

# Disrupting Liberal Democracy: The Phenomenal Rise of Duterte

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## Abstract

The paper offers an explanation why Duterte won the election in 2016 and how his phenomenal rise can be accounted. Some scholars on Philippine politics attribute the rise of Duterte to the failure of liberal democracy. On the other hand, this paper argues that “failure of liberal democracy” explanation merely scratches the surface of the question and does not address the source of the failure. Gramsci’s notion of passive revolution this paper maintains point to the root of the failures of the liberal democratic regimes established after EDSA People Power revolt in 1986. The main contention of the paper is Duterte is a product of passive revolution. If Italy swung to fascism in the 1920s, this paper asserts Philippines in 2016 turned to Dutertismo.

**Keywords:** liberal democracy, populism, Duterte, passive revolution

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last five years, a new political landscape has risen in the Philippines with the ascendancy of Rodrigo Duterte to the presidency. His election upended Philippine politics. He is brash, brusque and coarse, yet a plurality of Filipinos voted for him with a commanding lead of more than six million votes over the second placer.

The 2016 presidential election was held under the backdrop of a popular president, Noynoy Aquino who has a clean and decent image. He presided over a robust economy which is changing the picture of the Philippines as the “sick man in Asia.” Yet, the electorate rejected his anointed candidate and turned to Duterte.



During the campaign Duterte made many controversial and incendiary remarks – cursing Pope Francis, rape joke on a dead Australian missionary, among others, but he still carried the day on Election Day. He is the first president of the country from Mindanao. Why did he win over a sizable number of voters in Luzon that propelled him to the presidency?

The rise of Duterte has confounded experts and keen observers of Philippine politics. At the beginning the 2016 presidential campaign, Duterte was lagging in the polls. Leading the surveys prior to the election was then Vice-President Jejomar Binay who was over taken by Senator Grace Poe when the campaign started. Yet at the homestretch of the campaign, Duterte seized the lead from Poe and eventually emerged the victor. Finding an explanation for this come-from-behind victory of Duterte is important in understanding the current political mood of the country. Understanding the Duterte phenomenon contributes to unraveling a “major rupture” in Philippine politics since the inauguration of the EDSA regime in 1986.

The central question of this paper is: Why did Duterte win the election and how his phenomenal rise can be explained? Furthermore, the paper also raises these questions: How should one account for the shift in the political mood of the electorate in the 2016 election? Why did Filipinos choose as their leader a man from the backwater of Philippine politics – Mindanao? If Duterte's rise is inevitable as some pundits say, why is this so and what accounts for this inevitability?

This paper examines the explanations given by some scholars on Philippine politics and presents its own take on the phenomenon that is Duterte.

## EXPLANATIONS ON THE RISE OF DUTERTE

The paper explores two major explanations on the rise of Duterte. One view holds that the rise of Duterte is due to the failure of liberal democracy<sup>1</sup> in the Philippines. This is the account given by some scholars on Philippine politics. The other explanation argues that the Duterte phenomenon is a product of passive revolution. This is the explanation being put forward by this paper.

### **a. Failure of Liberal Democracy**

There are scholars on Philippine politics that attribute the phenomenal rise of Duterte to the failure of liberal democracy in the country. Arguelles (2016) contends that Duterte won because of the failure of the EDSA revolt to live up to the expectations it raised. The rise of Duterte for Teehankee (2017) is a manifestation of systemic disjunction, a major rupture in the post-Marcos regime. Pendulum of Philippine politics since EDSA revolt has been swinging from reformism to populism according to Thompson (2010) and Duterte's rise fits into this oscillation. Duterte's ascendancy is a populist revolt against elite democracy as Heydarian (2017) argues. The current liberal democratic order is the child of the 1986 EDSA People Power revolt which ousted the Marcos dictatorship.

#### *Failed Expectations of a Peaceful Revolution*

Duterte's victory was attributed by Arguelles (2016) to the failure of EDSA people power revolution in 1986 to meet popular expectations. In an online Time article, he argued that for most Filipinos EDSA was not just change of leadership from dictatorial to democratic. "In the public imagination, the promises of the People Power Revolution went beyond restoring democratic institutions. The narrative went like this: a return to democracy would secure prosperity and security for everyone."

