

**THE STATE OF REGIME CHANGE AND SYSTEMIC  
CHANGE IN THE ELECTORAL POLITICS OF  
MALAYSIA AND THE PHILIPPINES: WHAT HAS  
MALAYSIA AND THE POST-MARCOS PHILIPPINES  
LEARNT?**

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by

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BN	Barisan Nasional
COMELEC	Commission of Election
CPP	Communist Party Philippines
CSO	Civil society organization
DAP	Democratic Action Party
EC/SPR	Election Commission/Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya
EDSA	Epifanio de los Santos Avenue
ERC	Election Reform Committee
IRB	Internal Revenue Board
KBL	Kilusan Bagong Lipunan
MACC	Malaysia Anti-corruption Commission
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
NAMFREL	National Citizen's Movement for Free Elections
NASSA	National Secretariat for Social Action
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NPA	New People's Army
PAS	Parti Seislam Malaysia
PDRM	Polis Diraja Malaysia
PH	Pakatan Harapan
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat
PN	Perikatan Nasional
PPBM	Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia
PPCRV	Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting
PR	Pakatan Rakyat
1MDB	1 Malaysia Development Berhad
UMNO	United Malay National Organization
USA	United States of America

**KEADAAN PERUBAHAN REJIM DAN PERUBAHAN SISTEMIK DALAM  
POLITIK PILIHAN RAYA MALAYSIA DAN FILIPINA: APAKAH YANG  
TELAH MALAYSIA DAN PASCA-MARCOS FILIPINA PELAJARI?**

**ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini meneroka dan menganalisis perbezaan antara pertukaran kerajaan dalam politik pilihan raya. Pemerintahan demokratik bagi kebanyakan negara di Asia Tenggara terutamanya negara Malaysia dan Filipina, telah ditafsirkan secara berbeza oleh ahli-ahli politik, golongan elit dan pemimpin-pemimpin Malaysia dan Filipina. Namun begitu, mereka telah memilih untuk menyatukan kuasa yang mereka memperolehi melalui pilihan raya dan kekayaan sampingannya. Penganjuran pilihan raya kekal sebagai salah satu aset yang penting kepada pemerintahan demokrasi di Malaysia dan Filipina sejak pengisytiharan kemerdekaan. Oleh yang demikian, pemerintahan secara mutlak adalah mustahil. Oleh itu, “elektoral authoritarianisme” telah diperkenalkan atas keupayaannya sebagai peniru kepada konsep-konsep asas demokrasi, di samping memiliki petunjuk yang mencukupi untuk merealisasikan demokrasi. Sepanjang beberapa tahun atau dekad, rejim-rejim mula mengetatkan pemerintahannya dan meningkatkan tahap “elektoral authoritarianisme”. Akibatnya, rakyat mula menuju ke arah untuk mencabari rejim-rejim dan menuntut balik kuasa pemerintahan kembali kepada rakyat. Perubahan rejim dan perubahan sistemik yang telah berlaku di Malaysia dan Filipina bergantung kepada skala mobilisasi dan pergerakan pembaharuan pilihan raya. Antara cabaran-cabaran penyelidikan ini adalah jumlah pengekalan kesan-kesan terhadap sistem politik daripada perubahan rejim dan sistemik perubahan. Seterusnya, cabaran sama ada perubahan-perubahan ini mampu menghadapi dugaan-dugaan masa depan atau mengharungi cabaran perubahan masa depan dalam kerajaan? Penyelidikan ini menggunakan kaedah sumber sekunder dan

kaedah kualitatif; temu bual secara bersemuka yang melibatkan 10 responden yang dikenal pasti yang fasih dengan sistem politik dan pilihan raya di Malaysia serta Filipina. Kajian ini menganalisis bidang kepakaran oleh tokoh-tokoh pemikir dan sumber sekunder tentang proses kuasa politik di “autoritarianisme-separa” Malaysia dan “authoritarianisme” Filipina dan bagaimana ianya mampu bertahan lama dan seterusnya, dibahagikan kepada perubahan rejim dan sistemik. Kajian ini juga dijalankan untuk meneroka perbezaan mengenai isu reaksi rakyat terhadap pembaharuan pilihan raya dalam kerajaan mereka di Malaysia dan Filipina. Akhir sekali, kajian ini diakhiri dengan pengajaran yang telah dipelajari oleh Malaysia dan Pasca-Marcos Filipina daripada perubahan sistemik dalam Filipina dan perubahan regim di Malaysia. Penyertaan politik yang aktif dan mobilisasi yang teguh telah dipamerkan oleh rakyat Filipina dalam proses perubahan sistemik dalam Pasca-Marcos Filipina. Fenomena ini telah dikemukakan sebagai salah satu pengajaran untuk Malaysia dan rejim perubahan di Malaysia, selaras dengan tuju arah pendemokrasian keseluruhan dalam kedua-dua negara dalam masa yang akan datang.

