

# Philippine Political Science: A Cursory Review of the State of the Discipline

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## INTRODUCTION

The history of political science in the Philippines has been traced by Agpalo (1984; 1998) to the propaganda and revolutionary period in the Philippines (1880-1901). Agpalo based his assertion on the work of earlier political scientists, Teodoro Kalaw and Cesar Majul. In the *Manual de ciencia politica*, Kalaw highlighted the importance of the works of Jose P. Rizal, Graciano Lopez Jaena, and Marcelo H. del Pilar. On the other hand, Majul recognized the significance of the political and constitutional ideals of both Filipino revolutionaries in his two significant works, *Mabini and the Philippine revolution* and *The political and constitutional ideas of the Philippine revolution*.

Agpalo also documented the developments in the discipline from the 1880s to 1998. In the initial work titled "Political science in the Philippines: 1984," and the subsequent update in the article "Political science in the Philippines, 1880-1998: A history of the discipline for the centenary of the First Philippine Republic" published in the *Philippine Social Sciences Review*, Agpalo captured

the changes in approach or focus of practitioners or scholars in the discipline, from the philosophical normative to the exceedingly institutional-legal or state focused approach that was dominant until the 1950s. In the 1950s, the eminent political scientists of that time (Baldoria, Corpuz, and Majul) took on philosophical, historical and geopolitical approaches.

A major development that occurred in the 1950s underscores the institutional focus of the discipline at that time. This involved the establishment of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) based on the Bell Commission Report. The IPA was provided technical assistance by the University of Michigan, with its first two directors coming from the University. From the very start, the IPA was expected to extend its services to government by offering programs that catered to members of the bureaucracy and also conducting studies on the operations of government.

In the 1960s, Agpalo subsequently argued for a new foci:

*In our post independence era, the State-focused kind of political science is not appropriate. Our problem now is no longer how to gain independence but how to modernize the nation—economically, socially, and politically... The new political science is essentially sociological and dynamic. It studies the political system and the political process instead of the State” (Agpalo, 1984).*

More than a decade after Agpalo’s critique of the old political science, another political scientist had an even more scathing critique of the discipline. In his remarks before the 3rd National Conference of the Philippine Political Science Association, Dr. Francisco Nemenzo Jr., argued that:

*the mainstream of political science in the United States, as in the Philippines, has been an intellectualized expression of bourgeois ideology. At its formative stage, political science was hardly more than bourgeois jurisprudence reduced into liberal rhetorics, and there was a tendency to explain political realities in terms of the legal system...Over the last two decades, political science has, of course, become more sophisticated. The legalistic conception of reality it has given was to more dynamic approaches. All these had made political science, alas, no less conservative...studies along this line still leave unexamined and, therefore, uncriticized the foundations of the bourgeois social order.*

In lieu of the old legalistic-institutional frameworks and the then ascendant behaviorism and system approaches, Nemenzo proposed a political economic approach that Agpalo characterized as of “a Marxist variety.”

From the 1970s, however, scholars and students of the discipline have increased. Caoili (2005) captures the diversity in approaches or specialization among current scholars in the discipline. In her work, Caoili categorizes the then active scholars in the discipline into five post-World War II generations based on the decade when they obtained their Bachelor of Arts degrees: from the first generation who completed their degrees in the 1940s to the 1950s, the second

generation who obtained their undergraduate degrees in the 1960s, the third who got their baccalaureate degrees in the 1970s, followed by the 4th and 5th who graduated from college in the 1980s and the 1990s respectively.

At the end of her article, Caoili notes:

*Political science in the Philippines has come a long way from its legalistic, state focus to more dynamic topics in politics, and using varied approaches and methodologies. Research in the discipline has also become inter-disciplinary, with political scientists collaborating with other social scientists on current issues such as people empowerment, democratization, governance, and the peace process.*

Notwithstanding the increase in the number of political scientists in the country, Caoili observes that the number of professional scholars in the discipline still pales in comparison to those found in Japan, South Korea or Thailand. This she attributes to the dearth of international scholarships to fund graduate studies in the discipline compared with the era of the 1950s and 1960s. Aside from the limited support for graduate studies, Caoili also notes the lack of funding for research in political science. Essentially, Caoili’s observations affirm an earlier observation made by Agpalo who enumerated five concerns confronting the discipline, namely,

1. educational background of the faculty members teaching political science,
2. status and effectiveness of the professional association,
3. funding for political science research,
4. role of political scientists in society, and
5. linkage of Filipino political scientists with colleagues from other countries, with a view of undertaking international research projects.

