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THE CONTINUING
SAGA FOR BETTER GOVERNANCE
IN THE PHILIPPINES

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The historical economic and political domination in the country has constrained the promotion of relative egalitarianism in Philippine society. The concentration of power in the hands of a limited number of people has undermined and weakened the rule of the marginalized people and disputed the fundamental concept of *Demos Kratos* (Greek word for 'democracy'). The quest to achieve better governance in the country necessitates the shaping of its political institutions and structures within the confines of socio-political and economic empowerment, a mass-based institutional electoral system that guarantees the will of the people, and participative governance that allows multi-stakeholders' engagement in realizing the national vision of political and economic development.

Chronicling the historical quest of the country to better governance has been marked by powerful continuities and discontinuities witnessed by both periods of development and regression. Unlike its Southeast Asian neighbours like Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam, which have relatively transcended the challenges of development and democratic rule with better quality of life index, the Philippines remains struggling. The quest for better governance remains enduring and challenging. It perseveres to be hopeful though with the upcoming 2022 national (including presidential) and local elections.

Although all of our Southeast Asian neighbours, except Thailand, have been subjected to colonial rule, their institutions of governance have raised their quality of life. Unlike in the Philippines whose institutions and structures of governance were inherited from its former colonial rulers, particularly the Americans, and grew and interspersed with local and indigenous cultures, these institutions have yet to bear the fruit of better governance. While the country's present

has been whittled by its history, its future will be defined by how the state and society conduct its politics.

Seventy-four (74) years after the Philippines gained its independence from US colonial rule and 35 years since the people regained their power from Marcos authoritarian rule, the country has been politically hobbled and has yet to achieve an ordered sense of national development and effective democratic rule. Given the limitation of space, the paper focuses on issues of elitism and the electoral system. It argues that the country's inability to transcend the challenges and requisites of effectual democratic rule is collectively rooted in elitism, traditional politicians' and dynastic control of the electoral system, and less participative governance. Unless structural, institutional, political, and electoral reforms lead to a more empowered government structure, mass-based institutional electoral system, and collaborative governance, Philippine society would consequently steer towards political decay and insulate the nation-state from the people it serves.

* THE VIEWS AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS PAPER ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THOSE OF THE INSTITUTE.

GOVERNANCE: BRIEF CONCEPTUAL EXPLICATION

Conceptually, “governance” is the process of decision-making and the manner by which decisions are implemented/acted (or not implemented/unacted). Accordingly, it is a political process where power is derived, exercised, controlled, and allocated within and beyond the institutions of government. Further, an analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors and institutions involved in decision/policy-making and implementing the decisions/policies as well as on formal and informal structures created or established by power-wielding conventions designed to arrive at and implement decisions. “Governance,” as ascertained by Pierre and Peters (2000), is the replacement of traditional ‘powers over’ with contextual ‘powers to.’ It is a swing from the usual government approach – a top-down approach which attempts to regulate the behaviour of people and institutions in quite detailed and compartmentalized ways – to processes in governing, which tries to set the parameters of the system within which people and institutions behave so that self-regulation achieves the desired outcomes.

Though government and governance are often used interchangeably, they are different. As the “government” rules the state or local political community, “governance” pursues the defined goals in accordance with the proper functioning of state’s or community’s socio-economic and political institutions. As a paradigm shift in the role of government, governance extends beyond the confines of the aforementioned, yet is still predominated by government. Drawing from the convergence of paradigms, governance brings together interweaving institutional and political economy factors that shape the economic and social development of the country. Moreover, governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national governance, and local governance.

The concept of “good governance,” highlighted in the 1989 World Bank (WB) report on Sub-Saharan Africa, characterizes the crisis

TABLE 1 . DEFINING GOVERNANCE BY SELECTED INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Institution (Selected)	Definition of Governance	Indicators of Governance
World Bank (WB)	Governance is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development (1992). Governance consists of the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them (2010)	Good governance entails sound public sector management (efficiency, effectiveness, and economy), accountability, exchange and free flow of information (transparency), and a legal framework for development (justice, respect for human rights, and liberties). Six main dimensions of good governance: Voice and accountability; political stability and absence of violence; government effectiveness; regulatory quality; rule of law; and control of corruption (Kaufmann, Kraay, Mastruzzi, 2006).
Asian Development Bank (ADB)	Governance is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s social and economic resources for development. Governance means the way those with power use that power (2013).	Good governance as — sound development management based on four interrelated — pillars: accountability, transparency, predictability, and participation (1995). For the ADB, —good governance is good government (1999). As of the latest, adopts the World Bank’s six dimensions of governance.
United Nations Development Program (UNDP)	Governance is the exercise of political economic and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences (1997).	Good governance is, among other things, participatory, transparent and accountable, effective, and equitable, and it promotes the rule of law. It ensures that political, social, and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources. Recent emphasis on the role of the State in democratic governance (2010).
Department for International Development (DfID-UK)	Governance is about the capability of governments to get things done, how they respond to the needs and rights of their citizens, and how, in turn, people can hold their governments to account. In short, governance is about politics —the way in which citizens and government relate to each other. (2006: 18)	Good governance requires three things: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• State capability<ul style="list-style-type: none">– the extent to which leaders and governments are able to get things done.• Responsiveness—whether public policies and institutions respond to the needs of citizens and uphold their rights.• Accountability—the ability of citizens, civil society, and the private sector to scrutinize public institutions and governments and hold them to account. This includes, ultimately, the opportunity to change leaders by democratic means (2006)

