

# Philippines' democratization and its prospects for democracy



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In this paper, I will examine Philippines' transition to democracy from the authoritarian hold of Ferdinand E. Marcos. First, elaboration shall be made on the important events that led to the actual uprising that escalated and of the key players in the events that happened. The focus will be on the processes that happened in the transition, in line with theories by Huntington and other scholars of democratic studies. The second part of the essay will be an assessment of the prospects democracy in the Philippines.

Some historical background of the PhilippinesThe Philippine Islands was first colonized by the Spanish in the 16th century and was later taken over by the United States of America following the U. S victory of the Spanish-American war in 1898. In 1935, they were granted Commonwealth status where they had partial autonomy and self-governed. However, during the WWII in 1942, they fell under the Japanese occupation, interrupting their planned transition to becoming a fully sovereign state. In 1946, the Philippines finally achieved its independence, and it was a start of what was called the Third Republic which started with Manuel Roxas' election to presidency. Although the few presidents preceding Roxas have made some significant improvements for the state, the Philippines was still plagued by a multitude of insurgencies, population problems, economic mismanagement and corruption was rife. Our main focus of this paper would be the Fourth Philippine Republic under Ferdinand E. Marcos who won in the 1965 elections against Diosdado Macapagal who ran for re-election after his term ended.

Marcos' authoritarian ruleAfter being elected as president, Ferdinand Marcos intensified tax collection and embarked on many government projects including building roads, health centers and schools. It was said that he built

<https://assignbuster.com/philippines-democratization-and-its-prospects-for-democracy/>

more schools than all his predecessors combined. However, the country was constantly in a state of unrest. Civil disorder emerged as a result of the violence and fraud that were involved in his reelection in 1969. Throughout his term, he failed to contain corruption and could not create economic growth proportional to population growth. Dissatisfaction among the Philippines resulted in the formation of the New Peoples Army by the Communist Party of the Philippines. Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1970 after his attempted murder at Malacanang Place, the presidential residence and as a result of the increasing disorder and the threat of a communist uprising. This change in constitution gave him direct powers as a president. This lasted for eight years and that gave him free reign on ruling the country.

According to Siliman in his article, the Philippines in 1983: Authoritarianism beleaguered, Marcos used his powers to arrest social activists, political organizers and newsmen. He carried out those acts under the Presidential Commitment Order (PCO). It was later abolished but revived in a different name called the Preventive Detention Order." Crony capitalism" was a term that was made popular by Marcos where businesspeople who supported him were favored for large government contracts, while those who opposed him were often forced out of competition. He also made unpopular foreign policy decisions with the United States, a strong ally of his administration such as having the American bases in the Philippines. The Filipino Anti-Bases Coalition argues that his decision represents imperialism, threaten national security and have led to a brothel economy in adjacent towns. In terms of

the country's economy, growth in 1983 was no more than 2.6% achieved in 1982, the economy's second year of negative per capita growth.

Foreign debt reached approx US\$18 billion by mid-year and Marcos borrowed from IMF - who demanded policy changes. This decision was opposed by the opposition, United Nationalist Democratic Organization and Marcos' Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL) party. Prime Minister Virata submitted his resignation mid-May following a dispute over the issue. The EDSA RevolutionThe four-day nonviolent mass demonstration which was also known as the People Power Revolution was triggered by the assassination of Benigno Aquino on 21st August 1983. He was returning to Philippines after three years of exile in the United States by Marcos' orders. He was killed in the custody of government guards just after stepping off a plane at Manila International Airport. A sequential disaffection, beginning from students -; intellectuals -; leaders of previously existing political parties -; the Middle class -; white collar workers -; professionals -; small business proprietors -; Church leaders -; non-government affiliated labor unions to the larger business groups and bourgeoisie -; the United States and other foreign sources -; military, as suggested by Huntington did happen in this case of Philippines. This murder was the catalyst for the people to express their long-held feelings that it is time for a change.

