CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY AND PHILIPPINE POLITICAL BEHAVIOR: THE ELECTION OF 1953

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The impact of a political figure is usually defined in terms of his policies. This research concentrates on the significance not of policies or the political process, but rather on the impact of a campaign; specifically Ramon Magsaysay's attempt to become President of the Philippines. Particular attention is paid to pre-existing factors in the social and political environment and how they magnified the campaign's importance.

Ramon Magsaysay's victory in the 1953 Philippine presidential election can be viewed as the end-point of the Republic's first crisis of legitimacy. Given Magsaysay's extreme popularity and lopsided victory, it is reasonable to accept this election as a benchmark in Philippine political development.

In the Philippines or any political system, the level of legitimacy is produced by the interaction of a rational appraisal of system performance on one hand, and a non-rational allegiance to symbols of regime righteousness on the other. When a political system has a low output capacity, the basis of legitimacy must rely heavily on the non-rational element if the system is to survive. This is the case in many of the developing nations where there has been a tendency for the charismatic leader to personify the righteousness of the regime. Weber has argued that charismatic authority can be institutionalized in a bureaucracy identified with the purposes of the leader. The roster of such leaders is long: Nehru, Sukarno, Nkrumah, Nasser, Mao, Kenyatta and others. A singular preoccupation of these leaders has been the necessity for transferring their charismatic authority to some less mortal set of institutions — passing the torch, as it were, to a set of roles.

Seemingly, it is possible for the charismatic leader to donate his authority to the set of roles which comprise the democratic electoral process.[1] Witness, for example, Washington, Nehru, and now DeGaulle. It is the specific hypothesis of this paper that the presidential candidacy of Ramon Magsaysay resulted in such a transfer of charismatic authority

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[1] This logical extension of Weber's concept of charismatic authority is offered in Seymour M. Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Prospective* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 15-23.

to the institutions of the Philippines and to the voting process itself. It is not inferred that this transfer was an intended result of Magsaysay's campaign, but rather, that a particular combination of political and social factors which existed in 1953 resulted in extending the effects of Magsaysay's charismatic appeal to the institutions of the democratic electoral process. This discussion will attempt to explain the means by which such an electoral landslide can be translated into popular acceptance of certain political institutions.

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A crisis of legitimacy has some basis in the social events which affect political perceptions. The most evident factor is simply the lack of any real or imagined reason for the people to feel allegiance to the current regime. In the Philippines, as with any newly independent nation, the problems which faced the nation in the early post independence era were extremely complex. The unfortunate tendency for nationalist movements to equate independence with social panacea found no exception in the Philippines, and many Filipinos unreasonably hoped that independence would end the myriad problems of social and economic development. When the expected solutions did not materialize, the popular reaction was widespread frustration with the government. In addition, the corruption and incompetence of the Quirino administration gave the masses definite reasons for dissatisfaction with the current government, and for many this dissatisfaction extended to the democratic process itself. It can be argued that for the many members of the middle class responding to the National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) appeal, dissatisfaction was directed primarily against the government. On the other hand, the dissatisfaction of the Huk and their sympathizers quite evidently extended to the democratic process. The aspiring middle class was frustrated by what it saw as the failure of the government to comport itself in a manner which would allow them an adequate slice of the pie. For the Huk and their supporters, the causes of unrest were volubly related to the execrable social and economic conditions of the peasantry.

If Magsaysay did have a special role in changing the course of Philippine political development it was based on more than his exercise of presidential authority; his legislative success was very limited and his tenure of office was a short three years.[2] The bulk of his social and agrarian reform programs was quashed by a recalcitrant Congress, and although corruption may have been practiced more dis-

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[2] For an extended discussion of Magsaysay's agrarian reform program, see Frances L. Starner, *Magsaysay and the Philippine Peasantry: the Agrarian Impact on Philippine Politics 1953-1956* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), pp. 140-187.

creetly, it was not eliminated. Yet, although Magsaysay did not sig-
nificantly better the lot of the Philippine populace there was no serious
resumption of the Huk revolt, and the people were generally content
to affect the system through the ballot box after his election. As
the recent election (1969) again demonstrates, the system is still effect-
ing a relatively peaceful transfer of power.

