

Sectoral Groups & Philippines Electoral Process: 'Perversion' of party-list system hit; SC blamed

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Rather than giving voters real and more diverse choices, the inclusion of new and numerous sectoral groups in the party-list system is an indication that traditional politicians have found an easier way into public office through “dubious” and “fly-by-night” groups, according to political analysts.

The “sheer perversion” of the party-list system, originally meant to give marginalized sectors a better chance at winning elective positions, has led to newer and relatively unknown sectoral groups overtaking powerhouse left-wing and progressive blocs in terms of votes, said Richard Javad Heydarian, a political science assistant professor at the De La Salle University (DLSU).

“The sheer perversion of the political parties is the cause of the proliferation of these dubious groups... and the Commission on Elections (Comelec) should play a vigilant role in stamping out these groups because the party-list system is the last bastion of real, participatory and progressive democracy,” Heydarian said in a phone interview with the *Inquirer* on Friday.

Lax party-list rules

DLSU political science professor Antonio Contreras blamed the Supreme Court’s lax party-list rules for opening the floodgates to more groups joining the elections, which he said naturally scattered the votes.

“The groups [were competing] for a limited number of votes,” he said, adding that the lack of information and interest among voters also resulted in lackluster support for party-list groups.

The partial, unofficial tally of the May 9 party-list elections showed relatively new organizations surpassing the votes that old party-list groups, including the so-called Makabayan bloc, used to corner in previous elections.

Ako Bicol seemed to have sealed its standing at No.1 with 1,634,986 votes, followed by Gabriela party-list, apparently one of the two left-wing groups in the Top 10, with 1,339,112 votes or 4.26 percent of the total votes counted.

Newcomer 1Pacman or One Patriotic Coalition of Marginalized Nationals remained unmoved on third spot with 1,287,461 votes, or 4.09 percent of the more than 43 million votes counted as of 2:13

p.m. Friday.

ACT Teachers, a progressive and militant organization representing the education sector, garnered 1,151,095 votes based on the *Inquirer's* partial and unofficial tally using data from the Comelec's transparency server.

Bayan Muna, which ranked third in the 2013 midterm elections, moved down to the 15th spot with 586,193 votes so far, while Anakpawis was on the 29th spot with 354,909 votes. Kabataan was on the 38th spot with 293,784 votes.

Multimillionaires

Akbayan, which placed fourth in the previous elections with more than 820,000 votes, was currently at No. 13 with 589,161 votes.

Contreras said the lenient rules of the party-list system had a big impact on these left wing and progressive groups, which was competing against more varied sectoral groups.

In 2012, the Comelec had tried to cleanse the system according to the Constitution and the party-list law by reassessing so-called marginalized groups and screening their representatives in Congress which, the poll body noted, were either multimillionaires, former government officials or members of powerful political clans.

But the high court subsequently ruled that party-list groups need not represent marginalized sectors, revising the rules it laid down 15 years ago and allowing political parties and groups not representing the marginalized and underrepresented sectors to participate in the 2013 elections.

Analyst Edmund Tayao, a political science professor at the University of Santo Tomas, said the age of information "had inadvertently worked against some progressive organizations, as information on the ground could easily be shared by everyone through social media."

"While the so-called leftist bloc is pushing for real reform measures in Congress as party list representatives, they are also known to be associated with rebel armed groups," he said, adding that the association was hard to counter especially in the advent of social media.

Tayao said another factor that resulted in poor poll numbers for old-timers in the party list groups was their assumption that they no longer needed to ally themselves with traditional political parties that earlier enabled them to enter government.

'Dynastic' party-list groups

Election Commissioner Rowena Gananza said as much. "It's very hard for those not affiliated [with political parties] to generate votes on their own," she said, adding that this could explain why "the usual top three winners had slid down to [numbers] 12 or 15."

But former Akbayan Rep. Walden Bello disagreed, saying that being identified with a political party did more harm than good for the organization.

"I don't want to rub it in at this point but since I've been asked, I think the loss of over 200,000 votes from 2013 and then slipping from fifth to 13th [was probably due to the party's] identification with

the Liberal Party and pushing for *daang matuwid*,” Bello said.

Former Bayan Muna Rep. Teddy Casiño meanwhile attributed the party’s poor showing to its inability to match the huge resources and the alleged vote-buying operations of the rich and “dynastic” party-list groups.

“In fact, the party-list system is now dominated by groups composed of, funded, and supported by political dynasties, big business and landlord interests,” he told the Inquirer.

But Casiño also admitted that there was a sense of complacency among members and supporters of the organization due to the party’s high profile and excellent performance in the 2013 elections.

“Many thought we had two or three seats in the bag even with minimal campaigning, which was of course wrong,” he said. In total, he estimated that the Makabayan bloc would have at least eight seats in the 17th Congress. **TVJ**

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P.S.

* Philippine Daily Inquirer. 02:05 AM May 14th, 2016:

<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/785571/perversion-of-party-list-system-hit-sc-blamed#ixzz48e6aJpcD>