

Focus Group Discussion on Party-List Reform

Ateneo School of Government and FES Philippine Office

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Synthesis of the Discussion Papers

Guide Questions	Ramon Casiple (IPER)	Edna Co (ASoG)	Jay Carizo (IPD)	Lambert Ramirez (NIPS)
<p>What is the state of affairs of the Philippine Party-List after the 2007 elections? How has the space for developing new kinds of political groups and practices that was offered by the PL system been used and abused?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There were suspicions that COMELEC officers were bribed/pressured to approve certain party-list group. ▪ There is difficulty in determining the “marginalized and underprivileged sectors.” ▪ There are too many accredited PL groups. ▪ Entry of two traditional centers of political power (i.e., “political” churches and political dynasties). ▪ Party-list groups behaved like traditional parties/ candidates. ▪ The 2% threshold presents an obstacle in filling the maximum number of PL seats. ▪ Only 40% of the electorate participated in the party-list elections. 	<p>Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Weak voter turnout ▪ Weak information dissemination <p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PL groups have altered the texture of the discussion and “pluralized” House deliberations. ▪ Most PL groups take a sectoral approach and needs to graduate from sectoral advocacy to governance. <p>2007 Elections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PL candidates have now learned the craft of campaigning from the national candidates i.e., to invest in political ads in all available media). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prior to the 2007 elections, PL representatives gained prominence during the “Hello, Garci” scandal. ▪ Malacañang, through OEA, allegedly supported and fielded 11 PL groups. ▪ There was an increase in the number of PL contenders, and a decrease in votes for Left PL groups. ▪ Low public awareness on the nature of the PL system. ▪ The 3-seat cap, the 2% threshold, and the Panganiban formula encourages splitting of PL groups, instead of aggregating forces pushing for a common platform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In the future, attempts to putting up PL groups with questionable backgrounds can no longer progress as this modus operandi has already been exposed. ▪ The hasty departure of former COMELEC Chairman Benjamin Abalos is a welcome development. ▪ However, Abalos’ resignation does not guarantee reforms in the poll body. <p>Paradoxes of the PL system:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Under-representation (<i>i.e., the Party-list system is in spirit intended for the marginalized sectors of our society, yet the present law and set-up in effect legalizes this marginalization</i>)

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of voter education on PL system. ▪ Representation of PL groups in House Electoral Tribunal and CA is being held in abeyance. 	<p>Problems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2% threshold is contradictory since the law says that more votes mean more seats, but votes that take a party over the three-seat limit are useless. ▪ The law does not ensure that the 20% allocation for Party List groups is fulfilled. ▪ COMELEC applies a lax or open policy with regard to party list accreditation for as long as applicants comply with the rules and regulations and there is insufficiency of the evidence on the motions for reconsiderations filed by oppositors. 		<p>2. Under-appreciation (<i>i.e., the Party-list system is by design for the empowerment of the marginalized sectors, yet it is significantly under-appreciated by these sectors that comprise the biggest chunk of the voting population</i>)</p>
<p>Why have reform-minded PL fared so badly in the elections.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Entry of two traditional centers of political power (<i>i.e., “political” churches and political dynasties</i>). ▪ Negative campaign by the military and government-identified groups against many Left party-list groups. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High number of PL contenders. ▪ Entry of allegedly government-supported PL groups. ▪ Organizational splits within progressive PL groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prohibitive costs of PL elections. ▪ “Representational tokenism” (<i>i.e., limiting the representation of marginalized sectors to 20% of the total number of House seats</i>). ▪ Scarce and unsystematic, if any, information drive on the party-list system.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Party-list groups behaved like traditional parties/ candidates (e.g., negotiations for votes with local politicians, flashy campaigns, media ads, and use of personality endorsements). ▪ Some party-list groups were accused of vote-buying/electoral cheating. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low level of appreciation (or under-appreciation) of the party-list system by the marginalized sectors themselves. ▪ Disconnect between party-list groups and the people. ▪ Fragmentation of votes among many small PL groups.
<p>What are the lessons learned for Party-Lists themselves?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mainstream political groups will become more active in the party-list system in the future. ▪ Political reforms can be guaranteed if party-list groups can transform themselves into full-fledged political parties. 		<p>The problems of the PL system can be classified into:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. implementation problems 2. systemic problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The biggest chunk of the electorate that would vote for party-list groups would be concentrated among the tested party-list organizations rather than distributed among small ones with dubious backgrounds and financial sources.
<p>What appropriate reactions to the encroachment of traditional politics in the PL system?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Amending the party-list law. ▪ Amend the House Rules. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Set an appropriate PL threshold wherein the viability of small party representation is considered. ▪ Removal of 3-seat cap. 	<p>Implementation Problems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proper implementation of the law ▪ Voters' education ▪ Careful scrutiny of PL groups. <p>Systemic Problems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Amending the Party-List Law. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greater focus on sectoral representation (multisectoral PL should pave the way in time for the emergence of marginalized sectoral groups). ▪ Integrated and sustained Information campaign on PL system ▪ Benchmarking of the PL System ▪ Political/Social Audit

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Is the PL system a dead-end for progressive groups? How much attention does it still deserve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The success of the party-list system will have to be measured ultimately in its capability to give birth and nurture full-fledged political parties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The party list system is burdened with the problems of translating the terms “underrepresented” and “marginalized,” “party”, and proportional representation into concrete reality; however, despite these difficulties, there is no turning back on the PL system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The PL system ca still advance the interest of marginalized sectors as long as reforms can be instituted. 	
What changes in the law would be necessary to revitalize/strengthen the PL system and allowing for genuine representation?			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Removal of the 3-seat cap. ▪ Replace the fixed 2% threshold with a moving threshold (e.g., divide the total votes cast for PL by the number of seats to be filled and the quotient added with one). ▪ Impose sanctions against groups which splinter their ranks, those who use PL system to advance interests other than those of marginalized sectors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Removal of the 3-seat cap and the 2% threshold.
What could be achievable objectives for the 14 th Congress and what strategy needs to be applied to achieve the reform objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Amending the House Rules. 			