



**MARCH 1987 PUBLIC OPINION REPORT:
A POLITICAL ANALYSIS**

Felipe B. Miranda

SWS Occasional Paper

May 1987

Copyright (c) 1987 by Social Weather Stations, Inc.
All Rights Reserved.

No part of this Occasional Paper may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of the publisher.

The March 1987 Public Opinion Report: A Political Analysis

by Felipe B. Miranda*

1.0 Probing Public Opinion in Crisis Societies

Any society with claims to being or becoming democratic reserves a place for probes into the perceptions, the attitudes and sentiments of the citizenry. This is simply an acknowledgment that what the public thinks matters and that the political authorities are sensitive to the opportunities as well as constraints which the public perceives to be operational and/or desirable in their political system.

Oligarchic politics, on the other hand, systematically depreciates and provides no incentive for monitoring public opinion. Authoritarian government often turns on the principle of the authorities a priori knowing what is best for society, which is to say what primarily secures the interests of the authorities, but which may run counter to the interests of the people. As often invoked by the authorities, the "national security," the "security of the state," and comparable political doctrines serve to mask the interests of the few who control government; the pursuit of these interests often requires the corruption and even subversion of the interests and security of the people.

Filipinos in the last twenty years have learned to be wary of authoritarianism and oligarchy in their political regime. The costs of their erstwhile political naivete or apathy still stagger the Filipinos in 1987, whether such costs are figured in terms of economic deterioration, political instability or wasted opportunities for Philippine development. Consequently, there is now a proliferation of attempts to know more about government and national issues and to monitor the views of Filipinos on a wide range of issues which they may perceive to be salient.

In the last fourteen months since the fall of the Marcos government, public opinion surveys have proliferated on just about everything: government legitimacy, constitution-making, elections, human rights, the Philippine military, the communist and Muslim insurgency, foreign military bases, the church, and sensitive politico-economic issues like ill-gotten wealth, agrarian reform, employment, and foreign debt. The list is much too long to cite everything here.

*Professor of Political Science, University of the Philippines and Vice-President, Social Weather Stations. This paper was prepared by the author while he was a Visiting Research Scholar at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University.

As an indicator of how opinion polling has become a high-growth industry in the Philippines, the long defunct Philippine branch of Gallup Polls has announced its recent reactivation. Furthermore, in the last constitutional plebiscite in February, 1986, all the major political groups found it convenient to cite surveys apparently often commissioned by politically partisan parties. In the current national elections for congressional seats, hardly a day passes without survey results being bandied around by politicians, from the Presidential Palace to its most rabid oppositionists.

Conscientiously and competently done, public opinion surveys serve not only to monitor public opinion but also to consolidate it. The individual citizen's sense of political efficacy is positively served by the realization that he is not alone in his political views and attitudes. Even when one discovers that he is a member of a minority group as regards an issue, one can take comfort from knowing that it might be a significantly large minority. Thus, the individual citizen suffers less probability of feeling alienated politically. He also becomes more amenable to being organized with similarly-minded citizens into what might eventually be a significantly influential group. The potentials of conscientious and rigorous public opinion surveys towards helping democratize society are clearly obvious.

In a Third World setting like the Philippines, social scientists often feel an obligation to see to it that legitimate surveys of public opinion are conducted. While their immediate concern might be with methodological adequacy, they eventually become doubly aware that the most challenging questions in political surveying are beyond those posed by technical considerations. Technical questions have technical answers and eventually such questions are answered; but political questions often require even of academics that they remain unresolved, or even unposed. It is this author's experience as a political surveyor in the past eleven years that indeed the most difficult questions in opinion polling during Marcos' rule were not in the area of sampling design nor data processing and analysis; they were in the area of questionnaire design (taken not as a methodological but a political consideration, in the sense of what academics anticipated the government would permit to be asked, in what explicit form of question) and the very feasibility of running an opinion probe where as many as 40% of the respondents may insist on "non-response" responses, the Don't Knows and Refuse to Answers. (The author actually suggested in 1985 that Filipino social scientists should design special analytical techniques for interpreting large DK and RA data in Philippine surveys.) Clearly, in addition to technical competence, the effective running of public opinion polls during the time of Marcos required courage of both the academics who designed and implemented them as well as the respondents who provided responses beyond those simply dictated by prudence.

1.1 People's Perceptions of Philippine Conditions Over the Past Two Decades

As their objective conditions deteriorated during the Presidency of Marcos, Filipinos continued to hope for the best, patiently keeping faith in their political system and their government. Survey findings over a period of twenty years testify to the inherent reluctance of most Filipinos to press radical demands on their political authorities and yet, as conditions became more and more intolerable, signs of mass desperation became manifest. A Tagalog saying, Ang taong nagigipit, kahit sa patalim ay kakapit (A desperate man would hold on to the edge of a knife), reflected a popular attitude by 1985, when indeed, in the midst of multiple crises, the desperate Filipino would not rule out the use of violence in attempting social change.