This paper attempts to examine three major concerns confronting the discipline at present, namely, the breadth and depth of the curricular offerings in the discipline, the status of the Philippine Political Science Association, and the role played by political scientists in the country. Though limited by time and the fact that the profile, outputs and activities of professional

political scientists from various institutions have not been documented, this paper hopes to surface some conditions in the discipline, from what one distinguished political scientist referred to as one that has transited from an “encumbered history to a liberated destiny.”

### THE BREADTH OF POLITICAL SCIENCE OFFERINGS AND A BRIEF PROFILE OF DISCIPLINAL SCHOLARS

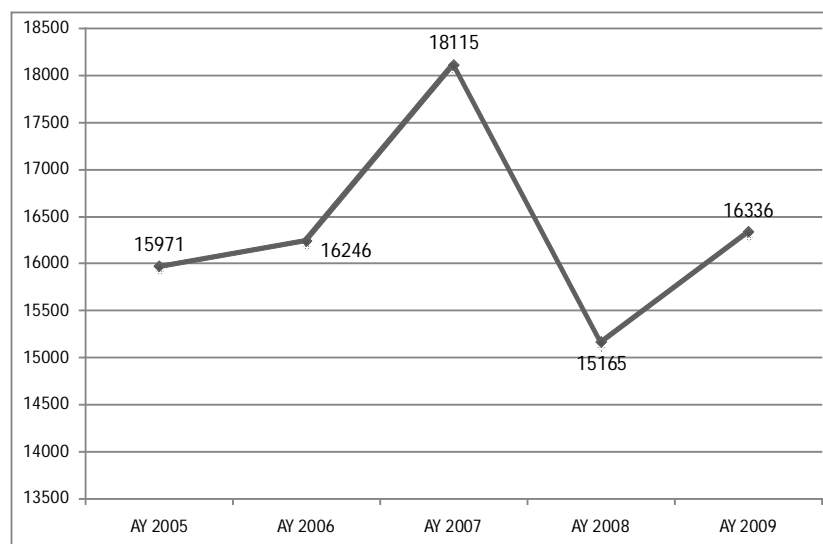
Data from the Commission on Higher Education show that there are 339<sup>1</sup> higher education institutions (HEIs) that have permits to offer an undergraduate degree in political science, seven institutions that offer a Master of Arts degree in the discipline, and two that have curricular offering in Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science. With 2,180 HEIs in school year 2009-2010, the number of HEIs offering an undergraduate degree is close to 16 percent of the total HEIs. Of these 339 HEIs, however, only 233 had students enrolled in SY 2009-2010. In terms of total student enrolment at the undergraduate level, the numbers

fluctuated from the academic year (AY) 2005-2006 to AY 2009-2010, as shown in Figure 1.

As a component of the total enrolment in the social and behavioral sciences, the undergraduate political science population constitutes more than a fifth of the total enrolment in the social and behavioral sciences in AY 2009-2010 (16,366 students, or 21 percent of the 76,546 enrolled in the social and behavioral sciences).<sup>2</sup>

Beyond enrolment data, the curricula offered in these institutions vary. While the more mature institutions offer a range of courses that cover the major fields (i.e., Philippine politics and government, international relations, comparative politics, political theory and methodology, public administration) in the discipline, a number of HEIs that offer the undergraduate program have filled their curriculum with subjects that are essentially in the legal field such as introduction to law, social and labor legislation, and constitutional law. This condition mirrors the sustenance of the view that the undergraduate degree is a preparatory course for a law degree.

