



## Tensions and Developments in Akbayan's Alliance with the Aquino Administration

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**ABSTRACT.** Akbayan Citizen's Action Party's participation in the Aquino administration is fueling continuing tensions not only between and among its leaders and members but also between the party and its allied social movements. What does this reveal about the nature and dynamics of leftist group participation in Philippine politics? This study is a reappraisal of the contested democracy framework, nuancing it with the Goldstone-Desai framework on social movement consolidation. By reviewing Akbayan's official party documents and archival studies of Philippine social movements, as well as interviewing key informants and engaging in participant observation, I recount how Akbayan's alliance with the Liberal Party (LP), leading to its role as coalition partner of the administration of President Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, exhibits the limitations of formalizing coalition networks into a uniform political party. The leadership of the party, in their pursuit of electoral victory and bureaucratic appointments, appears to deviate from the aforementioned intent of their allied social movements to address the sociopolitical issues they carry. The anti-administration stance of Akbayan's labor ally, the Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL), the less-optimistic views of the rural-poor organization Kilusang para sa Repormang Pansakahan at Katarungang Panlipunan (KATARUNGAN, Movement for Agrarian Reform and Social Justice), and the bolting-out from Akbayan of their rural sector ally, the Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA, National Confederation of Small Farmers' and Fishers' Organizations) are highly illustrative examples. The party leadership, their allied movements, and their members vary in the priority they give to government-based tactics to address such issues. This, in turn, explains the dissonances and tensions between the network of Akbayan, and why other leftist parties continue to pose real challenges to their efforts. These tensions could explain why, despite their constant 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.

**KEYWORDS.** Akbayan · contested democracy · National Democratic Front · Philippine Left · alliances · coalitions · Liberal Party · Philippine political parties

## INTRODUCTION

The election of President Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III in 2010 was charged with nostalgia for the politics of the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution and has been analysed and subjected to overly optimistic hopes of upholding this “legacy of People Power.”<sup>1</sup> With the death of his mother, former president Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino, on 1 August 2009, from colon cancer, Aquino was catapulted to a presidential race he did not expect to run in by a groundswell of support from civil society groups (Castañeda 2009). This compelled the then-standard bearer of the Liberal Party (LP), Manuel “Mar” Roxas II, to give way and serve as his running-mate for the vice-presidency (Ager 2009). Aquino’s victory at the polls, despite the defeat of Roxas, was accepted with almost-universal acclaim, with *Time* magazine even declaring him one of the “100 Most Influential People in The World” in 2013 (Chua-Eoan 2013).

Subsequent developments under his watch (the Priority Development Assistance Fund scandals, the Mamasapano clash, and the near-execution of overseas worker Mary Jane Veloso to name a few), however, have put into serious question the substance and credibility of his administration’s reform agenda. For a presidency largely brought into power by the confluence of many sections of society including civil society, religious movements, and issue-based social movements, its achievements and shortcomings may very well be emblematic of the current configuration of possibilities for political action in the Philippines. Considering political reform movements have been one of the long-standing and prided achievements of the post-authoritarian Philippine liberal democratic state since the 1990s (Encarnacion Tadem 2009, 2, 20; Abinales and Amoroso 2005, 237–42), their presence has become a large, if not persistent factor in shaping and determining the direction of democratization in the country. Moreover, their actions have contributed, for better or ill, in the political maturity and development of Philippine local and national politics (Diamond 1999, 235; Hilhorst 2003, 232; Abinales and Amoroso 2005, 266–67).

For the purposes of my study, I find the presence of a self-avowed “democratic socialist” political party in the coalition network of the Aquino administration of particular importance. Claiming and performing the functions of a parliamentary leftist political party and sociopolitical movement, Akbayan Citizens’ Action Party (Akbayan) appeared to be the locus of intersection by which peoples’ movements,

reformist political groups, and civil society assemblages converge and participate. This network of movements claims to be the representation of new possibilities for a Philippine leftist politics independent of the struggles of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)—with its participation in the political changes brought by the 1986 EDSA revolution leaving much to be desired since its ranks suffered an ideological split in 1992 (Quimpo 2008, 91; Acheron et al. 2011, 116–17). With the CPP’s above-ground front (the National Democratic Front or NDF) experiencing visible competition against other political groupings (Akbayan among them),<sup>2</sup> I believe a visible observation must be reiterated, if only because it is rarely voiced out. There is no single “Philippine Left.” As I see it, there are only multiple groups competing with each other to most credibly claim the title—and Akbayan is merely one of them. These dynamics, however, are in themselves theoretically and strategically contentious—especially considering that it has been argued that to think that “the counter-hegemonic struggle will necessarily take on a singular economic class character” is fallacious, and thus “the ‘plurality of social struggles’ cannot be managed by a single political party” (Weekley 2001, 4).

The history involved in organizing Akbayan’s network of movements to their alliance with the current administration should point to insights that could modulate how analyses of Philippine leftist movements have been made. Akbayan claims to offer potential alternatives to armed struggle and extra-institutional pressures through their simultaneous non-institutional struggles and reformist presences in government. This project remains a source of tension, not only between them and their competitors but more so within their ranks. While such competitions occurring could be explained as part of internal party discipline (Van Dyke 2003, 231–32; Przeworski 1985, 24–25), that such debates continue since the 1992 split within the CPP suggests that the participants may be missing some vital questions and variables.

In this study, I therefore ask: Why is Akbayan’s participation in the Aquino administration fuelling tensions not only between and among its leaders and members but also between the party and its allied social movements? What do these tensions reveal about the nature and dynamics of participation of leftist groups in Philippine electoral politics? While an integral view of democracy (Quimpo 2008) argues that participation in a liberal-democratic structure is the expected, sole viable direction for leftist politics, Akbayan’s experience puts this

appraisal to question. In viewing itself as a party that is independent from the social movements, it fosters a level of detachment from the movements' issues, which contribute largely to the internal and external tensions that members and allied networks have with the party leadership. These tensions involve alienation from an increasingly governance-centric political tactic, an unsettling comfort with taking part in bureaucratic concerns, and a perceived neglect of the issues of currently marginalized sectors in the policy and advocacy level. I thus propose a hypothesis on this end: The leadership of the party, in their pursuit of electoral victory and bureaucratic appointments, appear to deviate from the aforementioned intent of their allied social movements to address the sociopolitical issues they carry. The party leadership, their allied movements, and their members greatly vary in the priority they give to the importance of government-based tactics (which operate largely around national and Metro Manila politics) to address such issues. This, in turn, explains the tensions among the network partners of Akbayan and could thus be used to explain why the party's capacity to effect change remains challenged in the context of a dynamically evolving status quo of patronage politics in the country to date.

### **THE NEED FOR HYBRIDITY: AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK**

Accessible literatures regarding social movements and political parties in the Philippines are arguably limited in their theoretical underpinnings, as well as their tendency to view each movement as unique and unlikely to be part of a wider-yet-relatively consistent politico-ideological environment.<sup>3</sup> In addition, whatever documentation comes up detailing their histories appears self-edifying, denying the student of social struggles a more critical documentary appraisal.<sup>4</sup> Akbayan is not different in this aspect, in that there is a gap in the literature with regard to the internal politics and tensions that have characterized the networks that make up and support Akbayan. Such a gap inhibits Philippine leftist movements' appreciation of their precocious situation in Philippine politics, where their notions of activism and waging reforms for social change remain static.

For this study, I will use an amalgam of two existing frameworks regarding party-movement relations. First and vital is Goldstone-Desai's framework of social movements-political party formation/maintenance (Desai 2003), initially used in analyzing the cases of the Communist Socialist Party in Kerala and the Communist Party of

India of West Bengal, and why, despite having similar programs, and why, despite having similar platforms, the Kerala party was able to gain a majority government while the West Bengali party did not. This framework shall be complemented with Nathan Gilbert Quimpo's contested democracy framework, which attempts to address existing realities for Philippine leftist movements and primarily argues that while "oligarchs, caciques, bosses and *trapos* are still very dominant in Philippine politics . . . their predatory rule has been challenged and continues to be challenged by the poor and marginalized" (Quimpo 2008, 48).

Illustrating how social movements act as political parties and vice versa, the circular figures marked 1-4 denote the dynamics involved (see figure 1):

1. Cyclical institutional politics as a system with its own rules, which could be affected;
2. Protest actions mobilized by social movements to affect institutional politics, while the state (the repository of institutional politics) can similarly deploy such tactics;
3. Associational actions like network-building and alliance-forging that affect the standing and capacity of both the state and social movements to maintain their institutional integrity as well as their capacity to enact their political projects; and
4. Any social movement involved, which in this case will be Akbayan.

Considering that social movements/political parties, by virtue of their fluid identities, can engage formal and institutional politics in a variety of ways, it is understood that Akbayan could conduct itself accordingly, all for their so-called purpose of enunciating integral democratic politics. This also applies to member movements and agents within the reach of Akbayan (which I label broadly as sectoral groups, issue-based groups, and individuals).

