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Sino'ng Inaakbayan?: An Investigation on How Political Entities Give Rise to Conflict of Interest Within the Policy-Making Decisions of Akbayan Citizens' Action Party

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April 2014

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SINO'NG INAAKBAYAN?:
AN INVESTIGATION ON HOW POLITICAL ENTITIES GIVE RISE
TO CONFLICT OF INTEREST WITHIN THE POLICY-MAKING DECISIONS OF
AKBAYAN CITIZENS' ACTION PARTY

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DEDICATION

To the public
who deserves
a government
that serves their interests,

We dedicate this thesis
hoping that you will be able
to know the truth about people
who should steer the nation
towards a society
where no one
is marginalized

ABSTRACT

Cay, I.D.S. & Nonato, V.A.A.F. (2014). *Sino'ng Inaakbayan?: An Investigation on How Political Entities Give Rise to Conflict of Interest Within the Policy-Making Decisions of Akbayan Citizens' Action Party*. Unpublished Undergraduate Thesis. University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication.

The study probed how certain political entities and interests influenced the policy-making process of Akbayan Citizens' Action Party. Here, the existence of conflict of interest in the party's actions was looked into. Conflict of interest was defined as factors that adversely affect decision-making, such as the opportunity to gain political advantage.

After taking into account the development of Philippine party politics, the study found that coalition-building is not new in the Philippines, especially for small parties like Akbayan that wish to gain more political clout. However, the party is a curious case because it gained undue political advantage in the aftermath of the alliance. Also being the first party-list to be openly supported and endorsed by a president, its members were appointed to several government positions. Moreover, members of the Aquino family and several other unlikely donors gave contributions to the party's campaign in 2010.

By analyzing platforms, the study showed that the party had to make compromises to forward their agenda, which leads to the question of whether the coalition had been useful to their advocacies in the first place. This revealed how the party-list system is too limiting for them to be able to advance their interests and advocacies.

The findings are in a three-part series written in a journalistic manner.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Founded in 1998, Akbayan Citizens' Action Party is a party-list group that has one of the largest memberships nationwide. It also consistently wins seats in Congress as one of the leading candidates in the national elections. Moreover, members of the 16-year-old party have become prominent in the political arena and have gained significant media mileage to press for their advocacies.

Akbayan is part of the party-list system that was conceived to "level the playing field in the elite-dominated legislature," according to Rene Sarmiento, former commissioner of the Commission on Elections (Comelec). In the 2013 general elections, the party ranked fifth with 827,405 votes, based on Comelec's official tally. Two seats in the House of Representatives are currently allotted to the party-list, in proportion to its performance in the elections.

Akbayan's official website said the party was conceived "to institutionalize democracy" after the first People Power Revolution. It identifies itself as a "progressive" group committed to representing various sectors such as labor, peasants, youth, women, gays and lesbians, professionals, overseas Filipino workers and the urban poor. The party explained that it was founded by several groups and individuals including independent socialists, social democrats and unaligned grassroots activists (Moralina, 2011).

Some of Akbayan's members are ex-communists, including those of the Communist Party of the Philippines–New People's Army–National Democratic Front

(CPP-NPA-NDF). Among the party's ex-communist members are Walden Bello, one of its current representatives in Congress, and Joel Rocamora, former Akbayan president.

Although the party-list describes itself as one of the leftist electoral parties, Akbayan has been very critical of the CPP (Moralina, 2011). It has even released statements saying CPP should reassess its role in the progressive movement and that it should not be a "fascist harbinger of violence, hatred and murder" (Bello & Rosales, 2004).

What makes Akbayan stand out from other party-lists is that during the first three years of President Benigno Simeon Aquino III, it has made significant progress in obtaining appointive government positions, going past the elective posts of the House of Representatives. Akbayan is one of the prominent allies of the President when it comes to his legislative agenda, backing his stance on prominent issues and measures such as the reproductive health, agrarian reform, public information and anti-cybercrime bills.

Party-lists have previously been accused of serving as "puppets" to vote for the bills favored by the administration of the previous president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Others have been formed to serve as extensions of ruling political dynasties (Cayabyab & Flores, 2012). Yet, Akbayan is unique in a sense that it is one of the rare self-described principled political parties openly being backed by a ruling administration, as proven by political appointments of its members and public statements it has issued.

The Palace assigned Akbayan members and officers to high positions. These appointees serve in the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Political Affairs National

Anti-Poverty Commission, Commission on Human Rights, Commission on Elections, National Youth Council, Government Service Insurance System.

The Aquino-backed leadership of the House also appointed Arlene “Kaka” Bag-ao, who was then one of Akbayan’s representatives in Congress, as "caretaker" of the lone district of Dinagat Islands when its original representative was charged with graft and parricide. Bag-ao went on to win a seat in the succeeding elections in May 2013 (Casauay, 2013).

The party was also the only party-list group that Aquino endorsed during the May 2013 midterm elections. Aquino (2013) declared:

“Alam niyo kahapon pinakitaan ako ng kaliwa’t kanang text, napakarami ko palang ine-endorsong mga kandidato, at pati Party List. Iisa lang ho ang party-list ko eh. Tinutulungan ko po ang Akbayan (You know, I was presented several text messages yesterday. Apparently, I was endorsing so many candidates and party-lists. [But] I have only one party-list. I am helping Akbayan).”

Earlier, however, in a speech during Akbayan’s 5th Regular Congress, Aquino (2012) said the party does not control him and vice-versa. *“Tama po iyong sinasabing hindi po tangan ng bayan at di niyo ako tangan; tangan tayo ng taumbayan (What you are saying—that you do not control me—is right. The people control us).”*

In the speech, he enumerated the similarities between his and Akbayan's views. Aquino said that even when he was still in Congress, he and Akbayan would always have the same line of thinking.

The party's relationship with the administration was one of the reasons youth group Anakbayan petitioned Comelec to disqualify Akbayan in the 2013 elections. Anakbayan is affiliated with the House of Representatives' Makabayan bloc, composed of party-lists whose political beliefs are in line with the NDF and dismissed by Akbayan as "ultra-left." The group called Akbayan a "fake party-list" and a "lapdog of the Aquino administration," saying the party no longer represents the marginalized and underrepresented since most of its officials are holding posts in the government (Chiu, 2012). The party also received P112 million in campaign contributions during the 2010 elections. However, the petition was eventually junked by Comelec.

Given the unique situation of Akbayan Citizens' Action Party, the study looked into how conflict of interest exists in its policy-making decisions. It looked into how the members' access to political positions and money from campaign contributions influences their actions as an elected party-list.

B. Statement of the Problem and Objectives

This study asked the question, "How do political entities give rise to conflict of interest in the policy-making decisions of Akbayan Citizens' Action Party?" In an attempt to answer this question, the study aimed:

1. To prove that political interests outside of Akbayan's interests influence the policy-making process of members of Akbayan party-list

2. To determine political entities that influence the policy-making decisions of Akbayan
3. To determine if the party really represents the marginalized and underrepresented, as it claims to do
4. To plot the trends surrounding the Akbayan's participation in the government
5. To determine if the party has been consistent in its legislative agenda
6. To know if there is a marked or significant change within the economic, political and ideological structure of Akbayan under different administrations
7. To analyze the phenomenon of coalition building in the Congress, especially in the party-list system, and its effects on the decisions of individuals/parties.

C. Significance of the Study

The press has a watchdog role so it should always hold the government accountable for its actions. A good example of fulfilling this role is watching the independence and integrity of the policy-making process.

Policies are formulated and implemented in order to create social order and to improve the lives of people. Unfortunately, some public officials let personal interests interfere with their service to the public. In fulfilling of the watchdog role of the press, this investigative study hopes to provide one concrete example of impropriety in policy-making.

Questions about the integrity of Akbayan party-list have been raised. News reports mention the Aquinos' multimillion-peso campaign contributions to Akbayan during recent elections, the President's appointment of party members to high government positions, and measures supported by Akbayan that are opposed by other leftist political organizations.

It is important to note that Akbayan was a vocal member of the minority bloc under the Arroyo administration, which is why a study on what shapes its political decisions was relevant. Studying this phenomenon also provided a way to learn the factors and processes that affect the dynamics of a political party over time.

The contribution of Aquino allies to Akbayan's recent political maneuvers not only puts its status as a "marginalized" party-list put into question, but may also shed light on how members of the party have managed to obtain significant appointive government positions. Yet, a study on how this impacts the party's policy-making processes had yet to be made.

This study hoped to scrutinize what shaped the party's policy-making decisions. Ultimately, it delved deeper into reports saying the legislative decisions made by the party-list are imbued with compromises in the name of coalition-building.

This study went beyond "he said, she said" reporting, or journalism of assertion, by finding out if conflict of interest really exists in the work of a group that is supposed to represent the marginalized and underrepresented in an elite-dominated congressional system.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Formulating public policies is a major task of the government. A policy is a decision that implies and requires intended action. It is a “set of directives from political and administrative authorities or policy-makers” which are meant to achieve certain goals (Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, 2004). More often than not, public policies aim to solve existing or anticipated problems.

The importance of this function of the government is the reason for the abundant literature written on policy-making process and policy discourse. In a democratic republic like the Philippines, one of the major sources of public policies is the legislature.

Former senator Jovito Salonga (1989) said legislation can articulate needs and wants and provide for the ways in which people could fill these desires. For him, legislation serves a “higher purpose.” As representatives of the people, legislators have the responsibility to give the “most conscientious service in the public interest,” Salonga said.

A number of investigative reports and research projects have been done on the legislature. These studies concluded that the legislative branch has not been exactly what people envisioned it to be.

In 2004, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism published a book detailing how the wealthy and well-born dominate the Philippine Congress. Coronel et al. (2004) said the book’s findings were “troubling, but hardly new.” Overall, legislators in this country do not really represent their largely impoverished constituents but come instead from an exclusive segment of the society. They are richer, older, better connected

and better educated, coming from influential families who have already been leaders of the government for generations. The book also established that the so-called representatives of the people do not really fulfill their mandate to represent their constituents. In short, the Congress of the rich and well-connected makes the laws of a poor nation (Coronel et al., 2004).

Problematizing this aspect, Eric Gutierrez wrote in a similar book in 1994:

“Because only few representatives come from non-propertied social sectors, the interests of the lower social strata are seldom articulated and the wills of the propertied rich often prevails. The best example of this [was the] agrarian reform debates in 1987 and 1988, when the landlord majority in the House watered down a bill that provided for large-scale land redistribution.”

Due to these characteristics of the lawmakers, their performance is put into the spotlight. They are seen as the “elite body that defends the interests of the wealthy and the powerful while occasionally being open to demands from below” (Coronel et al., 2004). The composition of policy makers affects the performance of their duties, most especially their formation of public policies.

Government officials have the tendency to lean toward a rent-seeking behavior, wrote political scientists Kenneth N. Bickers and John T. Williams (2001) in their book, *Public Policy Analysis: A Political Economy Approach*. Rent-seeking occurs when organized groups “colonize a government bureau” so that it will promote the interests of a certain set of people at the expense of the public.

This notion assumes that the mere possibility of transfers of resources would attract rent-seeking and rent protection among lobbyists, interest groups, stakeholders and even the politicians who ran for Congress seats (Rowley, 1988).

The process of rent-seeking implies the existence of conflict of interest in the policy-making process. In the Philippine context, PCIJ's book supported this assumption when it said the congressional record is swamped with legislators using their positions to protect their interests and those of their friends (Coronel et al., 2004).

Journalists in the Philippines have written extensively about instances of conflict of interest arising in policy-making. For instance, vested interests were at work in the passage of the Biofuels Act of 2006 (Republic Act 9367). An undergraduate thesis by Jessica Hermosa and Johanna Sisante in 2008, excerpts of which were published in news outlets, found that the authors of the law owned assets or had affiliations that would benefit from it. The fast-tracking of the process resulted in a law that serves the landed elite in the Congress, instead of the people.

The party-list system was conceived in 1986 as a means to address this problem during the nascent stage of the post-Martial Law era. The system of proportional representation allocated seats not only to district representatives but also to party-list groups, who would have the privilege of sending as many representatives as the votes they garner would allow.

Article VI, Section 5 of the 1987 Constitution first provided for the formation of such a system by reserving congressional seats for representatives who "as provided by law, shall be elected through a party-list system of registered national, regional, and

sectoral parties or organizations.” Eventually, an enabling law called the Party-List System Act of 1995 was passed, and the first elections for party-list representatives were held in 1998.

A landmark ruling in 2001 by the Supreme Court penned by then-Associate Justice Artemio Panganiban (*Ang Bagong Bayani v. Comelec*) described the party-list system as a “social justice tool designed not only to give more law to the great masses of our people who have less in life, but also to enable them to become veritable lawmakers themselves, empowered to participate directly in the enactment of laws designed to benefit them.” By virtue of this ruling, party-lists were compelled and expected to represent the “marginalized” sectors, as a way of ensuring that such a mechanism would reach its aims.

Prior to the actual allocation of party-list seats in 1998, Gutierrez (1994) argued that “often self-interest, not party platforms or programs of government, determine[s] individual representatives' choice of a political party” (1994). Arguably, the party-list system would have addressed the problem, in a sense that it is the party that would be seated in the Congress and not the individuals.

“The absence of an intermediary level between citizens and state allows for a greater degree of arbitrariness, personality-based politics, political turncoatism, and the dominance of economic and financial power of individual political actors,” wrote Mirko Herberg in the foreword to the 2009 booklet, *Reforming the Philippine Political Party System*.

With the lack of a proper party-driven political system, representatives end up as “lobbyists for their constituencies, but only insofar as they fight for the appropriation of national government funds for their district,” Gutierrez said. Members of the Congress “seldom take interest in matters of national interest, opting to leave the decision making on these issues to the House or party leadership,” he said. The party-list system would have removed sectoral representatives from the rigors of having to attend to such “particularistic demands.”

However, Coronel et al. (2004) said that although representatives from the marginalized sectors have been given seats in the Congress, the character of the legislature still remains unchanged.

This system of proportional representation was initially supposed to “level the playing field in the elite-dominated legislature” and “open the political arena to ‘sectors or groups that have a national constituency, without specific reference to the marginalized and underrepresented sectors,’” according to Rene Sarmiento, a former member of the Commission on Elections. In 1995, the Party-List System Act stated that the groups were reserved Congress seats to represent the so-called “marginalized” groups.

What was still unresolved back then was whether the representatives or members of the party-list groups themselves should also belong to the “marginalized” sector (hence, they should be making income or holding government positions amounting to “marginalized” levels). Some of the Comelec commissioners believed that being an advocate for that sector suffices (Cayabyab & Flores, 2012).

The question was answered by a Supreme Court ruling in April 2013, which said that “it is sufficient that the political party consists of citizens who advocate the same ideology or platform, or the same governance principles and policies regardless of their economic status as citizens.”

Before the question became moot with the 2013 ruling, the Akbayan Citizens' Action Party and several other seated party-list groups faced cases that would have disqualified them from running again in the 2013 polls. The petitions sought to have their qualifications revoked, mostly because they were believed not to meet the criteria of representing the “marginalized” sector.

Akbayan, which hails from the democratic socialist tradition, had been described as “the locus of intersection by which peoples' movements, reformist political groups and civil society assemblages converge and participate” (Juliano, 2013). It was different in a sense that, while it can claim to be a multi-sectoral political party, it has received significant backlash from different election observers that question whether it can still claim to be marginalized, after the developments that occurred since the 2010 election of President Benigno S. Aquino.

Two petitions were filed on separate occasions against the party—one by youth group Anakbayan, the other by Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan), election watchdog Kontra Daya and Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Oscar Cruz. Comelec, however, allowed Akbayan to run, on the basis of the party’s “long track record in representing the marginalized... seen in the bills and laws passed in Congress” (Cayabyab, 2012).

Akbayan also entered into an alliance with the Liberal Party in 2010 to support Aquino's presidential candidacy, and former party-list representative Risa Hontiveros was a guest candidate in the "Team PNoy" senatorial slate for that and the succeeding election. That year, Akbayan fared slightly better in the elections, ranking fourth with 1,061,947 votes (Esmaguél, 2012). However, Aquino was quick to clarify that he neither controls the party nor does the party control him (Bordadora, 2012).

Other individuals and groups have been noticing the President's close ties with the party-list. In 2012, Former Chief Justice Renato Corona accused Akbayan and Aquino of conspiring to impeach him. Corona said the party-list was holding Aquino "by the neck" (Bordadora, 2012).

Other leftist groups like Bayan, Anakbayan and party-list Bayan Muna also made similar remarks about the relationship of Akbayan with the president. Vencer Crisostomo, national chairman of Anakbayan, said with the coalition formed by Akbayan and the Liberal Party in the 2013 midterm elections, "Akbayan is not just Aquino's favorite party-list but their leaders are practically interchangeable."

During the prelude to the 2013 elections, Bayan secretary-general Renato Reyes remarked that "Akbayan is a party in power." He also accused the party of using the government's resources to boost their party. He further said the actions of the party speak of undue and unfair advantage over those who are "truly marginalized and voiceless" (Esmaguél, 2012).

Several groups questioned the generous campaign contributions that Akbayan received from the President's immediate family, supposedly highlighting the party's close

ties with the Aquinos. Reyes said the financial contributions of the Aquino family to Akbayan's campaign showed that it is the president's "favored party-list" group and that it is "utterly beholden" to him (Tubeza, 2012). This evokes an observation Gutierrez made in 1994 that "many wealthy families also tend to back politicians they can trust to protect their interests."

