

# Metro de Quito: Better or Bitter?

## Analysis of “Getting Around Quito”

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### ABSTRACT

The case study illustrates not only the policy dilemma faced by Barrera (mayor of Quito) but also expounds on his decisions favoring Metro over Rapid Train Light Rail System (TRAQ) and the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRT). While Barrera considers TRAQ and BRT as temporary patches to the permanent problem of Quito public transit, in order to understand and justify the mayor’s decision, the “Metro de Quito: Better or Bitter?” analysis employs the concepts of Public Administration (including efficiency and public-service efficiency and the new public management, rational choice and public choice, public authority and bureaucracy, blame-avoidance and conflict of interest etc.) Making ‘quality transit’ as a campaign promise and then living up to the promise; this reflects the way Barrera enshrines the public amid other stakeholders such as council members, the city officials and investors. Finally, now that metro is actually in the second phase of construction, the analysis suggests mitigation planning, financing schemes, historic heritage protection, transparency unit and building of in-house capacity to ensure long-term maintenance of the huge infrastructure. Importantly, to make Metro de Quito “better”, the way to go is to forget the “bitter” past.

### KEYWORDS:

*Metro, TRAQ, BRT, efficiency, rational choice, public choice, blame avoidance, biases, conflict of interest, public authority, public administration, Barrera.*

### RESUMEN

El estudio de este caso ilustra no solo el dilema al que, con respecto a su política, tenía que hacer frente Barrera, el alcalde de Quito; también expone el por qué de sus decisiones que favorecían el metro, en preferencia al sistema del Tren Rápido de Rieles Livianas (denominado TRAQ por las iniciales de su nombre en inglés) y en preferencia también al Tránsito Rápido en Bus (BRT por las iniciales del inglés) porque estos serían remiendos provisionales para el problema permanente del tránsito público en Quito. A fin de entender y justificar la decisión del alcalde, el análisis titulado Metro de Quito ¿es mejora o amargura? examina los conceptos de Administración Pública, que incluyen eficiencia del servicio público y la nueva gestión pública, elección racional y elección pública y burocracia, evitar la culpabilidad, efectuar un tránsito de calidad, como promesa de campaña y luego cumplir la promesa. Esto refleja la forma en que Barrera respeta al público y a otras partes interesadas, tales como los miembros del concejo, los funcionarios municipales y los inversionistas. Por último, el nuevo metro está actualmente en la segunda fase de la construcción; el análisis sugiere la planificación, esquemas de financiamiento, protección de la herencia histórica, transparencia, fomento de la capacidad, dentro del propio municipio para asegurar el mantenimiento a largo plazo de la enorme infraestructura. Para que el metro de Quito sea el mejor camino, se debe olvidar la parte amarga del pasado.

### PALABRAS CLAVE:

*Metro, tren rápido, tránsito rápido, eficiencia, elección racional, elección pública.*

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### Introduction

From energy management, education policy, and rural development to urban planning, disaster management and transport issues-public administration in theory and practice has a say and a sway. Particularly, when it comes to urban planning and transport policy in a developing world, public administrators and city planners are more concerned. The undeniable fact is that effective public transit is vital to development and a requisite to equality and equity.

The case at hand is about Quito, the capital of Ecuador, where public transport is the common means to commute to offices, schools, colleges and public offices. However, public transit in Quito offered very little assistance to the mobility needs of the citizens. Bus service was also often unreliable, troublesome and risky. Motorization owing to a general surge in population in the metropolitan Quito led to an even higher congestion of the already congested streets, a greater atmosphere pollution and a higher death rate due to accidents. Thus, high demand of transport infrastructure, promising a short and speedy commute and a cost-effective quality service, was inevitable. Barrera, the then candidate for mayoral elections in 2009, felt this earnest need, and hence he pitched it in his campaign promise. This made him consider all the stakeholders including council members, the city officials, investors and most importantly the public.

Interestingly, in the realm of policymaking, case studies present intricate situations, involving a battle between equally important policy choices. In such situations, policymakers and stakeholders are supposed to prefer a choice which might be promising, convincing and definitely maximizes societal welfare. Whereas, in the domain of administrative theory, a case study typically delivers a stirring, real-world example of an administrative attitude to a dilemma which helps validate or forge a theory. The case study, "Getting around Quito", provided by the Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington, serves dual objectives; first, it raises a policy dilemma faced by a policymaker (mayor) and, second, it illuminates on the situation and the mayor's decision as an organizational approach in the field of Public Administration.