It was also a sign of the waning authority of national leadership. Outburst of anti-Marcos sentiment has spurred new opposition organizations - such as Justice for Aquino, Justice for all, which is the umbrella group coordinating many demonstrations. The Nationalist Alliance, an organization of small "nationalist" groups advocates the eviction of U. S. military bases and curbs <https://assignbuster.com/philippines-democratization-and-its-prospects-for-democracy/>

on multinational companies. This was followed by criticism from the Catholic hierarchy. Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) issued a pastoral letter urging Marcos to end his repressive decrees that violate human rights: the assassination of Aquino, the nation's economic crisis, the widespread clamor for justice by protestors and unexplained killings. Archbishop of Manila and the head of the Catholic Church, Cardinal Jaime Sin who has maintained his role as a constructive channel of communication with the president joined to call for a change.

Not long after, they were joined by The Philippine Chamber of Commerce, who were rarely critical of the government, sent a letter to Marcos complaining that the climate of "uncertainty" growing out of the Aquino slaying was stifling economic progress. Makati, the financial district of Manila has seen too many demonstrations by executives and office workers. The "replacement" that took place Huntington describes a replacement (and what Linz calls a ruptura) as an occurrence when opposition groups took the lead in bringing about democracy, and the authoritarian regime collapsed or was overthrown. This accurately describes the transition of Philippines from a dictatorship to a democracy. Among the characteristics of this replacement, as outlined by Huntington is the relative absence of reformers in regime as opposed to a transformation or transplacement. This is due to the fact that Philippines have been enjoying democracy since their independence, hence, the absence of any reformers. Instead, a number of opposition parties who were eager to restore the status quo. It can be seen that standpatters are dominant in Marcos' regime which were his cronies who had complete monopoly over social, economic, military and political power.

It has been in Philippines history that leadership and authority belonged to the same people or at least the same families. And over time, especially when Marcos' regime was almost overthrown, the opposition's strength increased while the government's declined. This was evident when Marcos was stranded in the Malacanang Palace after Aquino's assassination and intensified when rumors spread that Marcos was ill. The opposition's support increased as they merged and were joined in ranks with the Catholic Church and the Chamber of Commerce to protest against him. Dissatisfaction kept growing towards him from all sides with regards to his authoritarian ways, his unpopular foreign policies with the United States, and country's battered economy which is also directly linked to the corruption that was prevalent in his government. His cronies, especially infamous wife Imelda Marcos were enjoying shopping sprees around the world and living in the lap of luxury while millions of his people were living in poverty. For Philippines to undergo a transition to democracy or rather, its return to democracy is hardly surprising considering the factors that were in play during that time. It happened in the time of democracy's third wave which was the period between 1974 and 1990.

Huntington listed five major factors that contributed significantly to the timing and occurrence of the third wave transitions to democracy and they are directly relevant to the case of Philippines. We will discuss three that are relevant to the case of Philippines. 1) The deepening legitimacy problems of authoritarian regimes in a world where democratic values were widely accepted, the consequent dependence of these regimes on successful performance, and their inability to maintain " performance legitimacy" due

to economic (and sometimes military) failure. Although Marcos started on a right footing by increasing the country's economy and got America's military and economic support, it was short-lived. Economic growth, or rather, the lack of it spurred the people to fight for their return to democracy as Marcos' hold on the economy and the corruption that was rampant throughout his term has made the country poorer (and him and his cronies, richer). 2) A striking shift in the doctrine and activities of the Catholic Church, manifested in the Second Vatican Council of 1963-63 and the transformation of national Catholic churches from defenders of the status quo to opponents of authoritarianism. The Catholic Church has always been a major influence in the government of the Philippines. It spoke up against Marcos' repression and even issued a pastoral letter but was disregarded by him.

