

Probing the Iglesia Vote: Religious Endorsement and Iglesia Support in the 2004 and 2010 Senatorial Elections*

Allan Cairo Reyes

Abstract

The Iglesia Ni Cristo (Church of Christ) has had considerable influence in Philippine politics following the so-called EDSA Revolution of 1986. This is evident in the success of its candidate endorsement in elections, which has elicited allegations of the religious sect engaging in bloc voting. This phenomenon invites an inquiry into the efficacy of such endorsement. How potent is an Iglesia endorsement? To answer this question, this study obtained measures of Iglesia support (Iglesia Ni Cristo vote share) using 2004 and 2010 exit poll data for senators and analyzed these with Iglesia Ni Cristo candidate endorsement data and candidate popularity ratings. Ordinary least squares and logistic regression models were estimated to determine which variables really command votes from members of the Iglesia Ni Cristo, as well as to gauge whether or not candidate popularity is the primary consideration in the organization's endorsement. Findings suggest that while both endorsement and popularity produce INC votes, an Iglesia endorsement is contingent upon the candidates' projected winning margins. Moreover, there is a positive relationship between candidate popularity and the likelihood of an INC endorsement.

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The Iglesia Ni Cristo (INC) has been successful with candidate endorsement over the last four senatorial elections.¹ Of the twelve senatorial candidates endorsed by the INC in the 2013 elections, ten emerged victorious. Judging on election outcomes alone, one is easily compelled to believe an INC endorsement guarantees victory in the polls. In 2004, nine of 12 INC endorsed senatorial candidates made the cut. In 2007, eight of 12 endorsed candidates won seats in the upper house. In 2010, only one of the 12 candidates the INC endorsed failed to win a seat. Of the 48 candidates endorsed in the past four senatorial elections, 38 won, or a success rate of roughly 79 percent. The weight of an INC endorsement is attributed to the congregation's large voting base, which accounts for approximately four percent of the country's voting population.² It is widely held that the Iglesia Ni Cristo engages in bloc voting but this belief is rarely subjected to scholarly empirical scrutiny. Literature has very little to offer in terms of explaining the relationship between candidate success and INC endorsement. Moreover, questions such as where these endorsements figure along with public awareness, candidate experience, and party platforms, have yet to be answered.

With respect to candidate endorsement, Iglesia Ni Cristo presents an odd case for two reasons. First, the endorsing group is a religious organization and second, the *endorsement* is rather imposed³ instead of recommended. Previous works on group endorsement would typically have interest groups as units of analysis. Literature remains largely preoccupied with political endorsement by interest groups and very little attention has been given on exploring the impact of candidate endorsement by religious groups (Rapoport, Stone, and Abramowitz, 1991).

Determining how candidate endorsement leads to votes has some important implications. If religious endorsement impacts candidate choices and, ultimately, the likelihood of electoral victory, more candidates will be rushing to the Iglesia leadership for their endorsement. However, if other factors such as awareness or platform prove to be more important, then political aspirants must transcend current campaign strategies that bank on political endorsement. It is also important to explore what motivates church leaders to make political endorsement. If the church ministers decide based on platforms, then it is likely that candidates will frame their campaign platforms to suit the interests of the sect. Candidates will make corresponding adjustments to their campaigns to accommodate the interests of the INC in the hopes of receiving an endorsement. In any case, whether to pursue an INC endorsement or not will depend on its political weight, that is, by how many votes such endorsement can deliver, and how much those votes can change a candidate's political fate.

How persuasive is an INC endorsement? To what extent does it influence election outcomes? How does an endorsement fare with other determinants of candidate success? This study measures the impact of an INC endorsement, *vis-à-vis* other predictors such as candidate popularity, by looking at its effect on electoral support from members of Iglesia Ni Cristo and its sway on general election outcomes in the 2004 and 2010 senatorial polls. I begin with a review of existing studies on election endorsement. Central to this study is the idea of an INC endorsement—when the church calls upon followers to support specific candidates as one body—as a potent political variable. Most researches regard endorsement as a passive activity, utilized by ill-informed voters incapable of discerning candidates’ stands on issues. Hence, they consult trusted groups to make better-informed decisions (Lupia and Bartels, 1996). I then introduce a model measuring Iglesia support while accounting for other variables that are known in the literature to determine candidate success in the polls. I argue that both INC endorsement and candidate popularity are significant in commanding INC followers’ votes. But the predictive success of candidates handpicked by the INC church leadership may not necessarily be due to that endorsement. Rather, the church endorses candidates who are already popular to begin with, and whose popularity makes them effective frontrunners in the race. I expound on this conjecture in the discussion of the methods and the variables, and in the analysis of the results of the model estimates. The study uses a combination of ordinary least square (OLS) and logistic regression models to test my hypotheses. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings, with particular focus on the place of religious endorsement in an election campaign.