Taking from the above theoretical frameworks, my study attempts to explain how the tensions inside the network of Akbayan occur. Internal debates between pragmatism and ideological fealty, as Akbayan's case will show, are significant in determining a party's consolidation and survival. It has been argued that a political party, in its very construction, employs political articulation, largely defined as the

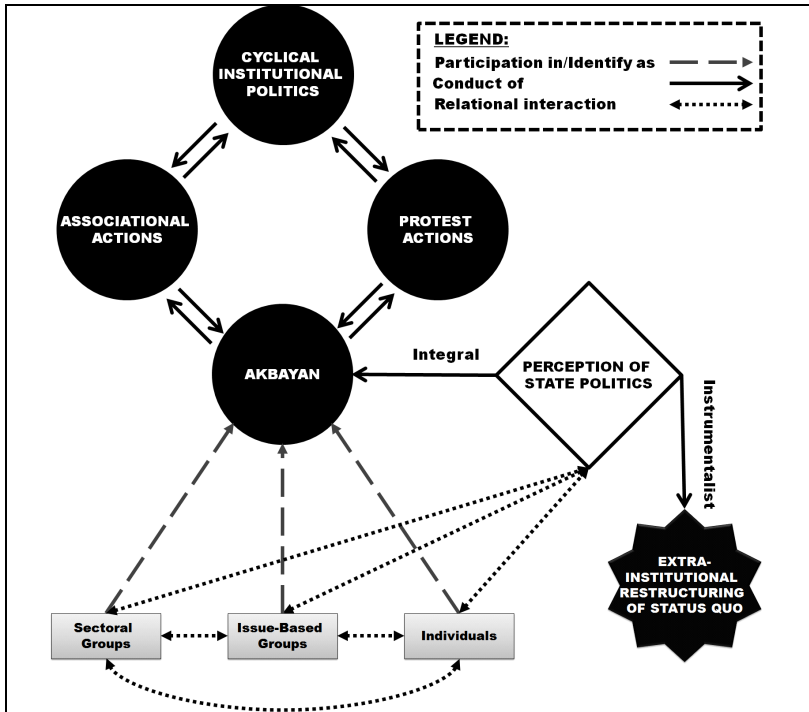


Figure 1. Conceptual framework integrating the Goldstone-Desai and Quimpo frameworks.

“process through which party practices naturalize class, ethnic, and racial formations as a basis of social division by integrating disparate interests and identities into coherent socio-political blocs” (De Leon, Desai, and Tugal 2009, 194-95). Debates and tensions inside movements, therefore, are expected to happen. The only difference is how skilful a party is in maneuvering its programs and political projects to consolidate its ranks.

What puts a party in tension with its affiliated movements and networks, however, is the fact that social movements have the potential and capacity to wage their own notion of politics (or, for that matter, build their own political parties to represent them in Congress). While Akbayan’s party leadership maintains their commitment to strengthening liberal democracy, the affiliate movements’ dissatisfaction with the issues the Aquino administration focuses on leads them to

clamor for extra-institutional political projects beyond the formal line of the party. Depending on how Akbayan is able to deal with these transforming relationships, the party might be able to maintain the status quo of its working alliances or experience potential key changes in turn (see figure 1).

I precisely chose to use and build upon the contested democracy framework and the Goldstone-Desai framework due to key indispensable relations that both frameworks tackle. In my view, Quimpo's contested democracy framework uncritically looks at liberal democratic governance, considering his claim that "[f]ormal democracy, despite its deficiencies, provides the opportunity for subordinate classes and communities to push for popular empowerment, and, further, for a more equitable distribution of the country's wealth, and ultimately bring about a stable, more participatory and egalitarian democracy" (Quimpo 2008, 53). This optimistic view visibly ignores an existing counterargument to it. Wherein Quimpo views the state as a space of contention separate from elites and popular movements, it has also been contended that states are constructions of specific power relations that can (and will) limit the actual extent of participation and reform possible. As Abrams notes, any state's construction serves an "ideological function" that allows for "conservatives and radicals alike believ[ing] that their practice is not directed at each other but at the state" (1988, 82). In prioritizing capturing positions and appropriating state power, political actors become susceptible to what has been labelled in Gramscian thought as transformism/*trasformismo*, which refers to

a lack of programmatic distinction between the different political parties emerged on the electoral terrain, and thus with no stable connection with defined social groups. Transformism is, first of all, the exclusion of the masses from the management of the state, and it is always a sign of political hegemony on the part of moderates. (De Nardis and Caruso 2011, 15)

It is perhaps more prudent to look at the role that Philippine leftist groups can play inside state structures less optimistically than has been borne out above, lest we risk perpetuating an unrealistic view of a political situation wherein "the world of illusion prevails" (Abrams 1988, 82). The Goldstone-Desai framework, by its capability of integrating peculiar situations, opportunities, and shifts of power practice among actors and subjects, allows us an appreciation of the complexities of leftist participation in liberal democracy. One should note that both the Kerala and West Bengal parties have been operational

for decades (since 1934 for the Communist Socialist Party, and 1964 for the Communist Party of India), while Akbayan has so far only been operational for about eighteen years (1998–2016). Nevertheless, my preference for the Goldstone-Desai framework is helped by the fact that, in my view, Akbayan's situation exhibits a curious mixture of elements found in the case studies Desai observed. As a political party growing out of social movements, Akbayan has been organizing within the grassroots and various sectors while linked with civil society and mainstream reformists (similar to the Kerala Communist Party of India). Yet, its current presence in the Aquino administration has, in one way or another, reignited tensions and feelings of neglect among the sectors the party was supposed to represent (like the West Bengali case). A seeming disconnect of directions and priorities between Akbayan and its constituents has become apparent.

To fully substantiate the arguments I will make below, I employed several data gathering methods, which include (1) archival research (studying internal documents of the party that are open to the public, classified documents, and relevant literature to Philippine leftist social movements); (2) key interviews (conducted with Akbayan's former party-list representatives Walden F. Bello and Arlene "Kaka" J. Bag-ao, Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka [PAKISAMA, National Movement for Farmer Organizations] national coordinator Raul Socrates Banzuela, and Kilusang para sa Repormang Pansakahan at Katarungang Panlipunan [KATARUNGAN, Movement for Agrarian Reform and Social Justice] secretary-general Danilo Carranza; (3) a focus group discussion (held with the mass movement organization Alliance of Progressive Labor [APL], led by its then-secretary-general Josua Mata, its then-chairperson Daniel Edralin, and two other members who requested anonymity); and (4) my own experiences and observations as a former member of Akbayan's youth wing, Akbayan Youth, falling under participant observation.<sup>5</sup>

## LEFTIST MOVEMENTS IN THE PHILIPPINES AND WORLDWIDE

What denotes a "leftist" political platform in the Philippines? One can take the argument that a "Philippine leftist" movement operates along the understanding that "it must decipher the complexities of ruling class hegemony in its particular time and culture and engage in a historically specific counter-hegemonic struggle, in all major institutions of state and civil society" (Weekley 2001, 4). In practice, this must



mean that “one of the most important tasks” of a leftist movement is to “force the state to play a different role from that of executive committee for the bourgeoisie, i.e., one that instead gives structural support to democracy and rights, redistributes social wealth and protects the weak” (Weekley 2010, 54).

With persisting issues continuously espoused by different Philippine leftist movements, discussions about their prospects and futures continue animatedly. We can glean from studies of social movements in the Philippines that these movements are not wholly detached from the predicaments that have been plaguing political organizations in the world for the past years. Even before the end of the Cold War in 1989, questions regarding broad leftist prospects for governance already existed, insofar as they continue to attempt gaining political power within the confines of existing liberal democracy. Przeworski, for example, gives a very sobering (if not cynical) appraisal of what and where the leftist projects at the time usually led to (Przeworski 1985, 41). Socialist and social-democratic political parties in Europe, according to him, tend to inevitably face the conflict of whether they will maintain their priorities and policy directions as befitting a workers’/peoples’ party, or take the more catchall approach that takes the form of a conscientious nationalism, which will attract people of many classes in supporting welfare-state policies. The choice of the CPP to characterize its struggle as primarily national-democratic (Weekley 2010, 50–51), as well as the nascent arguments of the self-identified Filipino social-democratic movements, suggests this observation also holds true in the Philippines.<sup>6</sup>

The defocusing of the workers’ and peoples’ movements will inevitably lead to the dissolution of their relationships with marginalized groups. However, if they continue to maintain a workers-only membership, they will remain marginal as a party—especially since many working peoples and precarious groups do not automatically attribute their problems to class struggle (Przeworski 1985, 15, 24–27). By the end of the Cold War, parties in general apparently faced newer challenges, as well as suffering from a continuing de-legitimization with regard to their hitherto credible leadership and source of access to political participation. It was suggested that “political parties now have lost their rooting in society and increasingly depend on the resources of the state” (Kersbergen 1995, 246). At the same time, parties were forced “to open up to new movements in the hope of reaching those sectors of the population . . . whose political relevance can no longer be ignored” (Hellman 1992, 60).<sup>7</sup>

The situations in different countries in Latin America, however, gave causes for optimism, considering the leftist political parties were actually able to enter government in local levels. Goldfrank, for his part, argued that the cases of the Chilean Socialists, the Brazilian Social Democrats, the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party) in Brazil, and the Broad Front in Uruguay show how leftist movements "remain[ing] critical and continu[ing] the search for other options" may indeed pay off (Goldfrank 2004, 194). Compared to Przeworski's negative appraisal of extending constituencies for leftist political parties, Baiocchi argued, in the experience of Partido dos Trabalhadores in Brazil, that while "[o]n one hand, to privilege the party's bases of support might jeopardize its re-election by narrowing the spectrum of potential supporters; on the other, to broaden excessively the range of social demands risks disfiguring the party's redistributive platform and alienating its bases of support" (Baiocchi 2003, 15), the solution to such dilemmas would be "political"—that is, to struggle and continuously find ways to "negotiate with diverse groups and build a temporary consensus" (Baiocchi 2003, 16).