The factors listed above are the basis for the argument that Mag-
saysay's election and administration were not nearly as important as
the emotional impact of his candidacy. Magsaysay's candidacy transferred
and institutionalized his charismatic authority into pre-existing Philip-
pine political institutions — particularly the vote.

MAGSAYSAY'S IMPACT IN 1953 — A CRITICAL ELECTION

With no survey data for this period of Philippine history, there
is no way to directly evaluate Magsaysay's impact on the political
attitudes of the Philippine voters. Therefore, this research will examine
specific behavioral changes in the Philippine electorate which are direct-
ly related to the 1953 election and then use these behavioral changes
to infer possible attitudinal changes which may have occurred.

Voting as a behavioral activity can be viewed as two separate
decisions: first, the decision of whether or not to vote (participant
choice); and second, choosing a candidate (partisan choice). As previous-
ly stated, the mass of the Philippine populace was at least dissatisfied
with the Quirino regime.[3] This dissatisfaction was widely evidenced
by Magsaysay's overwhelming victory in 1953. For this victory to
have lasting significance for Philippine politics there would have to
be a noticeable change in the long-term behavior of the electorate in
making its partisan choice. Since President Quirino was the leader of
the Liberal Party, and Magsaysay the leader of the Nacionalistas,
the most obvious hypothesis is that the 1953 election resulted in a
long-term partisan shift toward the Nacionalista Party. This hypothesis
can be tested using V. O. Key's concept of a critical election, "an
election in which there occurs a sharp and durable electoral realign-
ment between parties."[4]

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[3] Three excellent histories of the post-war Philippine period are: Alvin H.
Scaff, *The Philippines Answer to Communism* (Stanford, California: Stanford
University Press, 1955); Robert A. Smith, *Philippine Freedom 1946-1958* (New
York: Columbia University Press, 1958); and Frances L. Starner, *op. cit.*

[4] V. O. Key, Jr., "A Theory of Critical Elections," *Journal of Politics,* Vol.
XVII, No. 1 (February, 1955), p. 16.

It should be understood that Key dealt with a relatively long time period
in which the previous systems could be clearly identified. Since the Philippines
had achieved their independence in 1946, there was no effective way to definitely
establish the previous system state. The situation as prevailing in 1949 had to
be taken as the base point. There is, therefore, no possibility of asserting a
definite earlier division. Concern is focused as much on behavior after the 1953
election as on change from previous behavior. In Key's research, his primary

The first step in testing this hypothesis is to quantify Key's terms "sharp" and "durable." Quantitatively "defining" a critical election, *a priori*, rather than using some search means, for example factor analysis, may raise some methodological eyebrows. This analysis was conducted using fifty provinces as the number of cases, with data for five national elections. The number of possible combinations was obviously quite high. It was considered much more efficient to "define" a critical election and then check the results, rather than attempting a very sophisticated and probably misleading search technique. The election of 1949 was taken as the base year, and a 15% increase in electoral support for the Nacionalista Party from 1949 to 1953 was chosen as the criterion for considering the change "sharp." This large change was the minimum deemed appropriate considering the somewhat amorphous nature of Philippine political parties. Conceivably, in a system where strong party allegiances are the norm, and parties are closely matched, a change of only three or four per cent could be justifiably considered critical.

The convincing Magsaysay victory in 1953 left little doubt that if a critical election had occurred, the change would be in favor of the Nacionalista Party. Tests were made using the per cent of Nacionalista Party vote, designated as %N. A "durable" realignment was defined as a continuation of the new pattern at a level of 5% higher than the base year, 1949, during the period 1957 through 1965. Key's argument assumes the existence of a unique conjunction of factors at one point in time producing a critical election. While the effects of this conjunction are expected to continue over time, the long-term effects are not expected to be of the same intensity as the original phenomenon. The five per cent figure was chosen so that the definition did not demand unreasonable stability of a partially transient phenomenon. To consider the election as critical in any given province, it had to satisfy the following four conditions:

$$\%N\ 1953 - \%N\ 1949 \geq 15\%$$

$$\text{and } \%N\ 1957 - \%N\ 1949 \geq 5\%$$

$$\%N\ 1961 - \%N\ 1949 \geq 5\%$$

$$\%N\ 1965 - \%N\ 1949 \geq 5\%$$

Using this test, 21 provinces met the criteria and were considered "critical provinces" while 27 did not. Two provinces, Pampanga and Catanduanes, were not included because sufficient data were not available.