Still, Filipinos responding to survey probes have generally been optimistic as regards their living conditions, whether they be poor or not. Thus in 1974, the analysts of a survey undertaken by the Institute of the Philippine Culture and the Philippine Social Science Council, in comparing their findings with earlier studies done in 1959 and 1970, noted how respondents in the three studies generally saw themselves as "in the middle of an upward progression" in life. (Porio, et al., 1975:82) Subsequent surveys done in 1981, conducted by the Development Academy of the Philippines' Research for Development Department tended to be confirmatory. (Mangahas in Development Academy of the Philippines [henceforth cited as DAP], 1981:5; Miranda and Romero in DAP, 1981:11)

The 1974 study, however, already noted that their respondents were already "much less optimistic about [their] personal future than were respondents in earlier studies." Even as they believed in their progress in life, they manifested a strong belief that the nation would improve its condition more. This understatement of personal progress in relation to national progress represented "a reversal of a pattern found in . . . two earlier [1959 and 1970] studies, in which the respondents had higher hopes for themselves than for the country as a whole." (Porio, et al., 1975:83)

The 1974 analysts continued to note, "It is as if in earlier days people thought they could advance despite the national problems, whereas now [1974] they are of the opinion that the nation will advance regardless of the declining condition of its citizens. This could be symptomatic of a detached form of patriotism, or alternatively, a manifestation of political alienation." (Porio. et al.:83-84)

The analysts could have added that "detached patriotism" was precious capital for the martial law government, increasing as it does the range of political options which an activist government could undertake in its avowed goal of social engineering.

In 1981, one of the Development Academy of the Philippines' [DAP] Metro Manila studies noted a remarkable finding too. Even as the pattern of general optimism still prevailed among survey respondents, 22% could not imagine what a 1984 future might bring. (Mangahas in DAP, 1981:28) It was as if these respondents had a premonition of hard, even dangerous times lurking just around the corner. This finding becomes all the more significant as one recalls that survey to have been conducted soon after martial law was formally lifted. If anything such an event should have normally buoyed up people's optimism.

As late as 1981, the balance of opinion of Filipinos regarding the performance, capabilities and intentions of their government in relation to its political and economic functions might have continued to be positive. Nevertheless, a 1981 DAP Metro Manila survey of Filipino political well-being, conducted by this author, already indicated sources of political stress. The author cautioned that "Government will have to be sensitive to people who are potential sources of stress in the political system," and, on the basis of survey findings, drew a "profile of the sensitive sector..." as follows:

This sector will be comprised by poor, fairly senior, household-head respondents whose perceptions of living standards and general quality-of-life over the past years bespeak deterioration. The critical poor living in Class E residences, sharing negative evaluations of government's performance with other respondents, could well be easy targets of negative organizational work. Those inclined to undertake this work would probably come from the group of people with greater awareness of opposition groups, the primarily younger, male, college-educated and residential Class AB people. We may refer to this latter group as the probable organizer group (POG).

The POG could expand their target respondents beyond the poor, fairly senior, household head, negative evaluators of life conditions and government performance. The younger respondents more cynical of a government which they identify as serving a minority, could be added to the target group.

An even bigger potential target group is indicated by survey findings which appear to be equally shared by all respondents regardless of demographic groupings. Those who consider government performance since 1972 inadequate, those who manifest a low sense of political participation and those who reflect a low sense of leader elite-directed political efficacy are also potentially responsive subjects which the POG could attract.

(Miranda in DAP, 1981:16)

Three other studies were done in 1984-85 inquiring into the perceptions and sentiments of people regarding government and other political issues. (BBC, 1985 [reporting on both the Bishop-Businessmen's Conference nation-wide surveys of 1984 and 1985]; PSSC, 1985) All were done after the assassination of Aquino in 1983 and manifested much deterioration of popular confidence in their political system and its government. Since there is much agreement in the findings of these studies, it is probably advisable to focus on the findings of the most extensive of the three surveys, the Measuring the Public Pulse Project of the Philippine Social Science Council [henceforth cited as PSSC] conducted in September 1985. The survey had a sample of almost ten thousand respondents, thus permitting the first legitimate regional analysis in Philippine political survey history. This author conceptualized the survey design in 1984 when he was Chairman of the PSSC Research Committee and helped analyze the generated data in late 1985.

Five of the lead findings of this 1985 PSSC survey bear citing in full:

1. The data indicate minimal levels of public trust in government institutions. Less than half feel that the elections in the last few years have been generally clean and honest, and only about a third believe in the value of future elections as a means for solving the country's current political and economic ills. Moreover, low proportions of the population report trusting government instrumentalities. The highest trust ratings reach only 36 percent for local government, 32 percent for the Supreme Court and 28 to 29 percent for the Batasang Pambansa and the local judiciary; even lower proportions of between one-fifth to one-fourth of the population say they trust the Sandiganbayan, the police, the Comelec, the military and tax collection agencies.

2. The minimal confidence in government is also evident in the low trust accorded government officials, including the country's President. Less than half, and more realistically, a lower third trust and would support the President in another bid for the country's leadership. Even among top government officials reputed for their integrity and capability, trust ratings do not exceed the 35 percent mark. Other government officials, particularly those involved in recent national controversies, are expectedly accorded even lower ratings.