More than 30 years later Arguelles noted that nothing has substantially changed for the vast majority of Filipinos with the gap between the rich and the poor not only remains wide but is widening. Filipinos are still confronted with the same social ills: poverty, unemployment, lack of social services, a dysfunctional justice system, corruption, callous bureaucracy, criminality, and a host of social problems.

By the time Duterte arrived on the scene, "the 1986 revolution, once a symbol of the promise of democracy and prosperity, is now synonymous in the Filipino popular imagination with the dysfunctional transport system in Metro Manila." Arguelles observed that "Duterte articulated the public's deep-seated

feelings of precariousness and powerlessness using rhetoric they could relate to.”

From the point of view of Arguelles, “the failure to deliver on the promises of the People Power revolution made the rise of Duterte politically possible.”

### *Systemic Disjunction*

Teehankee (2017:37) advances the view that Duterte’s victory “is a major rupture in the post-Marcos ‘EDSA regime’ founded by Corazon ‘Cory’ C. Aquino in 1986.” Adopting Skewronek’s position that “situates presidency not according to personal traits and attributes but on structural patterns change and cycles within the presidency” he contextualized Duterte’s rise within the regime-based approach. A regime is “prevailing set of interests, ideologies, and institutions” (2017:39).

The political identity of an incumbent president Teehankee further argues is based on his/her affiliation with or his/her opposition to the existing regime (EDSA regime in the case of the Philippines). Ramos for example was identified with the EDSA regime while Joseph Estrada was not part of it. Gloria Arroyo straddled the two. The EDSA regime was responsible for her ascendancy to power but later withdrew its support from her. Noynoy Aquino is an inheritor of the EDSA regime.

Within the context of regime-based approach, Teehankee contends that “the rise of Duterte occurred at the exact moment when the reformist regime was most vulnerable.” Echoing Arguelles, “Duterte,” according to Teehankee “was able to take advantage of the ‘systemic disjunction’ of this once dominant political order – due to the discrediting of the good governance narrative” (2017:52). Tapping on the “politics of anger” due to the frustrations of the populace “Duterte has taken advantage of the systematic vulnerability of the liberal reformism to begin building a new elite coalition around his law and order narrative” (2017:52). Duterte’s emergence was placed by Teehankee “in between structural regimes and agential choices.”

The rise of Duterte was attributed by Teehankee to the failings of the second Aquino administration which is a manifestation of the EDSA regime's systemic disjunction. "The Duterte phenomenon was not a revolt of the poor but was a protest of the new middle class who suffered from lack of public service, endured the horrendous land and air traffic, feared the breakdown of peace and order, and silently witnessed their tax money siphoned by corruption despite promises of good governance" (2017:52).

### *Reformism - Populism Swing*

Explanation of Teehankee hues closely with the view of Thompson (2010) who describes the pendulum of Philippine politics as swinging from reformism to populism since the restoration of democracy in 1986. From 1986 until 2010, Thompson notes that Filipinos tend to elect either reformist or populist leaders. Noting the similarity between Philippine and Thai politics, Thompson observes that "Philippines too has seen a bitter split between self-proclaimed 'populist' and reformist" (2010:156). The election of Cory Aquino, Ramos, Estrada, Arroyo and Noynoy Aquino are manifestations of the swing. Thompson found that reformism and populism are competing narratives in Philippine elections.

The post-Marcos rise of the populist and reformist campaign narrative means that voters can no longer be simply divided into incumbent 'ins' and opposition 'outs.' Instead, they must also be seen as tending to fall into either a camp that stresses paternalistic promises to end corruption or one that favors (elite resistance notwithstanding) policies that meant to help the poor. Opinion polls reveal strong support for both populist and reformist appeals (2010:163).

Extending Thompson's analysis to the 2016 election, the rise of Duterte can be seen as the swing of the political pendulum from reformism (Second Aquino administration) to populism (Duterte administration).

## *Populist Revolt Against Elite Democracy*

The Duterte phenomenon for Heydarian (Stewart 2017) is “part of a broader arc of populism that has emerged over the past 10 to 15 years” in the world. Citing Huntington, Heydarian posits that it is “the rapidly growing economies in the post-colonial world that are susceptible to autocratic fallback or backsliding” (Stewart 2017). He argues that in countries like India, Turkey and the Philippines “you have a rising middle class that is increasingly attracted to strongmen leaders, or leaders who promise overnight solutions to very complicated 21st-century problems, who promise a certain certainty in times of disruptive change” (Stewart 2017).