RELATED LITERATURE

Endorsements

The general trend in the literature, as seen in the works of Arceneaux and Kolodny (2009), Lau and Redlawsk (2006), and Lupia and Bartels (1996) is to look at endorsements as voting shortcuts or heuristics that aid voters in decision-making during elections or as an alternative to the arduous task of examining and understanding information in election campaigns. Proponents of this view assume voters to be passive and ill-informed, and define endorsement as largely a factor of the political weight of the endorsing organization and how such weight is perceived by potential endorsees. But McDermott (2006) and, to some extent, Grossman and Helpman (1999), argue that endorsements are not simply aids nor assistance to voters but are signals to voters on where candidates stand in terms of their interests, ideologies, objectives, and values. It is held that organizations are likely

to endorse candidates that carry similar interests or values, or advocate policy objectives that endorsing organizations represent.

The voter-endorser dynamics follow this assumption (McDermott, 2006). However, more engaged members are more likely to adopt the group's endorsement than those who are less active (Rapoport, Stone, and Abramowitz, 1991). An endorsement holds more sway for members who are more committed to their organizations because of faith or loyalty (Fenton, 1960). The extent by which endorsement influences member behavior varies but what is certain is that organizational dynamics play a role. Whether or not followers will root for candidates their organizations endorse depends on how close the candidates approximate their individual preferences, as well as on the moral authority exercised by church leaders (Kim, Kang, and Kim, 2010). Church leaders shape the way followers view their congregation. Conversely, the congregation's favorable image before followers translate to higher confidence on the moral authority of church leaders.

Group identity is another factor. Voters who identify or have a certain level of sympathy to the interests and beliefs of the endorsing organization are likely to vote for candidates the organization endorses. Voters assume that these organizations endorse candidates whose interests and advocacies are attuned to their own, even if candidates cater their campaigns to voters in general. McDermott (2006) believes group endorsements during elections are not strictly for members of a target group. The study of religious endorsement is compelling because even though candidates try to represent the preference of the median voter, they seek the endorsement of organizations with well-defined ideological or political positions with a bloc vote in mind.

Voting and Religion

Membership in a religious group may affect one's political and civic orientation (Wald and Shye, 1995; Smith and Walker, 2012). Candidate support in an election is an example. Religious affiliation has been known to correlate positively with voter turnout (Smith and Walker, 2012). In fact, in recent years religion is turning out to be an important predictor of voting behavior along with education and income (Smith and Walker, 2012). Harris (1994) notes that internal religiosity promotes one's feeling of efficacy and interest in politics because it relates to certain morally defined issues like race and consciousness, which provide the impetus for political involvement.

Religious Commitment

Commitment refers to a process in which an option is selected and maintained, with "some degree of strength" through specific

circumstances until that option is terminated or replaced by an alternative (Wimberley, 1972; Wimberley, 1978). Bringing the concept into the context of religion, Wald and Shye (1995) define religious commitment as the maintenance and observance of the “commandments of religious law.” Although there are many classifications of religious commitments, I will only discuss two leading models of religiosity: the associational and communal models. The associational model views religious groups in Weberian terms as institutions tasked with the intermediation of grace (Wald and Shye, 1995). It refers to the degree by which an individual relies on religious groups for instruction and understanding. Frequency of attendance, degree of orthodoxy, level of observed religious importance, and belief in the doctrines of the church (Johnson, 1977) are some indicators of religiosity in this model. The communal commitment model posits that members rely or believe in a religion only to satisfy their needs for social identity, interaction, and fellowship. Number of friends and acquaintances in church is a determinant of communal commitment (Johnson, 1977).

Using this two-item typology in the analysis of the 1984 Knesset elections in Israel, Wald and Shye (1995) observed that voters who are more oriented towards associational commitment are more likely to vote for religious parties or candidates while those with communal commitment are more likely to vote for secular alternatives.

Kotler-Berkowitz (2001), Lee and Pachon (2007), as well as Smith and Walker (2012) identified three elements of religious life: belonging, behaving, and believing. Belonging is affiliation with a religious community. Behaving is engaging in religious practices. Believing is holding religious beliefs or values. While most scholars agree that a synthesis of these three provides the best perspective in understanding religious traditions (Layman 1997, 2001; in Smith and Walker, 2012), Lee and Pachon (2007) argue that it is religious beliefs, manifested through religious traditions, that explain most succinctly the role of religion in politics. Religious traditions encompass the denominations and related movements that share similar beliefs, rituals, and experiences and that belonging to a religious tradition highlights differences in beliefs, practices, and commitment (Lee and Pachon 2007). Religious orientation may be reflected in party identification and impact the political attitudes of members.

Briefly, one’s religion and religious environment may serve as a source or repository of predisposition and information in politics. It is also noteworthy that voters belonging to the same religious organizations tend to have similar or identical interests. Voters are utilitarian and vote candidates, they believe, have the same interests as theirs and are most

capable of concretizing these interests while in office. This provides one of the most compelling rationale for bloc voting.