3. The low levels of public trust in the current government however, is not matched by a clearly emerging confidence in the then leading figures of the opposition in September. Whether in open-ended or forced-choice questions, none of the opposition parties

and their prospective candidates individually emerge with substantial followings. Neither are trust ratings for individual opposition figures high or notable. There are indications that the then non-unified state of the opposition, and their limited party machineries and visibility constrained their popular support, as respondents continued to withhold their decisions on the parties and candidates they would vote for in an election.

4. High levels of uncertainty and anxiety are noted in questions bearing on possible economic and political developments in the country in the near future. Although respondents foresee as more likely a deterioration in the economic and a Marcos reelection in the near term, substantial numbers in the population are also not ruling out entirely the possibilities of either a military takeover, and intensified U.S. domination over the Philippines in the future.

5. On the presence or growth of the NPA [New People's Army], larger proportions of between 28 percent to 39 percent admitting to NPA activities in their areas are noted in Southern Mindanao, Bicol, Western Visayas, Cagayan Valley and Northern Mindanao, where there have been reported increases in military clashes with the NPA. Large "don't know" replies to the NPA questions are noted in the other remaining regions of the country.

(PSSC, 1985:35-37)

These five findings were even more remarkable as less than a third (32%) of the respondents could definitely rule out their countrymen resorting to violence as a means of solving national problems, given increasing political and economic difficulties. The other two thirds split into 37% who considered violence as a possibility and 30% who said they "don't know" or refused to answer. (PSSC, 1985:29-30) Given Filipino cultural values which generally deplore violent resolutions as well as considerations of prudence which might have biased responses towards "Don't Know" or outright refusals to answer, it was ominous that so few Filipinos in 1985 could categorically rule out violence in their political and economic life.

In summary, one may say that survey results over the past two decades project an image of Filipinos who by 1970 reflected much optimism about themselves and their country's capability to progress in life; who in the early years of martial law administration were ready to see national welfare being served ahead of their personal welfare; who even by 1981 were liberally granting their political system and government the benefit of the doubt and, on balance, were still supportive of government and other political institutions; but who, by 1984-85, had largely lost

confidence in their political institutions and ruling authorities and, in crisis, anticipated with great uncertainty and anxiety more threatening economic and political developments.

Finally, one must add, Filipinos, by a plurality (even a majority, if certain cultural and political assumptions were made in analyzing the responses), were admitting to the distinct possibility of violence being resorted to in the resolution of their economic and political crisis. At no other point in post-war Philippine political history is this plurality sentiment recorded. The presence of this threatening national mood makes the dramatic but relatively violence-free revolution of February 1986 so much more remarkable.

1.2 Public Opinion Since the Fall Of Marcos

The ouster of Marcos and the rise of Aquino to the Presidency resulted in an environment of liberated popular expectations. Surveys indicate that even as a sense of urgency might attend many anticipated economic and political improvements, people show sobriety and moderation concerning the rate at which improvements could be effected even under Aquino. In a nation-wide survey conducted last May 1986, for example, optimism was clearly indicated by about 80% of the respondents who felt their quality of life within the the next twelve months would at least be maintained at current levels. Less than a majority (40%) expected improvement; a similar number foresaw neither improvement nor deterioration, and a small number (9%) even conceded the possibility of further deterioration. Even more revealing was the greatly moderated average rate of improvement expected by the respondents. When asked to compare their present quality of life and that anticipated three years hence, those interviewed were effectively saying, "There definitely will be improvement, but at almost a snail's pace." The May 1986 survey data impressed this analyst enough to say, "By and large, Filipinos are not being unreasonable in their expectations of a better life. No unreasonable pressure is thus exerted on the Aquino administration to deliver beyond its presumable capabilities. This sentiment is so much political capital for the present dispensation." (Miranda in Ateneo-Social Weather Stations, 1986a:24-25)

The October 1986 data were largely confirmatory of the earlier May findings, showing no significant change in public expectations. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority (86%) of respondents expressed the belief that Aquino's government needed more time to improve the conditions of the people due to the enormity of the problems they face. This author also undertook the analysis of the October 1986 data and later commented: [Given these findings, the public's] only demand would probably be that conditions are not demonstrably worsening too much or too fast, a minimalist rather than a maximalist orientation which makes it easy to find virtue in absolute prices holding constant and inflation rates significantly diminishing, contrary to what [had] appeared to be the irrevocable natural laws of Marcosian

economics." (Miranda in Ateneo-Social Weather Stations, 1986b:6)

Public expectations in October 1986 were probably moderated not only by their appreciation of the magnitudes of Philippine economic and political problems, but also by their confidence in the incumbent President as well as the perception that her government was besieged by multiple threats from the communist and Muslim rebels, as well as by Marcos loyalists, and politicized military men. Popular support for Aquino did not decrease, despite predictions that it would soon after the political honeymoon (the first 100 days) with the new administration ended. Well into her eighth month then as President, Aquino remained popular, with 78% of respondents expressing satisfaction with her performance in general. This level of satisfaction unfortunately was not characteristic of most of her cabinet members and only one person, General Fidel Ramos, the New Armed Forces of the Philippines' Chief of Staff, enjoyed the satisfactory rating of about as many respondents (79%). (Miranda in Ateneo-Social Weather Stations, 1986b:13-14)