In the case of the Philippines, Heydarian asserts that the country enjoyed high level economic growth during the term of President Noynoy Aquino. Duterte entered the picture with GDP growing on the average at 6.2 percent. However, the general feeling is the growth is not inclusive. “So if you are an aspirational middle-class Filipino, or you are a member of the masses, the majority poor in the Philippines, you kind of feel the growth is not trickling down, inequality is getting worse, and you are not really having much of a voice in the political system, even if the Philippine constitutional order promises formal equality” (Stewart 2017). In short only the elite have profited from high growth. From the perspective of Heydarian, those who are left behind by the growth, the vast majority are susceptible to the message of Duterte.

Duterte’s law and order message also resonated well with the aspirational middle class as Heydarian explains. “A lot of these aspirational middle-class people—who just bought their new iPhones, who just bought their budget cars, who just recently got some level of material prosperity—are very concerned about crime because they still do not live in posh areas, gated communities, whereby they can ensure their own safety. So these are the people who very much gravitated to Duterte’s kind of anti-crime or penal populism” (Stewart 2017). Heydarian notes the Duterte’s support was strongest among Class C<sup>2</sup> or the aspirational middle class.

Duterte also appealed to the masses according to Heydarian by packaging himself as one of them. He projected a folksy image by how he talked – course and uncouth. To the masses Duterte “presented himself as an alternative to the old liberal elite” (Stewart 2017).

Heydarian discerns that Duterte also hit a raw chord among the “people from the Visayas and Mindanao regions who feel they have been neglected by so-called ‘imperial Manila.’ So he also promised federalism and further political decentralization” (Stewart 2017).

A combination of all of these factors led to the rise of Duterte. Heydarian called the phenomenon the populist revolt against elite democracy which dominated the country for over 30 years.

Despite the variation in their explanations, the above cited scholars point to the failure of liberal democracy as the primary reason for the phenomenal rise of Duterte. Liberal democracy established in 1986 raised expectation of Filipinos for a better and more equitable life but more than 30 years later the expectations have yet to be realized. Public frustration Arguelles (2016) argues made the rise of Duterte possible. In similar vein, Teehankee (2017) says that a rupture in the post-EDSA regime occurred due to its vulnerability with the discrediting of the good governance narrative. Teehankee posits that this systemic disjunction is due the failure of the second Aquino administration.

In the same manner, Heydarian (Stewart 2017) places the Duterte phenomenon in the context of the rise of populist politics globally. Populism’s appeal feeds on the frustrations of the public due to persistent problems of inequality, concern for law and order among other social issues. Economic growth only benefited the top portion of social pyramid and Heydarian called Duterte’s election as populist revolt against elite democracy. Thompson (2010) on the other hand, observes that Philippine politics since 1986 was oscillating between reformism and populism and he placed Duterte’s victory within this framework.

These explanations mainly point to one factor that produced the Duterte phenomenon - the failure of liberal democracy. The failure led to people’s frustration and systemic disjunction of the EDSA regime creating a populist revolt against elite coupled with the swing of Philippine politics from reformism to populism. But they do not answer the question why liberal democracy failed in the Philippines on the first place. How should one account for this failure? Why did liberal democracy fail in the last 35 years? Their explanations did not go far enough.

Failure of liberal democracy as an explanation to the rise of Duterte does not provide a deeper account on the phenomenon. It only scratches the surface of Duterte's emergence. Going beyond the failings of liberal democracy, this paper accounts why this failure happened by examining the nature of the 1986 EDSA People Power revolt. This is what is lacking in the "failure of liberal democracy" explanation.

Analyzing the nature of EDSA People Power revolt through the lens of Antonio Gramsci's concept of passive revolution reveals the limitations of the liberal democratic order it created. The paper argues that EDSA's very character as a passive revolution is the reason why it failed. Duterte's rise is inevitable (as some pundits' claim) as a consequence of a passive revolution is the main contention of this paper.

### **b. Duterte is a Product of a Passive Revolution**

The concept of passive revolution was originally conceived by Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci. He developed his idea of passive revolution as he was trying to grapple with the rise of fascism in Italy during his time. He analyzed Italian history and used it to explain how and why did fascism take root in Italy.

