The *Liberal Party* also provides informational materials to its members and interested individuals wanting to know about the ideological orientation of the party. The party has an independent think tank called *National Institute for Policy Studies (NIPS)* tasked to deepen the political engagement of the party using its liberal analysis of society.

The *Lakas Party*, on the other hand, also asserts their centrist political orientation based upon both Christian Democracy (and what?). However, the party has not been able to popularize their central tenets and remain undifferentiated from other traditional parties. Its merger with *Kampi* also further dilutes its ideological orientation, if not totally made it insignificant.

Meanwhile, the *Nacionalista Party* veered away from defining its ideological persuasion. However, their proposition (hardly an ideology by itself) that there is a need for economic liberty first before political rights can be exercised seems faithfully held and practiced by the party in terms of the kind of projects they undertook in the 2010 elections and post-2010 election that cater to providing social services to the poor, which was interpreted by some as a form of vote-buying.

Party switching is one of the main issues and characteristics of mainstream party politics in the Philippines, which is affecting membership coherence.

The transfer of two former Presidents of the country (Magsaysay and Marcos) to other dominant parties prior to their election highlights the *Liberal Party's* own share in major party-switching experience. In 2007, a big party split in the said party led to more than half of its members switching to other parties. For *Lakas*, the most recent elections showed the great reduction of party members in Congress, when around sixty winning representatives jumped ship to other parties leaving only 46 party members, while *Liberal Party* representatives bloated from 45 to 119. For the *Nacionalista Party*, party switching is viewed as normal and expected behaviors of members if the party no longer serves the member politician's interest.

There is hardly any sign that party-switching practices will change among mainstream parties. Party leaders, even those working to strengthen party politics, are seemed resigned to the fact that unless serious structural changes in the political system are introduced, party-switching cannot be abated. Politicians in the Philippines easily shift from one party to another, usually to join the winner. There is no legal restriction to this practice. Instead, such practice is politically rewarding, for joining the winning President would mean getting chairpersonship in committees of Congress and receiving more pork. This is so because the President has strong control over the budget and appointments in the country.

There is currently a bill filed in Congress that aims to sanction party-switching entitled *An Act Strengthening the Political Party System, Appropriating Funds Therefor and for Other Purposes*. The said bill also aims to set up a subsidy for political parties to support their party operations. Similar bills have been filed in Congress since 2001, yet until now it remains a proposed legislation. One strong argument against the bill is how the subsidy will be allocated, which is according to the number of seats won. Some minority political parties opine that this would only make the majority party more powerful. The other reason is the sheer unpopularity of political parties in the country, making it difficult for the public to have a favorable opinion towards the said legislation.

Non-Mainstream Parties

The non-mainstream parties are relatively young and hence are comparatively weaker in stability (as electoral political parties) compared to the mainstream parties. *Akbayan!*

Citizen's Action Party is only 11 years old relative to the establishment of the current multi-party system. The same goes with *Bayan Muna Party*, which was established in 1999 by the *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (New Coalition of Nacionalists) or *BAYAN Movement*, primarily to participate in electoral politics through the Party-List System in 2001.

As an indicative of the stability of non-mainstream parties, in the Party List System, *Akbayan* and *Bayan Muna* have been two of the strongest contenders, consistently gaining votes and winning seats (I edited this because it's more proper to assume you gain votes first before winning seats). *Akbayan*, however, surpassed its number of votes in 2010 and was even able to field a senatorial candidate in coalition with the *Liberal Party*, Risa Hontiveros, who garnered over 9 million votes.

As shown in the table below, *Akbayan* has had a steady increase in its votes, except in 2007, which the party attributed to the entry of pro-administration groups in the Party List System and the harassments of their members at the grassroots by pro-administration elements. In the first-ever party-list elections held in May 1998, *Akbayan* garnered only 232,376 votes for two seats, doing better the next elections with its vote base increased in 2001 to 377,852 votes that won them two seats. In 2004, it garnered 852,473 votes, gaining the maximum number of seats in Congress for party-lists. But in 2007, its voter support declined drastically to only 446,000 votes. In 2010, it again increased its voter base, garnering 1,057,370 votes, thus winning it two seats. It is also the most number of votes it has received since the party's creation in 1998.