The continuing growth of social movements espousing leftist platforms despite unfavorable circumstances, as evidenced by the discussions above, continues to provide possibilities for resistance and the enactment of new arrangements. Of course, any potential victory toward the capture of state power and the possibility of taking the reins of governance has to be handled carefully, especially since "this activity lasted only as long as the campaigns themselves [ . . . ] If grassroots organizations are demobilized and their militants excluded from political participation, the consequential alienation of this sector will weaken the democratic forces. To some extent, this process has already begun, leaving bitterness and disillusionment in its wake" (Schneider 1992, 275). Model narratives in the developing countries of social democratic governments supposedly empower their citizens and push forward social welfare policies. These narratives notwithstanding, they should be viewed critically and should actually give us pause.<sup>8</sup>

In the Philippines, the emergence and proliferation of nongovernment organizations during the 1980s (with efforts that has sustained themselves ever since) do suggest that "grassroots organizations or people's organizations provide a basis for meaningful participation," even as their effects remain largely indirect (Silliman and Noble 1998, 307). Inasmuch as they contribute to the development of civil society, entrenched elite interests remain difficult to actually combat (Eaton 2003, 490). Hence, the space for participation in the party-list system,

enshrined in the 1987 Constitution (art. 6, sec. 5) to constitute 20 percent of the total House representatives, which should be “filled, as provided by law, by selection or election from the labor, peasant, urban poor, indigenous cultural communities, women, youth, and such other sectors as may be provided by law, except the religious sector.” This fluidity of identification could be delineated along class-mass parties, formally defined as parties where “the centre of power and authority . . . is located in the executive committee of its secretariat, although formally the ultimate source of legitimate authority is the full party congress” (Gunther and Diamond 2003, 179). This also allows for “considerable intraparty conflict, particularly between pragmatists whose primary concern is electoral victory and ideologues who place much higher value on ‘constituency representation’” (Gunther and Diamond 2003, 179).

Precisely because of such dynamics, protest organizing, political education, and institutional parliamentary engagement by Philippine leftist political parties persisted through the years. Inspired by the Latin American possibilities, both of the more prominent leftist parties in the Philippines, Bayan Muna (Country First) and Akbayan, took to local politics and strengthening grassroots bases in order to build up clout for their long-term national struggles (Quimpo 2008, 161). However, despite their being on the same side of the political spectrum, leftist parties remain isolated from one another and sometimes actively cultivate such distance. Thus far, it would appear, they “have managed to forge only tactical alliances, often only on particular issues and concerns,” and it was argued that “[i]f the new, leftist groups want to become a truly significant force for the deepening of democracy in the Philippines, they will have move (sic) into more strategic unities and alliances” (Lopez-Wui 2009, 312).

### **COALITION TO PARTY TO COALITION: AKBAYAN’S DEVELOPMENT AS A “DEMOCRATIC LEFTIST” MOVEMENT**

Studying Akbayan’s history and directions is a continuing project, inasmuch as its very existence, identity, and effort to position itself in the Philippine liberal democratic space remain in contest and fluid. As early as its formation, a conscious effort toward organizing a political movement that is alternative, more expansive, and more inclusive and “friendlier” to parliamentary politics than existing Communist movements is evident among the movements that would eventually

form Akbayan. It is documented to have been initially composed of four political blocs (Quimpo 2008, 64–68; Dionisio, Karaos, and Santiago-Oreta 2011, 84): the Movement for Popular Democracy, Bukluran sa Ikauunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa (BISIG, Collective for the Promotion of Socialist Thought and Practice), Pandayan para sa Sosyalistang Pilipinas (Pandayan, Forging a Socialist Philippines), and Siglo ng Paglaya (Siglaya, Century of Liberation), another “democratic bloc” from the national democrats that split from the CPP, eventually reorganizing under the Padayon bloc.

At the time of the party’s founding, Bello, then an academic from the University of the Philippines’ Department of Sociology and a transnational activist since the martial law period, was hailed founding chairperson (Bello 2012). With its eventual expansion, Akbayan began forging relationships with sector-based organizations. While Akbayan membership is determined on an individual basis, these organizations became the main source of members and mass bases for the party.<sup>9</sup> This motley assembly of various and varying peoples’ organizations could be explained as among one of the developments within Philippine civil society and social movements, coming from the opening of spaces by the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution, the 1987 Constitution, and the institutionalization of the party-list system in Congress. Coming up with a cohesive and united front for political projects, as it is, remained a challenge, as would be illustrated in the various coalition-building attempts in the wake of the fall of the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos—especially when the demand to reframe party-mass movement relations into three-way party-mass movement-constituency relationships arose (Akbayan 1998, 7; Constantino-David 1998, 33–36; Abao 2005, 4–5; Saracho 2012, 231).

Akbayan made waves when it began actively participating in the electoral process in 1998. Its most visible achievements on the national level would be its legislative work in the party-list system. Its representatives have championed national sovereignty and territorial integrity, bills on women’s rights, the defense of human rights and redress for human rights violations, social justice and asset reform, promotion of good governance and reform of political institutions, co-sponsored bills on employment rights, foreign policy and international relations, bills seeking to criminalize discrimination against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community, mandatory human rights courses for military personnel, asking rightful compensation for human rights victims during the martial law period, a National Land

Table 1. Akbayan's electoral performance in the party-list system, 1998–2013

Election Year	Votes	First Representative	Second Representative	Third Representative
1998	232,376	Loretta Ann P. Rosales	n/a	n/a
2001	373,595	Loretta Ann P. Rosales	Mario Aguja	n/a
2004	852,473	Loretta Ann P. Rosales	Mario Aguja	Ana Theresia Hontiveros-Baraquel
2007	466,448	Ana Theresia Hontiveros-Baraquel	Walden Bello	n/a
2010	1,061,947	Walden Bello	Arlene J. Bagao	n/a
2013	829,149	Walden Bello <sup>a</sup>	Ibarra Gutierrez III	n/a

*Sources:* Fermin 2001; Llamas 2001; Commission on Elections (COMELEC) 2004, 2007, 2010b, 2013.

<sup>a</sup> Bello resigned from his post on March 11, 2015 (Bello 2015; Cayabyab 2015), with his seat subsequently filled by third party-list representative Angelina Ludovice-Katoh (COMELEC 2015).

Use Act, and initiating the debates for legislation on reproductive health care (Akbayan 2001b, 9–13; 2003b, 2–12). Most celebrated was the passage of Republic Act 9189 or the Absentee Voting Law, extending the right to vote for national government positions among overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) (Mercado 2006, 116–17). Eventually, their representatives (enumerated in table 1) advocated public access to information, regulation policies for basic and natural resources, enabling laws for government bureaucracies, as well as strengthening Akbayan's relationships with sectoral organizations and other activist movements, both local and international (Akbayan 2003c).

What is notable about Akbayan's political work is its willingness to participate in different issues that could be conceivably placed under the heading of advocating for social welfare, asset reform, strengthening democratic institutions, and the advancement of the state's institutional interests, even if these are not entirely defined by traditional leftist frameworks. Viewing it consistent with its promises of "transforming

politics,” Akbayan has been comfortable with cooperating with congressmen from other political parties, be it from traditional elite political parties or from so-called progressive parties, in creating and passing legislation. It was at this point that Akbayan ventured into allying with another traditional political party: the LP.

LP, despite being among the first political parties in the country, is not entirely the picture of robust party politics in the Philippines. In fact, it has suffered from cyclical massive defections and subsequent returns by political clans and interest groups during and after elections, as determined by the victor of the presidential seat (Kasuya 2009, 34). Nevertheless, it has consistently strived in reinventing itself as “a reformist political party that genuinely addresses the need for political, social, electoral and economic reforms” (Rodriguez 2009, 140). There is, therefore, significance in the very idea of this alliance between Akbayan and LP—if only for the perceived sense of complementarity in the identity, directions, and actions of LP and Akbayan. Both parties subscribe to what has been argued as a liberal tendency in political participation: “reformist, constructive, consultative, and interested in incremental but enduring change . . . the evolution of the status quo into something that at the very least is marginally better than that which came before” (Quezon 2006, 25).

The possibilities being open and inviting during the tail end of the administration of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Akbayan took up the question of whether the party would be willing to take the opportunity to join a national electoral campaign during their Fourth Regular National Congress. Then-Akbayan party-list representative Bello related that questions on the possibilities of allying with “acceptable traditional parties” have been floating as early as 2007–2008 (Bello 2012). The political report presented during this congress assessed that while Akbayan benefited from its participation in the party-list system, “the democratic opening provided by the party list elections had considerably narrowed” (Akbayan 2009a, 3). It was also in this congress that Akbayan resolved to launch Ana Theresia “Risa” Hontiveros-Baraquel’s senatorial candidacy as part of LP’s senatorial slate (Akbayan 2009b), which paved the way for the debate on which presidential candidate to carry. Bello and Bag-ao recounted that those supportive of the candidacy of Roxas (then a senator and the LP president) were quite convinced of the possibilities that his “reformist” campaign will be a boon to Akbayan’s electoral prospects.

In contrast, more cautious elements in that congress (then led by Ricardo Reyes, a former CPP official and member of Akbayan's Executive Committee) argued that the party be more circumspect of this engagement (Bello 2012; Bag-ao 2012). When consensus was achieved to support Roxas, the resolution passed in 16 August 2009 by Akbayan proclaimed that "Roxas supports our party's platform of political and economic reform that would create a climate of modernity and political pluralism which would be conducive to AKBAYAN's expansion and growth" (Akbayan 2009c). This support carried over to the subsequent shift of the Roxas campaign toward the candidacy of Aquino, following the death of his mother, former president Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino, on 1 August 2009.

Overall, the 2010 electoral campaign was viewed as a relative success, with Akbayan's achievements somewhat satisfactory according to the party's leadership (Bello 2012). Aquino won with 15,208,678 votes (SWS 2010); Akbayan, in turn, was able to garner 9,106,112 votes for Hontiveros-Baraquel's senatorial candidacy, placing her on 13th place, insufficient to get her into the twelve allotted senatorial seats (COMELEC 2010a). The party also got 1,061,947 votes for party-list seats in the House of Representatives, allowing Bello and Bag-ao to participate in Congress (COMELEC 2010b). Their contribution to LP's victory became their stepping-stone in becoming government functionaries.