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**ABSTRACT**

This study explores and analyses the differences in the change of government in the electoral politics. The democratic rule for most of the South East Asia nations particularly in Malaysia and the Philippines, were interpreted differently by politicians, the elites, and the leaders. Instead, they have chosen to consolidate the power that they acquired through elected office and the immense wealth that comes with it. As elections remain a crucial attribute of democracy in Malaysia and the Philippines since granting independence, absolute authoritarianism is impossible, therefore, electoral authoritarianism was introduced as it has the ability to mimic many fundamental attributes of democracy and possesses sufficient indicators of democracy. As the regimes began tightening its grip and employed a higher level of electoral authoritarianism over the years, the people began mobilizing towards challenging the regime and demanded that the power of rule returns to the people. Depending on the scale of mobilization and the electoral reform movements, regime change, and systemic change occurred in Malaysia and the Philippines, respectively. The great challenge is now how much of these improved changes were actually permanent after a change of government or even so, will they be able to stand the test of time or to stand against any future changes in the government? This research uses secondary source and qualitative method; in-depth one-to-one interviews are conducted with 10 identified respondents who are familiar with Malaysia and the Philippines political and electoral system, respectively. The study analyses the insights given by these experts and through the secondary sources on how Malaysia's semi-authoritarian and

Philippines' authoritarian political power persist then breakdown towards regime and systemic changes respectively and to explore the differences on the issue of how the people seek for electoral reforms to change their government in Malaysia and the Philippines. Finally, the research concludes with what Malaysia and the Post-Marcos Philippines learn from the systemic changes in the Philippines and the regime change in Malaysia. Active political participation and strong mobilizations by the Filipinos, shown in the process of systemic change of Post-Marcos Philippines were among the lessons that can be inferred upon as Malaysia changes regime, leading towards a better democratisation in both nations in the near future.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

A change of regime has often proven almost unimaginable in many developing democratic countries. Elections and even protests are important to facilitate better chances of a regime change to happen, but as most cases, incumbent regimes are capable of withstanding pressures like this, prolonging their longevity.

Often, elections have time and again been manipulated, often painting the misconception that a change of regime or government would lead to chaos and instability. Such manipulation and perception would only occur in nations, which would either be ruled through semi-authoritarian or authoritarian regime. Malaysia and the Philippines were part of the many nations in Asia that belong to two sides of the same coin, both the political and historical structures on opposite ends that had to endure a similar long struggle towards a change of resilient regimes. Malaysia had been held by the solid iron grip of a semi-authoritarianism regime for 61 years from the outgoing ruling coalition party, National Front (BN, Barisan Nasional), spearheaded by the dominant party, United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) only until the recent 14<sup>th</sup> Malaysian general election.

Philippines on the other hand, had been engulfed in an authoritarian rule up to 10 years when the martial law had been declared by President Ferdinand Marcos, and had addressed his Statement on the Declaration of Martial Law to be a so-called safeguarding democracy, *“I use this power implemented by the military authorities to protect the Republic of the Philippines and our democracy.”* (Lim, 2011, p. 4), and

throughout his 21-year-old tenure as President of the Philippines, he remained almost unopposed.

As such, this research has a specific focus on Malaysia's recent regime change and what could be learned from such changes, using the Philippines as a reference point/benchmark for such regime change to occur.

Both states, which emphasize on order and discipline over free will, partly due to the advocacy of the Asian values, were the reasons that such regime could exist and last for a considerable amount of time. According to Connors and Thompson's study (as cited in Thompson, 2015a) the Asian values were used to deter domestic effort and pressure in introducing democracy. Yet again, the unity of the people had emerged triumphant over these semi-authoritarian and authoritarian regimes, under the pretence of 'less democratic nations' than others and had unequivocally justified the needs of such resilient leadership for the sake of peace and stability.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Election defied all opinion surveys and analysis conducted by the government and non-government organisations, as the majority had predicted the odds to be in favour of the ruling party in retaining their power in the government (Moniruzzaman & Kazi Fahmida Farzana, 2018). The political development of the opposition parties throughout the years since the formation of Barisan Alternatif had grown ever since, uniting, and giving the people the liberty to have better alternatives.

The people had proven to challenge the ruling coalition throughout the last three elections, through three big pushes: from the denial of the two-third majority in 2008, to the denial of simple majority for a brief period in 2013 and finally, the denial of power in 2018 (Moniruzzaman & Kazi Fahmida Farzana, 2018). Rather than a violent



and drastic overthrow of a semi-authoritarian government, the changes were done in stages through peaceful means.

In the Philippines, the assassination of Benigno Aquino in 1983 had sparked great demonstrations and unity through the People Power and had forged an unholy alliance between the people and the military, turning against Marcos's regime and supporting the path towards better democracy. The 21 years of the authoritarian regime of President Marcos had finally come to an end when his military was ordered to put down the rebellion and civilian demonstration a few days right after the fraud-ridden snap presidential elections in February 1986 were overridden and later overthrown by his own military personnel through a mutiny and rebellion by the people of the Philippines (Lee T. , 2009). The exile of the ousted and disgraced President Marcos had paved a path of a revitalisation of the democratic system in the Philippines.

