

## The Philippines Is in “Democratic Recession” - MabuhayRadio

Written by Gov. Ben Sanchez

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According to Larry Diamond, the author of the following reviewed article, the Philippines is among more than 50 democracies, which are in "democratic recession". Mr. Diamond cites a survey as a reason why democracy is "at-risk" in the Philippines.

Mr. Diamond wrote: "The Asian Barometer (which conducts public opinion surveys throughout Asia) found that the percentage of Filipinos who believe democracy is always the best form of government dropped from 64 percent to 51 percent between 2001 and 2005. At the same time, satisfaction with democracy fell from 54 percent to 39 percent, and the share of the Filipino population willing to reject the option of an authoritarian "strong leader" declined from 70 percent to 59 percent."

Using the terms taken up by Larry Diamond, may I ask you to decide how governance in the Philippines can be best described:

- "Partial Democracy";
- "Superficial Democracy";
- "Struggling Democracy";
- "Electoral Authoritarianism"; or
- "Predatory State".

This article is thought provoking.

Editor’s Note: Please see related article,

[Mobocracy \(sic\) in the Philippines Is Harming True Democracy](#)

Excerpts from “The Democratic Rollback: The Resurgence of the Predatory State”  
By Larry Diamond

From Foreign Affairs, March/April 2008

Summary: After decades of historic gains, the world has slipped into a democratic recession. Predatory states are on the rise, threatening both nascent and established democracies throughout the world. But this trend can be reversed with the development of good governance and strict accountability and the help of conditional aid from the West.

LARRY DIAMOND is a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and Co-Editor of the Journal of Democracy. This essay is adapted from his new book, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (Times Books, 2008), © Larry Diamond.

Since 1974, more than 90 countries have made transitions to democracy, and by the turn of the century approximately 60 percent of the world's independent states were democratic.  
(Snipped)

But celebrations of democracy's triumph are premature. In a few short years, the democratic wave has been slowed by a powerful authoritarian undertow, and the world has slipped into a democratic recession.

Democracy has recently been overthrown or gradually stifled in a number of key states, including Nigeria, Russia, Thailand, Venezuela, and, most recently, Bangladesh and the Philippines. (Snipped) If democracies do not more effectively contain crime and corruption, generate economic growth, relieve economic inequality, and secure freedom and the rule of law, people will eventually lose faith and turn to authoritarian alternatives. (Snipped) By holding governments accountable and making foreign aid contingent on good governance, donors can help reverse the democratic recession.

### BEYOND THE FAÇADE

(Snipped) In large, strategically important countries, such as Nigeria and Russia, the expansion of executive power, the intimidation of the opposition, and the rigging of the electoral process have extinguished even the most basic form of electoral democracy. (Snipped)

Despite two decades of political scientists warning of "the fallacy of electoralism," the United States and many of its democratic allies have remained far too comfortable with this superficial form of democracy.

(Snipped)

Elsewhere in the developing and post-communist worlds, democracy has been a superficial phenomenon, blighted by multiple forms of bad governance: abusive police and security forces, domineering local oligarchies, incompetent and indifferent state bureaucracies, corrupt and inaccessible judiciaries, and venal ruling elites who are contemptuous of the rule of law and accountable to no one but themselves. (Snipped)

There are elections, but they are contests between corrupt, clientelistic parties. There are parliaments and local governments, but they do not represent broad constituencies. There are constitutions, but not constitutionalism.

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As a result, disillusioned and disenfranchised voters have embraced authoritarian strongmen (such as Vladimir Putin in Russia) or demagogic populists (such as Chávez in Venezuela). (Snipped)

For a country to be a democracy, it must have more than regular, multiparty elections under a civilian constitutional order.

Even significant opposition in presidential elections and opposition party members in the legislature are not enough to move beyond electoral authoritarianism. Elections are only democratic if they are truly free and fair. This requires the freedom to advocate, associate, contest, and campaign. It also requires a fair and neutral electoral administration, a widely credible system of dispute resolution, balanced access to mass media, and independent vote monitoring. By a strict application of these standards, a number of countries typically counted as democracies today -- including Georgia, Mozambique, the Philippines, and Senegal -- may have slipped below the threshold. (Snipped)

The Asian Barometer found that the percentage of Filipinos who believe democracy is always the best form of government dropped from 64 percent to 51 percent between 2001 and 2005. The satisfaction with democracy fell from 54 percent to 39 percent, and the share of Filipinos willing to reject the option of an authoritarian "strong leader" declined from 70 percent to 59 percent.

IT'S THE GOVERNMENT, STUPID

(Snipped) Certainly, the viability of democracy does hinge to some significant degree on economic development and open markets. But in most of the world's poor countries, the "economy first" advocates have the causal chain backward. Without significant improvements in governance, economic growth will not take off or be sustainable.

Without legal and political institutions to control corruption, punish cheating, and ensure a level economic and political playing field, pro-growth policies will be ineffective and their economic benefits will be overshadowed or erased.

