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**Philippine Democracy and Governance 2005:
Insights from the Asian Barometer Surveys**

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Introduction

The Philippines has been known as America's showcase of democracy in Asia. It attained Commonwealth status in 1935, operating under a Constitution that was virtually a copy of the American presidential model with three co-equal branches – the Executive (headed by a President), the Legislative (a bicameral Congress, and Judicial (headed by a Supreme Court) Branches. The main difference was that the American system was federal, while the Philippines was a unitary system, in effect making the President (and the national government institutions) more powerful in regard to the rest of the country than his/her American counterpart. Under the Commonwealth arrangement, the Philippines remained subject to the American Congress, but had much leeway in domestic politics. This period produced one of the more effective and charismatic Filipino presidents, Manuel L. Quezon. During the Commonwealth, there were periodic elections, with universal suffrage being in effect beginning ____.

The Philippine Constitution of 1935 was continued as the Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines when it gained independence from the United States on 4 July 1946 at the end of World War II. The challenges to the new republic were enormous, and the government was hard put to respond effectively. Manila, the primate city, was heavily damaged during the war. The expected level of assistance from the United States did not materialize. Onerous treaties relating to military bases and agreements, trade and investments were signed between the erstwhile colony and its colonial master. The agrarian problem, which spawned a socialist movement during the pre-war years, blossomed after the war. By the mid-1950s, the communist Huk movement was a serious

problem that showed the helplessness of the government. Ramon Magsaysay emerged as another charismatic leader who brought the Huks back into the folds of the law through a pro-people approach. Magsaysay died in a plane crash in 1957 but remained the Filipino's model of a caring, pro-masses president. The Philippine polity went on with regular national and local elections every two years, and procedurally, Philippine democracy appeared healthy.

By 1968, the political system became less and less responsive to the expanding and intensifying demand from its constituents. The communist movement resurfaced in the form of the People's Republic of China leaning Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed component, the New People's Army. With the global phenomenon of student activism as backdrop, the communist movement quickly expanded through its National Democratic Front – an array of aboveground and openly subversive organizations of workers, farmers, students, and professionals.

The unprecedented re-election of Ferdinand Marcos in 1969 to another 4-year term robbed the people of the illusory renewal that attends the election of a new, all powerful executive. At the very least, this involved a “renewal” of the President's retinue of bureaucrats and associated oligarchs. By 1972, Philippine democracy appeared in deep trouble. The need to re-invent Philippine democracy through far-reaching Constitutional reforms was recognized as early as 1971, when a Constitutional Convention was elected to draft a new constitution.

The path of constitutional reform was preempted by Ferdinand Marcos when he declared Martial Law in September 1972. For the next 14 years, under a regime of “Constitutional Authoritarianism”, Marcos ruled until he was deposed in the 1986 People Power Revolt. The Revolt, initiated by the military, and backed by the people of Metro Manila upon the goading of the Catholic Church, installed Cory Aquino, widely perceived to have won the snap presidential elections against Marcos in January 1986.

Aquino briefly exercised revolutionary powers until ___ 1987 in order to facilitate the drafting of a new Constitution through a personally hand-picked Constitutional Assembly?, as well as to root out the Marcos loyalists from powerful positions in the bureaucracy and local governments. The promulgation of the new 1987 Constitution contained the mandates for more reforms towards greater local autonomy, more participatory democracy, a more people-oriented armed forces, a

genuine agrarian reform, etc. Upon its promulgation, the forces of reform and the forces of the status quo immediately started to contend. Intended reforms were slowed or altogether reversed. The local government code was passed only in 1991 and has not been reviewed since, despite the constitutional mandate for a review every five years. The issue of local autonomy has continued to bedevil Philippine politics, and proposals for constitutional change towards federalism have again been revived lately.

The Philippine democracy that is contemplated in the comparative framework of the Asian Barometer appears to be the democracy since 1987, for which reason it is described as “young.” The specific lesson that can be derived from Philippine democracy, however, is that a democracy can log in decades of procedural practice of democracy, but be far from being democratic in substance. The Philippines is, in other words, a model of an “old” but “unconsolidated” democracy, or an “old” but “poor performing” or “poor quality” democracy. How a polity can persist in its outward democratic form without graduating to higher levels of performance is the question posed by the Philippine case.

The Philippine case also demonstrates three successful modes of transition from political order to political order. The Marcos constitutional authoritarianism is one such mode. The “People Power” Revolt is a second mode that has been resorted to, successfully, twice (1986 and 2001). The regular succession mode through election has also been demonstrated. As the current Arroyo Administration progressed from its start in 2004 and nears its constitutional termination in 2010, it is remarkable that all three modes of transition have been attempted. Several attempts to trigger a People Power event have been attempted but have so far failed. Efforts by political allies of President Arroyo to effect a constitutional change to extend her term of office have also been attempted. Meanwhile, the Presidential Elections in May 2010 is the default, but by no means the guaranteed mode of transition or succession of the polity or administration.

The Asian Barometer surveys of 2001 and 2006 will help in the exploration of the answers to this question.