In both the May and October 1986 surveys, popular support for all the policies of President Aquino were amply recorded. From policies designed to clean up Philippine government through the abolition of the Marcos legislature, the forced resignations of other public officials who clearly had betrayed their public trust during the previous administration and the freezing of wealth and properties of Marcos cronies, to policies of reconciliation attempting to court the cooperation of communist and Muslim rebels as well as the Marcos loyalists within and beyond the military, to policies designed to normalize politics through constitution-making and the encouragement of open participation in political processes by fringe and even subversive groups, the response of those interviewed in the surveys of 1986 was clearly one of marked support. President Aquino, it appeared, could do nothing wrong as far as the public was concerned. Her popularity rating soared from an already high 60% of respondents expressing their satisfaction with her performance as President by May 1986, soon after the February revolution, to 78% by October 1986. (The 18% increase came primarily from those who were "undecided" about her presidential performance in the May survey.) Even rural Luzon, which gave her slightly less than 50% support in May 1986 perhaps due to the still strong pro-Marcos sentiment among the Ilocanos of Northern Luzon, would not deny her a 76% majority support by October 1986. The proportion of "undecided" in this crucial region of the country dropped from 39% to 16% between May and October, with practically all deciding to make up their minds eventually supporting Aquino.

2.0 The Third Public Opinion Report: Substantive Coverage and Methodological Specifications

From February 25 to March 10, 1987, the Social Weather Stations and Ateneo University run the field survey for the Third Public Opinion Report. The topics covered included many of those considered in the First (May 1986) and Second (October 1986)

Public Opinion Reports: performance rating of the President, poverty and the quality of life, threats to the government, the military, the communist and Muslim rebels, foreign military bases, reconciliation policies, the constitution and the constitutional plebiscite of February 2, 1987, the national elections of May 11, 1987, land reform and public safety.

Between the Second Public Opinion Report of October 1986 and the time the February-March survey for the Third Public Opinion Report ran, much public attention had been focused on two failed coups, one in November 1986 and another in January 1987, by a few military elements including Marcos loyalists. New headlines bannered the replacement of four members of the Aquino Cabinet including her Minister of National Defense, Juan Ponce Enrile; the tense 60-day ceasefire between the government and the communist New People's Army; a similar agreement "to temporarily cease hostilities" between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front; the killing by soldiers and policemen of protesting farmers in the vicinity of the Presidential Palace; agrarian reform; the constitutional plebiscite of February 2, 1987 and the coming May 11 national elections for congressional seats. The visibility of President Aquino was accentuated during this period as she campaigned for the approval of the draft constitution, replaced some members of her cabinet, undertook reconciliation meetings with military officers and as she prepared her slate of senatorial candidates for the May elections.

In international affairs, the period between October 1986 and March 1987 witnessed a presidential trip to Japan, with the press projecting her success in securing pledges of assistance from that country. However, during the period under consideration, the apparent inability of the Philippine government to secure the release of a kidnapped Japanese businessman leading to Japanese threats to re-examine aid programs and influence Japanese tourists against visiting the Philippines strained relations between the two countries. During this time too, greater tension developed in the foreign debt talks between the Philippines and its creditors, particularly as one big creditor with a branch based in the Philippines appeared to be the major obstructionist in already protracted negotiations. Finally, media reported that American intervention in Philippine counterinsurgency operations was being perpetrated through the CIA and some of its operatives in the Philippines. A retired American General was identified as a main CIA contact and Filipino liberals and leftists scored the alleged intervention.

During the actual period when the survey ran (February 25 to March 10, 1987), Filipinos celebrated the first anniversary of the February 1986 Revolution on February 25, 1987 and both broadcast and print media heavily covered the events of the day.

Methodology

The methodological specifications of the Third Public Opinion Report survey is to be found in the Technical Notes of this survey.

SURVEY FINDINGS

2.1 Main Findings: Significant Increase in Perceptions of Improvement in Quality of Life, Continuing High Level of Public Support for President Aquino and Her Government and Positive Appraisal of the General Political System

A. Marked improvement in perceived quality of life (QOL) and poverty status: Both in terms of respondents' current QOL compared to the past twelve months and anticipated QOL for the next twelve months, the current survey reflects significant improvement over those of last year's. Those responding "better" now relative to last year increased by 61% over those similarly replying in October 1986 and by 37% to those of May 1986. While improvements in assessing QOL over the last twelve months occurred in both the urban and rural areas, rural areas specially in Mindanao registered the greatest increases. A reverse pattern is notable for those who perceived their QOL as having worsened in the last year.

It is not only for their own QOL that respondents claim improvement. With 32% of respondents claiming that QOL for the majority of people in their locality has improved in the last year, there has been a 33% increase among those answering "better" to this question compared to those of October 1986. Manila, rural Visayas and all of Mindanao are largely responsible for this increase in positive perception.

