Mabini Review
Volume XVI, No. 2, 2026

Polytechnic University of the Philippines



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DOI: https://doi.org/10.70922/wfzt1h27

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Article History:

Received: September 16, 2025
Accepted: November 26, 2025
Revised: January 6, 2026

How to Cite this paper:

Capacio, Jean Alchie T. "Addressing the Bobotante Phenomenon: Towards Filipino Solidarity through Rorty's Irony." *Mabini Review* 16, no. 2 (2026): 149–173. https://doi.org/10.70922/wfzt1h27.

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Addressing the *Bobotante* Phenomenon: Towards Filipino Solidarity Through Rorty's Irony

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Abstract

This paper examines the so-called *bobotante phenomenon*—the disparaging characterization of certain Filipino voters as "stupid" or "irrational"—and its implications for democratic solidarity in the Philippines. Rather than treating the phenomenon as evidence of a deficiency in civic rationality, I argue that such labeling undermines the very democratic community it purports to protect. Drawing on Richard Rorty's notion of Irony, I suggest that democratic solidarity is best cultivated not through epistemic hierarchies or exclusionary judgments, but through a shared recognition of the contingency of our vocabularies and the humility to revise them. Rorty's ironic stance invites citizens to engage one another not as deficient reasoners but as participants in a pluralistic conversation about common hopes. By reframing the *bobotante* discourse in terms of irony, this paper advocates for a more inclusive democratic ethos—one that resists elitist dismissal and instead fosters solidarity through empathy, shared vulnerability, and open-ended dialogue.

Keywords: *Bobotante Phenomenon, Filipino Democracy and Solidarity, Rorty, Irony, Sociopolitical Philosophy*

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is one of the most common kinds of governance in many parts of the world; some would even say it is ideal in the sense that it caters to the current demands and conditions of most societies. In the Philippines, it is recognized that we are a democratic society with a promise of equal rights, political participation, and popular sovereignty. However, a closer look at the country's political landscape reveals deep contradictions: the persistence of political dynasties, opportunistic party-switching, and systemic practices that often exclude the very people meant to be empowered by democratic ideals. One manifestation of this contradiction appears during elections, where public frustration over unfavorable election results often gives rise to a blame-oriented culture. At the center of this culture is the term *bobotante*—a word used to describe voters who are perceived to make irrational, uninformed, or even

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harmful electoral choices. In popular discourse, the *bobotante* has become a convenient scapegoat for the failures of democracy. Yet this label simplifies a far more complex reality shaped by poverty, systemic misinformation, coercive political structures, and limited access to civic education.

This paper seeks to challenge and rethink the *bobotante* phenomenon, not by defending poor electoral choices, but by interrogating the deeper forces that shape them. Rather than reproducing a culture of blame, the goal is to offer a more empathetic and structurally aware perspective, using Richard Rorty's concept of irony as discussed in his work, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity.* Hence, the paper is not limited to rediscussing or recalling the irony as Rorty understands it but focuses on a practical application of such concept to a timely and relevant issue today—2025 Local and National Elections. Methodologically, then, this paper adopts an interpretive and conceptual approach, using Rortyan redescription to examine how political vocabularies like *bobotante* function in public discourse. The analysis is descriptive and reflective, focusing on the social and moral implications of language rather than prescribing what citizens should think or do. Empirical sources, such as election reports or analyses, are used only to provide context and illustrate structural conditions shaping political behavior. Hence, I will focus on four (4) key discussions: 1) a comprehensive discussion of irony and the ironist according to Rorty, 2) a brief explication of the term *bobotante* and how it functions as a label for so-called irrational voters; 3) an analysis of the structural and cultural practices that shape and constrain voter behavior; and 4) a proposal for how irony can be used to reframe the *bobotante* phenomenon toward a vision of solidarity and a more genuine democracy. Ultimately, this paper argues that fostering a genuine democratic culture in the Philippines may need moving beyond contempt and toward compassion, grounded in humility, redescription, and an openness to understand others whose choices are shaped by their own circumstances. This paper contends that solidarity can be fostered by embracing irony, a concept that would lead us to critically examine the term *bobotante* instead of merely accepting it for how it is currently perceived. Rather than condemning fellow citizens and blaming the *bobotante* for the unfortunate conditions of our political scene, we may instead focus on embodying an ironist attitude that Rorty proposes.

The Irony and the Ironist

Irony, as it is commonly defined, is "the use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning."[1] This

1 "Irony," 2025, *Merriam-Webster,* https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/irony.

lexical definition already gives us a good starting point for understanding how Rorty thinks about irony, though he takes it further in a more deliberate and philosophical direction. Rorty brings out the oppositional nature of irony when he says, "The opposite of irony is common sense."[2] If being commonsensical means "taking for granted that statements formulated in that final vocabulary suffice to describe and judge the beliefs, actions and lives of those who employ alternative final vocabularies,"[3] then the contrast becomes clear. Irony resists this kind of certainty and finality found in common sense, as it pushes back against the idea that any vocabulary is fixed or unquestionable. It also challenges the terms we have inherited, especially those that seem so obvious, yet we forget to examine them. If I were to describe irony figuratively, I would say it's like the party-wrecker at a gathering of commonsensical people. It does not necessarily ruin the party, but it unsettles it by bringing a sharpness, a spice, which disturbs the easy flow of conversation and confidence. In that sense, irony isn't destructive in a violent or chaotic way. Rather, it is destructive in the way it erodes one's comfort with final vocabularies, one's sense of certainty, and even one's trust in foundational truths. It makes the ground a little less stable, *but maybe that's the point!*

In both the dictionary sense and Rorty's use, irony involves some distance from what is literally said or widely accepted. It can mean saying one thing while meaning another, or in Rortyan sense of the concept, refusing to accept the language we use to make sense of the world as final or unquestionable. For Rorty, this kind of irony reflects a deeper attitude—one rooted in radical self-awareness, in the recognition that our beliefs and vocabularies are contingent, and in the openness to the fact that things could have been otherwise. But it is also important to note that irony is not just a quiet, detached stance. Rorty writes, "Irony is, if not intrinsically resentful, at least reactive.[4]" Irony responds to something. It is reactive often against rigid beliefs or dominant narratives that present themselves as the only valid way of understanding the world. The ironist does not simply notice that alternatives exist; they live with the tension of knowing that their own worldview is unstable, especially in a world that encourages people to take things as they are and to rely on a commonsense shaped by widely accepted social norms. In this sense, irony is anything but static. Since people are shaped by their social environments, shifting norms, distinct histories, and lived experiences, then it is reasonable to say that the kind of irony they express is shaped by those dynamics as well. It is reactive because

2 Rorty, Richard, 1989, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 74.

3 Ibid., 74.

4 Ibid., 88.

we, as social beings, are reactive. We do not exist outside of society. We move within it, and our ways of thinking evolve alongside it. Irony, then, becomes not only a way of thinking but a way of being. It is something lived, something that reflects the ongoing push and pull between the self and the world.