Bayan Muna, on the other hand, was able to maintain its three seats in Congress, except in 2010, due to the entry of many groups affiliated with mainstream politicians and due to changes in the formula in computing the Party List System seats. The steady decline in its votes, on the other hand, does not indicate instability, for as many as six *Bayan Muna*-affiliate groups also entered the Party List System elections since 2001. *Bayan Muna* also in coalition with the *Nacionalista Party* fielded senatorial candidates, Liza Masa and Satur Ocampo, who garnered 3.5M and 3.9M votes respectively.

Number of Votes and Seats of Non-Mainstream Parties

Election	Akbayan		Bayan Muna	
	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
1998	232, 376	1		
2001	377,852	2	1,708,253	3
2004	852,473	3	1,203,305	3
2007	446,000	2	979,039	3
2010	1,057, 370	2	746,019	2

Source: Comelec

While the non-mainstream parties are far less stable compared to the mainstream parties in the electoral arena, their historical link to social movements would make them old. This explains the parties' sustained connection to the grassroots and societal forces (NGOs, POs, CSOs), which seems integral to the parties' operation and even survival.

Because the non-mainstream parties are mass-based with strong link to society, particularistic capture or capture of one or a few politicians of party processes, as experienced by the mainstream parties, is not a strong threat.

However, the dynamics within these parties would be in terms of varying ideological tendencies, with one ideological tendency sometimes "capturing" the direction of the party, which sometimes post a threat of party split, alienation of members or internal discord. *Akbayan's* varied ideological strands are apparent with some of its leaders coming from various ideological traditions: some are from the national democracy tradition, some from the socialist tradition and others from the social democracy tradition. *Bayan Muna*, on the other hand, seems to also grapple with the struggle between the ideas of engaging the electoral arena for minimum gains and engaging it only for propaganda or resource generation purposes, on the other. The latter seems to be the more popularly viewed interpretation of its engagement due to its affiliation with the CPP, its position on reform measures and the absence of any document that points to how its political analyses differ from that of the CPP.

On ideological coherence, the non-mainstream parties seem to be more particular in being programmatic or ideological, although the latter description seems avoided by both because of its negative connotation. *Akbayan* has collectively agreed to use an ideological lens called participatory democracy and participatory socialism or PARDEM PARSOC. Meanwhile, *Bayan Muna* subscribes to the ideology of national democracy, which posits that the ills confronting the Philippines are "foreign domination, feudal bondage, inequitous economic set-up and a graft-ridden government." To revert this, or to achieve a "truly sovereign and democratic" society, there must be a "social transformation" which can only be achieved through a "social revolution."

While the non-mainstream parties have a stronger ideological discipline, they have an apparent weakness in translating their ideological resources to programmatic options that are politically palatable in the electoral and governance arenas. There is also the challenge among non-mainstream parties to establish a clear link between their specific and focused advocacies and political tactics to their grand ideological vision and goals. In fact, some recent positioning in politics received criticisms from some sectors of the civil society and social movements. One of the heavily criticized political positioning was their affiliation with the mainstream parties in the 2010 elections.

Akbayan's affiliation with the *Liberal Party* in 2010, was resolved using the paradigm of radical democracy that recognizes the need to achieve immediate liberal goals in the current dispensation in order to enlarge the space for social equity goals. *Bayan Muna*,

on the hand, justifies its support to Manny Villar's party by taking Villar's promise, as captured in his platform distributed during the elections, that he will pursue their agenda.

No party-switching incidents among the members of the non-mainstream parties have been documented.

Organization: Weakest Link?

In general, there is a stark difference between the mainstream parties and non-mainstream parties in aspect of organizational life. The non-mainstream parties can be said to have more stable organizational processes, with their success dependent on the strength of their party organizational operations. Among the mainstream parties, there are varying levels of organizational activities between elections.

Management and Finance

In varying degree, the mainstream parties comply with a basic management requirement of having a center of operations (headquarters) and full-time staff.

The *Liberal Party* coordinates its operations through its headquarters managed by the Director General with Deputy Directors. It has 9 paid staff and six volunteers. While it has an established physical center, the ideal set of chapters at each local level is currently non-existent. In cases where there are bodies that resemble a local branch, it is through the supporters and allies of an incumbent party official in any given constituency and not commonly through the efforts of the party.