Whether it is a semi-authoritarian regime in Malaysia or an authoritarian regime in the Philippines, they share the common goal of remaining in power. However, economic, and social progress can affect political structures and bring about regime and systemic changes.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The road towards a breakdown of a change-resistant regime differs from one another, especially for both these cases, Malaysia, and the Philippines. One had achieved political and social change through holding numerous full-scale national elections while the latter had gone through consistent and large-scale political protests. However, before these regime changes had been immortalized in the pages of history, both the semi-authoritarian and authoritarian regimes had greatly controlled democracy, particularly through elections and their people, to shroud their true intentions of having an indefinite rule over the countries.

According to Linz and Stepan as cited in Johnston (2018), authoritarian states in a repressive environment do permit space for restricted diversity and civil society to exist, alongside opposition parties to operate underground and at minimal civic involvement. Totalitarian regimes as seen in North Korea, took a more radical approach compared to authoritarian regimes by limiting the viable space for the opposition and submitting its people to deference and acquiescence. Both Malaysia's semi-authoritarian and Philippines' authoritarian regimes had certain elite circles that had fed on power, corruption, and misappropriation, being hugely dependent on the leader's 'generosity'. One of the few highlights from those states was their heavy reliance on a patrimonial-clientelist relationship that complement the political elites and had a tendency for harsh repression towards the people and institutions, as legitimacy by the people to govern was highly disregarded by the regime (Johnston, 2018).

A simplified version of the downfall of authoritarianism in the Philippines would be the People Power Revolution, but the truth is always more complex than it looks. The key players behind the fall of the President Marcos's regime was a collaboration between the regime's soft-liners/losers and the moderate opposition leaders. It was argued by Anderson as cited in Fukuoka (2015) that the peoples' rally was too disorganised to have any permanent impact on the balance of power in the country. It would appear that if President Marcos's regime and the military leadership were to remain united without support from the opposition elites, a Tiananmen-like incident might have occurred (Fukuoka, 2015).

Malaysia, which was under a 'soft' dictatorship with an uncontested regime longevity ruling, was finally brought down by the people through the 14<sup>th</sup> general election. Given the multi-ethnic environment, Malaysian politics had apparently shifted from an

ethnic-based party to a more universal civic party system, and voters were now more concerned of universal political values such as competency in the government, accountability and transparency in public works, and political equality compared to ethnic-based issues (Moniruzzaman & Farzana, 2018). However, similarly to the Philippines, the ability to change the government had appeared directly from grassroots leaders that were engulfed in a power scuffle, riding on the peoples' sentiment of change. Given the right machinery and leadership, the people would be more than willing to seek a change of government. The problem, however, lied in whether the people could have a lasting impact on their decision in ensuring that the current and future government would not mirror the negative behaviour of their predecessors.

In this context, the Philippines had clearly portrayed that the presidential system adopted from the United States had failed to put President Marcos in check in his executive power for over 20 years, despite clear separation of powers. Even so, after the collapse of his regime through the People Power Revolution, Marcos's influence and brutality could still be heavily felt by the citizens under the administration of President Duterte today. What more could be said for Malaysia's Parliamentary system, which fuses both the executive and legislature power. Furthermore, the judiciary branch was often politicalised throughout the 61-year rule. The Philippines would be a better reference for Malaysia, as both governments utilized similar oppression towards its people and the opposition.

The current Malaysian political structure has the potential to redefine what is left of in "Asian values" and advocate a new "Asian democracy". Many of the Asian values comprise a series of dichotomies such as cultural particularism versus universalism, collective versus individualism, social and economic rights over political rights, and

non-interference in a country's domestic affairs rather than enforcing international norms. This, however, depended on whether leaders, particularly from developing nations, actually share a common goal of "Asian values" with its people. The real issue that revolves around the "Asian values" would be its authoritarian nature that went against democratic modernity. Many Asian countries relied heavily on the rule of a small elite group and emphasized on the restriction of freedom of its citizens just to make way for economic growth and political stability (Thompson, 2015a).

Often times, despite poor performance in the economy and lack of political stability under the same regime, the authoritarian nature would continue to be justified and emphasized for the sake of preserving the status quo. The "Asian Values" advocated by both Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Lee Kuan Yew, was shared by most of the Southeast Asia nations, and was now put to the test. According to them, the Asian culture would not go well with democracy as the people would prefer order and discipline over political freedom and equality (Lee, 2005).

Although it is clear that such manipulation exists, the main claim was that democratisation through elections could have some underlying effects on political outcomes or regime change (Morgenbesser & Pepinsky, 2018). However, in South East Asia, only three states had experienced regime change, which were the Philippines in 1986, Indonesia in 1999 and Thailand on four separate occasions, though it was concluded by the author that the Philippines was the only successful study that used elections as a cause of democratization, while the rest of the states had many other factors in play that caused democratization (Morgenbesser & Pepinsky, 2018). Thailand was taken out of the context of the study as its 'monarchized military' had great influence on its political system, unlike the Philippines and Malaysia.

As of today, the Thai monarchy and its military has been conjoined in a synergetic relationship, having full control over the country, and boosting each of their political and economic interests. The monarchized military had orchestrated the intervention of the primary government through the back channel of a delicate democracy since 1991 until 2014 by conducting *coups* to oust the government and replacing it with a junta. Throughout the years, the military safeguarding the monarchy as the most important institution of the nation and the head of state has been its top national security priority. The military legitimacy is sustained by the monarch through their palace-centered political order cooperation (Chambers & Waitoolkiat, 2016).

