



Philippines — Va-PoReg Country Report

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10/12/1898 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of USA]: On 06/12/1898, a revolutionary movement in the Philippines declared itself independent from the Spanish Empire. On 10/12/1898 the Philippines became a colony of the United States of America de jure with the Treaty of Paris. However, from 1899 on to 04/16/1902 the Filipinos fought back against the USA's occupation.¹ On 07/30/1907 the first election for the 80 members Philippine Assembly were held which was created by the Philippine Organic Act from 1902. These elections marked to begin of Philippines way towards self-determination. In 1916 it was renamed the House of Representatives of the Philippines.² On 11/15/1935 the US-congress approved a 10-year transition period to independence of the Philippines. The Philippines then held a referendum on the new constitution and an island-wide plebiscite on independence. Both were approved by huge margins.³ Males over 25 who could speak English or Spanish, with property and tax restrictions, were allowed to vote as early as 1907. However, universal male suffrage started only in 1935. LIED confirms the presence of legislative multiparty elections since 1907. However, the electorate between was primarily composed of the educated and property-owning elite, limiting broad public participation in governance. While the Philippine Assembly was established in 1907, allowing for an elected body of Filipino legislators, real power remained with American officials. Key administrative positions were held by Americans, and the U.S. had not only control over defense and foreign policy, but also the economy. Political liberties were absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as not really present until 1906 and as ambiguous from 1907 onward. For the relevant regime period, 1900-1934 V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

09/16/1935 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of USA]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of USA]: The first national elections with male suffrage were held on 09/16/1935. But universal suffrage was absent until 1937 (LIED). In 1937, women's suffrage was approved in a plebiscite.⁴ According to LIED, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and ambiguous according to V-Dem's PCLI. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For the relevant regime period, 1935-1941 V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

01/03/1942 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]: The only political party allowed during the occupation was the Japanese-organized Kalibapi.⁵ On 10/14/1943 the Philippines were nominally declared independent. However, the occupation regime continued until 08/17/1945. For 1942-1944, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. LIED lists elections and male suffrage as absent. For the given period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent and V-Dem's PCLI is also classified by us as indicating that political liberties are absent.

08/17/1945 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]: After the occupation of Japan ended the Philippines were under the colonial rule of the USA again. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held and universal suffrage was granted. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For 1945, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. In 1945, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is likewise classified by us as showing that political liberties are present.

07/06/1946 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this day, the Philippines became independent. The 1935 constitution remained in effect. Elections were held under universal suffrage (including all ethnicities).⁶ On 04/23/1946 general elections were held. Manuel Roxas became the last President of the Commonwealth and the Republic's first. Furthermore, the Liberal Party secured victories in nine out of 16 senatorial seats. In the House of Representatives, the Liberals secured a majority by winning 50 seats, while the Nacionalistas and the Democratic Alliance only managed to secure 33 and six seats.⁷ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. During this period the country held competitive elections per LIED. For the first four years V-Dem's CEI indicates ambiguous cleanliness outcomes. From 1950 to 1953 the elections were not really clean. Between 1954 and 1969 ambiguous cleanliness is scored again. Since 1970, the elections are not really clean again. Regarding the overall elections' conditions, they were somewhat free and fair until 1948. For the following four years they switched to ambiguous scores. Between 1953 and 1968 the elections were somewhat free and fair. In 1969 they were ambiguous for one year before they were somewhat free and fair again in 1970 (V-Dem EF&FI). However, no political liberties were present for this time (LIED). Whereas V-Dem's PCLI scores somewhat political liberties. The constitutional structure is based on the model of the USA, it is a bicameral system consisting of the lower body, the House of Representatives, and the upper body the Senate (Manglapus 1959: 613).⁸ The political regime is characterized by a two-party system and the presidential term lasts four years, a second term is permitted (Choi 2001: 489). From 1946 to 1949, according to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. Between 1950 and 1968, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks during this time. From 1969 to 1971, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. For the year 1946, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. From 1947 to 1970, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. For 1971, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

09/22/1972 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Personalist Autocracy: The declaration of martial law, on this date, was accompanied by decisive actions: Congress was shut down, and a wide array of individuals, including opposition leaders, journalists, members of Congress, student activists, and members of the Constitutional Convention, were arrested. These steps effectively dissolved the existing political opposition, consolidating power in the hands of President Marcos (Grossholtz 1973: 102, Zieh 1986: 119-20, Seekins 1993, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 89). Two explicit justifications for the coup were „to save the republic“ (from various plots) and „to reform society“ (after the failure of American-style democracy).⁹ Since the congress was dissolved in this period and Marcos ruled by decree with almost unlimited power the precondition of a pure personalist regime is fulfilled. The martial law period under Marcos is noted for its human rights abuses, targeting political opponents, student activists, journalists, religious workers, and others who opposed his regime. The extent of these abuses included thousands of extrajudicial killings, documented

tortures, disappearances, and incarcerations. In 1972 LIED records only the occurrence of executive elections but does not categorize them as multiparty. No legislative elections were held. From 1963 no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. For that period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is also classified by us as indicating that political liberties were absent. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. For 1972, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. For 1973-1977, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