SOURCE: WORLD BANK, ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK, UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

of governance in the region (World Bank, 1989). It underscored the persistence of widespread corruption in developing countries and the widespread lack of commitment among governments to address it. The WB assumed that if economic growth is achieved, political development inevitably follows. Thus, WB argued that political economic considerations should be given prominence. This political component of governance is evidently reflected in its original definition of the concept. Henceforth, governance has been defined by the WB as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development (WB, 1991, p. 1). Worldwide Governance Indicators, a WB project, refers to it as the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised; while Bell (2002) sees it as the use of institutions, structures of authority, and collaboration to allocate finite resources (natural, human, financial, technological, and managerial), and coordinate or control activities in society or the economy. Other international development institutions depict the political nature of governance. The table below (adopted from Gera 2011, pp. 44-45) exhibits the role of the state and indicators of "good governance," as described by selected international development agencies, but reveals less on the gauges of political development of a state.

Good governance is presumed to protect political, civil, and cultural rights and ensure a competent and non-corrupt and accountable public administration. The government's ability to govern is gauged not simply on its capacity to pursue and realize development goals but more importantly on its capability to create the necessary social, political, economic, and cultural conditions where continuous processes of interaction between social actors, groups, and forces on the one hand, and public or semi-public organizations, formal institutions of government and authorities, on the other hand, is allowed and guaranteed in co-managing and co-steering national development objectives, i.e. collaborative governance.

Collaborative or interactive governance does not only broaden institutional pluralism but also strengthens the centrifugal forces of social pluralism. It maintains a constant balancing process between the governing needs or problem situations as well as a grasp of opportunities on one hand and governing capacities or mechanisms for problem-solving or strategy formulation on the other hand. In as much as no single actor, whether private or public, has the monopoly of knowledge and information required to solve complex, dynamic, and diversified problems nor a single actor exists who has sufficient overview to apply effective solutions to problems. Thus, it becomes imperative that state's and society's responsibilities be fused at the central level and at the same time diffused at the local level.

Owing to this effort is the domain primarily of the state and civil society is made permeable. Moreover, the borderline between the state and non-state responsibilities becomes the object of interaction. Strengthening the participation and voice of people, through enhanced civic engagement with the state, can improve accountability and trust in institutions while ensuring responsive decision-making across governing political, economic, and social institutions. In a nutshell, empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality is critical to realizing good governance, strengthening the regime's legitimacy, and sustaining development.

So much of governance concerns the way that power is exerted and shared and the ways that the state's finite (natural, human, technological, managerial, and capital) resources are rationally and appropriately allocated and utilized within society. The issue of "good governance" has particular relevance today. What is more, democratization and good governance are constitutive of political development and that underpinned a sustainable economic and social development.

SNAPSHOT OF PHILIPPINE GOVERNANCE FOLLOWING GOVERNANCE INDICATORS

Using World Bank's governance indicators, Philippine governance in over two (2) decades (1996-2019) is gauged by applying six (6) governance dimensions, namely: political stability; control of corruption; government effectiveness; regulatory quality; rule of law; and voice and accountability across five (5) regimes (under the presidencies of Ramos, Estrada, Arroyo, Aquino, and Duterte). Table 2 and Figure 1 below display the estimated governance scores that was ascribed to the Philippines in line with the aforesaid dimensions. The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) assessed the country's governance performance ranging from -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong).

In terms of political stability, a dimension that measures the probability that the government will be subverted or toppled down through unconstitutional or violent means, Duterte's regime appears to control political stability slightly from the previous Benigno Aquino's regime. Except in 1996 when political stability scored relatively highest compared to the succeeding five (5) administrations, political stability ranked the weakest scores among the other indicators, from -0.48 in 1996 (Ramos administration) to -1.65 in 2010 (transition year of Presidents Arroyo and Aquino). On corruption control, the country has consistently obtained negative scores similar to the preceding dimension; worst in 2010, fairly improving in 2015, and scaling back to bad in 2019.

On government effectiveness, a feature in governance that takes into account the quality of public service and administration, civil service, policy formulation and implementation, and political independence, the country gained positive scores in 2015 and 2019 and a neutral score in 2010. As to regulatory quality which, mirrors the public's view on the ability of the government to promote private sector advancement, the country redeems a positive score in 2019 under Duterte after registering negative scores in three (3) previous regimes.