During the period between the two Asian Barometer surveys of 2001 and 2006, there have been the following significant political events:

Consolidation of the presidency under Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo following the People Power Revolt that installed her in power in January 2001. There were Congressional and local elections in May 2001. The so-called Oakwood Mutiny by junior officers in October 2003 inspired a declaration by Mrs Arroyo that she would not run for the presidency in the upcoming May 2004 elections, a promise that she was unable to keep. The 2004 presidential elections saw the fielding of 7 presidential candidates. The closest rival of the incumbent president was Fernando Poe Jr., a very popular and hitherto non-political but influential movie personality in the league of Joseph Estrada. President Arroyo won the elections with over a million votes. The elections were hoped to settle once and for all the controversial succession of President Arroyo to the Presidency. This did not happen, as just months after the elections, wiretapped conversations of President Arroyo surfaced in the media. These tapes that apparently featured a conversation between President Arroyo and a Commissioner Garcillano of the Commission on Elections, appeared to indicate that irregularities abounded during the 2004 elections. President Arroyo went on television to say sorry for a lapse in judgment, without admitting to specific acts. The mass resignation of ten cabinet-level officials of the Arroyo administration, including her closest advisers, almost triggered another people power event. The Catholic Church, which during the leadership of Cardinal Sin played an active role in organizing and mobilizing the masses during the previous people power events, was rather ambiguous in its stand on the issue of presidential accountability for the alleged Garci scandal.

The May 2007 elections was billed as a referendum on the presidency of President Arroyo. Her candidates for Senator were roundly defeated. The leader of the Oakwood mutineers ran for Senator on an anti-Arroyo platform and won despite the lack of financial support and even physical freedom to campaign, as he was in detention during that time. Before the elections, there had also been attempts to change the Constitution through people's initiative, an attempt by Arroyo partisans to engineer a creative extension of President Arroyo's term beyond 2010. The move, which did not succeed because of a Supreme Court decision finding the move unconstitutional, would have preempted the 2007 elections.

There had been two attempts to file impeachment proceedings against President Arroyo, but she survived both attempts through the deft use of presidential influence over the members of the House of Representatives in Congress from before which impeachment complaints must be filed.

Meanwhile, President Arroyo has attempted to protect herself from vulnerability to checks by the Congress by issuing executive orders that limited Congressional access to cabinet members and other top officials. She also stiffened police and military powers as against demonstrations and rallies that had no permits. While the Supreme Court has struck down part of these executive actions, nevertheless President Arroyo persevered by reissuing the orders in other forms. The most chilling condition the Arroyo Administration has been accused of is the extra-judicial killings and disappearances of oppositionists in media and progressive groups. The most notable of this is the disappearance of Jonas Burgos.

Socio-Political Profile of the Philippines

	GDP per capita (PPP) in 2006	Gini Co-Efficient (latest available)	Number of effective parties (based on last national election)	Freedom House Political Right Score in 2006	Freedom House Civil Liberty Score in 2006	WBGi Rule of Law indicator in 2006	WBGi Government Effectiveness indicator in 2006	WBGi Voice and accountability Indicator in 2006	WBGi Control of corruption Indicator in 2006
Japan	31865.98	25		1	2	1.40	1.29	0.91	1.31
Hong Kong	35395.66	43		5	2	1.45	1.76	0.55	1.71
Korea	21876.57	32		1	2	0.72	1.05	0.71	0.31
China	8004.14	47		7	6	-0.40	-0.01	-1.66	-0.53
Mongolia	2321.79	33		2	2	-0.32	-0.46	0.10	-0.54
Philippines	5159.91	45		3	3	-0.48	-0.01	-0.18	-0.69
Taiwan	29243.75	35		1	1	0.77	1.11	0.79	0.53
Thailand	8876.73	42		3	3	0.03	0.29	-0.50	-0.26
Indonesia	4752.88	34		2	3	-0.82	-0.38	-0.25	-0.77
Singapore	29742.85	42		5	4	1.82	2.20	-0.07	2.30
Vietnam	3255.30	37		7	5	-0.43	-0.37	-1.45	-0.66
Cambodia	2533.71	42		3	3	-1.11	-1.01	-0.98	-1.19
Malaysia	11914.52	49		4	4	0.58	1.02	-0.34	0.38
Average of East Asia	14995.68	38.92		3.38	3.08	0.25	0.50	-0.18	0.15

There are a lot of indicators that can be used to reflect how the international community of scholars and international development experts assess the quality of governance, development, and democracy in various countries of the world.

One of the standard measures is GDP per capita, which reflects the capacity of the nation to produce economic goods and services, taking into consideration the size of the population.

On this measure, the Philippines' GDP per capita of \$5160 ranks nine out of 13 countries/territories, almost one-seventh of top ranking Hong Kong's \$35396 and less than one-half of Malaysia's \$11915. Philippine GDP is twice the GDP of Cambodia.

In terms of Gini coefficient, which indicates how equitably distributed the GDP is, the Philippines 45 is the third least egalitarian economy, after Malaysia and China. This is almost twice the coefficient of top-ranking Japan – 25.

Two popular indices of civil and political rights are Freedom House's Civil Liberty and Political Right Scores. In 2006, the Philippines scored 3 on both indices, putting it in the league of Cambodia and Thailand in the middle of the 13 East Asian countries and territories covered by the Asian Barometer. Taiwan tops these measures at 1 for both civil liberty and political rights, while China comes in last, scoring 6 and 7 respectively.

Another set of indicators that portray the state of "control of corruption", "voice and accountability", "government effectiveness", and "rule of law" prevailing in a country or territory is provided by the World Bank. In 2006, the Philippines obtained a negative score on "control of corruption" (-0.69), "rule of law" (-.48), and "voice and accountability" (-0.18). It scored close to zero (-0.01) in "government effectiveness". This puts it in the league of Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and China as far as having no positive score on each of these measures. The rest of the East Asian bloc – Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan – score positively on all three measures. Mongolia and Thailand have mixed scores.