Unlike Malaysia and the Philippines, in which the legitimacy to rule comes from the people through the ballots, Thailand, on the other hand, derives its mandate to rule and sustains the legitimacy of its authority from the historical-cultural legacies of the monarchy, which the military could obtain instead of relying on general elections. Being one of the richest monarchies in the world with a net worth of \$30 billion through their investments managed by the Crown Property Bureau would also indirectly have a huge impact on the nation's socio-economic policy and its influence over the government and the people. All those factors contribute to the high degree of monarchizing over the country. Elections being the causes of Thai democratization can be only supported by little evidence through the three transitions that had occurred from 1976 till 1992, as it had involved constant military takeover and royal intervention (Morgenbesser & Pepinsky, 2018). Only recently, the 14<sup>th</sup> Malaysian general election was perceived as a cause of democratization.

Moving on to Indonesia, despite the fact that elections play a role in Indonesia's democratization, another noteworthy difference that rules out Indonesia as a reference includes the harshness of the economic crisis that had hit most of the Asian countries.

As both Indonesia and Malaysia had achieved successful economic growth throughout the 1960s till 1990s and had faced similar kinds of political and economic crisis in 1997 till 1998, the consequences for both these countries were different. Exceeding all expectations, the Malaysian economy had managed to be stabilized by the beginning of 1999 and had later averted a political scuffle/crisis between Mahathir and Anwar; the stabilization brought to the economy and to the UMNO-BN regime rendered a reform movement insignificant (Pant, 2002). Compared to its counterpart, Indonesia was one of the worst performing states in the South East Asia region, with its economy declining sharply at 13% in 1998, leading to political and economic disintegration and multiple incidents of mass violence within that year. The depreciation of the rupiah by 70% and high inflation had triggered a massive panic-buying in all over the country, which was then followed by an increase of ethnic tension, political and social unrest against the government in major cities demonstrated through riots which left more than 1,000 people dead (Pant, 2002; Tambunan, 2010). By the time, the economic situation worsened steadily in March 1998, Suharto was held responsible by the majority of the Indonesian people for the collapse of the nation's economy and financial hardship that the people had to suffer (Pant, 2002).

The military and the ruling party, GOLKAR, had abandoned Suharto on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> May 1998. The economic policy reform enacted during the 1986 oil price collapse had pushed the leaders of the army and GOLKAR out of Suharto's authoritarian circle, losing his influence to gain their allegiance. GOLKAR and the military allegiance towards Suharto had initially remained steadfast, especially during the oil boom of 1973 as both the parties had relied heavily on the massive oil revenue and had converted the political party into a patronage machine that stimulated prosperity and economic growth through state-owned enterprises.

By 1986, the collapse of oil prices forced the regime to look for alternatives to diversify its economic revenues. The New Order government swiftly liberalized the economy by attracting private domestic and foreign investment instead of relying on oil exports. Through the economic liberation, the New Order was now more dependent on the evaluations of foreign economic interests than before and fostered close relationships with a small group of business elites. By the 1990s, the military and GOLKAR had very little incentives to maintain their allegiance towards Suharto. The regime became a coalition of economic elites based on patronage, international investors, middle class society, the military and the political party itself, taking Suharto out of the equation by early 1990s. (Smith, 2003)

Stable investment soon became the regime's main revenue, a commodity deemed to be unpredictable and out of the regime's control during the 1990s. When the financial crises finally hit in 1997, the coalition was heavily tested, prompting pressure from international investors and lenders, and IMF, which demanded for the New Order cronyism to end (Smith, 2003). In short, the collapse of Suharto's regime and his resignation was mainly based on his deteriorating relationship with the military and his political party, and the latter began shifting their allegiance and reliance to foreign investors, institutions and businesses rather than Suharto himself.

Unlike Malaysia, competitive elections and politics were vaguely seen before Indonesia's 1999 election, as between 1977 and 1997, only three political parties were allowed by the New Order to partake in elections. It was only by 1999 did the number of political parties contesting in the legislative elections skyrocket to 48 parties, and the list was further extended after President Suharto's resignation in 1998 (Morgenbesser & Pepinsky, 2018). The Independent Committee for Election Monitoring (KIPP), a pioneer in election monitoring in Indonesia, was too poorly

organised to have any effect on the last election under Suharto. The party was plagued with massive lack of resources and funding, finally arriving at a complete standstill (Iskandar & Khoo, 2013). Malaysian elections had at least remained somewhat more competitive than its counterpart, pressing the state to uphold greater levels of efficacy for electoral commitments (Slater, 2005b). Both Malaysia and the Philippines had their respective electoral reform movements that played significant roles in mobilizing the public to push for a regime replacement through electoral means.