TABLE 2 . GOVERNANCE INDICATORS BY POLITICAL REGIME

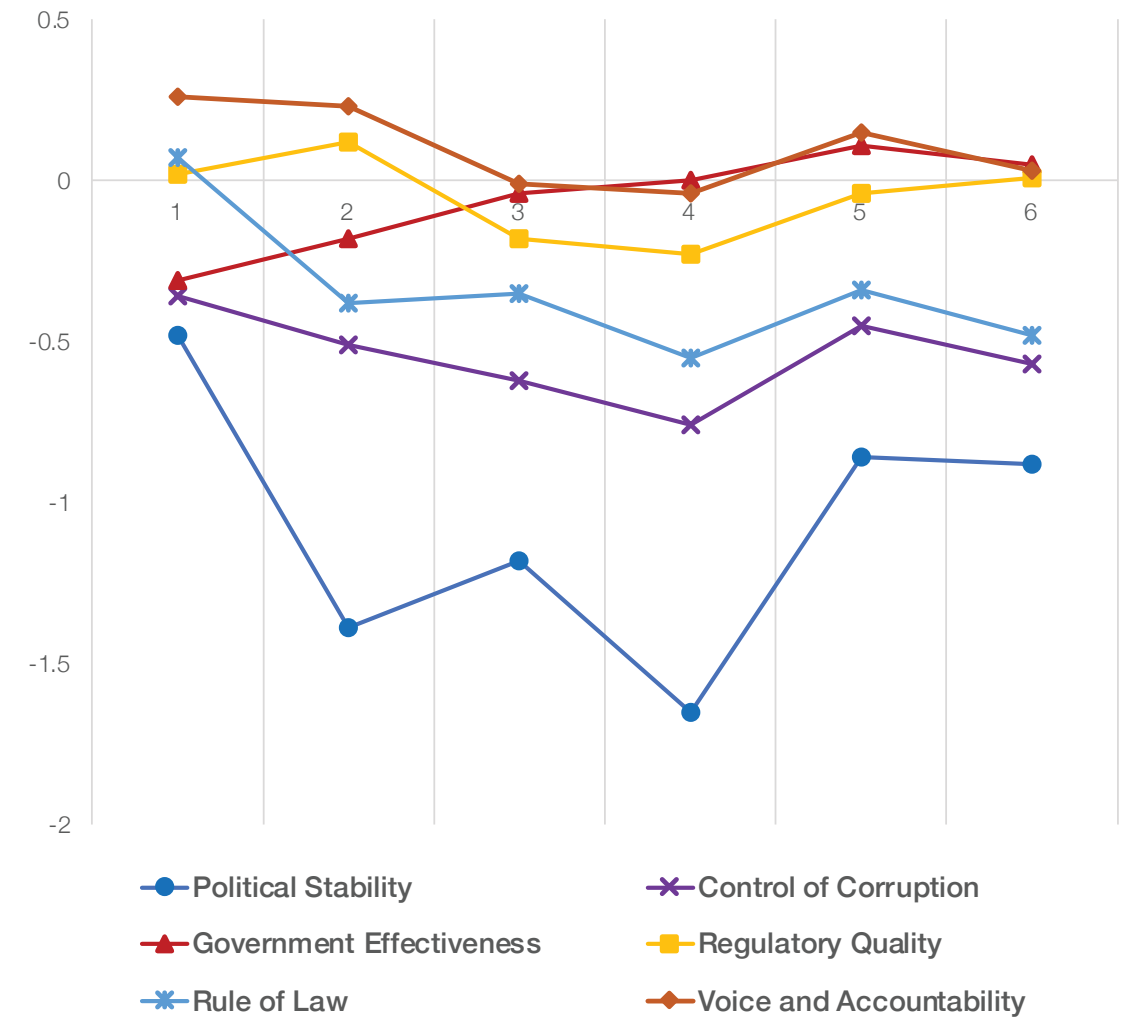
(1996-2019)

Dimensions	1996	2000	2005	2010	2015	2019
Political Stability	-0.48	-1.39	-1.18	-1.65	-0.86	-0.88
Control of Corruption	-0.36	-0.51	-0.62	-0.76	-0.45	-0.57
Government Effectiveness	-0.31	-0.18	-0.04	0	0.11	0.05
Regulatory Quality	0.02	0.12	-0.18	-0.23	-0.04	0.01
Rule of Law	0.07	-0.38	-0.35	-0.55	-0.34	-0.48
Voice and Accountability	0.26	0.23	-0.01	-0.04	0.15	0.03
Philippine Presidents	Ramos	Estrada	Arroyo	Arroyo/B. Aquino	B. Aquino	Duterte

SOURCE: SOURCE OF BASIC DATA, WGI DATASET, SEPTEMBER 2020, WORLD BANK

FIGURE 1 . GOVERNANCE INDICATORS BY POLITICAL REGIME IN GRAPH

(1996-2019)