To explain the concept of passive revolution, Gramsci did a historical comparison between Italy during the Risorgimento and France during the French Revolution in *Notes on Italian History* section of *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Specifically, he compared the actions of the Action Party in Italy and that of the Jacobins in France.

The Jacobins during the French Revolution seized the leadership of the revolution. "The Jacobins won their function of 'leading' party by a struggle to the death; they literally 'imposed' themselves on the French bourgeoisie, leading it into a far more advanced position than the originally strongest bourgeoisie would spontaneously wish to take up, and even far more advanced than that which the historical premises should have permitted" (Gramsci 1971:77). In contrast, Gramsci notes that in the Action Party "there was EDSA People Power Revolution nothing to be found which resembled this Jacobin approach, this inflexible will to become the 'leading' [*dirigente*] party" (1917:80).

Because the Jacobins led the revolution in France, they were able to carry out a bourgeois revolution. This enabled them as Gramsci



contends, to create “the bourgeoisie State, made the bourgeoisie into the leading, hegemonic class of the nation, in other words gave the new State a permanent basis and created the compact modern French nation” (1971:79).

Due to the inability of the Action Party to lead the Risorgimento, the leadership of the revolution was seized by the Piedmont State which functioned as “that of a ruling class” (Gramsci 1971:104). Instead of carrying out an active revolution like the Jacobins, the Piedmont State carried out a passive revolution. “The greatest importance for the concept of ‘passive revolution’-the fact, that is” according to Gramsci “that what was involved was not a social group which ‘led’ other groups, but a State which, even though it had limitations as a power, ‘led’ the group which should have been ‘leading’ and was able to put at the latter’s disposal an army and politico-diplomatic strength” (1971:105).

Passive revolution is revolution from above and Gramsci called it revolution/restoration. The Piedmont State carried out passive revolution upon assuming power. “Restoration becomes the first policy whereby social struggles find sufficiently elastic frameworks to allow the bourgeoisie to gain power without dramatic upheavals, without the French machinery of terror. The old feudal classes are demoted from their dominant position to a ‘governing’ one, but are not eliminated, nor is there any attempt to liquidate them as an organic whole” (Gramsci 1971:115).

In short what passive revolution or restoration-revolution achieved, as Gramsci argues is “preserve the political and economic position of the old feudal classes, to avoid agrarian reform, and, especially to avoid the popular masses going a period of political experience such as occurred in France in the years of the Jacobinism, in 1831, and in 1848” (1971:119).

Removing the Italian context, Gramsci in the above statement could be describing the outcome of the EDSA People Power Revolution. The people power revolt in 1986 is a passive revolution or a restoration revolution where the pre-martial law set up, disrupted by the Marcos authoritarian rule was restored.

## **EDSA 1: restoration revolution**

On February 22, 1986, Juan Ponce Enrile, Defense Minister and one of the pillars of the Marcos regime declared his break with the administration. He was joined by Vice Chief of Staff Fidel V. Ramos. That was the beginning of the people power revolt which culminated with the departure of Dictator Ferdinand Marcos into exile in Hawaii and the installation of Cory Aquino as president of the new government three days later.

A new era dawned in the Philippines with the ending of the twenty-year rule of Marcos marked by corruption, widespread human rights abuses, poverty, social inequality and injustice and growing communist insurgency. There were high hopes in the new administration of Cory Aquino mainly composed of traditional and moderate opposition groups that opposed the Marcos dictatorship. Within a year, the new government crafted a new Constitution which was approved by Filipinos in a plebiscite.

Gramsci (1971:115; 119) maintains that passive revolution as restoration- revolution does not eliminate or liquidate the old ruling class and preserve their economic and political interests. The return of political clans/dynasties and the failure of land reform under liberal regimes are among the major indicators that EDSA I is a passive revolution.

### *Return of political clans*

The 1987 Constitution provides the legal framework for the post-Marcos dispensation. It basically restores the old structure of government abolished by Marcos when he declared martial law in 1972. The most prominent symbol of the pre-martial law social order is the bicameral Congress which was then bastion of power of landed elites and dynastic families.

Article VI, sections 1, 2 and 5 of the 1987 Constitution re-created a two chamber Congress, the composition of which is a replica of old Congress under the defunct 1935 Constitution. The new Congress is composed of an Upper Chamber with 24 senators elected nationally and a Lower House with at least 250 representatives elected by legislative districts. The only innovation is the introduction of party-list system in the legislature.