It then joined the opposition to rise against the authoritarian regime. It was Cardinal Jaime Sin, the head of the Catholic Church who led the EDSA revolution that successfully overthrew the authoritarian regime with minimal bloodshed. 3) Changes in the policies of external actors, most notably the European Community, the United States and the Soviet Union. US increased pressure for Marcos to step down and to carry out an election to replace him after 20 years of governance. The Reagan Administration expressed their concerns over the country's state of affairs and the liberal interventionists in Congress were calling for reforms and threatened to diminish aid if he refuses to comply. 4) "Snowballing," or the demonstration effect of transitions earlier in the third wave in stimulating and providing models for subsequent efforts at democratization." Snowballing", as described earlier, was a result from the repressing authoritarian regime, poor economy and the

assassination of Aquino. The demonstration effect was that the people of Philippines have witnessed democracy before, and that helped them in process of democratizing.

Uniquely, the EDSA revolution became a demonstration effect for EDSA II to oust President Joseph Estrada in 2001 as well as other popular uprisings in Asia in the late 1980s, particularly in Burma, China, Pakistan and South Korea and also Indonesia in 1998. Prospects of democracy Taken from Off the Endangered List: Philippine Democratization in Comparative Perspective by Mark R. Thompson, I quote: Philippine democracy was consolidated after the May 1992 elections, even if it remains risk-prone. Democratic transition, which is commonly distinguished from consolidation, had been completed earlier. A new constitution, overwhelmingly approved in February 1987, established democratic procedures and spelled out civil liberties, while after the May 1987 congressional and January 1988 local elections all major politicians in the country were popularly elected (with Aquino herself being widely seen to have been the winner of the February 1986 presidential balloting). But continued armed challenges to the regime meant that democratic consolidation, defined as strong popular support for democratic institutions and the absence of major disloyal opposition to the regime, had not yet been achieved. While there is much evidence that Philippine democracy enjoyed popular legitimacy after the success of "people power," the "overthrow" character of the Philippine transition made the establishment of elite consensus difficult. Military opponents continued to seek power, not just defend institutional interests.



A number of “ moderate” politicians supported coup attempts against the regime. Communists remained revolutionaries, rather than adopting electoral means. But concessions to the military hierarchy and limits on socioeconomic reform gave Aquino’s government the time it needed to hold a series of elections that gradually undermined disloyal opposition and restored the pre-martial-law rules of the game. To assess Thompson’s statement that classifies Philippines as a consolidated democracy, we refer to Linz and Stepan, who branded consolidated democracy as “ the only game in town” which meant that for a country to be acknowledged as a consolidated democracy is as follows; Behaviourally: no significant group seriously attempts to overthrow the democratic order. This is the only factor that cannot be said to be true in the Philippines especially post-EDSA Revolution where countless coup attempts were made on the Aquino administration and this continues on to the other Presidents after her. Currently, President Arroyo does not face any less threats to deposing her from office. Attitudinally: when overwhelming majority believes that changes should occur through democratic procedures. Philippines have always maintained a voter turnout rate of 75%.

This fact is further strengthened by the existence of a National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) which is a non-partisan organization with over 250,000 member-volunteers from different religious, civic, business, professional, labor, youth, educational, and non-government groups. This shows the Filipinos’ confidence that they could build an antidictatorship movement around the ballot box and it demonstrates their commitment and belief in the democratic right of voting. Constitutionally: when political conflict is

resolved through democratically sanctioned laws and procedures. In the time of Marcos' dictatorship, the opposition were violently intimidated by the standpatters before martial law. They utilized their underdog position to make direct moral appeals to the electorate. They advocated a multiclass struggle "to save democracy" from the abusive incumbent. Such campaigns drew on popular beliefs about good government and could even override the greater material rewards offered the electorate by the party in power. In the 1986 elections, through moral appeals Aquino actually won the election, even if Marcos rigged the counting.

Linz and Stepan further elaborated on conditions for a country to be regarded as being a consolidated democracy. Firstly, democratic transition must be brought to completion. On February 1987, a new constitution which established democratic procedures and detailed civil liberties was approved. After the May 1987 congressional and January 1988 local elections, all major politicians in the country were popularly elected. Second, rulers should govern democratically. While most of their Presidents after Marcos have been governing democratically, we have also heard of Joseph Estrada and the EDSA Dos in 2001 which impeached him due to suspicions of political corruption akin to the first revolution which ousted Marcos. Third, there must already be the existence of a relatively autonomous political society. After Marcos' deposition, there was a wave of emergence of new political parties.