Subsequent campaigning in the 2013 midterm elections, however, proved less optimistic for Akbayan. The main party's votes were actually reduced to 829,149 votes for party-list seats (COMELEC 2013), yet still enough to seat Bello and Bag-ao's successor, Ibarra "Barry" Gutierrez III, in the House of Representatives. Hontiveros-Baraquel's second attempt to gain a Senate seat was proportionally less successful, considering that the increased votes she garnered (10,840,047) only allowed her to place seventeenth on the list, way outside the allotted seats (*Rappler* 2013).<sup>10</sup> This is remarkable considering that the other main Left-oriented political party, Bayan Muna, also managed to increase its votes in contrast to the 2010 elections (COMELEC 2013; see figure 2). Furthermore, Bag-ao, the previous Akbayan representative, shifted alliances to LP after supposedly being denied re-nomination as a party-list representative. This led to her appointment as a "caretaker representative" of Dinagat Island in 2012 (after its original solon, Ruben Ecleo Jr., was charged with graft cases), subsequently winning her own term in the 2013 elections (Tupaz

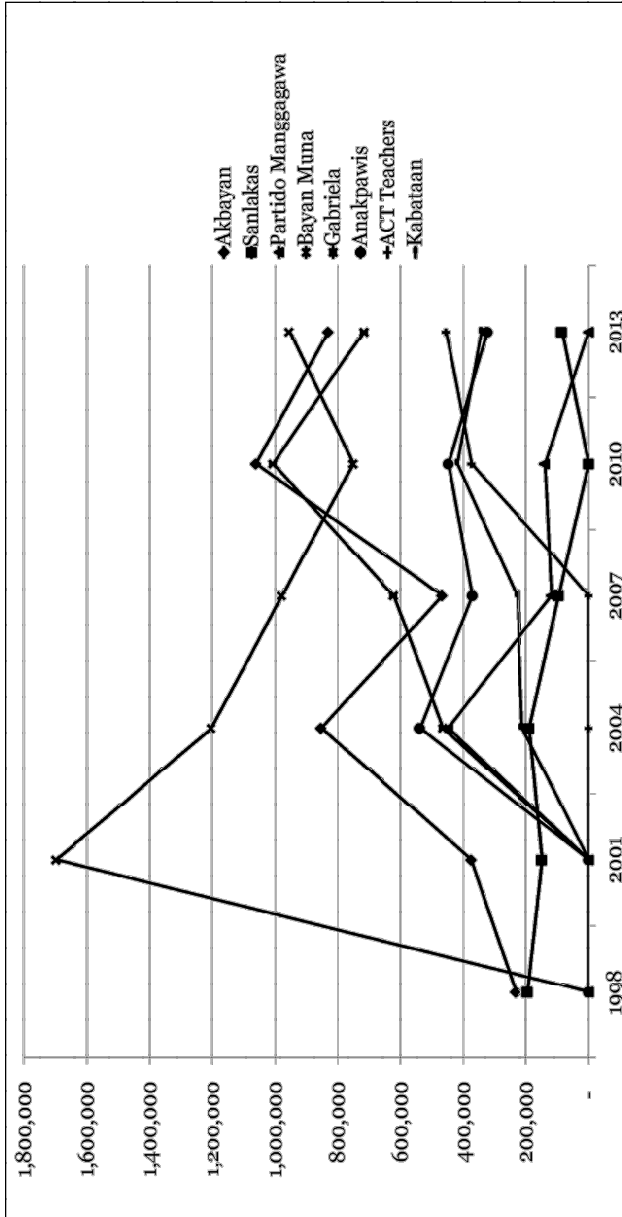


Figure 2. Party votes of Left-oriented political parties, 1998–2013. Sources: Fermin 2001; Llamas 2001; Commission on Elections (COMELEC) 2004, 2007, 2010b, 2013.



2013). These less-satisfying results, as I will show later, have material and political explanations.

### INSTITUTIONALIZING “AKBAYAN IN GOVERNMENT”

Bello and Bag-ao represented Akbayan in the Fifteenth Congress from 2010 to 2013. To systematize legislative work, the party leadership conceived a collaborative body called Akbayan in Congress. This body compartmentalizes the legislative agendas Akbayan currently holds and will attempt to participate in. Bello holds issues dealing with urban constituencies such as labor and urban poor, as well as OFWs. Bag-ao, in turn, prioritizes issues of the rural sector, specifically farmers, fisherfolk, and indigenous peoples, as well as women’s rights and justice-related concerns. The representatives themselves mentioned that while they support each other’s assignments, this prioritization scheme reflects their former background as advocates from civil society and peoples’ organizations (Bello 2012; Bag-ao 2012).

These engagements and achievements have been a point of pride for both representatives, saying these contribute to their continued efforts of presenting Akbayan as a party that has supposedly maintained its high level of integrity despite being part of a governing coalition. Even if their party is now being tagged as “the President’s party list,” then-representative Bello is quite confident that the Philippine electorate “sees [Akbayan] as a new kind of Left, as willing to take responsibility, that it is practical and pragmatic . . . [P]eople do see us working on Congress and the streets. [My sense] is that it is a good image” (Bello 2012). Then-representative Bag-ao, in turn, supports this assessment and says that Akbayan, by their assessment, is consistently seen as “the reasonable, democratic Left” compared to other leftist parties in the country (Bag-ao 2012). Viewed as continuations of their legislative work, it is visible that Akbayan is restructuring its dynamics, opening itself for political opportunities while trying to bring its constituencies into play.

On the executive bureaucracy, key Akbayan leaders serve in various positions in government to date, mostly appointed by the president (listed in table 2). To systematize their interventions, the party also conceived a collaborative body specifically called Akbayan in Government. Coming from the party platforms the party has upheld over the past years, specific engagements in government sectors are consolidated in order to give Akbayan a better picture of engagements

Table 2. Key Akbayan leaders in the Aquino administration

Name	Former Position(s) in Akbayan	Held Government Post(s)	Office
Ronald Llamas	Party President	Presidential Adviser	Office of Political Affairs (OPA)
Loretta Ann Rosales	Chair Emeritus, 1st Party-List Representative	Chairperson	Commission on Human Rights (CHR)
Joel Rocamora	Party President	Secretary/Lead Convenor	National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC)
Mario Aguja	2nd Party-List Representative	Member, Board of Trustees	Government Service Insurance System (GSIS)
Daniel Edralin	National Vice-Chairperson, Secretary-General	Member and Chairperson for Committee on OFWs	Social Security System (SSS)
Percival Cendaña	National Chairperson	Commissioner-at-Large	National Youth Commission (NYC)
Ana Theresia "Risa" Hontiveros	1st Party-List Representative	Appointive Member, Board of Directors	Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth)

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that could be maximized by the party's access to political power. Akbayan views its presence in office as a means to actualize and execute the party's policy propositions over the years. Nevertheless, inasmuch as Akbayan remains adamant in claiming these positions as victories for their political party, it must be noted that any current developments these offices are advancing are not entirely attributed to Akbayan but still largely to the Aquino administration's entirety (with the Akbayan label remaining a minor functionary). The direction Akbayan takes in the current Aquino administration is presented to be consistent with the struggle for good governance and social welfare. Discourses inside the movement itself, however, show that this front is not as unified or consistent as it claims.

Table 2 (continued)

Name	Former Position(s) in Akbayan	Held Government Post(s)	Office
Angelina Ludovice-Katoh	Member	Commissioner <sup>a</sup>	Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor
Tomasito Villarín	Member	Undersecretary	Office of Political Affairs (OPA); Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG)
Gibby Gorres	Member, Akbayan Youth	Member	Youth and Students Sectoral Council, National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC)
Gio Tingson	Member, Akbayan Youth	Commissioner for Natural Resources	National Youth Commission (NYC)

*Sources:* Cay and Nonato 2014, 64–65. Other information were drawn from publicly available data online from the Presidential Communications Operations Office, Commission on Human Rights, National Anti-Poverty Commission, Government Service Insurance System, Social Security System, National Youth Commission, and the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation.

<sup>a</sup> Note: Ludovice-Katoh left her post to serve as party-list representative following Walden Bello's resignation as first party-list representative effective March 11, 2015 (COMELEC 2015; *GMA News* 2015).

## LIMITS TO AKBAYAN'S AGENCY AND OPPORTUNITIES— DEMOBILIZING THREATS

Akbayan's currently amicable relationship with the Aquino administration has attracted its own share of supporters and detractors. While the party does find its newfound image as a potent governing element a positive development, it would be inaccurate to say that the entire network of Akbayan (as well as its audience) believes the same

way. Akbayan's transition from mass movement organizing into governance spaces has sparked tensions and frictions from its allies in civil society and mass movements. The departure of PAKISAMA from being a mass movement ally of Akbayan, the APL's continuously critical take on the Aquino administration, as well as the dissatisfaction of the still-allied rural group KATARUNGAN, point to contradictions in the party structure and its avowed principles. Akbayan's relationship with the labor and agrarian reform movements suggests that the party's focus on winning national political posts is posing problems to their long-standing mass bases.

The APL was formally organized in November 1996 during its National Founding Congress, seeing itself as "a 'national' labor center" that "draw[s] into its fold various forms of labor organizations and not just trade unions," thus emphasizing its pluralistic origins and yet moving toward a "union structure consolidated along industry and geographical lines" (APL 2006, 1). The movement is one of the founding members of Akbayan as discussed earlier, even if their internal policy says that their membership in Akbayan is on an individual basis. Josua Mata, secretary-general of APL, related that APL enforces such a policy "in order to assure that there is autonomy between the party and the movements, while there is coordination between them" (APL 2012).

With this arrangement between APL and Akbayan, it is thus remarkable for the former (and a point of pride for them) that despite backing and supporting the latter, they "have always believed that the party should be accountable to the mass movements; but the mass movements are not accountable to the party" (APL 2012). Due to this level of autonomy, APL separates its stances from Akbayan's alliance with Aquino. They stated that they have never supported the LP-led coalition government, since coalition talks began with Roxas and the Akbayan leadership. APL's members figured in the debates of Akbayan's Third National Congress, voicing vocal dissent against supporting Roxas.<sup>11</sup> When the LP candidacy was transferred to Aquino, APL, having broadened itself as the *Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa* (SENTRON, Center for United and Progressive Workers), posed the condition that they will only endorse Aquino should he support the movement's "labor agenda proposal." Negotiation, however, fell through—and thus "APL never endorsed the Liberal Party and I don't think we will" (APL 2012).