Bloc Vote

There is no agreed definition of a religious bloc vote in the academic literature. However, there are two generally accepted definitions which, I argue, are essentially the same. Bloc voting can pertain to (1) a religious group voting for the candidate with the same religious affiliation as they, or (2) religious leaders enticing members to vote for a specific set of candidates. In his study of the 1958 US Presidential Elections, Fenton (1960) defined a Catholic vote as the guiding influence behind views on political issues and attitude towards Catholic candidates running for public office. Fenton found that candidates' religious affiliations affect the number of votes they will ultimately receive.

Some studies offer more nuanced perspectives by advancing a number of requisites for a bloc vote to materialize. Analyzing the referenda vote on the repeal of prohibition⁴ in 1933 and on the relaxation of Utah's liquor laws in 1968, Campbell and Monson (2003) say there is no bloc vote unless two conditions are satisfied: (1) clear and outright endorsement of a position or candidates by church leaders; and (2) agreement among the leaders. In 1933, several Mormon Church leaders expressed strong objections over the repeal of prohibition, a stand other leaders of the church did not carry (Campbell and Monson, 2003). This correspondingly resulted to a cleavage among the Mormons, dividing what was supposedly a strong 66 percent of Utah's voting population at that time. The 21st amendment would ultimately pass with 62 percent of Utahans approving the repeal. In 1968, as in 1933, Mormon leaders took a strong stance in support of liquor ban in Utah. This time, however, church leaders were in accord. The Mormon position won with 65 percent of referenda votes.

Zaller's (1992) model of public opinion supports this view. How leaders influence public opinion, say through their choice of candidates, is largely a matter of consensus within the hierarchy. Members are more likely to adopt church endorsements as their own if the choice unanimously reflects that of the congregation's leadership. McDermott (2006), for her part, does not believe clarity of position is sufficient and argues that members of religious organizations should be able to identify their interests with those of the endorsed candidates.

The Iglesia Ni Cristo: Unity of Religion and State

Ando (1969) attributes the emergence of Iglesia Ni Cristo as a new religious organization in 1913 to the unfavorable conditions of the

environment that surrounded the masses in Central Luzon and in the urban areas, as well as to the desire to fulfill the failed duties of militant political organizations to satisfy the needs of the peasants. Founded in 1914, the INC has since grown in number and attracted followers not only from the lower class but from the middle and upper classes as well (Ando 1969).

The INC is known for its strong organizational unity. Harper (2004) believes the INC hierarchy has the power to tell its member what to believe. The church's command over members is believed to exert a strong influence on the political affairs of the state and has made the sect increasingly popular. Reed (2001) observed that the involvement of the INC in Philippine politics intensifies months prior to national elections. This escalates when the church leadership issues endorsements of candidates that its members are to vote. Harper (2004) notes that the INC penalizes members who stray away from this edict, such as with expulsion (Stevens, 2002).

The INC justifies candidate endorsement and bloc voting as modes to maintain and strengthen the church's unity (Harper 2004; Tolentino 2010). In a 1976 issue of *Pasugo*, Iglesia Ni Cristo's official newsletter, unity in Iglesia Ni Cristo was construed to encompass all aspects of life, including voting and the exercise of the right to suffrage.

During elections, political candidates rush to the INC to court support from its leadership. Candidates, in turn, are asked to lay down how this support will be reciprocated (Stevens, 2002). Once endorsed, the candidate is reportedly⁵ given a short list of INC members the church wants appointed to key positions in the judiciary, cabinet, law enforcement agencies, regulatory bodies, and revenue-generating agencies like the Bureau of Customs (BOC).⁶ Rufo (2014) notes that the INC does not intend to profit from these appointments but merely wants to ensure access to government for the protection of church members. Former Senator Sergio Osmeña III himself recognized the INC's "sway" in political decision making within government agencies following a BOC commissioner's sudden resignation in 2015.⁷

The Aquino administration in many occasions reportedly tried to resist political pressure from the Iglesia Ni Cristo leadership. Former Justice Secretary Serafin Cuevas and National Bureau of Investigation director Magtanggol Gatdula, both INC members, were dismissed from the cabinet. By some twist of fate, it was Serafin Cuevas who led the defense team of former chief justice Renato Corona during the latter's impeachment trial.

Dismayed by Aquino's ungratefulness,⁸ INC executive minister Eduardo Manalo reportedly was prompted to call upon members to

go to the streets and support Corona, a move that further strained ties with the Aquino administration. This narrative coincides with Reed's (2001) observation that the INC uses its political clout as latent power whenever its interests are being threatened or jeopardized.

Studies by Campbell and Monson (2003) as well as that of Wald and Shye (1995) indicate there is a relationship between religion and voting. Concrete evidence of a link, however, remains few and far between. Candidate endorsement by religious groups is one of the least studied dimensions of electoral behavior (Rapoport, Stone and Abramowitz, 1991). Moreover, literature on religious bloc voting during elections remains thin. Campbell and Monson's study focused on referenda voting and not general elections. In addition, no one has studied the cogency of candidate endorsements by religious organizations in terms of delivering votes from their members.