Instead of replacing the old regime, there was already a change of leadership, unlike Malaysia and the Philippines. This was the initial catalyst of the start of democratization before the election. B. J. Habibie, who was the vice president then, immediately implemented his liberation policy after assuming the post after President Suharto's resignation, leading to the former 1999 legislative election party's defeat. In other words, election had played no role in handing in President Suharto's resignation. Previous research conducted on Malaysia and Indonesia shows that the economic crisis can be an important factor in the process of change of leadership/regime (Pant, 2002). Malaysia's success in stabilizing the economy has helped saved Mahathir's regime from collapsing, while simultaneously serving as a lesson for the fall of Indonesia due to Suharto's poor management of the nation's economic crisis and implementation of policies that provoked ethnic tension and sidelined the middle class (Pant, 2002). Both states had experienced a similar crisis, but only Malaysia had managed to turn the tables by gripping economic stability and prosperity, which in turn ensured stability in the political regime. Unlike Indonesia, both the regimes in Malaysia and the Philippines were both respectively brought down only after holding the general election.



Thailand and Indonesia are classic examples of how democratization and a change of regime did not take place directly through the people and their respective movements that sought a change. Other contributing factors such as the underperforming economy, change of leadership and third-party interventions were the clear democratization tools for those states rather than the people themselves.

Since Malaysia and the Philippines had both adopted the fundamentals of democracy since independence, this facilitated changes to the incumbent regime at a faster pace compared to those that have not experienced any form of democracy within the nation at all. The first problem being addressed in the research is how even a change of government in Malaysia and the removal of the Marcos' regime in the Philippines, still showed a subtle form of electoral authoritarianism in the present time inherited by the previous regimes. For the first time a comparative research can be mounted to determine the chronologies, differences and the similarities of events and the electoral authoritarianism that happened throughout the regime and systemic change. As the chronologies arrangement for both nations begins to unfold, the researcher could determine that the past events and the former governments undemocratic ruling may have repeated itself in the current political situation, reaffirming the quote by George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it", however, the "intensity" of the events and the government similar/old undemocratic practices are deemed to be less severe compared to the past. Hence, Malaysia and the Philippines endured the continuous cycle of politics and the democratic struggle. The next problem addressed in this study is why regime or systemic change took place. Such differences in the government changes can be determined by how politically motivated and socially mobilized the people were at that time and how weak or strong the government was.

According to Mahathir's speech in Chatham House, democracy itself can be considered very foreign and difficult to be handled for many Asian countries, as the people were still not accustomed to the idea of a country governed by the people themselves. The meaning of democracy to the Western Tradition of liberal democracy cannot be fully grasped by people of non-democratic states and may even have their own nuanced and vague interpretation of what democracy constitutes (Huang, Chu, & Chang, 2013). Given that the changes of government in Malaysia and the Philippines have ameliorated fundamental attributes of democracy such as the people's participation in politics, electoral competitiveness, and some form of liberal and deliberative values in the government, how much of these improved changes would stay permanent after a change of government or even so, would they be able to stand against any future changes in the government? To put it simply, is the change of government permanent? With this in mind, the peoples' mind-set and their social values have to be compatible to democracy itself. To achieve such compatibility, time is needed for change and for the features of democracy to stay permanently, or else the sudden vacuum of power could lead to chaos and engulf the nation. This is evident in the Middle East. In the context of Malaysia and the Philippines, their achievements are a steppingstone to determine whether some attributes of democracy have achieved such compatibility with its people throughout its given time.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

To ascertain the findings for this study, several research questions are promulgated to understand the state of regime change in Malaysia, with reference to the systemic change in the Philippines.

- a) How did Malaysia's semi-authoritarian and Philippines' authoritarian regimes' political power persist and then breakdown to bring about regime and systemic changes, respectively?
- b) Why do differences exist between Malaysians and Filipinos in how they seek for electoral reforms to change their governments by protesting peacefully through the ballots and violently through street demonstrations, respectively?
  - i. What are the qualifications for Malaysia to qualify as a regime change?
  - ii. What are the qualifications for the Philippines to qualify as a systemic change?
  - iii. What is the difference between a regime change in Malaysia and a systemic change in the Philippines?
- c) What has Malaysia and the Post-Marcos Philippines learnt after regime and systemic changes, respectively?

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

To complement the research questions, the research objectives are framed from the notion of the research questions.

- a) To analyse how Malaysia's semi-authoritarian and Philippines' authoritarian political power persist then breakdown towards regime and systemic change, respectively.
- b) To explore the differences on the issue of how the people seek for electoral reforms to change their government.
- c) To determine the lessons acquired for Malaysia and Post-Marcos Philippines after regime and systemic change, respectively.

