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INTRODUCTION

“Electoral politics in the Philippines suffer from institutional and procedural defects that prevent it from becoming meaningful to effective and efficient governance. While Philippine elections are relatively open, there is the issue of the lack of real political alternatives or competitive candidatures.” - Julio Teehankee

Political patronage is a situation in which a person is rewarded for supporting a particular politician, such as campaigning or voting for them. Political patronage can sometimes include the exchange of money for political support (White, 2015). In the Philippines, a more particular form of political patronage has been practiced since the colonial times, that is, vote-buying (Schaffer, 2005).

Vote buying has always been a regular feature of Philippine elections (Pascual, 2010). It has been successfully used by moneyed politicians, often belonging to political dynasties, local gentry classes, and traditional clans, to entice the electorate to vote or not to vote for specific candidates.

Some analysts pointed out that the automation of Philippine elections forced many candidates, especially at the local levels, to focus more on vote buying to ensure victory. That is because with automation, the avenues for electoral cheating became limited and more expensive. Thus, moneyed politicians were compelled to re-focus their so-called “black operations” through vote buying.

This research was conceptualized to narrate evidences of all forms of patronage politics practiced around the time of elections in the Philippines. Specifically, this research was conducted at the second congressional district of the Province of La Union, including the lone city of San Fernando. It sought to describe campaign experiences of local politicians, campaign managers and supporters, campaign strategists and election observers and analysts through interview, shadowing and observation. Findings revealed that although politicians themselves denied the
practice of patronage politics, specifically in vote buying this was counter-validated by the different reports of informants and participant observers. Those who are in power and incumbent have an absolute advantage over those who are neophyte and have no resources for the election campaign.

The paper is divided into parts. The first part dealt with short overview of the research, second part discusses the winning strategies of the local candidates and the role of patronage politics, third part focuses on mobilizing structures, fourth part presents case studies taken from the interviews and shadowing conducted and last part is the conclusion.

BACKGROUND

Geography

Situated on the northwestern coast of Luzon, La Union is the gateway to the Ilocos Region. With its strategic location, the province has become the business, education, and government center of the Ilocos. Not only is La Union the region’s center for trade but also of religious devotees who flock to one of the country’s popular pilgrimage destinations, especially during Lent.

The province has 1,493.09 total land area. It is one of the four provinces comprising the Ilocos Region. It is bounded by Province of Ilocos Sur in the north; Province of Pangasinan in the south; Province of Benguet in the east; and the West Philippine Sea in the west. It has 19 municipalities and 1 city, with 576 barangays. It is divided into two congressional districts. The focus of this study is on the second congressional district comprising the towns of Bauang, Caba, Aringay, Agoo, Sto. Tomas, Rosario, Pugo, Tubao, Naguilian and Bagulin. Province’s main craft and products include rice, tobacco, soft broom, vegetables, dried fish, bamboo crafts and grapes.

The lone city of San Fernando, which is also covered in this study, is located at the middle part of the Province. It has 59 barangays. It is a third-class component city and capital of the province of La Union. According to the 2010 Philippine census, it has a population of 114,963 people. The city is bounded by San Juan to the north, Bauang to the south, Bagulin and Naguilian to the east, and the South China Sea to the west. It has a land area of 10,272 hectares (25,380 acres). San Fernando is the financial, industrial and political center of the province, as well as the center of the official Ilocos Region, or Region I in the regions of the Philippines.

Socio-Economic Situations

Farming and fishing are the dominant means of livelihood comprising 53% of the employment distribution. Agriculture remains to be the primary industry. Cottage industries are blanketweaving, basketry, bamboo craft, pottery, and broommaking. Commercial activity consists mostly of wholesale and retail business. Employment rate based on DOLE report is 92%. Poverty incidence is 23.30% among families and 30.6% among population. As to business establishments,
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58% is manufacturing, 37% is training while 5% are services. There are 21 hospitals and clinics in the province, combined public and private owned; 333 public elementary schools; 56 private elementary schools; 79 public secondary schools; 51 private secondary schools; 20 colleges and 1 state university.

