

The Transformation of Political Culture in the Philippines After Marcos: A Critical Review

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Abstrak

This study aims to critically examine the transformation of political culture in the Philippines since the fall of the authoritarian regime of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. The fall of Marcos, marked by the peaceful People Power Revolution, signaled the beginning of a transition toward a more open and participatory democratic system. However, the central question posed in this study is to what extent the political culture in the Philippines has truly undergone substantial change following this transition. This study employs a qualitative approach using the literature review method to analyze and examine various secondary sources such as books, academic journals, research institute reports, mass media, and official government documents, as well as to identify the patterns of political culture that have developed from the post-Marcos era to the administration of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. The research analyzes the political dynamics of the Philippines after Marcos, focusing on changes in values, norms, and political practices within both society and the political elite. The findings show that although the Philippines has made significant progress in institutional aspects—such as relatively free elections, press freedom, and the strengthening of democratic institutions—traditional political culture continues to exert strong influence. This is evident in the persistence of political dynasties, clientelism, and vote-buying practices, particularly in local elections. Despite reforms, political power remains concentrated in elite families, and voter engagement is often shaped more by personal loyalty than by policy orientation. The study concludes that the transformation of political culture in the Philippines after Marcos has yet to reach the depth necessary to support a mature and sustainable democracy.

Keywords- Political Culture, Transformation, Democratization, Dynastic Politics, Patronage

1. INTRODUCTION

Political culture reflects the values, norms, and behaviors that exist within a society in relation to power, governance, and the political decision-making process (Garrido, 2020). In developing countries such as the Philippines, political culture significantly influences the trajectory of democratic development and governance. As one of the oldest democracies in Southeast Asia, the Philippines presents a complex political culture shaped by its colonial legacy, periods of authoritarian rule, and

enduring elite dominance (Mendoza & Yap, 2022). These historical and structural factors have fostered a political environment characterized by patron-client relationships, populist rhetoric, and weak political party institutionalization. While scholars agree on the centrality of these factors, some argue that the persistence of such dynamics reflects a failure in political education and civic engagement, whereas others emphasize the role of entrenched power structures and media manipulation in sustaining this culture. Thus, rather than viewing political culture as static or

monolithic, it is essential to synthesize these perspectives to understand the evolving and contested nature of democratic practice in the Philippines.

For more than two decades, the Philippines was under the authoritarian rule of Ferdinand Marcos, who governed from 1965 until he was ousted through the peaceful People Power Revolution in 1986 (Ong, 2022). Marcos's regime was marked by rampant corruption, human rights violations, suppression of the opposition, and the imposition of martial law, which granted the president near-absolute power. Amid this repression, the Philippine political culture was shaped within the framework of authoritarianism and submission to a strongman figure, with limited space for public participation (Teehankee, 2016).

The fall of Marcos was seen as a victory for people's democracy and sparked hope for the establishment of a more participatory and transparent political system. The post-Marcos administration, beginning with the leadership of Corazon Aquino, sought to restore democratic order through constitutional reforms, the rehabilitation of state institutions, and the involvement of civil society in political processes. However, the process of democratization did not proceed without obstacles. Although relatively free elections were introduced and the media and NGOs gained space to develop, many traditional political practices persisted—some even adapted to fit

within the new democratic framework (Mendoza & Yap, 2023).

In this context, the transformation of political culture in the Philippines becomes a critically important issue to examine. More than three decades after the end of the Marcos regime, a fundamental question arises: Has democracy in the Philippines progressed in a substantive way, or has it remained merely procedural? While the Philippines is formally a democratic state, realities on the ground reveal that phenomena such as dynastic politics, clientelism, vote buying, and the personalization of power remain deeply entrenched. In fact, over the past decades, the Marcos family has managed to return to political prominence, culminating in the election of Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. as President in 2022.

The return of the Marcos family to the pinnacle of power has sparked serious debates about the nation's collective memory, the effectiveness of political education, and society's resistance to authoritarianism. Does this development indicate a failure to cultivate a democratic political culture, or does it instead reveal that the political and social structures in the Philippines have yet to fully transform from their old systems?

Moreover, the political dynamics in the Philippines also reflect the strong influence of local culture, religion, and patron-client relationships in everyday political practice. In many regions, political loyalty remains heavily

shaped by personal and familial ties rather than ideology or policy platforms. This condition undermines the institutionalization of political parties and encourages the rise of populist practices that emphasize individual figures over clear governance programs (Ordoñez & Borja, 2018).

You have effectively presented the political phenomena and complexities in the Philippines, particularly in the period following the fall of the Marcos regime up to the present. However, the study would benefit from a clearer articulation of the specific gaps or underexplored areas in the existing literature. Explicitly identifying what remains poorly understood or insufficiently examined will strengthen the academic contribution and provide a clearer direction for your analysis. A comprehensive analysis can help answer questions regarding the success or failure of democratization, identify the factors shaping political culture, and formulate lessons that can contribute to the strengthening of democracy—not only in the Philippines but also in other countries with similar experiences (Thompson, 2021).