#### *The Situation*

In the case "Getting around Quito", the city mayor seemed determined to live up to his 2009 electoral campaign promise. The promise was to bring a sustainable solution to transport issues of Quito in the form of Metro. Main actors involved there were the opposition including the previous mayors, the city transport expert Cesar Arias, the Spanish firm-Metro de Madrid, different international lenders (like The World Bank, The Development Bank of Latin America etc.), the public, and most specifically constituents. Prior to moving ahead, it would be wise to portray the city of Quito and its historical significance in brief.

Quito is one of the highest historical cities in the world, located just south of the equatorial line in a narrow valley, 2,850 meters above sea level. Cushioned in a river basin and near a volcano, the mountainous landscape makes Quito an incredibly beautiful city; however, it constrains the city to

grow just in a linear fashion approximately 30 miles in length and 3 to 5 miles in width (Garza, Ginsberg & Majdov, 2013). The case study shows some of the figures about Quito and Ecuador which if summarized would help understand the scenario henceforth.

**Table # 1**  
**Features of Quito, Ecuador**

Parameters of Quito/Ecuador	Status
Population of Quito (as of 2013)	2.24 million
Percent of total Ecuador's Population	14.5 %
Population in 1950 = x	Population in 2001 = 7x (7 times larger)
Annual GDP per capita growth of Ecuador	4.5 %
Trend towards urbanization in Ecuador	2 % per year
Pop. of Ecuador in Urban areas (as of 2010)	67 %
Percentage of Ecuador's industries in Quito	30 % to 40 %
Nationwide employment b/c of work in Quito	30 %

Source: "Getting around Quito", the Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington

Table 1 shows that Quito is experiencing economic growth, which not surprisingly has led to a growth in its population in addition to middle class expansion and a general surge in urbanization—all these have implications for the capital city. This should make Barrera concerned to develop a transport infrastructure that appeals to all. Moreover, better access to public services was a growing worry for the rising middle class. As per the 2010 census the percentages of people in Quito having access to public services are very encouraging: access to water 96 %,

access to electricity 99.5 %, access to sewage 90.9 % and garbage collection 98 % (Garza et al., 2013).

Besides, the increase in wealth led many families to invest in automobiles. In 2012, Quito had 420,000 vehicles, showing an increase of 7.44% between 2008 and 2012. By 2020, it is estimated that the number of vehicles in Quito will be close to 1.3 million ("El Metro," 2012). Overall, this mounting "motorization" because of growing incomes coupled with rising middle class, increasing



urbanization and high accessibility towards public services made demand genuine for an equitable and a sustainable access to transportation for the general public.

Then here came mayor Augusto Barrera, with his vision to re-build Quito and improve its livability as per his words (during local governments meeting at UN, 2013) "build cities for people, not just for cars." Within this vision, he had a mission to improve transportation system, originating the Quito Metro initiative ever since his 2009 election. The mayor believed that investment in infrastructure as closely linked to the successful economic and social development of the city, while a metro specifically would serve to show Quito's emergence as a sophisticated, modern city. A Metro will encourage public transport ridership from members of the growing middle class, circumventing a further surge in private car ownership. Feasibility studies conducted by a private Spanish firm had given a green light that the proposed metro will increase the efficiency of the flow of people through the city. Since Barrera had secured international financing from multi-lateral agencies for the metro project, the good thing was that this project would not have been discontinued even with the end of Barrera's term. The construction began in fall of 2013, just before Quito's mayoral elections in February 2014.

But what were the other alternatives to Metro in Quito? Other alternatives mentioned in the case study included Rapid Train Light Rail System (TRAQ) in the city and the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRT). Barrera was against those options on the ground of Quito's limited width and limited capacity of existing options. He abandoned the project to develop TRAQ initiated by his predecessor. For him TRAQ and BRT were temporary patches to a permanent problem. Fascinatingly, metro for him was not only the epitome of growth and opportunities but it would also ensure equal access

for the most vulnerable including women, youth and the poor who couldn't afford the luxury of a private car. Unlike the mayor, because of cost concerns, transportation expert Cesar Arias and previous mayors from opposition parties favored an improved BRT system. For them the money spent on metro could have been spent on other public services like education, water and housing.