### **1.5 Scope and Significance of Study**

This research intends to examine the recent political events that occurred in Malaysia and to study it comparatively with another case which had undergone a similar political change, the Philippines. This research engages in the investigation of the change of political regime in Malaysia that is supposed to be different and a far departure from a semi-authoritarian regime. Although the Philippines had faced a different and harsher variation of regime under President Marcos, both nations went through similar political decay although one could be more far-fetched than the other in a shorter period of time. In both cases, such regime could not live on a permanent mandate to rule the country and would only be a matter of time before a change of government would be necessary and forcible. Even so, sustaining the democratic environment had proven to be quite a challenge, particularly in the Philippines. The executive, legislature and judiciary branches suffered great erosions during President Marcos's rule and even up to the recent President Duterte administration. The burden of democracy now lies on the people themselves to provide a greater accountability to the government rather than to rely on the outmoded concept of separation of power. Through the lenses of Philippines regarding the political structure during President Marcos's regime, this research could provide a deeper insight of the Malaysian democratic state especially after the 14<sup>th</sup> general election. As Morgenbesser (2020) showed that the rule of President Marcos characterized by a downturn toward a retrograde or highly authoritarian regime from 1981, till its eventual collapse of his regime in 1986; this seems to be mirrored in a similar situation that occurred in Malaysia under Najib Razak's ruling, prior to the regime change. The situations in both nations showed a causal relationship between the changing quality of authoritarian rule and the diverse trajectories of authoritarian regimes. As Philippines

under President Marcos showed a downturn trend until its demise; the trajectory of Malaysia under Najib Razak also showed similar findings, directly supporting the finding in Marcos's ruling in the Philippines (Morgenbesser, 2020). Only when there was a change in government in both these states could a comparative research be mounted and studied.

This research also includes changes that happened in the Philippines and in Malaysia based on systemic and regime changes respectively, and what has both the nations learned from the regime change in Malaysia and the systemic change of Post-Marcos Philippines towards improving the society's attributes of democracy - electoral and participatory. As this research was conducted during the PH administration and Philippines' experience under Marcos's ruling was initially supposed to draw lessons towards a New Malaysia, a revision was necessary to replace the term "New Malaysia". The term "Post-Pakatan Harapan" would require the researcher to have a deeper insight on Perikatan Nasional (PN), a new coalition government formally formed after abruptly coming into power without them going into election. Unlike Malaysia, Marcos had reasons, citing the communist threat, in implementing martial law, thus prolonging his rule, and getting rid of elections. There were also many variables that had not been established, such as the PN's legitimacy to rule the people, its ability to obtain the majority number of seats in the parliament, the deep state agenda, the monarchy intervention towards justifying the new PN government and the COVID-19 pandemic hindering the public and the opposition to gauge on the political and democratic development and the workability formula between the political parties in PN. In addition, while the term "Pakatan Harapan Malaysia" may act as another replacement for "New Malaysia", it would still require the lessons drawn from the systemic change of Post-Marcos to be tailored specifically for the PH administration,

which might be insufficient. Taking the electoral authoritarianism theory and the sudden takeover by PN into consideration, it may not coincide well with the electoral authoritarianism theory and the comparative study/lessons with Post-Marcos Philippines.

As the researcher has already established the grounds of Marcos's ruling and the follow-up of Post-Marcos Philippines, an equal footing has also established for the change of a dominant regime in Malaysia throughout the thesis. As emphasized throughout the thesis, UMNO had been predominantly monopolizing the social and political scene due to their ability in championing the rights of the majority: the Malay ethnic group and *bumiputra*, the highest representation in the parliament for 61 years in Malaysia while the rest of BN coalition's partners were merely supplementary. Throughout the years, UMNO leaders, also sole consistent Prime Ministership holders, had been directly involved in pushing the agenda of electoral authoritarianism, hence why the study on the BN coalition on electoral authoritarianism without UMNO is similar to a study of an individual's body without his/her head.

Philippines's experience of systemic change after Marcos's ruling in the Philippines can provide a much deeper insight in terms of electoral and participatory attributes of democracy towards the understanding of Malaysian politics, especially the regime change after GE-14, compared to the other comparative research of Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand stated in the problem statement. Although the removal of the regimes was different respectively, both nations showed the immense resolve of the general population wanting to remove the regimes from power through electoral and participatory means. It is also imperative to know whether such changes brought by the people in the Philippines and Malaysia be able to maintain that way and not be reverted to the juggernaut government as in the past.

## **1.6 Methods**

Qualitative research methods had been employed in this research as these methods investigate strategies that yield data that were not in numerical form. It was thought to be more flexible in applying it and can be adjusted according to changing and different situations. Much of the data collected was processed by a “human computer”, technically.

### **1.6.1 Qualitative Analysis**

This research was conducted through a qualitative analysis and armchair study where knowledge had mostly come from primary sources such as multiple in-depth interviews and secondary source, respectively. Analysis, review, and comparison on those primary and secondary sources were done for this research. Qualitative research methods were utilized in this research as this research is exploratory in nature and credible or defensible results or hypotheses cannot be easily formulated.

Proceeding to data collection, the researcher has modified the field of search for information while at the same time, achieving equilibrium and correlations with the data collected. The perspectives of multiple categories of persons of interest has been included through this method. The researcher has explored particular depth and larger contexts of particular events that happened, particularly the historical change of government in Malaysia and the Philippines. The results collected supported one another due to the multiple interviews conducted.

