Conformity and Innovation in Local Patronage Politics

The Case of Bohol, Philippines

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Change is Coming?
Elections in the Philippines continue to be gripped with patronage, clientelism and money politics.
The Case of Bohol

- the “same faces and familiar surnames have thrown their hats into the [election] ring”
- noted to be the “Best Governed Province” in the Philippines
- Boholanos have claimed a collective political ‘self-image’ as politically conscious -- as citizens who want their needs and opinions known to their local leaders
- also known to be pious and religious as a people. Ironically, on an election week, it is not uncommon for people to succumb to cash offers in exchange for their votes
‘Is it raining over there? (Wa ba’y uwan-uwan diha?)’

They are not talking about the much-prayed for rain to water the dried-up rice fields. They are referring to the cash and goodies that political candidates distribute to villagers to ensure victory in the polls (Resabal, 2016).

The Case of Bohol
This paper

explores manifestations of clientelistic patronage politics in the 2016 elections at the local level by citing how this concept is reified in the electoral politics of Bohol.

examines instances of conformity to the old rule of patronage or innovation of such rule as the local body-politic continues to transition.
Patron-client relations in elections

- the discourse of loyalty, carrot-and-stick approach, and *utang na loob* (conformed to by candidates and campaign workers)

- employing technologies of management and (to a varying extent) coercion, which include surveys and validation tables designed not only as tools to get the feel of mass support for a candidate but more so for gatekeeping purposes especially in relation to the distribution of goods and other resources in exchange for votes (*aspects of clientelistic patronage that have managed to evolve*)
exploring the 2016 elections in the Philippines as being a platform that reveals an uneven playing field for women and men

attempts to cast light on how stereotypical expectations about gender are conveniently woven into the politics of patronage and clientelism

elaborating on the specificities to which female candidates rely on the politics of patronage and clientelism as winning strategies

Gender and electoral campaigns
335 aspirants running for local elective offices in the 2016 elections. Of these 335 candidates, only 23.28% or one out of five is female.
Campaign Strategies and the Role of Clientelistic Patronage and Money Politics

- **Sowing the Seeds of Patronage and Exploiting the ‘Utang na Loob’: Still a Winning Strategy**

- **In with the New: Upscaling Money Politics**

- **Investing on a Campaign Network: Bottom-up is Best**
a study entitled “Women Candidates and their Campaigns” conducted by Dittmar (2012) of Rutgers University

candidates and campaign professionals note that gender is among the least influential of the many factors shaping electoral wins and losses while political climate, party affiliations, money, and other realities matter more

campaigns take gender into account [only] to ensure that it will not be decisive in victory or defeat

Does gender matter in electoral campaigns?
Case Study: Women Candidates Freeriding than Subverting Patronage?
“To convince voters to vote for me the first time, I invited key stakeholders for a shared governance discussion and presented my platform of governance. It is easier this time in the 2016 elections because people saw my achievements. But I cannot change tradition – that it’s all about money.”

Candidate A
“… Money politics cannot be avoided. It has been an accepted practice… One has to give [money] no matter how small. I would like to see the day when election becomes a matter where people will really look into the things you are capable of doing and the things you offer. In terms of being a candidate, you believe that your advocacies are indeed worth sharing to the people. Money should no longer be involved, much more violence. Clean and honest elections are very elusive.”

Candidate B
"I decided and influenced [my] team ... not to give money to voters in the elections. I believe that I and the rest of the team lost because of this. Money still played a large part in this election."

When asked whether her being a woman candidate helped her in any way during the elections, she shared that she and her team tapped into the “gender” messaging to garner votes especially from women. They tried to sell the message about a foremost (for them) woman characteristic being “better” leaders than men through messages as “housekeeping of the city” and “Mother Earth” for the protection of the city’s environment.

Candidate C
Candidate D

⇒ a neophyte in the political arena but her maiden name rings a bell as it is a political clan
⇒ has opted to highlight that family name in her campaign materials (with her married name taking a backseat) while espousing “no to vote-buying” in the elections

Candidate E

⇒ also benefits from the political name of her husband’s family
⇒ resorts to social media, plucking up Bible quotes in her regular posts and projected herself as a motherly and family-oriented candidate
⇒ while her party avowed “no to vote-buying” in the elections, reports surfaced that her regular campaign sponsor had released and distributed cash to voters on her behalf

⇒ Both Candidate D and E lost in the elections as they were no match for the mobilization network of the administration candidates.
attempts by women to break out from the mold and secure their own space in politics on their own merits but these attempts are simply foiled given the embeddedness of patronage politics.

But a more nuanced understanding of how women engage in current electoral politics can be drawn from feminist perspectives in the premise – that, it is utterly difficult to go against the tide of patronage politics.

The electoral field is not a free for all ‘public’ but a field of conflict involving a confrontation of different rationalities articulated from a variety of power positions. From this articulation, the male-dominated electoral politics already locates women at a presumptive disadvantage within this contest.

Discussion & Analysis
Rather than subverting the system, they end up navigating around it tangentially, at least in equivocal pronouncements of good governance and clean and honest service while freeriding on the benefits that accompany patronage relations to willing subjects.

Examining it in another note with the help of feminist articulations of agency, women not subverting the patronage system but working around it stands in itself as the site of women’s agency where agency is not simply “a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable” (Mahmood, 2001).

The envisioned reform in local electoral politics may not have been demonstrated in trying to freeride the patronage system but, at best, this acknowledges the agentic moments of women to secure this most coveted political space.

Discussion & Analysis
While the local body-politic continues to transition, patronage and clientelistic relations linger on with the supervening machine-based politics morphing into more sophisticated forms that have clogged efforts for electoral reforms.

Conformity to the old rule of patronage remain strong than deviation, as reinforced by innovations of such rule.

Sowing the seeds of patronage early on the electoral cycle complemented by exploiting the concept of utang na loob as well as investing in an elaborate and efficient campaign network are winning strategies to secure votes.

While the practice of vote-buying remains as the principal force in the whole electoral exercise in the province, other well-machinated means complementary to and in aid of securing votes (that is, clientelistic campaign network, political machine) have accrued, fortified and morphed into different faces over time.

These not only render the quest for electoral reforms null and void but also ensure the persistent proliferation of patronage politics.

Other instances (that is, the role of vote-counting machines, the rise of social media as political channel, reformist calls for good governance, gender and development) appear as cracks within this entrenched system but have remained only as potential spaces for resistance to how patronage politics works at the local level.
Daghang Salamat!