SOURCE: SOURCE OF BASIC DATA, WGI DATASET, SEPTEMBER 2020, WORLD BANK

TABLE 3 . PHILIPPINE RANK IN PERCENTILE AMONG ASEAN COUNTRIES CONCERNING GOVERNANCE INDICATORS (WGI)
(2015-2019)

Governance Dimensions	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Rank
Political Stability	19.52	9.52	11.43	12.86	16.67	9
Control of Corruption	39.90	36.06	39.42	34.13	31.25	7
Rule of Law	43.27	39.42	37.02	34.13	34.13	7
Government Effectiveness	57.21	51.92	51.92	55.29	54.81	5
Regulatory Quality	52.40	53.85	55.77	53.85	55.29	5
Voice and Accountability	51.23	51.23	48.77	48.28	47.29	1

Legend: 0 percentile. (lowest rank) to 100 percentile. (highest rank)

SOURCE: SOURCE OF BASIC DATA, WGI DATASET, SEPTEMBER 2020, WORLD BANK

On the rule of law, which denotes the quality of service of law enforcement agents, peoples’ perception of the criminal justice system, as well as the incidence and resolution of crime and violence, the country obtained negative scores under four (4) presidents except in 1996. Finally, on voice and accountability which designates the extent citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) can participate in choosing their government or partake in governance, and degree in exercising basic and constitutionally-guaranteed rights and freedoms, the country has catalogued the strongest among the governance indicators with relatively high positive scores except during the period of President Arroyo and the transition year of Aquino in 2010.

Comparing the state of governance of the country in Southeast Asia (composed of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), the Philippines is reflected as the most politically involved with reference to citizens’ participation

and CSO engagement in the nation’s civil, constitutional, and politico-economic affairs as exhibited by the highest rank (1) it earned in the “voice and accountability” governance category countries. Conversely, the country ranks second to the least politically stable with Myanmar as the least in relation to governance dimensions measured by the WGI from 2015 to 2019. Likewise, the country ranks below the median in the region in controlling corruption and the rule of law, while it maintains a middle-range ranking for government effectiveness and regulatory quality (see Table 3).

Despite the relatively “good” assessment by the World Bank in the area of “voice and accountability,” the Philippines generally remains weak in overall governance indicators notwithstanding governmental reforms made over several decades. This paper examines henceforth the historical and contemporary causes of weak governance of the country.

COGNIZING INSTITUTIONS AND STRUCTURES IN THE
CONTEXT OF GOVERNANCE

As previously discussed, an umbilical cord ties governance and socio-political institutions. As governance is the process or the power of governing, institution refers to the established organisation designed to provide society’s socio-economic and politico-cultural needs such as education, public service, culture or the care of the destitute, poor, etc. and other services a government is obliged to deliver as mandated by its statutes.

COMPREHENDING INSTITUTIONS AND STRUCTURES

Distinguishing the concepts of institutions, organizations, and structures is an important endeavour to determine how these notions are employed towards apprehending better governance. The UK’s Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office [FCDO], formerly Department for International Development (DFID, differentiates “institutions” from “organizations,” stating that institutions as the ‘rules of the game,’ while organisations are how players structure themselves to play (DFID, 2003, p. ii). Organisations are thus shaped by institutions, and in turn, shape institutional change. North (1991, pp. 3, 5) declares that organisations are the material expressions of institutions circumscribed by “groups of individuals bound by a common purpose.”

Institutions are generally formal – (written) laws, regulations, legal agreements, contracts, and constitutions enforced by third parties, and informal - (usually unwritten) norms, procedures, conventions, and traditions that are often embedded in culture (Leftwich & Sen, 2010, p. 16). They can complement, compete with, or overlap with formal institutions (Jutting et al., 2007, p. 36; Leftwich & Sen, 2010, p. 17). Both formal and informal institutions organise social, political, and

economic relations (North, 1990). Hodgson (2006, p. 2) imparts that “institutions are the kind of structures that matter most in the social realm, they make up the stuff of social life.” They are the systems of “established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions.”

Moreover, institutions are structures that are patterned based on social needs. They include the family, education, religion, economy, politics, and health care necessities and demands. Wells (1970, p. 3) avers that “social institutions form an element in a more general concept known as social structure” which generally refers to the social arrangements that organize a group or society. Giddens (1984, p. 25) contends, for instance, that societies and practices are structured by institutions (“rules”) and power differentials over people and things (“resources”). They are the underlying cause of social patterns, “organized as properties of social systems” that exist only as structural properties. Structure, for Giddens, is both medium and outcome as it is created through a process.

Fleetwood (2008, p. 2) argues that any “discussion of social structures and institutions often involves the use habits, habitus, rules, conventions, norms, values, roles, customs, laws, regulations, practices, routines, procedures and precedents,” apart from mores, scripts, obligations, rituals, codes, and agreements. Social structures and institutions, Fleetwood continues, “are the conditions of human action, they make human action possible; but they are not outcomes or actions and so cannot be patterns of actions” (p. 5). The character of institutions whether they are relatively strong or weak, or are inclusive or discriminatory, are contingent on the context within which they operate (Unsworth, 2010; Carter, 2014).