President Arroyo has prided herself in being an economist, and she has focused on attempting to improve the economic performance of the Philippines. This appeared to materialize in 2007, when the Philippines attained a GDP growth rate of 7 percent, and the Philippine peso markedly appreciated against the US dollar. Ironically, this economic trend has been credited to the intensified diaspora of Overseas Filipino Workers, whose remittances have reached a staggering \$28

billion per year, the country's highest source of foreign exchange earnings.

The Asian Barometer Survey

The Philippine survey was undertaken during the period _____ to _____. A stratified sample of 1200 adults aged _____ to _____ was drawn.

The survey used the standard questionnaire consisting of _____ questions that covered _____ major topics.

Macro-trends in the political, psychological, and social life of a nation are difficult to portray. We need to use a combination of objective and subjective indicators to even begin to adequately form images of the underlying reality. Often, the dearth of indicators encourages many political commentators and analysts to perform lengthy analysis and prognostication with little data.

The use of subjective data is important, considering that the subjective perceptions and evaluation of people are a valid and legitimate data on the performance of democracies. They are, after all, the customers.

Public opinion polls provide an invaluable tool for mirroring to the people their collective perceptions of their democracy. Election serve this purpose are regular intervals. However, in between elections, there is a need for a device for canvassing the people's views on various aspects of governance, democracy, and development. In the case of the Philippines, it has been remarked that public opinion polls serve the purpose of helping political parties identify and nominate candidates. In the absence of a systematic and enforceable system for political parties to assess the strength of candidates as in the system of primaries in the United States, only public opinion polls provide the systematic data for estimating the potential strength of candidates.

In the absence of interest aggregation mechanisms, public opinion polls during elections enable people to successively approximate the final shape of their mandate. It also serves as a check and defense against cheating and fraud in elections.

A. Rule of Law

Law-Abiding Government

Table 1 shows that a majority of the respondents (63.5 percent) disagrees with the statement that national government officials abide by the law. On the other hand, a majority of them (57.6 percent) agrees that current courts always punish the guilty even if they are high-ranking officials. This indicates that the judiciary is perceived to be more law-abiding than the executive.

This difference in perception reflects a deep general respect of Filipinos for the court system as the ultimate check on government abuses. It may also reflect the symbolism that attended the case of President Estrada – the unprecedented arrest and arraignment of a deposed president on charges of the capital crime of plunder. The President being the highest ranking official, while the Sandiganbayan (graft court) that had been trying his case and has authorized his detention and denied him bail while on trial during the period covered by the two surveys 2001-2008) – is one of the top courts of the land.

Controlling Corruption

Table 2 shows that in the 2001 survey, half (51.6 percent) of the respondents think almost all or most local government officials are corrupt, while a clear majority (65.5 percent) believe almost all or most national government officials are corrupt. Local officials are clearly perceived to be more honest than their national counterparts. This trend is the same in the 2006 survey, although the difference in national official and local official honesty appears smaller.

National officials involved in corruption have greater exposure through the mass media compared to local officials, whose misdeeds, if covered in the media, would be less prominently treated in the media. Filipinos generally trust local officials more than national government officials, perhaps due to the greater accessibility and therefore accountability of these officials to their constituents.

Table 3 shows a comparison of the responses to two questions on the control of corruption. The 2001 survey asked the respondents to compare the current regime with the past regime under Martial Law. The predominant response is that the current and previous regimes are much the same with regard to controlling corruption (42.3 percent). Those who say somewhat better (22.3 percent) are slightly more than those who say somewhat worse (17.3 percent).

The 2006 survey asked the respondents if the government was working to crack down on corruption and root out bribes. Those who say the government is doing nothing or not much (59.6 percent) outnumber those who say it is doing something or doing its best (34.2 percent).

These results indicate that there is no clearly perceived advantage of the current regime over the past one in terms of controlling corruption. The respondents also do not show any optimism that the current government is doing much to control corruption.

These results are not surprising, considering the regular and routine reports over the past few years about how the Philippines rates poorly in cross-national corruption indices such as the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, the Political and Economic Risk Consultancy ratings, and periodic reports on corruption perception by adults and businessmen of Philippine survey organizations such as the Social Weather Stations.

In view of the fall of Joseph Estrada on the issue of corruption (he was charged and eventually convicted of plunder), the Arroyo Administration has emphasized its anti-corruption campaign. At the forefront has been the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission, which initiated a program of requiring government offices belonging to the executive department to formulate and implement Integrity Development Action Plans (IDAPs) under its supervision and monitoring. This effort is unprecedented in institutionalizing at the agency level the management's responsibility for checking corruption within the agency. Hitherto, this was a task assigned to external agencies, such as the Ombudsman, the Justice Department, the Civil Service Commission, the Commission on Audit, and other anti-corruption agencies of the government.

The unprecedented conviction of an American serviceman for the rape of a Filipina in 2006 may also have contributed to the perception that the court system goes after transgressors, no matter how

well connected. On the other hand, officials of the bureaucracy have continued to figure in corruption scandals (such as the liquid fertilizer scam involving Department of Agriculture Undersecretary JocJoc Bolante). These scandals also featured members of the President's family – her husband Miguel Arroyo who was accused of stashing enormous amounts of money in German banks, and his brother Iggie Arroyo who owned up to the Jose Pidal account suspected of being Mike Arroyo's. These scandals would have tended to confirm the public perception that executive department officials are more corrupt than members of the judiciary and for that matter, local government officials.

The Marcos regime also began with a strong posture against corruption. In fact, corruption in government was one of the evils that Martial Law intended to stamp out. People are however conscious of the difficulty of making headway against corruption in a culture that values kinship and family. Pronouncements of the Government against corruption therefore do not necessarily inspire confidence.