No less than the President defended the contributions that the party-list was receiving (Ubac, 2012). "[Just because] you're a marginal party, or a party ... representing a marginalized sector, you're not entitled to have supporters? How does a political party exist without supporters?" he told reporters. "They are allied to us but it doesn't make them any less of representative of marginalized sectors."

Aquino does not deny his ties with the party-list. In fact, while speaking in Akbayan's fifth regular Congress, the President confirmed his close relationship with the party-list (Bordadora, 2012). "I and the members of Akbayan think alike," he said. Aquino cited the time his political party—the Liberal Party—and Akbayan helped each other oppose the previous administration, headed by Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

While the party was known for being a staunch opponent of Arroyo's government, it should be noted that Akbayan publicly defends the Aquino administration's actions most of the time.

After a series of budget cuts in 2011, student groups coined the then-memetic term "Noynoying," to ridicule how the President seemed to be sleeping on the job. NAPC appointee Rocamora responded by saying: "They see reforms as obstacles to the realization of their illusory revolution. But they cannot oppose specific reforms with

massive public support” (Reyes, 2012). Members of the party-list see the groups’ opposition as borne out of the ideological divide between different factions of the Philippine Left.

In the same vein, Crisostomo cited several issues that showed Akbayan’s “clear pro-admin stance” (Anakbayan, 2012), specifically its support for several controversial measures such as the Cybercrime Law (“even going as far as to call it ‘only partially repressive’”), the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms, and budget cuts to social services like state universities and colleges. Crisostomo also hit the party’s “refusal to condemn human rights violations by the military” and “silence on other burning issues.”

“In the first place, how can they call themselves ‘Leftist’ when they are supporters of the status quo? When their track record screams ‘pro-administration?’” Crisostomo said. “What difference does Akbayan have with the Gloria Arroyo-backed party-list groups of 2007? They both claim to be ‘representative of the marginalized,’ but their real objective is to provide Congressional foot soldiers for their respective administrations’ agendas.”

It has to be noted, however, that Bayan Muna – which belongs to the Makabayan bloc – supported Arroyo’s People Power coalition during the 2001 elections, in opposition to former President Joseph Estrada (Burgos, 2001). Also, the Makabayan bloc supported Manuel Villar’s presidential bid in 2010. According to a joint statement, Satur Ocampo and Liza Maza – both senatorial candidates in 2010 – said they joined the alliance because of Villar’s “positive response” to the people’s issues. Also, they said the

Nacionalista Party's standard bearer showed his "openness to work with progressive forces in pursuing meaningful reforms."

The bickering between the parties is hardly new. Gutierrez said in 1994: "An interesting finding is that members of the 'progressive bloc' are spread out across the different categories [of power and wealth]. This is because members of the bloc think along intellectual rather than class lines in their espousal of progressive causes. Such class diversity, however, may be a weakness as varied class backgrounds could make consensus within the bloc more difficult."

This alliance with the administration evokes Gutierrez's observation in 1994 about other members of the House of Representatives. He quoted political scientist Alexander Magno as saying that "access to the top more than control of small grassroots constituencies" determined who would "control important government posts." During the Martial Law period, it became apparent that currying the favor of the President is important to level up in the political arena, as evidenced by new political families propped up by Jose Aspiras of La Union, Faustino Dy of Isabela, and Crisologo Abines of Cebu.

Similar research linking political connections to actual legislative and political output have been put out in the past. In 2012, Cayabyab and Flores established in their published undergraduate thesis that several party-list representatives are members of prominent political families or are previously elected in other executive or legislative posts. Some also own large companies. "This is making a mockery of the party-list system. This has to end," Sarmiento told Cayabyab and Flores.

Staunch opponents of this alliance have argued that such compromises have already started taking place. “Akbayan has only managed to sustain its progressive pretensions by using reformist rhetoric and by issuing customary press statements feigning opposition to some government actions while remaining utterly subservient to its Malacanang backers,” observed political blogger Karlo Mongaya (2012).

“But the track record of Akbayan would show a complete absence of spine and strong opposition whenever these platforms they purport to advocate are threatened by the anti-people policies of the Aquino regime,” he added. “For a so-called ‘leftwing’ party, it is exceptional for its deafening silence on the standard issues of the day.”

“The leadership of the party, which prioritizes winning electoral positions and getting their stalwarts appointed in bureaucratic offices, appears to deviate from the aforementioned intent of their allied social movements to address the socio-political issues they carry. The party leadership, their allied movements and their members vary in the priority they give to the importance of government-based tactics to address such issues,” said Hansley Juliano (2013) in a paper detailing the tensions in the party. “These tensions could explain why, despite their seemingly-stabilized presence in national politics, Akbayan’s capacity to effect change remains challenged in the context of a dynamically-evolving status quo of patronage politics in the country to date.”

Based on these related literature, it was established that the law-making process in the Philippines is influenced by several factors. Books and dissertations about the integrity of the lawmakers have been put out. These automatically cast doubt on the policies that these elected representatives formulate. Furthermore, as what has been

showed by the investigative studies on the biofuel policies of the country, conflict of interest exists in the process of formulating laws.

Many published articles have also questioned the independence and credibility of Akbayan. They have presented evidence such as the Aquino family's campaign contributions, the appointment of several of the party's members to key positions in the government and their stand on issues.

Though many different sides have expressed their two cents—support and opposition—about the party, it is important to note that there is still a lack of deeper research on the matter. Commenting on how it is to study such political phenomena, Gutierrez warns that “plumbing motives brings us to the realm of speculation. There is therefore a need for measurable indicators for understanding the dynamics of the House” (1994). There has been no previous research done to prove that there really is a conflict of interest in Akbayan's policy-making processes and it has been affecting the laws that they pass and the decisions that they make.

Indeed, there are several works that deepen the understanding of representative politics and the party-list system in the country. From the related studies, books and articles that were reviewed, one general observation is the fact that the legislative system has become a turf of the wealthy, powerful and the well-born, leaving little or no space for the underrepresented in the Philippine society. This observation goes on to apply to the party-list system which was supposedly devised to correct the errors of the status quo. However, it seems as if this might not be the case.

Akbayan Citizens' Action Party exists in this kind of system. Numerous related works also cast doubt on its integrity and its mission of representing the marginalized and underrepresented. However, these are limited to reporting the biggest campaign donors of the party or "he said, she said" reporting of what other party-lists have been saying. Based on research, the gap in the existing literature existed in the lack of actual proof that integrity and independence of Akbayan has been compromised.

III. STUDY FRAMEWORK

A. Theoretical Level

This study, which probed the existence of conflict of interest in the policy-making decisions of Akbayan Citizens' Action Party-list, required theories on politics, economy, political representation and mass media. Hence, the following theories were used as basis for the study.

1. *Hegemony*

Antonio Gramsci's theory on hegemony (1971) views culture as an integral part of the political arena. Aspects such as pervading notions of morality and responsibility provide the situational context where certain political and historical activities are grounded. Culture, through the "related notions of... force and consent," reinforces and makes resilient the political—and ultimately, the societal—order.

Political rule is stabilized through legitimizing myths and ideologies. For factions to be part of the political elite, it either has to co-opt the aspects of the dominant "cultural function" or else, overthrow it by creating a "new" one.

In the Gramscian view, political parties are an "expression of a social group," in which blocs are created to represent the interests of a certain people and "cement" their relations between it and the groups that represent them (10). Alliances are products of the "recognition of common interests, common values, as well as the generation of an encompassing discourse and narrative." Hegemony is ultimately a description of the process where interests are articulated and aggregated (84-5).

Also according to Gramsci, subaltern classes are those subordinated by hegemony. They are excluded in meaningful roles within a regime of power. Hence, they are not allowed to speak or to contribute. The only way when they can be unified is when they are able to become a “State.”

Among these subaltern groups, one will inevitably exercise control. Gramsci said this supremacy manifests in two ways” “domination” and “intellectual and moral leadership.” The former entails violence and coercion, while the latter is concerned with leadership and consent. This study will more concerned with the second type of supremacy, the one with the elements of consent and willing subjugation.

2. Pitkin's Views on Political Representation

Hanna Fenichel Pitkin offered one of the most comprehensive discussions of political representation (Dovi, 2011). Her book, *The Concept of Representation*, discussed various ways in which political representation may be viewed in order to fully grasp the concept. Pitkin (1967) said “political representation means acting on the interest of the represented in a manner responsive to them.”

However, Pitkin did not neglect the fact that there are different perspectives on political representation which affect the way it is generally understood. Basically, she posited that people value their claim to have a say on certain matters when they are being represented. But when the representative is a member of the elite, he or she is likely to feel the need consult the opinions or wishes of the represented. On the other hand, when the representative and the represented are viewed as equal, the more the former is required to consider the views of the latter.

Furthermore, Pitkin said the extent to which a representative pursues the interests of his her constituents, is discussed by substantive representation. “If the legislator represents his constituency, the substantive ‘acting for’ view suggests that he must pursue its interest.”

When it breaks down, the nation falls to descriptive representation where the people choose a representative who shares the same values and beliefs with his/her constituents (Pitkin, 1967).

This view focuses on whether the public officials and their constituents share common interests and common experiences. Failing that, the people retreat to symbolic representation where representatives are evaluated by the degree of acceptance they have among the people they are representing (Dovi, 2011).

“Failing even that” Pitkin said, “we can cling to our formal and institutional representative arrangements even when they seem devoid of substantive content.” Formalistic representation tackles institutional arrangements that precede representation. Having two dimensions—namely, authorization and accountability—this view is concerned with the process by which representatives obtain their positions and the ability of the constituents to sanction officials for failing to deliver what the people want (Dovi, 2011).

3. *Public Choice Theory*

Public choice explains how economics applies to the analysis of political behavior. It says that like the economic model of rational behaviour, people are immensely guided by their self-interests. (Shughart, 2008) Hence, people in the political

sphere are no different when it comes to actors in the market. They promote their personal gain over that of the public when it comes to formulating public policies.

In the legislature, public choice states that most of the political decisions are made not by the citizenry but by public officials who were elected to represent them in legislative assemblies (Shughart, 2008). Small, homogenous groups with strong interests and resources tend to exert more political pressure. Public choice states that this kind of system is enabled by a “rational-voter ignorance” about the negative effects of these legislative decisions on their well-being.

Synthesis

These three theories helped provide a theoretical background to this investigative report, which was a case study that portrayed these theories in the flesh. These not only grounded the study with previously formulated and tested theories but also illustrated the larger context that surrounded the phenomenon being tackled.

As noted by Pitkins' theory, political representation works with certain political entities at the core to represent, in an ideal situation, the interests of the people who they are elected, chosen or appointed to lead. In essence, the government is the biggest manifestation of this concept of political representation in that it is the system that acts in accordance to the wishes of the public by leading them and providing for their welfare.

However, as shown by the public choice theory, individuals in the system of political representation do not always choose the option that is favorable to the public. Political and economic interests will exert significant influence on a political entity, and while the people are supposed to expect these entities to govern in their favor, ultimately,

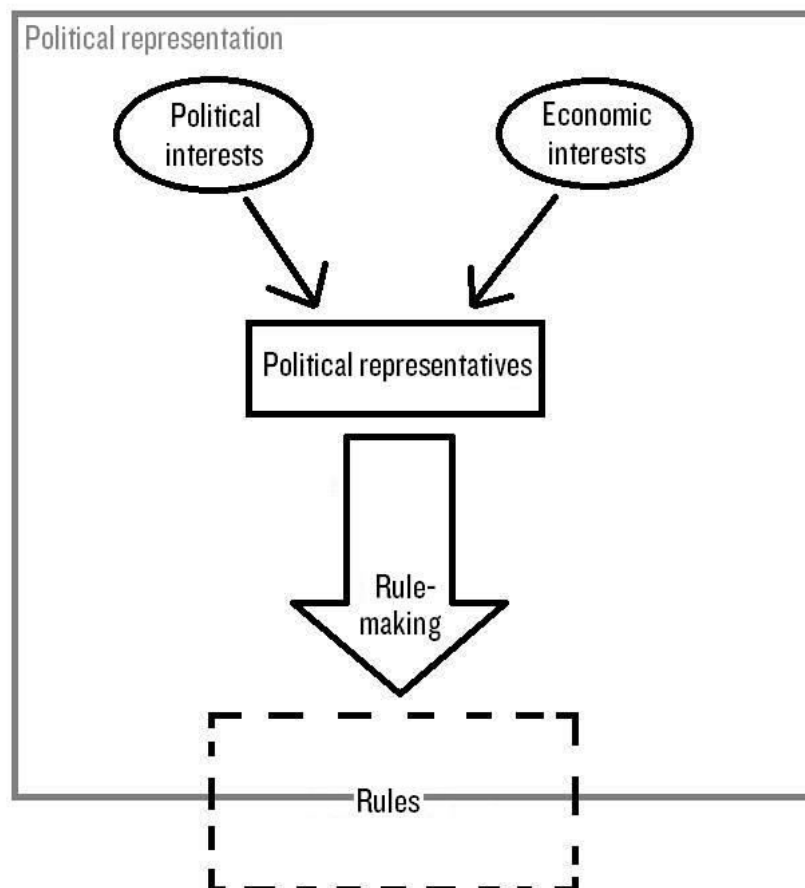
the decisions are made by the very individuals themselves. Political pressure by vocal groups and opportunities to gain more ground serve as such influences. In the end, what they choose ends up as the public policy governing the people, unless they exert enough pressure to sway the political entities in their favor.

People in power, however, would certainly like to be the ones to pressure the political entities to choose in their favor. People in power, as stated by the theory on hegemony, will choose to have their powers perpetuated or even expanded. Since they already have the advantage in terms of economic and political clout, they will be able to curry the political entities' favor without much opposition.

Hence, the political entities fail to uphold their duties as representatives of the people. The public policy they create fall outside the bounds of what it means to be truly representative of their constituencies.

The following theoretical framework model illustrates the relation between political and economic interests and the decisions political entities make as representatives of the public or certain sectors of it. It was partly based on the models made by Cayabyab and Flores as part of their study on the party-list system, and also of Hernandez and Sisante as part of their study on the conflict of interest present in the making of the Biofuels Act of 2006.

Figure 1. *The Theoretical Framework*



B. Conceptual Level

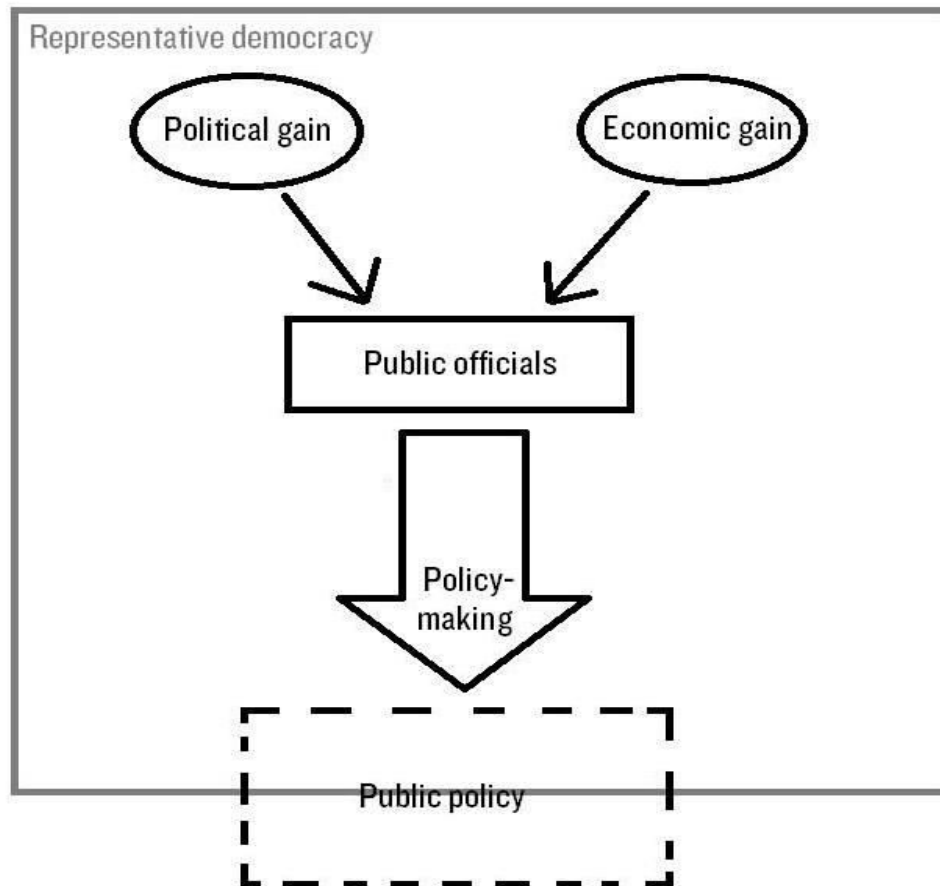
Several factors affect the interests and actions of lawmakers. Particularly, political interests influence the lawmakers who are supposed to make laws which would benefit the people. However, as stated by hegemony and public choice theories, lawmakers are driven by their own interests.

The intervening variable is the process of formulating public policies. This process is dependent on political conditions and on the way the intentions of the policies

are framed by the legislators. The results of the intervention of the political gains in the process of passing legislations are the laws themselves.

All these are enclosed in a general system of representative democracy. There are several ways on how political representation can be viewed, as illustrated by the Pitkin's four views of political representation. Public officials are the people who were elected to government positions. They have the duty to represent their constituents in formulating the laws of the land. However, the model shows that the actions of these representatives are highly influenced by how they are able to represent the public and their interests. Eventually, these actions will reflect on the kind of decisions and laws that they will be making.