The *Lakas Party*, similarly, has a headquarters managed by the Secretary General 12 staff in the National Secretariat's office, which usually increases during election period. There are a few sub-offices in the regions depending on the local *Lakas* Chair, which are usually the highest *Lakas* incumbent or the renowned politician in the locality.

The *Nacionalista Party's* headquarters is adjunct to the office of the Villar Foundation, without demarcation of responsibilities for staff.

The non-mainstream parties, compared to the mainstream parties, have functional offices and headquarters. Their headquarters really become the center of operations of the party.

Bayan Muna is coordinated by a National Secretariat housed at its National Headquarters (or NHQ), which is composed of 5 departments and 15 regular employees or dedicated staff excluding those assigned to the party representatives. The NHQ coordinates local chapters with around 2-3 personnel.

Akbayan's operations are coordinated by a secretariat at the national level and informal operations center at the local level. The party headquarters is manned by 20 full-time staff members who run administrative functions for the party. Some of these personnel are designated to support its incumbent representatives in Congress.

There is no state funding in the Philippines for political parties, hence parties raise funds on their own to operate.

The mainstream parties rely on their member-politicians for financing, which is affecting their autonomy. This is more obvious with the *Nacionalista Party*, which was known to depend on Party President Manuel Villar's largesse. Funding for non-mainstream parties is also a problem, which they address by collaborating with affiliate NGOs and networks. This, however, is not without problems because of lack of consistency and problems on sustainability.

Collecting membership fee is proven to be ineffective in all the parties, though they all tried to implement it. From among the mainstream parties, the *Liberal Party* is somehow successful in getting support and contributions from their politician members. It was able to make arrangements with the salary system of its elected members in Congress where contributions are automatically deducted. However, the efficiency of this scheme is still unknown. *Lakas* collects fees from members occupying national seats while the local chapters are left to collect fees from their local members, but oftentimes, collection is hardly enforced.

Akbayan largely relies on its local chapters to implement their own schemes in charging and collecting dues, but the collected fees are hardly substantial to fund party operations. The *Bayan Muna* by-laws prescribe a minimal annual membership due determined according to financial capacity of its members, which are to be collected from the local chapters. However, this is not strictly enforced as well.

Membership

In terms of membership, all parties recognize the difficulty of maintaining a reliable database especially for mainstream parties due to an influx of members during elections, who become hardly visible after elections. There is an account for how many are card-carrying members, but this is hardly indicative of the party's organizational strength due to the lack of requirements imposed upon card-carrying members and the poor documentation and recording of the party with no validation done whatsoever. A citizen can join or leave a party on his/ her own accord, hence the party cannot oblige strict membership requirements.

The *Liberal Party's* conservative estimates pegs their membership at 10,000, but this changes at an undetermined rate due to the fluidity of party loyalty amongst its members especially in local areas. There are occasional training and educational

activities organized by the secretariat for recruitment and membership formation. For new and prospective recruits, the orientation centers on liberalism and the party's profile. For party member, the orientation centers on party principles, history, structures and program of government. The National Institute for Policy Studies (NIPS) is considered as the party's think tank. It also provides several trainings to LP members.

Lakas Secretariat would estimate their card-bearing members at 2million, but there is hardly any way this can be validated. The Party is not as aggressive in recruitment, but it usually conducts trainings for incumbents and new recruits. For new recruits, who are mostly those with resources and backing, are briefed on the party ideology and principles. The local chapter approves membership applications, which if disapproved can be appealed to the NEC for a final verdict. *Lakas* has a youth group, but cannot be considered active independent of the electoral campaign of the party candidate. It has no women wing and its processes and activities are hardly gender-sensitive.

As of 2010, *Akbayan* was able to account that it had more than 40,000 registered members, as evidenced by chapter rosters across the country. It regularly conducts basic orientation for new and/or prospective members. It also developed a basic party course to provide ideological orientation for local chapter development and to allow members to better understand the party and its underpinnings. Its educational activities aim to ensure the members' ideological development and to encourage and capacitate members to run for local posts.