B. Competition

Elections are a hallmark of democracy. Graph 4a shows that a majority of the respondents (56.3 percent) think that elections offer the voters a real choice between different parties/candidates “sometimes” and “rarely”. This indicates an area of great concern as far as Philippine democracy is concerned. As the data will show, electoral participation is the exclusive means of participation of most Filipinos.

With regard to partisanship, Graph 4a also shows that a majority of Filipinos (55.3 percent) do not feel close to any political party in particular. They go through the electoral exercises without being committed or inspired by the party manifesto or program, or the party organization and campaign activities of a particular party.

Among respondents who felt close to a particular party, a slightly bigger plurality (41 percent) believed elections provide voters a real choice “always” or “most of the time”, compared to 37 percent of those who did not feel close to a particular party.

Graph 4b shows that 32 percent of the respondents reported they voted for the winning camp during the May 2004 elections, while 42 percent reported they voted for the losing camp. (This result reflects the tendency for respondents, when recalling electoral behavior, to disproportionately report having voted for the winning political party or candidate. There were 7 presidential candidates during that election, and the winner, President Arroyo, won only ___ percent of the votes.)

The Graph also shows that 57 percent of the respondents agreed that political parties have equal access to the mass media during the election period while only 40 percent believed otherwise. This result reflects the general freedom of the press in the Philippines, and the availability of the media to those who can afford to pay for political advertisements. The media is also highly diversified in type, ownership, and distribution, and there has been no significant effort to control the media for electoral purposes. In fact, Philippine media has sought to always present a balanced perspective, and if there is any bias at all, it would be sympathetic to the underdog or the opposition.

It is interesting that this agreement that the political parties and candidates have equal access to the mass media is less (55 percent) among those who voted for the winning camp) compared to those who voted for the losing camp (60 percent). This could reflect the perception among those who voted for the winning camp that money and political machinery enabled their political parties greater access to the mass media.

Graph 4c shows that some 54 percent of the respondents consider the last national election in May 2004 as being “completely free and fair” or “free and fair with minor problems” compared to 48 percent who say it was “free and fair with major problems” or “not free and fair” at all. Since these elections were elections for national (President and Vice-President, one-third of the Senate, the entire House of Representatives) and all elective provincial, city, and municipal officials) as well as local officials, a perception by one out of two respondents that the elections were fair and clean and the other perceiving it otherwise does not indicate a healthy electoral process as a driving mechanism for a democracy.

Graph 4c also shows that more of those who reported having voted for the losing camp (48 percent) tend to believe the elections were “not free and fair” or were “free and fair with major problems” compared to less of the respondents who reported having voted for the winning camp (31 percent).

This means that the “winners” have greater confidence in the electoral process than the “losers”.

These trends confirm the general dissatisfaction of the electorate with the electoral system in the country. Despite repeated efforts to modernize the system through the use of voting machines and computerizing the counting, and summarization of the votes, the 2004 (and 2007) elections remained an entirely manual process. Filipinos agonize over the slow counting and delayed proclamation of winners (over a month for the post of president). Agonizing still are the electoral protests that invariably attend the contest, tremendous energy and resources continuing to be engaged by partisan activity long after the elections have been concluded. The cost in terms of low confidence in the mandates of many newly elected officials and the legitimacy of the electoral process is incalculable.

C. Participation

Electoral Participation

Graph 5a shows that there has been a 10 percent increase (71 to 81 percent) in the voting reported by the respondents from the 2001 (May 2001 congressional and local elections) to the 2006 surveys (May 2004 presidential, congressional, and local elections).

Attendance in rallies, however, declined from 27 to 23 percent. Persuading others to vote for a particular candidate or party also declined slightly from 23 to 20 percent.

These trends indicate that (1) presidential elections attract more voters, (2) there is less person-to-person campaigning, as parties and candidates resort to the mass media, especially television, as the greater “bang for the buck” as far as campaigning is concerned, (3) political parties have less community and grassroots agents and representatives, and (4) public opinion polls enable political parties, candidates, and their strategists a more systematic approach to targeting their messages and resources for obtaining the votes of specific voter segments.

Only slightly better than one of five respondents in the 2001 and 2006 surveys did all the three

electoral participation actions asked about in the survey. Considering that the rates can be as high as ___ in other countries, this can be considered a crisis in political participation, considering that two-way person-to-person interaction important to engaging citizens actively in the discussion of political issues is not possible or extremely limited in mass media. The electronic approach to campaigning is also expected to intensify in the future, and the less impressionistic, deeper treatment of issues in the election campaign becomes less likely.

There is no significant difference in the tendency of males and females to vote, attend rallies, and persuade others to vote for a particular candidate or party. However, males apparently tend to do all of the above (13 percent) compared to females (9 percent). The relationship between educational attainment and electoral participation is not monotonic. Generally, the most highly educated tend to attend rallies and persuade others to vote compared to the less educated. This trend does not apply to the entry-level electoral participation action – voting. Respondents who had some college education also demonstrated the highest rate of doing all the three actions – 19 percent, compared to 10 percent of the college graduate/postgraduate group, or 11 percent of the some high school, high school grad, and vocational group.

The apparent shift to electronic means of reaching voters, however, may augur well for the breakdown of traditional patron-client relationships in bringing in the votes for specific parties and candidates as part of symbiotic vertical relationships. This situation may bring in new opportunities for non-traditional political parties to aggregate interests along issue areas through coalitions with NGOs which have more extensive and continuing grassroots presence. This condition may tend to favor the more “progressive” issue-oriented rather than the conservative personality-oriented political parties.