Examination of the data for the five elections produced the results shown in Figures I and II. Comparison of Figures I and II since 1953

interest was identifying an election as being of particular importance. The technique adopted here allows such identification, but does depart from Key's original concept.

FIGURE 1

MEAN NACIONALISTA PARTY VOTE AS A PERCENTAGE OF
TOTAL PRESIDENTIAL VOTE: CRITICAL PROVINCES —
1949-1965

n = 21
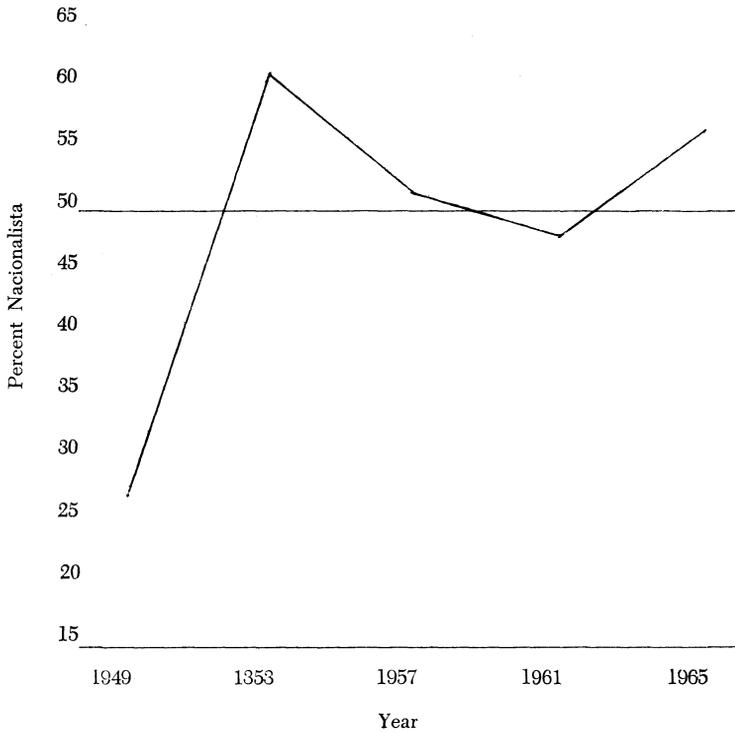
FIGURE 2

MEAN NACIONALISTA VOTE AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
PRESIDENTIAL VOTE: NON-CRITICAL PROVINCES —
1949-1965

n = 27
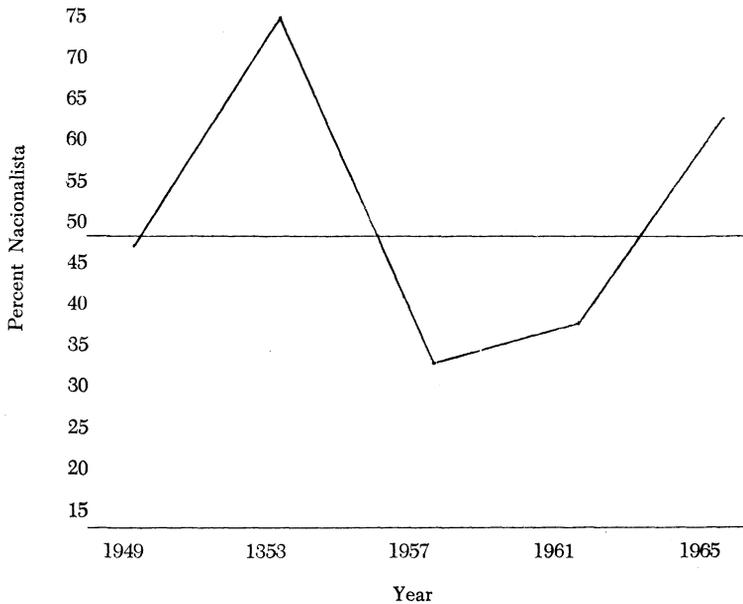
illustrates quite clearly the difference between the electoral behavior in the non-critical, and more stable, critical provinces.[5]