Figure 2. *The Conceptual Framework*



C. Operational Level

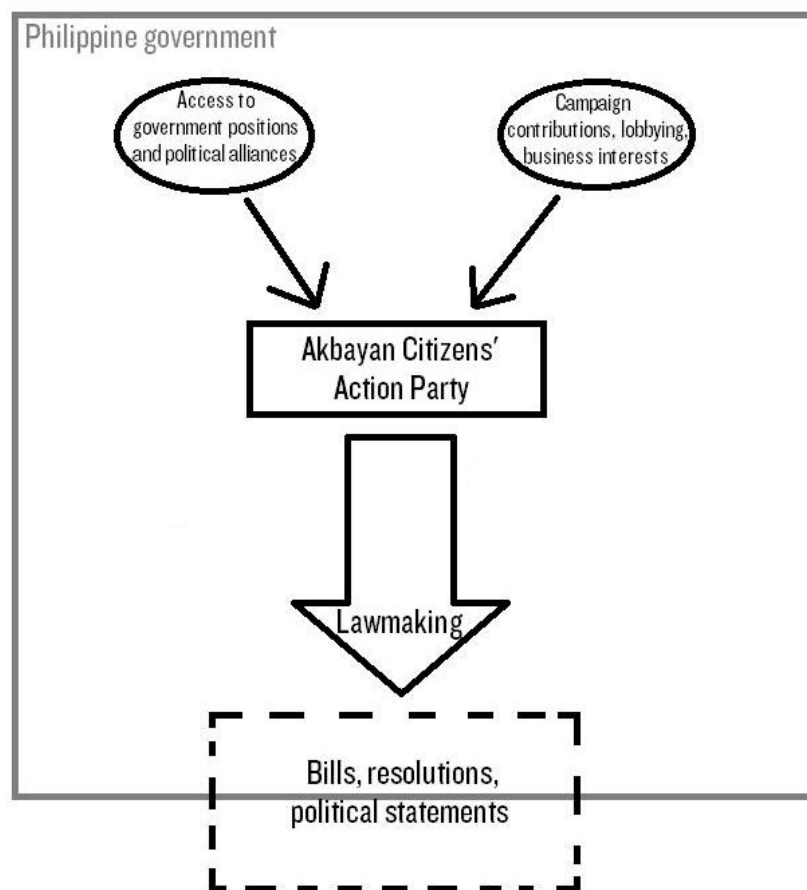
The process through which the constituents are represented by their respective congressmen is explained by Pitkin's forms of representation. In this study's model, public policies drafted by Akbayan Citizens' Action Party are assumed to be the end product of the different forms of representation as formulated by Pitkin. The bills and resolutions, along with political statements, may be assessed to see if it reflects public interest.

However, to get to the final product of the legislative process, it is deemed important to explain what brought about the result. As explained by public choice theory, expected political gains influence policy makers' decisions; conflict of interest may be present in the process.

To illustrate that phenomenon, the study sought to tackle which political entities got involved with Akbayan. "Political gain" may be determined by assessing the possible forward movement exhibited by the party in the political arena, such as political support, appointments to significant government positions and electoral gains. Coalition-building is one of the most tangible determinants of political benefits.

To gauge if Akbayan's political maneuvers have been effective, it was important to plot their political stand vis-a-vis that of its partners in coalition-building. Those are objective conditions that may interfere with the process of lawmaking and policy-making.

Figure 3. *The Operational Framework*



D. Definition of Terms

Conflict of interest: Factors that may be affect decision-making in a way that may be susceptible to influence such as the desire for political advancement.

Party-list: A group elected through the system of proportional representation which was created to give voice to the marginalized and underrepresented sectors of the Philippine society.

Policy-making decisions: The passing of judgment on issues manifested through political statements released, resolutions created, bills filed and laws passed.

Political entities: Individuals or group of individuals who hold significant political power and may be elected or appointed government officials. Political entities outside the government can take the form of political parties or lobbyists.

Political gain: Benefits that can be obtained through the political process, taking the form of political support, such as access to government positions and political alliances, as well as endorsements and declarations of support.

Political interests: Interests that are possessed or can be obtained by policy-makers, taking the form of government positions or political support, especially during elections and coalition-building.

Political support: Takes the form of publicly declared support or informal alliances during elections. It can also manifest in the support given in the process of policy-making, by voting or publicly declaring support in favor or against certain measures as needed.

Public policy: Fundamental policies that govern the land. These basic principles guide the state in guarding the welfare of its citizens primarily through laws or legislations.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design and Methods

This study aimed to find if there is conflict of interest in the decision-making process of Akbayan Citizens' Action Party. Conflict of interest was viewed in terms of the influence of access to government positions and other political advantages to the decisions made by the members of the party-list.

The study took on an investigative format. University of Missouri's Steve Weinberg (1996) described investigative journalism as "reporting, through one's own initiative and work product, matters of importance to readers, viewers, or listeners." The study was presented in a format accessible for popular audiences in the form of journalistic writing. The research was made rigorous through the process of triangulating—where documents were checked against other documents (both primary and secondary) and multiple interviews that shed light and made sense of what was written.

Impropriety as well as failure to represent the marginalized and underrepresented in the process of formulating laws was investigated through methods such as textual analysis of bills, resolutions and political statements passed or issued by the party.

The study used quantitative, qualitative and investigative approaches. Qualitative research helped make sense of "unstructured data" such as legislative measures, which were not composed of quantifiable statistics. Even hard, numerical data such as declarations of electoral expenditure, were analyzed by checking against other documents

and information that were not numerical in form, necessitating a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Quantitative methods, on the other hand, helped in analyzing the bills filed and laws passed by the party. As part of textual analysis, a template or matrix was used to determine which bills have undergone conflict of interest or reflect changes in the decision-making processes of Akbayan.

Techniques of data journalism were also employed in making sense of data such as budget of government agencies where Akbayan appointees are serving and the Priority Development Assistance Fund of party-list groups.

This study also applied archival research—the location, extraction and evaluation of information from archival records. This method was used in analyzing records of the party to be able to know more about their history in the Congress and their actions during the past administrations. Archival research also helped the researchers find out if there really were differences in how the members of the party act, think and decide over the years.

B. Concepts and Indicators

The independent variable of the study would be the political gains that influenced Akbayan's policy-making decisions. These were determined by gathering government-sourced documents.

The political gains were evaluated by the benefits that Akbayan was able to attain, such as government positions given to party members. Another factor was the alliances Akbayan made with other major political coalitions; such acts are actually prohibited

under the Party-List Act of 1995. These factors denoted conflict of interest, which could interfere with the legislator's purpose of representing their constituents.

The intervening variable, meanwhile, were the objective conditions that affected the process of legislation itself. Political conditions—such as the formation of coalitions and the priorities of the President— were among those conditions that either supported or went against Akbayan's maneuvers.

The independent and intervening variables resulted in the dependent variable: the policy decisions effected and affected by Akbayan. These were determined by the congressional bills and resolutions the party authored or supported, along with political statements that detail the party's plans and promises. By comparing their declared agenda with the actual output, the study determined the authenticity of the party's representation, which is susceptible to influences from the independent and intervening variables detailed above. Such legal outputs were seen as products that result from the legislative process, which may or may not have been influenced by factors that denote conflict of interest.

C. Data Gathering

As the study was a longform journalistic process, rigorous sourcing from documents and interviews was exercised. The research involved government data and documents, as well as the statements of people involved with the party's affairs.

The researchers approached the following government agencies for vital data:

- Commission on Elections

- House of Representatives
- Securities and Exchange Commission
- Department of Budget and Management

Table 1. *Paper Trail*

Document	Custodian	Purpose
Statement Election Contributions and Expenditures (SECE)	Commission on Elections	To be able to identify the individuals or people who contributed to Akbayan's campaign. This served as a guide in determining the people who may have influenced the actions of the party.
Bills filed and laws passed (including different revisions, along with transcripts of congressional discussions)	House of Representatives	To keep track of the sectors and issues they have been focusing on
Political statements	Office of the President, House of Representatives, Akbayan and news organizations	To know their stand on issues and determine the extent of political support expressed by different political entities.
Resolutions	House of Representatives	To keep track of the sectors and issues they have been focusing on.
Organizational profile of Akbayan Citizens' Action Party	Akbayan	To know the complete and official list of the party's officers and identify the people in charge of the party's decision-making.

Budget of government agencies headed by Akbayan members	Department of Budget and Management	To determine if there were significant changes in the agencies' budget since the start of the Aquino administration and the leadership of Akbayan members
Priority Development Assistance Fund allocation of Akbayan and other party-lists	Department of Budget and Management	<p>To be able to know how much pork barrel the party has been getting under the Aquino administration compared to other party-lists.</p> <p>To determine if they are favoured in terms of allocations just because they are the "party in power."</p>

Aside from government documents, the researchers interviewed key informants to extract statements which offered interpretations and provided information otherwise not found in hard data.

The following people were interviewed (arranged according to date of interview):

- Ramon Casiple, political analyst from the Institute of Political and Electoral Reforms (December 9, 2013)
- Rene Sarmiento, former commissioner of Commission on Elections (December 12, 2013)
- Neri Colmenares, representative of Bayan Muna in Congress (December 17, 2013)

- Christian Monsod, former chairman of Commission on Elections and main sponsor of the party-list system (December 18, 2013)
- Oscar Cruz, Archbishop Emeritus (January 21, 2014)
- Gibby Gorres, member of Akbayan Youth and Youth and sectoral representative of National Anti-Poverty Commission (January 21, 2014)
- Lucenito Tagle, commissioner of Commission on Elections (January 22, 2014)
- Paula Bianca Lapuz, former member of Akbayan Youth (January 22, 2014)
- Julio Teehankee, member of Liberal Party think tank, National Institute of Policy Studies (February 11, 2014)
- Joel Rocamora, secretary of National Anti-Poverty Commission (February 12, 2014)
- Walden Bello, representative of Akbayan in Congress (February 20, 2014)
- Loretta Ann Rosales, member of Akbayan and Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights (February 24, 2014)
- Ibarra Gutierrez, representative of Akbayan in Congress (March 4, 2014)
- Ana Theresia Hontiveros, chairperson of Akbayan (March 7, 2014)
- Emmanuel Hizon, deputy secretary general of Akbayan (March 19, 2014)

Meanwhile, the following charts the central questions and issues raised to the different sources who were able to show the different sides of the issue.

Table 2. *Interview Guide*

Independent	Anti	Akbayan	
		Disgruntled Members	Key Officers/Members
Characteristics of the party-list system. Why do party-lists/other legislators ally with larger political figures or groups?	Main reasons why they are critical of Akbayan	Descriptions of the decision-making process of the party	Main thrust of Akbayan
Aim of the party-list system (ideal situation)	General observations about the party	Powerful members of the party (who gets to decide what)	Issues it has been trying to focus on over the years
Views on some people's assertions that party-list representatives must come from the sector they are claiming to represent	Recommendations (for the party, the government in general)	Main problems or issues that the party has to contend with	How the party developed over the years, in terms of decision-making, formulation of policies, representation
The degree of acceptance when it comes to compromises within coalitions		Truth behind the allegations that the Aquino family (and other political entities) influence the decisions of the party	Comment or reaction on the accusation of other people that Akbayan is not a legitimate party-list, that it does not represent the marginalized

Observations on Liberal Party's and President Aquino's influence on Akbayan's political actions and decisions		Reason why the party had to enter the alliance with the Liberal Party and endorse Aquino, in the first place	Why the Aquino family is the party's biggest donor. Doesn't it cast doubt on their integrity?
How the party developed over the years, in terms of decision-making, formulation of policies, representation		People or groups who expressed opposition or discomfort regarding this alliance	Describe the process of decision-making inside the party
		Assessment of the justification of the party's decision to enter the coalition given the gains that it obtained	Why there was a need for the party to ally with the Liberal Party and to endorse Aquino as the presidential candidate
		Difference in the party's actions and stand on issues before and after the alliance was formed	Gains that Akbayan got from this alliance. Are these enough to justify the decision to coalesce?

D. Data Analysis

House bills, resolutions and political statements filed or issued by Akbayan were classified into different issues that each is trying to respond to. These documents were

narrowed into a few pertinent issues that were vital to the study. The significant information that the study tried to determine is the existence of trends in Akbayan's focus when it comes to legislation. This was compared to the administration's political agenda and its stand on different issues to see if they have similarities.

It was also important to use their bills, resolutions and political statements in seeing if they have been consistent with their party's political platform and what they claim to stand for during their first years in Congress.

Also, the party's Statements of Election Contributions and Expenditures were examined to identify the campaign contributors of the party-list. They were profiled to see if they have affected the legislative decisions of the party in any way.

The following table was the template used to classify and analyze the resolutions, bills filed and laws passed.

Table 3. *Classification of Bills, Laws, Resolutions*

No.	Title of Resolution/ Bill	Date Filed	Significance	Issue	Committee	Bill Status	Enacted as Law? What law?

The data from all these documents were supplemented by interviews with Akbayan members and constituents, critics and political experts. Their statements explained the special relationships of Akbayan to the Aquino family and the Aquino administration in the context of the goals of the party-list system.

E. Scope and Limitations

This study sought to prove conflict of interest in the law-making process of Akbayan Citizens' Action Party-list. The investigation started from the formal establishment of the party in 1998. It was also the year when the party first won seats in the House of Representatives.

The research focused on their performance in the legislative and executive realms. It looked into their relationship with the current administration, campaign contributions and political interests. Also, the study focused on the Statements of Election Contributions and Expenditures, statements, bills and resolutions issued or passed by Akbayan.

It also included background investigation on the representatives of the party-list. The personal involvements of the Akbayan representatives could have had influences on their actions as legislators.

The research did not include House bills and resolutions which the party-list representatives only co-authored. Although the study utilized the bills and resolutions filed by members of Akbayan during every term they serve, the analysis was limited to the versions they submit. Even if similar measures were filed at the same time (and ultimately consolidated in some cases) as the ones by Akbayan, the study only analyzed the similarities, differences and developments through the use of committee hearing transcripts, where all such measures are discussed.

F. The Researchers

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J 199 – Research in Journalism

Political Science 14 – Philippine Politics and Government

He is currently a correspondent for VERA Files. He also worked as an intern for VERA Files in 2013.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A marriage of strange bedfellows

For the sake of reforms, Akbayan gets involved in traditional politics

(First of three parts)

In 2007, the party-list group Akbayan Citizens' Action Party campaigned for the disqualification of other party-list groups allegedly backed by then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. For two of its key members Loretta Ann Rosales and Joel Rocamora, government interference weakens and undermines the party-list system when it should be strengthened to allow marginalized voices to be heard in Congress.

“We welcome pluralism but the accreditation of dubious and administration-backed groups to run under the party-list system makes a mockery of the law and the reasons for which the system was created in the first place,” Rosales said in an article on her official website in 2007.

Two years later, however, Akbayan found itself on the opposite side of the fence after striking an alliance with the Liberal Party, one the oldest major political parties in the country, whose members had been at the forefront of a number of policies that the party-list have been opposing over the years.

Many members of the Liberal Party come from the richest and most powerful clans in the country, while Akbayan had mostly served in the party-list system, where groups representing so-called “marginalized” sectors had competed since its formation in 1998.

In the latter half of the last decade, Former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was mired in numerous controversies. Some of these were the NBN-ZTE bribery scandal

and the alleged rigging of the 2004 elections – which eventually came to be known as the *Hello Garci* scandal.

Capitalizing on anti-Arroyo sentiments, Akbayan announced its support for LP—which, like the party-list, was also part of the opposition then—and its standard bearer, Benigno Aquino III, in 2009.

As a result of this coalition, the party has been able to expand to government agencies outside the legislature, when Aquino appointed several key members to high government positions in the aftermath of his coalition’s victory in the 2010 elections.

This, however, did not come without a price. Akbayan had to compromise certain principles and stances on issues, according to an analysis of their platforms and the decisions that it has been making since allying with LP and Aquino.

Akbayan has been criticized for flip-flopping on issues such as the conditional cash transfer program. This is only one of the instances which led to accusations that the party-list no longer represents the marginalized. Additionally, despite the gains it has obtained in and out of the legislature, Akbayan’s advocacies did not seem to gain any more traction compared to its years as a party in the minority.

An unlikely alliance

Despite pronouncements by Aquino that he and the party “think alike,” vast differences exist in the two parties’ priorities, plans and policy framework, leading to what critics have pointed out as an unlikely alliance.

Political analysts say coalition-building in politics is inevitable, especially with the multi-party system set up in the aftermath of the EDSA Revolution in 1986. This

caused shifting allegiances among political personalities and parties during election seasons, with turncoats—pejoratively called “political butterflies”—siding with the presidential bets that are highly favored to win or would eventually win the electoral contest.

“*Sa sitwasyon sa Pilipinas na mahina ang political party system... 'yung kalakaran ng mga major parties kasi, personality-oriented 'yan. Kung sino ang boss, kung sino ang head, siya ang nagdadala* (Given the situation in the Philippines, the political party system is weak. What happens with major parties is that they are personality-oriented. The head of the party is the one who usually carries the discourse),” said Ramon Casiple, executive director of the Institute of Political and Electoral Reform (IPER).

Akbayan’s Rocamora made the same observation in a 2007 piece. He wrote, “In the post-1986 period, parties have been so weak that in national elections, coalitions of parties are the relevant campaign mechanisms.”