Bayan Muna estimates its membership to 100,000 to 150,000, but it also lacks a more systematized accounting of its members, as it does not also maintain a database. The party recognizes the lack of political maturity of some of its members. In an effort to educate its membership, the party performs routine party activities such as organizing assemblies and mass campaigns in between elections.

Democratizing Practices

There are mechanisms for party-based decision-making and command structures in mainstream parties like the Liberal Party and *Lakas*, but it remains a challenge to make these mechanisms fully operational and effective.

Major party decisions have been decided through the party's layers of decision-making bodies, which include National Directorate, the National Executive Council (NECO), the National Political Council, the National Board and the Advisory Council. However, its by-law provides broad powers to its president who can overturn or take the place of the governing bodies when the matter/issue at hand is urgent and needs a decision from the party. Hence, the level of "decisional autonomy" will depend largely on the leadership style of the incumbent president.

Lakas' chain of command, on the other hand, follows the political structure of the Philippines. The National Council is made up of local heads. For stratified leadership, they have Regional Chairs, District Chairs, and City/Municipal Chairs. They also have standing committees for financial, internal, and external. Decisions in *Lakas* are usually made by the National Council (top-bottom) or the National Executive Committee, when the Council is not assembled. The caucuses and conventions serve as confirmation of the decision of the NC. The decisions, however, are hardly accounted for.

Meanwhile, for the *Nacionalista Party*, the party website gives hints that they have no clear-cut organizational robustness. Even if they have officers, these positions are vague and have no clear-cut definitions. In short, it is largely *ad-hoc*.

The non-mainstream parties have more functional decision-making mechanisms.

Bayan Muna members at the barrio level is organized into Municipal and City Chapters that are represented in the highest governing body of the party called the National Convention (NC), which meets every 3 years or as decided upon by the National Council. The National Council is comprised of the chairpersons of the Provincial Chapters. The NC elects the National Executive Committee.

Akbayan regularly observes key organizational processes. The highest governing body is the National Congress, which is convened every three years. It elects the party leadership and serves as the space to make major policies and decisions such as who will be nominees for congress and others. The National Congress elects members of the National Executive Council, composed of seven representatives from each of the geographical island regions, five representatives for the National Capital Region, eight sectoral representatives, three representatives from locally-elected members, and one party ombudsman/arbitrator, and all their elected representatives in Congress. The Executive Council also includes the offices of the Secretary General, Treasurer, Arbitrator, and a representative from the Akbayan Youth. (I deleted the numbers since "three" in the second sentence is written just as a word. Deleting aimed to have consistency.)

Among all the parties, only *Akbayan* has a clear and verifiable record of regularly convening its highest decision-making body that determines its highest officials and the party mandate.

All parties, except the *Nacionalista Party*, have clear rules and guidelines on making their leaders and elected members accountable. The *Liberal Party* Constitution provides for specific disciplinary actions and procedures for removing or suspending officials on certain grounds. Mechanisms for accountability in *Lakas* are stipulated in its Charter and By-Laws. Party-switching is the common violation, which the party cannot sanction. The gravest accountability mechanism that the party can enact is the expulsion of a member. It also has a Grievance Committee to establish accountability among

members. However, these mechanisms are either non-functional or not consistently utilized.

Nacionalista Party, on the other hand, does not have a formal internal control mechanism to ensure accountability. Membership is fluid and so is the organization's hold on its members. In a way, the party and the party members' dependence on their party Chair serves as a mechanism for control of the party's decision-making processes. However, it hardly employed to ensure that the rules of the party are followed and to make party members toe the party line. The party itself claims that it recognizes the autonomy of its member-politicians in making decisions.

The non-mainstream parties have a relatively stronger track record in ensuring that the rules and processes of the parties are followed and agreements of the parties are pursued. In the case of *Akbayan*, owing to its strong social movements, the leadership is regularly made to account on the agenda agreed upon by the parties. The party also has records of sanctioning high-level leaders of the party who were found to made lapses in performing their duties as officials. *Bayan Muna* also has records of sanctioning some members who violated rules, although such incidents were rather isolated, which the party attributes to their strong disciplinary mechanisms.

Financial transparency and accountability is a problem for all the parties. There seems to be no strong demand for parties to make their campaign and organizational financing transparent and accountable, with documents on this being hardly accessible.