Following paragraphs I will briefly outline the policy options and the decision made, before a neutral assessment of the claims of all stakeholders in the light of theories of public administration. Finally, I will conclude the analysis following suggestions, which would not have only ameliorated the circumstances back but would keep the situation fine in future too.

### **Policy Options**

Here are two policy options either to invest in metro or invest in the already existing options like BRT and TRAQ. Previous mayors suggest that metro is too expensive. As compared to BRT which is estimated to cost \$ 276 million for a 23 km track, metro would cost \$ 1.7 billion for the same track (World Bank, 2013). According to the World Bank Executive Summary of Environmental Impact of first metro line, the projected demand for mobility in the city of Quito for the year 2030 is 48.000 passengers per hour while the demand for mobility for the year 2010 was 28.000 passengers per hour (World Bank, 2013). With no exclusive lanes, the existing BRT is subject to traffic jams, lowered speed of operations and increasing delays. It has reached its maximum capacity which means further spending would just raise the marginal cost without raising the marginal benefits. The research conducted by a Quito public transport agency concludes that BRT system alone can no longer be a viable solution in Quito. Similarly Light Rail Transit (LRT) which costs more than BRT, but less than a metro line would not be a viable option for

meeting the projected demand of 48.000 passengers per hour (El Metro, 2012).

### *Decision*

Following the research on Environment and Social Aspects of the metro line and feasibility study by the Spanish firm, Barrera decided to build the metro line. The obvious reasons for choosing metro over other options are its increased capacity and high speed which in turn would lead to a higher productivity.

### **Analysis on the Basis of Public Administration Theories**

Stakeholders considered relevant public administration theories which will now be analyzed.

#### *Efficiency and the New Public Management*

Opposition parties invoke the concept of "efficiency". For them efficiency carries economic undertones and is "cost-consciousness", "cost-cutting", getting output using less and less input. The New Public Management (NPM) paradigm which came at the outset of the 1970 financial crises suggests for the government to "work better and costs less" (Denhardt, 2011). "Efficiency" is one of the central themes in NPM. According to Dunsire and Hood (1989) in fact efficiency is one of the megatrends in the rise of NPM and it means "an attempt to slow down or reverse government growth in terms of overt public spending and staffing" (as quoted in Hood, 1991, p.3). For the opposition parties at that time, spending on metro is extravagance as it maximizes costs and minimizes profits. However, is a public official only concerned about cost-cutting? Barrera promised to build metro and he came to power on this promise. He has a mandate on the basis of which he would decide. It could be said that Barrera is also invoking "efficiency" but in a different sense discussed under the next sub-heading.

#### *Efficiency and the New Public Service*

Barrera invokes "efficiency" in the

framework of the New Public Service (NPS). "NPS advances dignity and worth of public service by reasserting the value of democracy" (Denhardt, 2007). For Denhardt, NPS would define efficiency as "the instances in which public interest is upheld". Hence, Barrera would say that by constructing metro he serves the "public interest" and thus equally efficient. Had he not done this, he would have violated the sanctity of his mandate. However, through the logic of NPS, Barrera as a public official would neither be the sole arbiter of public interest nor would he simply engage in cost-benefit analysis. Rather, he would be expected to act as a key actor within a larger system of governance including residents of Quito, elected representatives in his municipality and other institutions.

#### *"Upright (Public) Politician" with "Essential Public Managers"*

Barrera sounds to be an "upright (public) politician". The argument, that the coming election in 2014, made him plead vehemently towards metro, did not carry much weight<sup>1</sup>. While politicians do engage in short term projects to capitalize on the pleasures of constituents, metro project is a long term solution for a permanent problem. With rear view thinking, it is also obvious to see that metro was his campaign promise since 2009 election and he continued working for it throughout his tenure, although he failed to materialize it at the very start of his term.