A check on the quantitative requirements for the critical election was performed using the correlation coefficients of Liberal Party vote before and after 1953. The Liberal vote is used for two reasons: the Liberal Party was expected to lose ground as the result of the election, and more important, the possibility existed that there would be temporary inflation of the Nacionalista vote by marginal participants who would be motivated to engage in only this election. In critical provinces, following the argument of Neldrum and Macrae,[6] the correlation of electoral behavior between the pre- and post-critical election years (1949 and 1953) should be low, while correlations between 1953 and subsequent years should be higher. Table 1 presents the results

TABLE 1

LIBERAL PARTY VOTE CORRELATION CHECK ON CRITICALITY

Years Correlated	Critical Group R	Non-Critical Group R
1949-1953	0.57	0.94
1953-1957	0.77	0.92
1957-1961	0.85	0.94
1961-1965	0.67	0.97

of this check and provides rather convincing confirmation for the basis on which critical provinces were chosen. Obviously, the 21 provinces represented by Figure I fulfill the requirements for a critical election in 1953.

In the critical provinces, after the wide swing of voter support in 1953, the Nacionalista vote has, in subsequent elections, remained relatively stable at approximately 50% of the vote. On the average, there occurred a stable 22% increase in Nacionalista support from the base year average of 28.8%. The converse of this change is, of course, the reduction of Liberal Party strength. Stabilization of the distribution of party support around the 50% level indicates that the election of 1953 resulted in the development of a consistent two-party system in the 21 provinces where the election was critical. In short, Magsaysay's candidacy in the 1953 election resulted in a marked shift in the partisan choice of the voters in almost half of the Philippine provinces.

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[5] All electoral data were drawn from *Philippines Republic Commission on Elections* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1950, 1958, 1962, 1966).
[6] Duncan Macrae, Jr., and James A. Neldrum, "Critical Elections in Illinois: 1888-1958," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. LIV (September, 1960), p. 669.

In the non-critical provinces, the winning party has garnered at least 57% of the vote in three of the last four elections, and in 1953, the winning candidate obtained 72% of the vote. The 1957 election clouds the issue somewhat due to the candidacy of a third party hopeful, Manuel Manahan, who ran quite strongly in many of the non-critical provinces. In these provinces, Manahan averaged 27.3% of the vote, and in the Central Luzon region he averaged 41%. From the radically oscillating pattern of voter support it seems that the "common man candidate" explanation of presidential vote operates in the non-critical provinces. This type of explanation is further supported by the effectiveness of Manahan's radical agrarian reform program in gaining support in these provinces.

Some Philippine scholars have suggested that one impact of Magsaysay's candidacy was on participant choice, claiming that he mobilized previously non-participant elements of the peasant population.[7] Positive results in a test of this hypothesis would also lend credence to the contention that Magsaysay's candidacy brought an end to the Philippine's crisis of legitimacy by altering the perception of the political system by significant elements of the population. Examination of the electoral data on the level of turnout finds no support for this hypothesis. Figure III shows a consistent increase in the level of electoral participation in the Philippines from 1949 to 1965. Figure IV presents the same data controlling for the increase in the literate population. The rather large increase between 1946 and 1949 seen in Figure IV is probably illusory in part due to the prevalence of corrupt electoral practices reported during the 1949 elections. Neither Figure shows any abrupt increase in electoral participation centering around the 1953 election.