Political dynasties or political clans according to Teehankee (2007) are main fixtures on Philippine politics. He defined a political clan or dynasty as “basically composed of a family and its network of relations that actively pursues elective or appointive political office at the local and/or national level. In many cases, the clan has also managed to maintain power through generations” (Teehankee 2007).

An Inquirer editorial citing the study of political scientist Dante Simbulan shows pre-Martial Law politics was dominated by political dynasties or clans. The editorial says from 1946 to 1963, 584 public officials came from 169 political clans or dynasties. They include “seven presidents, two vice presidents, 42 senators and 147 congressmen” (Inquirer Editorial, 2015).

In the post-EDSA 1 era, the political dynasties or clans dominate the restored Congress. A study by Mendoza et al. (2011) on the composition of the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress reveals that 70 percent of its members came from dynastic families. Their study found that “40 percent of congressmen (84 of 229) have kinship links with legislators in the previous three Congresses” (Mendoza et al. 2011:23).

The return of political clans and their domination of politics in the post-EDSA 1 political scene is the clearest indication that the People Power Revolution of 1986 is a passive revolution. The dominant class was not even demoted but asserted their dominance in national life. To borrow the words of Gramsci, EDSA 1 merely “preserves the political and economic position of the old feudal classes...” (1971:119).

To curb the power of political dynasties, the post-EDSA regime introduced term limits in the Constitution and the banning of political dynasties. Members of the Lower House are limited to serve for three consecutive terms [Article VI, Sec 7 (2)] while senators are allowed one re-election [Article VI, Sec 4(2)]. Article II, Section 26 of the Constitution, on the other hand, has this provision.

The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law.

Political dynasties however are able to circumvent the term limit. The evidence provided by the study of Querrubin (2011) suggests that term limit is not effective in restraining political dynasties. “The

ability of term limits to dismantle political dynasties is not obvious, as term limited incumbents may be replaced by relatives or may run for a different elected office” (Querrubin 2011:1). Officials who reached the limit of their term fielded family members – wife, children, siblings or other relatives, to the post they are vacating.

Querrubin even found out that “term limits may exacerbate the dynastic nature of Philippine politics by providing incentives for incumbents to bring additional members of their family to power and thus control several offices simultaneously” (2011:26). The study concludes that “term limits do not directly affect the fundamental sources of political power of dynasties such as their control over land, access to state resources, employment and violence in their respective provinces” (Querrubin 2011:26).

The constitutional provision prohibiting political dynasties remains unrealized. Congress dominated by political clans failed to pass the law needed to implement this provision of the 1987 Constitution.

Revival of the pre-martial law political structure, particularly Congress heralds the return of political clans and dynasties in power. Restoring to power the landed elites and political dynasties is a strong indicator EDSA 1 is a restoration or a passive revolution. Morton argues that one condition that defines a passive revolution is how revolutionary transformation like EDSA “is pressed into a conservative project of restoration but is linked to insurrectionary mass mobilisation from below” (Morton 2012).

Aside from resurrecting the power base of the pre-martial law elite bloc, the issue of land reform provides a strong case for EDSA 1 as a passive revolution.

#### *Agrarian question*

Gramsci faulted the Action Party for failing to raise the land question which pushed the Risorgimento to become a passive revolution. On the surface, this is not true in the case of EDSA1 for the post-EDSA regime did address the agrarian question. Several provisions of the 1987 Constitution tackle the land question. Article II, Section 21 declares that it is a state policy to “promote comprehensive rural development

and agrarian reform.” This provision is further fleshed out in Sections 4 to 6 of Article XIII.

“The State shall, by law, undertake an agrarian reform program founded on the right of farmers and regular farmworkers who are landless to own directly or collectively the lands they till or, in the case of other farm workers, to receive a just share of the fruits thereof. To this end, the State shall encourage and undertake the just distribution of all agricultural lands, subject to such priorities and reasonable retention limits as Congress may prescribe, taking into account ecological, developmental, or equity considerations, subject to the payment of just compensation. In determining retention limits, the State shall respect the rights of small landowners. The State shall further provide incentives for voluntary land-sharing. (Article XIII, Section 4)

To concretize its commitment to land reform, the Cory Aquino administration passed RA 6657 or the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law of 1988 for a period of 10 years. RA 6657 aims to promote social justice and industrialization and address the centuries-old problem of landlessness in the country. The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) was crafted to implement the CARL. Despite its noble intentions, CARL and its implementing program is fundamentally flawed which eventually undermined it.