Optimism is the prevalent attitude as indicated by QOL ratings for the next twelve months, with respondents from urban areas generally being more hopeful than their rural counterparts, except in Mindanao. Manila respondents (55%) remain most optimistic, a characteristic they have manifested since the May 1986 survey.

The improvement in self-rated poverty status presents an interesting picture. Although the proportion of those who rate themselves not poor has remained largely constant in the three surveys, those who rate themselves poor have decreased from 66% in May 1986 and 67% in October 1986 to 43% in March 1987. There has been a consequent threefold increase in the proportion of self-rated "borderline" (neither poor or not poor) respondents in the most recent survey.

Drastic declines in self-rated poverty are recorded in the March 1987 survey for all areas except Mindanao. The greatest drops are in Luzon (urban, 62%; rural 70%) and the Visayas (urban, 17% and rural, 19%).

B. Continuing high level of public support for President Aquino and her government. The Third Public Opinion Report survey,

indicates no waning of her immense popularity. The initial 60% public support registered in May 1986, increasing to the higher 78% in October 1986, holds at 76% in March 1987. Those dissatisfied with her Presidency remain at minimal levels (below 10% in the last three quarters) and those who initially withheld their opinions appear to have made up their minds in her favor by October of 1986 and remain sympathetic to her Presidency in the latest survey.

Regional support is currently highest in Mindanao, followed by the Visayas and Metro Manila and lowest in the rest of Luzon. Except for the Visayas where rural support (87%) is significantly higher than urban support (74%), locality does not appear to affect the degree of public support for her by much.

In terms of economic classes, the best-off (AB) appear to be least supportive (65%), while the middle class (C) respondents are most supportive (81%) of President Aquino. Dissatisfaction with the President is highest (17%) among the AB class, more than twice the proportion (8%) of the poorest or class E respondents.

Sex and age do not influence the Presidential popularity ratings.

C. Markedly positive perceptions of the Aquino Administration extend over a wide range of performance issues and, in direct comparison with the previous Marcos Administration, there is a high consensus that the present administration is better. In assessing the Aquino Administration's performance, respondents expressed satisfaction regarding bringing about a more peaceful society (78%), protecting human rights (75%), fighting corruption in government (75%), telling the truth to the people (73%), developing livelihood opportunities (70%), acting according to what the people want (68%), and land reform (63%). Those who said they were dissatisfied constituted 10% and less for any of the test items. Mindanao has the highest proportions of respondents satisfied with the President.

In a direct comparison with the Marcos Administration on the same issues, the Aquino Administration uniformly gets more than a majority of respondents saying the latter administration is better. Their endorsements are lowest in the three issues of land reform (51%), developing livelihood opportunities for the people (56%) and bringing about a more peaceful society (61%). The Aquino Administration is best rated in telling the truth to the people (68%). Mindanao again has the biggest proportions of positive raters. Metro Manila (39%), Luzon (urban, 43%; rural, 47%) and urban Visayas (41%) failed to give Aquino's Administration a majority endorsement for its performance in land reform.

D. Public support is also extended to the Aquino Administration on the issue of how it has handled perceived threats to her government, as well as related policies of reconciliation with communist and Muslim rebels. There is majority support in the

way the government has handled the threat of Muslim rebels (59%), the communist rebels (57%), the Marcos loyalists (56%) and the military men who aspire for government power (55%). President Aquino's policy of reconciliation is endorsed by comfortable majorities in the case of the Muslim rebels (67%) as well as the communists and the New People's Army (62%). There are no significant urban-rural differences in responses to both sets of questions. On the question of threat handling, Mindanao again provides the highest proportion of "just right" respondents; it is not significantly different from other regions in registering approval for the policies of reconciliation.

E. Public confidence in President Aquino is expressed in the majority preference that she now should enact legislation rather than await Congressional action on a range of sensitive issues. Majorities prefer that she herself enacts reform legislation affecting land (65%), workers (63%) and the military (60%). No strong differentiation can be seen between rural and urban responses, but Mindanao generally has lower proportions endorsing this view than the other regions.

F. There is much more public confidence in the President than in the political groups publicly associated with her. Only the President manages a majority (62%) of respondents who affirm that her support for a candidate will dispose their vote favorably; the UNIDO, Lakas ng Bansa and PDP-Laban, all political parties linked to her are unable to gain majority endorsements. Her low majority endorsement (52%) in rural Luzon and Metro Manila and a close-to-majority endorsement (49%) in urban Luzon do not indicate significant opposition (7% and less in the areas cited); large (35% to 42%) "no effect" responses obtain in these places.

G. Other indirect indicators of public support for the Aquino Administration reveal majority perceptions of the political system's openness and government's need for more time to improve Philippine conditions. A great majority (74%) of respondents avow that they can say anything they want, openly and without fear, even if it is against the national government. Mindanao responses (urban, 82%; rural 81%) are most affirmative; Luzon gives the lowest majorities (urban, 69%; rural, 65%).

The perceived openness of the political system is also indicated by a majority of respondents who disagree with the view that the people's civil and political rights are being lessened. Mindanao majorities are highest (urban, 64%; rural, 68%). Metro Manila (45%) and Luzon (urban, 44%; rural 43%) yielded simple pluralities for this test statement.