Simply put, irony opens space for progress because it takes seriously the idea that neither society nor human beings are fixed. We are always changing, just as those who came before us were different from who we are now, and just as those who come after us will also be different in ways we cannot yet fully imagine. This sense of openness is echoed in the kind of philosophy Rorty advocates early in the book. He describes the philosophical method as "to redescribe lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of nonlinguistic behavior."[5] In other words, philosophy for Rorty is less about finding timeless truths and more about reshaping how we speak and act, in ways that might inspire future generations to imagine and live differently. Irony, as reflected in this method of philosophy, is about an ongoing willingness to revise, to question, and to remain unsettled in pursuit of new ways of thinking and being. Both irony and philosophy, in Rorty's view, emphasizes the ongoing process of reinterpretation and redescription. But to really understand what Rorty means by irony, it helps to look at how he describes the ironist: someone who is always slightly uneasy with their own beliefs, aware of how fragile and constructed they are, and never fully at home in the language they use to make sense of things. Rorty writes:

> "I shall define an "ironist" as someone who fulfills three conditions:
>
> (1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself."[6]

Rorty's definition of the ironist brings out the deeply personal and unsettled nature of irony. An ironist is not just someone who questions things casually, they carry a persistent doubt about the very words and concepts they use to make sense of the world. As Rorty remarked, "Ironists have to have something to have doubts about."[7] This doubt centers on the recognition that

5 Ibid., 9.

6 Ibid., 73.

7 Ibid., 88.

one's own moral, social, philosophical, and political vocabulary is historically contingent. What stands out is that they do not believe their vocabulary gets them any closer to some ultimate truth; instead, they live with the awareness that their way of speaking and thinking is just one among many, shaped by encounters with others and open to being reshaped again. This definition suggests that irony helps resist complacency by continually questioning the frameworks and socially accepted 'facts' that we use to understand ourselves and the world. In this way, irony is not just a form of skepticism, it becomes a creative, even hopeful, way of reimagining both self and society.

Ironists, in Rorty's terms, are afraid that "they will get stuck in the vocabulary in which they were brought up if they only know the people in their own neighborhood."[8] This suggests that irony is not just about recognizing the contingency of our own vocabulary, it is also about recognizing how deeply our communities shape our language, beliefs, and assumptions about the world. Once again, it reveals the interconnectedness of the self, language, ways of life, and society. The ironist, upon realizing this, fears becoming too comfortable with the familiar—too convinced that her inherited way of speaking and thinking is the only one. She also spends time worrying about the possibility that she has been "initiated into the wrong tribe, taught to play the wrong language game."[9] They fear that what they have been taught and how things have been described to them may be wrong, and as a result, they do not take their understanding of a vocabulary, a concept, or a framework for granted the way non-ironists usually do. Rorty further stated, "she worries that the process of socialization which turned her into a human being by giving her a language may have given her the wrong language, and so turned her into the wrong kind of human being."[10] The ironist recognizes that anyone can be at risk of closing themselves off from the vastness and diversity of perspectives, and that no one is safe from the dangers of accepting things as they are, without further questions. These fears do not paralyze the ironist, rather, they motivate her to seek out other perspectives, to explore different vocabularies, and to remain aware of her own limitations. In contrast, the non-ironists who stay within their comfort zone and take common sense assumptions for granted, do not experience this discomfort, but in doing so, they risk becoming closed off to other ways of seeing the world. What these contrasting experiences reveal is that a non-ironist might enjoy a sense of stability and comfort that the ironist lacks, because the ironist lives with a kind of unsettling awareness. Eventually, however, the consequences may prove more fruitful for the ironist. Because they are constantly engaged in the practice

8 Ibid., 80.

9 Ibid., 75.

10 Ibid., 75.

of questioning and rethinking, ironists are trained to be critical of social norms, institutions, ideologies, and philosophies. This critical stance helps guard against dogmatism and fosters openness. The same cannot be said of the non-ironist, who, having never developed this habit of questioning, risks remaining confined within their inherited worldview, digging themselves into a place of moral and intellectual stagnation. And so, in relation to the self, Rorty writes that "we redescribe ourselves, our situation, our past… and compare the results with alternative redescriptions,"[11] which shows that for ironists, self-understanding is about experimenting with different vocabularies in the hope of, as he puts it, "making the best selves for ourselves that we can"[12] which is a process grounded in language, shaped by encounters, and guided by continual redescription. Rorty also writes that for ironists, "nothing can serve as a criticism of a final vocabulary save another such vocabulary."[13] In simpler terms, if we want to question or challenge the language and beliefs we've inherited, we cannot appeal to some deeper, objective truth outside of language—because such a truth would offer no alternative possibilities or other plausible explanations. The only way to critique one way of seeing the world is to offer another. So, "there is no answer to a redescription save a re-re-redescription,"[14] which means no single vocabulary has the final say. All we can really do is keep proposing new ways of describing things and see where they take us. This is also why irony is at odds with metaphysics. The ironist, Rorty says, "is a nominalist and a historicist. She thinks nothing has an intrinsic nature, a real essence."[15] While the ironist sees all things as contingent and shaped by time, the metaphysician believes that things have some stable, underlying nature. They spend their time trying to discover or explain this supposed essence, often "analyzing old descriptions with the help of other old descriptions."[16] This shows how metaphysicians tend to stay within inherited vocabularies, working within the commonsense frameworks passed down to them, without asking whether these frameworks themselves need rethinking. In doing so, they risk taking at face value, things that may call for deeper and more imaginative re-description, and things that can only be understood through their historical contexts. Metaphysicians also hold that philosophy "is an attempt to know about certain things - quite general and important things,"[17] while for the ironists,