As of 2014, the provincial government revenue is amounting to P1, 256,936,600.39. There are 69 banks and 180 cooperatives in the whole province.

Social Structure
There are 741,906 population based on 2010 Census with population growth rate of 1.02%. Population density is 497 persons per square kilometre. Ilocano is the common dialect. The residents of the coastal barangay of Sto. Tomas and Rosario also speak Pangasinense while the cultural communities in the towns bordering the Cordillera speak Ibaloi or Kankanay. English and Filipino remain as basic tools of instruction in schools. People of La Union are predominantly Roman Catholic although about 1% who are Muslim. As to literacy rate, the province rated 96%.

Main Electoral Challenges for the Candidates
The electoral challenges encountered by the candidates include the prevalence of unfair election practices (e.g. vote buying, use of government resource for campaigning, black propaganda/ mudslinging), lack of campaign funds, proximity of barangays from the urban areas, death threats (particularly in Agoo) and non-compliance by some candidates as to the guidelines of campaign paraphernalia.

Political History
When one thinks about politics in La Union, they usually associate this with the Ortegas. Indeed, for more than a century, Ortegas have been ruling the province and in the City of San Fernando, thus La Union becomes a favourite example when political dynasty is being discussed.

But aside from the Ortega, there are other dynasties thriving in the different municipalities in the second congressional district of La Union such as Eriguel of Agoo, de Guzman of Bauang, Ong of Aringay, Crispino of Caba, Garcia of Tubao, and Flores of Naguilian and Rosario.

There are municipalities in the past that were place under COMELEC control because of violence like in Naguilian where the Dumpits are residing. It was reported that they own the biggest drug den in the country which was subject of controversy recently. This was also dragged during the gubernatorial forum where Butch Dumpit, a candidate for governor, denied the involvement.

Table 1. Winning Candidates for 2013 and 2016 Elections
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituency/Position</th>
<th>2013 Election</th>
<th>2016 Election</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name of Candidate</td>
<td>Number of Votes Garnered</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd Congressional District Representative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congressman</td>
<td>Eriguel, Eufranio</td>
<td>145,322</td>
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<td>Province of La Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>Ortega, Manoling</td>
<td>257,906</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vice-Governor</td>
<td>Nisce, Aureo</td>
<td>244,345</td>
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<td>City of San Fernando, La Union</td>
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<td>City Mayor</td>
<td>Ortega, Pablo</td>
<td>44,185</td>
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<td>City Vice-Mayor</td>
<td>Gualberto, Hermihild</td>
<td>25,283</td>
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<td>Municipality of Aago</td>
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<td>Mayor</td>
<td>Eriguel, Sandra</td>
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<td>Vice-Mayor</td>
<td>Balbin, Henry</td>
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<td>Municipality of Aringay</td>
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<td>Mayor</td>
<td>Sibuma, Eric</td>
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<td>Vice-Mayor</td>
<td>Jucan, Charlie</td>
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<td>Municipality of Baguil</td>
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<td>Mayor</td>
<td>Tumbaga, Ferdinad</td>
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<td>Vice-Mayor</td>
<td>Nang-is, Joel</td>
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<td>Municipality of Buaun</td>
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<td>Mayor</td>
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<td>Mayor</td>
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<td>Municipality of Caba</td>
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<td>Mayor</td>
<td>Crispino, Clyde</td>
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<td>Mayor</td>
<td>Bulloquing, Orlando</td>
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<td>Mayor</td>
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<td>Mayor</td>
<td>Carbonell, Marietta</td>
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<td>Vice-Mayor</td>
<td>Rafanan, Vincent</td>
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<td>Municipality of Tubao</td>
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<td>Mayor</td>
<td>Fontanilla, Jonalyn</td>
<td>11,805</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vice-Mayor</td>
<td>Garcia, Dante</td>
<td>13,323</td>
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</table>

Source: PPCRV and COMELEC Data, May 2013 & May 2016 Elections

Above is the comparative table of candidates who won in the second congressional district of La Union and in the City of San Fernando with their total number of votes garnered for 2013 and 2016 elections respectively.
Comparing the winners for 2013 and 2016 local elections, one can discern that mostly are the same name in the arena and incumbent in their positions. Other observation noted is that they just exchanged positions from Mayor to Vice-Mayor and vice-versa (e.g. Municipality of Tubao and Municipality of Caba).