D. Political Interest

“How interested would you say you are in politics?” In the 2001 survey, 56 percent reported “very interested” and “somewhat interested while 42 percent said “not very interested” and “not interested at all. In the 2006 survey, 52 percent were very or somewhat interested while 46 percent said not very or not at all interested. There appears to be a slight reduction in political interest among adult Filipinos.

“How often do you follow news about politics and government?” The responses to this question show a dramatic change. In 2001, only 29 percent of respondents said they follow news about politics and government everyday. In 2006, 45 percent of the respondents said they followed such news everyday, a 31 percent increase. While anywhere from 20 to 23 percent of the respondents in 2001 followed news about politics and government “several times a week”, “once or twice a week”, or “not even once a week”, this was reduced to 14 to 16 percent in 2001, as more respondents shifted to daily monitoring of political and governmental news.

What could be behind these trends? One could be the dramatic increase over the past few years in the availability of second-hand television sets from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. While brand-new sets sell for at least \$200, the second hand sets sell for \$20, putting them in the hands of even the poorest families. Even in the remotest towns throughout Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, second-hand television sets abound.

On the supply side, political and governmental news are interspersed with entertainment news and are difficult to avoid on radio, television, and the newspapers. The number of newspapers, tabloids, television channels, and radio stations throughout the islands also tend to make it easy and convenient to follow political and government news.

The events since President Estrada was deposed in 2001 to 2006 also represented an unusually highly charged political atmosphere in the Philippines that continued to generate interesting political and governmental news.

E. Political Efficacy

Graph 6b1 shows data on political efficacy for 2001 and 2006. To the statement “I think I have the ability to participate in politics”, 31 percent agreed while 69 percent disagreed in 2001. In 2006, 28 percent agreed and 69 percent disagreed in 2006. There has been no significant change in overall political efficacy levels. Generally, the trend is dismal – seven out of ten respondents of both surveys report they do not think they have the ability to participate in politics.

Graph 6b2 shows that this inability has increasingly been less accountable by a lack of understanding of what is going on. While 45 percent disagreed and 55 percent agreed (balance of -10) with the statement “Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what is going on” in 2001, 57 percent disagreed and 39 percent agreed with the statement (balance of +18).

Graph 6c show some interesting demographic correlates of political efficacy in 2006. More females (33 percent) compared to males (26 percent) think they have the ability to participate in politics. A bigger percentage of respondents who attain at least some high school education report higher levels of political efficacy compared to elementary or lower level respondents.

Graph 6c also shows that slightly less of the females (57 percent) compared to the males (60 percent) agree that they find politics and government to be complicated. Interestingly, as far as educational attainment is concerned, less of the elementary graduates (44 percent) compared to college graduates and postgraduates (63 percent) find government and politics complicated. This may be a function of active versus passive processes for deriving meaning from political and governmental events. The less educated may more readily and uncritically accept mass media or influential persons’ account of political and governmental events.

The efficacy reported by women is an empirical reality in the Philippines. More and more women are serving in elective and appointive positions. Of the 20-year period 1986 to 2006, women served as President for 12 years, an unprecedented record in East Asia. There are an increasing number of women in cabinet level, constitutional commission, and other high offices of the government. This perception may mean that more women are currently being mobilized for political participation in the Philippines at both national and local levels.

Vertical accountability refers to the accountability of government to the people. In a democracy, all sovereignty emanates from the people, and political power is exercised by elected and appointed government officials and employees on their behalf.

There are three statements in the survey that help measure vertical accountability.

To the statement “People have the power to change a government they don’t like”, 67 percent of the respondents agreed (35 percent strongly), while only 31 percent disagreed (12 percent strongly).

Of the 11 countries/territories covered in the survey, the Philippines is second only to Mongolia in the percentage that strongly agrees with the statement. This can be explained by the strong memory of the two people power events that have occurred in the Philippines where presidents were deposed.

This strong vertical accountability is confirmed by responses to another item. Slightly more Filipino respondents (49 percent) also believed that “Between elections, the people have no way of holding the government responsible for its actions”, compared to those who did not believe so (46 percent). However, this percentage of those who thought people have a way of holding the government responsible for its actions is highest in the Philippines of the 11 countries/territories surveyed. It is lowest in Mongolia (26 percent).

When asked about more operational, transactional, day-to-day indicators of government accountability, however, the pattern does not hold. Asked “How often do government officials withhold important public information from public view?” only 40 percent had positive views (14 percent said rarely, 26 percent said occasionally) while 52 percent had negative views (31 percent said most of the time and 21 percent said always).

Whereas on the average 45 percent of the respondents in all countries said “always” and “most of the time” to this question, 52 percent of Filipino respondents said so, depicting a government that is not so accountable to them. In contrast, only 19 percent in the Thai survey said the government withheld important information always or most of the time. On the high side, 70 percent of the Korean respondents said their government withheld important information.

F. Horizontal Accountability

Horizontal accountability refers to the extent to which the system of checks and balances among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government work.

Two survey items tested for this variable.

In response to the statement “When the government breaks the laws, there is nothing the legal system can do”, the survey respondents

More Filipinos believe that the legal system can do something about the government breaking the law. Some 50 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement while 45 percent agreed with it. In comparison, the country with the greatest percentage of disagreeing respondents is Singapore (62 percent) while the one with the least percentage is Mongolia (23 percent).