Rainey and Stewart (1994, 261-2) mention the essential qualities of a public manager "being a person well-versed with socio-political system, understands public pressure and public behavior with a sense of public accountability and wider responsibility to a changing society" (as quoted in Pollit, p.18). I would take all those qualities for an upright politician too. While reading

<sup>1</sup> There might be conflict of interest, which I discuss later under a separate sub-heading.

the case study, a sense of Barrera being an upright public politician with a “public sense” and a sharp vision reverberates. An upright public politician while leading from the front would make his managers upright and focused towards achievement of a goal.

The website of Quito government mentioned that Barrera lost the 2014 election, but still metro is on its way to completion. Such is the vision of an upright public office-holder.

#### *Efficiency vs Equity*

If something is efficient, would it be equitable too? There is a long debate on efficiency versus equity in the literature of public administration. While “efficiency” involves economic connotations, “equity” involves a “sense of fairness and justice” and it proposes that “benefits be greater to those who are the most disadvantaged” (Denhardt, 2007, p. 105). Examples would clarify the distinction between efficiency and equity. In organizations, downsizing is a well-known strategy employed to reduce costs and hence enhance “efficiency”. Similarly, in capitalistic markets, poverty is an efficient outcome. However, poverty leads to income inequality and downsizing lowers staff motivation. Who would call these outcomes equitable? In “Getting around Quito” opposition parties and transport experts appeal to an “efficient” outcome, though this outcome is “constrained” and others might consider it inefficient. However, it seems to me that Barrera is for an equitable and a sustainable solution, which would offer commercial speed, high capacity, fast commute, and weather protection because of its underground subways, a range of passenger amenities and above all a quality and comfortable service.

#### *Rational Choice and Public Choice*

While advocating “efficiency”, opposition parties and Cesar Arias apply rational choice model of Simon when they favor improvement of existing BRT over Metro.

According to them it is the most “rational, utility-maximizing, methodical, deliberate, focused, consistent, explainable and responsible decision” as mentioned in Simon, Alison and Lendblom’s work on organization (as quoted in Denhardt, 2011). However, my analysis says rational choice fails to deliver and predict decisions made during social dilemmas. For example, Barrera makes use of public choice instead of rational choice. While dealing with a choice related to public transport policy, Barrera’s choice of metro is a rational decision. According to Muller (2009), public choice is the economic study of non-market decision making (as quoted in Heckleman & Whaples, p. 797). Non-market Decision-making would essentially involve political landscape and environmental arena. Moreover, market mechanisms of competition and privatization are preferable modes to deliver public services in public choice. These mechanisms generate optimal outcomes in line with individual preferences. This is why Barrera’s municipal government announced a bidding competition to conduct initial feasibility studies of metro, and Metro de Madrid, the Spanish company was selected. Similarly, another Spanish company, Acciona has been contracted to build the first metro phase of the Quito Metro (Garza et al., 2013).

However, I would question this increased reliance of Barrera’s government on market mechanisms. Though Steel and Long (1998) in their bivariate analysis appreciate to contract out projects only in urban and densely populated areas based on the “least cost”, “quality service” and competition mechanisms. But then to confine the blind trust that public choice puts on market mechanisms, they conclude “to have a pragmatic approach towards privatization rather than idealizing it”. Therefore, I will say in the suggestions section that Municipality of Quito must have some in-house capacity to carry out feasibility and some

maintenance and construction.

#### *Political Authority and Bureaucracy*

Here it is evident that the municipal government of Barrera has an ex-officio authority. This political authority in turn stems from the constitutional provisions, values, traditions and constituents' aspirations, which, in the long run, frame and mandate the domain and structure of the transport agency. According to Goodnow (1967, p.28), politics has to do with policies or expressions of the state will while administration has to do with execution of policies/state will. In Quito, there seems an accord between the municipal administration and the elected officials. When Barrera comes to office with the idea of "Metro de Quito", he abandons the construction of TRAQ on the ground that it could not meet public demand. Here the municipal administration could not resist Barrera's decision, showing continuity between political and administrative authorities towards the achievement/fulfillment of the state will.

