

Memo: The Election Fever is On!
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For: Colleagues and peers of Louis Perron
People interested in winning elections
From: Dr. Louis Perron

**Perron Campaigns Election Update:
The Election Fever is On!**

With the elections less than four months away, the election fever is definitely on. As all surveys indicate, **Noynoy Aquino** is the frontrunner for the presidential election. Voters like him and his family for their clean image. This being said, unless a candidate is running unopposed, everybody is beatable. Especially in a presidential election, three months is an eternity. Exactly six years ago, three months before the 2004 presidential election, FPJ was still the clear frontrunner in all the surveys and GMA had just overtaken Roco for second place. Also, in a way, the sudden arrival of Noynoy a few months ago also shows how volatile this race still is. Some of his supporters are probably joining a bandwagon and could still change their minds. The challenge for Noynoy will be to answer the questions about his record and readiness.

Since **Manny Villar** is behind at the moment, he has to do something to change the dynamics of the race. An election campaign is about showing differences. But how do you show differences with somebody who has a skyrocketing approval rating? That's the challenge. Ironically, Barack Obama's campaign could be an inspiration to both, Aquino and Villar. On the one hand, Obama ran against somebody much more experienced and had to answer questions about his readiness. On the other hand, he also ran 20% behind Hillary for a long time. It was only a few weeks before the first caucus in Iowa when he started to pick up.

Joseph Estrada clearly has a very loyal base of supporters who would swim to China with him. In 2007, many candidates endorsed by Estrada won. Once the disqualification issue is resolved, it will definitely give some momentum to the campaign as it fits the Robin Hood image of Erap. His challenge is to convince the broad middle class.

I would not write off **Gilbert Teodoro** and **Dick Gordon** entirely, but they need big, bold steps to get into the game. The challenge for Teodoro is clearly that he has to defend the incumbent administration in a way that is not turning off voters. Also, local machinery has a limited impact, especially in a nationwide campaign. It is necessary to protect the votes but it can only generate votes to a limited extent. Remember the 2007 elections? Only three Team Unity candidates made it to the Senate, while Honasan and Trillanes also made it. So much for the wonders of local machinery in a nationwide campaign (in fact, even at the local level, the capacity of machinery to generate votes is over-estimated. It can mostly protect votes only).

Don't underestimate the forums and debates!

In 2004 and 2007, the big new thing in Philippine election campaigns were the paid TV ads. Candidates who made smart use of it, could improve their standing dramatically. **The big new thing in 2010 are the televised forums and debates.** Since the media is not only showing them live but also reports about the outcome of the debates, they reach a broad audience. Voters appreciate it because it's the only opportunity to compare the candidates and to see them next to each other. It works best for candidates who are young and articulate. In my opinion, the debates are the reason why Gilbert Teodoro is slowly improving his standing. It is not yet enough to really translate into votes, but people become less negative about him. On the other hand, it hurts those who are absent or perform badly.

The same is true for vice-presidential and senatorial candidates. Once there will be debates for them, they are well advised to **invest enough time into comprehensive debate preparation.** Of course, this does not mean that the paid ads have become obsolete. The importance of the debates comes in addition to the ads. Also, as of now, we have not yet seen a knock-out ad. In terms of the message, all presidential ads are basically doing the same thing. This explains why none is getting a big boost out of the millions spent on them.

The race for vice president

Talking about ads, **Mar Roxas'** ads were not as successful in connecting to voters. All the ads that he aired during the entire 2009 did not help much. If anything, it was the fact that he was giving in to Noynoy, the LP ticket and the way he played it out (and the TV

coverage that came with it) that made him the frontrunner for the Vice Presidential run. This being said, **Loren Legarda** can give him a good run for the money. She has a history of coming from behind. In 2004, she started way behind Noli de Castro and was able to catch up significantly. Also, the typhoons of the past months have illustrated to average voters why the environmental issue matters.

The way I see it, **Jojo Binay** is running the best ad campaign of this election cycle: the campaign has a clear, appealing and believable message with content (namely his record as Mayor of Makati), the ads are well-executed and he is investing enough money into a serious time buy. This is the reason why he has improved a lot in all parts of the country. In most cases, a good ad campaign is enough to get a candidate to the Senate.

The race for the Senate

The race for the Senate is even more volatile than the ones for president and vice president. Surveys that are taken months before the election usually have a bias in favour of established names. For many known names, the ratings reflect awareness much more than real support. At the end of 2006, Ralph Recto, Vicente Sotto and Koko Pimentel were all in the winning twelve, but ended up losing. **As for the new candidates, the strategy is to put together a well-researched ad campaign that communicates a credible and believable message.** Carry it out with discipline and do well in the debates. In 2004, Mar Roxas, Jamby Madrigal and Dick Gordon were all outside of the winning twelve at the beginning of the year. They all made it on Election Day. The February and March surveys will be interesting to watch in this respect. Let's look forward to exciting months in Philippine politics.

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News about Perron Campaigns and Dr. des. Louis Perron:

- Perron Campaigns is becoming ever more global. We were involved in the last German elections (on the winning side!) and now have clients in the UK and Romania.

· I published a rather scientific article about Philippine elections in the German *Journal for Political Consulting*. If you wish to get a free copy of this article, kindly email us at (info@perroncampaigns.com).

Kind regards,

Louis Perron