Through this article, the author seeks to examine the evolution of Philippine political culture from both historical and contemporary perspectives, assessing the extent of change in the political behavior of both citizens and elites. It also explores how political memory and social dynamics have influenced the character of democracy in the Philippines today. This critical

review is essential for understanding not only the formal political structures, but also the cultural and sociological dimensions that impact the long-term sustainability of democratic governance.

Therefore, this article aims to critically examine the transformation of political culture in the Philippines by exploring the interplay between political memory, contemporary power practices, and the cultural dynamics shaping Philippine democracy. This study not only addresses a gap in the literature—which has so far focused predominantly on institutional aspects—but also offers a deeper understanding of the tension between formal democratization and traditional political practices. .

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using the method of library research, focusing on the exploration and critical analysis of various secondary sources related to political culture in the Philippines following the fall of Ferdinand Marcos. This approach is chosen because the study aims to gain a deep understanding of political culture through the examination of discourse, historical narratives, and socio-political dynamics that cannot be measured quantitatively.

1. Research Approach and Type

A In this research, a qualitative approach is employed to delve into the meanings, values, and perceptions embedded in the evolution of Philippine political culture over time. This study is descriptive-analytical and interpretive

in nature, aiming to describe and analyze the transformation process of political culture based on available historical, social, and political data.

This qualitative approach draws upon the classic model of political culture developed by Almond and Verba (1963). This model views political culture as a system of cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations that shape political participation and influence democratic stability. Consequently, this framework is highly relevant for analyzing how political values and beliefs in the Philippines have evolved and shaped its political landscape.

2. Data Sources

In the context of this literature study, all data are derived from existing documents (secondary sources). However, these data can be distinguished based on their proximity to the object of study: primary documentary data and secondary literature data.

- a. Primary documentary data include official Philippine government documents, transcripts of political speeches, election results, post-1986 laws and constitutions, and news archives from national and international media outlets. These sources are considered primary as they are direct records or artifacts of the phenomena under investigation.

- b. Secondary literature data consist of scholarly books, academic journal articles, research reports from political research institutions, and publications from non-governmental organizations focusing on democracy, human rights, and governance. These sources provide analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of primary data or broader phenomena.

Some of the key references for this study include:

- a. Academic journals such as the Philippine Political Science Journal and Asian Survey.
- b. International organizations like Freedom House, The Asia Foundation, and Human Rights Watch.
- c. Credible media outlets such as Rappler, Philippine Daily Inquirer, and The Philippine Star.

3. Data Collection Methods

Data collection was carried out through the following methods:

- a. Literature review of relevant documents and publications.
- b. Thematic analysis of media content and speeches by key political figures.
- c. Comparative analysis across different presidential administrations (early post-Marcos era, Estrada, Arroyo, Aquino III,

Duterte, and Marcos Jr.).

4. Data Analysis Techniques

- a. The data obtained was analyzed using content analysis and discourse analysis methods to understand the representation of political culture in various public and institutional narratives. The analysis process followed these steps:
- b. Data reduction: Grouping relevant information based on political culture themes such as patronage, dynastic politics, public participation, and democratization.
- c. Data display: Presenting selected information in thematic and chronological descriptions.
- d. Conclusion drawing: Synthesizing and interpreting the data to answer the research questions and critically reveal patterns in the transformation of political culture.

5. Data Validity and Credibility

To ensure the validity and credibility of the research findings, the researcher applies source triangulation, which involves comparing data from various sources—academic scholars, independent media, and official institutions to avoid information bias. Additionally, the researcher refers to sources that have been verified and possess a solid scholarly reputation (Talamayan, 2021)

6. Research Limitations

This study has several limitations, including:

- a. The analysis is focused on the post-1986 period up to 2024.
- b. It does not involve direct interviews or field surveys due to methodological constraints.
- c. The study is descriptive and interpretive in nature, rather than statistical generalization.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study finds that the process of political culture transformation in the Philippines after the fall of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 exhibits complex and paradoxical dynamics. On one hand, there have been significant changes in the structure and mechanisms of politics that indicate democratic progress. On the other hand, old political cultures characterized by patronage, dynastic politics, and the personalization of power have persisted and even reproduced within the context of the new democracy (Labonne, Parsa, & Querubín, 2019). To fully understand the transformation of political culture in the Philippines, this discussion is divided into several key subthemes:

A. Institutional Democratization: Limited Reforms

Post-1986, the Philippines experienced a significant era of political reform. The 1987 Constitution replaced the authoritarian framework built by Marcos with a presidential system that emphasized checks and balances, human rights, and direct elections. Democratic mechanisms such as press freedom, multi-party systems, and the

separation of powers were restored. Institutions like the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), the Ombudsman, and the Supreme Court were institutionally strengthened (Mendoza & Yap, 2022).