11 Ibid., 80.

12 Ibid., 80.

13 Ibid., 80.

14 Ibid., 80.

15 Ibid., 74.

16 Ibid., 74.

17 Ibid., 76.

"philosophy, so defined, is the attempt to apply and develop a particular antecedently chosen final vocabulary—one which revolves around the appearance-reality distinction."[18] In other words, while the metaphysician treats a chosen final vocabulary as a means of drawing a clear line between what is really *real* and what merely *seems* to be, the ironist doubts that any vocabulary can bring us closer to ultimate truth. The metaphysician's confidence in discovering deep, foundational truths is exactly what the ironist is wary of as she considers such claims as just one vocabulary trying to pass itself off as final. Metaphysics tends to assume that we possess a lot of the "'right' final vocabulary,"[19] that our tradition can "raise no problems which it cannot solve,"[20] or that there is some permanent truth or hidden structure behind what we experience—something that exists beyond language and which we are supposed to uncover. Irony, on the other hand, does not try to go beyond language at all. It stays within language, recognizing that our thinking is always shaped by the vocabulary available to us, and that there is no higher ground from which we can judge them finally. In many ways, Rorty's insights resonate with Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein once said in *Philosophical Investigations* (PI) that "philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language,"[21] and that philosophical problems arise when "language *goes on holiday*."[22] That is, when we push language beyond what it can do, especially when we expect it to give us access to metaphysical certainty, we end up going in circles, or as he wrote in the PI's preface, we get lost in these "long and meandering journeys."[23] Rather than looking for a final foundation, Rorty's ironist stays inside language but keeps moving—constantly questioning, redescribing, and searching for new ways of making sense of the world. That is why he writes, "nothing can serve as a criticism of a person save another person, or of a culture save an alternative culture,"[24] because people and cultures are, to him, incarnated[25] and socially-embedded vocabularies. We do not need to step outside of language if we want to rethink who we are or how we live together, we

18 Ibid., 76.

19 Ibid., 77.

20 Ibid., 76.

21 Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 2009, *Philosophical Investigations*, edited and translated by Gertrude Elizabeth M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, Singapore: Wiley-Blackwell, 109, 52e.

22 Ibid., 38, 23e.

23 Ibid., Preface, 3e.

24 Rorty, Richard, 1989, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity,* 80

25 Ibid., 88.

can do this by simply "enlarging our acquaintance."[26] We need to expose ourselves to different people, practices, and perspectives,[27] and let those encounters reshape how we understand things. In another unexpected reference to Wittgenstein, I find that Rorty's explication of language and social relations echoes Wittgenstein's ideas about language-games and forms of life. Like Rorty, Wittgenstein pushed back against the idea that philosophy should offer abstract, fixed, essence-based, dogmatic, and overarching systems. He also showed how language, meaning, and understanding are grounded in everyday use, not in fixed foundations. Rorty's irony follows that same path. It does not settle for final answers but stays open, alive, and responsive to real experiences and to the lives of others. Irony makes it possible for both individual and collective realizations about "our inability to step outside our language"[28] to compare it with something else, yet it also affirms the value of recognizing language as contingent, encouraging an active and responsive stance toward pragmatic and sociopolitical transformation.

Moving forward, while it is arguably easier to talk about the usual philosophical terms often treated as final vocabularies, such as Justice, Knowledge, or Science, I find it relevant to contextualize the concept of irony, as well as the image of the ironist, in a way that resonates with contemporary Filipino society. In this light, I propose that we consider non-philosophical and localized terms such as *bobotante*, a word uniquely shaped by the distinct electoral and political experiences of Filipinos. The term *bobotante* can be seen as a final vocabulary in the Rortyan sense, as it is often invoked to express political frustration and to justify a sense of moral or intellectual superiority over others. As Rorty writes, a final vocabulary consists of "words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes."[29] These are the words in which we tell "the story of our lives,"[30] especially those we rely on when justifying our beliefs and actions. For many who use the term, *bobotante* is not just an insult, rather it encapsulates a worldview, one that resists deeper reflection and dismisses alternative explanations for voter behavior. Drawing from my understanding of Rorty's irony and the ironist so far, an ironist would try to step outside of this final vocabulary to redescribe and reframe the *bobotante* conversation in more generous and self-reflective terms. They would recognize the contingency of such a term and seek to redescribe the so-called *bobotante*

26 Ibid., 80.

27 Ibid., 80. Rorty suggests that one way of enlarging our acquaintance is to read books.

28 Ibid., 75.

29 Ibid., 73.

30 Ibid., 73.

in a way that accounts for the social, economic, and political conditions that shape voter decisions. Rather than reinforcing inherited categories of blame, the ironist opens up space for understanding, for asking what other stories might be told, and for seeing how different vocabularies might lead to different, perhaps more inclusive, futures. To do this, it is crucial to first understand what the term *bobotante* refers to.

Meet the *Bobotante*

When citizens elect leaders who are clearly incompetent or unfit for office, the blame is often directed at those who voted them into power. This is where terms like *bobotante* emerge, capturing a widespread frustration with the failures of democratic participation. At the same time, this response reveals an important truth. A functioning democracy depends not only on the freedom to choose but also on the ability to choose wisely.

Bobotante — a term we have probably heard before a lot of times often during election period. The term *bobotante* combines the words *bobo* (stupid) and *botante* (voter).[31] *Bobotante* pertains to "voters judged as voting against their interests by choosing the trapo, opportunist, or corrupt politician,"[32] regardless of affiliations and can be uttered by two opposing voters who think that the other individual is supporting the wrong candidate. While it is not clear when and where the term *bobotante* was first used, there are historical references that reflect the kind of voting behavior often associated with it, such as electing TV personalities, basketball players, and action stars into public office. If we are to take the historization of Tayao, we can trace this attitude back to the 1992 elections, when figures like Tito Sotto, Ramon Revilla Sr., and Freddie Webb, who were all known for their careers in entertainment or sports, won seats in government.[33] By the 1998 elections, this trend continued, with popular personalities such as Renato Cayetano and basketball legend Robert Jaworski garnering significant public support. In the succeeding elections up to the present day, this pattern has become a familiar formula: popularity often outweighs platforms, relevant educational or professional background, and credibility. Given this trend, it becomes understandable how a term like *bobotante* would naturally emerge to express frustration over what some see as a failure of voters to choose "qualified" candidates. Today, the term is often used to describe irrational and

31 Gutierrez, Eric, 2025 "'Bobotante,' 'balimbing': Should campaigners update political dictionary?" *Rappler*, March 7, 2025.