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Kenya is a tragic case in point. (It) . . . achieved a record five percent annual growth rate and establishing free universal primary education. (Snipped) President Kibaki did not fail on the economic policy front . . . Rather, he failed politically by condoning massive corruption, ethnic favoritism, and electoral malpractice -- a poisonous mix that has brought a promising new democracy to the brink of chaos.

(Snipped) A list of such democracies would encompass more than 50 states, including most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, four of the eight democracies in Asia, all of the post-Soviet democracies that do not belong to the European Union, and virtually all of the democracies in Africa. (Snipped)

At-risk democracies are almost universally plagued by poor governance.

(Snipped) For thousands of years, the natural tendency of elites everywhere has been to monopolize power rather than to restrain it -- through the development of transparent laws, strong institutions, and market competition. (Snipped) The result is a predatory state.

(Snipped) Ordinary people are not truly citizens but clients of powerful local bosses, who are themselves the clients of still more powerful patrons. (Snipped) The purpose of government is not to generate public goods, such as roads, schools, clinics, and sewer systems. Instead, it is to produce private goods for officials, their families, and their cronies. (Snipped)

In such a system, as Robert Putnam wrote in his classic *Making Democracy Work*, "corruption is widely regarded as the norm," political participation is mobilized from above, civic engagement is meager, compromise is scarce, and "nearly everyone feels powerless, exploited, and unhappy."

(Snipped) People do not get rich through productive activity and honest risk taking; they get rich by manipulating power and privilege, by stealing from the state, extracting from the weak, and shirking the law. Presidents silence dissent with threats, detentions, show trials, and murder. (Snipped) In such societies, the line between the police and the criminals is thin. (Snipped) (Snipped)

By contrast, sustainable democracy and development require active "civic communities" . . . In sustainable democracies, institutions of good governance -- such as impartial judicial systems and vigorous audit agencies -- induce, enforce, and reward civic behavior. (Snipped)

### ESCAPING THE PREDATORS

For democracy to triumph, the natural predatory tendencies of rulers must be restrained by rigorous rules and impartial institutions. (Snipped) This requires dense, vigorous civil societies, with independent organizations, mass media, and think tanks, as well as other networks that can foster civic norms, pursue the public interest, raise citizen consciousness, break the bonds of clientelism, scrutinize government conduct, and lobby for good-governance reforms.

(Snipped) The premier example of vertical accountability is a genuinely democratic election. But ensuring democratic elections requires a truly independent electoral administration capable of conducting all the necessary tasks -- from registering voters to counting votes -- with strict integrity and neutrality. Other effective forms of vertical accountability include public hearings, citizen audits, the regulation of campaign finance, and a freedom-of-information act.

Horizontal accountability invests some agencies of the state with the power and responsibility to monitor the conduct of their counterparts. No institution is more important than a counter-corruption commission, which should collect regular declarations of assets from all significant elected and appointed officials. (Snipped) Their work must be reinforced by ombudsmen; public audits of all major government agencies and ministries; parliamentary oversight committees to investigate evidence of waste, fraud, and abuse by executive agencies; and competent independent judiciaries capable of penalizing bribery and embezzlement. (Snipped)

It is not only the regulatory and participatory institutions of government that need strengthening. Effective democracy also requires improving the technical skills, resources, professional standards, and organizational efficiency of the state.

(Snipped) Finally, reforms must generate a more open market economy in which it is possible

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to accumulate wealth through honest effort and initiative in the private sector -- with the state playing a limited role. (Snipped)

The most urgent imperative is to restructure and empower the institutions of accountability and bolster the rule of law. Changing the way government works means changing the way politics and society work, and that, in turn, requires sustained attention to how public officials utilize their offices. This is the fundamental challenge that all at-risk democracies face.

### AIDING THE DEMOCRATIC REVIVAL

(Snipped) Connected by grass-roots movements, community radio stations, cell phones, civic organizations, and the Internet, citizens are rising up as never before to challenge corruption, defend the electoral process, and demand better governance. (Snipped)

Now, with the momentum going against democracy, a resurgent and oil-rich Russia flexing its muscles, and China emerging as a major aid donor in the rest of Asia and Africa, it will be more difficult to encourage reforms. (Snipped)

The key is the principle of conditionality (or selectivity), which lies at the core of the Millennium Challenge Account -- one of the Bush administration's least heralded but most important foreign policy innovations. (Snipped) The instrument of aid selectivity is showing promise as a tool that civil-society actors in predatory states can use to campaign for governance reforms and as an incentive for corrupt governments in need of more aid to reform their ways.

The international donor community's habit of keeping afloat predatory and other troubled states (in some cases covering up to half of their recurrent government expenditures) must end.

Now, as democratic setbacks multiply, is the moment for a new strategy. Without a clear understanding of the fundamental problem -- bad governance -- and the necessary institutional responses, more democratic breakdowns are likely . . . (Snipped) Public-opinion surveys continue to show that majorities in every region of the world believe democracy is the best form of government. The urgent imperative is to demonstrate, through the effective functioning of democracies worldwide, that it really is. # # #

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