#### *Blame Avoidance*

Throughout the case study I see clear traces of blame avoidance as mentioned in Weaver (p. 371, 1987). Previous mayors in hope of re-election tried to avoid blame by mere counter arguing, instead of thinking about sustainability and capacity of the options they pose. Since they are out of office this term, they don't claim the credit for their projects. Their projects such as BRT could not do well, as its speed got lowered and it reached to its maximum capacity. Therefore, for them it is "rational" and "optimal" to avoid "blame" rather than claim "credit" so to minimize the loss of a "lost reputation". In turn they criticize the Barrera's government on the plea to dismantle his public "image", and "reputation". While they say that the mayor Barrera should focus on other public services, data as mentioned earlier show that Quito is well above 90 % and ahead of other districts in the achievement of public services. Someone

could ask whether an affordable and a sustainable quality service transportation doesn't count as a public service.

#### *Conflict of Interest*

This case shows a prime example of how conflict of interest works at the back of mind of project advocates. Cesar Arias' advice is inherently biased. For him, the incentives that his services would be hired in case if Barrera opt for existing BRT make him blind to suggest a neutral optimal decision. How about previous mayors? Because of the limited capacity of the existing options, they are also in the quest to avoid "blame avoidance", hence a rational advice is not something they give. Barrera might be aware of all those conflicts of interest. But he seems to be unaware of his own conflict of interest, which could be victory in coming election. One supporting argument to this would be his use of international loans instead of full local-based financing to fund his project as a mean to get around the limitations of election cycles. The counter-argument which sounds optimistic to me would be that metro being on top of his manifesto makes him devoted towards metro throughout his period. A Psychologist, Dan Ariely, convincingly expresses that "pursuit of knowledge and insight could be affected, consciously or unconsciously, by shortsighted personal goals" (Ariely, 2011). So the task would be to find those conflicts of interest and avoid falling prey to them while making decisions.

#### *Biases*

Jonathan Doochin (2010) suggests that decision-makers frequently succumb to "psychological biases". The task for a good decision-maker is to address those "biases" and turn towards "organizational values". Similarly Robert Wolf (2012) suggests when there is reward-risk situation, the possibility of "biases" grows exponentially. Hence, there is a dire need to minimize those biases. In Metro de Quito, there are biases involved in the decisions. On part of Barrera there is



“confirmation bias”, in that he considers metro- his first decision, as a self-fulfilling prophecy. The previous mayors suffer from “framing” as they deem BRT and LRT optimum, because these options have been presented to them as such. Similarly, almost all project advocates suffer from some form of “anchoring”, as every advocate is influenced by the “numbers” of feasibility studies without checking the validity of those numbers. It would have been great if Barrera had taken Cesar “Chief Contrarian” as part of the team. Likewise, all the actors would have deserved appreciation if they had embraced diverse opinion in countering their overconfidence and had flipped the problem on its head to check whether they had been viewing the situation either in a positive or a negative framework.

#### **Policy Recommendations to advance the situation & to minimize the risk of resources**

Prior to illuminating some recommendations for the stakeholders, it would be useful if Quito’s current situation is elucidated. Although not mentioned in the case study (written before Quito election), Barrera lost 2014 election to Mauricio Esteban Rodas Espinel, who is currently the mayor (“Municipio de Quito”, n.d). It is out of the scope of this paper to analyze why he lost the election<sup>2</sup>. Research on Metro shows that phase I of Metro line is completed. Now it is turn of phase II which is going to take at-least 36 months (“El Metro”, 2012). In this backdrop following would be some of the recommendations that would have not only advanced the situation in solving the policy dilemma but would also keep the project lively in future.

a) Barrera should have done feasibility study of metro by the state transport agency rather than favoring the Spanish

firm. This way he would have injected a sense of ownership, earned even more support of administration and avoided the dissenting voices claiming that the private firm declared metro feasible because of its interest in the project. He would have also engaged in a positive discussion with opposition parties on the transport policy. Before contracting out the project to the Spanish firm, first he should have looked for an in-house capacity too. Importantly, for a solid support beyond his campaign promise, he should have sought a consensus from public specifically on metro, right after taking his oath.

b) It is right that the metro would cost \$ 1.7 billion which is more expensive than both BRT and LRT. But there is no escape. Most of it, being underground, metro promises a clean, quiet and quality travel across Quito from North to South in 24 minutes. Remembering it as an option for providing a sustainable solution to the problem, it is suggested that all the previous mayors should have done feasibility studies very earlier and would have advanced a long-term solution like metro in their terms. Nevertheless, when metro is a solution, it is time to work towards financing this project amid other businesses. Rather than asking multilateral agencies for more and more finance, which is in fact a tied aid, it is wise to take private loans. Secondly, to cut down costs, the city administration should make maximum use of its internal capacity prior to getting to market.

c) Barrera was of the view that metro would reduce gender gap and would ensure equal access to vulnerable population. To this end, it is suggested to make the metro part of an integrated transit system, taking care of transfers. May be an eco-friendly bicycle sharing would allow accessibility between metro stations and people’s final destinations.