Hence, it is highly likely that social structures affect, influence, or shape institutions (rules, conventions, norms, values, and customs) which, in turn, cause the emergence of a habitus that, in some sense, reflects or

expresses these social structures. In the same way, social and political institutions could either facilitate or hinder structural change through the power of the state. In a study of Ho-Joon Chang (1994) using the experiences of “industrial policy states” of East Asia and France in a comparative mode as well as the “social corporatist” economies of Scandinavia, he concludes that entrepreneurial states which provide a vision for the future and the building of new institutions are necessary to propel structural change.

Clearly, a brief survey of literature shows that social structures and institutions have a symbiotic relationship. The discussion and debates on social structures and institutions abound and it is not the interest of this paper to be deal with these exhaustively. What is certain though, is that countries rarely succeed in their socio-economic and political development efforts with the absence of state institutions that can establish, advance, and enforce rules, collect revenues and finance development projects, and provide public goods and services effectively and efficiently.

In recent years, the role of institutions for development has drawn considerable thought from development researchers, policymakers, and practitioners due to the collective awareness in advancing better governance and mitigating social and political conflicts. It is now widely accepted that institutions play a critical role in poverty reduction and growth. Political institutions have performed a significant role in safeguarding the welfare and rights of citizens of the country and ensuring the unity and integrity of the nation. Strong institutions and good governance further result in the overall development of the country. It is against this backdrop that Philippine governance is examined by appraising the role of its public institutions – policies, legal frameworks, informal norms, and codes of conduct – in a sluggish quest to better governance.

INQUIRING INTO SOCIO-POLITICAL STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONS IN PHILIPPINE GOVERNANCE

The country's colonial past – more than three centuries under Spain (333 years), almost five decades (46 years) under the Americans, and three (3) years under the Japanese – left an indelible impact on the country's structures and institutions in politics and governance. Although direct American colonial rule in the Philippines is much shorter, the US can be credited for the development of the country's democratic institutions. The Americans prompted political participation as the key process in training Filipinos for self-government.

Despite the trappings of civil and political institutions introduced by the colonizers, Filipino values, norms, and characteristics of familialism, personalism, and parochialism persisted and failed to develop among the people the concept of social well-being or national welfare (Abueva 1971, pp. 1-24). Even if democratic institutions taught civil and political rights, the ideals of nationalism, patriotism, and social justice were either repressed or insubstantially inculcated in peoples' consciousness and temperaments, especially among the country's leaders.

Landes (1991, p. 71) aptly describes that institutions overlaid by developed countries to underdeveloped/developing ones suffer from institutional inadequacies and incapacities to perform their roles in the latter due to mismatch in the politico-economic and cultural systems and structures between the countries concerned. This disparity is portrayed in the following words:

It is a fact of history that most developing countries are also new countries. They have young, untried institutions and administrative structures that fall far short of the task implicit in their ambitions for power and wealth. In many instances, they still have no firm identity, no sense of national purpose, no common interest. On the contrary, they suffer the pains and after-effects of colonial arrangements imposed without

regard to reason or circumstances. Government is unstable or, even if enduring, essentially brittle. The regime may call itself democratic, but the people are subjects rather than citizens. (italics supplied).

Another key political institution introduced by the Americans was the electoral system which saw the conduct of the first local election in 1899. The Americans brought in the right of popular suffrage at the municipal, provincial, and later at national levels of government. The imposition of the system of voting in a predominantly feudal and agrarian society effectively extends the patron-client relationship, where the landlord is considered the patron and the tenant as the client, into an electoral relationship where a politician who has authority and wealth is deemed as the patron and one who benefits from their support or influence is the client (see Landé, 1966 for details). The former dispenses favours and the latter reciprocates it by providing services and bestowing loyalty. This relationship exemplifies a “debt of gratitude” type of reciprocity. Likewise, this interaction simulates a kinship dimension with the paternalistic landlord acting as the father and the tenants as his children.

This relationship persists, survives, and continues to be practiced at the 21st century’s elections with some few insignificant changes. Fundamentally, politicians act both as good and bad patrons at the same time, depending on the circumstances. While on the one hand, a candidate distributes goods, services (infrastructure, health and medical, and welfare), and cash (especially on the eve of election day), on the other hand, he or she may turn violent – threatening and terrorizing both electorates and the Commission on Elections’ (COMELEC) deputized registrars and inspectors (usually public-school teachers) and harassing their opponents and supporters. Historically, election-related harassment and violence can range from intimidating and threatening persons with bodily harm, to kidnapping and murder. It also includes arson and bombings of strategic locations. Hired goons, private armies, the police, and military, as well as armed

rebel groups, also figure prominently (Patino and Velasco 2004).