**Figure 1 Enrolment in Bachelor’s Degree in Political Science, AY 2005-2006 to AY 2009-2010**



In a continuous attempt to set the minimum standards for undergraduate and graduate programs, select political scientists have worked with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) through the Technical Panel on the Social Sciences and Communications, specifically the Committee on Political Science. From 1995, the Committee has drafted the minimum policies and standards for HEIs offering undergraduate and graduate courses in the discipline. The standards were updated and presented before a national consultation late in 2009. While the CHED has not issued a memorandum order that would enforce these standards, the bigger question is the extent by which HEIs would conform to the standards, especially in the area of curricular offerings, faculty, and library resource requirements.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to graduate education, only seven (7)<sup>4</sup> HEIs offer a Master of Arts program in the discipline. Only the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman and the University of Santo Tomas offer a Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science degree program. Though enrolment in the graduate programs has increased from AY 2007-2008, compared to previous academic years (see Figure 2), the number of graduates in the offered

Master's and doctoral programs presents a problematic picture (see Figure 3) with respect to producing formally trained academics in the discipline for the conduct of the existing undergraduate programs, and much more, the production of scholarly research outputs.<sup>5</sup>

Table 1 presents the number of faculty members<sup>6</sup> and the highest degree they attained in select academic institutions.

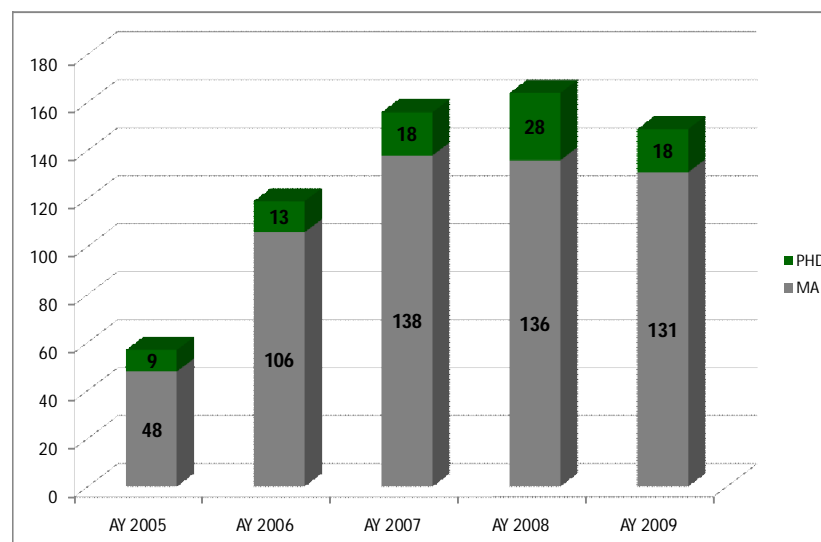
**Table 1** Number of Faculty Members based on Highest Degree Attained

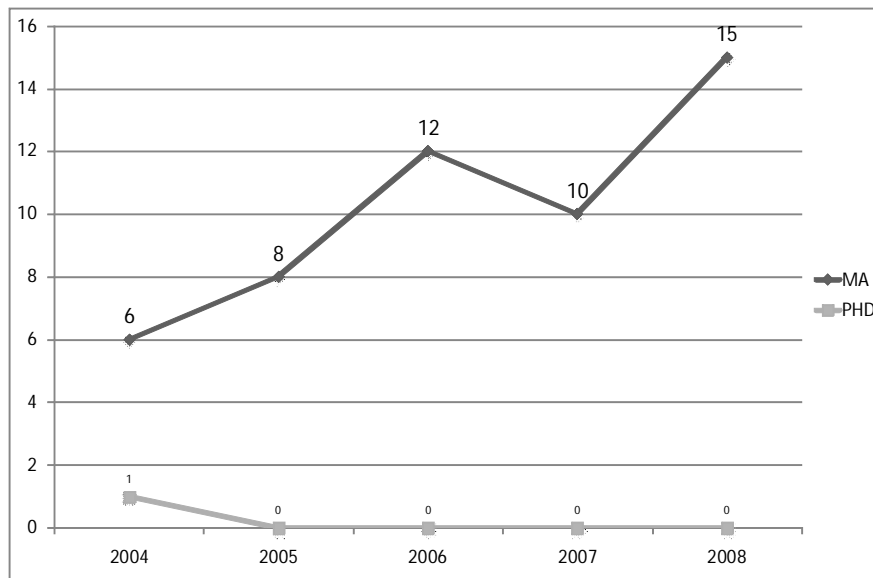
Institution	Highest Degree Obtained		
	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctorate
University of the Philippines-Diliman	0	17	11
Ateneo de Manila University	0	8	5
De La Salle University	0	7	6
University of Sto. Tomas	1	3	4