32 Ibid.

33 Tayao, Edmund, 2020, "OPINION: Analyzing Philippine Electoral Behavior," *ABS-CBN*, January 23, 2020.

uneducated voter who encompass even more targeted terms like **Duter**tards (Duterte retards) for Duterte, **Noy**tards (Ninoy retards), **Binay**aran for Binay's allegedly paid supporters, and **Mar**umi (connoting Roxas' dirty politicking).[34] Like these terms, the word *bobotante* carries a negative connotation because it is perceived to embody an irrational voter who elects politicians based on stupid and often invalid reasons. However, the term '*bobotante'* is contentious because of the underlying assumption that the one who utters it knows better about who the *'right'* candidate is, while those being labeled are simply backing the *'wrong'* one. In any case, *bobotante* has been understood as the political and popular culture term for stupid and misguided voters, frequently used to refer to voters who are believed to have chosen candidates based on popularity, family name, or what they receive during campaigns (e.g. money, groceries, or promises) instead of the candidates' competence or character. In online discussions and media today, *bobotante* is often said with frustration or disappointment, especially when unqualified or corrupt candidates win by large margins. We hear people expressing themselves "*Ano ba yan, bobotante talaga mga Pilipino, bumoto na naman ng trapo*," "*Bobotante lang naman bumoto kay Digong*," and the like. Drawing from Rorty's irony, the term *bobotante* should not remain a label of blame or contempt. Rather, it may serve as a prompt for self-reflection and a call to improve the conditions that shape our democratic choices. If we want better leaders, then we might begin by cultivating better voters. Our needed change starts with understanding, not criticism, and with redescription, not the passive acceptance of our current realities.

Beyond *Bobotante*: Filipino Electoral Crisis

By looking at various social and political contexts in the Philippines, we will see that the underlying issue behind the *bobotante* phenomenon is not as simple as we initially thought. The following discussions reveal the sad realities that the Filipino voter faces every election which may have largely shaped most of the *bobotante's* political choices.

One recurring problem we have every election is the rampant and almost normalized vote-buying, vote-elling, flying voters, and related malpractices. Just days before the 2025 local and nation elections, the International Observer Mission (IOM) reported several vote-buying incidents,[35] showing how openly these practices are now carried out, with little regard for legal or ethical standards. If that is not alarming enough, on election day itself, the Philippine

34 Untalan, Carmina Y, 2016, "Philippines 2016: Democracy for the Bobotante," University of Nottingham.

35 Valmonte, Kaycee, 2025, "Vote-buying, violence 'evident' during campaign period – international observers," *Rappler*, May 10, 2025.

National Police (PNP) confirmed at least 28 recorded incidents of vote-buying and vote-selling across the country.[36] Aside from these vote-buying cases, the 2025 elections also faced several cases of flying voters, backing, or *badil*[37]. There is a recent report of at least 80 men being caught and admitting being hired to participate in voting as flying voters in Buluan in exchange for P1500 per person. In the same news, it was reported that some votes are being sold for up to P15,000 especially in provinces like Zamboanga del Sur and del Norte, Surigao del Sur, Samar, and Leyte.[38] It is also said that *badil* in Eastern Visayas ranged from P50 up to P15,000 per voter, depending on the position being sought by a candidate.[39] Some candidates even outdid each other by giving out tempting packages, such as in Lanao del Norte where one candidate dished out P700 in cash and 25 kilos of rice per family while another gave out P1,000 plus 5 kilos of rice per voter."[40] These practices persist largely because of a cultural tendency to remain loyal to those who offer help. The concept of *utang na loob* likely contributes to the effectiveness of vote-buying, making it a reliable strategy for opportunistic politicians.[41] Yet the official figures are likely to represent only a fraction of the real scale, revealing a deeply rooted and systemic issue. Such data highlights a dual failure: one among politicians who exploit vulnerable voters, and another among citizens who, despite knowing the corrupt implications, continue to accept and even expect such exchanges. Thus, the *bobotante* likely must weigh the debt or feeling of gratitude towards the candidate who has given them bare minimum help like packed goods or a little money. In the overall electoral vote-buying scene, cash offers are said to range "from P500 to as high as P16,000 per vote" according to the recorded incidents in this year's elections.[42]

The *bobotante* also face issues regarding their safety during elections where in some areas, voters are pressured, dictated, and threatened to give their precious votes to the intimidating political groups. In the 2025 elections

36 Sarao, Zacarian, 2025, "PNP records 28 vote-buying incidents on Election Day," *Inquirer.net,* May 12, 2025.

37 *Badil* is a local term referring to the distribution of money or goods in exchange for votes, a practice commonly associated with vote-buying during elections.

38 Fernandez, Edwin, Joey Gabieta, and Leah Agonoy, 2025, "Philippine Elections Votes sold for up to P15,000; 'flying voters' taint midterm polls," *Inquirer.net,* May 13, 2025.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 De Joya, Isidora, Charmagne Inao, Christian Olegario, and Jose Miguel Villegas, 2024, "The Ethical Perception on Utang na Loob as Basis of Voter's Choice," *Emerging Trends in Social Science* 6:92-109.

42 Center for People Empowerment in Governance (CenPEG), 2025, A Deepening Crisis in Electoral Democracy: CenPEG 2025 Election Analysis, June 2025, 12.

alone, IOM documented 577 cases of red-tagging and 48 incidents involving threats, harassment, and voter intimidation.[43] It is even possible that even with 218 reported red-tagging cases, the actual number could be as high as 1,445 incidents as pointed out by the local civil society groups.[44] These incidents, along with several deaths and injuries, instilled fear that discouraged many from voting. For instance, the Climate Conflict Action Asia, as reported by the news outlet *Rappler*, documented "219 election-related deaths since October 2024, surpassing the 2023 barangay and SK poll fatality count of 165, with most cases involving gun violence."[45] Among the most severe cases of widespread election-related violence was a 90-minute gun battle between a private armed group and the group of Morsid Mamalinta in Maguindanao del Sur, resulting in one death and three injuries just days before election day.[46] It has also been reported that at least three people were killed and several others were involved in violence and intimidation-related incidents in Lanao del Sur and Marawi City.[47] In Silay City, Negros Occidental, two people were killed and seven others were wounded in a shooting incident on election day.[48] A similar shooting incident in Abra went viral online after two individuals were injured near a polling site.[49]

Moreover, the *bobotante* often finds himself in a position where he lacks sufficient knowledge about the candidates' qualifications or platforms. However, he is familiar with certain names like those of celebrities he has seen on television, in movies, or on sports channels. As a result, he is confronted with the tendency to choose the familiar face over the more competent but less recognizable candidate. This dynamic highlights not just a matter of individual choice, but also a deeper issue of access to information, media influence, and the emotional pull of familiarity in shaping political decisions. We can see this in the 2022 senatorial race where out of the 12 elected senators, at least nine belonged to established political families, many with celebrity backgrounds or

43 Valmonte, Kaycee, 2025, "Vote-buying, violence 'evident' during campaign period – international observers," *Rappler*.