As a client, it has been customary that electorates seek material goods from the patron in exchange for his or her vote. This type of “utilitarian” culture perseveres and permeates both in rural and urban areas as well as local and national elections. It has been a convention that clients take advantage of elections by selling their votes to the highest bidder; civic organizations use the opportunity to ask for donations from politicians; small enterprises make windfall profits through contracts with individual candidates for their campaign paraphernalia like-t-shirts, calendars, balloons, pencils, and basketballs with their names emblazoned on it; and businesspersons support candidates whom they believe have the high probability of winning, rather than based on principles, in exchange for contracts and favours beneficial to their businesses.

Beyond issues and platforms of government, a politician traditionally campaigns with promises of providing government jobs, financial assistance, educational support, and other personal aids. In turn, the voter supports the politician who can produce tangible and material benefits (positive transaction) or the capability to inflict harm or punishment to those perceived to be their “enemies” and “exploiters.” As stated earlier, this psychological make-up of Filipino electorates is rooted in a culture of patron-clientelism that is largely a reflection of skewed socio-economic mal-development where a few privileged classes use institutions and structures of government to lord over the many underprivileged and marginalized sectors of society.

The deeply-rooted desire of most politicians to either seek or remain in power for personal/familial enrichment and aggrandizement rather than local or national interest has institutionalized cheating as a well-developed practice in Philippine elections. Local and national politicians are adept at manipulating the process from beginning to end. It begins during the registration process when politicians work to

remove supporters of competitors and pad the voters list with “flying voters” (those who vote more than once in several election precincts). Election return canvassers, often public-school teachers, are bribed to manipulate the results. If cheating before and during the election is “retail” cheating, at the canvassing stage it is “wholesale” cheating that occurs. If cheating is a normal part of elections, so is protesting election results. Politicians say that no one losses in elections, only cheated.

Although several endeavours to reform and modernize the Philippine electoral system have been done, hence laudable, it has to be accomplished in conjunction with the alteration of the current social, economic, and political iniquities. Unless this is resolved, modernization will simply serve the limited interest of the élite and powerful over the greater interest of the people and nation. Tangcangco’s (1997) classic study of the country’s modernization program reveals that electoral reforms will not eliminate fraud where unequal power between government and society exists. Thus, she concludes that the modernization of the Philippine electoral system conforms with the “purposes of politicians, election officials, and interest groups to retain defective procedures and loopholes in election laws ... rather than of nagging concern for fairness and commitment to democracy by the incumbents.” (Tangcangco 1997, p. 127).

The continuing attempt to unshackle the poor and marginalized sector from the elite-controlled and perverted electoral system, i.e., riddled with corruption, fraud, and irregularities, has not borne fruit. Since the use of an electronic voting system or e-voting in the 2010 and 2016 presidential elections and the 2013 and 2019 mid-term elections, the usual cheating and other election-related irregularities like vote-buying, intimidation and harassment of both voters and candidates, and the presence of armed goons in precincts have not been prevented. A non-governmental organization (NGO) engaged in keeping elections safe, free, and peaceful says that:

We have observed that vote buying became more rampant since automated polls took place in 2010 because the politicians cannot rig the vote counting machines. Now, they go straight to organizers, operators in barangays. Ways of vote buying became more creative. (Panti, 2019).

As in the past, Philippine elections have not become, as yet, an effective means of expressing people's sovereignty in choosing their political leaders. While democracy is inconceivable without the institution of elections, elections alone are no guarantee for democratic rule. Put differently, one cannot be a democrat without supporting elections, but one can very well conduct elections without being a democrat.

Fareed Zakaria (2003, p. 102) enumerates a long list of what he terms "elected autocrats. He writes that "Over the past decade, elected governments claiming to represent the people have steadily encroached on the powers and the rights of other elements of society." Zakaria draws a clear line between liberal democracy and the illiberal deviation which he calls "illiberal democracy." In other words, while liberal democracy is characterized by competitive elections, the rule of law, the separation of powers and the protection of basic political liberties, "illiberal democracy" may permit competitive elections, but shows little respect for the aforementioned basic liberal rights.

Elections need not necessarily transpire in a democratic regime. It can also take place in an authoritarian regime as a measurement of legitimacy. Elections are done to appease and abate people's resistance to the regime. Furthermore, they are intended to provide a peaceful option to radical, armed, and mass movements seeking to overthrow a despotic regime. Under Marcos' 14-year rule (1972-1986), for instance, four (4) national elections were held apart from plebiscites and referenda. In all these political exercises, Marcos was able to legitimize his rule beyond the provision of the 1935 Constitution that limits the term of the

Office of the President to a maximum of eight (8) years.