Except for Burgos in which winners are new and fresh names in the Mayoralty and Vice-Mayoralty positions. For Congressman position, the husband Eufranio Eriguel just passed the throne to his wife Sandra Eriguel.

WINNING STRATEGY AND THE ROLE OF PATRONAGE

Winning the race in the local election requires variation of campaign techniques, rigorous campaign planning and coordination and mobilization of many productive and creative minds in order to strategize assurance that constituents will vote for them. In the series of interviews conducted, these are their common winning strategies.

House-to-House Campaign. Almost all mentioned this as strategy and they agreed that this personal approach is an effective means to convince voters. The advantage of this strategy is that they can relate to their personal concerns and issues in their area. Voters will come to realize their sincere intention to run for the position. In doing so, they are distributing flyers or “polyetos” where their platforms and credentials are detailed out. One candidate mentioned that aside from “polyetos”, they also give snacks, giveaways like hat, umbrella, T-shirt, mug, wrist band and fan.

Outstanding Performance in the Past. In this strategy, the Latin maxim “res ipsa loquitur” applies. There are local politicians who in their past terms have shown credible and outstanding performance; hence they do not need to prove something. People will elect them based on their qualification standards and their accomplishments. For instance in the case of Eriguels of Agoo, they have shown competent leadership and outstanding accomplishments in improving Agoo. They were able to improve the standing of the LGU from third class to first class municipality, now an aspirant to become the first city in the second congressional district of La Union. They disclosed that you don’t have to be

Familiar Names in Politics. In this strategy, they claimed that familiar names in politics can have greater chances of winning in the election. They believed that people can easily remember them because they are the by-word in their respective locality. In other words, being a member of political dynasties/families is an advantage. In an interview with Mary Jane Ortega, she said:

“Unlike real dynasties, the Ortegas do not reign. They serve and they work hard to be where they are. They do this by continuing to stay in the province and helping the people whether they win or lose in the elections. Unlike other politicians who leave the province
when they lose, and come back only when election time comes, Ortegas stay right here and are always visible.”

**Affiliation in their Respective Political Party.** They admitted that affiliation in a political party is a plus factor in winning the election. The advantages of being aligned in a dominant political party, in this case Liberal Party, are the resources and finances they may get in the campaign. All those candidates interviewed who are under LP unanimously confirmed that they get party funds to keep their machinery going. While those who are running independent or with the minority party do not have enough funds to pursue huge campaign sorties.

**Creative and Proactive Team and Creative Campaign Paraphernalia.** It is also important that the people behind every candidate should be creative and innovative. The campaign strategist of Dong Gualberto, for example, conceptualized a very catchy Iloko term “Panawenen!” (English: “The time is now!”). This is to address the recurring issue of political dynasty in the province where Ortegas remain in power for century now. The picture of Dong in the flyers, tarpaulin and in the different campaign materials showed his “ordinary” side which is the very opposite of his contender Mary Jane Ortega whose face looks elitist according to an election observer. So from this technique alone, one can discern the winnability of the candidate. There are campaign materials which are not visually inviting. Too wordy flyers just like the campaign material of Bacurnay was not effective too because voters tend not to read them all.

**Conduct of Medical Missions.** There are certain candidates who admitted that they conduct medical missions as part of their strategy to entice voters. They said that this activity is a crowd drawer as everyone is concerned about their health. Particularly, Mario Ortega who is running for governor used this strategy. He brought with him medical doctors, nurses, even beauticians and barber man as well as masseurs in campaign sorties. This became a hit activity because people are longing for free services. In effect, this is moneyed politics but in a different form, that is, the provision of health and wellness services instead of cash.

**Financial Assistance to those Seeking for Help.** Candidates admitted that they give away financial assistance even at the height of campaign period. According to them, this is part of their social obligations to the community especially if the one seeking for assistance is to be used for medication, hospitalization or for funeral services of the bereaved family.