44 Center for People Empowerment in Governance (CenPEG), 2025, A Deepening Crisis in Electoral Democracy: CenPEG 2025 Election Analysis, June 2025, 11.

45 Gomez, Herbie, and Ferdinand Cabrera, 2025, "Pre-election tension turns bloody in Maguindanao del Sur: 1 dead, 3 hurt," *Rappler*, May 10, 2025.

46 Ibid.

47 Malawini, Abdul Hafiz Tacoranga., 2025, "3 dead as violence mars election day in Marawi, Lanao del Sur," *Rappler*.

48 Subaldo, Romeo, and Barbara Mijares, 2025, "2 dead, 7 wounded in Silay City shooting on election day," *ABS-CBN*.

49 Abanto, Rowegie, and Terry Aquino, 2025, "2 injured after gunshots heard near polling center in Abra town: police," *ABS-CBN*, May 12, 2025.

dynastic ties.[50] Whereas, more recently, in the 2025 senatorial election results, 6 celebrities and personalities are included in the 'Magic 12.'[51] This reflects a public preference shaped more by name recognition and media exposure than by critical assessment of qualifications. The success of these candidates points not simply to media manipulation or elite orchestration, but to a wider failure among voters to engage in evaluative thinking about leadership. This gap between appearance and ability becomes painfully clear once such candidates are elected. They often lack the skills, knowledge, or training to carry out the responsibilities of public office. The late Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago once criticized this pattern, observing that actors who play the role of "champion of the poor" on screen are often elected into office, only to perform like "talking dummies" that rely on their legislative staff "to feed them with the proper things to say during the sessions of Congress."[52] Her warning highlights the consequences of superficial voting: candidates are elevated based on image, not substance, and their performance in office reflects that. The election of individuals based on surnames and celebrity status ultimately reveals that our electoral process is not taken seriously enough by candidates or voters. It demonstrates how the lack of political literacy and critical education leads to a culture where popularity eclipses qualifications. In this light, the widespread election of unqualified officials is not simply a failure of politics, but a reflection of a deeper educational and epistemic crisis. We are often blinded by the flowery words of politicians as they use attractive and hopeful phrases during elections like "Iboto para sa tunay na pagbabago," "Bagong Pilipinas," etc. and yet after being elected they can only show how incompetent and corrupt they truly are.

Another looming problem that influences a *bobotante* is the moral dilemma between choosing the ideal politician through rational means or

50 In the 2022 Philippine senatorial elections, 9 out of 12 winners—Villar, Cayetano, Zubiri, Gatchalian, Escudero, Villanueva, Ejercito, Estrada, and Tulfo—belonged to prominent political dynasties. Additionally, Padilla, Tulfo, Legarda, and Escudero had celebrity backgrounds or ties, reflecting the persistent influence of name recall and media visibility in electoral success.

51 Severo, Jan M. 2025, "How celebrities fared in the 2025 Senate elections," *Philstar.com*, May 13, 2025, Examples of celebrities and personalities who have transitioned into political roles include former TV host Bam Aquino, athlete and TV host Pia Cayetano, news anchor and broadcaster Erwin Tulfo, actor and public figure Kiko Pangilinan (husband of Sharon Cuneta), *Eat Bulaga* host Tito Sotto, and action star Lito Lapid. Several of these figures—Aquino, Cayetano, Sotto, Tulfo, Rodante Marcoleta, Camille Villar, and Imee Marcos—also belong to well-established political families, many of which are part of the country's most influential political dynasties. Meanwhile, Bong Go and Bato Dela Rosa, who have since proven their incompetence, have garnered support primarily due to the familiarity of their names, having played central roles in the Duterte administration and its controversial *War on Drugs.*

52 Yamsuan, Cathy, 2012, "Santiago: Most voters, leaders not educated," *Philippine Daily Inquirer,* November 24, 2012.

choosing the candidates chosen by their religious church—bloc voting. Bloc voting is commonly understood in two ways "(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."[53] In the Philippines, we are more familiar with religious bloc voting of the latter kind, most notably from the Iglesia ni Cristo (INC) group. In practice, such bloc voting has become a political tool wielded for material advantage rather than spiritual discernment. Even worse, the endorsement is imposed instead of recommended[54] as it is believed that the candidates chosen by their leader were chosen through wise, just, and spiritual judgment. However, it has been obvious now that some, if not all, endorsements are made in exchange for favorable treatment or political protection, reducing voters to extensions of institutional allegiance rather than autonomous agents. It is apparent, even if we can only make close assumptions rather than factual evidence of their deals, mostly because the candidates being endorsed are the ones with allegations of corruption, unfair elections, and criminal charges. For instance, in this year's election, INC endorses candidates, most of which have no legitimate and trusted credentials and even worse candidates with questionable history in politics.[55] The same is true for some other religious institutions, such as JMCIM (Jesus Miracle Crusade International Ministry) which has been my family's church and was visited in 2016 by (now president) Bongbong Marcos to campaign for the 2016 presidential elections.[56] At that moment, it became clear to me that some institutions make material deals in exchange for votes, and are not at all guided through some spiritual cause.

53 Reyes, Allan, 2016, "Probing the Iglesia Vote: Religious Endorsement and Iglesia Support in the 2004 and 2010 Senatorial Elections," edited by Rogelio Panao, *Philippine Social Sciences Review 68 (2),* 28.