Upward mobility among members in the mainstream parties is hardly unlikely. It is usually those with resources that get elected and is usually those elected who are the leaders. The majority of the 46 parliamentary seats won by the *Liberal Party* after the 2010 national (and local) elections were won by entrenched political families in various districts in different provinces. In other words, climbing up the ladder or rising from the ranks hardly exists. To be a candidate worth the *Nacionalista Party's* attention, for example, one must already have had a solid, personally-built base in one's locality. There are minor efforts by the *Liberal Party* and *Lakas* to build and develop their membership's capacity, but membership development is not enough to go up to the party leadership. In *Lakas*, the capacity building seminars are usually given to position-bearing members or running candidates and not to local level members.

Some level of upward mobility among members is observed in the non-mainstream parties, with the democratic processes inside the party allowing those from below to be leaders. There is an incentive for members in *Akbayan* party to internally organize and mobilize support because of its largely democratic process of selecting leaders. *Bayan Muna* meanwhile highlights "track record" as the primary criteria for any member to be elevated in the organizational structure of the party. However, for both parties, at least for their top three party-list representatives, it is almost the same candidates who are fielded and who are mostly coming from a middle class/ educated background. The

party also has very little capacity to support the candidacies of members, especially at the local level, except through coalition and advocacy/ media exposure work. Up to some extent, the candidates from these parties need to also raise their own funds to run for office.

One manifestation of the weak autonomy of mainstream parties is how they select their candidates and how they form coalitions. It almost always boils down to the candidates and personalities. Especially if the party has a presidential candidate or has won a presidential election, this serves as a magnetic force that attracts all sorts of coalitional possibilities.

As earlier mentioned, the President of the country holds enormous powers. In particular, its power over the purse and its appointment powers allow it to have an effective control over members of Congress. Congressmen who belong to the party of the President, as practiced, would be benefitted of Congressional Chairpersonship and relatively bigger pork. If the politician has a bet for high positions in the country such as cabinet members, judiciary or constitutional commission, s/he can best lobby for his bet if s/he is an ally of the President.

Candidate selection is largely determined by the presidential candidate, although there is a varying degree of appreciation and practice in terms of selecting candidates through party mechanisms.

The *Liberal Party* explicitly determines their candidates using the following criteria: resources to mount and sustain a campaign, capacity to mobilize people and capacity to muster enough votes to win. In choosing the senatorial candidates and local candidates, the presidential candidate has a big say because s/he would have the biggest contribution to the campaigns. *Lakas* also has a top-down approach to candidate selection; however, the party has an “equity of the incumbent” principle, which in effect gives premium to the sitting officials before other members are chosen to run for a given position. The *Nacionalista Party* in the past election left candidate selection in the hands of its presidential candidate since he was the main financier of the campaigns. In the non-mainstream, candidates at the national level are determined democratically, although there seems to be a shallow crop of leaders.

All the parties give importance to youth participation in the party, with all of them having their respective youth arms and youth-targeted strategies and activities. Although among the parties, the youth wings of *Akbayan*, *Liberal* and *Bayan* were observed to be consistently active even beyond elections. How much they weigh in the decision-making of the party remains a question. Only *Akbayan* has an automatically allocated seat for its youth representative in its executive body.

Women participation is also viewed important by all the parties, although the *Nacionalista Party* does not see the need to give an extra effort to encourage women

participation because of its view that women are no longer marginalized in Philippine politics. *Akbayan* is the only party that ensures automatic allocation of seats to women, 30% of seats, in all structures and bodies of the party. *Bayan Muna* sees no need for this as they have an affiliate women group, *Gabriela*. The *Liberal Party* and *Lakas*, recognize the need to work more on women participation in the party and in politics as a whole.

Relating with the Public

By and large, the mainstream parties are catch-all in scope and are therefore not specifically catering to certain sectors or segments of the population based on a program. While it is possible to have ideologically-inclined catch-all parties, they view the electorate as an audience to convince, not a constituency to cultivate. Catch-all parties defy specific categories, which makes it a perfect contrast with program-based parties. Since they are seeking to attract all people, they are prone to tailor-fit a message to attract a particular segment. Being a catch-all of the mainstream parties has a lot to do with the need to resonate to voters/ population that are really diverse and do not base their choices on programmatic options.