**Giving Away of Scholarships.** Another winning strategy they have mentioned is the giving away of scholarship to poor but deserving students. This is true to those incumbent officials who are seeking for re-election or different post. They will make it appear that this scholarships are within the legal limits since they are incumbent and they continuously supporting their scholars. Through this scheme, scholars are indebted to the local politicians believing that if its
not for them, they will not be able to continue their studies. Patronage politics comes in again in this scenario.

**Vote Buying.** In the interviews conducted, none of them admitted that they committed vote-buying but it shall be included in the list since based on the shadowing reports and interviews with some local political observers, they noted that vote buying is rampant and is being practiced. They particularly pointed out the involvement of those who are in power, those who have the guns, goons and gold. In an interview conducted with a political analyst, he said:

“All without mentioning names of politicians, it is obvious that vote buying is rampant in our locality. This is being done usually in the evening prior to the Election Day. The price ranges from five hundred pesos to two thousand pesos”.

Money is the common type of material that the candidates use in order to buy votes. But vote buying not only takes the form of money. It can be other forms of material offers Schedler (2002). In a gubernatorial forum conducted by Bombo Radyo La Union, one gubernatorial candidate enthusiastically answered the issue by telling that if one will offer you money in favor of your vote, accept it. Anyway, this is a public money. Your choice will still prevail.

**Are They Engaged in Patronage Politics?**

Bottom line is, even without mentioning it, Philippines is known to be actively engaged in patronage politics. It is evident in the narratives of the present case that ensuring a winning for a seat should go hand-in-hand with the use of moneyed politics. A local political analyst has this to say about the advantage of incumbent officials running as candidates again:

*Incumbents’ advantage emerges from their better knowledge of the state of the world. Incumbents use this knowledge to strategically choose inefficient policies in areas where they are more competent than the challenger. Their actions produce outcomes that are just adverse enough to encourage voters to re-elect them, since they are the candidates best placed to address the policy problem.*

**MOBILIZATION STRUCTURE**

An election is a big socio-economic activity, mobilizing manpower, finances and redefining the structure of political and administrative powers. Elections in the Philippines by common knowledge influence markets, prices, the labor market and economic activities (Ballester, 2010). Without a highly structured political campaign, the result would be a failure to achieve the desired elective position.
Based on the narrations of local politicians, it is imperative to have the machinery in order to survive the local race. In the case of local candidates who have aligned themselves with the Liberal Party, they are benefitting an allocation of their party funds that help them finance some of their campaign needs such as printing of flyers and tarpaulins. One candidate mentioned:

“We have an absolute advantage because we have a political party. They back-up us financially and they have the people around us who will serve as watchers during the counting period. Also, with regards to connection and coordination, barangay captains are easily convinced to support us.”

As to financing the campaign, a big portion was used for the reproduction of campaign materials and maintaining their headquarter. This is true to those who have political affiliation, however for those who are not affiliated with any political party, they relied much on their personal money. The reality is that it is often the lack of financial resources which prevents certain groups and leaders from achieving political participation through representation. When asked what is the use of political party fund, a candidate replied:

“Financing of political parties during and between election campaigns, that is, all funds raised and spent in order to influence the outcome of elections as well as the parties’ routine operations.”

Almost all of them experienced waking up very early in the morning to start their campaign. The earliest time noted was 3 o’clock in the morning who still have to go to their headquarters to prepare materials needed for the campaign.

Those who are in Liberal Party and those who are incumbent officials who are running again this election unanimously mentioned that they maintain a campaign headquarter while those who are running independent or who are part of the minority party, they usually utilize their house as their headquarter. In this alone, one can recognize the disparity between one who is a patron and the other is not.

The operation of the headquarter is a challenge to most candidates. Aside from the issue of funding, they have to be assured that the persons working for them are loyal to the candidate. However, they unanimously agreed that proactive and creative individuals should man the headquarter, hence they recruit mostly youth volunteers who are very passionate in campaigning. At least 15 of those I interviewed mentioned that they utilize their former scholars for the campaign. One candidate stated:

“Most of our volunteers are scholars of the Congressman. They volunteer themselves to work for the campaign as a gesture of their gratitude and respect for the scholarship they
received. And these scholars truly recognized the contribution made by the Congressman to uplift their lives.”