G. Freedom

Table 9 shows the data on the evaluation of freedom under the current regime. In response to the statement “People can join any organization they like without fear” 65 percent say they agree (33 percent strongly and 33 percent somewhat agree) while 32 percent disagree.

This is matched and confirmed by the responses to the other “freedom” item. In response to the statement “People are free to speak what they think without fear” 67 percent say they agree while 31 disagree.

The comparable (but slightly different) 2001 survey items were: “You can join any organization you like”. Some 49 percent agreed while 45 percent disagreed.

“Everyone is free to say what they think”. Some 59 percent agreed while 37 disagreed.

People can join any organization they like without fear.

The 2001 and 2006 survey responses indicate more respondents think there is freedom compared to those who think there is none. The 2006 survey present a bigger positive balance of responses (positive minus negative) than the 2001 survey, indicating the sense of freedom among Filipinos has increased over time.

H. Equality

Subjective social status refers to the respondent's own perception of where they stand socially in society. It is measured by asking them the question, "People sometimes think of social status of their families in terms of being high or low. Imagine a ladder with 10 steps. At step one stand the lowest status and at step 10 stand the highest. Where would you place your family on the following scale?"

A ladder marked only "highest" at step 10 and "lowest" at step one is presented. For purposes of labeling (not actually presented to the respondents), we can consider steps 9-10 as "very high", 7-8 as "quite high", 5-6 as "middle", 3-4 as "quite low", and 1-2 as very low.

Table 10 shows that subjective social status of the Filipino respondents in comparative perspective with 10 other East Asian countries/territories. Some 4 percent of the Filipino respondents indicated they belong to the top two steps ("very high", 9 percent to the "high" steps, 45 to the middle steps, 22 percent to the "low" steps, and 19 percent to the lowest 2 steps ("very low").

The most remarkable feature of the Philippine subjective social status distribution is that the lowest level has 19 percent of the respondents, while twice that of the nearest countries with high percentages with the lowest SSS – Hong Kong at 10 percent and Indonesia at 9 percent. Remarkably, Thais report only 2 percent belong to the lowest two steps. This perception counts towards a low equality rating for the Philippines.

Some 38 percent of the respondents say everyone is treated equally by the government, while 60 percent disagree. As can be expected, more of those who rate themselves very high in SSS (50 percent) compared to the "quite high" (37 percent), middle (29 percent), and quite low (21 percent) say the government treats each one equally. Interestingly, 29 percent of the respondents in the lowest level say government treats everyone equally, a percentage that matches the middle level. This could indicate that the government's effort to reach out to the poorest members of society through highly publicized programs to provide food subsidies, health care benefits, housing and land, have some impact.

I. Responsiveness

“How well do you think the government responds to what the people want?” Some 28 percent of Filipino respondents said “Very likely or likely” while 52 percent said not very likely or unlikely. This pessimism is surpassed only by Japan (21 percent saying unlikely) and Taiwan (29 percent saying unlikely). On the other hand, a high 77 percent of the Vietnamese respondents and 75 percent of the Indonesian respondents think their governments will likely solve the important problem identified within 5 years.

It can be seen in Table 11b that among the respondents who think the government is responsive, 64 percent think it will be able to solve the most important problem identified within five years. On the other end of the scale, of those who think the government is not responsive at all, only 22 percent think it will solve the said problem.

A Summary of Quality Assessment

Chart 1 presents a summary assessment of the quality of Philippine democracy in 2005 based on data from the Asian Barometer survey. Composite indices that were computed for responsiveness, equality, freedom, horizontal accountability, vertical accountability, political efficacy, political interest, electoral participation, competition, controlling corruption, and law-abiding government (see Note on Computation of Quality of Democracy Assessment Indices).

The Chart indicates that the main strengths of Philippine democracy lie in the following areas:

1. Freedom
2. Equality
3. Political Interest
4. Horizontal Accountability
5. Vertical Accountability
6. Competition.

The main weaknesses are in the following areas:

7. Controlling corruption
8. Responsiveness
9. Electoral participation
10. Political efficacy
11. Law abiding government

Freedom and equality are the outstanding strengths of Philippine democracy, according to the Asian Barometer survey. This emphasizes the individual liberties that are embodied in the Philippine constitution, especially enhanced in the basic law and highlighted in political discourse after the martial law regime. On the other hand, it also emphasizes the low level of enforcement of laws, among others due to the weak capacity of law enforcement agencies, as well as of the judicial system. This creates an atmosphere of “self-help” wherein citizens, families, interest groups, and communities are relatively free to pursue their own interests, including negotiating and bargaining with politicians and bureaucrats for electoral favors in exchange for public goods and services. This freedom also includes the freedom to implement family-oriented survival and development strategies, including sending out a member or two of the family as Overseas Filipino Workers to dramatically increase family income and “escape poverty”.

From a holistic point of view, the level of freedom and equality, taken in conjunction with the low responsiveness of the system and the low electoral participation, show a worrisome level of apathy or cynicism among Filipinos about their governance and democracy.

The high level of political interest coupled with the low electoral participation is a baffling situation that can be accounted for in many ways – continuing political scandals (especially intensive and extensive during the 2001-1005 period in the Philippines), an artifact of increased access to mass media (especially television, radio, and celfones). The non-translation of this high level of political interest to electoral politics may mean a deterioration of the capacity of political parties to aggregate interests at different levels of the political system, relying solely on the magic of mass media to deliver electoral messages, without the intervening and interceding process of discussion of issues

by citizens in assemblies or forums at different levels of aggregation.

The low level of electoral participation coupled with the low level of competition signifies that the process of political recruitment, interest aggregation, and discussion of issues and alternative programs of government are neglected functions in the political system.

Horizontal accountability and vertical accountability scores are positive, but low in value. Over the period 2002-2005, the interplay of the Congress, the Presidency, and the Supreme Court in terms of their check and balance relationships have been intense. There were two impeachment processes that have been initiated (one within the period and one after) involving the Congress and the Presidency. Questions of executive privilege in withholding certain information by the executive department from the legislative department have also been discussed during this period.

On the other hand, there have also been efforts to formulate constitutional amendments to be proposed to the people in a referenda, as well as moves to use people's initiative (a constitutionally provided process of citizens directly proposing amendments to the constitution).

While the rhetoric highlighted horizontal and vertical accountability, it is far more likely that there has been a diminution of horizontal and vertical accountability during the 2001 to 2005 period in the Philippines as evidenced by the strengthened position of the Executive vs the legislative and judicial branches of government, especially through the deft and extensive use of the tremendous powers of the executive under the Philippine Constitution. The use of these powers in an election (May 2004) was never contemplated in the 1987 Constitution, as Philippine Presidents are not eligible for re-election. President Arroyo took over power from President Estrada when the latter was deposed by People Power 2 and stood for election in May 2004 while sitting as President, a condition the constitution did not foresee.

Controlling corruption is admittedly one of the most difficult tasks of government, and it is one of the main weaknesses of the system. National government officials are seen as more corrupt than local government officials, but generally citizens perceive government as corrupt. The difference between the perception of corruption of the national government officials and the local officials may be a cue to generating more accountability and responsiveness from government – Filipinos find

local governments to be more responsive, accountable, and amenable to higher levels of participation by the people. The implementation of the Local Government Code of 1991 has generated valuable lessons in dramatically improving governance and the quality of life of the people through intensified interaction with citizens with local governments, often with the intermediation of non-governmental organizations.

The low political efficacy captured in the index indicates the lack of responsiveness of the whole system to the need of citizens to participate meaningfully in politics. There are no formal opportunities for citizen participation in politics in between elections. There are no institutionalized ways of harnessing citizen energies and contributions. Concerned citizens are expected to respond to road-shows, forums, and other events staged by national and local government officials that are too “supply driven” rather than “demand driven.” No systematic and continuing engagement of citizens based on their felt needs and expectations are undertaken. This is the interpretation that can be given to the low political efficacy score given to the Philippines

Quality of Governance and Regime Legitimacy

Interpretation of some statistically significant relationships.

- The more law-abiding the government is perceived, the less detached from authoritarianism is the respondent.
- The more effective the government is perceived in controlling corruption, the higher is the satisfaction with democracy.
- The more effective the government is perceived in controlling corruption, the higher is the support for democracy.
- The more effective the government is perceived in controlling corruption, the lower is the perception the current government is good for the country.

- The higher is the perceived political competition, the higher is the satisfaction with democracy.
- The higher is the perceived political competition, the higher is the support for democracy.
- The higher is the perceived political competition, the lower is the perception the current regime is still the best for the country.
- The higher is electoral participation, the lower is the perception that the current regime is still the best for the country.
- The higher is the political interest, the higher is the support for democracy.
- The higher is political efficacy, the less is detachment from authoritarianism.
- The higher is political efficacy, the less is the perception that the current regime is still the best for the country.
- The higher the vertical accountability, the higher is support for democracy.
- The higher is horizontal accountability, the higher is satisfaction with democracy.
- The higher is horizontal accountability, the higher is support for democracy.
- The higher is freedom, the higher is support for democracy.
- The higher is freedom, the less is detachment from authoritarianism.
- The higher is freedom, the less is the perception that the current regime is still the best for the country.

- The higher the equality, the greater is satisfaction with democracy.
- The higher the equality, the greater is support for democracy.
- The higher is equality, the less is detachment from authoritarianism.
- The higher is equality, the less is the perception that the current regime is still the best for the country.
- The more responsive the government, the higher the satisfaction with democracy.
- The more responsive the government, the higher the support for democracy.
- The more responsive the government, the less the detachment from democracy.
- The more responsive the government, the less the perception that the current regime is still the best for the country.
- The better the country's economic condition, the greater is the satisfaction with democracy.

Of all the variables considered, the only variable that did not correlate with any of the four dependent variables considered is the quality of personal economic condition. The quality of the personal economic condition of the respondent is not at all related to his satisfaction with democracy, support for democracy, detachment from authoritarianism, or his or her evaluation that the current regime is good for the country.

Conclusion

Philippine democracy is a “tired” democracy. People may have long dissociated themselves from expectations of government, despite the formal rhetorics of interest groups and non-governmental organizations. For the typical poor Filipino family, there is a strategy for survival, even if there is no

strategy for national survival. Part of that survival is for the family to privatize public resources. The family is the greatest rival of the state for the loyalty of its citizens, and the family has been a more reliable security system.

Filipinos are settling for democracy, no matter how responsive it is to their needs. They have low expectations of it, and because they put their hopes on what has been a reliable source of sustenance and happiness, they feel happy and content. They have equality and freedom – its is a matter of competition between families and extended families. Government is simply a package of resources available to each family. Globalization offers another set of package – the OFW opportunities.

This is one of the ways we can interpret how Filipinos, faced with an unresponsive government, an unlawful government, etc., can continue tolerating what would already be an intolerable situation in other countries.

Will government and the state be able to capture the imagination of Filipinos once again? Only through the electoral system will this happen. People Power events do not give people any recognizable benefits that will motivate them to embark on similar events in the future. There is nothing like being able to send, purposively, somebody out to be an OFW and bring home the bacon.