Issue-based coalitions have formed from time to time, such as the Northern Alliance, a group of representatives from the tobacco-growing regions in Northern Luzon, who oppose sin tax measures. Political alliances have also formed, as in the case of the Sunshine Coalition that backed Arroyo in Congress during the first few years of her presidency.

During the 2010 elections, however, the two larger groups in the party-list system struck alliances with the mainstream political parties, despite the prevailing notion that party-list groups are supposed to represent the marginalized. While Akbayan went with the Liberal Party, the Makabayan bloc—composed of leftist groups such as nationalist Bayan Muna and feminist Gabriela—partnered with the coalition of then-Senator Manuel

Villar. Among Villar's senatorial candidates is the son of former President Ferdinand Marcos.

The 2010 elections was not the only time party-list groups have coalesced with the larger, traditional parties. In fact, Bayan Mun, which belongs to the Makabayan bloc, was one of the parties that ran under the People Power Coalition. The coalition carried Arroyo's allies during the 2001 elections.

But Akbayan's partnership with Aquino's LP led to an unprecedented case—it was able to gain numerous political appointments as a result of an electoral alliance. Being a party-list group whose electorate supposedly votes it for its principles, this puts the party in a complicated situation.

The party started out in 1998 as among the first groups to run for seats in the party-list system. During the first three elections, Akbayan's votes consistently increased—from barely above the two percent threshold needed to earn one seat, to gaining 6.7 percent of the votes in 2004, which earned them three seats.

Its votes, however, were halved from 852,473 votes in 2004 to just 466,448 the following election period—from three seats to two. This led the party to conclude that “the party list system had been successfully subverted by old political clans; what was supposed to be a national contest had been broken up into so many local contests,” Rocamora said in a 2007 article, “Learning New Ways of Being Left.”

This apparently also served as one of their motivations to consider expanding to a party of greater influence.

Breaking into mainstream politics

Akbayan first entered the alliance even before the rise of Aquino, then considered a lightweight politician, to popularity. LP back then was still fielding opposition leader Sen. Mar Roxas as its presidential candidate.

In the Senate, Roxas backed the passage of Republic Act 9502, or the Universally Accessible Cheaper and Quality Medicines Act of 2008. This support for Akbayan's reform advocacy was one of the reasons Akbayan originally supported Roxas's aborted presidential bid, said former Representative Risa Hontiveros, who filed the bill in the House of Representatives.

Hontiveros added that Roxas was one of the three presidential bets (the two of which she did not name) that Akbayan thought of choosing for the 2010 elections. The party did not want to miss out on the first presidential elections to be held after the controversy-ridden term of President Arroyo, she said.

The death of the country's first post-Marcos president, Corazon Aquino, was said to be a game-changer in the build-up to the 2010 elections. With her son catapulted to the presidential race, the alliance became a more likely bet to win the elections.

Campaigning on a platform of reform governance, the younger Aquino promised to pave the "*tuwid na daan* (straight path)" through a transparent government that seeks to counter the previous administration of President Arroyo. Akbayan was one of the notable members of the opposition bloc. In fact, Hontiveros swiftly became popular as an anti-Arroyo politician since the "Hello Garci" scandal of 2005.

For Hontiveros, however, it was a matter of events coming together at the right time; what transpired that year presented the party with the conjecture that it might be ready to enter into a coalition.

“So, it's a natural progression... In 1998, we said, ‘Eventually, sometime in the future, we want to be the ruling party in the country.’ [Maybe, even if] unconsciously, we were preparing ourselves,” she said.

With this as goal, members of Akbayan said the party believed it could advance its agenda in accordance with Aquino’s reform platform.

Julio Teehankee, a member of the LP think tank National Institute for Policy Studies, drew parallels between the trajectories of the two parties. He explained that LP is a traditional party trying to follow the path of reform politics, owing from its experiences during Martial Law. Meanwhile, as a product of the mass movement that pursues reforms from its radical background, Akbayan is now trying to enter the traditional arena of politics.

“So from the get-go, it is but natural for the two to gravitate (toward) each other,” he said.

Sticking points

Despite this “common” reform agenda, several sticking points have emerged during the first four years of the Aquino administration. While Akbayan members have gained more clout to push for their agenda, some observe that because of the alliance, the party might be forced to go along with the administration’s policies. This puts Akbayan in danger of backtracking on its previously held beliefs.

One of their differences is on the issue of economics. “*Iba kasi ‘yung economic framework namin sa gobyerno* (Our economic framework differs from that of the government),” said Gibby Gorres of Akbayan Youth. Among these issues would be the government’s position of “*puro PPP, puro utang sa iba’t ibang bansa* or public-private partnerships and heavy reliance on foreign debt.”

Representative Walden Bello also identified economic framework as one of the three major differences Akbayan has with the Liberal Party, citing agrarian reform and foreign policy as the other two.

An analysis of Aquino’s platform of government during the 2010 elections revealed that there are some differences when it comes to the priorities and general principles of action between Akbayan and the administration.

For instance, Aquino did not address agrarian reform, workers’ rights and the urban poor in his 2010 platform “A Social Contract with the Filipino People” (Table 4). Akbayan has been zealously carrying these issues – which are mostly part of the issues concerning the members of their social movement.

While Aquino kept job generation in mind, he did not address labor issues such as contractualization. This has been among the policies Akbayan has been staunchly opposing.

Another sticking point is Aquino’s silence on the issue of agrarian reform. Akbayan has been advocating for the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (which even the party itself admitted was prone to loopholes). Aquino belongs to the clan that owns the sprawling Hacienda Luisita in Tarlac, where he claims to own “only” 1 percent of the estate.

Furthermore, candidate Aquino lacked concrete and specific means to address national issues, mostly laying out his goals and failing to elaborate on his plans for action. Aquino did not outline his economic plans until the Philippine Development Plan 2011-2016 was unveiled in 2011. Akbayan, on the other hand, had clear stances on what it wanted the government to achieve, criticizing the policies currently being implemented.

“*Ang tingin namin* was that ‘*yung framework ng government* (What we think is that the government’s framework)... [on] so-called inclusive growth is just a mantra, and if you really push it, it really has a very little substance,” Bello said.

Moreover, while Aquino promised a government that would recognize “rural enterprises as vital [and creating] conditions conducive to the growth and competitiveness of private business, big, medium and small,” Akbayan was more specific in how it wants to foster such economic growth. The party said it wanted to promote export-oriented local economies, develop “effective responses to the challenges of globalization,” and enable small businesses.

Akbayan also stated in its platform what it believes to be the root of poverty—mass unemployment and wide inequalities in wealth and income—and demanded that these be addressed, instead of relying on foreign aid. Aquino’s platform gave analysis of the country’s endemic poverty, only saying government anti-poverty programs “instill a dole-out mentality,” instead of providing opportunity to the poor.

Another example of the parties’ divergent views is the manner in which both chose to attend to the issues of the health sector. Apart from committing to “responsible parenthood,” Aquino simply said he wanted to advance and protect public health.

Akbayan, on the other hand, said the government must ensure community-based health care, access to essential medicines and stringent regulation for private hospitals.

The same can be said for education issues. Aquino said he wanted to make education a “central strategy for investing” in the people. The party, on the other hand, criticized the current model of the education system, which it said is heavily oriented towards simply creating “skilled labor power,” ultimately linked to the pertinent labor issues that Aquino did not address in his promise of creating more jobs.

Table 4. *Comparison of President Aquino and Akbayan’s Platforms*

Issue	Akbayan Party Platform	Aquino Campaign Platform	Aquino Government Actions
Corruption	“No amount of tinkering with the design and formal powers of bureaucracies will go any distance if the understanding of corruption is not embedded in an understanding of the maladies found in the political sphere; e.g., the under-representation of the majority and the imbalance of the prerogatives of a strong presidency.”	“A President who is the nation’s first and most determined fighter of corruption.”	Prosecution of former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, impeachment of Chief Justice Renato Corona, attempts to institute reforms in the corruption-ridden Bureau of Customs, attempt to create a so-called Truth Commission.
Governance	NA	“From... political accommodation to discerning selection based on integrity, competence and performance.”	Appointment of known political allies and friends to high positions.
Education	Criticizes the current model that “addresses only the required	“Making education the central strategy for investing in our	K+12 (which extends basic education from 10 to

	scientific and technological capacities of the market [to produce] skilled labor power” and advocates students’ rights and welfare, alternative learning systems, professionalization of teachers, maximization of private sector participation and highest budget prioritization.	people.”	12 years and adds technical education to the curriculum) and the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education (SONA 2010); budget cuts to state universities during the first two years of Aquino’s term.
Health	Greater role of the State in healthcare, community-based healthcare, access to essential medicines, reversing brain drain, stringent regulation for private hospitals, reproductive health.	“Advancement and protection of public health, which includes responsible parenthood.”	Philhealth for poor families (SONA 2010).
Poverty	“Mass unemployment and wide inequalities in wealth and income are at the root of the scourge of mass poverty. To attack poverty without tackling these is to treat the symptoms of the disease rather than its causes. The world is made to believe that poverty can be eradicated with massive doses of foreign aid.”	“From government anti-poverty programs that instill a dole-out mentality... to well-considered programs that build capacity and create opportunity among the poor.”	Conditional cash transfers (SONA 2010).
Urban Poor	“The notion of housing as a ‘right’ must be taken seriously. The government housing program should adhere strictly to a rights-based approach to housing provision. Premium must be placed, not on quantity, but on sustainability.”	NA	Demolition of slums to make way for infrastructure projects, such as the Quezon City Business District; relocation of said squatters to nearby provinces.

Economy	“Promotion of exports and local economies, regional integration [and] emphasis on social dialogue to develop effective responses to the challenges of globalization,” enabling micro, small and medium-scale enterprises (MSMEs).	“Recognizing... rural enterprises as vital [and creating] conditions conducive to the growth and competitiveness of private business, big, medium and small.”	Public-private partnerships, Fiscal Responsibility Bill, Anti-Trust Law to combat cartels (SONA 2010)
Labor	“Decent work and sustainable livelihood for all... full employment [and] the development of market-labor regulations that strengthen labor standards rather than dismantle them.”	NA	
Migrant workers	Overseas work is “unsustainable” and it “[exacts] unacceptably high social costs”; building local economies “will also facilitate the reintegration of overseas Filipinos.”	“A government that creates jobs at home, so that working abroad will be a choice rather than a necessity; and when its citizens do choose to become OFWs, their welfare and protection will still be the government’s priority.”	
Gender equality	NA	“Promotion of equal gender opportunity.”	
Peace and order	“While AKBAYAN joins the clamor against extra-judicial killings perpetrated by the State (mostly against the CPP-NDF bloc), it does so under the frame that oppressions in general have to be fought—whether	“Seeks a broadly-supported just peace and will redress decades of neglect of the Moro and other peoples of Mindanao.”	Negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) that eventually resulted in the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro.

	perpetrated by the State or by non-state actors.” The party also seeks reforms to “address the root causes of insurgency and social unrest,” as well as peace talks, negotiation and consensus-building.		
Environment	NA	“Planning alternative, inclusive urban development [and] sustainable use of resources.”	
Agrarian reform	Advocates genuine agrarian reform (land-to-the-tiller principle, preferential treatment for the marginalized, comprehensive coverage, just compensation, affordable amortization, collective farming and cooperative-building) and calls Corazon Aquino’s Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law a “compromise” law (“the loopholes and flaws of RA 6657 continue to be a source of agony and difficulty for many prospective agrarian reform farmers and the source of defense and escape for many landlords”).	NA	

Sources. “About Akbayan: Our Platforms.” Retrieved February 18, 2014 from www.akbayan.org.ph. President Benigno S. Aquino’s Platform of Government. Retrieved February 18, 2014 from www.pcdspo.gov.ph. President Aquino’s State of the Nation Address 2010

Yet, for the party, Aquino's "commitment" to the platform of good governance remains "overriding," according to Bello, who had served the first of his three consecutive terms under Arroyo.

"Although we had differences on these areas, we did not feel that these differences were crucial enough for us to break from the coalition, [because] we felt that the good governance pushed," he said. "They (LP) pushed to make the previous administration, GMA (Gloria Macapagal Arroyo), accountable and that was going to be the measuring rod of this administration. So we were willing to live with differences in these areas."

Gorres described the party's role in the coalition as that of a dissenter. "*Sa* coalition *ng* reform government *ngayon*, *kami 'yung isang maliit na boses na makulit, na nagsasabing 'Hindi, failed na 'yan,'* etc. (In the coalition of the reform government today, we're the little voice that says, 'No, that has already failed,' etc)," he said.

Alliance attacked

Still, people both inside and outside the party have expressed doubts and opposition to the alliance. For instance, election watchdogs – like the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting and Kontra Daya-- and rival political factions—such as the Makabayan bloc—have called for Akbayan's disqualification from the party-list elections, saying it "ceased to exist as a marginalized and underrepresented party" and was "now considered as a party in power."

In a petition filed on October 23, 2012, members affiliated with Makabayan, along with Archbishop Oscar Cruz, called for Akbayan's removal as a party-list group because it was "overrepresented in government."

Notably, the petitioners used the same Supreme Court ruling that Rosales and Rocamora cited against the party-list groups allegedly backed by Arroyo in 2007. The 2001 ruling, *Ang Bagong Bayani v. Comelec*, declared that "the party or organization must not be an adjunct of, or a project organized or an entity funded or assisted by, the government."

"It must be independent of the government," the ruling added. "The participation of the government or its officials in the affairs of a party-list is not only illegal and unfair to other parties, but also deleterious to the objective of the law."

The Commission on Elections, however, ruled to accredit Akbayan for the 2013 party-list elections, based on its "track record" in serving the interests of the marginalized sectors.

According to the Comelec ruling, "there is no showing" that the party was an adjunct of the government. It added that Akbayan cannot be considered a "major political party" because it lacks the "ability to significantly participate in the general elections by being able to field a substantial number of candidates nationwide, from the lowest levels to the highest."

This observation by Comelec echoes the party's goal of participating in the national elections. It was this goal that served as one motivation for the party to align with LP.

“*Dahil hindi pa naman noon—kahit ngayon—kaya ng Akbayan magpatakbo para sa presidente, tanggap namin na kung mag-e-endorse kami*, it would be from among the traditional parties (Because Akbayan couldn’t field a candidate for the presidency then and now, we have accepted that if we are to endorse, it would be from among the traditional parties),” Hontiveros said.

Representative Ibarra Gutierrez III, who serves as Akbayan’s second representative to the House after Bello, agrees with Hontiveros that inching into the national political arena is but the “natural course” for the party.

“From the start *naman talaga ang agenda ng Akbayan* has always been to enter the political mainstream. *Siguro* to put it accurately, bringing ‘*yung mga prinsipyong biitbit ng partido*’ which for a long time, unfortunately *nare-relegate sa* political margins (Actually, from the start, Akbayan’s agenda has always been to enter the political mainstream. Maybe, to put it accurately, bringing the principles the party has been carrying, which for a long time were unfortunately relegated to the political margins),” he said.

Debates inside Akbayan

Yet, even within the party, there are doubts and debates caused by such an unlikely alliance. A big part of this was due to LP members’ supposed inclination to “elitist” ideals and perspectives.

“There was a big debate on how to go about it, because there were members who really frowned at the idea of partnering with LP, because not only was LP a traditional political party, but it was also being led by your local elites which Akbayan has been

criticizing for the longest time,” said Paula Bianca Lapuz, an Akbayan Youth member who left the party after disagreeing with the decision to ally with the Aquino-led coalition, among others.

At the time, Lapuz said, the party acknowledged what the Aquinos have done. After all, Ronald Llamas, current political adviser, and Hontiveros had already worked with President Aquino in the past.

“Pero siyempre iba pa rin ‘yung usapin na kailangan ba talaga pumasok (But whether it is really needed for the party to go into the alliance is a different question entirely),” Lapuz said.

Lapuz was not the only one who parted ways with the party in the aftermath of the alliance with the Liberal Party and the endorsement of Aquino. The peasant confederation, Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA), bolted out of the party, after realizing that “not a single representative of Akbayan came from the basic sectors,” National Coordinator Soc Banzuela told Hansley Juliano, author of *The Tension Points of the Democratic Left Politics in Akbayan's Alliance with the Aquino Administration*.

“What sealed their decision to become independent, however, was their acknowledgment of the fact that, for all intents and purposes, Akbayan was first and foremost a national political party that targets national electoral and governmental prominence,” wrote Juliano.

He also said these set of priorities, as noted by Banzuela, appeared as limiting to PAKISAMA’s long-term project of building up political clout so the leaders of political sectors themselves could represent their own interests.

Akbayan's priority of advancing into the national political arena came at the expense of the basic sectors. Banzuela also recounted PAKISAMA's talks with Aquino himself during the campaign period. However, Juliano said, all they got were "vague concessions."

Lapuz added that the party might lose its independence once it struck an alliance with the larger parties. "*Walang pera 'yung partido* (The party has no money). [If] you are economically dependent on somebody else, on something else, then you really put your autonomy in question," she said.

Akbayan, however, maintains that the alliance was necessary for it to push its advocacies. Gorres, for instance, said being in the party-list system naturally entails wanting to win, adding that this is the only way that the party can implement the programs that they are advocating.

Despite criticisms against the appointments and attempts to have Akbayan disqualified from the party-list elections, Aquino remained adamant when it comes to his relationship with the party-list.

During the 2013 election period, he said in a speech that Akbayan is the only party he supports. "*Iisa lang ho ang party-list ko eh. Tinutulungan namin ang Akbayan* (I have only one party-list. I am helping Akbayan)," he said.

