

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Philippines

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>8</td> <td>8</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>8</td> <td>8</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td colspan="3">23</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	Polity:	8	8	0	Democ:	8	8	0	Autoc:	0	0	0	Durable:	23			Tentative:	No			
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SCODE	PHI	CCODE	840	Date of Report	1 June 2011																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	6	2	4																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date		25 February 1986		Begin Date																					
				3 February 1987																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1987																								
Executive(s)	President Benigno Aquino (LP); directly elected 10 May 2010; 42.1%																								
Legislature	<p>Bicameral:</p> <p>House of Representatives (286 seats; 229 directly elected; 57 allotted to party-lists according to proportional representation; most recent elections, 10 May 2010; <i>note: the Constitution prohibits the House of Representatives to have more than 250 members; however, a Supreme Court decision in April 2009 ruled that additional party members could sit in the House if they received enough votes to do so</i>)</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Lakas-Kampi-CMD coalition: 106</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Liberal Party (LP): 42</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC): 31</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Nationalist Party (NP): 25</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Non partisans: 7</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Other parties: 18</p> <p>Senate (24 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 10 May 2010)</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Nacionalista: 4</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">LP: 4</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">LAKAS: 4</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Other parties: 6</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Non-partisans: 6</p>																								
Judiciary	Supreme Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

Vice President Gloria Arroyo was sworn into office in January 2001 after President Estrada was forced to relinquish his office under mounting public pressure. In an event now referred to as “People Power II,” President Estrada resigned from office after the military sided with a broad coalition of anti-presidential forces that had been mobilized in the wake of his attempt to derail his impeachment on corruption charges. Estrada and Arroyo had won in competitive presidential and vice-presidential elections in 1998 that took place in a relatively peaceful and non-violent atmosphere. Estrada had won these elections with the biggest majority in Philippine history, relying primarily on the support of the poor. Running as a populist politician, Estrada lacked support from both the traditional elites and the middle classes. These groups, along with opportunistic elements in the military, forced the resignation of Estrada on 20 January 2001. On May Day 2001 thousands of Estrada supporters launched an ill-fated effort to storm the presidential palace and return the former-president to power. Lacking support from the military, civil services and the mainstream political parties, Estrada could not muster the “people power” to overturn the pseudo-coup of January 2001. President Arroyo imposed a “State of Rebellion” in July 2003 after a failed military mutiny. The mutiny, part of a wider effort to depose the President, was linked to loyalists to ex-President Estrada. The decree was lifted in early August.

The presidential elections held in May 2004 were plagued by violence and allegations of fraud. More than ninety people died during the electoral campaign. While Arroyo was deemed the winner, domestic and international monitors noted significant irregularities in the election process. On 30 June 2010, Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino, the son of an assassinated anti-Marcos leader and a former president, was sworn into office as the new president of the Philippines after an easy electoral victory in May. Aquino saw his political fortunes rise significantly after the death of his mother, former President Cory Aquino, in 2009. Aquino defeated Joseph Estrada in the May 10 election with 42% of the vote. President Gloria Arroyo, who was constitutionally prohibited from seeking another term in office, won a seat in Congress but saw her political base quickly erode. Arroyo, daughter of former President Diosdado Macapagal, saw her popularity plummet in recent years as she was increasingly criticized for both fraud and corruption. While her Laskas-KAMPI-CMD coalition won 107 seats in Congress in the 2010 poll, compared to 45 for Aquino’s Liberal Party, nonetheless, her political support has largely evaporated. Given the historic weakness of political parties in the Philippines and the continued power of personality and patronage, over 70 members of Arroyo’s alliance defected to the Aquino camp in the wake of her electoral defeat. More than 90 people were killed in pre-election violence in the country.

Executive Constraints: Near Parity (6)

The Philippines’ governmental system is modeled on the constitutional framework of the United States, with a separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. However, presidential authority within the Philippines has always been stronger than in the United States. The patrimonial nature of politics in the Philippines has long driven the concentration of political power into the hands of the chief executive and has simultaneously undermined the power of the legislature. As the primary gatekeeper of state largesse, the Philippine president has long held political powers that far exceed those spelled out in the Constitution. Nevertheless, while the president is the head of state, chief executive, and commander in chief of the armed forces, s/he does face considerable constraints by the legislative branch. Presidential cabinet appointments are subject to approval by the legislature and while the president may declare martial law in a national emergency, Congress is empowered to revoke such an order at any time. The power of the legislative branch in the Philippines was starkly displayed in January 2001 when Joseph Estrada was unceremoniously removed as president after he unsuccessfully sought to derail the congressional impeachment process targeted against him. While President Macapagal-Arroyo has tried to amend the constitution to reform the legislature to a parliamentary system modeled after Germany, the legislature has been uncooperative this far. If successful, this reform could have significant implications for executive constraints. The country’s judiciary is independent, but suffers from inefficiency and corruption. The courts are hindered by backlogs, limited resources and a lack of judges.