There is a very high level of consensus (85%) that, due to the enormity of the people's problems, government must be given more time to improve their conditions. There is no significant urban-rural differentiation in responses although Mindanao again has the highest majorities (urban, 90%; rural 94%).

H. The most direct indicator of public support points to a willingness to undertake "people power" once more should President Aquino's government be endangered. This sentiment is expressed even as the Philippine military's loyalty to the present government is acknowledged. Respondents (62%) agree that the military is loyal to the Aquino government, with Mindanao respondents giving significantly higher majorities (urban, 77%; rural, 79%). Except for the Visayas (urban, 52%; rural, 64%), locality does not affect the response distribution.

A high majority (74%) affirm the willingness of the citizenry to undertake "people power" to protect an endangered Aquino government. Metro Manila (82%) and Mindanao (urban, 86%; rural, 82%) have the highest while the Visayas (urban, 65%; rural, 61%) registers the lowest majorities. No locality effects may be imputed to the data.

2.2 Other Findings: The Military

A. Majority view that the military is loyal to the government of President Aquino. A national majority (62%) confirms the perceived loyalty of the military; Mindanao respondents give the highest majorities among all the regions. Locality effects are insignificant except in the case of the Visayas.

B. Still enjoys majority support although perceived as harboring military officials thinking of wresting power from the civilian government; clear signs of a popular desire to punish military men involved in attempted political take-overs; split opinion on the desirability of cutting down the military manpower and budget. A small majority (53%) rates the military in their local areas as satisfactory, with Mindanao respondents again registering significantly higher proportions of the satisfactory ratings.

A high plurality (43%) believes the military to have high officials thinking of wresting political power. Urban respondents except in Mindanao are majority raters (Manila, 65%; Luzon, 58% and Visayas, 52%). Mindanao respondents reflect the greatest proportions of those disagreeing with this perception. Locality effects for those agreeing are not significant.

A very high majority (80%) of respondents would like to see punished those military men participating in political take-overs. The sentiment cuts across all regions, with Mindanao respondents registering the highest proportions. Except for the Visayas, locality effects are insignificant.

While a plurality (42%) disagrees with the idea of diminishing the size and budget of the military, a sizeable, almost equal proportion of respondents (37%) endorse the idea. Metro Manila

respondents have the highest proportions (49%) of those resisting military cutbacks. Urban Luzon (40%) has almost 1.5 times Metro Manila's proportion of respondents (28%) among those who agree that military size and budget must be trimmed.

C. Military groups discouraged from using force to unseat President Aquino, even assuming she fails to perform her duties. A plurality (44%) disagrees that any military group has reason for overthrowing the Aquino government should she be derelict in the performance of her duties. Mindanao respondents, specially in the urban area (86%), reflect the highest proportions among those disagreeing. A sizeable proportion of respondents (37%) agrees that Presidential dereliction of duty justifies any military group's use of force to overthrow her government. The Visayas region has the highest proportions (urban, 50%; rural, 49%) of those endorsing military action in such circumstances. No locality effects are discernible for the agree or disagree responses.

2.3 Other Findings: The Communists and Their Sympathizers

A. Plurality perception (42%) disagrees that NPA network is extensive in respondent's province or city, but an almost equal percentage of respondents (39%) agrees. Mindanao respondents (urban, 51%; rural, 66%) lead those who disagree about the NPA network being widespread; The Visayas (urban, 59%; rural, 49%), on the other hand, yields the highest proportions of those agreeing, followed by Metro Manila (48%). An urban bias is present among those agreeing from the Visayas; a rural bias characterizes disagreeing respondents from Mindanao.

B. Disconfirmation that popular support for the communists is increasing. A sizeable majority (63%) disagrees that popular support is increasing. Rural Mindanao (79%) and rural Visayas (75%) rate highest whereas Metro Manila (52%) and urban Luzon (51%) trail other areas. Rural location appears to have significant positive effects in responses coming from Visayas and Mindanao.

C. Generally unfavorable perceptions of the communists and their sympathizers. Close to a majority (47%) avow that most of the people in their province or city do not sympathize with the NPA. Agreement with this view is highest in Metro Manila (55%) whereas disagreement is highest in Mindanao (33%).

A near-majority (47%) also believes that most NPA activities are not justifiable. Urban location exerts strong positive effects on the responses, with all urban areas markedly higher than the rural ones in proportions of those agreeing. Urban Visayas (65%) lead all areas in this aspect. Conversely, a rural bias is apparent in responses for those who disagree with the test statement.

A very big majority (74%) does not approve of the NPA collecting taxes in any area of the country. Metro Manila (80%) and Urban Mindanao (80%) yield the highest proportions of those holding this sentiment. Urban biases appear to influence responses from Visayas and Mindanao.

An equally high majority (71%) would not like to have the Communist Party legalized. Urban biases clearly guide the distribution of responses in Mindanao (urban, 92%; rural, 76%).