A 'necessary' alliance

In politics, coalition-building is nothing unusual. In fact, IPER's Casiple said this is "normal."

According to Casiple, Akbayan needs the coalition in order to push its advocacies. “How can you represent the marginalized and underrepresented sector *kung* minority *ka*? So *palagi kang naghahabol ng mas malaking impluwensya* (How can you represent the marginalized and underrepresented sector if you’re in the minority? You’re always going to have to go after the bigger influences). And one way to do that, of course, is coalition-building,” he said.

He cited many advantages when a party belongs to the ruling coalition:

“*Mas nasa posisyon sila na mag-effect ng kanilang reforms o mag-influence ng gobyerno, kaysa sa outside the kulambo ka* (They are now in the position to effect their reforms or influence the government, as opposed to staying outside the proverbial mosquito net).”

This view is supported by Akbayan members. In fact, it is probably the biggest influence in their decision to ally with the administration: to be able to gain political power.

“The thing is, at the end of the day, *ano ba ‘yung gusto mo* (what do you really want)? *Gusto mo ng kapangyarihan* (You want power) ... to be able to push for your agenda, and you can’t do that without being in government,” said Gorres, who was appointed as a youth sector representative in the National Anti-Poverty Commission.

Agreeing to disagree

Even then, some members of Akbayan felt tentative about this supposed benefit of the alliance. For instance, the one senatorial candidate the party fielded—Hontiveros—lost in both the 2010 and 2013 elections.

Outnumbered as she might have been in the senatorial slates that the coalition fielded, Hontiveros said that in the end, the parties “agreed to disagree.” After all, Akbayan was in an alliance with Aquino and not necessarily the other members of the coalition, she said.

“*Ang klaro sa amin, kay Noy (Aquino) lang talaga kami may totoong coalition, sa Liberal. But everybody else, tingin namin sa kanila, tactical electoral ang pag-coalesce nila kay Noy. And since... siya ang sitting president, they keep up ‘yung packaging na ganu’n (What’s clear to us is that our coalition is just truly with Noy and Liberal. But everybody else, we see their coalition with Noy as tactical and electoral. And since he’s the sitting president, they keep up that packaging),*” she said.

She said the challenge of being in an alliance is making sure they curry Aquino’s favor so they could forward their interests and advocacies.

“*Ang pinakamay-expectation at pag-engage at paniningil kami in terms of implementing the unities on the reform agenda from 2010 is with Noy and the Liberal (We mostly expect, engage and hold accountable Noy and the Liberal in terms of implementing the unities on the reform agenda from 2010),*” Hontiveros said. “*Hindi kami umaasa sa NP, etc. (We don’t expect anything from NP, etc.)*”

“We deal with the individual legislators as individuals, *dahil tingin din namin, hindi rin sila ganap na mga partido pa para mag-unify with us, even with the coalition (because we see them as not being fully developed as parties to unify with us, even with the coalition),*” she added.

It seems, however, that this decision to coalesce with larger political entities has been long in the making. In an interview with the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* in 2012,

Hontiveros said this alliance is a sign of Akbayan's maturity as a party, a statement backed in separate interviews with other members of the party.

While Rosales and Rocamora campaigned in 2007 to have the Arroyo-backed party-list groups disqualified, this aim by Akbayan to go wider as a mainstream party was manifested earlier than that.

In 2002, the party's vice chairperson, Ric Reyes, told *Newsbreak* that the Supreme Court ruling that the party-list system be limited to the marginalized and underrepresented would impede his party's advancement in the political arena.

"Akbayan may be a marginalized political party for now, but it may get more local [elective] seats [in the future] and be stricken off the marginalized list," Reyes said. "As civil society progresses, a tie-up with government is not far-fetched."

Undue advantage?

Akbayan reaps political gains from Aquino-LP coalition

(Second of three parts)

Akbayan Citizens' Action Party today is a far cry from what it was almost four years ago—before going into an alliance with President Benigno S. Aquino III and the Liberal Party, that is.

After being in Congress for 16 years, Akbayan has expanded well beyond the legislative arena when Aquino appointed several of its key members to high government positions following his coalition's victory during the 2010 elections.

Among these appointed members were two of the party-list's former representatives. Akbayan's first representative, Loretta Ann Rosales, was named chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights in 2010. She had been an advocate for victims of human rights violations during the regime of President Ferdinand Marcos and a victim herself. Meanwhile, Mario Aguja, who served two terms from 2001 to 2007, became a board member at the Government Service Insurance System in 2013.

Other key members were appointed to similarly high government positions. In 2011, Ronald Llamas was appointed as Presidential Adviser on Political Affairs. Although Llamas was caught with high-powered firearms in 2011 and seen buying pirated movies in 2012, Aquino came to his rescue and stated he would not fire him.

Meanwhile, two Akbayan members—Ibarra Gutierrez III and Angelina Ludovice-Katoh—held office at the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Political Affairs and the Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor, respectively. They have since left these offices after they were nominated by Akbayan to be its party-list representatives for the

2013 elections. Tomasito Villarin, another party member, eventually replaced Gutierrez in 2013 when the latter took the second seat after incumbent Walden Bello.

Also, former Akbayan Chairperson Percival Cendaña was appointed as NYC's Commissioner-at-large in 2011. One of the party's founding members, Joel Rocamora, heads NAPC since 2010. Secretary General Daniel Edralin is a Commissioner-at-Large at the Social Security System. One more member, Gio Tingson, is NYC's Commissioner for Resources.

Table 5. *Akbayan Members in Office*

Akbayan Member	Position in the Aquino administration	Position in Akbayan, if any
Loretta Ann Rosales	Chairperson, Commission on Human Rights	Former President, Former Party-List Representative
Mario Aguja	Board of Trustees Member, Government Service Insurance System	Former Party-List Representative
Joel Rocamora	Chairperson, National Anti-Poverty Commission	Founding Member, Former President
Percival Cendaña	Commissioner-at-large, National Youth Commission	Former Chairperson
Ronald Llamas	Presidential Adviser on Political Affairs	President
Daniel Edralin	Commissioner-at-large, Social Security System	Secretary General
Tomasito Villarin	Undersecretary, Office of the Presidential Adviser on Political Affairs	Member
Gio Tingson	Commissioner for Resources, National Youth Council	Member, Akbayan Youth
Gibby Gorres	Member, National Anti-Poverty Commission Youth and Students Sectoral Council	Member, Akbayan Youth

Angelina Ludovice-Katoh	Commissioner, Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor	Member
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Akbayan's incursion into a number of government agencies is but one of the several gains that the party obtained which led to questions from opposing groups. Akbayan's decision to ally with LP was met with puzzled reactions and harsh criticisms from different groups and individuals, both from inside and outside the party.

On October 23, 2012, members of organizations affiliated with the so-called Makabayan bloc, along with Archbishop Oscar Cruz, petitioned the Commission on Elections to disqualify Akbayan from the party-list system, saying the party was no longer "marginalized and underrepresented."

Among the grounds in the petition for Akbayan's disqualification is the fact that several members have been appointed to key government positions by the President, marking the transition to a party that is "well-entrenched and well-connected to the present administration."

Because of these appointments, the petitioners argued: "It has a preferred status of being in the inner circle of Malacañang, compared to other party-list groups. That if Akbayan has any agenda, plans or projects in mind, it could go directly to the policy-makers and have these suggestions directly heard by those who will execute the policies."

They also added that getting into government positions grants them "influence and access to government resources, which give them undue advantage over other party-list groups and increases their ability to compete [which] stifles the chances of the truly marginalized."

Members of Akbayan, however, countered that being able to wield influence in policy-making was the point of getting into the executive branch of government.

After all, among the reasons the party entered into the coalition with LP was to be able to push for their advocacies, despite divergent positions on major issues, said Akbayan chairperson Risa Hontiveros. Hontiveros served as the party-list representative for two terms under former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and is now a close ally of Aquino.

“[Factor] *din sa diskusyon na*, will that open up avenues for us *para isulong 'yung agenda natin, kahit 'yung agenda na lagpas sa unity sa Liberal?* Kasi, klaro 'yung common values namin sa kanila, 'yung sa political at electoral reforms, pero 'yung sa econ, iba (It was factored into the discussions, if that will open up avenues for us to forward our agenda even if the agenda is not within the unity with Liberal. Because, our common values on political and electoral reforms were clear to them, but on economics, we differ),” said Hontiveros.

Yet, despite these differences, Akbayan members said that for the most part, this alliance is necessary for them to effect change outside the legislative branch of the government.

“The party-list system was made... because *gusto mong magkaroon ng boses 'yung mga* sector, marginalized and underrepresented. *Hindi ibig sabihin na* you want them to stay that way, *na hanggang party-list lang sila* (You want the marginalized and underrepresented sectors to have a voice. This does not mean that you want them to stay that way, that they will only be limited to the party-list system),” said Gibby Gorres, a

member of Akbayan Youth. “You want them to be able to expand; you want them to be able to fill in other positions, etc.

Expanding into the executive branch

Aside from being a member of the party’s youth sector arm, Gorres was appointed as the youth and student representative in the National Anti-Poverty Commission, itself headed by founding member Joel Rocamora. Two of his colleagues in Akbayan Youth, Percival Cendaña and Gio Tingson, were also appointed commissioners in the National Youth Council.

Because members of Akbayan Youth have been appointed to the two government agencies, they have been able to put “progressive youth programs” into place, Gorres said. For instance, he credited Cendaña and Tingson for enabling NYC to take a stand on issues.

“Before, *'yung NYC, walang political stand 'yan. Walang stand sa RH—anti-RH pa, I think. (Before, NYC had no political stand. It doesn’t even have a stand on RH—it was even anti-RH, I think,*” Gorres recalled. “So, *'yun yung mga ginagawa ng Akbayan—not to take the positions as some form of gift, pero... trabaho 'yun eh. Nanalo tayo, trabaho tayo (So, that’s what Akbayan has been doing—not to take the positions as some form of gift, but... that’s work. We won, so let’s work)!”*

Comelec eventually allowed Akbayan to run again in the party-list election after determining that it “still actually and genuinely represents marginalized and underrepresented sectors.” It also said the party-list system provides for parties that still

could not field a substantial number of candidates in the general elections nationwide, even if it has been able to gain seats under the Office of the President.

“I thought *na... wala na 'yung Presidente, eh 'di wala na sila*. But, *'yung kanilang* track record *nila* for advocacy, *andu'n pa rin naman* (I thought that if once the President is gone, they would be gone too. But their track record for advocacy would still remain),” said former Elections Commissioner Rene Sarmiento, who voted to accredit the party.

Members of Akbayan also said their track record speaks for itself. For them, expanding into positions outside the party-list system helps them maximize their ability as representatives of the marginalized.

“You’re supposed to be in government if you win, [right]? *Kasi, doon niyo mai-*implement *'yung mga* programs *na gusto niyong gawin* (That’s where you implement the programs you wish to do),” Gorres said. “*Hindi naman dahil kami ay na-appoint ... nawala ang mga sector na aming nire-represent. Hindi naman nawala yung pagka-*marginalized *nila ... 'yung pagka-*underrepresented *nila* (Just because we were appointed doesn’t mean the sectors we represent are gone. It’s not as if they’re no longer marginalized and underrepresented).”

Comelec’s decision was not unanimous, however. Lucenito Tagle, in his dissenting opinion, said “this might result in the violation of the doctrine of separation of powers” between the legislative and executive branches of government.

Chairman Sixto Brillantes, meanwhile, said Akbayan had “radically advanced as a political party—now influential and well-funded” and that “it has unfortunately outgrown the party-list system.” He also agreed that Akbayan has gained the position to influence government policy with the appointments it has earned.

Even if it is taken for granted—or contested by political rivals—that coalition members are supposed to obtain such political gains, it has been argued that the Akbayan members appointed in government are qualified for the job, making these more than just political concessions.

“Pag binigay mo lang dahil kakampi mo lang, patronage 'yun. 'Pag binigay mo dahil alam mong may magagawa—let’s say Etta Rosales in Commission on Human Rights—'di ba obvious naman na dapat sya du'n (If you gave the position because of alliance, that’s patronage. If you gave the position because you know the person can do it—let’s say Etta Rosales in Commission on Human Rights—isn’t it obvious that she belongs there)?” said Julio Teehankee, a member of the LP think tank, the National Institute for Policy Studies.

Not often discussed, however, is the fact that Aquino’s choice to appoint Akbayan members also meant that he passed over expected figures from the Liberal Party itself, which caused tensions with the latter, according to Teehankee, currently on leave from the party to attend to his duties as a college dean in De La Salle University.

Former Akbayan Youth member Paula Bianca Lapuz said likewise. “Ronald [Llamas] was appointed as the [presidential] political adviser over all the other LP stalwarts, who are equally deserving, equally good—if not even better, you know?” she observed.

The political appointments Akbayan got highlighted Aquino’s tendency to grant concessions to people who helped in the campaign, even if it came at the expense of LP itself.

“*Nu'ng natalo si Mar* [Roxas, Aquino’s running mate], *walang nag-asikaso sa LP* and its interests within the administration (When Mar lost, no one took care of LP and its interests within the administration),” said Teehankee. “All of a sudden, you see the *balimbings* (turncoats), and the Johnnies-come-lately—*sila ngayon 'yung nakapalibot sa* president (they are now the ones surrounding the president). So, do you expect reforms to be pushed by these people to be institutionalized?”

A surge in campaign funds—from unlikely donors

The political appointments Akbayan received were not the only gain that Akbayan’s critics have questioned. Even before Aquino went on an appointing spree, the party benefited from the alliance during the election period. The party received campaign contributions it had never seen before—a total of ₱112 million.

That large amount – which they mostly spent on broadcast advertising – was cited by Brillantes in his dissenting opinion as one of the reasons he considered Akbayan “a party strong enough to compete in the regular elections and win in a traditional manner.”

Interestingly, 2010 was the only election year that Akbayan received such amount of campaign contributions. From 1998 to 2007, the campaign contributions never exceeded ₱10 million—mostly sourced from the party’s membership dues, the pockets of the party’s nominees themselves or even from loans the party took out.

Around ₱14 million of this came from members of the Aquino family: celebrity Kris Aquino, for instance, gave ₱10 million the largest single contribution. The President’s two other sisters, Ballsy Aquino-Cruz and Viel Aquino-Dee, each contributed ₱2 million.

Aquino's brother-in-law Richard Dee gave ₱3 million, while members of the Lopa family, related to the Aquinos and known Hacienda Luisita stakeholders, gave a total of ₱1 million.

Apart from contributions the party received from the Aquino family and their cousins, there were other unlikely contributors to the campaign of Akbayan. Some of these are Chinese-Filipino tycoons and executives of big businesses, who at first glance do not seem likely to contribute to a progressive, leftist party, like Akbayan.

Table 6. *Contributors to Akbayan's Campaign Who Gave P1 million Or More*

Contributor	Affiliations	Amount
Banson Choa	Owners, Discovery Hotel Chain and Sterling Bank	₱5 million
Ben Tiu		₱5 million
Ruben Tiu		₱5 million
Manuel Gana	Belle Corp.	₱2 million
Gregorio Yu	Independent Director, Philippine Airlines; Former President Belle Corp. ; Chairman, Belle Jai Alai Corp.	₱5 million
Willibaldo Joven Uy	President, Phinma Properties Corporation	₱1 million
Johnip Cua	Former President, Procter and Gamble Philippines; Former Director of Macro Asia and Philippine Airlines	₱2 million
Antonio Moncupa Jr.	President, East West Bank	₱2 million
Antonio Samson	Executive of Antonio Cojuangco (President Aquino's cousin); Philippine Airlines	₱2 million
Lolita Chua	Dunkin Donuts Chain in Zamboanga	₱3 million
Alvin Hung	Founder and CEO, GoAnimate Inc.	₱1 million
Tyrone Corcuera	Owner, Consolidated Mining, Inc.	₱2.5 million
Alfonso Ng	Republic Biscuit Corporation	₱2 million
Teodoro Camacho III	LGTM Real Estate; Former Mayor of Balanga, Bataan	₱8 million

Charlene Reyes Escaler	Landowner, Hacienda Tinang in Tarlac	₱1 million
Maria Therese Escaler Dabao	Landowner, Hacienda Tinang in Tarlac	₱1 million
Margarita Juico	Chairman, Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office	₱1 million
Kristina Bernadette Yap	Sister, President Benigno Aquino III	₱10 million
Maria Elena Cruz	Sister, President Benigno Aquino III	₱2 million
Victoria Dee	Sister, President Benigno Aquino III	₱2 million
Richard Dee	Brother-in-law, President Benigno Aquino III	₱3 million
Walden Bello	Representative in Congress, Akbayan Citizens' Action Party	P1.1 million
Jose Eliseo Rocamora	Lead Convenor, National Anti-Poverty Commission; Founding Member, Akbayan Citizens' Action Party	₱1 million
Pedro Rufo Soliven	President, Zamboanga Chamber of Commerce and Industry Foundation, Inc.	₱2 million
Francis Hernando	Vice President, Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation Game Licensing and Development Department; former Senior Consultant, Lombard Investments	₱1 million
Anton Mari Lim	Zamboanga City Coordinator, Tzu Chi Foundation; Founder, Yellow Boat Hope Foundation	₱1 million
Philip Chan		₱2 million
Alexander Cruz		₱1.5 million
Princess Costales		₱1 million
Benjamin Santos		₱1 million
Ike Trocio		₱1 million
Daniel Lichuaco		₱1 million
Efren Berioso		₱1 million
Jorge Bernardo		₱1 million
Dennis Huang		₱1 million
Myl Johann Amsid		₱1 million
Herman De Luna		₱1 million

Source: Akbayan's Statement of Election Contributions and Expenditures in 2010

Aside from receiving campaign contributions from unlikely sources, Akbayan gained some of its funds from people or corporations, whose activities and policies have apparently come into conflict with the party's pro-poor, pro-labor, pro-agrarian reform, pro-food governance and anti-corruption advocacies.