### STATUS OF THE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1962, the Philippine Political Science Association (PPSA) has seen a rebirth of sorts after its reactivation in 1976. The activities of

**Figure 2** Enrolment in Graduate Programs, Political Science, AY 2005-2006 to AY 2009-2010



**Figure 3** Number of Graduates, MA and PhD Political Science, AY 2004-2005 to AY 2008-2009

the PPSA from 1976 to 2005 are amply documented in the earlier work of Agpalo (1998) and Caoili (2005). Based on the themes of the national conferences held by the PPSA from 1996 (see Table 2), however, it is clear that the PPSA has been much more conscious in dissecting the character of the political and societal order in the country, specifically examining the capacity of the Philippine state, the cohesiveness of the nation, and the trajectory that our political system has taken after the political transition in 1986.

Aside from its annual conferences that have increasingly attracted scholars from other countries and obtained significant support from external funding agencies, the PPSA has also engaged in a number of extension activities in the past decade, aimed at upgrading the capacities of teachers to handle the general education course, *Politics and Governance*, and updating them on developments in specific fields of study. These activities were done in cooperation with the UP Diliman, specifically during the period when the latter institution was endowed with CHED support after it was named as a Center of Excellence for the discipline of political science.<sup>7</sup>

The PPSA also continues to be active in the social science community, through the Philippine Social Science Council (PSSC). From 2001, the PPSA has been conferred by the PSSC the Outstanding Regular Member award for continually being up-to-date in its membership requirements, most specifically in the publication of its journal. Across the years, the PPSA has also played a leadership role in the PSSC, with its officers holding various important positions in the social science professional organization, including the position of Chairperson/President. Six political scientists have served as the Council's Chairperson.<sup>8</sup> The first, the late Dr. Loretta Makasiar-Sikat, played a very significant role in sustaining the Council during its most difficult period having served as the PSSC's Executive Director for a period of eight years, from 1977 to 1985.

More than its annual activities, the PPSA has the sole distinction of having its journal, the *Philippine Political Science Journal (PPSJ)*, under the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) registry since 2008. The inclusion in the SSCI came as a result of the institution of a strict peer review process by

**Table 2 List of PPSA Conferences, 1996-2011**

Date and Venue of Conference	Theme
9-11 May 1996, Pangasinan	Assessing National and Global Processes of Democratization
8-9 May 1997, Quezon City	Furthering Democratization and Development through Elections
28-29 October 1998, Quezon City	Teaching of Politics and Governance
23-24 July 1999, Quezon City	The Poverty of Politics and the Politics of Poverty
28-29 October 2000, Quezon City	Leadership and Democratization
27-28 October 2001, Quezon City	Philippine Democracy on Trial
8-9 November 2002, Cebu City	The Diversity of Politics and the Complexities of Democratization
23-25 October 2003, Davao City	Strengthening the State, Society, and the Discipline
22-23 October, 2004, Manila	Is the Liberal Moment Over?
21-22 October, 2005, Bohol	Bringing the People Back In
26-27 October 2006, Zamboanga City	Alternatives
2-3 April 2007, Makati City	Rethinking Representation
11-12 April 2008, Dumaguete	Nation Formation, State-Building, and Political Science
3-4 April 2009, General Santos City	Reimagining the Nation-State: Consensus and Conflict on Sovereignty and Autonomy
8-10 April 2010, Baguio City	Transitions
29-30 April 2011, Bacolod City	Democracy Contested: Progress, Reversal, Defects, and Prospects

*PPSJ*'s editorial Board beginning 1996. From 2012, *PPSJ* would be published by Routledge, an international publishing firm that publishes a significant number of reputable social science journals. The PPSA Board and the *PPSJ* Editorial Committee have decided to produce two issues a year, as well as expand the scope of articles to cover studies done in other Southeast Asian countries.

Teehankee (2010) reviewed the articles published in *PPSJ* from 1999-2009, totaling to 52 articles. He noted that close to half (44%) of the articles published came from faculty members from the UP Diliman, with close to a fifth (17%) of the articles originating from faculty members from De La Salle University (DLSU)-Manila. The other articles published for the ten-year period were written by scholars affiliated with foreign institutions. More than the institutional affiliation of the authors of articles published in the *PPSJ*, Teehankee noted that more than a third (36%) of the articles published delved on issues related to Philippine democratization, while the remaining articles were on social actors (22%); economic and extra-national processes (20%); political order (14%); political regimes (6%); and other topics (3%). Finally, in terms of approach and purpose, all of

the articles primarily adopted a qualitative approach and were essentially descriptive.

### THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL SCIENTISTS IN PHILIPPINE SOCIETY

It is difficult to qualify or assess the extent by which political scientists, especially after the political transition in 1986, have contributed to a progression of the scholarship in the discipline and in general, the social sciences, or to the refinement of obtaining political and socio-economic processes. In general, one could identify a few, albeit anecdotal, indicators that mirror the extent of contribution or the significance of the role played by political scientists in contemporary Philippine society. For example, among professional political scientists, the discipline is the least represented among all social science disciplines in the roster of academicians or outstanding young scientist (OYS) awardees. Only one political scientist, Onofre D. Corpuz, has been named an academician and also one political scientist, Francisco A. Magno, has been conferred an OYS award by the National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST).

A number of political scientists have, directly or indirectly, influenced public policy through their participation in commissions or the conduct of systematic research on a number of issues. Among senior political scientists, Dr. Jose Abueva remains one of the main advocates of substantive constitutional change, a passion that was rekindled after he took the chairpersonship of the PPSA's Committee on Constitutional Continuity and Change. As Chair of the Consultative Commission appointed by then President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Dr. Abueva pushed for constitutional change even at a time when the once agreed-upon reforms were being challenged by elements opposed to one of its proponents, former President Arroyo.

On the other hand, Professor Emeriti Carolina G. Hernandez has distinguished herself in the field of strategic studies at the national, regional and international levels. In 2006, she was appointed by the United Nations Secretary General as a member of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Affairs. She has also continued her pursuit of research on civilian-military relations in the Philippines and, given her expertise, has been tapped to be a member of two Commissions that inquired into failed coup attempts, the Davide Commission and the Feliciano Commission. Professor Hernandez was also appointed member of the National Peace Forum that was tasked by former President Joseph Estrada to conduct talks with communist insurgent groups.

Immediately after the political transition in 1986, Prof. Wilfrido V. Villacorta helped frame the new Philippine Constitution as a member of the Constitutional Commission (ConCom). Dr. Villacorta was one of the proponents of the introduction of proportional representation that was subsequently enabled by a statute and allowed for an expansion in the representation of erstwhile under-represented groups. In 2004, Dr. Villacorta was appointed as Deputy Secretary General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Prof. Felipe B. Miranda has contributed much to an understanding of the military mindset and has also pioneered in public opinion/social

indicators and prognostic futures' research. As founding fellow of the Social Weather Stations (SWS) and founding president of Pulse Asia Inc., Professor Miranda has taken the lead in the conduct of numerous public opinion polls across the last twenty years and has had the privilege of briefing presidents, cabinet officials, heads of various government agencies, and private sector organizations.

There are other political scientists who have served in formal or advisory positions in governmental or international organizations, or taken a lead role in civil society organizations (and even social movements in the past). Moreover, in the most recent elections, as well as in previous elections, political scientists were also actively involved in running the campaign of select candidates, crafting their formal program of governance or action, or in monitoring electoral results.

All told, however, the political science community, notwithstanding the critical positions held by its members in government or in established civil society groups, has not really had any significant impact on public policy, a reflection not only of the capacity of political scientists to impact on public decision making but also the constraints or infirmities of formal policy making institutions in the country.

## **ON THE RELEVANCE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

For a country where democracy has not been embedded and where trappings of what are supposed to be democratic processes are curtailed by the continuous ascendancy of oligarchs, it is not surprising that the Philippines has continually been enmeshed in periodic crises. In this milieu, political science will never run out of relevance inasmuch as the discipline should proffer solutions to the myriad of political problems that the country faces. More than relevance, however, political scientists should consider that obtaining conditions pose challenges. There are two main ones particularly worth attending to much more closely and sustainably.



The first is the challenge to expand the level of participation, the sense of citizenship or civic-spiritedness, especially among the youth. Based on estimates drawn from sample surveys, the youth population, those from 18 to 24 years old, constitute about 17 percent of the adult population. As a proportion of registered voters, however, the same age group only constitutes 14 percent of the total number of registered voters. Further, of those who have voted, the 14 to 24 age group's share is at 13 percent. The last two figures indicate that those from the youth group tend to register and vote less than other age groups.<sup>9</sup> Though this is a single indicator, it somehow validates the assertion that the youth are less disposed to participating (i.e., voting) in elections.