A big majority (63%) of respondents disagrees with the idea that the NPA/National Democratic Front or NDF must be allowed to appoint their candidates for the May 1987 elections. Bare majorities (urban, 50%; rural, 55%) are recorded in Luzon. The highest majorities are recorded in rural Visayas (76%) and urban Mindanao (74%).

More than half (54%) of the respondents affirm that they will be unfavorably disposed to a candidate supported or endorsed by the NDF and the NPA. Mindanao respondents (urban, 77%; rural, 77%) are most agreed on this negative effect of communist support but all other areas except Luzon register concurring majority sentiments. In the latter area, the majorities (urban, 55%; rural, 51%) are not favorably inclined to communist support but aver that such support would not affect their manner of voting.

A very big majority (75%) counsel that, in reconciling with communist rebels government leaders should be careful and not too trusting. Metro Manila respondents (86%), followed by urban Mindanao (80%), have the highest proportion of those who are wary of the communists.

2.4 Other Findings: Indicators of Political Stress

A. Widespread perception of multiple threats confronting the government of President Aquino. Majorities of respondents view as great threats the rebel communists and supporters (70%), military men who aspire for political power (62%), Muslim rebels (60%), and Marcos loyalists (58%). The perceptions are fairly well distributed, cutting across all regions and manifesting hardly any locality effects except in the Visayas. For two test threats, military men and Marcos loyalists, rural respondents gave significantly higher proportions of those viewing the threat as great.

B. A heightened sense of public insecurity in terms of perceived poor public safety conditions, significant insurgency in their local areas, and concern that the military may be dominating or unduly influencing the current administration. By at least 50%, respondents consider walking the streets of their neighborhood unsafe at night and are concerned that robbers would break into their houses. Split opinions on the safety of the streets at night are recorded for Manila and Luzon, where from 41% to 50% of

the respondents disagree with the feeling of apprehension. Rural Mindanao has the highest percentage of those who feel the streets are unsafe.

The fear of robbery in their homes would be most prevalent among respondents in urban Visayas (71%), followed by Metro Manila (64%). Urban locale appears to positively influence the responses in Luzon and the Visayas, but negatively in the case of Mindanao. Equally split opinions (45% agree v. 45% disagree) are expressed in Urban Mindanao as regards this fear of robbery.

Although a plurality (42%) does not believe the NPA network as being extensive or widespread in their areas, an almost equal proportion (37%) confirms this to be the case. All urban area respondents except in Mindanao actually constitute significant pluralities affirming the widespread network of the NPA in their province or cities. Urban locale positively influences responses in the Visayas (urban, 59%; rural, 49%) and Mindanao (urban, 30%; rural, 17%).

C. There is a distinct possibility of resort to non-peaceful means of social change. Close to a majority (42%) of the respondents admit that Filipinos may completely lose faith in peaceful means of promoting democracy in their country. Less than one in three (29%) is able to definitively rule this out. Those admitting the possibility cannot be differentiated on the basis of locality, but respondents from Mindanao (urban, 56%; rural, 50%) clearly outscore those from other regions. Respondents from Metro Manila (37%) and the Visayas (urban, 37%; rural, 41%) have the highest proportion of those who deny that the Filipino can lose his faith in peaceful means.

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

These survey findings indicate a sustained optimism among Filipinos a full year after the installation of the Aquino government. The positive evaluation of most respondents as to both their current and anticipated quality of life, reinforced by perceptions of their improved poverty status, appears to incline them towards a generous assessment of government performance in many areas. Their appreciation is particularly heightened by the awareness of the previous, Marcos government's record of poor performance in these areas relative to what the Aquino government appears to have been able to accomplish. Given their perception of how enormous their national problems are, the respondents naturally acknowledge that Aquino's government need much more time in significantly reducing the gravity of the Filipinos' economic and political conditions.

Even as the respondents express overwhelming support for the President and her government, a fact indicated not only by survey findings but also by the near 80% majority which endorsed the Constitution of 1987 in the last plebiscite, they also continue to point to the continuing stress build-up in the political system.

At the personal level, grave insecurity is indicated by responses to probes into criminal activities like robberies and hold-ups. The deterioration of public safety continues unabated, as perceived by respondents from the time of President Marcos up to the present.

There is much concern with various threats to the stability of the Aquino government. The communists, the Muslim rebels, politically ambitious military men as well as Marcos loyalists are all seen to actively threaten this government.

There appears to be much leeway for the Aquino government in its attempts to provide for a stable and secure economic as well as political environment. The threat from the left is not coupled with perceptions of public sympathy for the rebels, nor a view that the left has increased its influence during the survey period. Furthermore, public wariness as regards negotiations with the communists also appears to be so much political capital for the government. It allows the Aquino government to undertake a wider range of responses, from the fully conciliatory to the progressively harder line policies, in dealing with communist rebels.

The current survey does not allow similar inferences to be made of either the Muslim rebellion nor that of the Marcos loyalist threats. Not enough test statements regarding these two threat sources were included in the current survey.