Within the aggregate voting patterns, countervailing trends may result in the same total outcome. In this case, it is possible for the total figures to mask very opposite forms of behavior, and thus lead us to improper interpretation. Operating from the premise of possible masking tendencies, the level of literacy was correlated with the level of voting turnout in the elections from 1949 to 1965. Table 2 presents

TABLE 2

CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS OF LITERACY AND TURNOUT: 1949-1965

Year	Correlation
1949	—0.268
1953	+0.660
1957	+0.607
1961	+0.707
1965	+0.490

[7] Onofre D. Corpuz, "Filipino Political Parties and Politics," *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, Vol. XXIII, Nos. 2-4 (June, 1968), pp. 147-159.

FIGURE 3

ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION — 1946-1965
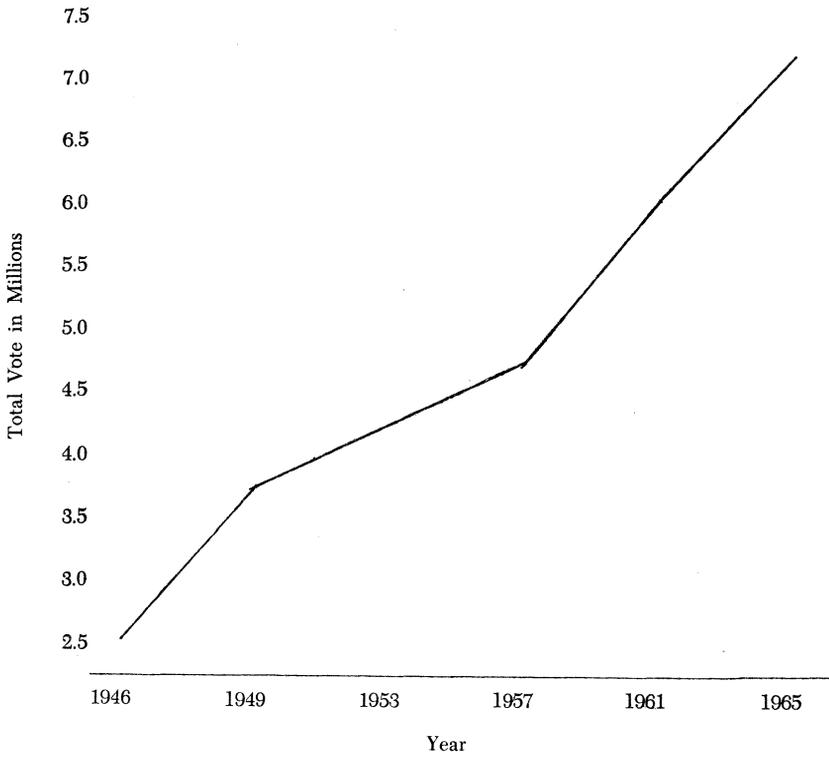
FIGURE 4

VOTING PARTICIPATION AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE
LITERATE POPULATION: 1946-1965 FOR ALL PROVINCES
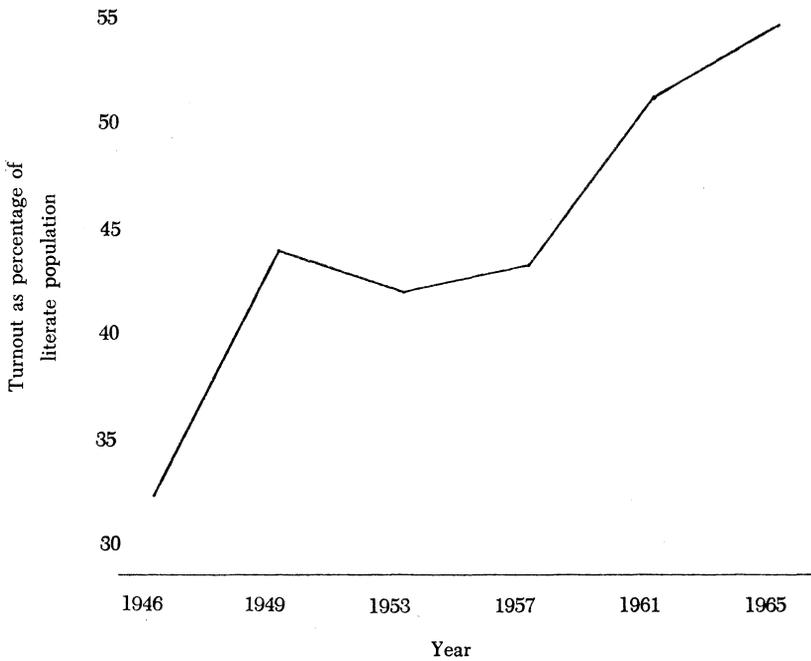
the correlation coefficients for literacy and turnout for the five elections. The literacy figures were drawn from the 1948 decennial census and were the same for both the 1949 and 1953 correlations. Since the literacy rates were constant, it is obvious that a radical alteration occurred between 1949 and 1953 in the patterns of electoral turnout. This will be explored further in the discussion section.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS AND CRITICALITY