Citing James Punzel, Bello et. al, point out the basic defect of CARL from the very beginning. “It lacks a reliable and durable system of landownership registration” (Bello et al. 2004:39). They also note that “numerous provisions inherent in CARP legislation allow landowners to contest DAR rulings including valuations, the manner of acquisition, target beneficiaries, and actual land distribution” (2004:40). Finally, they observe that land reform under Cory Aquino’s administration “was enacted not to stimulate asset reforms but to address peasant unrest in the countryside, and once that was no longer perceived as an immediate threat, the political will to push it vanished” (2004:45).

More than 30 years after its implementation, the CARP is beset by problems that diluted its goal and made land reform in the post-EDSA era very problematic. Among these problems are: public lands instead of private lands were covered by the program in its first four years

of implementation; it allowed land owners to dictate the “fair market value” of their land; landowners used the loopholes of the law to stall its implementation and contest valuations in court; stock distribution options enabled corporations to evade land distribution; private land leased by local and foreign corporations exempted from the program for ten years or until the lease expires; and land planted by commercial crops were not touched by the program for 10 years (Wright & Labiste 2018:36-37).

A year before RA 6657 expires, CARP has only met 54 percent of its over-all target while 2 percent of private land for compulsory acquisition had been expropriated according to Wright and Labiste (2018:40) using Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) DAR data. Most of the lands distributed were government-owned lands, public alienable and disposable lands and lands sequestered from Marcos’s cronies. In 1998, President Ramos signed RA 8532 extending CARP for another 10 years, known as CARPER or Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Extension with Reforms. In 2014, CARPER was extended for another 16 years.

The heart of land reform is giving land to the landless and this criterion measures the success or failure of CARP. Wright and Labiste, citing figures from (DAR) reveal that since 1972 only 4.8 million hectares of land have been awarded to 2.7 farmer-beneficiaries. This figure is far below the 10.3 million hectares of land to be distributed to farmer-beneficiaries, the original target of CARP in 1988. Despite its attempt to address the land question, EDSA 1 failed to correct the centuries-old injustice.

### **EDSA 1 as passive revolution**

Pre-martial structures such as the bicameral Congress were restored in the post-EDSA era. A limited agrarian reform was carried out by the post-EDSA regimes, but the landlord class was not entirely displaced. Age-old problems such as poverty, social inequality, injustice, and the yawning gap between the rich and poor persisted. Gramsci contends that one fundamental principle of passive revolution is “no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for further movement” (1971:106). This is precisely the outcome of EDSA 1. The oligarchy (both old and new) remains well-entrenched while the lot of the poor majority has not considerably improved.

Furthermore, EDSA 1 under the leadership of the traditional or bourgeois opposition was by used this group to re-create the pre-martial law set-up where it is dominant and restore its privileges. Morton points that “a passive revolution can be a technique of statecraft which an emergent bourgeois class may deploy by drawing in subaltern social classes while establishing a new state on the basis of the institution of capitalism, such as in the case of the Italian Risorgimento [1861].” (Morton 2012)

Peter Thomas in his interpretation of Gramsci says that passive revolution is a restoration revolution. “The notion of passive revolution for Gramsci signified a distinctive process of (political) modernization that lacked the meaningful participation of popular classes in undertaking and consolidating social transformation.” (Thomas 2013:23) In this regard, EDSA is a restoration revolution, re-establishing the social order disfigured by Marcos when he declared Martial law in 1972.

### **Passive revolution and the rise of Duterte**

Failure of the succeeding post-EDSA regimes to address the pestering grievances of the masses only fueled social discontent and disgruntlement among them. In every election which is an intramural among the elite, candidates regale the people, especially the poor with promises to better their life, to improve their condition, to serve their interest but after the election nothing has been done. During elections all candidates made change their battle cry, yet people see that their lot is still the same.

This is not to say all politicians are insincere and no genuine effort was made for social reforms. EDSA revolution cannot carry out genuine social reforms for it is constrained by its nature, its being a passive revolution or a restoration-revolution. As such, it cannot carry out reforms that will break up the existing social order and cannot dismantle the current unequal and asymmetrical social structure.

In the same manner, the passive revolution during the Risorgimento failed to address the problems of Italian society like the peasant question and Gramsci faulted the Action Party for its failure to raise it. As a reaction to the French Revolution, the Piedmont State carried out a passive revolution. During Gramsci's time in 1920s, the Italian state was confronted by the similar external situation, this time

it was from the Russian Revolution. Aggravating the situation in Italy during Gramsci's time was the threat of Americanism expressed through Fordism or the export of American free market economy to Europe.

Gramsci saw fascism in Italy during his time as a response to these external challenges as well as internal ones. "But, in present conditions, is it not precisely the fascist movement which in fact corresponds to the movement of moderate and conservative liberalism in the last century?" Gramsci asked (1971:119). For Gramsci fascism rose in Italy to counter the threats of Russian Revolution and Fordism while ensuring the preservation of the status quo.

The rise of Duterte could be explained in similar way. Public frustration over the inability of the post-EDSA regimes to meet popular expectations made Filipinos consider an authoritarian solution to address the persistent and enduring social problems of the country. EDSA revolt being a passive revolution cannot carry out radical changes that deal with the fundamental problem of social inequality and injustice and this made illiberal project a palatable option to many Filipinos, enough in numbers to elect Duterte. If Italy turned to fascism in the 1920s, Philippines turned to Dutertismo in 2016.

## Summary

This paper addresses the question "Why did Duterte win the election and how his phenomenal rise can be explained?" It interrogates the question by presenting the views of some scholars on Philippine politics and its own take on the emergence of Dutertismo in Philippine politics.

Several Philippine scholars in varying degrees attribute the rise of Duterte to the failure of liberal democracy exemplified by the EDSA regimes that followed the 1986 EDSA People Power revolt. Teehankee (2017) proposes that a rupture in the post-EDSA regime occurred due to its vulnerability with the discrediting of the good governance narrative creating public frustration (Arguelles 2016) which made the ascendancy of Duterte possible. Thompson (2010), on the other hand, situates the emergence of Duterte to the swing of pendulum of Philippine politics which lurch from reformism to populism while Heydarian (2017) locates the ascent of Duterte in the world-wide rising tide of populism.



The paper offers its own explanation of the Duterte phenomenon. It contends that the “failure of liberal democracy” explanation is insufficient and does not go far enough. Why did the EDSA regimes failed? Where is this failure rooted? Using Gramsci’s concept of passive revolution, this paper argues that EDSA 1 is a passive revolution or a restoration revolution. Instead of restructuring Philippine society to address the deep-seated problems of poverty, injustice, and inequality, EDSA 1 simply re-established the highly asymmetrical social order disfigured by the Marcos dictatorship. Failure of EDSA 1 is rooted in its being a passive revolution and this explains the inability of the liberal democratic regimes that came after 1986 to address the structural and fundamental problems of Philippine society. Decades of accumulated public frustration due to failed expectations ruptured in 2016 producing the Duterte phenomenon. The rise of Duterte is the consequence of passive revolution which explains the failure of liberal democracy.

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1987 Philippine Constitution

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> "Liberal democracy is a liberal political ideology and a form of government in which representative democracy operates under the principles of classical liberalism. It is characterized by *elections* between multiple distinct political parties, a *separation of powers* into different branches of government, *the rule of law* in everyday life as part of an open society, a *market economy* with private property and the *equal protection of human rights, civil rights, civil liberties, and political freedoms* for all people. To define the system in practice, *liberal democracies* often draw upon a constitution to delineate the powers of government and enshrine the *social contract*. After a period of sustained expansion throughout the 20th century, *liberal democracy* became the predominant political system in the world." This is the definition of liberal democracy according to European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS). <https://www.populismstudies.org/Vocabulary/liberal-democracy/>

<sup>2</sup> AB classes represent only 1% of the families in the Philippine population. Meanwhile Class C comprises 9%, with Class D representing the largest bulk of families in the Philippines: 60%. Therefore, six (6) out of every 10 Filipinos belong to Class D. Judging by this huge percentage, we can say that the "*masa*" population in the country is Class D. The poorest segment, Class E, also comprises a big chunk. Around 30% of Filipino families are classified under this class, which undoubtedly confirms that poverty in the Philippines remains prevalent. For further discussion see *Socioeconomic classes (SEC) ABCDE explained* at <https://www.pinoymoneytalk.com/sec-abcde-percentage-population/>