The Filipino culture “utang na loob” is endemic at this point in time of election. If one gets scholarship from a politician, he will be indebted forever as long the politician is still active in public service. Tendency is, the scholar has to work with him during campaign to compensate the “gift” or “benefit” given by the local politician.

Aside from the scholar-volunteers, relatives and family members are also working for the campaign. Almost all mentioned that relatives play a very vital role in campaigning. They rely on them because of trustworthiness just like the saying goes “blood is thicker than water”. One candidate told that they do not compensate these family members because in the first place, it’s for the prestige of the family if he will win in the election. Candidates only provide snacks, travel and communication allowance for their relative-supporters.

Another interesting part of the mobilization structure is the use of cars and jeepneys with loud audio power amplifier playing a continuous campaign jingle. In most places that the researcher travelled, these vehicles usually roamed around in thickly populated areas like in the plaza, market, near the church, and urban barangays in order to cover a bigger number of constituents. The sounds they are playing are familiar hits with lyrics changed to conform to their platforms, credentials and qualifications of the candidate. There is one candidate in the City of San Fernando who used an Iloko novelty song entitled “Dung-dungwen Kanto” while another candidate in Baunag uses the classic hit of John Lennon “Imagine”. These and more are some of the gimmicks of the politicians to entice voters. Just like Gonzales (2010) pointed out from the start of the campaign up to the day of reckoning, elections are always reminiscent of a barrio fiesta where a lot of fanfare takes place. The first ‘festive feel’ of the elections happens during the campaign period. However, when I asked one candidate if he is aware with the provision of the Intellectual Property Code prohibiting the infringement and unfair usage of original music, he said that he has no knowledge about it and he believes that it is licit to do it.

Some politicians are also interested in either attending a forum or organizing a forum. In the campaign events I covered, there are 2 major fora organized by independent bodies for the gubernatorial candidates. One is organized by Bombo Radyo La Union and the second one is organized by Saint Louis College Student Council. For the first forum, Pacoy Ortega was a no-show particularly because at that time the expose on Abono Partylist was a hot issue as this was exposed in the documentary program of Ted Failon’s “Isyu Ngayon” and was reported as poor performing partylist in “TV Patrol”. Pacoy Ortega is an outgoing representative of Abono Partylist and was scandalized due to PDAF scam. In the said Bombo Radyo Forum, each candidate was given chances to present themselves and their platform of governance. They also rebutted each other if their name is dragged in the discussion. Highlighted issues include political
dynasty of the Ortegas, involvement of Dumpits in drugs, Bacurnay’s claim that he was able to bring 300 million worth of projects to La Union while being an Undersecretary of the PNoy government, hampering the establishment of SM in La Union by the Ortegas and allegations of corruption of the incumbent officials. The Regional Director of National Citizens’ Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) said:

“The debate was a good venue and chance for the voters themselves to scrutinize the character, the candidates’ programs and platforms and make an intelligent choice among the four candidates”.

The second leg of the forum was hosted by Saint Louis College of La Union, Student Council. In this forum, an academic type of atmosphere filled the air as they conversely exchanged arguments. Just like in the first forum, Pacoy was a “no-show” with the same reason that he did not want to be in dilemma discussing the issue on poor performance of Abono Partylist. In this forum, I was able to grab the chance to get to know the 4 gubernatorial candidates better through participating in the question and answer portion and an exclusive interview after the forum. Some of the fascinating moments in the forum is on their stand on national issues such as LGBT, same sex marriage, divorce, death penalty, gender equality, federalism, and even question of “forever”.

**CASE STUDIES**

**Case Study No. 1: Patronage Politics in the Ortega Dynasty**

Teehankee (2016) noted that the continuing clan dominance is a product of the seemingly immutable and unequal socio-economic structure, as well as the failure to develop a truly democratic electoral and party system. The institutional, legal, electoral, and party systems have prevented the expansion of the base of aspirants and candidates for representation. Hence, a classic illustration is the case of Ortegas of La Union.

