

Phillipine Elections: How the left fared

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How did the senatorial candidates and parties coming from the ranks of the left-wing social movements fare in the last election? What does their showing tell us about their strengths?

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Two political blocs with social movement origins fielded senatorial candidates in either the LP or the NP slate. These are the AKBAYAN (ranked 4th in the party list election) bloc, led by senatorial candidate Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel who joined the LP team; and the national democratic (natdem) bloc, whose Liza Maza (Gabriela) and Satur Ocampo (Bayan Muna) ran in the senatorial election under the NP banner.

Risa's votes

Among the three candidates, Risa performed best, landing 13th place with approximately 8.5 million votes. This means her base has expanded far beyond the 981,020 people who voted for her party, Akbayan. Her own social networks outside of the social movements (classmates, former colleagues in the media, kin and their own circles) certainly contributed. But we can surmise that the biggest contribution came from the NoyMar constituency of about 13 million.

This large base not only includes the Liberal Party supporters, many of whom voted straight, but also the ordinary citizens from the public at large who were inspired by the Noynoy's promise of change. There are also non-NoyMay supporters who voted for Risa because they wanted more competence in the Senate and a new name outside of the same, old family names. Indeed, many have expressed regret that Lito Lapid instead of her didn't make it to the Magic 12.

It is very unlikely that the natdem base of about 2.85 million people voted for Risa given the unfriendly relationship between them. Akbayan and the natdem party list groups locked horns in Congress on how to advance agrarian reform. They are at odds over the pending indemnification claims of the human rights victims of the Marcos regime. The greater hostility takes place on the ground and has led to harassment mostly of Akbayan campaigners. Akbayan has been a vocal critic of the CPP-NPA's practice of imposing permit to campaign fees.

The natdem's electoral base

How did I get the estimate of 2.85M natdem (electoral) base? I drew this from the total votes

garnered by the natdem party list groups. Other than Bayan Muna (ranked 7th) and Gabriela (ranked 5th), these are the Anakpawis (ranked 16th), Kabataan (ranked 17th), ACT Teachers (ranked 20th), and the Katribu Indigenous Peoples' Sectoral Party (ranked 67th). While 2.85 million is not enough for a full-pledged natdem to become senator without outside help, it is good enough to get them some seven seats in Congress.

Note that Liza Maza chalked up 3,587,956 votes and Satur Ocampo got a slightly lower tally of 3,298,262, to land 25th and 26th place, respectively. This shows that the people who wanted Ocampo and Masa in the Senate did not go much beyond the estimated natdem circle of 2.85M.

Between Bayan Muna and Gabriela, it would seem that the latter is able to appeal to a slightly wider base. Liza got almost 300T more votes than Satur. Gabriela, after all, has been able to help many abused women. The campaign against domestic violence has a broader appeal, beyond the more politicized groups, although violence against women is certainly political. To its credit, Gabriela is the only women's group that has landed a party list seat in Congress in consecutive elections since it joined the race in 2004.

It is also possible that some of Satur's votes went by mistake to the unknown Ramoncito Ocampo of Bangon Pilipinas but we'll never know now.

Little added value from Villar

If we can credit NoyMar for a huge chunk of Risa's vote, we cannot also ignore Villar/NP's contribution to Ocampo and Maza. But then, Villar got only about 5 million votes. Assuming Ocampo and Masa got most of their other votes from Villar, the courtesy-of-Villar votes will translate to only about 450,000 votes (the difference between Ocampo's votes and 2.845M). This means that the alliance with Villar did not do much good for the natdems.

Would they have fared better if they ran under the Liberal Party, with Noynoy? Very likely, although they would most likely still fall short of the top 12. In any case, the natdems already closed the deal with Villar even before the "Noynoy for president" momentum began.

Big contribution to Villar

Assuming only 2M of the 2.85M natdem constituency voted for Villar, the natdems delivered more for Villar than he did for them. The natdems does constitute a bloc vote, similar to the Iglesia ni Cristo.