The *Nacionalista Party* attempts at remarketing themselves: while they are a catch-all party, their messages through mass media focus on the *masses*. All the same, they employ different strategies to get the elitist crowd such as big business with a more transactional approach, which is quite consonant with their tactic of garnering as much votes as possible. *Lakas* is also catch-all, which is exhibited by the ambiguity of their target voters. It is being posited that Gibo Teodoro (the party's stand-bearer in the 2010 elections) represented middle-class interest, but this itself is not clear in the propaganda.

The non-mainstream cannot be classified as catch-all parties, owing to their ideological underpinning and program, but they seem to project a catch-all image to attract more supporters and voters.

Most of the bills filed by *Akbayan* are targeted to marginalized sectors such as labour, peasants, students, human rights victims, women and children and homosexuals. However, the unprecedented vote, which was more than nine million garnered by its senator candidate during the 2010 election demonstrates that its voter base has expanded beyond its catered marginal sectors. Likewise, *Bayan Muna* is also targeted to the marginalized sector, though it tries to project itself as a catch-all party to make itself more encompassing, claiming to represent "all" marginalized and under-represented sectors in society. Unlike *Akbayan*, the senatorial candidate of *Bayan Muna* who ran under the ticket of the *Nacionalista Party* during the 2010 election did not fare well in the race, and thus the party was unable to demonstrate the expansion of its voter base.

If we look at both the result of presidential and senatorial elections, there is no indication that the votes garnered by the candidates are consisting with the base of

supporters of the mainstream political parties. In all likelihood, electoral results were largely based on the candidates and not the parties.

This is clearly shown in the senatorial race where there is a wide gap in the number of voters garnered by senatorial candidates running under the same political party, for instance from 19.5 million votes garnered by Ramon Revilla Jr. (ranked 1) to 1.2 M votes secured by Raul Lambino (ranked 39).

The table below shows the lack of consistency in the number of votes and ranking of senatorial candidates, indicating that party affiliation is not a determining factor on the votes.

Votes for Senatorial Candidates, 2007, 2010

	Candidates	2007		2010	
		2007 overall rank	Number of votes	Overall rank	Number of votes
Nacionalista	Manuel B. Villar, Jr.	4	15,338,412		
	Alan Peter S. Cayetano	9	11,787,679		
	Pia S. Cayetano-Sebastian			6	13,679,511
	Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.			7	13,169,634
Liberal	Francis Pangilinan	5	14,534,678		
	Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III	6	14,309,349		
	Franklin Drilon			4	15,764,639
	Ralph Recto			8	12,344,675
	Teofisto Guingona III			12	10,200,293
	Ruffy Biazon			14	8,566,631
	Sonia Roco			16	6,590,050
Lakas-Kampi-NUCD	Ramon Revilla			1	19,513,521
	Lito Lapid			11	11,025,805
	Rey Langit			30	2,694,213
	Silvestre Bello III			31	2,468,276
	Ramon Guico			38	1,264,982
	Raul Lambino			39	1,156,294
	Joker Arroyo (Kampi)	8	11,803,107		
	Juan Miguel Zubiri	12	11,005,866		
	Ralph Recto	14	10,721,252		

	Mike Defensor	15	9,938,995		
	Prospero Pichay	16	9,798,622		
	Cesar Montano	18	7,800,451		
	Vicente Magsaysay	21	6,357,905		
	Luis Singson	24	4,353,644		
Akbayan	Risa Hontiveros*			13	9,041,494
Bayan Muna	Liza Maza**			25	3,855,800
	Satur Ocampo**			26	3,539,345

Source: Comelec

* *Ran under LP, but is a member of Akbaya*

** *Ran under NP, but is a member of Bayan Muna.*

Campaign strategies during elections hardly benefit the mainstream parties. Campaign strategies remain personality-based and are more often just about packaging the party candidate, since hardly do the electoral respond to party-based campaigning. This makes it unnecessary for mainstream parties to differentiate themselves. The personality-based campaigning also has a lot to do with the fact that it's the candidates who are financing their campaigns. Campaign contributions are also usually given to the candidates and not the parties.