The highly contested positions in the province were dominated by Ortega versus another Ortega. It is very interesting to point out that in the gubernatorial race, two Ortegas occupied first and second spots in the official tally of COMELEC during the canvassing of votes. Emmanuel Pacoy Ortega III, who is in his last term as Abono Partylist Representative and son of the incumbent Governor Manoling Ortega is battling for the same position with his uncle Mario Ortega, the resigned Executive Administrator of the Provincial Government of La Union. At the onset of the election campaign, they tried to thresh out personal family issues and settle who will run for a certain position but the supposed to be orderly arrangement was not achieved. Instead they went in their own way and file their candidacy. This means that despite the fact that there are alternative candidates for the said position, people still clamoured for the retention of power.
of Ortega which may have been instigated by either their good performance or lured by a thousand pesos in exchange of “bobotante’s” votes.

Aside from the gubernatorial race, there are other local elective positions which were competed by two Ortegas. These are the Vice-Mayoralty race between Pepe Ortega and Alf Ortega and the First Congressional District Representative between Manoling Ortega and Mannix Ortega. Pepe and Manoling belong to the older generation while Alf and Mannix are the younger generation of Ortegas. In the canvassing of votes, Alf Ortega stood out for Vice-Mayoralty race while Manoling won in the 1st Congressional District Representative.

But not all Ortegas won in the 2016 election. The most remarkable defeat is that of Mary Jane Ortega who was once known as icon in good local governance. Rappler (2016) reported that the Ortega clan lost for the first time in a century their hold on the capital city of San Fernando City in La Union. Former Mayor Mary Jane Ortega, who sought to return to the city hall, lost to Vice Mayor Hermenegildo Gualberto in the mayoral race.

Further, it reported that an Ortega, however, will serve as Gualberto's vice mayor. Alf Ortega, the son of Governor Manuel Ortega, is leading the race against his uncle Pepe Ortega. The Ortega clan will keep its hold on the province. Abono Representative Francisco Manuel Ortega III won against his uncle, Mario Eduardo Ortega, for the gubernatorial position. Outgoing San Fernando City Mayor Pablo Ortega won as representative of the first district against his nephew Manuel Victor Ortega Jr. Kit Ortega also won as board member of the first district.

Despite the bad publicity of Ortegas in the national TV particularly the PDAF scam, and poor performance of Abono Partylist in the last Congress, there has been a negligible or no effect in their dominance. One local election analyst mentioned that their resources work for them. The reported vote-buying incidence and the viral video of tricycle drivers waiting for their turn to get their “pay” proved that money works for them and it could possibly pole vaulted their stature in the last election. The analyst added that despite prohibition of vote-buying, impoverished voters themselves would rather accept the “payment” than being feel sorry and hungry.

In 2013 elections, the same scenario existed. Election fraud was alleged to the Ortega clan because of endemic vote buying. But the issue remained allegations and nobody dared to file an election case against the family.

Being in politics gives a person the power and influence over his area of jurisdiction including its public resources. This could be overwhelming to a person and much more to a family with more than one politician. The basic power and influence of a politician tends to widen as the term of office goes on and the existence of people around them with vested interests to obtain the politician’s endorsement and approval. According to Ngayan (2011), the overwhelming power

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and influence plus the exposure to unsolicited and solicited favours eventually lead the politicians to become greedy and corrupt. This has been going on and on, never ending, and more of this greediness and corruption could be expected from the existence of political dynasties. Indeed, to be in politics has become a lucrative business in the process. This political system in the Philippines is one of the major causes of the downfall of the country’s economy to the detriment of the struggling Filipinos and the whole country.