Since social and economic factors provide the background for political attitudes, this research will next examine Magsaysay's impact in terms of the socio-economic milieu in which the voters functioned essentially determining what factors differentiate critical versus non-critical voting patterns.

A series of socio-economic variables was drawn from the 1948 and 1960 Philippine Census.[8] The variables were chosen to indicate the two dimensions believed to underlie the Philippine crisis of legitimacy; the process of social mobilization, and the relative rate of agrarian disadvantage. A factor analysis was performed to validate the hypothesis that these variables were, in fact, measuring two dimensions; the results provided confirmation. Table 3 presents the results of a series of regression

TABLE 3

MULTIPLE CORRELATIONS — SOCIO-ECONOMIC VARIABLES
AND NACIONALISTA VOTE

Year	R^2 All Provinces	R^2 Critical Provinces	R^2 Non-Critical Provinces
1949	10%	54%	54%
1953	29%	83%	41%
1957	52%	53%	59%
1961	46%	54%	62%
1965	44%	73%	56%

analyses using the per cent of the Nacionalista vote by province as the dependent variable in each of the five elections. In the first column the sample includes all provinces. In the second and third columns the provinces are dichotomized on the basis of criticality in the 1953 election. The R^2's indicate the proportion of the total variance in the turnout which can be accounted for by the five socio-economic variables included in the regression equations. The radical difference in the mean R^2 before and after dichotomization demonstrates two things: first, it

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[8] All socio-economic data were drawn from the *Census of the Philippines* (Manila: Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1950, 1961).

is clear that in regard to voting behavior, a high level of explanatory power is obtained using socio-economic data; and second, the great increase in R^2 again confirms the original method of determining critical provinces.

As would be expected if socio-economic factors had a significant bearing on the 1953 election, controlling for the election brings about a high increase (44%) in the R^2 for 1949, the election prior to 1953. We may, therefore, argue that the outcome of the election was, in part, determined by the electorates' prior perception of its economic situation, and not merely by the manipulations of the political elite. This indicates that in a partisan sense, Magsaysay's long-term appeal was most effective in certain provinces with similar economic and social environments.

Table 4 presents a comparison of the critical and non-critical provinces in terms of the mean values of six socio-economic indicators. The first three indicators present the differences in the dimension of social mobilization and urbanization, while the last three present a general picture of the agricultural characteristics of these provinces.

TABLE 4

COMPARISON OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICES

Variable	Critical Provinces	Non-Critical Provinces
Literacy	67%	76%
Density	105.9/km²	175.0/km²
Radios	5.4%	10.4%
Tenancy	33%	43%
Palay	32%	60%
Agricultural Population	56%	49%

A primary difference between the critical and non-critical provinces is the potential for a much more effective communications network in the non-critical provinces. The non-critical provinces tend to have a higher proportion of radio owners, a much higher proportion of literate persons, and a much greater population density. These factors indicate that the level of social mobilization and urbanization is considerably higher in the non-critical provinces.

The lower level of social mobilization in the critical provinces, as well as the smaller number of persons able to speak Tagalog, would suggest that these provinces possess communications networks which are more definitely "oral" in character.[9] Ninety per cent of the critical

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[9] Daniel Lerner, "Communications Systems and Social Systems — A Statistical Exploration in History and Policy," *Behavioral Science*, 2 (October, 1957), p. 267.

provinces are in the low Tagalog speaking category, versus only 40%
of the non-critical provinces. Magsaysay's barrio to barrio campaign
would, therefore, be expected to be more effective in a partisan sense,
than in those provinces which possess "media" type communications
systems, and had already been directly subjected to the blandishments
of national candidates.

Table 5 presents a cross-tabulation of provinces in terms of high
or low radio ownership and criticality in the 1953 election. It is clear
that media consumption via the radio was a major factor in the long-
term effects of the election. Magsaysay's barrio to barrio campaign had
the greatest long-term effects in precisely those provinces which had
not previously been integrated into the national media network.

TABLE 5

RADIO OWNERSHIP

	High	Low
Non-Critical	14	13
Critical	2	19
Q = .82	$x^2 = 9.53$ @ 1 d.f.	p < .01

As a corollary to the effects of differential media consumption it
is possible to examine the effects of differentials in the proportion
of the population who speak Tagalog, the dominant Philippine language.
Table 6 compares the provinces in terms of criticality and the proportion
of the population able to speak Tagalog.

TABLE 6

TAGALOG SPEAKING POPULATION

	High	Low
Non-Critical	16	11
Critical	1	20
Q = .93	$x^2 = 15.39$ @ 1 d.f.	p < .001

The combined effects of radio ownership and language are presented
in Table 7. These combined effects are treated as high, mixed, and low
communication potential. Again, it is clear that the effects of the
available communications network had a major impact upon the con-
tinuing effects of the events of 1953.

It was suggested earlier that the level of agrarian disadvantage
would likely have an effect upon the electoral behavior of the populace.

TABLE 7

COMMUNICATION POTENTIAL

	High	Mixed	Low
Non-Critical	12	6	9
Critical	0	3	18
C = .492	x^2 = 15.49 @ 2 d.f.		p < .001

The agrarian situation in the non-critical provinces seems to be, on the average, much less favorable than in the critical group. In the non-critical provinces only 49% of the population is directly engaged in agriculture, but as of 1960, 43% of these farmers were tenants as compared to only 33% in the critical provinces. In both groups of provinces, approximately half of the population is directly engaged in some form of agricultural occupation, but as the difference in tenancy rate suggests, the situation of the peasantry in the non-critical provinces is much less favorable than in the critical provinces. This is especially true given the vast difference in the level of cultivation of the Philippine principal crop, palay. In the non-critical provinces, 60% of the cultivated land is sown to palay as contrasted to only 32% in the critical provinces. The effective marketing of palay requires a series of middlemen to handle the product as it proceeds from primary producer to final consumer. The system of credit relations produced by this process is not conducive to the well-being of the primary producer even though it may be absolutely vital to his existence.[10] In Table 8 the provinces are compared in

TABLE 8

AGRARIAN DISADVANTAGE

	High	Low
Non-Critical	19	8
Critical	7	14
Q = .65	x^2 = 6.54 @ 1 d.f.	p < .02

terms of the prevailing level of agrarian disadvantage and criticality in 1953. While it is obvious that the level of agrarian disadvantage is associated with critical or non-critical behavior, agrarian disadvantage by itself is not as effective an explanatory factor as either language

[10] Barbara Ward, "Cash or Credit Crops? An examination of some implications of peasant commercial production with special reference to the multiplicity of traders and middlemen," *Economic Development and Cultural Change,* Vol. VIII, No. 2 (January, 1960), pp. 148-163.

or media consumption. There is little reason to suspect however that
mere disadvantage would be that powerful and explanatory factor.
Unless those who had reason to be dissatisfied were able to effectively
communicate this dissatisfaction the ramifications in the political sphere
would be slight.