METHODS

Data collected encompass 109 candidates in the Senatorial elections in 2004 and 2010.⁹ The regression model analyzing the effect of an INC endorsement has the following parameters:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Iglesia Votes} = & a + \beta_1 \text{Endorsement} + \beta_2 \text{Popularity} + \beta_3 \text{Political party} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{Dynasty} + \beta_5 \text{Experience} + \beta_6 \text{Incumbent} \\ & + \beta_7 \text{Platform} + e \end{aligned}$$

To establish the bases of INC endorsement, on the other hand, a logistic model with the following parameters is presented:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Endorsement In } (p/1-p) = & a + \beta_1 \text{Popularity} + \beta_2 \text{Political party} + \beta_3 \text{Dynasty} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{Experience} + \beta_5 \text{Incumbent} + \beta_6 \text{Platform} + e \end{aligned}$$

For all models, endorsement refers to Iglesia endorsement, popularity is candidate popularity, and the rest are controlled variables. Party refers to the candidate's party affiliation. Dynasty is simply the number of former members of Congress related to the candidate. Experience refers to the candidate's years of government experience. Incumbent is a dummy variable indicating whether or not the candidate is an incumbent senator. Platform is a categorical variable that denotes the policy programs espoused by the candidate. Robust standard errors were utilized in obtaining estimates for both models.

Information on INC voting behavior is sparse and the Philippines' Commission on Elections (COMELEC) does not track voters' religious affiliation during registration. To obtain a measure of INC votes, the study relied on the 2004 and 2010 exit poll data from the Social Weather Stations, which disaggregated respondents

according to religious affiliation. The first model is an ordinary least square model that accounts for the effect of INC endorsement and candidate popularity on INC vote share. The second model, on the other hand, looks into the leadership's decision-making processes by establishing the factors that shape endorsement choices. In this model, what is being measured is the likelihood of an Iglesia endorsement given a certain level of popularity and other factors.

Data on candidate endorsement were based on official statements released by the INC, as well as on news reports from media outfits such as the *Philippine Star*¹⁰ and *ABS-CBN News*¹¹. Candidates endorsed were coded 1. Those not endorsed were coded 0.

Candidate awareness is used as proxy for popularity. In the study, awareness refers to the extent by which voters recognize senatorial candidates. Awareness ratings were obtained from pre-election surveys conducted by Pulse Asia¹¹ closest to election day. The survey asked voters if they read or heard about a senatorial candidate. Awareness ratings range from 0 to 100. A wider name recall, according to studies, supposedly translates to more votes for the popular candidate (Parker, 1981; Krebs, 1998).

I also controlled for variables which are known to influence voter preferences and behavior, such as the candidate's party affiliation, dynastic ties, experience in office, incumbency, and campaign platform. Party affiliation refers to the political party under whose banner a senatorial candidate ran. It is not unusual for political parties to field several candidates so a coding scheme¹² was developed that codes individual scores for parties that fielded at least five candidates (30th percentile) and a collective score for parties with less than five candidates. Candidates who ran as independents scored 0.

In measuring dynastic ties, I used the family name identification approach. This provides a crude but convenient method, albeit with several limitations. Mendoza et al. (2011) and Mendoza et al. (2012) point out that, first, kinship relations are not limited to consanguinity and can extend to affinity and other similar relations. This is particularly relevant when there are intermarriages between political dynasties. Second, two individuals can share the same family name but may not be related in any way. Third, political dynasties whose family members were not in office in the institutions and periods examined are excluded from the count. This method was applied to two levels: the House of Representatives and the Senate. Only members of the lower house in the last three Congresses prior to the election (10th, 11th, and 12th in 2004; 12th, 13th, and 14th in 2010) and members of the upper house in the last four Congresses (1992, 1995, 1998, and 2001

for the 2004 election; 1998, 2001, 2004, and 2007 for the 2010 election) were considered.¹³

An experienced candidate is one who has held an elective office previously (Lazarus, 2008). To measure experience, I used data from the House of Representatives and the Senate, among others, to establish each candidate's political experience. Elective positions range from national level positions to provincial and municipal positions. Experience, in this study, refers to accumulated total number of years in an elective office.

To measure incumbency, I checked the website of the Philippine Senate to ascertain the composition of the senate prior to the 2004 and 2010 elections. The dichotomous variable assigns a value of 1 to candidates who were incumbent senators during these periods. Incumbents benefit from name recognition and are better able to attract financial support and other resources during elections (Kushner, Siegel, and Starwick, 1997).

Finally, the study utilized qualitative content analysis of the candidates' respective plans of action to determine the policy areas to which they focused their campaigns. I used party platform as a proxy variable for candidates who do not have a specific individual campaign. In coding for platforms, I employed the coding scheme designed by Werner, Lacewell, and Volkens (2011) of the Comparative Manifesto Project.¹⁴ Werner, Lacewell, and Volkens (2011) identified 56 standard policy preferences categorized into seven policy areas: external relations, freedom and democracy, political system, economy, welfare and quality of life, fabric of society, and social groups. A value of 0 is given to candidates with no platforms or whose platforms do not fit any of the categories. Table 1 shows the descriptive summary of the variables used in the analysis.

