

Civil Society, Populist Politics and the State – Philippine Democracy Today

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Philippine Democracy




- The framework for democracy of the Philippines owes much to the country's heritage of US colonization in recognizing political and civil rights. This ideology was imposed on a highly skewed society after the Spanish-American War.
- By 1946 and Philippine independence, the Philippines could be described as an *elite democracy*.

Philippine Democracy

- Civil society organizations (CSOs) emerged in response to the need to rectify the contradiction between: the Phil's democratic ideological framework, on the one hand; and the reality of mass poverty, inequality, and powerlessness of the poor, on the other
- E.g.: the role of CSOs in the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC)

The Philippines as “NGO heaven”

Civil society roles (Edwards)

-  As part of society
-  As a kind of society
-  As the public sphere



The Philippines as “NGO heaven”

- Rise of civil society: from Martial Law to Macapagal-Arroyo
 - Marcos dictatorship
 - People Power Revolution (EDSA I)
 - After 1986 (Aquino, Ramos, Estrada, Macapagal-Arroyo)

The Philippines as “NGO heaven”

■ Roles of civil society today

■ Numbers

■ NGOs

- 27,100 in 1986
- 50,800 by 1992
- Possibly 80,000 today
- Some 5,000 can be considered genuine grassroots-oriented NGOs

■ People’s organizations (POs)

- In the thousands, augmented by 35,000 registered cooperatives

The Philippines as “NGO heaven”

■ Roles of civil society today

■ Focus

- community organizing and empowerment of poor for participation, and increased capacity to gain access to resources

■ Policy advocacy

- Local and national
- International

■ Strategy

- engaging with government in a spirit of collaboration or critical collaboration

The Philippines as “NGO heaven”

- Challenging an elite democracy
 - Making strengthened POs take positions of power through capacity building
 - Enabling marginalized sectors to engage in electoral process via Party-List system
 - Addressing social injustices through progressive legislation
 - National govt/Presidential pro-poor actions
 - Land proclamations, resettlement sites, community-driven development

The Philippines as “NGO heaven”

■ Challenging an elite democracy:

■ Popular protests

- People Power/EDSA I and II
- Urban riots of May 1, 2001 (“EDSA III”)
- The phenomenon of an incipient class-conscious social movement forming, but led by upper-middle class political leaders
- The strong position of the barangay captain in the power structure of urban barangays
- A “caveat” on regularly resorting to “people power” when dissatisfied with government
- Urban protests: geographically identified rather than class conscious

Conclusion

- Philippine civil society is alive and well. However, it recognizes the many challenges that still lie ahead for the country, such as poverty and inequality. NGOs and POs are continuing their struggle toward genuine social transformation, engaging government and to a lesser extent the private sector in the process.