APL remained skeptical of the relationship Akbayan has with the president. They also raised concerns on how Akbayan's links with the

president had a “demobilizing effect” on the party’s membership. APL pointed to the party’s allegedly “turning lukewarm” in supporting social movement struggles, like issues of labor contractualization, political dynasties (the president being part of one), and the layoff of workers from Philippine Airlines affiliated with the workers’ union Philippine Airlines Employees’ Association. APL traced this commitment to criticism to their view that the Aquino administration has no capacity to enact long-term systemic overhauls or reforms: in fact, they believe that Aquino’s administration “is a government that was elected by the people, but essentially carries an elitist, pro-landlord, pro-capitalist interest” (APL 2012).

The two subject agrarian reform movements trace their beginnings from a series of consultations conducted by the Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas immediately after the 1986 People Power Revolution (Putzel 1998, 88). PAKISAMA was comprised of and consolidated with organizations from around “70% of the provinces in the country and participated in by more than 10,000 peasant leaders.” The August 1986 national consultation thus resolved to build “a strong national alliance that will push for genuine agrarian and aquatic reform, rural development, and the protection of peasants’ rights” (PAKISAMA 2015). Currently, PAKISAMA has also ventured into piloting agribusiness efforts, opening opportunities for higher incomes and productivity among its member farmers as well. They also continue to engage campaigns for policy reforms and similar legislative agendas in different capacities (Banzuela 2012).

For its part, KATARUNGAN is formally identified as “a grassroots-based network of peasant organizations established in December 2007, with presence in 15 provinces nationwide” (ISS 2015a). However, its secretary-general Danilo Carranza noted that the mass bases which participate in KATARUNGAN were formerly part of the larger rural mass movements of the CPP, which left it during the 1992 split (Carranza 2013). The mass bases that eventually gave rise to KATARUNGAN (such as rural poor communities within the provinces of Pampanga, Tarlac, and the Negros Island), furthermore, have also been organized in partnership with the nongovernment organization Rural Poor Institute for Land and Human Rights Services (RIGHTS) (RIGHTS Network 2012). Primarily, the member organizations and activists of KATARUNGAN are advocating for the “land redistribution of around 100,000 hectares of private and public lands and grant of ancestral domain titles. Several chapters of KATARUNGAN are also

resisting land grabbing especially in areas that are being developed for eco-tourism purposes” (ISS 2015b).

Carranza and the current national coordinator for PAKISAMA, Raul Socrates Banzuela, related that when the party-list law was approved in 1995, they were already participating in the consolidation of Akbayan, in the hope that there would also be avenues for participation in a party that professed to be composed of democratic leftist forces/movements. Akbayan’s subsequent victory and representation in Congress thus also became a foothold for both KATARUNGAN and PAKISAMA’s political efforts (Banzuela 2012; Carranza 2013).<sup>12</sup> Banzuela noted how a majority of them subscribed to Akbayan’s platforms and its political programs. Their participation in Akbayan and its coalitional efforts from 1998 to 2009 were similarly motivated. PAKISAMA expanded Akbayan’s linkages in the rural development sector on different levels (local, national, and international levels) (Banzuela 2012).

As PAKISAMA expanded, it had been very active in pushing for agendas involving the rights and concerns of farmers. Their most celebrated victory, also counted as a landmark policy development by the rural sector movements, was the campaign of the Sumilao farmers of Bukidnon to win back their 144 hectares of ancestral and productive farmland wrested by the San Miguel Corporation (Banzuela 2012), supported by Arlene “Kaka” J. Bag-ao, then a lawyer and organizer for the Akbayan-allied Balay Alternative Legal Advocates for Development in Mindanaw (Niemelä 2009; Bag-ao 2012). Their partnership with Akbayan, however, was complicated as of Akbayan’s Fourth Regular National Congress, the same event inaugurating the alliance with LP. While Akbayan confirmed the alliance with Roxas, PAKISAMA and KATARUNGAN expressed their reservations on the alliance, while still agreeing that LP (and by extension, Aquino) is the most acceptable choice at advancing an agrarian reform agenda (Banzuela 2012; Carranza 2013).

The publicized promise of Aquino during the formal launch of his campaign on 9 February 2010, to actually distribute Hacienda Luisita before June 2014 (Sisante 2010) apparently strengthened PAKISAMA’s optimism. However, when they began lobbying Aquino even during the campaign period to begin distributing Hacienda Luisita’s lands, going so far as to talk about it in Aquino’s campaign headquarters with their allied federations inside the hacienda, all they got were vague

concessions, which are yet to be acted upon up to this day (Banzuela 2012). This became one of their impetuses to eventually bolt out of Akbayan. Banzuela (2012) recounts PAKISAMA's own Council Meeting in Aklan held sometime in September 2009, where the observation was made that "for the past eight to ten years, not a single representative of Akbayan came from the basic sectors. All the representatives were coming from the professional sector [ . . . ][T]hose leading the nomination for representatives [are] chosen for 'winnability.' And you will find that there's no affirmative action from the party to put anybody from the basic sectors among the first three nominees." Sealing their decision to become independent was their acknowledgment of the fact that, for all intents and purposes, Akbayan was first and foremost a national political party that targeted national electoral and governmental prominence. These seemed too limiting to PAKISAMA's long-term project of ensuring that the leaders of the rural sectors (farmers, fisherfolk, and indigenous communities) themselves could become their legislative representatives. Remaining in Akbayan would mean continuing to be represented by professionals, which runs counter to their sectoral aspirations (Banzuela 2012).

In light of the immediate aftermath of the 2013 midterm elections, Carranza observed that Akbayan actually has had very limited success in pushing for the actual and substantive implementation of agrarian reform. It was hoped that the supposed-proximity of Akbayan leaders within Aquino's cabinet (Llamas foremost among them) would sway Aquino toward actually deploying political pressure to Congress for the extension of Republic Act 9700 or the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms Law. In reality, these moves were frustrated time and again from 2012 onward, no less in part due to Aquino's retention of Agrarian Reform Secretary Virgilio de los Reyes (Carranza 2013), who has been consistently criticised by nationwide agrarian reform advocates due to his dismal performance of land distribution under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (Manahan 2013, 16). While KATARUNGAN continues to participate in inter-civil society and intra-movement advocacies for agrarian reform, they have chosen to carry limited expectations of Akbayan's clout in government, considering a majority of their advocacies have received very limited support from Akbayan (Carranza 2013).

### CONTRADICTIONS FOR “A PARTY IN THE CORRIDORS OF POWER”

There is a shared sentiment among the leaders of APL, KATARUNGAN's Carranza, and PAKISAMA's Banzuela on how the composition, priorities, and ideological dispositions of the tight network of party leaders have affected and glossed over whatever differences and tensions the party's component blocs might have had over the years. These dynamics are very comparable to Manali Desai's analyses of the Communist Party of India in Kerala and the Communist Party of India in West Bengal, which I used as a model for my observation. Most marked among her arguments would be that despite the pioneering activists coming from the upper castes of their respective local societies, their organizing efforts, directions, and critical approaches are highly different from one another.<sup>13</sup>

While the party leaders suggest that this is a part of the party's consolidation and maturation as a political agency (Bag-ao 2012; Bello 2012), the movements think that this might be actually contributing to the party's bureaucratization, becoming less accountable to the comprising mass movements (APL 2012). The respondents point to the increasing primacy of former leaders from the BISIG bloc, led by Secretary Ronald Llamas, as the likely root of such recent developments.<sup>14</sup> The leaders of APL, KATARUNGAN, and PAKISAMA voiced concerns on whether the party is still maintaining its integrity as a politico-social movement that is answerable to the leftist mass movements comprising it. APL Chairperson Daniel Edralin calls the party's problematic vagueness of positioning “*dikit-ism*” or the party's pandering to people in influential positions in government. Mata added that it was beginning to disturb them that Akbayan's cozy relationship with LP led the party to start regulating criticism of the administration, with BISIG-affiliated leaders allegedly expressing displeasure at APL's highly critical rhetoric against the administration (APL 2012).

That its component social movements, APL, KATARUNGAN, and PAKISAMA, continue to find their identities as social movements-cum-people's organizations an important counterbalance to Akbayan's increasingly transforming nature suggests that these organizations find something in the party's directions that no longer corresponds to their initial agreements, and that their identities as social movements with their own prerogatives and priorities should be asserted if not made paramount (illustrated in figure 3). Akbayan's currently amorphous identity, while still able to relate with social movements, has been subjected to questioning, especially their perceived benefiting from



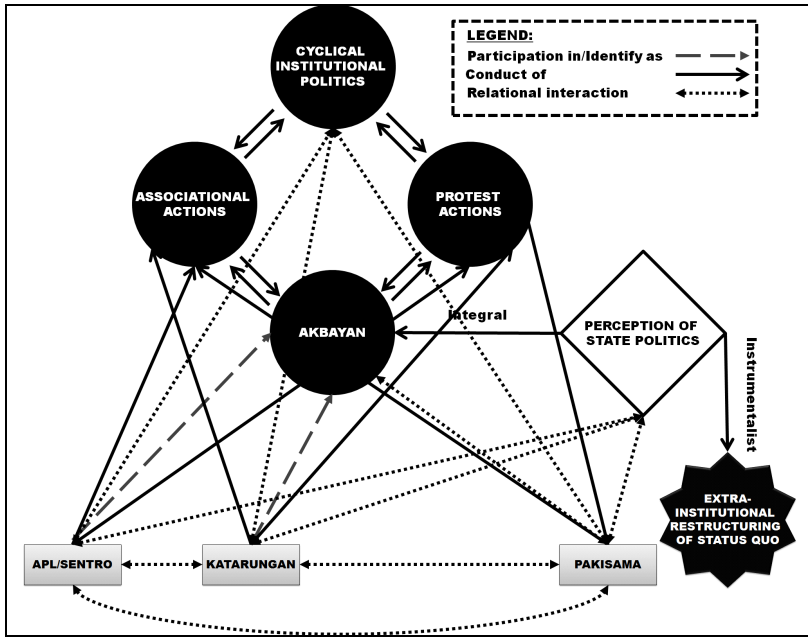


Figure 3. Framework illustration of subject social movements' relationships with Akbayan

access to governmental influence and resources. Current and former members of Akbayan have begun questioning whether the party is still an independent movement, considering it has received vast amounts of technical and financial support from LP's (and by extension, Aquino's) network (Cay and Nonato 2014).<sup>15</sup> This serves as a double-edged quality that has inspired the appreciation of formalistic, process-oriented civil society groups, yet also stimulated resentment from sectors dissatisfied with the fact that Akbayan participates in the strengthening of this still-contentious status quo. While working to facilitate *détentes* between government offices and select civil society groups, it nonetheless neglects other interests of other sectors of society whose relationship to governance remains problematic.

### QUO VADIS: WHO'S LEFT, REALLY?

Akbayan's position in the Aquino government, rather than opening spaces for dialogue between such competing leftist parties, narrowed spaces further and polarized these parties against each other. Bayan

Muna's existence since 2001 as a leading party-list group was seen as a testament to the NDF's existing mass bases and the continuing appreciation of the national democrats' political program (Caouette 2004, 657). This subsequent development did pose challenges for Akbayan's efforts to project itself as a democratic leftist political party during this time. Curiously, the issues that Bayan Muna would uphold (reflected by the allied organizations of its parent movement Bagong Alyansang Makabayan or Bayan) would include rights for the education sector, youth, women, workers, peasants and fisherfolks, indigenous peoples and the urban poor, government employees, religious social action groups, as well as OFWs, the very sectors Akbayan attempts to consolidate under their umbrella organizations.<sup>16</sup>

The persistent subculture of negative identification within Akbayan (herewith defined as "publicly presenting Akbayan as 'not the national democrats' and building political capital from such identification")<sup>17</sup> actually limits its capacity toward properly enunciating its own independent, stable, and long-standing political program. Such a stance seems ironic, if one will consider the general voter trend of Akbayan to the cumulative Makabayan<sup>18</sup> voter total since 2001. There is a remarkable parallelism regarding their dips and spikes in voter share—suggesting that voter perception of them may not be entirely differentiated at all (see figure 4).<sup>19</sup>

Inasmuch as Akbayan's position has been a conscious effort to inaugurate a "democratic leftist" politics that can engage and change Philippine governance apparatus, records are aplenty to show that this identity has also been forged retroactively (and remains to be sustained as such).<sup>20</sup> Its alliance with LP could be seen in this light as the opportunity for Akbayan to perform its potential as a social movement inside government structures on its own terms (more accurately, its own terms of what "leftist governance" should be). Thus, their activities and narratives were rewritten and expanded in order to highlight this change in their relative position to power. Due to this, the tussles that Akbayan had with an evolving NDF intensified in the current administration. This points to existing realities, both historical and sociopolitical, suggesting that this contest among similar constituencies still show the inability of Akbayan to truly divorce itself from the cultural legacy of the NDF.

It was initially hoped that redressing factional differences could still be achieved (Navarro and Elumbre 2011, 84). After all, former representative Bello himself, when he was interviewed earlier for this study, would recall how he worked together with some parties from the

NDF on key legislation and that “overall, despite ideological differences, the antagonism is not as high as it was five or six years ago” (Bello 2012). The lead-up to the 2013 midterm elections, however, saw their tussles taking a turn for the less-amicable. The allegations of “un-genuine” representation of the country’s “marginalized sectors” thrown between Akbayan and Anakbayan (another NDF-affiliated movement, in turn among the organizations instrumental in the foundation of Kabataan Partylist) triggered by Commission on Election’s (COMELEC) attempt to disqualify “unqualified” party lists during the first weeks of October 2012 point to the possibilities of their tensions devolving further into low-brow oppositionism, likely stimulated by their concern for their possible political futures.<sup>21</sup> While both parties were eventually cleared to participate in the 2013 elections, Akbayan would receive fewer votes than Bayan Muna, Anakbayan’s senior coalition partner in the oppositional Makabayan bloc (as shown in figure 2).

The exposure of corruption scandals involving officials affiliated with the president also posed subsequent challenges to Akbayan. The Priority Development Assistance Fund scandal (which involved House representatives and senators laundering public money for their own benefit via the alleged assistance of businesswoman Janet Lim-Napoles) led to an outpouring of outrage and protests. Largest among these protests was the “Million People March,” which occurred on 26 August 2013, attended by at least seventy-five thousand Filipinos from various socioeconomic classes. The presence of Akbayan and other partisan Left movements, normally expected to spearhead such movements, were markedly de-emphasized (Calonzo 2013). The Supreme Court subsequently declared the Priority Development Assistance Fund practice unconstitutional (*Belgica et al. vs. Ochoa et al.*, G.R. No. 208566, 19 November 2013). The same verdict of unconstitutionality was handed down against the executive budgetary policy known as the Disbursement Acceleration Program or DAP (*Araullo et al. vs. Aquino et al.*, G.R. No. 209287, 1 July 2014). Akbayan chose to justify the Aquino government’s previous actions on these ends as supposedly consistent with government policy (Akbayan Party-List 2014), earning them harsh criticisms from competing leftist movements (KMU 2014).

With negative press about the Aquino administration’s credibility beginning to increase substantially, then-Akbayan Representative Bello sent an unsolicited letter dated 9 August 2014, attempting to convince the president to fire budget secretary Florencio “Butch” Abad (the

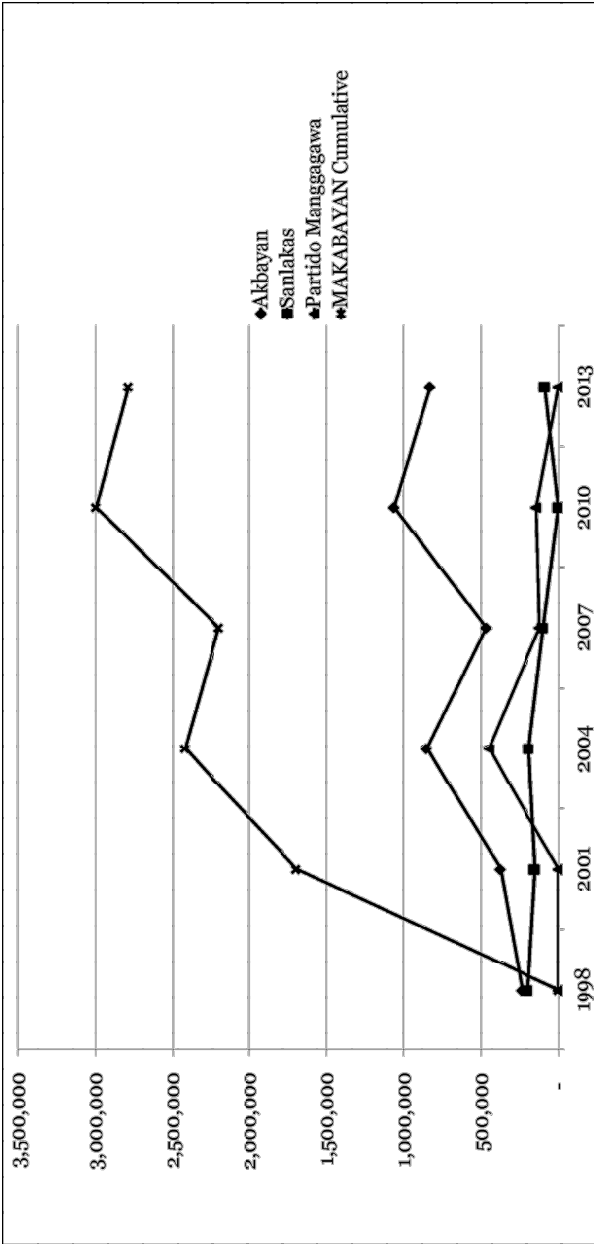


Figure 4. Comparative voter share, 1998–2013. Sources: Fermin 2001; Llamas 2001; Commission on Elections (COMELEC) 2004, 2007, 2010b, 2013.

architect of the DAP program) and agrarian reform secretary Virgilio de los Reyes (on account of the latter's continued failure in implementing existing agrarian reform laws), if the government was to continue pursuing reforms with credibility. Aquino, however, dismissed this exhortation and stood by his cabinet secretaries (Cabacungan 2014), with the leadership of Akbayan officially issuing a message disowning Bello's pronouncements, professing their continued support of the president. This situation, however, led to criticisms by affiliates and allies of Akbayan and even from outside organizations (Casauay 2014). APL (since reorganized into SENTRO) supported Bello's "well-intentioned proposals and constructive criticisms," rebuking Akbayan for its inability to "support the principled position he has taken" (SENTRO 2014).

Further tensions within and outside Akbayan, coinciding with the volatile Mamasapano incident of 25 January 2015,<sup>22</sup> led to Bello's resignation as Akbayan representative on 11 March 2015 (Bello 2015; Cayabyab 2015) and to Ricardo Reyes's resignation from the party entirely on 25 April 2015 (Reyes 2015; Mohideen 2015). SENTRO subsequently exhorted Akbayan to depart from the administration coalition, as continuously protecting it supposedly "open[s] [Akbayan] to many unsavory charges, real and imagined, that will hound us for many years to come, and which will seriously destroy our reputation and future as a political party that purportedly espouses genuine freedom, justice and democracy" (Mero 2015).

This split in the ranks of Akbayan's constituencies became more explicit after Bello's declaration that he is running as an independent Senatorial candidate in the 9 May 2016 National Elections, and Akbayan's open disavowal of his candidacy in favor of Hontiveros-Baraquel's third bid for the Senate, while remaining a part of the LP coalition (Macaraig 2015). As of press time, Hontiveros-Baraquel managed to land in the 10th slot in voter preference, while Bello is trailing at the 30th to 34th range (SWS 2016).<sup>23</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This study dealt with the development, consolidation, reorientation, and subsequent narrative building Akbayan undertook as part of its long-term project to become a leftist political party in power. While making a name for its anti-corruption crusades, the party would also make conscious efforts to position itself as the more accessible and

reasonable ally of different groups in Philippine civil society, at least compared to reemerging traditional political parties (reformist in character or not) and the reconsolidating NDF. Thus, Akbayan allied with what it claimed to be the more reasonable traditional political party with both the machinery and with the possibility of pushing a reform agenda: the LP under Aquino. While this situation afforded Akbayan access to political capital and allowed its members to practice handling power in governance, the party must now reckon with the view that its ascension to power has bereft them of their more critical appraisal of Philippine political realities. The misgivings and tensions the Akbayan is having with the social movements they dealt with (the labor and rural workers' sectors), as well as their members who are currently experiencing dissonance with their actions, are perhaps brought about by their conscious appraisal, review, and reorientation of their history to justify their current governance praxis—something that is not as reflective of the party's membership as previously assumed. That competition from a more agitated NDF would continue to hound Akbayan's existence, its claim to power and its legitimacy as "the democratic Left" appear as something they had expected since their inception, yet something that the party has not fully addressed.

It remains to be seen whether Akbayan has properly assessed the limitations that their narratives and analyses of Philippine politics will afford them in the near future—and whether this will change their seemingly unwavering loyalty to an LP-led administration in spite of the criticisms now being levied at them by opponents, outside observers, and their own allied movements. The question of leftist political agency remains a murky terrain for such "old dogs" whose habits die hard. Philippine leftist movements, I would say, are in a very precarious balancing act of attempting to appeal to a general electorate historically and socially isolated from their political history, while at the same time attempting to transform whatever gains and institutional practices they have achieved. The institutional history and partisan gripes among these leftist political parties remain integral to the question of how a leftist political program might thrive in the country. That their historical tensions remain alive, if kept periodically at bay, is quite understandable. That they seem to be unable to differentiate themselves on other terms (despite their claims to being programmatic parties) remains disturbing.

Integrating the Goldstone-Desai and the Quimpo social movement frameworks turned out to be appropriate in highlighting the transitions

the party is taking. The framework's flexibility and enumeration of key factors for study, I believe, allows it to be utilized for studying most social movements adhering to leftist ideological persuasions, insofar as the situation (1) involves intra-class and bloc interactions within these movements and (2) suggests these tensions will potentially affect the form of governance these movements will adopt presently or in the future, when they formally become ruling political parties. Since Akbayan's practice of contention in the political space has been well-sustained by its linkages, it is unsurprising the party still wants to benefit from it even if it is in government. However, being inside state apparatuses that have their own institutional logic yet still wanting to retain that position, their experiencing levels of tension and negotiation with affiliate and sympathetic social movements is inevitable. Future research into social movements (as well as the potential political parties they could give birth to) would therefore be well served to practice a certain level of sensitivity to the multiplicity of ideals and programmatic approaches within social movements *and* political parties, and not to primarily assume general uniformity among unified political parties or movement coalitions—as befitting the actual, material experience of democratic politics.

Inasmuch as Akbayan remains well-intentioned yet primarily pragmatic in its political projects, it is beginning to run the long-standing risks of most so-called Philippine progressive activist groups,

well-meaning, but closed-circle, groups presumed to speak for the hearts and minds of the rest of Filipino society . . . end[ing] up as another elite “convenor group” or “council of elders,” mouthing what they thought were the priorities and aspirations of the larger part of Filipino society. And yet the social, economic and political cancer is still there—robust and seemingly indestructible. (Hidalgo 2011, 280)

Akbayan would therefore be well served by critically reviewing, reconsidering, and reappraising its position as a social movement. Otherwise, with its current position, it is likely to be fully assimilated by an intransigent Philippine political system, slowly but surely neutralizing its actual capacity for engineering substantial reform and political change—precisely because of its attempts to be more proximate to traditional sources of power. ❀

## NOTES

1. Aquino's election was explained and (more often than not) rhapsodized in publications made at the time (for example, Rocamora 2010; Villacorta 2011). Hofileña and Go (2011), in contrast, offer a sober account of the elections, attributing Aquino's victory to competent public imaging and the transformation of established electoral strategies.
2. The 1992-1993 split within the CPP was engineered by its own Central Committee in releasing the 1991 document entitled "Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors." The document claimed centralizing party policy and political strategy should be done to address the party's then-being plagued by "weaknesses and mistakes in the three fields of party life: ideology, politics and organization." This move for centralization caused sections of the party to "declare 'autonomy' . . . taking with them whole groups of Party members" (Weekley 2001, 228-33). The most injurious aspect of this split was the exposure of Operation Kampanyang Ahos: internal party purges within the period of 1982-1985, which involved the torture and summary execution of alleged "deep penetration agents" inside the movement (Garcia 2001; Abinales 2001, 2008). This saw "the movement weakened and split into competing factions . . . and many former cadres turned to reformist activism within new leftwing parties and organizations" (Rutten 2008, 2). Subsequent accounts were written about the political struggles that have fraught the NDF, its affiliated parties and "rejectionist" (RJ) leftist groups (some of the latter who would go on and support the foundation and political consolidation of Akbayan), which tended to fault the NDF's (and by extension, the CPP's) ideological intransigence, while nonetheless grudgingly praising the resiliency of its "reaffirmist" (RA) resistance movement even as it isolates itself from other leftist groups (Pabico 1999; Caouette 2004, 609-11, 693-94; Abinales and Amoroso 2005, 267; Quimpo 2008, 59; Melencio 2010, 140-41; Rivera 2011, 293; Saracho 2012, 232).
3. An early recounting of social movement activity in the form of university-based student organizations in the Philippines tended to claim that there is "no possibility that a political group can emerge out of the present student aggregations . . . . This inability to unite may be attributed to the diversity of issues student organizations uphold and to the pressures of vested groups who endeavour to influence them or win their support" (Damo-Santiago 1972, 214). This hypothesis is now belied by the historical narratives of student movement unity in multiple sociopolitical issues over the decades (Lacaba 2003; Pimentel 2006; Abinales 2012). A later study released by the Institute of Popular Democracy would similarly prefer to represent social movement activity as primarily dependent on "the current socio-political environment they operate in" (Fabros et al. 2006, 17), which somewhat ignores the potential effect of "interactions of cadres with outsiders" such as "state actors, allies, counter-movements, the wider public [and] also more personal contacts such as relatives and peers" (Rutten 2008, 5).
4. This difficulty is most apparent when studying still-active political parties, especially those affiliated with traditional political forces. For recent examples of political hagiography, see Crisanto and Crisanto 2007, and Malaya and Abad 2006. In contrast, revisiting the older history of political parties with limited public coverage (such as the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas - 1930) allows for detailed history writing and appraisals. For such a case, see Fuller 2007; 2011; 2015.



5. As a former member of Akbayan Youth, I was part of the youth wing's International Committee, which is primarily given the responsibility of liaising with international organizations that have solidarity or working relationships with Akbayan, in tandem with officials and leaders from the main party. At the same time, I was also employed by the Active Citizenship Foundation, a "non-stock, non-profit organization committed to promoting people's active participation in community activities," which primarily cooperates with Akbayan's programs between May 2011 and March 2012.
6. This tendency toward choosing a wider and less-ideologically charged label has been the standing justification of Filipino social democrats with regard to their origins and directions:

Social democracy in the Philippines emerged not only in the context of the Marcos regime in the late 1960s-90s, but also as a reaction to Marxism-Leninism . . . Those activists who were initially termed as "moderates" turned to social democracy/democratic socialism with its traditions of upholding political democracy, economic justice and social/human solidarity. (Tolosa 2011, 4)

To their credit, social democrats' identification was not primarily reactive. Taking up Catholic social teaching as a further influence "[t]he embryonic Filipino social democrats, both competing with and learning from Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and immersed in the lives and struggles of the basic sectors with whom they were engaged, saw themselves as responding in a radical way to the call to commit their lives to social and political transformation" (Tolosa 2011, 4-5).

7. This became more evident in the case for socialist parties who identified closely with Soviet hegemony, since their "ideas and politics are . . . shaken by doubts, driven by failures, embarrassed by calamities of their own making" (Keane 1998, xii). This, despite the positive appraisal of many re-democratizing states during the third wave of democratization that political parties "proved highly effective instruments for socializing the general public into the ways of democracy and for increasing the political capacity of civil society organizations (from neighborhood organizations to the trade unions) to press their demands against the state and deepen the process of democratization" (Encarnacion 2003, 100-101).
8. While the Partido dos Trabalhadores has made a name for itself for practicing radical democracy with its internal structures and actually integrates its supportive movements without the risk of co-optation, this party was nonetheless appraised as "often [winning] elections on protest votes, only to garner electoral sympathy later." The increase of middle-class professionals inside the Partido dos Trabalhadores and the eventual settling-in of bureaucratization have posed the risk of the party's own checks against such bureaucratization "lose its effectiveness, and the possibility of factional fights again becomes a potential downfall for administrations" (Baiocchi 2003, 216-18). The same could be said of the limited successes that movements in Montevideo, Uruguay, has experienced, where "an enduring political culture that tends to favor 'representative democracy' over 'participatory democracy', consistent with the statist and party-centered evolution of the Uruguay political system" has produced less-than-favorable results (Chavez 2004, 94). Less-optimistic would be the track record of social democratic movements in the Northern Hemisphere—

ironically where social-democratic thought first emerged. Studies point to “a social democracy that has confirmed its rupture . . . with its role as the primary political representative of working-class interests . . . [S]ocial democracy has demonstrated its protean talent for adapting to the requirements of the different phases of capitalism” (Evans 2012a, 11), demonstrated in the cases of Canada’s Co-operative Commonwealth Federation–New Democratic Party (Evans 2012b, 93, 95), the United Kingdom’s Labor Party (Sheldrick 2012, 178), and the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany) in Germany (Schmidt 2012, 439).

9. Key sectors that were marked as active supporters as recorded in 2001 include the APL, PAKISAMA, Confederation of Independent Unions in the Public Sector (formerly Caucus of Independent Unions), Kapisanan ng mga Kamag-Anak ng Migranteng Manggagawang Pilipino (Association of Migrant Filipino Workers’ Kin); Lesbian and Gay Legislative Advocacy Network, and the youth organizations Movement for the Advancement of Student Power and Student Council Alliance of the Philippines (Akbayan 2001a, 3).
10. Hontiveros-Baraquel’s campaign, at the same time, has been met with criticism for its supposedly disjointed projection of her as an advocate of the ruling government coalition, which supposedly clashed with her previous reputation as a hard-hitting sectoral and issue advocate when she was Akbayan representative (Lazaro 2013).
11. An APL member who requested anonymity recounted the proceedings, noting that while Akbayan leaders say that Roxas is “an inconsistent neoliberal” that could be reasoned with to push for a more reform-oriented platform, they were unconvinced because Roxas was a “patronizing” cacique who does not consult with the affected sectors of society (APL 2012).
12. Even if the Congress for a People’s Agrarian Reform’s campaigning for a substantive agrarian reform policy led to a watered-down Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (largely in part to the strong lobby of a landlord-dominated post-Marcos Congress led by Negros Occidental Representative Hortensia Stark), PAKISAMA nonetheless saw this as an opportunity to distribute 10.3 million hectares out of the 30 million hectares of arable land under the government’s jurisdiction (Kasuya 1995, 28; Banzuela 2012). Akbayan adopted Congress for a People’s Agrarian Reform’s (and by extension, PAKISAMA’s and KATARUNGAN’s) policy proposals, incorporating it in its own agrarian reform platform. This is hallmarked by its “land to the tiller principle” where those who work to develop the land should own it, just compensation to the former landowners while granting affordable amortization for the land title grantees, and collective farming efforts to ensure maximum productivity among its farmers (Akbayan 2006).
13. A similar separate study suggested that what Kerala was able to achieve (that West Bengal did not) were “changes in the balance of class forces and how these have played out in a sub-national context” (Sandbrook et al. 2007, 92). The question now stands on whether Akbayan’s comparable historical experience and development has borne out similar results. Curiously, Akbayan’s tensions and problems in terms of coalitional concerns could be largely compared to the West Bengali experience. Even if Akbayan has taken the route of the Kerala activists to expand its partnership with a national, mainstream party, its organizational integrity seems affected by the growing exclusivity and bureaucratization of its

leadership. Inasmuch as the party claims to reflect the concerns of its constituency, party cultures and structures have been pretty much indistinguishable from the leaders of the former BISIG bloc. BISIG's public website (<http://filipinosocialism.wordpress.com/>), last updated 20 December 2008, identified its chairperson as Tomasito Villarin and its national secretary-general as Edwin Chavez. Villarin now serves as an undersecretary of the Department of the Interior and Local Government, a department ran by Roxas from 2012 until 2015, while Chavez serves under him directly.

14. The former BISIG president, having brokered Akbayan's alliance with the LP, has been officially hands-off from the party since his appointment to the cabinet, and BISIG itself as a bloc is indistinguishable from Akbayan's officers since at least 2008. It is interesting to note how the organizational composition of BISIG, which could be accurately considered a "rainbow coalition" of different perspectives and ideological moorings, could well serve as a generalization of Akbayan's current character.
15. In their investigative research, Cay and Nonato (2014) documented conversations with current and former members of Akbayan. Of particular interest to this study would be the information from Paula Bianca Lapuz, who left Akbayan in 2009 for disagreeing with the coalition. She questioned the viability and actual benefit of the coalition to Akbayan's political representation, pointing out that Akbayan is in a position where it cannot "bite the hand of the one who feeds [it]" (Cay and Nonato 2014, 92). The study also documented a lengthy list of donors which contributed money to Akbayan's campaigns in the 2010 elections—mostly from "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" (Cay and Nonato 2014, 71–72).
16. Bayan's members include, in no particular order: Anakbayan, League of Filipino Students, Student Christian Movement of the Philippines; General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action (GABRIELA); Kilusan ng Manggagawang Kababaihan (Women Workers' Movement), Amihan (National Federation of Peasant Women), Samahan ng Malayang Kababaihang Nagkakaisa (Association of United and Free Women), Health Alliance for Democracy, Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace, Alliance of Concerned Teachers, Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (National Federation of Fisherfolk Organizations); Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees; Promotion for Church People's Response, Kalipunan ng Katutubong Mamamayan sa Pilipinas (National Federation Of Indigenous Peoples' Organizations), Migrante International, First Quarter Storm Movement, Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (Association of Urban Poor Communities), and Sinagbayan (Bayan 2015).
17. Among the peculiar labels I have noticed in the vocabulary of Akbayan's members and organizers is the term "fascist Left," which they largely use to refer to the Communist Party of the Philippines–New People's Army–National Democratic Front. The term is usually a derisive label to their allegations regarding the NDF's practice of "vanguardism" and "democratic centralism" borne out of the CPP's efforts to recentralize party strategies, leading to the 1992 split.
18. As stated in Makabayan's website: "Makabayang Koalisyon ng Mamamayan ([Citizen's Nationalist Coalition or] Makabayan) was founded on 16 April 2009.

It is a political coalition that is presently comprised of 11 Philippine progressive parties: Bayan Muna, Anakpawis, Gabriela, Kabataan, Courage, Migrante, ACT-Teachers [Alliance of Concerned Teachers], Katribu [Kalipunan ng mga Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas or National Alliance of Indigenous Peoples Organizations in the Philippines], Akap Bata [Sectoral Organization for Children, Inc.], Piston [Pagkakaisa ng mga Samahan ng Tsuper at Operator Nationwide], Kalikasan [People's Network for the Environment], and Aking Bikolnon [Child of Bicol]. The national council also includes personages in the field of arts, governance, mass media and people's organizations. In its founding assembly, Makabayan rallied for change that is embodied in their call 'Pilipino para sa Pagbabago, Pagbabago para sa Pilipino' (Filipinos for Change, Change for Filipinos)" (Makabayan 2015).

19. That both Akbayan and Bayan Muna avowedly pursue divergent forms of political organization yet conduct virtually identical actions did not remain unnoticed. Immediately after the 2010 national elections, comments were raised on the results of the decision of Philippine leftist political parties to ally with traditional political machineries. A forum organized by the Third World Studies Center on 24 June 2010, asked for the reasons behind these leftist parties trying to expand their influence in the political arena and "why did their mass base, as shown in the unbroken successes in the Lower House, fail to bring them to the Senate" (TWSC 2010). Akbayan's foray into the senatorial elections has been discussed earlier in this study. At the same time, it was recorded that two parties from the NDF (Bayan Muna and GABRIELA Women's Party) supported the Nacionalista Party ticket and Manuel "Manny" Bamba Villar Jr.'s campaign for the presidency, with Bayan Muna's party president Satur Ocampo and GABRIELA's Liza Maza included in the senatorial slate of the Nacionalista Party. While both parties would publicly deny their formal relationship with the Nacionalista Party during the campaign period, Ocampo would later acknowledge that they did conduct talks with Villar and that the NDF bloc "gave Villar at least more than 2 million votes" (Ocampo, as quoted in TWSC 2010, 3).
20. Akbayan supporters make efforts to actually disassociate Akbayan historically from the legacies of prior leftist movements, claiming that to attribute its emergence from the NDF "does not capture the richness of the group's historical experience, and does injustice to the prospects and promises of post-EDSA politics" and "paints an all-too-simplistic picture" (Moralina 2011). While this claim is technically true, it still demonstrates how Akbayan's political praxis seems "allergic" toward relating to their erstwhile comrades.
21. COMELEC opened a minefield when its commissioner Sixto Brillantes declared on 26 September 2012, that seventeen party-list groups were disqualified. They justified it by saying that these groups do not correspond to supposed legal qualifications for a sector to be allowed to run, with an undisclosed seven more groups to follow (*Rappler* 2012; Narito 2012; Reyes 2012). Tensions began when Anakbayan released statements by its chairperson Vencer Crisostomo, urging COMELEC to disqualify Akbayan from running for the party-list representation in 2013. They justify this call from the fact that Akbayan's leaders are now key functionaries in the Aquino government, and that their leaders, being professionals, cannot be considered genuine representatives of Akbayan's supposed sectors (Alvarez 2012; Tupaz 2012). The situation came to a head when Anakbayan members stormed an Akbayan press conference on 16 October 2012, vocally

- denouncing the party's ties with the administration and calling Akbayan names. Anakbayan members and then-Representative Bello eventually had a physical struggle with each other, incensing Akbayan members to unceremoniously throw the Anakbayan members out of the press venue (Casauay 2012).
22. The incident involved a fatal encounter between elements of the Special Action Force of the Philippine National Police and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, a splinter group from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front—the latter currently in peace negotiations under the 2012 GPH-Moro Islamic Liberation Front Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (OPAPP 2012) and the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (OPAPP 2014). With forty-four casualties among the Special Action Force personnel, seventeen killed among the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and at least seven civilians (*Rappler* 2015), the violent encounter compromised the stability of the negotiation process and the presumption of good faith between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. This is further complicated by Aquino deflecting command responsibility on the fatal incident (Bacani 2015) despite the Philippine National Police Board of Inquiry clearly placing him among those responsible for violating the chain of command that led to the incident (PNP-BOI 2015, v, 44–45).
  23. Editor's note: No time machine was ever involved in writing this article. It may seem anachronistic that an article published in 2015 discusses events in 2016. The simple and plain explanation: the process of revising and tidying up the article ran into the first quarter of 2016.

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