

The Spectre of Neo-Authoritarianism in the Philippines



Mark R Thompson

Department of Asian and International Studies and
the Southeast Asia Research Centre, City University of Hong Kong

Burying EDSA



- Victory of Duterte as anti-EDSA candidate
 - Thirty years after EDSA uprising
 - And transition to liberal electoralism
- Duterte's neo-authoritarian narrative
 - Nostalgia for Marcos as “greatest president”
 - Marcos's “heroes burial”
 - Symbolic burial of liberal reformist EDSA regime

But what has been born?

- Still formally democratic
 - Albeit a “bloody democracy”
 - Egregious rights violations
 - Not yet electoral authoritarian
- Same basic reformist agenda
 - *Sans* liberalism
 - With a “tough guy” to insure its implemented
 - Greater emphasis on social policy
 - Neo-liberal economics preserved, even deepened
- With major federalist, French-style constitutional change
 - Possible “rebalancing” vis-à-vis China and the US



How did this happen and what may happen still?

- The flaws of the EDSA regime
- Duterte wins the presidential election
- The neo-authoritarian narrative
- Blood first 64 days
- Constitutional revisions ahead



What was the EDSA regime?



- From Aquino to Aquino (Teehankee Thompson)
 - Liberal reformist narrative
 - In reaction to Marcos' despotism and cronyism
 - “Trust me”, “straight path,” “*walang corrupt, walang mahirap*”
- Extra-electoral strategic group backing
 - Big business, Catholic hierarchy, civil society, military
- Institutional basis
 - Free press, strong opposition
 - Electoral democratic consolidation
 - Strong macroeconomic financial institutions
 - Strong economic growth

Weaknesses of the EDSA regime

- Promises governmental efficiency
 - not greater popular participation
 - doesn't achieve the former either
- Exclusive growth
 - social neglect under C. Aquino and Ramos
- Estrada overthrown
 - FPJ cheated, “stealing” opportunity pro-poor populism provided
 - Arroyo’s “legitimacy crisis” (Teehankee)
- Aquino’s weakened reformism
 - Growth without poverty reduction
 - pork despite “reform”
 - Moralizing but lack of political reform



Presidential polls: Duterte outsmarts Aquino-Roxas

- Binay early frontrunner as pro-poor populists
 - But tagged as *trapo* by corruption investigations and campaign meltdown
- Poe survives Supreme Court case
 - But citizenship issues, tycoon links, mixed narrative and passive campaign
- Duterte's late start strategic
 - Bank account revelations too little, too late
- Roxas weaknesses
 - Roxas' "straight path" a dead end
 - Duterte tags him as weak and incompetent
 - Reliant on traditional "machinery"
 - Undermines remaining Liberal exceptionalism
 - Allied politicians switch to popular Duterte



Duterte's neo-authoritarian narrative

- Political story made plausible by candidate's life
 - "Davao model" as calling card
 - Weak state has left citizens defenseless
 - Kill "zombie" pushers
 - Harks back to Marcos-style authoritarian "discipline"
- Radicalizes weakened liberal reformism
 - Besides Mindanao/Visayan/anti "imperial Manila" constituency
 - Core constituency lower middle class
 - With secondary pro-poor populist aspects



Talk dirty to me

- Brings coarse language of local politics
 - To national-level discourse
 - Misogynist jokes, xenophobic attacks causal cussing
- Amplified by social media due to “strength of his support base” (Aim Sinpeng)
 - Bringing “authenticity” (Nivolr Curato)
 - Underlines his determination to bring “real change”
- Trumpesque sense of sharing backstage discourse
 - With an enthusiastic public



Duterte unbound

- “Sticks to his guns” about extra-judicial anti-drug killings
 - Killings increase impunity
 - Weakening already weak institutions
- Marcos nostalgia
 - “Discipline” before liberal democracy
- Controls Congress – few politician opponents
 - Personal attacks on critics foreign (eg UN and US ambassador)
 - and domestic (eg shameful attacks on Sen. Leila de Lima)
 - Criticises key institutions (church, courts, CHR)
- Popularity soars
 - Constitutional change reopens issue of “*continuismo*”



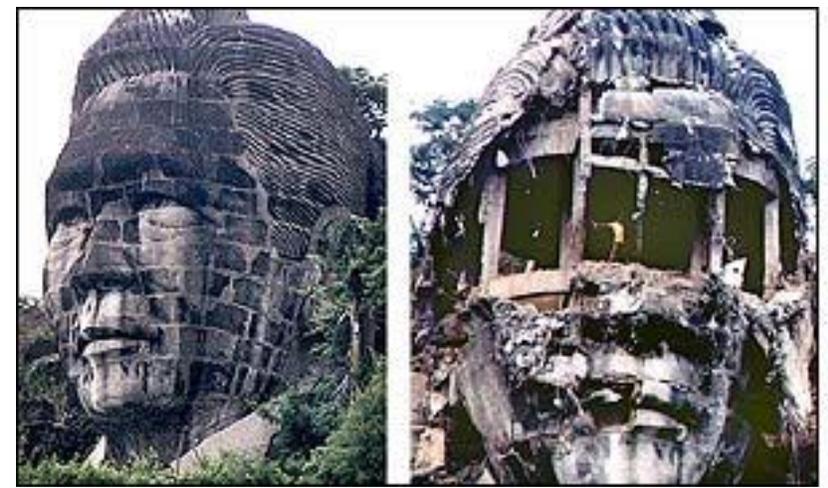
Poor Filipino's lives don't see to matter

- *Philippine Daily Inquirer's* “kill list”
 - *Washington Post's* “deadly force” blacks killed 2.5 x more often
 - Class bias in Philippines
 - Al Jazeera's Jamela Alindogan: “war on drugs is a war against the poor.”
- Jennilyn Olayres cradling her murdered partner
 - peddycab driver Michael Siaron, Pietà-like
 - “Innocents” killed
 - Even pushers denied all due process
 - Criminalizing the poor
 - Elites “named and shamed” not murdered



The emerging Duterte regime

- Continuing neo-authoritarian narrative
 - Despite claiming “I’m not Marcos”
- Reshuffling of elite “strategic groups”
 - Provincial more than Makati business
 - Church marginalized
 - Far left’s new clout
 - “New” social media-oriented civil society replaces “old-style” activism
- Constitutional change
 - Empowers local elites
 - Creates opportunity for dominant party system
 - Danger of “continuismo”



“I like Putin”

- Duterte: “We have similarities”
 - Not just “the girls”
 - Xenophobic attacks and nationalist credentials
 - Undermine domestic critics through personal attacks
 - Also similarites to Hungary’s Orban and Turkey’s Erdogan
- Regionally Thailand’s Prayuth only most recent Thai “tough guy”
 - Preceded by Chamlong, Sondhi and Suthep
 - Indonesia’s Prabowo



But is democracy really under threat?



- Not yet electoral authoritarian
 - elections have been largely free and fair
 - Press not censored, senate investigations, courts still independent
- Democratic deconsolidation:
 - attitudinally, behaviorally and soon institutionally
- Illiberal democratic
 - popularly elected but increasingly illiberal an unchecked chief executive
 - Duterte has not “feared to transgress liberal discourse.
 - Not only does this not trouble a significant part of the population, they’ve even clapped for it!” (Walden Bello)
 - Duterte Bonapart?

Thanks



**Maraming
Salamat
sa
inyong
Pakikinig!**

“Who will protect us from our protectors”

- Ayn Rand