This is not the only trend at play. The political parties will try to organize and make things work. This will not happen soon. The media will be the means of battle in the next elections.

Filipinos are being judged in terms of democratic rationality. It is the rationality of the family as the unit of analysis that gives meaning to Philippine politics. Democracy is but the outward symbolism of the game, masking the lurking realities beneath.

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Note

on Computation of Summary of Quality Assessment Indices (Guide Instructions provided by the Research Project Secretariat)

Tasks to be Performed:

1. A composite index of *law-abiding government*: create a nine-point scale (+4 thru -4) by adding up II-Q104 (coding +2 for “strongly agree,” +1 somewhat agree, -1 “somewhat disagree”, -2 “strongly disagree”, and 0 for DK/NA) and II-Q113 (coding +2 “always”, +1.”most of the time”, -1 “sometimes”, -2 “rarely”, and 0 for DK/NA). Convert this scale to standardized -1.0~1.0 scale by dividing the raw score with 4.
2. A composite index of *controlling corruption*: create a 13-point scale (+6~-6) by adding up II-Q117 (coding +2 for “Hardly anyone is involved”, +1 “Not a lot of officials are corrupt, -1 “Most officials are corrupt” and -2 “Almost everyone is corrupt, and coding 0 for DK/NA), II-Q118 (same as before), and II-Q120 (coding +2 for “It is doing its best”, etc.). Convert this scale to standardized -1.0~1.0 scale by dividing the raw score with 6.
3. A composite index of *competition*: create a 13-point scale (+6~-6) by adding up II-Q105 (coding +2 for “Strongly agree”, etc.), II-Q114 (coding +2 for “Always”, etc.) and II-Q43 (coding +2 for “Complete free and fair”, etc.). Convert this scale to standardized -1.0~1.0 scale by dividing the raw score with 6.
4. A composite index of *electoral participation*: create a four-point scale (+3 to 0) by adding up II-Q38, II-Q40 and II-Q41 (coding 1 for “Yes and 0 for all other answers). Convert this scale to standardized -1.0~1.0 scale by subtracting it by 1.5 and then dividing the result with 1.5.
5. A composite index of *political interest*: create a nine-point scale (+4 thru -4) by adding up II-Q104 (coding +2 for “Very interested”, +1 “Somewhat interested”, -1 “not very interested”, -2 “not at all interested, and coding 0 for DK/NA) and II-Q50 (coding +2 for “Everyday”, +1 for “several times a week” or “twice or once a week”, -1 for “not even once a week,” -2 “practically never”, and 0 for DK/NA). Convert this scale to standardized -1.0~1.0 scale by dividing the raw score with 4.

6. Create a composite index of political efficacy by constructing a nine-point scale (+4 thru -4) by adding up II-Q127 (coding +2 for “strongly agree,” +1 somewhat agree, -1 “somewhat disagree”, -2 “strongly disagree”, and 0 for DK/NA) and II-Q128 (coding -2 for “strongly agree,” -1 somewhat agree, +1 “somewhat disagree”, +2 “strongly disagree”, and 0 for DK/NA).
7. A composite index of *vertical accountability*: create a 13-point scale (+6~-6) by adding up II-Q 103 (coding +2 for “Strongly agree”, etc.), II-Q106 (coding -2 for “Strongly agree”, -1 for “somewhat agree”, +1 for “somewhat disagree”, +2 for “Strongly disagree”, and 0 for DK/NA) and II-Q112 (coding -2 for “Always”, -1 for “most of the time”, +1 for “sometimes”, +2 for “rarely”, and 0 for DK/NA). Convert this scale to standardized -1.0~1.0 scale by dividing the raw score with 6.
8. A composite index of *horizontal accountability*: create a nine-point scale (+4 thru -4) by adding up II-Q107 (coding -2 for “Strongly agree”, -1 for “somewhat agree”, +1 for “somewhat disagree”, +2 for “Strongly disagree”, and 0 for DK/NA) and II-Q115 (coding +2 for “Very capable”, +1 for “Capable”, -1 for “Not capable”, -2 for “Not at all capable”, and 0 for DK/AS). Convert this scale to standardized -1.0~1.0 scale by dividing the raw score with 4.
9. A composite index of *freedom*: create a nine-point scale (+4 thru -4) by adding up II-Q110 (coding +2 for “Strongly agree,” etc.) and IIQ-111 (coding +2 for “Strongly agree,” etc.). Convert this scale to standardized -1.0~1.0 scale by dividing the raw score with 4.
10. A composite index of *equality*: create a nine-point scale (+4 thru -4) by adding up II-Q108 (coding +2 for “Strongly agree,” etc.) and II-Q109 (coding +2 for “Strongly agree,” etc.). Convert this scale to standardized -1.0~1.0 scale by dividing the raw score with 4.
11. A composite index of *responsiveness*: create a nine-point scale (+4 thru -4) by adding up II-Q116 coding +2 for “Very responsive”, etc.) and II-Q102a (coding +2 for “Very likely”, etc.). Convert this scale to standardized -1.0~1.0 scale by dividing the raw score with 4.
12. Report the mean scores of the eleven composite measures in a horizontal bar chart (Refer to Chart 1). Summary discussion of the analysis above, in particular identify the strength and weakness

of the current regime.

Sleepless in Seattle, Democracy in the Philippines?

“Marriage is already complicated as it is. You should not be bringing so low expectations into the marriage. I do not want to be the man you settle for.”