**Case Study No. 2:**

**Dong Gualberto and his Magic KBL (Kasal, Binyag and Libing) Campaign Strategy**

Not all efforts to breakout from the political dynasty chain remained futile such as the case of Herminihueldo “Dong” Gualberto, the incumbent Vice Mayor of the City of San Fernando who ran for Mayor and won the race. He was pitted against a hegemon in local politics Mary Jane Ortega who sought for a comeback in the mayoralty. Gualberto is leading Ortega by a wide margin of over 5,290 votes with 94% of the votes already transmitted as of May 10. The margin is more than the remaining ballots that have yet to be counted, even assuming that all of the city's 66,197 registered voters participated in the elections. The defeated mayoral candidate is the wife of La Union 1st District Victor Ortega, the first to file a certificate of candidacy for the post vacated by his brother Pablo. Mary Jane was a substitute candidate.

According to his campaign strategist, Dong has been known for KBL – Kasal, Binyag and Libing even if it’s not election time. People adore him for his sympathetic gesture to attend the most grieving moment of a bereaved family or attend merriment as “ninong” of either kasal (wedding) or binyag (baptism). In the interview, she said:

“Dong is just an ordinary man. He is cowboy who can adjust to the different situations of impoverished lifestyle of his constituents. He is loved by many people because of his compassion to the poor and willingness to help the needy.”

Kasal Binyag at Libing (KBL), is in fact not a new campaign strategy as this is the being used by local politicians in the other parts of the country. In the study of Pimentel (2010), he stated that KBL is the most popular campaign strategy in local politics. For many politicians, grassroots empowerment means having the most number of godchildren in every barangay. No politician can ever refuse a request to be a godparent in a wedding. There are constituents who can excuse the lackluster performance of an incumbent official as long as the local leader has been visible in the community. People will not forget how many times a town councilor attended wedding, baptismal and funeral ceremonies.

The rise to power of Dong Gualberto maybe attributed also to his long years of public service – his genuine advocacy for accountable and transparent local governance. According to
his campaign supporter, he was never involved in graft and corrupt practices. He ensures that
government funds are spent judiciously. In the black propaganda that the other camp is
disseminating, they made it appear that Dong will change the present set-up of the City to the
detriment of the people of San Fernando. The campaign supporter said they did not succeed in
brainwashing the people because they know Dong very well – a man with integrity.

With the eminent defeat of Mary Jane Ortega, this could serve as an eye opener that one
can change the conventional way of running the government. It was a tight contest between the
two contending parties but the new breed of political scion prevailed. This is a fresh development
for the city’s political maturity.

Political reforms will be critical in helping families and communities break out of the
dynasty poverty trap. Alternative political candidates will need the support of political parties to
convey their message of reform and non-traditional politics, built on empowerment, participation
and accountability against patron-client relationships that thrive on poverty and inequality
(Mendoza et.al, 2013).

CONCLUSION

This study only proves that patronage politics is existing and continuously flourishing in
the country. The experiences of La Union politikos on vote-buying transcended the kind of
election and the local elected leaders that the LGU have. It will take electoral, judicial and most
importantly moral revolution in order to dramatically change the culture of Filipinos particularly
on respecting the sanctity and legitimacy of the electoral process. While everyone is dreaming of
an ideal democracy, it could be said that it will take time before the country can revolutionize for
electoral reforms, free from fraud, unfair practices, and undue influences. Elections laws are
already in place but none has been prosecuted for electoral offenses up to this date, particularly
on vote buying.

The impoverished status of voters ameliorates the incidence of vote-buying. There are
voters who are willing to exchange their votes with money for this would mean something in their
everyday financial struggle. For the abusive and opportunist politicians, they took advantage of
their vulnerability and lure voters with money. Money inundated the polls, and these elections
were again decided by the power of money. Vote buying as a tool to clinch an election victory
changed the way legislators use their pork barrel. They saved their PDAF and use it during
campaign period.

Nevertheless, a light sparked with the defeat of the ruling clan in the City of San Fernando.
This in a way provides opportunity to prove that political maturity in the locality is gaining
grounds. The challenge now is how to keep this trend in the succeeding elections especially that
dynasty still reigns in the province.
Finally, this research is a constant reminder to go back to the very essence of elections as enunciated by Heywood (2000). Ideally, elections serve as a ‘major source of political recruitment, a means of making government, and of transferring government power, a guarantee of representation, and a major determinant of government policy.

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