Table 9 presents the combined effect of both the communications
variables and the prevailing level of agrarian disadvantage. These com-
bined effects are collectively referred to as the dissatisfaction potential.

<div align="center">TABLE 9</div>

<div align="center">DISSATISFACTION POTENTIAL</div>

	High	Moderate	Low
Non-Critical	16	7	4
Critical	1	8	12
C = .51	$x^2 = 16.78$ @ 2 d.f.		p < .001

Only four of the non-critical provinces are found in the "low dis-
satisfaction potential" category, and only one of the critical provinces
is found in the "high dissatisfaction potential" category. Clearly the
effect of Magsaysay's campaign was extremely different depending upon
the socio-economic backgrounds of the various provinces.

The effectiveness of the "Common Man" campaign in the non-
critical provinces may be understood in the light of this combination
of factors.[11] Since social mobilization is expected to produce higher

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[11] For a fuller explanation, see Carl Lande, *The Structure of Philippine Politics:
Leaders, Factions and Parties* (Detroit: Yale University Press, 1964). Carl Lande's
work on the dyadic relationship in Philippine politics strongly emphasizes the
local orientation of the average member of Congress. A working dyadic relation-
ship rests upon several factors: acceptance of an ascriptive social order, deferential
patterns between leader and led, and the social and physical proximity of the
actors in the system. Nacionalista dominance of the political system prior to World
War II suggests that even presidential politics operated through the dyadic mechanism.
Faction leaders contrived to deliver their clients' votes to the national candidate
supported by the local faction. In this type of relationship it must be assumed
that the voter relates not primarily to the candidate, but to the local patron
to whom he is indebted.

If a national candidate competes with local leaders, attemption to appeal
directly to the voters using their self-interest as campaign material, he faces two
important problems. First, he must reach the voter across great social distance,
and second, he must out-do the local leaders without benefit of accustomed ascriptive
patterns. Despite these problems, Magsaysay ran and won with just such a campaign
in 1953. In presidential elections subsequent to 1953, similar campaigns were also
effective suggesting 1953 as the start of a weakening or destruction of the traditional
dyadic relationships. Unless confined to presidential elections, this argument runs
into diametrically opposed data found by Lande while studying Philippine local
electoral politics. However, it is highly probable that the Philippine situation is
highly analogous to the prevalent situation in the American South where many
voters desert their traditional party allegiances to vote for another party's presidential
candidate, returning to the fold when voting for lesser candidates.

levels of political awareness, the population in the non-critical provinces may be expected to have a more participant attitude toward the political system. At the same time, these provinces possess a much higher level of agrarian disadvantage, a situation which the political elite has been promising to rectify for many years. Thus, it is not at all surprising that the majority of the electorate in these provinces should support whichever candidate promises to do the most for the common *tao*, regardless of the candidate's party. These findings are bolstered by the fact that the Central Luzon region, the major area of Huk activity and the area in which Manuel Manahan polled 41% of the vote, is composed of all non-critical provinces.

Conclusion

Political participation is a means to an end. When no perceived rewards are forthcoming from participation, it is likely to cease. In the Philippines, the negative correlation between education and participation in 1949 (Table 2) underscores the possibility of a breakdown in the process. To restore the positive nature of the process, the average citizen must be given some reason to believe that in the future, rewards will follow participation. Ramon Magsaysay's candidacy in the 1953 election seems to have had such a restorative effect upon the socially mobilized sector of the Philippine populace. In this sense the charismatic appeal of Magsaysay was transferred to the electoral process, as the continuing positive correlation between education and participation indicates.

Partisan behavior in the Philippines was most directly effected in those provinces in which the 1953 election was critical. Examination of the socio-economic background factors of the critical provinces indicates that Magsaysay's appeal was most effective in those provinces which were neither highly mobilized nor highly disadvantaged agrarian regions. In this regard the successful transference of Magsaysay's charismatic appeal occurred in the least volatile of the Philippine provinces. Continuing wide shifts in the partisan loyalties of the electorate in the non-critical provinces indicates that the transfer was least successful in precisely those provinces most in need of a long term stabilizing influence.