Party differentiation is more crucial for the non-mainstream parties, since in the Party List System, the voters vote the party. However, even between the two non-mainstream parties covered by this study, a large portion of the population still does not have a clear idea what differentiate them.

Trying Hard to Make a Difference

What can be considered achievements of the mainstream parties were those done by their candidates. There are hardly any significant advocacies won by the mainstream parties as a party. There are a few advocacies related to or claimed to relate to the parties, but how critical is party-based processes on these success cannot be established. Furthermore, how consistent are these "achievements" with parties' respective ideologies is also suspect because they largely depend on the personal platform of the sponsoring politician.

For the *Liberal Party*, landmark policies like the passage of the Agrarian Reform Law was led by then President Diosdado Macapagal, rejection of the US military base extension by then Senate President Jovito Salonga, Cheaper Medicines Act through then Senator Mar Roxas. These policies, including the party's supposed support for Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law Extension with Reforms (CARPER) Law in 2008, are not as consistent to a strictly Liberal ideological frame. The social equity content of these policies is arguably strong.

This holds true for *Lakas*. Achievements by former Presidents from the party are claimed as party achievements: the decentralization and de-monopolization of governance in the Ramos administration and the economic stability and progress reported under the Arroyo administration. *Lakas* also claims as their achievement the peace talks with Muslim and Communist rebels under these administrations.

As the country's oldest political party, the *Nacionalista Party* has greatly influenced the course of Philippine history up until the early 1970s. The party, being tied to the institution of the Philippine Commonwealth, can claim that the Philippine political sphere for self-governance is its masterwork and legacy. In contemporary history, the *Nacionanlista Party* would claim the impeachment drive against President Estrada headed by Manuel Villar in 2001 was its achievement.

Non-mainstream parties have many advocacies that are party-driven. While great efforts have been exerted by these parties in pushing for their advocacies, there were of minimal success. *Akbayan*, from 1998 to 2008, was able to submit 42 proposed bills that were largely focused on improving delivery of basic services, reforms in several sectors of the economy, human rights, environment and land use and distribution. It was only able to pass two bills into laws since then.

Bayan Muna has also campaigned for the passage of several bills centering on labor, agrarian reform and trade but did not gain significant milestones.

Interestingly, the combination of *Akbayan*, the reform drivers of the *Liberal Party* and the leadership from *Lakas* (Ramos) must be credited for the critical reforms after Martial Law, such as the decentralization policy, the Party-List System, CARP, the establishment of the National Ant-Poverty Commission (NAPC) and the breaking of economic monopolies, like the telecommunication industries.

If the issue is further narrowed down to their contribution to reforming the political system, particularly reforms in the electoral and party system, parties vary in terms of what measures they support and their efforts in supporting the measures. By and large, there is very little success in pushing for measures that reform the elections and parties and this is indicative of the lack of leadership from the parties.

The *Liberal Party* and *Lakas* were observed to have stronger drives in supporting electoral and political party reform measures than the *Nacionalista Party*. *Liberal Party* members in Congress were seen to champion bills and resolutions that pertain to political party reform. *Lakas* stalwart, former House Speaker Jose de Venecia, had consistently pushed for shift to parliamentary form of government to develop political parties in the country. The *Nacionalista Party* only sees political reform possible with economic liberty.

Akbayan has consistently pushed and worked for political reform. Some of its leaders participated actively in developing the proposed bills in Congress on electoral and party reforms. However, recently, its support for the party reform and development has been lukewarm with hardly any recent party effort to push for and advocate for the party reform bill filed in Congress.

Bayan Muna has expressed its strong opposition on the party reform bill and has hazy record on electoral reform work. It opposes measures that aim to reform elections and party system because for them these measures do not address the root causes of the problem in Philippine politics and hence will just be band-aid solutions to problems that must be responded to with bigger structural change. Such analysis seems consistent with their revolutionary agenda.

The generally weak party performance in winning critical advocacies and pushing for reform measures that can improve the country's political system can be attributed to the lack of incentives for parties to perform well and the lack of support system for them to develop and perform better. The electorate vote for candidates regardless of party affiliation. Parties are largely unpopular that candidates would even opt to be perceived as independent from any party influence rather than be guided by party ideology and processes.