54 Ibid., 24.

55 Lalu, Gabriel, 2025, "Iglesia ni Cristo endorses 8 Senate bets," *Inquirer.net,* May 9, 2025. Some questionable senatorial candidates this year who are being endorsed by the INC church are Senator Ronald dela Rosa (PDP) —a key person in the War on Drugs which is marked by numerous human rights violations through its extrajudicial killings, Senator Bong Go (PDP) —who faced allegations of plunder and corruption, Sagip party-list Rep. Rodante Marcoleta (independent/ PDP) —a key person in the denial of ABS-CBN's franchise renewal as an act of suppressing press freedom, Senator Imee Marcos (Nacionalista Party) —who has been investigated for the misuse of PHP66.45 million in tobacco excise tax funds during her tenure as Ilocos Norte governor, and Senator Camille Villar (Nacionalista Party/ Alyansa) —whose family is known for perpetuating a corrupt political dynasty for their abuse of power, greedily taking the land of the farmers.

56 Mindanao Examiner, 2016, "Jesus Miracle Crusade shines at 41," Press Reader. I was actually there when this happened. It was perhaps the main trigger that led me to stop going to church and, for a time, to become skeptical of all religious institutions. It may also have been the unexpected endorsement of a church, that is not even widely known to the public, that made me rethink what might be happening in other churches as well, especially since bloc voting is often solely attributed to the Iglesia ni Cristo (INC).

This realization came at that time when everyone was aware of the accusations regarding Marcos' illegal drug use (a vice heavily criticized by the church) not to mention he was also in a hot seat for the crimes committed by his father during Martial Law—confirming that political endorsements from the church were not based on divine, moral, or even logical reasons. The point is, relying on religious institutions where the followers follow and believe everything that is being fed and demanded by them is not new to us, and is continuously being taken advantage of by politicians to secure votes. Hence, we can see that bloc voting being perceived and justified as a moral obligation by uncritical followers of the church (who are also voters) further complicates the questionable electoral scene. Clearly, the practice of bloc voting can lead the *bobotante* to become uncritical and passive, as the fear of going against their church's endorsement outweighs their own moral conviction. The dominance of bloc voting reveals how collective belief can easily replace genuine understanding, prompting many to support what is politically expedient rather than morally sound. In turn, this contributes to the production of religious masses of *bobotante*.

With these recurring cases of alarming electoral events, we must consistently emphasize the urgent need for "comprehensive electoral reform, stronger accountability mechanisms, and a political culture that values participation over patronage, dissent over suppression, and transparency over transactionalism."[57] It is not enough that we are able to identify the problem we need to face or that we are equipped in exposing the roots of our corrupted electoral practices; attention must also be given to how these conditions are reproduced, normalized, and sustained within existing political, institutional, and social structures.

Reframing the *Bobotante*

Despite the common perception towards the *bobotante*, there is another strand of commentary that challenges the idea that *bobotante* voters are simply irrational. From this angle, what looks like a poor electoral choice to one observer might still be perfectly rational from the voter's own standpoint, an insight that gestures toward moral and political subjectivism.[58] One journal article traced the term's social meaning and found that "*bobotante*" is typically deployed by supporters of liberal politicians in order to label voters who back more populist, often conservative, or "illiberal" figures, thereby smuggling

57 Center for People Empowerment in Governance (CenPEG), 2025, A Deepening Crisis in Electoral Democracy: CenPEG 2025 Election Analysis, June 2025, 12.

58 Gutierrez, Eric, 2025 "'Bobotante,' 'balimbing': Should campaigners update political dictionary?" *Rappler.*

liberal norms of rationality into the insult.[59] Another study rejected the equation of *bobotante* with sheer "dumbness." Instead, it argued that "the demonstrated irrationality does not lie in the voters' lack of intellect or cognitive capacity, but in the predicament that Filipinos are underdeveloped simply because, like the candidates, the voters become passive of long-term development and in turn politically participate under the thought of damage control."[60] In this view, what appears to be irrational voting behavior is often a survival strategy shaped by systemic constraints. The study concluded that voters "are curtailed by the freedom and autonomy of thought because the circumstances do not permit them to choose wisely the candidates."[61] These findings make it clear that branding someone a *bobotante* oversimplifies a web of economic conditions, lack of quality education, and a political culture structured around short-term, often patronage-based decisions. Understanding those conditions, rather than dismissing voters as foolish, is precisely the sort of work an ironist undertakes. Refusing to accept the inherited vocabulary at face value, the ironist seeks fresh redescriptions that show how power, history, and circumstance shape electoral behavior. In other words, the ironist looks *through their own terms* at terms like *bobotante*, thus revealing complexities that tend to be overlooked by overreliance to commonsense.

While the term *bobotante* generally points out poor and irrational choices, it often overlooks the deeper reasons behind them. While it is easier to simply accept the term *bobotante* at face value, the ironist refuses to take that easy path and instead explores the various perspectives surrounding it. The ironist recognizes the electoral crises discussed above and acknowledges that many voters live in poverty (often under circumstances that make pursuing education seem out of reach) which, in turn, makes them prime targets for misinformation. As a result, voting for a well-known name or someone who offers help during the campaign may feel like the only option, especially when the campaigns of competent candidates fail to reach them. The ironist recognizes that some voters do not even have access to critical information about the credentials and platforms of candidates. This leaves them with no choice but to either guess their votes, choose familiar names, vote for those who gave them "gifts" (which some may not even realize constitutes vote-buying), act out of a sense of debt or gratitude, or simply not vote at all. For the ironist, watching someone casually use the term

59 Barte, Kyle, 2023, "Liberalism's Other: Analyzing the Emergence of the Bobotante Signifier in the Philippines using Chantal Mouffe's Critique of Liberal Political Theory," *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy 9*, 179.

60 Carreon, Rodrigo, Queen Loyola, and Franz Abelgas, 2022, "Debunking the term "Bobotante": The Eichmann Problem and the recurring voters' behavior in the Philippines," *Antorcha 9, no. 2* (July), 49.