It is indeed unfortunate that the character of elections in the Philippines, even after Corazon Aquino was catapulted to power as a result of the 1986 "People Power Revolution," has not been principally altered. Democracy and elections linger to be weak institutions. Elections under the 1987 Constitution closely resembles that of the pre-martial law period. The Philippine party system hitherto is largely a one-party/multi-faction system. Despite the proliferation of political parties at the advent of the 5th Republic (post-martial law period), they are neither different from each other in terms of party platforms and programs of government nor in ideologies, philosophies, standpoints, and viewpoints. Croissant and Lorenz (2018) characterize Philippine political system as highly 'defective elite democracy' more than 30 years since 'democratic rule' was restored in the country.

Electoral candidates' commonalities lie in their class bases, elite origins, and interests they represent. Hicken (2018) attributes the oligarchic control of political parties and paucity of politically active citizenry or mass organizations to the "under-institutionalized" Philippine political party system. He contends that an under-institutionalized political party hinders democratic consolidation and good governance as it undermines the ability of voters to hold politicians accountable and produces ambivalence among voters on the merits of a democratic society.

Local clans and dynasties including warlords and regional kingpins endure and play an important part in Philippine electoral politics. They are considered as building blocks of politics. Given the size of Filipino families and the matrix of interrelationships that bind them, they ensure not only the political continuity and dominance of a particular clan in local politics but also play a major role in supporting the ascendancy, continuity, and even the downfall of local political leaders as well as Philippine presidents.

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THE QUEST
TO ACHIEVE
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Teehankee (2018) documents that from 1987 to 2016, elected legislators who belong to political clans comprised 70.4 percent of the House of Representatives (HoR). In the 2013 mid-term elections, all 80 provinces were littered with political families and 74 percent of the elected members of the HoR came from such dynastic groups (Purdey et.al., 2016). In 2016, Sidel (2018) affirms that there ‘remains ample evidence of the persistence of local ‘bossism’ and ‘dynasticism’ in municipalities, cities, congressional districts, and provinces across the Philippines’ (p. 35). Tadem and Tadem (2016) deduces that the concentration of political and economic power on the hands of the elite clans and dynasties contributed to the dysfunctional Philippine democracy and electoral system reminiscent of the pre-Marcos and martial law years.

Political dynasties linger to be a feature of the country’s political landscape. Dynasties have not been dismantled despite the constitutional provision (Art 2, Sec. 26, 1987 Constitution) to prohibit them, until a law is passed which defines the details of its proscription. In as much as members of Congress are direct beneficiaries of political dynasties, it is unimaginable that such law would be promulgated soon.

Elitism in electoral politics rather than weakened had intensified. In a country where around a fifth of the population lives below the poverty line in 2018 and share a measly less than 5% of the national wealth (ADB, u.d.), it is hypocritical that candidates vying for an elective post would claim that they represent the interest of the poor and would advance their aspirations when they have not experienced living in poverty, as a marginalized, or as a wageworker with monthly income below P10,481.00. In 2015 for instance, it is estimated that a candidate for HoR or for mayor has to spend around P73 million (approx. US\$1.5 million) in a 45-day campaign period when the accumulated salary of a mayor for a three-year term amounts to approximately P2 million (approx. US\$41,000) and P3 million (approx.

US\$61,000) for a representative at the HoR. In the 2016 national elections, the 12 winners of the senatorial elections spent an average of P107 million (approx. US\$2.2 million) while some local government candidates spent even more than what the senatorial candidates had spent.

It is estimated that a successful Philippine presidential candidate would spend three (3) billion pesos (approx. US\$61 million), and five to seven (5-7) billion pesos (approx.. between US\$98 million US\$138 million) for the 2022 elections, while a senatorial candidate must spend at least half-a-billion pesos (approx. US\$10 million). Based on the 2019 Salary Standardization Law IV, the cumulative salary of a President for six (6) years is at P28.7 million (US\$590,000) and P10.6 million (approx. US\$224,000) for three (3) years for a senator, yet billions of pesos are spent to get elected. It is expected that in the upcoming 2022 national and local elections, candidates will carry on spending more either to seize or hold on to their political power in anticipation that they could recoup their “political investments.” As before, political power at the national and local levels in the Philippines has always been concentrated on the hands of the wealthy millionaires and billionaires and has undermined the institution of democracy that gives power to the masses.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The pursuit for better governance is faced with arduous challenges, yet opportunities and prospects for improved governance abound. As discussed earlier, elections are necessary yardsticks of a leaders’ legitimacy, yet not sufficient devices to test the strength of democracy. Elections have to be accompanied by functioning institutions and processes such as transparency, a free press (including unfettered investigative journalism), ombudspersons, participation, civil liberties,

democratic political culture, and professional associations. The Philippine electoral system and institution of democratic rule have been subject to state capture either to legitimize, sustain, or seize power. In practice, political and economic power leave the masses powerless. The increase in political participation of people, nevertheless, need not necessarily result in an enlargement of their democratic space, as even the so-called “peoples’ power” can be orchestrated and instigated by the elite against another group of elites.