04/07[&27]/1978 End Personalist Autocracy/Start Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy: On these dates a fraudulent parliamentary election took place. From his prison cell, Aquino was allowed to take part in the elections. It was the first time Lakas ng Bayan („People's Power“) participated in elections. However, due to the fraud, the opposition party gained no seats in the parliament.¹⁰ On 01/17/1981 Marcos lifted martial law. On 06/16/1981 presidential elections were held which were boycotted by almost all opposition parties.¹¹ Because parliamentary and presidential elections took place the regime has to be classified as an electoral autocracy. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Those elections are considered as not competitive (LIED). No cleanliness was scored (V-Dem CEI). The elections were not free and fair according to V-Dem's EF&FI. Per FH's evaluation from 1978 to 1983, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. According to FH, in 1984, the country is partly free with a score of 8, which we interpret as rather not free. Per FH, in 1985, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. Besides both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI confirmed that political liberties were absent for the whole time. However, in key aspects it was a continuation of the personalist autocracy of the previous period. Between 1978 and 1980, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive operated with unlimited authority, facing no institutional checks on power. Since 1981, as per Polity5's categorization, the executive experienced minimal limitations on decision-making, placing it in the first intermediate category. For 1978-1985, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

02/25/1986 End Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date, Marcos resigned in response to a mutiny of officers and massive demonstrations protesting a stolen election. His resignation allowed the newly elected government to take office (Seekins 1993, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 89, Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 53). The newly elected government under Corason Aquino drafted the 1987 constitution, that limited presidential power and re-established the bicameral Congress.¹² The 1992 presidential elections, conducted under the new constitution, were deemed the first held under regular and peaceful conditions since 1965.¹³ In June, the Philippines smoothly navigated a presidential transition from Aquino to Fidel Ramos. However, Ramos' victory, with just 23 percent of the vote amidst seven contenders and no run-off system, hardly provides him with a clear mandate. Starting in 1991 FH classified the Philippines as partly free (McColm 1993). On 01/20/2001 standing President Estrada was impeached for his involvement in a gambling scandal. In his trial, members of congress refused to examine a piece of evidence which led to mass anger and a rejection of the proceedings and president. The armed forces and police reassigned their loyalties to Vice President Arroyo and Estrada was ousted. Despite the shift from authoritarian rule in 1986, the Philippines grapples with inconsistent adherence to the rule of law, marked by a notable bias favoring political and economic elites. Oversight and accountability mechanisms within democratic institutions are either feeble or subject to subversion. Lingering violent insurgencies, persisting for decades, have diminished in recent years but remain a concern. Opposition politicians, particularly in recent

years, face heightened harassment and politically motivated charges, impeding their ability to challenge incumbents amid an atmosphere of violence and restricted access to state resources for those outside of power.¹⁴ The general election on 05/12/2025, featured the contested implementation of new automated voting technology from Miru Systems, raising significant concerns about electoral integrity and transparency.¹⁵ LIED classified the Philippines between 1990 and 1998 as a polyarchy (equivalent to a liberal democracy). According to our observations this seems to be a misclassification. FH in accordance with our observations state that „the rule of law and application of justice are haphazard and heavily favor political and economic elites”. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Since 1986 the country scored constant competitiveness for its elections (LIED). V-Dem’s CEI indicates ambiguous cleanliness from 1988 to 2003. For six years, not really clean elections were stated. Since 2010 the outcomes turned back to ambiguous cleanliness. From 1987 to 1997 the elections were somewhat free and fair. In 1998 and for the next two years the overall conditions are classified as free and fair. Since 2001 somewhat freedom and fairness are achieved (V-Dem EF&FI). According to FH, a score of 6 to 7 in 1986 designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. As per FH’s classification in 1987, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. According to FH, in 1988 and 1989, the country is rated as free with a score of 5, which we interpret as rather free in our framework. Per FH, from 1990 to 1995, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. As per FH’s classification from 1996 to 2004, the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. According to FH, a score of 6 to 7 from 2005 onward designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. In addition to that, LIED indicates that political liberties were present since 1990. V-Dem’s PCLI indicates some changes for this time. In 1986 and since 2020 the political liberties are ambiguous. Between 1987 and 2004 and between 2010 and 2015 full political liberties are given. For the remaining years the outcomes score a somewhat presence. From 1987 to 1991, as per Polity5’s classification, the executive’s authority was on par with or below that of other branches, reflecting executive parity or subordination. Since 1992, as per Polity5’s categorization, the executive’s authority was significantly constrained, nearing parity with other branches, placing it in the third intermediate category. For 1986, V-Dem’s JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem’s LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. In 1987, V-Dem’s JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem’s LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1988-1993, 1998 and for 2002-2017, V-Dem’s JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. For 1994-1997 and 1999-2001, V-Dem’s JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem’s LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive. For 2018 onward, V-Dem’s JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem’s LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. Over most of the time in this regime period the Philippines were a borderline case between an electoral democracy and an electoral hybrid regime.

Electoral Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Celoza 1997, Hutchcroft 1991, Thompson 1995, Thompson 1998, Brownlee 2008, Croissant 2002, Slater 2010)

Notes

¹ <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/APA/Historical-Essays/Exclusion-and-Empire/The-Philippines/>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippine_Assembly

- ³ <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/APA/Historical-Essays/Exclusion-and-Empire/The-Philippines/>
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_occupation_of_the_Philippines
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1946_Philippine_presidential_election
- ⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_of_the_Philippines#:~:text=The%20Congress%20of%20the%20Philippines%20\(Filipino%3A%20Kongreso%20ng%20Pilipinas\),an%20upper%20body%2C%20the%20Senate.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_of_the_Philippines#:~:text=The%20Congress%20of%20the%20Philippines%20(Filipino%3A%20Kongreso%20ng%20Pilipinas),an%20upper%20body%2C%20the%20Senate.)
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martial_law_under_Ferdinand_Marcos
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1978_Philippine_parliamentary_election
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1981_Philippine_presidential_election_and_referendum
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corazon_Aquino
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corazon_Aquino
- ¹⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/philippines/freedom-world/2022>
- ¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_Philippine_general_election

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