Quantitative analysis such as the distribution of questionnaire forms to the public could not be done due to the scope of this research and the lack of supervision towards the public views. As this research emphasizes on the state of regime change and systemic change in Malaysia and Philippines respectively, the researcher would then require to not just distribute questionnaire forms to a particular region/state but to

several states encompassing the cities and the outskirts that were once a stronghold towards the previous regime. If the questionnaire forms distributed were confined to city areas particularly in Penang or in Kuala Lumpur, the partiality of the respondents might affect the data collected for this research as most of the major cities were already aligned with the Pakatan Harapan coalition parties. Therefore, the high likelihood of obtaining a skewed data from the public through quantitative analysis might affect the accuracy and reliability of this research. For the case of Philippines, the systemic changes and the events unfolded were from around 30 to 40 years ago; questionnaire forms would need to be distributed to an age and demographic-specified type of respondents and to those who had experienced the Marcos-era during their teenage years or adulthood. As the researcher lacked resources, communication and connection with the Filipino society, there will be very little verification that the questionnaire forms could reach these specific respondents and whether its data can be timely-accurate.

In the data collection aspect, the method of primary and secondary data collection was incorporated. The Primary data included a series of in-depth interviews with individuals that possess extensive knowledge and are well-versed with both nations' political systems. Individuals being interviewed were given a set of open-ended/subjective questions to encourage two-way discussions between the interviewer and the interviewee. Multiple interviews were conducted either through e-mail, Viber/WhatsApp and face-to-face with the same interviewees for a more comprehensive data collection. Chapter 3 has featured some data obtained from interviews while the completed data collection from the interviews has been analysed and disseminated in Chapter 4 and, finally Chapter 5 concluded the data collection and analysis of this research.



In contrast, secondary data has included a collection of information from the analysed findings of the political development of the democratic state for both nations. Both of the data collected for the respective countries has been comparatively analysed and both states were chosen to be subjects in this research study to determine how the state transitions towards a government change, besides drawing lessons for Malaysia and the Philippines.

Moreover, secondary data also played a significant role in this research, in which it was used to support claims and information found during the research. Firstly, the secondary data has been procured and examined from many relevant existing literatures and works such as journals, academic books, governmental records/publication, articles, research programs, etc. It was necessary to obtain such information through this method as well in order to further verify extensive validated facts and figures, in addition to analysing documentations or material that pertained to a similar situation but in foreign circumstances, unambiguously comparing or disseminating a similar plight other than Malaysia and the Philippines.

### **1.6.1 (a) In-depth Interviews**

One of the key features in this method was the prompting of open-ended questions based on an interview guide, then probing for answers. Its application involved extracting information from main informants and exploring an individual's or organisation's perspectives on a topic. The interviewees gathered through this research were comprised of diverse backgrounds to provide varying perspectives towards the events and the role their organisation played on the changes that took place in Malaysia and the Philippines' political system.

However, interviews, especially those that were on one-to-one basis, required a significant amount of time as the researcher had to adjust the time accordingly to set a

suitable time with the interviewee. The researcher had come prepared to understand and to be aware of the interviewee's social context and level of understanding on a particular subject. Time was taken to set suitable questions only after the interview was set with the interviewee and not prior to it. Questions created without profiling the interviewee can be confusing for the interviewee, as not all the interviewees possess the same level of understanding of the subject. Hence, this helps mitigate the risk of reducing the reliability of the data collected. Some of the interviewees that were unable participate in the interview due to logistics issues and the Covid-19 pandemic were contacted either through email or WhatsApp/Viber messaging network.

A total of 11 interviewees were interviewed for this research. All the interviewees had their own respective backgrounds - a former lecturer, lecturers/professors currently in the field of political science for both Malaysia and the Philippines respectively, activists, politicians from the ruling and opposition parties in Malaysia, president, and the members of the civil society movement (ALIRAN), Election Commission committee, former Bersih Chairperson, and a public member of the Filipino community. All interviewees have contributed significantly towards the development of this research, particularly in Chapter 3 and 4.

#### **1.6.1 (b) Document analysis**

Its defining features would be reading, examining, and analysing written materials. Much of the credible written materials came from journal articles, published or unpublished thesis, conference papers, etc. Other written articles available through open sources such as the internet or from certain organisations had undergone more examination for its reliability, accuracy, and impartiality. Written documents being used as references in the research were supplemented or supported with the in-depth interviews and vice-versa.

### **1.6.1 (c) Ethical Challenges**

The interviewer has assured honesty by keeping the researcher's word to the interviewee and ensuring faithfulness to proper methodological procedures. To assure voluntary participation from the interviewee, informed consent was provided. Information collected through in-depth interviews were dealt with high confidentiality by not identifying or revealing its data sources unnecessarily and protecting others from harm. Special concerns were given to some interview and document analyses, such as addressing the interviewee properly before the interview. During the interview, interviewees were also provided the chance to review and comment on the interviewer's account, which are included in the findings.

### **1.7 Conclusion**

For this chapter, explanation is given on the basis that the research reveals as well as enumerates what the research focuses upon. In addition, the research objectives were also modelled to complement the research questions. The scope of the study was identified to prevent any diverting from the research objective, which was essential to ensure that the research empirically answer the research questions accurately. The significance of the study remained an important element in inserting curiosity and determination in arguing the questions that arise from the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the research objectives and the research questions of this research has been introduced.

The reign of Malaysia's semi-authoritarian and Philippines' authoritarian political rule throughout 61 years and 20 years respectively had given both regimes significant amount of time to deconstruct any forms of democratic ruling by legitimate institutions and its people. Even so, the change of government in both states did not signify that democracy had been restored to its actual state.