The threat coming from a politically interested group within the military, that which could foment destabilization of the present government and effectively threaten political takeover by a faction within the military, is more adequately considered by the survey designers. As in the case of the communist threat, public perceptions are negatively inclined, with fully eight out of ten respondents in the survey recommending punishment for military men who participate in destabilizing the government. Furthermore, a similarly high proportion (74%) of the respondents may be seen as indicating great support for the government when they affirm their willingness to undertake "people power" responses to threats to the government; such sentiment would force coup plotters within the military to entertain second thoughts about their political operations. While public resistance need not necessarily eliminate military coup scenarios, it definitely complicates both the planning and the execution of coups.

A highly supportive public, the main asset of the present government, nevertheless indicates some potential for restiveness. As in previous Public Opinion Report surveys in the last year, this Third POR probe reveals a disconcertingly high proportion (68%) of respondents who cannot rule out the possibility of Filipinos losing faith in non-violent means of effecting democratic social change. The current proportion is the highest recorded for this test statement in the last three years, including the last two years of the Marcos government.

Should the Aquino government fail to sufficiently address major citizen concerns, such as those involving the improvement of much deteriorated public safety and criminality conditions, there is a serious possibility that public support might soon deteriorate. Government inability to effect unity and purposiveness within both the civilian and military institutions and, in particular, among government's lead officials could lead to popular disenchantment and cynicism.

Even as Filipinos are indicated in POR surveys to be pragmatic regarding the capacity of their present government to improve their economic and political conditions, this pragmatism also may be understood as being a double-edged sword. The rate of improvement could be slow, as pragmatically anticipated, but there must be demonstrable improvement, as pragmatically demanded too.

The popular anticipation is that there would increasingly be a functional government, whose establishment and operation entail much public support. Surveys indicate Filipinos had generously extended this level of support in the first year of the Aquino government. Furthermore, popular support was given President Aquino in practically every crisis point, from the pathetic July 1986 attempt of legitimizing a Marcos government by Mr. Arturo Tolentino and other Marcos loyalists, to the more serious "unauthorized military exercises" of November 1986 and January 1987, to the recent February 1987 constitutional plebiscite.

Clearly, public support for the Aquino government has not been stunted on. Taking the President's popularity rating as indicative of this public support for her government, one may chart the movement of this support's center of gravity (i.e. the highest proportion of those satisfied with President Aquino) from Metro Manila to the Visayas and most recently to Mindanao. Even the rural Luzon, with Ilocano provinces initially withholding much support for this government, succumbed to "Cory magic" by October 1986.

It is remarkable that Presidential popularity has attained such high levels and remained there in the last year, despite a still barely recovered economy and clearly marginal positive material gains for the citizenry. This unprecedentedly durable regard of the citizenry for President Aquino probably results from a popular perception of her government being under siege, from the subversive left, the secessionist Muslims, the politically ambitious military coup-plotters, the Marcos loyalists, as well as, within her very own government, the restive, selfish politicians. Continuing public support may thus be perceived as a protracted exercise of the February 1986 "people power" which installed her government in the first place, with the people continuing to uphold and protect her government against perceived multiple and simultaneous threats. In this context, what strengthens the Aquino government is basically the continuing destabilizing efforts of subversive and oppositionist groups whose impatience keeps them from giving the Aquino government a clear chance to prove itself to the public as a functionally performing government. Or, alternatively, as a failure.

Historically, many governments have had to fabricate national crises and political threats either to draw away public attention from hidden political agenda (e.g. dictatorial rule) and government incompetence, or to re-channel public interest into diversionary issues. The Aquino government, on the other hand, has found its hands full of crises and threats which have clear origins as well as public manifestations. As a consequence, the Aquino government has continued to receive a bonanza of public support.

The abnormally high level of continuing public support should not be treated with profligacy by this government. Political tension generated by national crises cannot be long maintained at current levels without the very credibility of government and its leadership ultimately also suffering. The possibility is real that if political crises like coups continued to afflict the government, serious doubts could be entertained by the public regarding the political will and the managerial skills of this government. Furthermore, crises that remain unresolved, as in the case of anti-constitutional military involvement in politics, invite dangerous participation by more and more military elements who could rationally conclude that coup-participation is a non-losing proposition.

Government, apart from governing (in the sense of authoritatively defining the locus of political control and decisively resolving conflicting claims regarding the legitimate exercise of political authority within government itself and, progressively, the general political system), ultimately needs to deliver what a pragmatic citizenry considers at least a minimum level of material benefits. In the Philippines at this point in time, it is most vital for government authorities, including the most popular, to ponder the question of government performance and effective delivery systems even as the government continues to have sufficient public confidence and active support. The time is not too far off in the future, if it has not already come, when the same public will not be so receptive to excuses which basically turn on a denunciation of the Marcos government and its extensive plunder of the Filipino economy and its corruption of the Filipino political system.

President Aquino and her government leaders need to prepare credible answers which Filipinos even now are already beginning to increasingly ask: Given our extensive popular support, what has the Aquino government managed to achieve for Filipinos? After the last twenty years of misrule, a wiser and more demanding Filipino constituency obviously will not settle for ritualistic pronouncements, however well-crafted they might be by presidential wordsmiths.

REFERENCES

- Ateneo [and] Social Weather Stations. