

*The Lowland Philippine Alliance System in Municipal Politics**

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While the study of modern systems are traditionally the preserve of the political scientist, sociologists and anthropologists have been taking a second look at the structure and function of the political institution. They are particularly interested in the mechanisms by which the goals of the institution are realized. For it is one thing to talk in terms of party platforms and official memberships, and quite another to discuss patterns of behavior which make politics the exciting phenomenon that it is in the Philippines.

In this paper, I propose to examine the basic political operation in a Bulacan municipality which, in the view of rural people at least, chiefly involves the management of the downward flow of patronage from local leaders to the people and the reciprocal flow of support upward from people to leaders. It is my thesis that while the political party systems provide the formal core for this process, it is the workings of the alliance system which give it substance. To understand the dynamics of Philippine local politics, therefore, one must possess a knowledge of how the community uses the alliance system to achieve its goals.

Rural residents here will testify to the fact that local elections, that is,

those in which the offices of mayor and municipal councilors are at stake, are usually the most hotly contested ones in the town's election cycle. Although interest in national level offices is undoubtedly lively, it is usually during the municipal level election that tempers flare up to the point of bitterness, that family feuds are reactivated, and that the town undergoes a cleavage on the basis of loyalties to one candidate or the other. This is the occasion every four years during which rumors are most rampant, friends become enemies and enemies friends, and allies of opposing candidates glare belligerently at one another while keeping a watchful eye on the vote counting on election day.

The reason for this passionate involvement in the municipal level election is simple enough. The power and prestige of people living next door, of people one passes on the street every day, of people who attend the same cockfight or PTA meeting, of one's relatives, compadres, and close friends is here being put to the test. If one is identified as being for or against a particular candidate, he is automatically very deeply involved in the campaign because he acquires certain duties and responsibilities in line with his role either of supporter or opponent of a candidate.

The people in a rural community who do get actively involved in a political campaign may be classified into four types according to their operational or

* This paper was written to illustrate one aspect of the alliance system described by Frank Lynch, S.J., in his companion paper entitled "The Lowland Philippines Alliance System." Fr. Lynch's paper will be published in a subsequent issue of the REVIEW.

immediate goals: (1) the incumbent office-holder, (2) the candidate for election, (3) the members of the incumbent party, (or at least those who are thought to have voted for the mayor in the previous election), and (4) the members of the party out of power (or at least those who are thought to have voted for the rival and defeated candidate for mayor in the previous election). What does each of these groups seek? This we must know in order to understand the process by which they attain their goals.

The current office-holder must do three things if he intends to retain his post: (1) satisfy the constituency, particularly those who belong to his alliance, (2) consolidate and expand his alliance group, and (3) if he is interested in higher positions locally or in regional, provincial, or national offices, seek influential contacts on a higher social plane both within or outside the community. If he accomplishes these measures successfully, he is assured of continuing and possibly increasing his political fortune.

The second interested party, the candidate for election, is primarily concerned with procuring votes and financial support for his campaign. He must therefore work at expanding his alliance group and seek influential contacts to convince his allies that he has a chance to win and get patronage for them. Unless he is able to accomplish these goals, he will never achieve the position of having to worry about the problems facing the incumbent. On the other hand, the incumbent acquires the candidates' anxieties once more when he launches into his re-election campaign.

Those who align with the party of the incumbent also have certain needs to satisfy. This, they can accomplish by

receiving patronage from above and by consolidating the power of their own group in order to remain in their profitable state. The fourth group, those aligned with the party out of power, also seek patronage and the consolidation of power in the group. But in addition, they must work energetically at enlarging their membership so as to oust the incumbent.

These four active sectors have no difficulty identifying their needs in relation to the total political system. But how do they reduce these verbalized or un verbalized wants to attainment? Through the principles of segmentation, ranking, equivalence, and solidarity. Translating these principles into everyday activity, the incumbent and the candidate try to ensure a maximum of diehard supporters or allies (segmentation) who link their fortunes to the success of *this* leader rather than *that* one (ranking). Any insult against the leader is equivalent to an insult against oneself and vice versa (equivalence). Furthermore, it is one's duty as a staunch ally to chastise the party guilty of the insult, and uphold the injured party's side; the merits of his stand are secondary considerations (solidarity).

The key figures for an ambitious politician are, aside from the electorate, *his* men, or his *liders*—"the type of person who rallies people toward him and keeps them in his alliance network by skillful manipulation of the social system."¹ The

¹ The word "lider" though originating from the English word, "leader," has been incorporated into Tagalog speech in Hulo with a very precise connotation. Whereas "leader" in its more general English sense of "head" is translated into Tagalog by "puno," "lider" refers to the person with a large following in a barrio who utilizes this support during political campaigns for a certain candidate or group of candidates. These candidates call him their "lider" referring to his dominance over his particular followers rather than to any superordinate position he holds in relation to the candidates. On the contrary, the "lider" in this instance is a staunch follower of

lider's loyalty to a candidate or incumbent thus becomes his fellowmen's loyalty as well. His opinions go. If he switches to the other party, his allies follow him en masse. A multiplicity of such alliances forms the backbone of the politician's power. Just as the relation of each follower to the lider is dyadic, so too is that of lider to his candidate. Therefore, their relationship must be cultivated on a highly personalized level. For the higher status occupant to do less is to court disaster at the polls.

Liders may be one's relatives by blood or affinity, compadres, close friends. Those among these groups, who do not have the inclination to become professional liders can generally be counted as supporters since they fall within the candidate's or incumbent's alliance network.

The wise candidate or incumbent consolidates and adds to his power by agreeing to be his lider's compadre. Being a baptismal or wedding sponsor for the child of one's lider strengthens the bond between parents and sponsors making them like relatives in the duties and responsibilities assumed toward each other. The lider therefore, gets the patronage he seeks, and the candidate much needed support. Naturally, when there is patronage to be distributed, one's compadre must have a share. Therefore, the incumbent recommends his compadre's allies for jobs in public works projects. The compadre himself, may get a covet-

the candidate he is supporting. The "lider" has no official position as such but is often repaid by candidates with favors which can in turn be distributed to his followers, reinforcing his position. He is extremely important to candidates and their party, for few can command the loyalty of his barrio's voters as he can. He might be likened to the ward leader in United States politics. The verb, "naglilider," (to "lider" or to behave like a "leader") has been coined from the noun and is frequently heard in Hulo. The "lider" will be used for the remainder of this paper when its special connotation is required.

ed appointment as municipal secretary, policeman, or chief of police depending on his power and the incumbent's degree of affective indebtedness (*utang na loob*, Tagalog) to him. When Kumpare appears at the incumbent's house early in the morning with a sad looking man or woman in tow, of course the incumbent will see to it that the official in charge of collecting market stall fees will stop bothering his Kumpare's friend. Or, certainly the investigators of the barrio stabbing a few nights ago will refrain from arresting the visitor's son even though he was seen near the scene of the crime. Yes, he will see what he can do about setting aside the basketball court in the town plaza for use by this club even though a rival club did reserve it ahead of time. Certainly, he will contribute a basketball to the favored club. On and on goes the list of favors an incumbent can do for his loyal supporters. The rewards of being on the winning side are numerous.

Having an influential compadre in the upper echelons of the government is an important key to a lider's getting a share of patronage benefits. (Although one does not have to be a compadre, this tie is frequently established as added insurance.) Nor does the incumbent limit himself to being the upper status compadre. He also utilizes the social system by seeking out influential officials on the provincial and national level who will be his compadres and act toward him as he does to his lower status compadres. This is doubly important in that, aside from dispensing ordinary patronage, the influential provincial or city compadre can marshal the funds for an office-holder's re-election campaign through political party and private sources. Campaign costs, as anyone knows are enormous. Party men realize this only

too well and partially solve the problem by choosing as candidates persons rich in their own right. This is why the ambitious municipal level lider who is poor has little chance of gaining an official position. To run for office, he must put up some money. Hence, to get a share of patronage whereby he personally can make money becomes essential for his political future.

In this manner, a network of compadres is built up which spans class and geographical separation, and which is organized into a hierarchy of persons bound together in relationships of mutual support. Down the chain travel patronage benefits, and up the chain travels support. Each link, or person, in the chain acts as intermediary between the person immediately below him and the one immediately above. This system of communication is highly personalized and most efficient for getting things done because each person involved knows the roles he is expected to fulfill. Should the incumbent stop catering to the wants of his local liders, he runs the risk of their defection to a rival because of his failure to live up to his reciprocal responsibilities.

This system relies heavily on the principle of reciprocity for its effective functioning. Although politicians sometimes deplore the number of special favors, they have to do for constituents and liders in particular, their deprecatory attitude prevails only between elections. Come election time, they are only too keenly aware of their heavy dependence on the wholehearted support of their allies. The true ally will be busy contacting all his various lower or equal status allies to enlist their support. Now is the time for the lider to cash in on the various favors he has done for various neighbors and friends. He capitalizes on their feeling of indebtedness to

him, to their sense of gratitude (*utang na loob*), and now in effect demands payment in asking them for their vote. Since cultural values support the belief that to recognize a debt of gratitude is good, then the average person who is not suffering similar pressures from liders on the other side agrees to reciprocate in this proper manner. Clearly, the politician who has the most liders is in a favorable position to win the election provided the liders have large followings. On the other hand, the lider who is in, who is strong, who has a great deal of influence in the upper echelons of political power stands to have a large alliance network upon which he can count when loyalties are put to the test.

The alliance system, then, enables the upper level politicians to distribute benefits to their lower level allies and provides a means for the individual to determine where his loyalties are and what is expected of him in this context. Once he has established the identity of those whom he will consider his segment at any one time, his roles in relation to them become clear—loyalty and service at all costs, as long as both parties stick to role expectations. It is true that the systems may be less than democratic in the sense that not everyone in the community can expect equal benefits from the government. For the government is run by people, and people work within the framework of their social system. There is no question, however, that while not everyone may benefit in equal amounts, many little people in the municipality do profit. Those who do not because they supported the wrong side can look forward to being beneficiaries when their side wins, or they can switch loyalties. I have always been amazed at how skillful the lower classes in a rural municipality are at

getting a share of the benefit. The politician who does not adhere to this system, whereby he is almost drained of his surplus, can hardly expect to maintain his power. If he seeks power, he must be willing to pay for it.

This then is how the rural community in Bulacan, with which I am most familiar is galvanized into action. Its residents have never, to my knowledge, worked as one solidary unit, as a community, except possibly during the Japanese occupation when a common enemy welded them into more cooperative units.

But they do work most efficiently on the basis of the informal alliance network. The party structure only provides a formal point of departure. Through personalized contacts and special relationships, the political figures of the town do get things done. And from the people's point of view, they get their share — if not during this administration, then during the next one. Patience and faith that this will be so, keep the townfolk relatively content with the power system as it functions in their municipality.

Some Population Characteristics of Cagayan de Oro City

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Two reasons motivate my present topic. First, the rest of the Philippines has been experiencing a population explosion. But according to the 1960 Census reports, Misamis Oriental has simultaneously been experiencing what may be described as a population "implosion." By a population "implosion", I mean the direct opposite of a population explosion, namely, a sudden and drastic decrease in population growth. Data gathered by Xavier University surveys in Cagayan de Oro City may shed light on this interesting "implosion" in Misamis Oriental, of which Cagayan de Oro is the capital.

Secondly, United Nations demographers have estimated the crude birth rate of the Philippines as a whole at between 47 and 53 births per thousand persons for the years 1939-1957.¹

In particular, Miss Edith Adams estimated this rate to be between 45.6 and 52.9 births per thousand for the period 1947-1957.² How close to fact are these estimates, made by means of complex reverse-survival, stable population, and graphic methods. If fairly accurate for the Philippines, as a whole, are there nevertheless large fluctuations in the crude birth rate from region to region of the Philippines? Only regional studies can provide the answer to such questions.

Thus Xavier University's data for Cagayan de Oro City are presented

Nations, 1960), pp. 3, 38-39. Also: Edith Adams, "Notes on the United Nations' Population Projections for the Philippines," (Typed memorandum prepared for the statistical offices of the Philippine Government), p. 1.

² Edith Adams, "Notes on the United Nations' Population Projections," pp. 1-3; and "Estimates of the Crude Birth Rate of the Philippines by Method of 'Reverse Survival'" (Typed memorandum prepared for statistical offices of the Philippine Government), pp. 2-4.

¹ United Nations, *Population Growth and Manpower in the Philippines* (New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United