Results of the OLS regression

This section reports the regression estimates based on the models. I first present the estimates from the OLS regression, and then compare the results with those based on the logistic model of INC endorsement.

Table 2 shows the estimates from the OLS model. The results show that Iglesia endorsement and candidate popularity are predictors of the Iglesia electoral support. The results also indicate that across the two models, incumbency, experience, campaign platforms, party affiliation, and family ties actually have no bearing on INC members' support of a particular candidate.

How do we put these findings into perspective? When endorsed, a candidate receives an additional 61.78% of the Iglesia

TABLE 1.
Summary of Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Iglesia Votes (%)	109	16.39	25.96	0	77.49
Candidate Popularity	109	45.48	35.22	0	100
Dynastic Ties	109	.87	1.40	0	6
Candidate Experience (years)	109	5.09	6.69	0	28
Non-continuous Variables					
	N	Frequency	Percentage		
Iglesia Endorsement	109	24	22.02		
Incumbency	109	12	11.01		
Success	109	24	22.02		
Party Affiliation	109				
Independent		11	10.09		
Aksyon Demokratiko		6	5.50		
Ang Kapatiran Party		8	7.34		
Bangon Pilipinas		6	5.50		
Kilusang Bagong Lipunan		9	8.26		
Lakas-Kampi-CMD		14	12.84		
Liberal Party		13	11.93		
Nacionalista Party		9	8.26		
Partido Isang Bansa, Isang Diwa		9	8.26		
Pwersa ng Masang Pilipino		10	9.17		
Others		14	12.84		
Campaign Platform	109				
External Relations		4	3.67		
Freedom and Democracy		8	7.34		
Political System		17	15.6		
Economy		8	7.34		
Welfare and Quality of Life		38	34.86		
Fabric of Society		12	11.01		
Social Groups		15	13.76		
No Platform		7	6.42		

votes. Controlling for other variables (see columns 3 and 4) leads to a 2% to 3% decrease in votes. Overall, an Iglesia endorsement only yields approximately 58% to 61% of votes from INC members. An INC endorsement was able to secure for a senatorial candidate approximately 600,000 votes in 2004 and 800,000 votes in 2010,¹⁵ respectively. If this trend continues in subsequent senatorial elections, an endorsed candidate could expect around 900,000 to a million votes from the INC.

Table 2 indicates that candidate popularity is significant in courting INC votes but its impact appears to be miniscule. A single-point increase in a candidate's awareness rating brings about only an additional .05% in the number of Iglesia votes. A candidate endorsed in the 2016 elections could only expect around 850 votes¹⁸. It seems a candidate has to be massively popular to court a substantial number of votes from the Iglesia bloc.

Results of the logistic model

Table 4 shows how candidate popularity correlates with the odds of obtaining an endorsement from the Iglesia Ni Cristo leadership. The results indicate a positive relationship between the two variables. In the first model, with a unit increase in one's popularity rating, the odds of endorsement by the INC increases by 11%. Reestimation with the controlled variables shows a decrease of 0.02 in the odds. The hypothesis holds that candidate popularity influences the INC leaders' decision whether or not to endorse a candidate. The summary of the odd ratios also shows that there is no significant relationship between the odds that the Iglesia Ni Cristo will endorse a candidate and other candidate attributes such as party affiliation, incumbency, dynastic ties, candidate experience, and campaign platforms. This is in spite of the insistence of INC members that the church leadership endorses candidates based on development programs and plans for the nation.¹⁶

In an attempt to triangulate results obtained from these regressions, I also tried to conduct interviews with the INC's executive minister, Eduardo Manalo, and several other local ministers regarding the processes and the rationale behind the sect's candidate endorsement. However, my request was denied and was told that only members of the INC may engage in such academic endeavor. Church members I tried to contact for appointment also expressed worry that the church could be put to bad light.

Discussion

This article hypothesized that an INC endorsement can deliver votes. The findings indicate that in previous elections, an INC

TABLE 2.
OLS Regression of the Effects of Endorsement and Popularity
on Iglesia Vote Share

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable is the number of INC Votes received			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Iglesia Endorsement	61.78***	-	59.17*** (0.93)	58.13*** (1.34)
Candidate Popularity	-	0.54*** (2.8)	.05*** (.01)	.04* (.02)
Dynastic Ties	-	-	-	.18 (.26)
Candidate Experience	-	-	-	-.08 (.07)
Incumbency	-	-	-	1.57 (1.48)
Party Affiliation				
Aksyon Demokratiko	-	-	-	-.55 (2.36)
Ang Kapatiran Party	-	-	-	-3.68 (2.97)
Bangon Pilipinas	-	-	-	-2.23 (3.02)
KBL	-	-	-	-2.53 (2.76)
Lakas-Kampi-CMD	-	-	-	-2.46 (2.67)
Liberal Party	-	-	-	-.57 (2.59)
Nacionalista Party	-	-	-	-.21 (2.46)
PIBID	-	-	-	-3.12 (2.67)
PMP	-	-	-	2.16 (2.89)
Others	-	-	-	.28 (2.42)
Campaign Platform				
External Relations	-	-	-	2.96 (2.93)
Freedom and Democracy	-	-	-	1.93 (2.65)
Political System	-	-	-	2.19 (2.32)
Economy	-	-	-	3.39 (2.63)
Welfare	-	-	-	2.94 (2.76)
Fabric of Society	-	-	-	2.46 (2.55)
Social Groups	-	-	-	1.89 (2.27)
Constant	2.79	-8.04	0.89	0.70
N	109	109	109	109
R ²	.98	.53	.98	.99

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
Standard errors are in parentheses.

endorsement has yielded around 600,000 to a million votes from members of the Iglesia Ni Cristo. While these are considerably small given that in recent years topping the senate election required an average of 19 million votes,¹⁷ these marginal votes can be crucial for senatorial candidates competing for the final spots of the so-called “Magic 12.”

Consider the case of Senators Rodolfo Biazon and Robert Barbers in 2004, who were both endorsed by the INC. Days before the elections, Pulse Asia predicted Barbers to land in the 14th spot with just 29.5% of the total votes, or about 1% short of tying it with Biazon on the 12th spot. Intuitively, the INC endorsement should pull both to place higher in the senatorial race. In the final canvass, Barbers placed 13th and Biazon 12th. While the INC endorsement delivered the expected 600,000 votes (Barbers ended up with 31.7% of the votes cast, an increase equivalent to the INC votes reported earlier), it was not enough to put him ahead of the race. Those who were at the lower end of the “Magic 12” such as Biazon, Estrada, and Enrile, also benefitted from the INC endorsement. Worse, Biazon slipped to the 12th spot as newcomer Pia Cayetano, who Pulse Asia expected to finish 15th, placed sixth in the actual rankings. Despite an INC snub, Cayetano benefitted from her popularity ratings (97 as compared to Barbers’ 84 and Biazon’s 82) and made a remarkable leap of nine spots from what the pollsters predicted.

Senators Marcos, Recto, Sotto, and Guingona also benefitted from the endorsement in the 2010 elections. INC’s political clout was strongest in this election where all but one of its endorsed candidates won. The only non-endorsed candidate who was able to sneak into the “Magic 12” was Sergio “Serge” Osmeña III, who Pulse Asia expected to win even prior to the elections. Marcos, Recto, and Sotto were all projected to place behind eventual 10th placer Osmeña, but the INC votes raised all three candidates ahead of the Cebuano senator to finish at the seventh, eighth, and ninth spots, respectively. The INC endorsement proved to be more advantageous for Sen. Teofisto Guingona III, who made it to the final list due to the solid votes. Fellow Liberal Party candidate Risa Hontiveros tailed Guingona by only a million votes, roughly equivalent to the 59% average command votes that INC members were expected to deliver. Candidates who are already projected to place at the top or upper half of the “Magic 12” do not really benefit much from the INC endorsement. At best, the command votes can only shift their projected rankings in the surveys. It is candidates who trail behind the polls who really gain from an INC endorsement because the solid votes can spell the difference between winning and losing.¹⁸

These findings present major implications for candidates who seek an Iglesia ni Cristo endorsement during elections. Candidates projected

to win by large margins and place high (between one and four out of 12) in the list of winning senatorial candidates, can dispense with the endorsement from Manalo and the INC congregation. Doing so would at least spare them the worry of repaying political debts subsequently. Endorsements, after all, do not come cheap. In any case, candidates confident of their performance in the polls are better off not seeking an endorsement in the first place.

Candidates whose dismal standing would likely see themselves competing for the final spots in the Magic 12, however, may want to secure the INC’s endorsement to increase their chances of earning a Senate seat. If all it takes for a candidate to make the cut is just around a million votes, then an INC endorsement could spell the difference between winning and losing the elections.¹⁹ These candidates, therefore, have a lot to gain from an INC endorsement.

The findings also suggest that candidate popularity influences INC endorsement and support. Members of the INC are more likely to vote for candidates who are popular over those who are relatively obscure. This concurrence between the predictive abilities of Iglesia endorsement and candidate popularity with respect to INC support is not a matter of coincidence. Results of the estimates in Table 3 suggest that the INC leadership weighs candidates seeking its endorsement only on the basis of popularity and nothing more. Salient candidate attributes such as party affiliation, experience, family ties, and campaign platforms appear to make little dent despite claims by INC members that candidate selection is based on programmatic platforms. In short,

TABLE 3.
Logistic Regression of the Effects of Candidate Popularity on the Choice of Endorsed Candidates

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable for all models is the Iglesia ni Cristo endorsement	
	(1)	(2)
Candidate Popularity	1.12*** (.03)	1.10** (0.03)
Dynastic Ties	-	1.29 (.46)
Candidate Experience	-	1.15 (.09)
Incumbency	-	4.11 (5.04)
Number of Observations	109	109
Pseudo R2	0.56	0.7

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
Standard errors are in parentheses.

the candidates the Iglesia Ni Cristo endorse are those who are already topping the competition due to their high name recall and popularity. This is probably why an endorsement is announced only a few weeks before the elections.²⁰ Possibly the INC hierarchy first makes a survey of senatorial contenders then makes an endorsement based on candidates' performance in the polls. The INC is known to ensure the appointments of church members to key government positions as concession for such endorsement (Rufo 2014). The political weight of the endorsement, in other words, is pivotal to the prominence of the INC as a religious entity. An endorsement is not only a source of political relevance but a latent power the church utilizes to preserve itself (Reed 2001).