The multiparty system developed in the post-Marcos era greatly split the vote in 1992. Fourth, a usable state bureaucracy and rule of law.

Traditionally, those in power are immune to the law and this continues to

plague the Philippines and state bureaucracy under a thick cloud of  
<https://assignbuster.com/philippines-democratization-and-its-prospects-for-democracy/>

corruption will be the bane of maintaining the country's consolidated democracy. Lastly, the existence of the Philippine Economic Society proves that Philippines has an institutionalised economic society as required of a consolidated democracy. Presidential versus parliamentary systems

Jurgen Ruland argued for both presidential and parliamentary systems for the Philippine government, as opposed to what Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub and Limongi suggest that the parliamentary system is what would make democracies endure. He proposes incremental reforms by amending the 1987 Constitution where needed, instead of scrapping the presidential system of government, as some problems simply cannot be solved by both systems. Below are some of his arguments for both sides of the two systems. In a presidential system, the chief executive is not responsible to the parliament and thus cannot be replaced by a vote of no-confidence.

Difficulty arises in replacing a weak, inept or corrupt president which is only possible by impeachment. However, an impeachment trial is a strict and circumscribed process. It is seen as a last resort designed to remove an incompetent or criminal president. The negative example of this is the case of Estrada where even though there was sufficient evidence to prove his crimes, the lengthy process which is subject to the political manoeuvrings in both houses of the legislature. However, to quote the example President Aquino, she has used the power that she had to push for urgent socioeconomic reforms. And even in a parliamentary system, removing a prime minister from office is often easier said than done. A no-confidence vote that is not constructive can be abused. A vice president post, which is expected to help curb presidential power (especially from an opposition

party) more often than not, does not play its role well as it is viewed as a springboard to presidency.

We have witnessed tense relationships and fall outs between presidents and their vice-presidents, namely Corazon Aquino and Salvador Laurel and also between Joseph Estrada and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Gridlock in the legislative process is a structural problem primarily caused by the bicameral nature of congress. A transition to a parliamentary system at the same time, does not offer a solution to this problem as a bicameral parliamentary system may also be prone to paralysis. The problem, however, could be mitigated through skilful coordination between the executive and the two legislative chambers. The expectation that a parliamentary system could generate a strong party system has insufficient empirical evidence. This is particularly in the case of Southeast Asia where political parties have always been personality-based power centres. Parliamentarians, in any case could switch " identical parties" at will for opportunistic reasons. Philippines todayThe current situation under Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, as described by freedomhouse.

org, a non-profit, nonpartisan organization that advocates democracy and freedom around the world gives Philippines a partly-free status following their report on Arroyo's current governance which includes her declaring of a week-long state of emergency in February 2006. This had security forces raiding antigovernment press offices, arrests of opposition officials without warrants, and brutally suppressed public protests. In response to these actions and a series of Supreme Court rulings against the administration, opposition members of the lower house of Congress launched a second <https://assignbuster.com/philippines-democratization-and-its-prospects-for-democracy/>

unsuccessful impeachment bid against Arroyo in June. Amnesty International in August released a report documenting a spike in the number of political killings of left-wing activists during the first half of 2006, garnering international attention and prompting Arroyo to establish the Melo Commission to Address Media and Activist Killings the same month. Yet minimal concrete steps to reduce these extrajudicial killings have been made. Both the police and the military were believed to be involved in the killings, raising doubts as to whether the perpetrators would be held accountable under Arroyo, who remained heavily dependent on military support to stay in power. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court in October ruled against a proposed referendum on constitutional reform that would replace the country's bicameral legislature and presidential executive structure with a unicameral parliament and a prime minister, effectively ending the long-standing debate on the issue. Conclusion It is yet to be seen what holds for the nations' future but if the leaders do not seriously crack down on the corruption in the administration, find a right balance to keep the many diverse parties happy and make the suggested constitutional changes, we might just be witnessing another EDSA Revolution which will only further decrease the government's legitimacy.