61 Ibid., 49.

bobotante as an insult can be deeply frustrating because they have deliberately distanced themselves from such fixed, commonly accepted descriptions and definitions. The ironist might even think it is more foolish to ignore how hard it is for many people to make fully informed choices in a system that rarely supports them. As Rorty writes, the ironists' realization that "anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed, and their renunciation of the attempt to formulate criteria of choice between final vocabularies, puts them in the…meta-stable [position]."[62] In the context of the *bobotante* phenomenon, the ironist finds a way to reframe the *bobotante* not simply as autonomously misguided and irrational, but as victims of social, institutional, and political structures. In this redescription, the *bobotante* is treated not as the culprit, the offender, or the party responsible for the flawed political scene, but as the victim, the sufferer, the wronged party who needs understanding and support. This shift moves us away from a culture of blame and toward a culture of solution, transformation, and sociopolitical change. Since the ironist understands that "the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change,"[63] and that they are "always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves,"[64] it is fair to say that they are precisely what we need to change for the better, especially with regard to how we, as a society, should perceive the *bobotante*. If we are to truly act on this realization, we too can cultivate the ironist's mentality and stance when it comes to the vocabulary we use, not only for our own betterment, but for the betterment of society. This possibility is precisely one of the ways that irony can bring us closer to others. Instead of fueling unnecessary and harmful divisions—often pitting two innocent sufferers against each other—the ironist envisions a society that is focused on addressing the root causes of its problems and creating a shared, collective goal. This, I believe, is how irony can lead to solidarity. It pulls people away from staying within their "neighborhoods" unquestioningly and uncritically, and instead leads them to consider other people's interests, perspectives, and distinct backgrounds in their own sense-making of the world. More importantly, it connects us more deeply with our own histories and brings us to understand that mentalities like the bobotante did not emerge in a vacuum, but were rather shaped by layers of social, economic, political, and historical conditions, all too often manipulated by greedy politicians and oppressive systems.

62 Rorty, Richard, 1989, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 73.

63 Ibid., 74.

64 Ibid., 74.

Irony towards Solidarity

The ironist shares the commitment of looking at things with fresh eyes, the same way a defamiliarist[65] does, detaching from familiar assumptions to imagine a better world for herself and her society. In Skhlovsky's words, "*Ostranenie* [defamiliarization] is seeing the world with different eyes…*Ostranenie* is not only a new way of seeing; it is also the dream of a new world, sunny only because it is new."[66] This imagination as well as a distancing effect it possesses is consistent so far with Rorty's irony and its redescription. In line with Rorty's observation that an ironist hopes "by the time she has finished using old words in new senses, not to mention introducing brand-new words, people will no longer ask questions phrased in the old words,"[67] I, too, hold onto the hope that we Filipinos can finally begin to redirect our anger, criticism, and voices toward the real roots of our political problems rather than turning against one another simply because of differing electoral choices or preferred politicians. The irony lies in recognizing that, as Filipino citizens, we are not enemies of each other, but that the real hindrances to sociopolitical and economic transformation lie in dominant institutions, the prevailing status quo, and the entrenched power of the 1%. Solidarity, though difficult to achieve, especially given our differences, perspectives, and subjective preferences, is not impossible. As mentioned in the introductory part of Rorty's work, "Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people."[68]We ought to strive for solidarity precisely because we know what it feels like to be victims of our circumstances. This shared vulnerability makes it possible to resonate with others who suffer similarly, and to extend our sensitivity even to those whose lives differ from our own. Returning to the main thread of the *bobotante* phenomenon, solidarity becomes possible when we begin to shed our prejudices and judgments toward those labeled as *bobotante* and more importantly, when we begin to stand with them rather than against them. As Rorty puts it, "human solidarity would be seen not as a fact to be recognized by clearing away "prejudice" or burrowing

65 What I call the "defamiliarist" here refers to someone who engages in the act of defamiliarization: distancing herself from habitual ways of seeing the world in order to perceive it anew. This echoes the ironist's desire to resist becoming too at ease with the commonsense—the familiar—and instead to re-describe the world from fresh perspectives. While the ironist seeks new vocabularies, the defamiliarist makes the familiar strange to disrupt passive recognition. My reference to defamiliarization is a quiet homage to my undergraduate thesis on the same theme.

66 Shklovsky, Viktor, 2017, *Victor Shklovsky: A Reader,* edited and translated by Alexandra Berlina, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., 334.

67 Rorty, Richard, 1989, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 78.

68 Ibid., xvi.

down to previously hidden depths but, rather, as a goal to be achieved."[69] To reach this goal, it is crucial to cultivate an imagination that allows us to venture beyond the borders of our own "neighborhood"—an imagination that breaks down the limitations that prevent us from rediscovering ourselves, others, and the world. As Rorty also says, solidarity is to be achieved "not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers."[70] This point is especially relevant here, because the ironist's reframing of the *bobotante*—after considering the many complex factors behind their voting decisions—leads naturally to solidarity. The ironist recognizes that those who are publicly condemned as "irrational" are, in fact, fellow sufferers of the same oppressive systems. So, since the ironist redescribes the *bobotante* in the name of imagination rather than reason,[71] she can freely scintillate the kind of solidarity we need to achieve genuine democracy. To be clear, however, this is not to suggest that the ironist guarantees that redescription alone can make us free.[72] As Rorty cautions, "She has to say that our chances of freedom depend on historical contingencies which are only occasionally influenced by our self-redescriptions."[73] To think otherwise would risk falling into the same metaphysical trap—the belief that redescription itself grants power and freedom. For Rorty, the ironist's sense of human solidarity is based on "a sense of a common danger, not on a common possession or a shared power."[74]

As one editorial column states "You know a democracy is in trouble when foolish ("*bobo*") victim-blaming supplants civic duty and cross-class solidarity."[75] This insight underscores how the myth of the *bobotante* unfairly shifts blame onto the masses for the country's political troubles, rather than prompting us to focus on how to truly address our socio-political problems. Upon realizing this, the ironist understands the power of redescription—how reframing the *bobotante* not only dismantles a culture of victim-blaming but also fosters the kind of solidarity necessary for genuine democratic progress. However, this solidarity cannot be achieved through the efforts of one, two, or a few ironists alone; it might emerge from a collective mindset that embraces the same commitment to openness and imagination. This makes the issue profoundly social. Democracy cannot rely on the labor of isolated ironists