However, these institutional successes were not always accompanied by the internalization of democratic values within the political culture of both society and the elite. Elections were often seen not as a means for the rational articulation of the people's will, but rather as a platform for mass mobilization by political elites using financial resources, kinship ties, and populist symbolism. In other words, the democratization that took place was procedural and did not always reach the cultural roots of the people's political behavior.

B. Patronage Politics and Clientelism: An Ingrained Legacy

One of the key findings is the continued strength of patronage politics at various levels of government. Although the Philippines has regularly held elections, many political relationships are not based on ideology or policy but rather on mutual dependency between politicians (patrons) and constituents (clients). Patrons provide material assistance, jobs, or legal protection, while clients offer political support, particularly in the form of votes during elections.

Clientelism is especially prominent in rural areas, where access to state services is still limited and heavily reliant on local political figures. The lack of trust in formal institutions

pushes people to rely on informal networks, often based on kinship or ethnic ties (Mendoza et al., 2016).

This phenomenon not only perpetuates power imbalances but also hampers the rationalization of the electorate's political choices. Voters often do not choose based on platforms or track records, but rather on who "gives the most." This creates a cycle of corruption and inefficiency in the bureaucracy, as political elites use state resources to repay "political debts" to their constituents.

C. Dynastic Politics: The Dominance of Elite Families

The Philippines is one of the countries with the highest levels of political dynasty dominance in Asia. Studies conducted by both local and international scholars show that around 70% of members of the Philippine Congress come from the same political families. Even at the local level, political dynasties dominate key positions such as governors, mayors, and provincial council members.

Although the 1987 Constitution explicitly prohibits the formation of political dynasties, the implementation of this rule has stalled due to conflicts of interest among legislators, many of whom belong to political dynasties themselves. Dynastic politics not only creates an electoral oligarchy but also weakens political renewal and narrows public participation.

This situation indicates that structural changes alone have not been sufficient to

dismantle the exclusive political culture that benefits only a limited elite group. In practice, Philippine democracy has become an arena dominated by certain families who pass on power through generations, resembling a feudal system (Lee, 2020).

D. The Rise of Populism and Political Personalization

The post-Marcos era has also been marked by the rise of populism, which taps into the emotions of the masses through simple rhetoric, charismatic symbolism, and the reinforcement of the leader figure. Rodrigo Duterte, for example, was elected president in 2016 with a promise to eliminate crime and drugs, using harsh language that garnered public sympathy. He built a narrative that he was a "man of the people" willing to challenge the elite and corruption, even though in practice, he reinforced an authoritarian style of governance.

Such populism obscures the role of institutions and deliberative processes in democracy. Populist leaders often centralize power in themselves, weaken opposition, and undermine oversight mechanisms. This indicates that the personalization of power remains an inseparable part of Philippine political culture.

E. Disinformation and Historical Revision: The Victory of the Marcos Narrative

One of the most controversial phenomena in the last decade is the return of the Marcos family to power, especially after the election of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. as president in

2022. This raises serious questions about the nation's collective memory and the effectiveness of political education in the Philippines.

Marcos Jr.'s victory cannot be separated from a massive campaign carried out through social media, which was colored by historical revision, glorification of the past, and structured disinformation. Many young generations who did not experience Marcos Sr.'s rule firsthand grew up with an alternative narrative that called the era a time of glory and economic stability (Encarnacion & Tadem, 2016).

This indicates that the process of political culture transformation in the Philippines is not only about political practices, but also about how history is constructed and interpreted. If the collective memory of society can be engineered through false information, then democracy becomes increasingly fragile because the public loses its foothold in truth and criticism.

F. The Role of Civil Society and Media: Space for Resistance Despite

The enormous challenges of political culture, the role of civil society and media as a balancing force cannot be ignored. Many non-governmental organizations in the Philippines actively monitor elections, educate voters, and advocate for important issues such as budget transparency, anti-corruption, and human rights protection.

Independent media outlets such as Rappler are examples of how investigative journalism can counter the dominance of official narratives and

disinformation. However, media and NGOs also face significant pressure, whether in the form of criminalization, censorship, or violence against journalists.

IV. CONCLUSION

The transformation of political culture in the Philippines after 1986 reveals a complex and paradoxical process. While the Philippines institutionally succeeded in building a formal democratic system, many long-standing political cultural values persisted and even thrived within this framework of procedural democracy. This indicates that democratization in the Philippines remains superficial, and its political culture has not undergone a deep transformation.

This finding aligns with theoretical perspectives suggesting that democracy can function procedurally without fundamental changes in political culture (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). Therefore, a long-term approach is imperative, one that not only addresses the political system but also targets fundamental changes in the mindsets, values, and norms shaping the political behavior of both the populace and the elite. Without such profound changes, Philippine democracy will continue to be vulnerable to power co-optation and populist manipulation.

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