For instance, Tyrone Corcuera, who owns Consolidated Mining, Inc., gave the party ₱2.5 million. CMI operated copper mines in Marinduque.

Akbayan accepted the contribution despite the party's stance against large-scale mining. Last year, Akbayan questioned the constitutionality of some sections of the Mining Act of 1995. It has also been pushing for the banning of all large-scale mining operations and the enactment of "a pro-people, pro-environment, alternative minerals management bill."

On the other hand, Gregorio Yu, a director at the Philippine Airlines, donated ₱5 million to the campaign. The airline company was later subject to an outsourcing dispute with the Philippine Airlines' Employees Association (PALEA). Akbayan had backed the union and forwarded their call to the Office of the President, only for Aquino to uphold the company in what Hontiveros calls "one battle we lost."

Yu is also into gaming and real estate. He served as the President and Chief Executive Officer of Belle Corporation from 1989 to 2001 and Sinophil Corporation from 1993 to 2001. He was also the Chairman of the Belle Jai Alai Corporation from 1999 to 2001. Belle Corp. revived operation of the Jai Alai. The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism found that it was one of the friends of former President Joseph Estrada that benefitted from the liberalization of the gambling industry under his term.

Meanwhile, Charlene Reyes Escaler and Maria Therese Escaler Dabao also contributed a total of ₱2 million to the party's campaign. Both are members of two of the elite landowning families that the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism reported in 2004 to have circumvented loopholes in the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program. They did this by redistributing Hacienda Tinang lands in Tarlac among themselves, by naming their family members as “farmer-beneficiaries.”

When they authored the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extended Reforms law in 2008, Akbayan eventually moved to eliminate the voluntary land transfer option—the loophole that allowed for minimal intervention from the Department of Agrarian Reform, which made the Hacienda Tinang distribution possible.

Escaler and Dabao are also related to Ernesto Escaler, the businessman and investment banker who was linked to the 2001 bribery scandal involving the IMPSA power plant contract, which eventually led to the arrest of former justice secretary Hernani Lopez. The anomaly occurred within the first few months of the Arroyo administration.

Given that Akbayan is a small party, “there is no way” it could have received such an amount of contributions, wrote Rigoberto Tiglao, who served as Arroyo's presidential spokesperson. In a column published in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* on November 8, 2012, he noted that even the likes of Bello and Rocamora—“NGO activists for most of their working lives”—could not have raised the ₱2 million they contributed to their own party's campaign.

“If one believes Akbayan's report, Chinese-Filipino tycoons and big-business executives, now believe in the proletarian cause to contribute substantial amounts to this

group that professes to be a socialist party,” he earlier wrote in another column for the same paper on October 31.

Hizon countered: “*Minsan kasi, gusto nila 'yung advocacy namin... kasi, alam mo naman mga businessman, hindi naman naniniwala sa sosyalismo 'yan. Pero minsan, 'o, okay ang advocacy ni Risa sa Reproductive [Health] Law*’ (Sometimes, they like our advocacy, even if, you know, businessmen don’t really support socialism. But sometimes, they would be like ‘Oh, it’s okay that Risa’s advocating the Reproductive Health Law).”

Still, Hizon said they “definitely” screen contributors. “*Ayaw kasi naming 'yung donation na 'to ay mag-cause ng negative perception na tumanggap kayo ng ganitong pera kay ganito, ganyan* (We do not want these donations to cause negative perception from the public, that we accepted money from so and so),” he said. “*Unless talagang sobrang grabe...; parang human rights violator talaga 'to, talagang pumatay ng mga tao 'to.* (Unless, the situation is extreme; someone who’s a human rights violator or someone who kills).”

Hizon said, however, Akbayan ensures independence from campaign contributors. “*Wala silang maaasahan na kahit ano* (They cannot expect anything from us),” he said.

And as much as the party accepts donations, it makes clear to the donors that there are “no strings attached,” he added. “We know that in the Philippine elections, you really need money to wage a decent campaign.”

Despite supposedly gaining credibility as the party-list group allied with Aquino, electoral contributions to Akbayan dropped sharply from ₱112 million in 2010 to a little more than ₱9 million in 2013. Hizon attributed this to the “different political

atmosphere” in 2010; the elections then were unique in a sense that people were very hopeful about the first post-Arroyo government.

With the party’s resources now spread thin, Hizon recounted: “We asked people that if you want to contribute to Akbayan, just contribute [the money] to Risa Hontiveros’ senatorial campaign.” After all, the party felt confident it would still have seats in the party-list system. So Akbayan focused on Hontiveros’s campaign, which it considered “a more difficult electoral battle,” Hizon said.

At disposal: Pork for representatives, funds for appointees

Despite a setback in 2013, the petitioners contend that Akbayan's newfound ability to obtain more campaign funds was not the only monetary advantage the party-list gained as a result of the alliance.

Consistent with the sectors they represent, Akbayan members have been appointed primarily to three government agencies: NAPC, NYC and CHR. All in all, these government offices have around ₱500-600 million in budgetary allocations under the General Appropriations Act.

Aside from the budgetary control that they got from the administration, the members’ strategic positions in a number of government agencies also give them electoral advantage. For instance, NAPC, NYC and the Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor are anchored in grassroots work, one of the tactics which may be employed by the party to consolidate votes from marginalized sectors. These agencies are mandated to ensure the participation their participation in government, through means such as consultations of the agencies’ respective sectors

The party also gained larger allocations under the controversial Priority Development Assistance Fund, until it was scrapped in 2013. PDAF was a lump-sum appropriation in the General Appropriations Act to fund the government's priority development programs and projects.

Table 7. *Priority Development Assistance Fund Released to Akbayan*

	Hontiveros	Bello	Bag-ao		Gutierrez	Total
	Party-List Representative (2004-2010)	Party-list Representative (2007-)	Party-list Representative (2010-2013)	Dinagat Islands Representative (2012-)	Party-list Representative (2013-)	
2009	₱30,000,000	0	NA	NA	NA	₱30,000,000
2010	₱4,000,000	₱30,000,000	NA	NA	NA	₱34,000,000
2011	NA	₱35,000,000	₱35,000,000	NA	NA	₱70,000,000
2012	NA	₱65,975,000	₱66,005,000	₱137,375,000	NA	₱269,355,000
2013	NA	₱37,550,000	0	₱22,995,000	0	₱60,545,000

Source: Department of Budget and Management

Along with the budgets of the government agencies they head, PDAF had given them hundreds of millions of pesos at their disposal. While certain congressmen in the minority bloc—such as former President turned Pampanga Representative Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo—had received zero allocation under the Aquino administration, Akbayan's PDAF only increased.

The fiscal year 2013 was an exception, when PDAF allocations as a whole decreased, affecting not only other party-lists not officially aligned with the President, but also Akbayan itself.

The Aquino government first took control of budgetary powers for the fiscal year 2011, and during that year, Akbayan's PDAF doubled from a rather small ₱34 million to about ₱70 million.

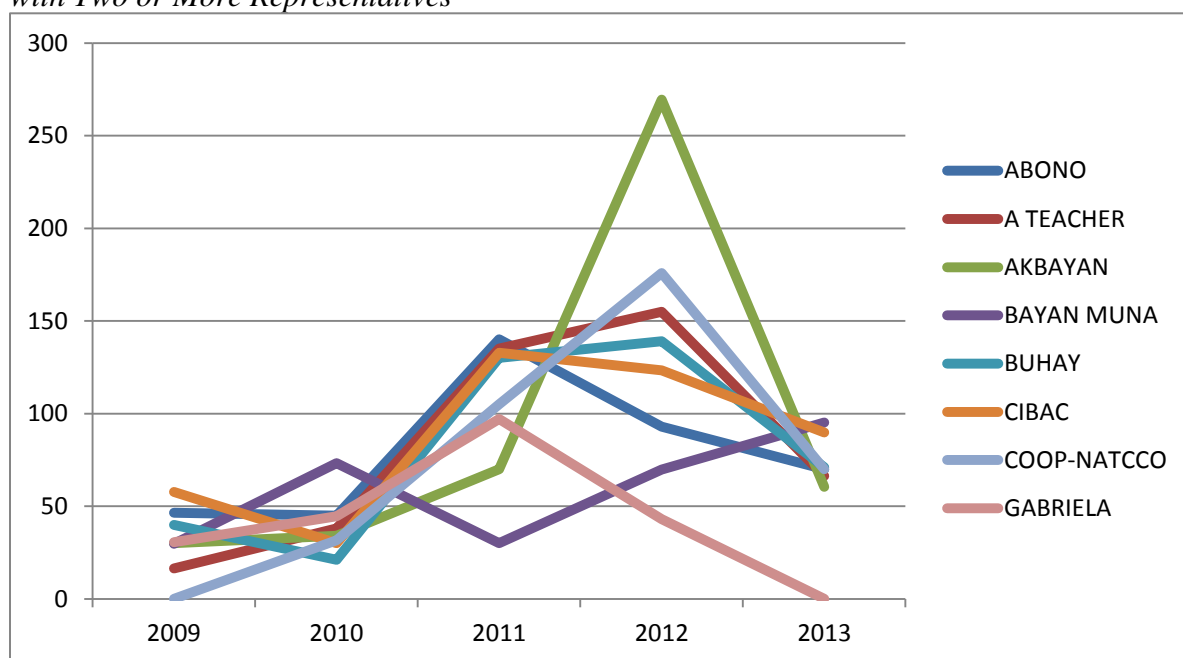
It was not the only party-list with such a large allocation, however. In fact, other veteran party-list groups, such as Abono, ABS, A Teacher, An Waray, Buhay, Butil, COOP-NATCCO, Cibac and Kabataan, received much larger increases in their PDAF ranging from 133 percent to 827 percent.

Yet, during the following year, Akbayan received one of the highest increases in PDAF allocation, to the tune of 89 percent – from ₱70 million to ₱ 131.9 million.

Among the parties included in this analysis, only Bayan Muna's PDAF gained a larger increase than Akbayan from 2011 to 2012 at 133 percent. However, its allocations only doubled from ₱30 million to almost ₱70 million – much less than Akbayan's ₱132 million in 2012.

The PDAF of other party-list groups either decreased or increased at a rather minimal rate.

Figure 4. *Comparison of Priority Development Assistance Fund Allocations of Party-lists with Two or More Representatives*



Source: Department of Budget and Management

Even then, this rate only takes into account the PDAF allocation for Akbayan's two party-list representatives—that year, one of them set another unprecedented case for the party-list system.

That increase in PDAF allocation does not compare to the controversial appointment of then Akbayan representative Arlene “Kaka” Bag-ao as the “caretaker” of the lone district of Dinagat Islands. In October 2012, House Speaker Feliciano Belmonte quietly appointed Bag-ao to take over the congressional seat vacated by Representative Ruben Ecleo Jr., a cult leader who went into hiding after being convicted of parricide.

It was touted as the first instance a party-list representative took the place of an absent colleague—usually, relatives, chiefs of staff or representatives of neighboring districts would take his or her place.

Around that time, Bag-ao was gearing up to run for the congressional seat of the impoverished province under the banner of the Liberal Party. This was questioned by critics. After all, when Hontiveros ran twice for senator under the coalition, she still filed her certificate of candidacy as a candidate under Akbayan.

Republic Act 7941, or the Party-List System Act, says that “any elected party-list representative who changes his political party or sectoral affiliation during his term of office shall forfeit his seat.” This was the basis for one Dinagat Islands resident to petition Bag-ao's disqualification before the House of Representatives Electoral Tribunal in February 2013.

As the petition was dismissed based on a technicality, Bag-ao went on to win the seat that May. The question of whether her stint as the "caretaker" of the Dinagat Islands district was within the bounds of the law, however, was not answered by HRET.

Bag-ao's appointment also came under fire because she received not just her own ₱66 million allocation as Akbayan representative, but also as "caretaker" of Dinagat Islands. This amounted to around ₱137.4 million—itsself, the largest allocation for a legislative district that year. Notably, Ecleo received zero allocation during the previous year.

The double allocation for the year 2013 meant that Bag-ao controlled around ₱200 million in funds—almost as much as the PDAF of a senator.

An 'accident of history'

Still, political observers note that it is important and even inevitable for Akbayan to resort to the tactics of traditional political entities. This means that the coalition makes sense for a reformist party-list like Akbayan to push through with its agenda.

"Partly, at least, they [Akbayan] have to play the game. *Kasi, kailangan mo ng majority para magpasa ng iyong batas eh. Paano mo kukunin ang majority kung ganyan ang mga kasama mong congressmen? Makakatulong 'yung member ka ng ruling coalition* (You need the majority for you to be able to pass your laws. How will you get the majority if you are with those kinds of congressmen? It will help if you are a member of the ruling coalition)," said Ramon Casiple, executive director of the Institute of Political and Electoral Reform (IPER). CHR's Rosales was once the Executive Director of IPER, according to her bio-data.

Some have argued that had former Senator Manuel Villar, a rival presidential candidate, won in 2010, the Makabayan bloc would have been in the other side of the controversy instead of Akbayan. For Sarmiento, Akbayan's integrity being put into question was an "accident of history."

"*Nu'ng nanalo 'yung* Aquino administration (When Aquino won), of course, because of the coalition, we're going to be appointed," Gorres said.

What piques the curiosity of observers, however, is if the party has really achieved much with these gains—or made the most of the alliance.

"At the end of the day, *titingnan mo din 'yun: Totoo ba* that you benefited (you have to see if it's true that you benefited)? [It's the] first time that a democratic left party has actually been able to hold positions of power [in] government, and for whatever it's worth, it would really be nice to look at how much they have influenced government policies. And to see if these policies have impact on the ground," said Lapuz.

Serving in two branches of the government

For some Akbayan members, however, gaining from the coalition does not automatically translate to better progress for their advocacies. "*Nakakatulong na* in the sense *na nasa* majority *kami*, but at the end of the day, *sariling sikap pa rin talaga eh* (It was helpful in the sense that we belong to the majority, but at the end of the day, it still boils down to your own effort)," said Representative Gutierrez.

Gutierrez was among the Akbayan members appointed by Aquino shortly after winning the presidency. However, in 2012, he left his position as an undersecretary at the

Office of the Presidential Adviser on Political Affairs, which Akbayan's Llamas heads, after being nominated by the party to serve as its representative.

Seemingly underscoring the President's favor for Akbayan, Aquino then replaced Gutierrez with another party member, Tomasito Villarin. This appointment occurred two months after Comelec finally cleared the way for Akbayan to run in the elections.

A neophyte in Congress, Gutierrez saw that serving in the executive and the legislative branches of the government presents its own unique advantages and difficulties.

"[No matter] how high you may be—Cabinet secretary... or Undersecretary—at the end of the day, you are an extension of the President. In other words... you can't go around saying something contrary to what the official position of the President," he said. "I suppose on the flipside of that, *mabilis 'yung pace nu'ng executive; marami kang magagawa, kasi andu'n ka mismo, 'di ba* (The pace in the executive is much faster; you can do more because you have direct control, right)?"

In Congress, however, Gutierrez sees the need for building alliances to earn votes, because "you can't do anything on your own." On the upside, being in Congress brings more leeway to adhere to party platforms. "*Sa Congress kasi, mas may clear mandate ka* (In Congress, you have a clearer mandate). You're here as a representative of the constituency—representative of the Filipino people," he said.

CHR's Rosales, on the other hand, went the other way in her political career—from serving as the party's three-time representative since the party-list system's inception in 1998, to heading in the executive branch an agency that oversees her long-time advocacy on human rights.

When asked if it was easier to forward her advocacies in the executive or the legislative, Rosales pointed enthusiastically to the chair she sat on during the interview, finding it easier to push for the party's human rights agenda now that she chairs the CHR. "I'd have my difficulties, but... in fact, I would want to continue, [because] there's so much more that you would have to do," she said.

"Here, I can manage contradictions a bit more than down in the House of Representatives. It's more difficult there in terms of managing differences."

Rosales had her fair share of difficulties as a member of the opposition under the Arroyo administration. At one point, Arroyo encouraged the creation of the Marcos Compensation Law, she said, until the former president backtracked on it. The bill would only eventually be passed under the Aquino administration.

While Rosales became the chairperson of the House Committee on Human Rights during the 14th (2001-2004) and 15th Congresses (2004-2007), she had to forfeit her chairmanship in 2005, when Akbayan, along with the parties that now form the Makabayan bloc, switched over to the minority during the height of the Hello Garci scandal.

Rosales and other Akbayan representatives became staunch critics of the Arroyo administration. That was the only time Akbayan chaired a House committee in the previous administrations.

Reassessing the alliance

Aside from winning positions in the executive and gaining unprecedented access to funds, another issue for the party has to do with Hontiveros running for senator twice

under the Aquino banner in 2010 and 2013. This was among the reasons Brillantes voted for Akbayan's disqualification from the party-list system, saying the party "has established strong political machinery that it has been fielding a senatorial candidate since 2010."

The opportunity to field a senatorial candidate, however, came up as a result of the coalition. "It also happened *na nag-offer si Noy na magpatakbo ng isang kasama* to the party *sa* Senate slate *nila, na eventually naging ako 'yun.*(Noy offered to have a cadre run in the party's Senate slate, and eventually, I was chosen)," Hontiveros said.