<sup>2</sup> But since the case study mentions the results of a poll conducted by research firm-Opinion in August 2013 that Barrera would win local elections with popular support of 48 % which is in contrast to what actually happened, this is certainly in the purview of this analysis to suggest that constituents behave in an unpredictable way.



- d) One of the concerns is that metro would damage the archeological sites. This is something reasonable and it is suggested to ensure maximum checks and controls during excavation. The department of archeology and historic heritage could deploy its staff and monitor the project daily. One way to celebrate historic heritage is to name the station as per the discovered heritage. Similarly, the finding could be a positive externality of the project.
- e) Barrera should have consulted the city transportation expert, who appeared to be an outspoken critic of the decision to build a metro. This way a quick consensus across the city would have reached. The expert is more interested in BRT, one of the probable reasons being, that he was involved in its development and design. Anyways, consultation and a leadership role in construction and design of metro would have appeased the expert.
- f) Had all the actors acted beyond their narrow interests, inherent biases and personal goals, there would have been a consensus at par. In light of personal and organizational values, checking ones intentions, prioritizing public interest and taking the time to step back from a situation and examining the circumstances as a third party would, would have helped Barrera and other advocates reach objective outcome.
- g) While comparing all the options made, metro is now a reality. It is suggested that Barrera and opposition parties would have worked to develop transparency within the project. A transparency unit comprising personnel from the metro company, city council, transport ministry, audit institution and monitoring officer from multilateral agencies would do for ensuring transparency. Moreover, they would have planned plans to mitigate the discomforts caused due to road closures and construction.

## Conclusion

Theoretical frameworks of public administration help explain the case. Setting aside his motive, Barrera appears a man in show and he makes realize that metro is the policy option. With a political authority accorded to him by constituents, he had to work to fulfill his campaign promise. From New Public Service point of view, Barrera appears to be an upright politician putting public interest ahead of everything else. For New Public Management paradigm, Barrera is as inefficient as he is efficient for the New Public Service paradigm. Instead of focusing on cost concerns, he seems determined towards the achievement of a sustainable solution at any cost. The fact that multilateral agencies extend help to realize this local development goal also shows that internationalists and comparativists converge, when it comes to local development.

Barrera, while making use of competition and other market mechanisms in the delivery of public services equally becomes appealing for public choice. As opposed to Goodknow's apparent discontinuity between politics and administration, there exists a strong concurrence in Quito's administration and Barrera's Council. While mayors from opposition play blame avoidance tactics, they would have done the earnest planning towards a sustainable solution during their term. Importantly, it would have been wiser, had Barrera consulted Cesar by changing the advocate hat of Cesar to an expert hat. Moreover, keeping afore organizational and personal values, setting aside biases and parochial interests and placing atop public interest would have appeased the situation. Finally, when metro is entering in the second phase of construction, it is sagacious to suggest mitigation planning, financing schemes, historic heritage protection, and transparency unit and last but not the least building of in-house capacity to ensure long-term maintenance of the huge infrastructure post-construction. It's high time to forget the "bitter"

past and make Metro de Quito even more “better”.

*Beyond & along this analysis: Reflections-The harbingers of Realities*

This analysis stimulates my curiosity to further look into the reasons of Barrera’s failure in 2014 elections. Why did he lose elections? Is it because, people don’t trust the project. Or is it just that transport project would always create problems for commuters and people will curse the project ahead. I think people only realize that it’s a blessing once the project is completed. However, Barrera’s timings for the project were really awful. Had he been on its construction since the start of his term, he would have capitalize on this. One thing he must learn from Shehbaz Sharif, the Chief Minister of Punjab (one of the provinces of Pakistan) who not only happened to establish first metro in metropolitan Lahore during his first term (2009), but also made a metro in Capital Islamabad following his electoral success in second term (2013).

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