President Marcos's authoritarian rule and its impact can still be felt and still slithers its way through the current administration of President Duterte, despite his exile in 1986 through the People Power Revolution. After the Malaysian 14<sup>th</sup> General Election, the path towards a New Malaysia era has posed a major hurdle for the government of Pakatan Harapan to restore its democratic state to its people.

Many theories and past studies have been proposed especially for the case of Philippines in this research. Although there are many cases or past studies that have been covered in many literature reviews, this literature review focuses on these following major themes to see through how a change of respective regimes in both states affect both the government and the people in a path to restore and maintain democracy.

The major themes include the development of semi-authoritarian and authoritarian political rule in the respective states and its departure towards better changes. The people's course of action towards the regime and the actions taken towards them are documented in one of the major themes.

### **2.1.1 Semi-Authoritarian and Authoritarian Regime**

Participatory democracy and human rights are often considered as a luxury that a developing country could afford to have, and almost never existed particularly in a semi-authoritarian state of nature. Instead of being called as semi-authoritarian, the fourth Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohammad coined it as 'realistic democracy' (Chong, C., 2018):

*“Malaysia is not over-zealous about the democratic system to the point where we accept without question everything that is done in the name of democracy. If the people and the country benefit, then we will accept practices, which are said to be democratic. If the people and the nation get only worst from any practice that is said to be democratic, we will give priority to what is good for the country and the people, and put aside the questions of whether or not it is democratic... What are important in a system of governance is the people and the nations' well-being (Chong, C., 2018, p. 217)”.*

Such 'realistic democracy' proposed by the Prime Minister has similar traits to Fareed Zakaria's 'illiberal democracy', which ranges from moderate to near-tyranny. According to F. Zakaria (1997), many countries are transforming into a form of government that incorporates elements of both democracy and a substantial degree of illiberalism. In 'The Third Wave', Samuel P. Huntington pointed out that a government elected through elections might indulge in corruption, inefficiency, and incapability in serving the people. Such qualities are undesirable, but they do not make the government undemocratic as democracy is a public virtue and interconnected to other political and public virtues and vices (Zakaria, 1997). However, the case of Malaysia has shown quite the contrary. Despite the semi-authoritarian rule, there is a high level of corruption, inefficiency, and incapability at one point, which has led to

the collapse of the 61-year-old regime, giving birth to a better form of democratic system. Democracies being a public virtue are later to be dissected and defined by the new government and people of the state.

In the journal article by Zakaria (1997), there is an emphasis on illiberal democracy and authoritarian rule on most of East and Central Asia, many of which remain semi-democratic, with a one-party rule indifferent to genuine elections. Many parts of the world were cited for authoritarian examples; however, in the case of South East Asia, the author cited Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand for providing a better environment for the happiness, life and liberty of their people compared to dictatorial and illiberal democracies, such as Iraq, Libya, Ghana and Slovakia (Zakaria, 1997). Given the history and the value of the people in those states, they are vastly different. The comparison of the countries was grossly generalised, when in reality, it was far from the truth; the happiness, life and liberty they experience were, in fact, limited.

The choices listed by the author for comparison was too general, as major repression often took place in almost all parts of South East Asia for a lasting period, up to the extent that both Dr Mahathir and Lee Kuan Yew had claimed that Asia is a far cry from being democratised. The region of South East Asia is poorly and shallowly mentioned in this article. The author had also highlighted the fundamental role of the United States to 'encourage' democracy and to push for constitutional liberalism across the world. In essence, the author emphasises on the intervention of the United States' on other states' political and democratic environment, and that without such intervention, it would have eventually led to turmoil and war. However, the author had also failed to address the fact that this intervention to promote democracy as part of their 'duty' had backfired, given their continuous involvement in Iran and the Philippines had eventually resulted in a theocracy and authoritarian rule for both

respective states. The literature itself showed partiality, as it was more towards pro-American.

In another separate article by Christopher Skene, the article drew two hypothesis which stated that developing countries that were vulnerable towards free capital movement will move towards authoritarian practices and, following such vulnerability, developing nations with IMF structural adjustment programs needed to adopt authoritarian practices in making sure the implementation carried on successfully (Skene, 2003).

According to Diamond, Huntington, Dahl, and Przeworski in Skene (2003), the authors suggested that economic prosperity through market capitalism is supposed to encourage democracy as it created new urban classes that wanted an influence over public policy options, with little control from the government over the complex economy. The authors claimed that the most prosperous countries in the world, particularly rich oil states in the Middle East and even Singapore, were governed through democratic means.

The study and the relationship between the economy and democracy had shown great flaws as its examples of these prosperous countries were often ruled through a single party or regime, disregarding any kind of opposition throughout the years. The public and the opposition were subjected to many draconian laws that restricted any criticism and potential threats to the nation or the government. In this research, economic prosperity and its relationship with democracy made very little impact on improving democratic standards. In the same article, authoritarian practices were resorted to by democratic governments to attract and maintain capital flow in their governance. For instance, President Aquino and the following government's actions in suppressing and disregarding human rights for financial investments were considered to be