

Memo: Lessons Learned from the 2010 Elections!
Date: July 1, 2010
For: Colleagues and peers of Louis Perron
People interested in winning elections
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**Perron Campaigns Election Update:
Lessons Learned from the 2010 Elections!**

That's it, the new president of the Philippines is Noynoy Aquino. He won an overwhelming victory because he had a clear, distinct and credible message. His message basically was: *Vote for me because I will not steal. In the name of the Lord and my parents, I promise you that I will not enrich myself and that I will clean up corruption. If there is no corruption there will be no poverty.* While it's true that part of the media was bluntly campaigning for Noynoy, it is also true that in terms of the message, it was a coherent and well-run campaign. Voters see corruption as a big, omnipresent problem and the main reason for poverty. They want the president to be God fearing and not corrupt and that's exactly what Noynoy had on the offer.

Noynoy's claim also mirrored perfectly with the weakness of his two main opponents. Joseph Estrada has a solid base of loyal supporters who would swim to China with him. His final result illustrates this appeal to parts of the poor. However, his having been convicted of plunder made him unelectable for the broader middle class. C5 and a series of other allegations created the impression for some voters that Manny Villar was using his positions in order to enrich himself. Villar's opponents used these allegations effectively and destroyed a long pre-campaign that had focused on Villar's background and the help for the OFWs.

Gilbert Teodoro had no realistic chance of winning the presidency. The alliance with the unpopular President Macapagal-Arroyo is the simple reason for this. However, he made some inroads with voters especially thanks to the debates. He is in pole position for the Senate in 2013, which is more than what many of his former admin colleagues can say.

Senator Dick Gordon and Brother Eddie both started the campaign with high negative personal ratings. The remarkable thing is that they were hardly hit by others. The negative ratings were within their internal control but unfortunately, they were unable to do anything to change them. It was a typical case of mismatch between political demand and offer.

The victory of Makati Mayor Jojo Binay is without any doubt the upset of the election cycle. It was a great campaign: a crystal clear message (his achievements in Makati), well executed and carried out with discipline and over a long period of time. Binay also attacked Senator Roxas explicitly in a TV ad. This is sort of new in Philippine politics. It seems that voters have become more tolerant in this respect, if the attacks don't look like a smear campaign but are credible, documented and convincing.

This being said, Binay's upset would not have been possible without the mistakes committed by both Senator Legarda and Senator Roxas. Legarda's sudden teaming up with Villar and the perceived lack of message hurt her campaign a lot. On the other hand, the complacency of the Roxas campaign confirmed an old campaigning rule: it's better for a candidate to trail a few percentage points behind but work like crazy than be ahead and become complacent. In fairness, it also has to be said that such an upset is easier to pull off for a vice presidential than for a presidential campaign, which is much more in the spotlight.

Finally, the Binay victory also vindicates survey companies. Sure, there are many fly-by-night and doubtful "surveys". Sure, many candidates and observers don't know how to interpret and use survey results for their campaigns. But scientific surveys, done and analyzed carefully and according to newest methodological standards are accurate (within the margin of error and at a 95% confidence level). If one looks back at the Pulse Asia and SWS surveys, he or she will note that the Binay upset did not happen overnight. He improved slowly but steadily in each new survey that came out.

The 2010 campaign also teaches us an important lesson about endorsements. Again, many candidates wasted millions and millions on endorsements. Politicians constantly underestimate voters. Voters nowadays are being bombarded with ads and news. They have become cynical and assume that the celebrities are being paid anyway. Both candidates endorsed by Manny Pacquiao, namely Senator Villar and Lito Atienza, lost. The example of Sarah Geronimo is very interesting in this respect. In 2007, she helped

Senator Angara as she was used to communicate the message that Angara is the father of free High School education. For Senator Legarda and Boboy Syjuco, however, Sarah Geronimo was the message itself and therefore had little impact.

The most important endorsement of the cycle was without any doubt the one of Senator Chiz Escudero. While most endorsers endorse both ticketmates, the Escudero endorsement started a lot of media discussion about the Noy-Bi option. The endorsement and the media coverage that came along with it had the effect of making voters realize that Noy-Bi is actually a possibility. Ticket-splitters that Philippine voters have always been, they embraced it willingly.

Regarding the Senators, the victory of Bongbong Marcos – arguably under worst possible circumstances – sticks out. Though the campaign started later, the decision of the two siblings to go to the wake of the late President Aquino established them as individuals in their own right far removed from the past. Like Binay, Marcos focused his ad campaign on his achievements, started early and carried it out with discipline. Few other neophytes marketed themselves wisely and with little money spent by the senatoriables during this cycle, the likes of Sotto, Recto and Lapid had a relatively easy way back to the Senate.

There were also some interesting local races in Metro Manila, for example the case of Herbert “Bistek” Bautista in Quezon City. Voters want celebrities to start at the lowest level and work their way up. Bautista was smart enough to wait his turn and now had an easy fight. Manila Vice Mayor Isko Moreno seems to follow the same route and example. Both the Muntinlupa and Manila races for Mayor are two examples of unsuccessful comeback campaigns. Both challengers let the first two years of the incumbent’s term pass without putting up a substantial challenge. They failed to redefine themselves in time. By the time the official campaign started, the respective incumbents were already in solid positions and both races were basically over. Navotas is also an interesting case. Voters in Metro Manila have become quite critical of family members entering politics. Sometimes it works (Jun Jun Binay, Abigail Binay), sometimes it does not work (Ali Atienza, Dante Tinga). The fact that the brother of Mayor Toby Tiangco, John Rey, not only won as Mayor but even ran unopposed is remarkable in this respect.

Finally, it is also important to maintain that after the long struggle for automation and the intense talk about failure, the automation did push through. The result was clear the day after the election (except for the Vice President) and candidates started to concede. I think that this is a very good development for Philippine democracy. The fact that the automation has worked will also make traditional machinery less dependable and the pursuit of market votes even more important – also a good development for democracy.

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Best regards,

Louis Perron