Conclusion

This article measured the extent by which INC endorsement and candidate popularity command electoral support from members of the Iglesia Ni Cristo during the 2004 and 2010 senatorial elections. The study found that while endorsement and popularity are both effective determinants of electoral support, the real impact of an INC endorsement depends on how well an endorsed candidate is performing in the polls. Senatorial candidates whose precarious electoral prospects would likely compete for the bottom spots would benefit immensely from an INC endorsement. Conscientious candidates who are already performing well on their campaigns, on the other hand, are better off without it. It also appears that the INC leadership makes an endorsement largely on the basis of candidate popularity and not on salient factors such as experience, incumbency, policy platforms, or party affiliation.

The study is concerned with political endorsement by the Iglesia Ni Cristo but the models presented may also be applied in the study of other organizations that engage in candidate endorsement or bloc voting. The study found that in spite of an endorsement from its leadership, the INC rarely commands monolithically solid votes from its followers. The church is not wont to tolerate deviance. But why members take such risk nevertheless is arguably a topic that merits further examination. The relationship between candidate popularity and INC leadership decisions is only barely uncovered and requires further scrutiny. Future studies may also examine the legitimacy of an INC endorsement and its place in democratic exercise.

Allan Cairo M. Reyes teaches senior high school students at the De La Salle Green Hills. A political science graduate of the University of the Philippines Diliman, Reyes served as president of the UP Political Society in 2014. He can be reached at allan.reyes@lsgh.edu.ph.

End Notes

- ¹ Data on electoral endorsement were sourced from several news sites and compared with official results from the COMELEC.
- ² Mangahas of the Social Weather Stations (SWS) estimates INC voting population to be around 4.28% based on recent exit polls conducted by SWS and TV5 in 2010. These numbers were counterchecked with official voter statistics released by COMELEC.
- ³ Stevens (2002) claims that the INC leadership penalizes members who do not abide by its orders. According to Harper (2004), church doctrine stipulates that members who defy the leader's endorsement may be expelled from the INC.
- ⁴ Prohibition refers to the 18th amendment to the American Constitution, which instituted a national ban on liquor in USA. This prohibition would be later repealed with the ratification of the 21st amendment. See, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/prohibition-ends> (accessed May 25, 2015).
- ⁵ Aries Rufo, "PNoy and God's anointed ones," Rappler, www.rappler.com/newsbreak/1805-pnoy-and-god-s-anointed-ones (accessed May 25, 2015).
- ⁶ Aries Rufo, "INC lobbies for key gov't. positions," Rappler, www.rappler.com/newsbreak/64529-inc-lobbies-key-government-positions (accessed May 25, 2015).
- ⁸ Paterno Esmaque III, "Iglesia's show of force," Rappler, www.rappler.com/nation/1858-iglesia-s-show-of-force (accessed May 25, 2015).
- ⁹ This research originally aimed to cover the past four Senate election cycles - 2004, 2007, 2010, and 2013. However, the author encountered several constraints. No survey institution conducted exit polls during the 2007 and 2013 elections. The study was limited to this period for two reasons. First, COMELEC documents prior to the 2004 elections were already destroyed following the 2007 fire incident that burned the old Commission on Elections building, see <http://www.philstar.com/bansa/389163/comelec-naabo> (accessed May 25, 2015). Thus, documents containing information on campaign expenditures and party affiliation are no longer available. Second, Internet efforts were futile because parties and candidates did not digitize their campaign platforms prior to 2004.
- ¹⁰ Philippine Star, "Iglesia endorses GMA, Noli," Philippine Star, www.philstar.com/headlines/248399/iglesia-endorses-gma-noli (accessed February 2, 2015).