69 Ibid., xvi.

70 Ibid., xvi.

71 Ibid., 90.

72 Ibid., 90.

73 Ibid., 90.

74 Ibid., 91.

75 Heydarian, Richard, 2021, "The foolish myth of 'bobotante' voters," *Inquirer Opinion*, August 10, 2021.

because it may tap people to constantly influence one another toward change. To make this possible, we can instead look at the overlap in our final vocabularies so that "everybody has some words with which to express the desirability of entering into other people's fantasies as well as into one's own."[76] Differences do not necessarily prevent solidarity, in fact, it can even enrich it because no single vocabulary is privileged above the rest. This view challenges the kind of political elitism that occurs when some people, convinced that they are 'right' in their electoral choices, believe that only the critical and educated deserve to vote—thereby undermining the democratic rights of those who are uneducated or uncritical. As former Vice President Leni Robredo aptly said, "Even if we don't share, you know, many values. Even if we don't agree on many important issues, I still think that it will be to the best interest of the country if we can work together."[77]

While I argue for the importance of cultivating what I call an "ironist attitude" at a collective level, I also acknowledge the concern that such a proposal risk transforming irony into the very kind of final vocabulary it seeks to dismantle. One might worry that to speak of adopting an ironist attitude renders irony a public moral obligation or a 'prescriptive ethos' that Rorty explicitly rejects. This concern is valid, particularly since the latter part of the paper emphasizes irony's public implications rather than its strictly private character. However, this paper does not claim that irony should function as a new civic doctrine or a vocabulary that dictates who we are or what we must do. Rather, the appeal to an ironist attitude is intended as an invitation to a sensibility. This sensibility is one that loosens or is critical of the grip of contemptuous and exclusionary descriptions such as *bobotante*. In this sense, irony operates not as a rule to be followed but as a disposition that enables redescription, beginning with how individuals critically reimagine familiar political vocabularies and extending outward into social life. And so, to speak of a "collective mindset," then, is not to mandate irony as a shared creed, but to note that solidaristic practices become more conceivable in a society with overlapping habits of humility, doubt, and imaginative redescription. Such overlap does not require philosophical agreement or compulsory self-understanding; it emerges contingently through shared encounters, narratives, and sensitivities. Irony, on this account, remains revisable, non-compulsory, historically situated and is responsive to the specific needs and demands of a given society rather than fixed in form or content. In short, the ironist attitude defended here is not a final vocabulary but a reflexive sensibility: one that resists closure, remains open to revision, and gains its

76 Rorty, Richard, 1989, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 91-92.

77 Flores, Helen, 2018, "Leni Robredo: 'I'm the most vilified gov't official," *The Philippine Star*, October 19, 2018.

relevance not from universal obligation but from its capacity to foster solidaristic imagination in practice. This way, we can collectively benefit even from our own personal initiative of redescription.

Redescription, in this light, becomes a moral task. By redescribing the *bobotante* not as irrational, but as victims of systemic neglect and disinformation, the ironist redirects attention from blame to empathy and understanding, and ultimately to pragmatic solution. In doing so, they embody what Rorty called the nonlinguistic ability to 'feel pain' which is more important than the "differences in vocabulary,"[78] grounding solidarity not in agreement, but in shared vulnerability. In a democratic country like the Philippines, we may learn to see ourselves not as mere spectators, judges, or indifferent bystanders, but as active participants in the democratic process. We can then strive to build a democracy in which rights, autonomy, and freedom are exercised critically and conscientiously. As Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa powerfully stated, "The only government that exists without trust is a dictatorship… But beyond that, we don't have a shared reality. Democracy happens in a shared reality."[79] Without the virtues of critical thinking, moral courage, and civic responsibility, democracy and solidarity cannot thrive. Reclaiming democratic integrity, then, requires not only institutional reform, but a broader cultural transformation that is grounded in education, ethical self-awareness, and a refusal to let the country fall into the grip of authoritarian rule.

CONCLUSION

While democratic participation is often reduced to the simple act of voting, the Philippine electoral reality reveals deeper structural and cultural conditions that complicate this ideal. The behavior often associated with the *bobotante*—the so-called "foolish voter"—cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the persistent economic struggles, entrenched social obligations, and lack of access to critical education that shape it. It is true that such behavior may at times undermine the principles of informed, rational democratic engagement. Practices such as vote-buying, election-related coercion, political branding through celebrity or dynastic lineage, bloc voting, and political opportunism expose a political culture driven less by thoughtful deliberation and more by necessity, loyalty, and survival. But this does not justify carelessly labeling someone as *bobotante* without examining the broader forces at play—forces that have repeatedly resulted in questionable leaders rising to

78 Rorty, Richard, 1989, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 88.

79 Loss, Hannah, 2025, "Maria Ressa says Americans must 'hold the line' against autocracy," *WGBH*.

power. This is where Rorty's notion of the ironist becomes useful. The ironist is someone who holds a deep, ongoing doubt about the final vocabulary they use to make sense of the world. Applying this to the *bobotante* phenomenon opens the door for rethinking the label itself, seeing it not as a fixed insult but as a word that deserves critique and redefinition. It is not enough to treat bobotante as if it captures a permanent truth about a kind of voter. Irony, in Rorty's sense, asks us to examine the terms we use and to realize that such judgments are always shaped by our own positions, our privileges, and our limited perspectives. This realization does not lead to moral relativism or indifference. On the contrary, it leads to solidarity. Through imagination and sensitivity, we begin to see that maybe we have been directing our frustration at the wrong people, while the real sources of our collective suffering such as the institutions and systems that keep us uncritical and unequal, go unchallenged. To see the *bobotante* not as inherently foolish, but as someone shaped by exclusion, disinformation, survival-based choices, and even religious beliefs is to practice the kind of ironic stance Rorty advocates. It is not about excusing electoral outcomes, but about understanding the context in which those outcomes are made.

Redescription, then, becomes an act of solidarity. It allows us to approach others' political decisions not with contempt, but with curiosity, compassion, and a willingness to imagine what it's like to live under unfavorable conditions, often experienced by the marginalized people of our society. This kind of solidarity does not come from agreement on universal principles, nor from reliant on universal truth, but instead, it comes from recognizing shared vulnerability, from imagining others as fellow sufferers, and from having the humility to revise not just how we see them, but how we see ourselves. Only when we collectively develop an ironist stance toward familiar terms like *bobotante*—deeply embedded in our sociopolitical discourse—can we begin to build a more inclusive and empathetic democracy, one that looks beyond blame and moves toward the genuine change or "*tunay na pagbabago"* which is, *ironically*, so often promised in campaigns but never really actualized.

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