

Civil Society and Democracy in the Philippines: An Update

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A Background and Update

- Brief context and very short background on civil society politics
- Update on civil society perspectives of current political situation
- Possible developments in civil society engagement with democratic politics

Past 50 Years: Anemic Growth

- From 1960 to 2000: RP's GNP grew 11 times. Malaysia's grew 39 times; Thailand's 48 times; Hong Kong's 172 times
- Same period: RP output per worker grew 1% annually; rest of East Asian countries grew 4.4%; average for all developing countries was 1.4% annual growth

Past 50 Years: Inequity

- In 1960, richer half of families took 82% of total income; still the same in 2000
- Richest one-fifth earned 11 times that of poorest one-fifth; compared to 9 times for Thailand; 6 times for Vietnam; 4 times for Sri Lanka
- Richest 1% (150,000 families) earned incomes equivalent to poorest 38% (6 million families)
- Richest one-fifth families have average fertility of 2.0 children per woman; poorest one-fifth have average fertility of 5.9 children per woman

Civil society as political player

- Emerged and grew in response to limited democratic space during Marcos dictatorship (1969 to 1986)
- Many forms: free independent media; community-based social activism; politically sensitized parts of Catholic Church; alternative politics to Marcos Party; armed underground

Post-dictatorship flowering

- Restoration of constitutional democracy re-channeled civil society forces to new political arenas
- Forms: elections; free media; non-government organizations and actions; protest movement; sectoral advocacies; local governance
- Central channel of politics remained presidential campaigns and engagement with incumbent administrations (proxy for political parties)

Civil society in current GMA administration

- In 2001, GMA gained power via an anti-corruption coalition that exposed, impeached, tried, protested and ousted incumbent President. Civil society was prominent part of coalition.
- In 2004, GMA secured power against potential populist backlash by using incumbency to create a coalition with “above-ground” and “below-ground” components. Civil society was part of “above-ground” component.

Civil society reaction to GMA administration

- By 2005, scandals caused large parts of “above-ground” component in GMA coalition to break-away. New hardened GMA coalition now focus an impeachment-proof House, a vocal and visible local government network, and loyal AFP/PNP.
- Civil society forces divided: anti-GMA protest; incremental reforms at sectoral and local levels; political engagement with incumbent administration; vigilance against dictatorship

GMA in Power Centrifuge

- In late 2007, conflict in GMA coalition as Speaker attacks corrupt deal attributed to GMA husband. Deal cancelled.
- In early 2008, GMA husband strikes back by ousting Speaker. No peace in GMA coalition.
- New forces shaping landscape: new Speaker; Lakas instability; Kampi aggressiveness; local governments division; former Speaker's potential; 2010 Presidentiables; economic uncertainties

Civil society in democratic politics

- Lesson 1: political roots of good governance yielding development outcomes
- Lesson 2: reform-based electoral politics critical to harnessing democracy for development
- Lesson 3: central importance of presidential politics in pursuing reforms at scale in Philippines
- On-going process of digesting and acting on these lessons, possibly for 2010 Presidential elections