In both elections, the senatorial candidates were packaged as necessities for Aquino to institute his reforms. Yet, even if Hontiveros was among the leading candidates, she lost narrowly both times to more popular candidates, most of whom are members of well-entrenched political dynasties.

In both elections, she carried the Akbayan flag as its former representative. As Lapuz put it, "That was the first time that the party braved the odds and went for national elections. They lost. And Risa lost again. *Ang sakit nu'n* (That's painful)."

Teehankee, meanwhile, said the alliance has not been able to use its advantages to the fullest. "Ideally, Akbayan should provide the mass base for LP, which is a traditional party. *Eh kaso nga, walang nag-iisip nang ganyan eh* (But, no one thinks that way)," he said. "Akbayan will provide the mass base, LP will provide the national power base, then we can propel this coalition forward."

Rosales echoed this observation, saying: "President Aquino has given so much—limitations *din 'yan ng Akbayan* (Akbayan has had its limitations). Akbayan should also improve itself."

Like Akbayan's current members, Lapuz said there should really be an assessment of the party's gains, if any.

“*Malinaw na malinaw—kay Risa talo. Isang malaking* glaring assessment point *'yun na teka lang, ano ba talaga 'yung ganansiya* (It is very clear—when it comes to Risa, they lost. That is a huge, glaring assessment point. What really is the gain)?” she said.

“Since you are a party in power, you should have been able to amass strength and enough resources within this period to ensure that you can take off in 2016. If not, you probably have a big problem.”

For Hontiveros, the gains may be not as lucrative as one would expect from political concessions, but these gains were the ones that Akbayan wanted the most to push for their advocacies. “*Para sa amin, meaningful, kasi andu'n sa mga ahensya na may kinalaman sa reform agenda* (For us, the gains were meaningful, because they had to do with the agencies related to the reform agenda),” she said.

Yet, the party, Hontiveros said, continues to ponder about the fruits of the coalition. “Did our being a progressive party in coalition with a reformist—but not a socialist, [still] a traditional party—did it make a difference? Did it make a difference *sa* political culture *ng mamamayan* (Did it make a difference in the political culture of the people)?”

For the sake of political advantage

Akbayan gives in to Aquino-LP policy framework

(Conclusion)

At first, Akbayan Representative Walden Bello vehemently opposed the Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT) program, the government’s multi-billion-peso flagship anti-poverty measure. Bello described the Department of Social Welfare and Development’s program—which gives the poorest families a monthly stipend of ₱1,500 in exchange for minimum attendance in schools and health care centers—as just a “band-aid solution.”

However, within the first few months of the President Benigno S. Aquino III’s administration, he eventually changed tune.

“Initially, *ayaw ni* Walden but after a few conversations, *tanggap na rin niya ang* CCT. (Initially, Walden did not like it but after a few conversations, he already accepted the CCT),” said Joel Rocamora, Secretary of the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) and one of the founders of Akbayan Citizens’ Action Party.

Notably, in his privilege speech on September 28, 2010, Bello implored then newly-appointed Rocamora to “wean his [NAPC] colleagues away from their fascination with another magic bullet, the CCT ... program, as a way out of poverty.”

This instance is just one of the controversies marring the party's decision to ally with the Liberal Party and to support its standard bearer Aquino as presidential candidate in 2010. Decisions like these meant that both had to make concessions in the name of alliance.

Akbayan members said they had to make compromises when the party became part of the ruling coalition. These adjustments, they said, enabled them to gain political advantage in the form of campaign support, backing for their legislative agenda and access to several government positions.

“In terms of engaging the administration ... *na dati walang* access (we used to have no access) when we were solely in the streets—now na we are both outside and inside the government, *minsan, may mga pagtitimpla talaga kami na ginagawa, kasi hindi lang kami bumabanat* from outside (now that we are both outside and inside the government, sometimes, we have been making adjustments, because we’re not just attacking from outside),” Hontiveros said.

However, given the fact that theirs is a marriage of strange bedfellows when it comes to principles and priorities, there were many instances when Akbayan had to give in to the policy framework of the Aquino administration. In that vein, the party has been criticized for supposedly flip-flopping on controversial measures—ones that often come with a huge price tag—like the ₱62.6 billion CCT program, whose budget has increased exponentially since the start of the Aquino administration.

From critical to cautious: Compromising on CCT?

Initially, Bello was critical of the program. Even during the first few months of the Aquino administration, he had attacked the poverty alleviation measure in the privilege speeches he delivered to the House of Representatives.

“Let me just say that when we deal with poverty *ho*, I do not think we can just have band-aid solutions like ‘*pantawid pamilya*,’” he said in a privilege speech on pertinent economic issues, which he delivered on August 2, 2010.

The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program was initiated by Former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in 2008. Years later, Aquino touted the analogous CCT program as the government’s main poverty alleviation measure, despite promising “opportunity for the poor” as opposed to the previous government’s “anti-poverty programs that instill a dole-out mentality” during the campaign period.

In the same speech, Bello said while CCT is a “transitory program,” it cannot be the government’s solution to poverty. He stressed the importance of major structural changes and major policy changes in the economy.

“*Ang sinasabi ko lang po* is that multipronged and comprehensive *ang dapat maging* approach to poverty reduction (All I am saying is that the approach to poverty reduction should be multipronged and comprehensive),” he said.

In an interview with the researchers, Bello said he was initially critical of the program because he was not aware of its success in other countries such as Mexico and Brazil. Also, he admitted that it was a knee-jerk reaction given that he is a World Bank critic.

Bello said he eventually came to realize that the CCT worked in other countries. “When I looked more into it ... because some people called me up, *iba ito* (this is different),” he explained.

However, in another privilege speech that he delivered in the House on September 28, 2010, he said that it did not work in other countries.

In his speech, Bello said he had no problem when conditional cash transfers are being used for emergency conditions for a certain period of time. The problem, he added, lies when they become the principal form of addressing the poverty issue.

“I have problems with that, especially when there is no solid empirical evidence that [it] in fact, leads to a reduction of poverty. The evidence from Brazil is definitely not there. Our NGOs, our partners in Brazil have, in fact, told us that the CCT program in Brazil is a major failure,” he said.

Not a month passed since this speech was delivered when Akbayan representatives Bello and Arlene “Kaka” Bag-ao authored House Resolution 529, along with Bagong Henerasyon representative Bernadette Herrera Dy. The resolution urged the HOR to create a special committee to oversee the implementation of the CCT on October 12 and stated that the program, after all, is “one innovative practice to achieve social protection and inclusion for the poor.”

“The CCT is a viable and effective tool to reach the poorest of the poor provided that it is properly enforced,” it concluded.

Immediately, allegations surfaced regarding his stand on the issue, to which he replied in a statement two weeks later that, in the first place, he never signed the manifesto opposing CCT, which was forwarded in the House by the militant Makabayan bloc.

“If one has five years left to fulfill the Millennium Development Goal of halving the poverty rate, and all Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo’s administration left us was massively increased poverty, then I would not be unwilling to try out conditional cash transfers as a poverty containment strategy so long as there are strict controls and criteria for

disbursement and compliance,” he said in the statement, which was posted on his Facebook page.

Bello was quick to say, however, that he was not pressured to change his mind. “In terms of was it pressure, you know, that changed my mind, that is not,” he told the researchers.

Cooperation or cooptation?

CCT is hardly the only issue where the party has had to lend support to the administration’s framework of governance. Critics alleged that as a result of the alliance, Akbayan had to back the administration—or at least downplay the issue or keep mum—on other raging topics, such as the Freedom of Information Bill, Cybercrime Prevention Act and the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Act.

In October 2012, a petition for disqualification was filed against Akbayan. The petitioners alleged that Akbayan no longer serves the marginalized, hence, it should not be allowed to run in the party-list elections.

“It has a track record of subservience to this regime. It feigns ‘disagreement’ with Aquino, only when the need arises. It has partnered with the Aquino regime in further marginalizing the marginalized and underrepresented,” the petition quoted Bagong Alyansang Makabayan’s Renato Reyes’s blog post. “Remember Akbayan’s spirited defense of Aquino’s CCT program?”

Akbayan allied with the party believing it could forward its agenda in accordance with Aquino's reform platform. Despite differences on prioritized issues and in ways to

address the country's problems, the two parties struck the alliance based on a platform of reform governance, mostly revolving around the country's endemic corruption.

"This is really a reform government," said Gibby Gorres of Akbayan Youth. "And then as of now, okay *naman 'yung* action. I mean, *hindi* okay—*kulang pa pero*, at least, *meron nang* attention for the sex for flight scheme (the action is okay. I mean, not that okay—it's lacking but at least there's attention to the sex for flight scheme)."

He further said the reform agenda of Aquino and LP would, in their opinion, be addressed if the party would really fight for it.

Differences and disappointments

While Akbayan members have gained more clout to push for their agenda, members of the party admit that they have to bend over at times for the sake of their advocacies—and the coalition itself.

"The principles remain the same, the positioning on the issues remain the same, but the conduct is adjusted ... to try to be effective, to try to preserve *'yung* space *namin sa loob* (our space within)," said Risa Hontiveros, Akbayan's chairperson and former party-list representative.

She said they had to make adjustments in their manner of asserting their position in order to preserve a "minimum decorum as a coalition partner."

Citing the thorny issue of political dynasties, Hontiveros recounted: "*Yung* issue *ng* political dynasty... *hindi rin namin pwedeng tiktikan nang masyado ang* Team PNoy *dahil may mga kasama sa slate na young dynasts din*. So, *ganoon 'yung isang halimbawa na konkretong pag-adjust ng tono at kondukta* given the particular conjuncture with the

long-term goal (With regards to the issue of political dynasty, we can't criticize Team PNoy that much, because some of the members of the slate are also young dynasts. So, that is an example of a concrete adjustment of tone and conduct given the particular conjuncture with the long-term goal)."

While the party members have tried to adjust to the situation, some members have opted to leave the party in the aftermath of the alliance.

One of them is Paula Bianca Lapuz of Akbayan Youth, who left the party in 2009 after disagreeing with its decision to ally, among other reasons.

"*Ang Akbayan kasi, iba kasi 'yung position niya. Hindi ko lang ma-reconcile. Hanggang saan, 'di ba?* (Akbayan's position is different. I just can't reconcile it. What would be the limit when it comes to this?)," she said, laughing. "*Saka papalag ka pa ba?* (And, will you be able to budge?) How can you bite the hand of the one who feeds you?"

Gorres, who was appointed as the youth and student representative at the National Anti-Poverty Commission, acknowledged this concern. "If you are a political party, you have to compromise. However, you don't compromise your principles—you compromise certain stances, you compromise certain issues, so that you will be able to win another set of issues," Gorres said. "I think, in terms of timing and strategizing, *may mga compromises na naganap* (compromises did occur)."

Gorres said that for the most part, the party is still in favor of the administration. "We've been helping each other out for the longest time, and we really think it's the working relationship that there is," he said.

In that vein, Akbayan had more or less accepted that differences will inevitably arise from such an alliance, especially on the issue of economic framework, something they said they make clear to LP.

“If it comes to the point [where] you as an administration will decide to take a position contrary [to our] party stance..., we’ll stay with our party stance—agree-disagree *na lang tayo* (we’ll just agree or disagree). But we can work on other issues,” said Representative Ibarra Gutierrez III, a neophyte congressman who is currently serving alongside the three-term Bello.

Support for a ‘watered-down’ FOI bill

However, even if members of Akbayan have accepted that there will be differences, they can’t help but feel “disappointment” when some of Aquino’s campaign promises failed to materialize. Among these is the government’s declining to prioritize the Freedom of Information Bill.

For Akbayan Citizens’ Action Party, passing the FOI bill is seen as one of the instruments in achieving their goal of a reformed, transparent government. Given that Akbayan thought LP would be the traditional political party that is more aligned with a reform agenda, it had hopes in pushing for the passage of the FOI bill, among others.

Four years in, the bill still remains in limbo, just as it has been since the first such proposal was filed in Congress in 1992.

Like previous party representatives, Bello and Arlene “Kaka” Bag-ao filed an FOI bill that sought to enforce and complement the constitutional right to “information on matters of public concern,” as stated in the Section 7 of the Bill of Rights.

Yet, that bill and several similar ones authored by other representatives did not fare better in terms of progress, even when compared to previous attempts at legislation during the decade-long Arroyo government. The previous attempt at passing the bill had the House of Representatives adjourning without going over the legislation for a third reading because of the lack of quorum.

However, problems arose when stakeholders expressed alarm over the version of the bill that was suggested by the Palace. Several provisions were deemed vague, such as the one that provides for the President's "executive privilege" to withhold certain records "by reason of the sensitivity of the matter." Its exemption of issues relating to "national security" was also seen as too broad.

The bill was so "watered-down" that members of the Makabayan bloc—the group of party-list congressmen who belong to the national democratic part of the political Left—withdraw their authorship to the consolidated bill. These seven congressmen contested the Malacañang-sponsored provisions: Teodoro Casiño and Neri Colmenares of Bayan Muna, Luzviminda Ilagan and Emmi de Jesus of Gabriela, Rafael Mariano of Anakpawis, Antonio Tinio of ACT Teachers, Raymond Palatino of Kabataan.

"With so many exemptions it, might even be used by government authorities to withhold information that should be accessible to the public. Congress has bended back too far on the FOI bill. The Committee on Public Information has delayed its deliberations and even watered down the bill just to accommodate President Aquino's concerns," Casiño said in a statement.

Yet, despite the restrictions that made Casiño and his allies withdraw their authorship, the representatives of Akbayan did not back out of the bill.

House Bill 133, which was authored by Bayan Muna representatives Casiño and Colmenares, originally had no such restrictions. The bill stated that the duty to disclose information shall not be denied except in cases where criminal intent is proven by court process.

Bello and Bag-ao's House Bill 301 was somewhat closer to the Palace's proposals. The Akbayan-authored bill, unlike the one by Bayan Muna, had a section dedicated to the exceptions from mandatory disclosure.

Like the Palace's version, House Bill 301 provides for the exemption of information authorized by executive order to be kept secret or related to national defense and law enforcement. It also exempts personal or financial information and drafts of government policy decisions.

Even then, Akbayan had historically authored FOI bills that increasingly expounded on such restrictions every congressional term. For one, House Bill 5784—the first such bill the party filed, authored by 12th Congress representative Rosales 2003—contained no such restrictions at all. It went so far as to say that “no request for information may be denied by reason of its generality.” She refiled the exact same legislation under House Bill 3580 the following congressional term.

However, in 2007, Risa Hontiveros's House Bill 3116 excluded information relating to security and foreign policy, as well as personal and commercial information. It also gave the President and the Congress the power to exempt certain information.

Bello and Bag-ao's House Bill 301 expanded on the restrictions by including drafts of government decisions to the list and granting offices the right to deny information on grounds of criminal intent. The bill also did away with the provision for

the creation of a National Information Commission—a provision included in previous Akbayan bills.

The latest incarnation of the legislation, House Bill 2003, authored by Gutierrez and Bello, finally incorporated the suggestions made by the administration. This was after “consultations between public officials and stakeholders were made in order to strike a balance between the right to information and the duty of the government to function efficiently for the People,” according to the bill’s explanatory note.

The President’s broken promise

Despite this, Bello expressed his disappointment on the Palace-backed version of the bill when he addressed the media in November 2012.

“I don’t really know what Malacañang priorities are at this point. In fact, I am not sure if the House leadership wants this bill to get through,” Bello said, a few weeks before the Palace’s version of the FOI became news.

Other Akbayan members couldn't help but express disapproval of the government's perceived lack of enthusiasm for the right to information.

“When PNoy (President Aquino) was campaigning, he said it was going to be one of the priority bills of this administration, *pero wala pa hanggang ngayon* (but there's still none of it up to this day),” said Gibby Gorres, a member of the party's youth arm, Akbayan Youth. “We’re very disappointed *na hindi pa matingkad sa administrasyong ito ang usapin ng FOI* (the issue of FOI is still not prominent with this administration).”

Aquino’s campaign originally said that an FOI bill would “strengthen people’s participation with simple and clear procedures for citizens to monitor all government

projects and report their feedback through accessible means.” However, the government has since backtracked on its promise to prioritize the bill.

Unlike the Reproductive Health and Sin Tax bills—both of which were advocated by Akbayan and its allies—Aquino declined to certify the FOI bill as “urgent” at various points during his administration. Instead, a September 2013 position paper by Press Secretary Herminio Coloma merely said that “the objectives of a Freedom of Information bill have been achieved as a result of the President’s unwavering campaign for transparency and accountability in the bureaucracy” and that there is no need for it to be classified as “urgent” in order to make its passage quicker.

For his part, Gutierrez objected to the Palace-backed version of the bill being labeled “watered-down.” After all, the variances were “very, very minimal” and the bill was a product of a “tremendous amount of discussion.”

For now, Akbayan is still hoping to see the passage of the FOI bill during the remaining days of the Aquino administration, just as he promised four years ago during his campaign. “*Meron pang dalawang taon* (There's still two years left),” Gorres said. “So, siges pa rin when it comes to FOI (So, let's go with FOI)!”

While it has been passed by the Senate early March, whether it will be given a relatively quick pace like that in the House remains to be seen.

Gutierrez said that since the Palace—with the backing of the ruling majority in Congress—had already presented its version of the bill, Akbayan might as well as support it so what have been an arduous process would proceed quicker.

“*Mas ma-minimize 'yung ibi-veto* (There would be less chance of it getting vetoed),” he said. “We should go with the one that will get the biggest consensus as quickly as possible. *Kasi gusto ko nang lumusot eh* (I want it to pass right away).”