On the other hand, the system within which parties operate, the electoral system and the larger political system, is not conducive for the growth and development of full-fledged and programmatic parties. Patronage-based politics and family-ties remain the more effective way for politicians to win seats in office. Even if it is costly, it ensures their total control over their fate in politics and they need not invest in the tedious processes of party politics.

The winner-take-all electoral system also contributes to the problem on two accounts. One, it gives tremendous powers to the winners that makes abuse of power that leads to corruption easier, especially given the government's weak accountability mechanisms. Two, it facilitates the dissolution of the oppositions or the other tendencies since whoever wins in the elections, regardless if s/he wins with a slim margin or without the majority votes, gets all the power of the government. There is no relationship between the number of votes/ mandate of the people and the distribution of power in governance.

Since the system in the Philippines is a combination of multi-party system in a plurality electoral system, there are often many candidates vying for the same post and the victor, often than not, would not get a majority of the vote, yet will receive all the powers of the position. This encourages party-switching and prevents opposing or alternative tendencies to build on their electoral gains.

With this context, the growth and development of parties is hardly supported. The system, instead, facilitates practice of party-switching, resort to patronage-based or clientelistic politics and reliance on personalities and families.

The non-mainstream parties have better performance in terms of resisting and dealing with patronage-based, personality-oriented politics. These parties' birth and survival have been a living critique to the traditional system. Their design and operations are such that they can withstand constraint in the political environment they are in. The question though is, whether they can sustain their alternative practice once they move pass the limited space of the party-list system and go mainstream. For them to show that an alternative way of organizing for politics could work in winning power to govern under a coherent and long-term development and reform program for the country, moving out of the party-list system is an imperative these party-list groups must heed.

Party-Less No More

Parties in the Philippines are vehicles of personalities and are creations of political families. They are hardly differentiated because they hardly have or give importance to their platform or program of government. Almost all literature in politics have scored this description about Philippine political parties.

However, this study that attempted to provide a baseline on the organizational processes within parties may hold this as not entirely true. If we look closer and see the fine prints, the story is not as simple and clear as painted for us in books. The entire story involves alternative practices of non-mainstream parties and efforts of some in mainstream parties to do things differently. These are just as real too.

Strong party politics with autonomy, coherence, link to society and organization is seen in non-mainstream political parties, but cannot be considered effective yet in achieving political goals because of their limited political clout. There are efforts by some mainstream parties (*Liberal* and *Lakas*) to modernize and be full-fledged political parties organizationally and build coherence, link to society and autonomy.

It is not a question, therefore, whether party politics exist in the Philippines. It does. It is only a question of how institutionalize and stable it is and whether it is contributing to further democratization or is serving as an avenue for patronage-based/ personality-oriented politics.

For the past century, the mainstream parties have been more of the latter, a mechanism for patronage and personalities; they are products of their political milieu that is not conducive for the growth and development of programmatic political parties. Even the performance of these parties historically has largely been towards establishing and maintaining the traditional political order (elitist, patronage-based, personality-oriented) and only recently that some mainstream parties are putting reform content to

their political engagement, such as pushing for electoral and party reforms and moving towards supporting governance reform agenda.

The non-mainstream parties, on the other hand, struggles to become full-fledged political parties. Their birth and development has been towards the purpose of providing an alternative, a critique to the existing political order. But just like anything that swims against the current, their onward thrust is difficult, slow and painful. They nonetheless exist. They are nonetheless parties with party-based processes and mechanisms that serve as their approach to winning seats in the government. And as they enter the national mainstream political scene, the effectiveness of party-based politics will be put to a test. Can party processes really catapult a political organization and politicians to power in the Philippines? How will the mainstream parties react?

There are bright spots for reforms within parties, which is largely due to leadership action of a few reform-oriented leaders in mainstream parties and party processes for non-mainstream parties. This can be maximized to enhance the effectiveness of efforts to strengthen and reform the party system in the Philippines, which has been a long-standing political reform agenda of advocates and progressives.

Building a support constituency around this leadership action, linking up the efforts through cross-party dialogues and policy advocacy on legal infrastructure supporting party-based politics are some of the possible ways forward to improve the stability and performance of Philippine political parties.