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Political Participation: Political Liberalization: Limited and/or Decreasing Overt Coercion (9)

One of the most surprising trends in recent years has been the steady decline of factional political violence in the Philippines. Historically, Philippine politics have been plagued by factional violence between the numerous, and ever-shifting, political clans (or patrimonial networks) that have dominated Philippine political life since independence and between these military-backed political clans and left wing, anti-system social movements. Electoral violence and communist insurgency have long defined the nature of politics in the Philippines. However, building on the success of the “People Power” movement that ousted President Marcos in 1986, the Philippines has witnessed the growth of an increasingly active civil society that has worked to weaken the dominance of radical factions within the political arena. The pervasive political influence of the political clans and their military supporters has weakened in recent years while the once-powerful Communist Party is but a shadow of its former self. The communist-inspired New People’s Army, which had waged a protracted guerrilla war in the 1970’s and ‘80’s, currently has about 12,000 troops, about double what it had in the mid-1990s but down from a high of 40,000 two decades earlier. While the patronage-fueled *trapos* (“dishrags” or traditional politicians) and the radical left continue to function in the Philippines, nevertheless, their power has been increasingly challenged by the expansion of nongovernmental “people’s organizations” (PO-NGOs).

Legitimized in the 1987 Constitution, PO-NGOs within the Philippines have increasingly worked through legitimate political channels to push for “pro-people” legislation. The growth of these autonomous civic organizations, fueled by the 1987 law to include party-list representatives in legislative elections, has weakened the stranglehold of traditional politicians and radical communist organizations over the political activities of the Philippine poor and disenfranchised. With the emergence of alternative political channels within the Philippines, the capacity of local strongmen and radicalized mass organizations to mobilize their followers in political violence has lessened. Moreover, the emergence of pro-democracy NGOs, such as the Roman Catholic Church’s electoral “watchdog” projects, has helped clean up elections in the Philippines and weaken the impulse for violent political activity.

Despite the deepening of democratic participation in Philippine politics in the post-Marcos era, factional politics, fueled in part by extreme income inequality, continue to threaten the consolidation of democracy in this country. Political parties remain weak and the military, while less politically active than in the late 1980s when coup attempts against the Aquino regime were commonplace, nevertheless, remains a wild card in the political equation. Moreover, ethno-religious violence between Moro (Muslim) and Christian followers on the southern islands of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago continue to threaten political stability of this country. While the 1998 elections were relatively free from the violence that had marred previous presidential polls, sporadic incidents of violence occurred in the southern provinces, with nearly forty deaths reported during the campaign. Long a hotbed of political and ethnic discontent, rebel groups in the southern provinces engaged the Christian-dominated central government in ethno-political warfare from the mid-1970s until 1992 when President Ramos negotiated a cease-fire agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). However, this peace accord has failed to bring stability to this area of the country as two other Moro groups, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf Group, continue to engage in violence and lawlessness in the region. With the help of the United States, the central government engaged in a widespread campaign to eradicate these groups throughout 2002-03. The MILF agreed to a cease-fire in July 2003, which held until attacks in January 2005 were blamed on the organization, although MILF did not take responsibility.

Protests against Arroyo’s involvement in election-rigging and banking scandals increased in 2005, and created a serious challenge to her administration in 2006. On 24 February 2006 an alleged coup plot was uncovered by the government and Arroyo responded by declaring a state of emergency, authorizing warrantless arrests of protesters, government control of private utility companies, and the closure of primary and secondary schools. The state of emergency was lifted on 3 March 2006 and the Supreme Court later found the proclamation constitutional.

With the election of Aquino to the post of president in mid-2010, his administration has actively sought to negotiate peace settlements with the country’s various insurgency forces. In early 2011 the government was negotiating with both the Communist New People’s Army and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to find peaceful settlements to their respective insurgencies that have persisted for nearly four decades and have claimed the lives of an estimated 160,000 of the country’s citizens.