- ¹¹ ABS-CBN News, "Iglesia ni Cristo leader endorses, Noynoy, Mar," ABS-CBN News, news.abs-cbn.com/nation/05/04/10/iglesia-ni-cristo-back-noynoy-mar-sources (accessed February 2, 2015).
- ¹² See Appendix B
- ¹³ Article VI Sections 4 and 7 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution stipulates that Senators and members of the House of Representatives may not serve for more than two consecutive six-year terms and for more than three consecutive three-year terms, respectively.
- ¹⁴ See Appendix C. For a more comprehensive discussion of the coding scheme, see the Manifesto Project Database at https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/information/documents?name=handbook_v4 (accessed May 25, 2015).
- ¹⁵ SWS's Mangahas estimates Iglesia voter population to be around 1.7 million in 2016, projecting a 2% annual growth to the INC's voting population of 1.5 million in 2014. See <http://opinion.inquirer.net/88241/sws-statistics-about-the-inc> (accessed May 25, 2015).
- ¹⁶ Last April 25, 2015, the author visited the INC Central Office along Commonwealth Avenue, Quezon City, in an attempt to secure an interview with INC's executive minister. While the request was ultimately denied, the researcher was able to conduct informal interviews with some of the employees of the office. I asked questions regarding the processes and protocols behind candidate endorsements, to which they responded that candidates seeking an INC endorsement will have to arrange a private meeting with the executive minister and present their "plano para sa bayan (plans for the nation)." The executive minister will then pick endorsees based on the merits of these respective plans.
- ¹⁷ Both Sen. Revilla and Sen. Sotto led their respective senatorial races in 2004 and 2010 with more than 19 million votes.
- ¹⁸ The range between candidates who ranked 11-15 in the 2004 elections was 1,056,762 votes and 1,171,240 for ranks 12-13 in the 2010 elections.
- ¹⁹ Social Weather Stations, "BW-SWS April 16-19, 2010 Pre-Election Survey: Aquino leads Villar, 38%-26%; Roxas leads Binay and Legarda, 39%-25%-24%; Revilla and Jinggoy Estrada lead circle of 12; Bayan Muna leads 12 with guarantee," Social Weather Stations, www.sws.org.ph/sws_main/artcldispage/?artcsyscode=ART-20151211111509 (accessed May 2015)
- ²⁰ Executive Minister Manalo announced INC's endorsements in

2004 on May 2, a week before the scheduled May 10 elections, and in 2010 on April 28, two weeks prior to May 10 elections.

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APPENDIX A. Coding Scheme for Party Affiliation

- 0 - Independent
- 1 - Aksyon Demokratiko
- 2 - Ang Kapatiran Party
- 3 - Bangon Pilipinas
- 4 - Kilusang Bagong Lipunan
- 5 - Lakas-Kampi-CMD
- 6 - Liberal Party
- 7 - Nacionalista Party
- 8 - Partido Isang Bansa, Isang Diwa
- 9 - Pwersa ng Masang Pilipino
- 10 - Others (Nationalist People's Coalition, PDP-Laban, PAP-Laban, People's Reform Party, GAD, Promdi, Reporma-LM)

APPENDIX B. Coding Scheme for Campaign Platform

Domain 1: External Relations

- 101 Foreign Special Relationships: Positive
- 102 Foreign Special Relationships: Negative
- 103 Anti-Imperialism: Positive
- 104 Military: Positive
- 105 Military: Negative
- 106 Peace: Positive
- 107 Internationalism: Positive
- 108 European Integration: Positive
- 109 Internationalism: Negative
- 110 European Intergration: Negative

Domain 2: Freedom and Democracy

- 201 Freedom and Human Rights: Positive
- 202 Democracy: Positive
- 203 Constitutionalism: Positive
- 204 Constitutionalism: Negative

Domain 3: Political System

- 301 Decentralisation: Positive
- 302 Centralisation: Positive
- 303 Governmental and Administrative Efficiency: Positive
- 304: Political Corruption: Negative
- 305: Political Authority: Positive

Domain 4: Economy

- 401 Free Enterprise: Positive
- 402 Incentives: Positive
- 403 Market Regulation: Positive
- 404 Economic Planning: Positive
- 405 Corporatism: Positive
- 406 Protectionism: Positive
- 407 Protectionism: Negative
- 408 Economic Goals
- 409 Keynesian Demand Management: Positive
- 410 Economic Growth
- 411 Technology and Infrastructure: Positive
- 412 Controlled Economy: Positive
- 413 Nationalisation: Positive
- 414 Economic Orthodoxy: Postive
- 415 Marxist Analysis: Positive
- 416 Anti-Growth Economy: Positive

Domain 5: Welfare and Quality of Life

- 501 Environmental Protection: Positive
- 502 Culture: Positive
- 503 Equality: Positive
- 504 Welfare State Expansion
- 505 Welfare State Limitation
- 506 Education Expansion
- 507 Education Limitation

Domain 6: Fabric of Society

- 601 National Way of Life: Positive
- 602 National Way of Life: Negative
- 603 Traditional Morality: Positive
- 604 Traditional Morality: Negative
- 605 Law and Order: Positive
- 606 Civic Mindedness: Positive
- 607 Multiculturalism: Positive
- 608 Multiculturalism: Negative

Domain 7: Social Groups

- 701 Labour Groups: Positive
- 702 Labour Groups: Negative
- 703 Agriculture: Positive
- 704 Middle Class and Professional Groups: Positive
- 705 Minority Groups: Positive
- 706: Non-Economic Demographic Groups: Positive
- 000 No meaningful category applies