Gutierrez added that Aquino, after all, was the first president he’d seen vetoing a lot of bills.

Compromises are natural and inevitable

Political analysts, however, say such compromises are just but a natural part of being in a coalition.

“If you are in a coalition, *mahalaga* in the first place na *ilinaw mo sa sarili mo kung bakit ka ba* in a coalition. *Anong kahalagahan ng coalition sa inyo?* Therefore, prepared *ka dapat* to pay the price. 'Yung coalition mo, magde-demand (It is important to make clear why you are in a coalition. What is the importance of the coalition to you? Therefore, you should be prepared to pay the price. The coalition will have demands),” said Ramon Casiple, executive director of the Institute of Political and Electoral Reform (IPER).

On the other hand, Julio Teehankee of the LP think tank, National Institute for Policy Studies, said coalition politics is acceptable in mature democracies, provided that it is based on common platforms and stances on issues. The problem for him, however, lies in the dynamics besetting traditional politics in the Philippines.

Underwhelming push for advocacies

Despite the supposed advantages, the FOI bill remains one of the party's many disappointments when it comes to the legislative arena, where it would be assumed that they would gain a lot more momentum because of the alliance.

“Kung popular halimbawa ang presidente mo, meron siyang ruling majority sa both Houses sa Kongreso. At ikaw ay member ng ruling coalition. Ang biyaya ng bahagi ka bale ng pamunuan; therefore, may share ka sa anumang mga biyaya na nanggagaling sa ganu'ng arrangement,” said Casiple.

However, he added that this does not guarantee the passage of legislation, because there are times that even the President would object to Akbayan's bills.

Hence, the progress of passing legislation in Congress did not accelerate—in fact, the rate even dropped. For the first four congressional terms, the passage rate of their bills increased from 0 to 11 percent. However, by the Aquino administration, it dropped to just 7 percent. In contrast to the notion that being in a ruling majority helps gain support for legislation, the alliance did not give a much needed boost to Akbayan's advocacies in the legislature.

Table 8. *Progress of Akbayan Bills from 11th-16th Congress*

Level	Bill Status	11 th	12 th	13 th	14 th	15 th
President	Enacted	0	2	4	6	4
	Vetoed	0	0	0	0	1
Senate	Approved	0	0	1	1	0
House of Representatives	Approved	0	10	3	7	6
	Approved by Committee	0	0	0	1	0
	Committee	7	6	10	14	8
	Pending	12	15	30	27	37
Total		19	33	48	56	56

Source: House of Representatives Legislative Archives. Retrieved 18 February 2014, from www.legis.congress.gov.ph

Interestingly, it was Aquino who became the first president to veto an Akbayan-authored bill—even if the Rights for Internally Displaced Persons Act of 2011 had endured the long road since 2004 to being made a law.

Aquino objected to certain provisions in the law, which invites reparation claims and does not discriminate between displacement caused by natural disasters and violent conflict, some of which may even been perpetrated by the State.

Although Gutierrez removed the provision for victims of natural disaster in the overhauled bill he filed the following congressional term, the legislation still did not remove the provision for the reparation scheme, which Aquino disapproved.. Instead, the bill only elaborated on how the Commission on Human Rights should act on such claims, despite Aquino objecting to the agency being granted such powers.

Still, Bello said the party found itself in a better place, despite setbacks in the legislation. “We could have chosen to remain in the sidelines but I don’t think that if we have remained in the sidelines some of those bills would have made it,” he said, referring to such victories as the much-contested Reproductive Health and Marcos Compensation Laws, as well as the Human Trafficking Act and Kasambahay Law.

Such disappointments were not limited to the legislative arena, however. Even if members of the party have been appointed to several government positions, the areas where the party disagreed with the administration would be the places where they were not given an advantage.

For instance, Akbayan opposed the government's decision to uphold the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001, which it deems to give too much clout to the private sector and too much emphasis on coal-intensive energy.

Yet, it was in these instances that Akbayan did not have to compromise, said Gorres. “*Di naman kami nakaupo sa DOE* (We are not seated in the Department of Energy),” he added. “*Pero kung nakaupo kami sa DOE, siguro magko-compromise—pero as of now, walang compromise na magaganap* (But if we were seated in DOE, there would probably be compromises—but as of now, no compromises would be made).

For the party's members, however, they said they do not regret being in the coalition, despite encountering disappointments. They recognized that there are limits to what a party can gain from an alliance.

“Coalition work is not the case of getting everything you want all the time, [isn't it]? It's the case of actually being able to get to a position where you are in a better position to push for some of your items in your agenda, and *tingin ko nangyari naman yun* (I think that happened),” Gutierrez said.

Brewing tension points

Still, Akbayan and LP's differences in ideology cause tensions even bigger than the disagreements they had in certain legislation. For instance, they differ in their opinion regarding what should be done with regards to the territorial dispute between China and the Philippines.

Bello said the party has been supportive of the push of the administration to get support for the country's claims against China. However, he said they do not agree to the administration's decision to enlist the support of the United States.

He added that bringing the United States into the dispute would only subject the conflict to "superpower dynamics." "On this area the President has warned—told us that we cannot fight two people at one time, the US and China," he said. "But, it's not the question of fighting two people at the same time, it's maintaining an independent form, and politics."

Since it's an issue that party feels very strongly about, Bello said that "we really have to reassess our position" on the coalition.

Two weeks after the interview with Bello, the Philippine government drafted an agreement on March 4-6 to give the United States access to its military bases in line with the China's increasing assertiveness in the so-called West Philippine Sea.

This will enable increased US military presence in the Philippines. Both countries hope to finalize the terms for the "Agreement on Enhanced Defense Cooperation" before US President Barack Obama visits Asia in April.

As of the time of writing, however, Akbayan has not yet issued any statement addressing the matter.

A party in power for the year 2016?

While the parties' conflict in ideologies serves as a test to the coalition, observers anticipate what the upcoming 2016 national elections would mean for a party-list group that was considered to have swiftly become a "party in power."

The 2016 elections would serve as a benchmark to see if Akbayan really gained what it takes to be a national party, outside the party-list system.

Lapuz said that since Akbayan is a “party in power,” it should have been able to amass strength and enough resources to ensure their “take-off” in 2016. “If not, you probably have a big problem,” she added.

For now, one thing is for sure: There are duties that Akbayan has to fulfil as LP’s coalition partner.

“*Sa ngayon, I believe as a coalition partner na ang ethics noon, obliged kami to support ang magiging kandidato ng Liberal, o ng Liberal-led coalition (For now, I believe that the ethics of being a coalition partner states that we are obliged to support the would-be [presidential candidate] of Liberal Party or of the Liberal-led coalition),*” Hontiveros said. She added, however, that the candidate should also be reform-oriented.

These are the effects that Akbayan had to contend with now that it had entered traditional politics. Teehankee quoted the late Popoy Lagman, of leftist group Sanlakas (unaffiliated with either Akbayan or Makabayan), as saying that those who enter the “pigpen” should be prepared to get just as dirty as “pigs.”

For Teehankee, there is always a dilemma of balancing principle and power, especially when the party is in power—as in the case of LP and Akbayan.

“If you’re a party of principle, and yet you do not have power, then you will not be able to realize your principles. But if you focus too much on power, you might end up losing your principles,” he said.

Sidebar

Party-list system ‘too small’ for parties to effect change

Akbayan formed an alliance with the Liberal Party in 2009 and endorsed then presidential candidate Benigno Aquino III because it had found that the party-list system was a “trap.”

“*Papasok ka sa electoral, parliamentary struggle, pero pumasok ka sa isang napakakitid na espasyo* (You will enter the electoral, parliamentary struggle, but you entered a very narrow space),” Joel Rocamora, one of the party’s founding members and former president, said.

Akbayan found that coalescing with larger political entities or groups will be helpful for the party. In 2009, it formally announced its decision to form a coalition with the Liberal Party and support LP’s standard bearer back then, Mar Roxas. An interesting turn of events eventually resulted to Aquino being the presidential candidate.

Since then, members of the party have been appointed to several government positions, with some even heading a number of agencies.

Rocamora, himself an Aquino appointee to the National Anti-Poverty Commission, said with the number of votes Akbayan has been getting, it could have fielded more representatives in Congress. However, a party-list can only have a maximum of three representatives, according to Republic Act 7941 or the Party-list System Act.

For instance, Akbayan garnered a total of 1,058,691 votes in 2010 – its highest since 1998. With that much votes, it could have gotten at least four seats in Congress if it competed on the same grounds with district representatives. According to the 1987

Constitution, each legislative district which has at least 250,000 residents shall be entitled to one representative.

However, because of the limit imposed by the Party-list System Act, the party can be given only a maximum of three seats in Congress no matter how much votes they get every elections.

“You can get 5 million votes, *hanggang tatlo ka pa rin* (but you can still only get three seats),” Rocamora said. “So it’s a trap. *Lalahok ka sa electoral, pero may limit* (you can join the electoral race, but there is a limit),” Rocamora said.

The party-list system is based on the idea of proportional representation. Christian Monsod, the main sponsor of the party-list system, said the idea behind this key feature of the system is to ensure that there will be more representation of different ideologies and agenda in Congress.

A system of proportional representation means that a party will get the number of seats corresponding to the number votes that they will receive. Hence, if a party gets 40 percent of the total number of votes, it should be able to get 40 percent of the allotted seats for party-lists in Congress.

However, in the Philippine party-list system not practicing “genuine” proportional representation has resulted to the diffusion of different parties or groups with the same advocacies.

“It diffuses, instead of consolidating those poor sectors. *Halimbawa*, for labor union, farmers’ parties, [there are] three or four or five labor parties *na binibiyak mo yung mga boto ng mga magsasaka, manggagawa*. Hence, *‘di ka nae-elect* (For example, for labor union, farmers’ parties, there are three or four of five labor parties that split up the

votes of the farmers and the laborers. Hence, you don't get elected),” said Teehankee.

“*Dapat kung totoong* proportional system ‘*yan... magko-consolidate kayo para makuha niyo* (If it is a genuine proportional system, they will consolidate to get seats).”

Election Commissioner Lucenito Tagle similarly expressed his frustration over sectoral representation being fractured along party lines.

“*Kaya dumadami kasi kanya-kanya. Sila sila nag-aaway*. Different advocacies *na*. (This is why there are so many of them. Each party acts on its own. They fight each other. They have different advocacies),” said Tagle. “‘*Di tuloy sila makapagpasa ng law, nahihirapan* (That’s why they find it hard to pass laws).

For instance in the 16th Congress, there are four party-lists claiming to represent educators: Abakada, A TEACHER, ACT Teachers and AVE. There are three parties representing the interests of the agricultural sector: AGAP, Agri and BUTIL. Two parties represent migrant workers in Congress: OFW family and ANGKLA. Also there are three party-list groups advocate the interests of the labor sector: TUCP, DIWA and Anakpawis.

However, while former Comelec Commissioner Rene Sarmiento agrees that the party-list system is “too small,” he said it just needs tweaking for it to be bigger and more open.

“*Totoo na maliit sila*, but still, *nakakapuwing rin naman sila, 'di ba? Nakaka-stir sila ng debate. Kahit na maliit, eh, nakaka-impluwensya; nabubuksan ang isyu*. (It is true that they are small, but they are still able to stir debate. Even if they are small, they have the ability to influence; issues are raised),” he said. “*Sabihin mang maliit, eh kasi experiment naman talaga ito eh* (After all, even if the system is small, it is still an experiment),” he said.

Rocamora affirmed this as he said: “While it’s a trap, it’s still a way to get into national politics.”

Hence, for as long as the party-list system remains this way and is seen in this light, more parties might be given no choice but to ally with larger political entities just to gain political advantage—just like what happened with Akbayan.

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A. Summary

Akbayan Citizens' Action Party said it formed an alliance with the Liberal Party and with President Benigno Aquino III in 2009 because of their common reform agenda. This alliance came to be even when they have vast differences in principles and priorities.

The alliance is a marriage of strange bedfellows because Akbayan, the Liberal Party and President Aquino are a mismatch. For one, an analysis of their platforms shows that they have differences in their stances and plans in education, poverty and economy. Furthermore, LP and Aquino did not address in their platforms the issues which Akbayan has been very passionate about: agrarian reform, labor and urban poor.

Members and officers of the party also said this alliance will enable them to expand their influence in government. Indeed, the party gained political advantage after the 2010 elections. They gained unlikely contributors to their campaign and appointments to several high government positions. This also meant being able to take control of government agencies consistent with their advocacies and may be used to consolidate votes from sectors.

However, Akbayan had to pay a price for all these. In its decision to become part of the ruling coalition, it had to sacrifice certain principles and stances on key issues. This is manifested through their stance on the Conditional Cash Transfer Program, Freedom of Information Bill and their view of what a party-list should be.

B. Conclusion

The phenomenon of coalition building is not new in politics, especially in the post-EDSA days of the country. However, Akbayan Citizens' Action Party's coalition

with the Liberal Party is unique in a sense that this is the first time a single party-list group has been openly supported by a President.

More than that, the alliance taints the party's integrity. Akbayan joined this coalition despite having divergent views when compared to that of the Liberal Party and President Aquino. This meant having to compromise on their manner of addressing issues and, at times, their stances on these.

The alliance enabled the party to gain political advantage by receiving campaign contributions from unlikely and first time contributors. An analysis of this roster of new donors allows questioning of the party's supposed pro-poor, pro-labor, pro-agrarian reform, pro-good governance and anti-corruption principles.

Aside from that, several Akbayan members and officers have been appointed to various high government positions. In effect, they are in control of a number of government agencies which may be used to consolidate the marginalized sectors for electoral purposes. This adds to the resources at the party's disposal.

Therefore, the coalition has been made possible by clear compromises of principles on the part of Akbayan. Hence, conflict of interest has been present in the policy-making decisions of the party.

VII. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Theoretical Issues

The findings of this study corresponded with the theoretical framework, although they may not be an exact fit. For instance, while the theoretical framework has identified the interests of political entities that influence their actions and how they do so, the theories have not said much about the nature of coalition building—the central premise of this study’s results. Still, it can be said that coalition building is just one of the mechanisms that bring about the formation of conflict of interest in a political entity, thus addressing the central premise of this study—how does conflict of interest affect the decisions of a political entity like Akbayan Citizens’ Action Party?

First, Akbayan obtained political and economic gains from the coalition, a goal that is explained by the public choice theory, where the economic factors of political entities play a role in shaping its decisions.

Yet, an alliance like this does not come without a price. Due to the compromises that Akbayan has to make, it conceded to Aquino’s stances on certain issues and his way of addressing some, leading to doubts on whether the party is still representing the marginalized sectors and the interests of its own social movements. This may be seen through Pitkin’s Four Views on Representation, where true representation may devolve into just a formalistic one.

This phenomenon resulted in a loss of credibility for the party, not just among its political rivals but also in the eyes of some supporters and even poll bodies. It caused the fear that a loss of independence would mean the interests of the larger party—Liberal

Party in this case—would be forwarded instead. This evokes Gramsci's observation that political entities are the expression of the interests of certain social groups.

While the scope of the study was limited to Akbayan as a case study and a unique example in a system of representation, it is recommended that future research be done on the dynamics of the party-list system with the rest of the Congress. Other systems of representation in the regional or local levels may be tackled within the national contexts. The effects of coalition building may also be studied with a sociological approach, as mainstay party-list groups have been observed to use grassroots politics as a means of consolidating power in their respective sectors.

B. Methodological Issues

The study employed an investigative approach to an issue that has mostly been confined to the issue of questionable economic gains. This study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods in an effort to find out more about the party's dynamics beyond those contained in monetary data.

It can be said that the study works mostly because of the extensive analysis and contextualization that numerous interviews helped provide for the bulk of archived data and legislation. Data that do not seem to say much when taken alone can provide a lot of information given the bigger picture.

This study heavily relied on triangulation, where interviews are made to ensure that statements made by the sources can complement, confirm or even contradict each other. Contrasting statements help shed light on the most contentious issues where different perspectives when put together can provide a clearer picture of what happened. Information from interviews were also put side by side those gotten from documents.

Although not all data have been used in the findings section of this study, going over them confirms the seeming presence or absence of possible anomalies. The importance of checking Akbayan data against those pertinent to other similar political entities is stressed, for comparison and contrast had been a valuable tool of determining the findings of this study.

Finally, it is recommended that researchers still put seemingly theoretical phenomena like coalition building into the format of investigative reportage, as a means of reaching popular audiences. Investigative journalism involves rigorous collection of data and statements, among others, which also seals its place in the academe as a valid tool of research.

C. Practical Issues

The study found that because of the limitations in the party-list system—and the personality-based political system as a whole—non-mainstream parties like Akbayan have been forced to make do with the practices of traditional politics, including but not limited to coalition-building. Although Akbayan went with a traditional, elite-controlled party that it believed would forward its reform agenda and call for transparency, this study showed that despite the compromises that it made, the benefits it gained from the alliance have been questionable at best.

Members of Akbayan have consistently expressed that the party-list system's limits have impeded their efforts to legislate on behalf of the marginalized sectors it represents. Hence, its members had to take positions outside the party-list system and even the legislature.

With this, further studies should be made on policies regarding government representation that may end up defeating their own purposes. An example of this would be the Party-List System Act itself, although other policies and systems of representation do exist in the country. Studies like these may do well not just in the tradition of sociology or political science, but also in journalism, where it is desired that the mandate to ensure the people's self-governance be upheld.

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