The intense and frequently personal nature and character of Filipino politics has largely contributed to the growing corrosion of political institutions. Public officials view government funds as a potential source of self-enrichment and the bureaucracy as an enterprise to be staffed by relatives and friends. Rent-seeking is more predominant than making a legitimate profit. It is thought that the best way to generate wealth is to take it from someone else or from the government rather than producing it themselves. Weber’s concept of bureaucracy as an institution that delivers public goods and services in an impersonal and rational manner, bounded by rules and regulations, and staffed by competent and committed employees seems an alien doctrine if not simply an academic discourse.

The enduring challenge and at the same time opportunity to better governance in the country is principally three-fold. First, there is a need for - more appropriate and long-term structural reforms in the country’s politico-administrative system. Currently, political institutions fail to provide clear strategic policy goals, infrequently allocate sufficient resources to deal with the scope of the problems and restrict the bureaucracy’s autonomy, flexibility, and independence in implementation. Furthermore, rather than simply applying rules and laws with impartiality, there is a need to reshape the country’s political institutions to accommodate differences in the country’s diverse people in terms of culture, ethnicity, and religion.

Second, is to combine political stability with political liberalization and democratization. Markedly, political liberalization advances economic growth and development rather than contributes to political instability. In Fish's and Choudhry's (2007) study, they conclude that democratization adjusts in the direction of a long-term equilibrium to which economic liberalization contributes markedly. Hence, the substantial empowerment of the people in the political, economic, and social affairs of society will eventually be manifested in economic development and progress.

And third, transforming political culture and actual political relationships, for example, patron clientelism, to a more egalitarian, less hierarchical, and the further symmetrical relationship between groups of political actors is a critical process in rejigging the substructure of the nation-state. This is relevant in better governance as it is likewise concerned with informal institutions not only on formal constitutional and organizational arrangements.

History has taught us that a weak party system, patronage politics, and elitism, undermined the legitimacy not only of elected officials of government but also emasculated the processes and institutions of elections and democracy. Indeed, addressing these concerns is challenging yet the opportunity to resolve them lies in the sheer and unceasing determination of the people to place their collective future into their hands.

CONCLUSION

The quest for better governance through effective institutions and appropriate structures in the Philippines is a continuing task in nation-building. A brief examination of the issues that inhibit the development and enhancement of public institutions expected to lead to good



governance is traced to the country's colonial history, carried over after national independence, and extends up to the 21st century. As noted in the paper, post-colonial governments ruled through the processes and institutions bequeathed by the former colonizer which were utilized not to expand the democratic space and enlarge the participation of people but to serve the economic and political interests of the more powerful sector of society. The same system of government and institutions were restored after the fall of Marcos's authoritarian regime of 14 years. Unfortunately, despite 35 years of 'democratic' rule, the institutions and systems of governance were unable to shore up the nation from poverty, economic independence, and powerlessness.

The institution of election became an instrument to safeguard political and economic power that further entrenched the patron-client relationships. The nation, rather than be unified through the institutions and instrumentalities of the state, has been torn apart. The state has alienated itself from the people as corruption, centralization of power, and elitism have been unabated from the 4th to 5th Republic covering nearly three decades-and-a half under five (5) (excluding the current one) Presidents (Buendia 2021).

Powerful clans and political dynasties continue to hold power. Thus, the tools of democracy have become devices of violence—both naked and concealed—that drove the marginalized sectors of society to seek refuge in communist and separatist movements. The economic and political crisis that resulted from the government's neglect, abuse of power, and callousness on the nation's welfare was aggravated under the so-called "democratic" regime.

The institution of the Philippine election is beset with procedural problems taken advantage of by the old and emerging political élites to secure, protect, and perpetuate their interests. Moreover, the intense and frequently personal nature and character of Filipino politics have

largely contributed to the growing corrosion of political institutions. The agrarian-feudal political culture of client-patron relationship, which views governance as an individual affair, has yet to be transcended. The blurred dividing line between official function and personal duty needs to be accentuated.

The relationship between democracy, empowerment, and popular participation on the one hand and corruption and centralism on the other hand is inversely proportional—as the former increases the latter decreases and vice-versa. Concomitantly, enlarging the capacity of civil society enhances accountability of public officials, cultivates transparency on the provision of relevant and reliable information affecting public welfare, and strengthens predictability on the application of laws, regulations, and policies.

As exhibited by the country's political history, the use of extra-constitutional, extra-legal, and extra-institutional means in asserting Filipinos' legitimate right to rule and claim a government that embodies their aspirations and national goals as a people is not a strange political act. The demands for better governance that began in the country's popular 'People Power' uprising, 35 years ago (more than the total period of 21 years that Marcos reigned in the country commencing in 1965), have yet to be fulfilled and its realization is contingent on the re-structuring of Philippine political institutions that would ensure that democratic space is meaningfully enlarged through more inclusive and participative governance, better representative electoral system, and deeper national consciousness.

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