

WHY CHANGE OUR PRESIDENTIAL GOVERNMENT TO A PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT?

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I. The Philippines today. What is the big picture?

1. We are a weak, divided nation.

Most people are preoccupied with their concerns for self and family, private interests and possessions. They do not care about other citizens, the community, the nation, the government, the state, the environment, and the common good.

2. Our Republic is still a "Soft State."

Weak rule of law and governance because of the dominance and power of political families, warlords and rebel groups.

3. Our constitutional democracy cannot deliver on its promise of a peaceful, just and humane society under the rule of law.

4. Our people are increasingly dissatisfied with the way our democracy works, but still believe in democracy as an ideal.

5. In fact, our country is in a deep political and economic crisis. The very survival of our constitutional democracy is gravely threatened.

In our deepening political division and confrontations, some groups are proposing undemocratic and extra-constitutional means of resolving our differences, including rebellion and military intervention.

II. Our democratic political development since independence in 1946

- 1. We had a Presidential and Unitary Government under the 1935 Constitution—until Sept. 1972 (except during the Japanese Military Occupation 1942-1945).**

Legislative power in the unicameral National Assembly, then in Congress (Senate and House of Representatives). Executive power in the President. Judicial power in the Supreme Court and lower courts. Based on the principle of "separation of powers and checks and balance" among the three branches of government.

- 2. The Marcos Authoritarian Government lasted from Sept. 1972 to Feb. 1986. We had a Pseudo-Parliamentary, and actual Dictatorship under the 1973 Constitution.**

President Marcos exercised executive and legislative powers in a pseudo parliamentary government, and controlled the judiciary and the media. He governed with the military and national police. The people lost their political freedom and civil rights. Many were illegally detained, tortured, killed, or simply disappeared.

- 3. The EDSA Revolution ended the Marcos Dictatorship on Feb. 25, 1986. It called for "Justice, Freedom and Democracy."**

The world's freedom-loving nations acclaimed our success in overthrowing a dictator of over 13 years without bloodshed—through "people power."

- 4. President Aquino ruled for one year under a Revolutionary Government—from Feb. 25, 1986 to Feb. 1, 1987, under her so-called "Freedom Constitution."**

- 5. Democracy was restored under the 1987 Constitution prepared by an appointed Constitutional Commission and ratified by the people on Feb. 2, 1987. We also restored a Presidential and Unitary Government.**

We restored the separation of powers and checks and balance among the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary.

The unitary structure concentrated powers and revenues in the national government. Local governments are weak and dependent on the national government but some local autonomy was extended under the Constitution and the Local Autonomy Code.

6. **Under President Aquino (1986-1992) we restored our elitist democracy and restarted our economic recovery, but there were nine coup attempts by politicized military rebels supported by some Marcos loyalists.**
7. **Under President Ramos (1992-1998) our economic recovery made solid progress as he was also able to restrain the military rebels, and successfully end the GRP-MNLF conflict.**

But, as before and after Ramos, our chronic social and economic problems and the Communist and Moro insurgencies persisted.

8. **In January 2001, President Estrada was the second president removed by “people power,” after his failed impeachment trial for plunder and corruption. His removal, trial and detention led to more political instability.**

This showed the people’s determination to hold their President accountable. This was followed in May by a march on Malacañang by thousands of his urban poor supporters, suggesting a “revolt of the poor constituents” of an ineffective democracy.

9. **Vice-President Arroyo succeeded Estrada and was elected in 2004 to a full six-year term until 2010. President Arroyo has worked hard to improve social services, infrastructure, and initiate economic reforms—with some success.**

But her term has been marred by sustained opposition by Estrada loyalists and other opposition and NGO leaders and military rebels, and unresolved allegations of cheating in the 2004 presidential elections where she defeated FPJ, “Da king” of Filipino movies. She has survived several “people power” protests, military rebellion, and impeachment attempts but suffers from unending challenges to her legitimacy.

10. **After 19 years under our restored elitist democracy and our presidential and unitary government—we have failed to check our problems of mass poverty, unemployment, social injustice, corruption, rebellion, inadequate education, health, housing, rapid population growth, destruction of the environment, and so on.**

Every year so many of our people have to go abroad to find jobs and support their families.

11. Largely because our leaders are unwilling and unable to raise taxes, our government has very limited funding. It is now heavily in debt from too much borrowing. Up to 40 % of our national budget goes to debt service, thus reducing funds for social services and development.

However, serious fiscal reforms and new taxes have been initiated by President Arroyo with the support of Congress.

III. Charter change is imperative and urgent!

Fully realizing the serious ineffectiveness of our political institutions and governance, and the failure of our constitutional democracy, many leaders and citizens are proposing their reform by revising our Constitution and other ways.

President Arroyo and many leaders in the House of Representatives and the local governments and civil society are proposing the change of our political system—

1. From a presidential government to a parliamentary government.
2. From a bicameral legislature to a unicameral Parliament.
3. From a centralized unitary system to a decentralized system of autonomous territories and regions leading to a Federal Republic.
4. It is also proposed to reform of our political parties as institutions of representation, and our electoral system, judiciary, and civil service.
5. And it is proposed to liberalize some restrictive economic policies in the Constitution—to attract much more foreign investments and business, as our progressive neighbors in Asia have been doing all along.

IV. What Parliamentary Government is proposed ?

1. A Parliament that combines legislative and executive powers.
2. Unicameral in structure.

3. **The Parliament shall have as many members as may be provided by law. To begin with, the Parliament shall have as many elected members as the present 235 congressional district representatives.**
4. **In addition the members chosen by the political parties shall constitute thirty percent of the total members of Parliament (MPs), including those elected to the Parliament.**

These additional members are chosen by "proportional representation" of the political parties based on their share of the total votes cast nationwide for the individual parties in the previous parliamentary election.

5. **"Checks and balance" are exercised in the relations between the majority party and the opposition parties, including their regular "question hour."**
6. **The opposition is represented in the Commission on Appointments. There are also the others centers of countervailing power: the business groups, the interest groups, the media, and civil society organizations.**
7. **Members of Parliament shall be elected, or chosen by the political parties, for a term of five years, with no term limits. Candidates for MP must have a college degree.**
8. **The Prime Minister is elected by a majority of all the MPs. He exercises the executive power as the Head of Government. He is normally the leader of the majority party in the Parliament.**
9. **As the Head of the Government, the Prime Minister is assisted by the Cabinet of Ministers, at least three-fourths of whom are MPs.**
10. **From among the MPs, the Parliament elects the President who is the Head of State for a term of five years.**

The President shall cease to be an MP and a member of any political party. He has a term of five years.

V. Advantages of Parliamentary Government over our Presidential Government?