While we acknowledge that there are other forms and venues for political participation that the youth may be more inclined<sup>10</sup> to participate in, this does not do away with the reality that political scientists should play their distinct role in bringing forth civic spiritedness. We say distinct in the sense that the discipline carries more nuanced definitions as well as the breadth of knowledge that is needed to frame formal and informal civic education campaigns. We do not, however, advocate the introduction of a political science course that would secure a minimum level of political literacy, with students reciting precise definitions of important concepts, or remembering provisions of the Constitution, or memorizing who occupies what critical government position at a given time. What is more important is that the courses offered provide the students continuous opportunities to actively inquire into and reflect on the realities of politics and governance as these obtain in their communities, in particular, or the nation and the world, in general. This approach

necessitates engaging the students in the same way that we wish the political system to engage them, as active rather than passive learners/citizens. Promoting civic spiritedness on the part of the students also requires that teachers reflect on the approaches (pedagogy) that we use in facilitating learning. With information available by a movement of one's hand (on a mouse) or fingertip (on a trackpad), teachers must be prepared to develop the capacity to sift through, critically appraise, infer from, and build on available knowledge, among other competencies.

The second challenge for the discipline is equally daunting, i.e., to have a purposeful impact on public policy, and more specifically to influence the enactment of policies that are able to reduce distributional inequities that have sustained the patrimonial nature of politics in the country. This does not mean that political scientists in the country should cast aside their scholarly garb to advocate changes in policy but to use their standing as scholars to probe into real problems, describe the causes and consequences of a problem in the thickest details possible, and finally, offer a set of recommendations to resolve the problem. We say that this challenge is daunting because it requires expanding the breadth of scholarship among local political scientists, ensuring that these scholarly outputs are not trapped in the scholasticism that has been observed in other countries, and guaranteeing that the language used in conveying the results of one's scholarly output is comprehended by the public, in general, and policy makers, in particular. It also requires producing the results at a pace that public policy cycles normally take, which is definitely much, much shorter than what it regularly takes to get a paper published in a scientific journal.



## NOTES

- 1 This figure includes satellite campuses of State Universities and Colleges (SUCs).
- 2 For AY 2005-2006 until AY 2007-2008, political science enrolment represented nearly a fourth of the undergraduate student population enrolled in social and behavioral sciences. As regards enrolment in the social and behavioral sciences relative to total tertiary enrolment, the former constitutes around three percent of the total for AY 2009-2010 (76,546 as against total tertiary enrolment of 2,770,965).
- 3 The author, as an accreditor of higher education institutions, has gone around more than a dozen universities assessing programs in the social sciences. He has found a number of institutions that conform to the existing minimum program standards imposed by the Commission on Higher Education with regard to the formal curricula. However, many of the faculty members handling political science courses in these HEIs do not have the requisite relevant advanced degree. There are also HEIs, specially those with low student enrolment, which only have one faculty member with a directly relevant degree and who handles all the students in most of the courses offered under their program.
- 4 These are Ateneo de Manila University, De La Salle University-Manila, Manuel L. Quezon University, University of Manila, University of the Philippines Diliman, and the University of Santo Tomas.
- 5 All enrolment and graduate data are from the Commission on Higher Education.
- 6 This refers to full-time faculty members only for AY 2009-2010.
- 7 Aside from engaging in teacher training seminars, the University of the Philippines Diliman has also produced a two-volume textbook on Philippine Politics and Government.
- 8 The political scientists who have served as Chair of the Philippine Social Science Council are Loretta Makasiar Sicat, Carolina Hernandez, Wilfrido Villacorta, Carmencita Aguilar, Felipe Miranda, and Ronald Holmes.
- 9 These estimates are based on three surveys conducted by Pulse Asia Inc. These surveys are the Ulat ng Bayan March 2010, the Project Islands survey (May 3-5, 2010), and the Exit Poll (May 10, 2010)
- 10 We are cognizant that the younger generation, described in a 2005 McCann Erickson study as the "mouse generation," tends to express themselves and associate with others at greater lengths through social networking sites.

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