But we can assume that not all followed the central command. Indeed in Region 4A (CALABARZON), Satur got 154,658 more votes than Villar. The gap between Liza and Villar is even higher at 232,195 votes. In Region 12 (SOCCSKSARGEN), Satur and Liza got slightly 25,000-27,000 more votes than Villar.

But barring any organizational level-betrayal of Villar, and crediting the discrepancy in these two regions to aberrant acts of natdem followers and to additional votes from non-natdems/non-Villarites for the natdem senatoriables, 2M natdem believers voting for Villar is a fair estimate.

Two million is about 40 percent of Villar's votes. The natdems delivered and Villar certainly got his money's worth from them.

Villar also benefitted from taking in Bongbong Marcos and the KBL. Who contributed more, the natdem left or the Marcos right, is hard to tell. Villar came next to Noynoy in

Regions 1, 6 and the ARMM but it was in the Marcoses' Region 1 that he was only 10 percent short of Noynoy's votes (642,000 against Noynoy's 715,595).

We can also presume that Bongbong helped pull up Villar's votes in other places, considering that he got about 12 million votes as against Villar's 5 million. But it's quite clear that majority of the more than 10 million people who voted for Bongbong and the full-pledged, victorious NP senatorial bet Pia Cayetano did not vote for Villar.

Geographic spread

Majority, or 63%, of the votes for the natdem partylist groups came from Luzon, including Metro Manila. The trend is consistent with the votes for Satur Ocampo and Liza Maza. Approximately 65% of the two's total votes came from Luzon and Metro Manila.

Satur's and Liza's votes are highest in the NCR, Region 4A (CALABARZON) and Region 3 (Central Luzon), in that order, with votes ranging from 398,000 to 643,000. Votes of 100,000 to 200,000 are spread out in all the other regions except for Region 4B (MIMAROPA), Region 9 (Zamboanga Peninsula), CARAGA and the ARMM, which registered below 100,000 votes.

In all, the natdems are rather weak in the Visayas and in Mindanao. In Luzon, they have lost many followers in MIMAROPA and the Cordillera. Only about 60,000 voted for Liza and Satur in these two regions, while Villar got considerably higher votes.

Still a political force

Still, compared to all left-wing social movement forces, the natdems remain the strongest and most consolidated. Although Akbayan aced all of them in rank, the natdems are thrice larger than Akbayan's voting constituency. They are more than 20 times larger than the base of Anak Mindanao and Partido ng Manggagawa, among whose leaders were former natdem personalities who belonged to the 1970s and 1980s generation of student activists.

To conclude, the natdem's fortunes in relation to the Senate has not changed since 1987 when they even more ardently aimed for the Upper House, with several senatorial candidates running under their own party, the Partido ng Bayan.

On the other hand, at the Lower House, they have cumulatively increased their presence, proving that they remain a political force. This success in turn shows that the party list system, despite its loopholes, has enabled the access of social movement groups and forces to the state's representative institutions.

Dealing with Aquino

The next administration would do well to institute the needed electoral reforms that will ensure fairer chances for others groups, unfamiliar names and new faces in the next electoral contests. This way, the natdem left will not be discouraged from investing more efforts (and strategizing more wisely) in the electoral arena, away from the recourse to armed, political violence.

Peace talks with the CPP-NPA-NDF can also support this process of instituting the guarantees of fair play and rule of law (on both sides), and identifying a basic set of shared policy reforms that can be collaboratively pursued, or competitively but nonviolently discussed in the public arena in cases of policy difference.

Getting one or two natdem personalities into the Executive branch and keeping lines open with the natdem party list representatives can help build bridges and combine constituencies in advancing key legal reform areas as well as in the jockeying for key positions against the Arroyo bloc in the Lower House.

The natdems, for their part, have serious thinking to do as to how they will relate to the new Aquino presidency. They can choose to be the extremeyl opposed to it and be marginalized as in the earlier Aquino presidency, or they can take their chances by treading the “critical collaboration” path.

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P.S.

* This analysis was based on ABS-CBN’s consolidated election data posted in its online site and accessed on May 19 and 20, 2010. Posted at 05/21/2010 1:04 AM | Updated as of 05/21/2010 1:36 AM.

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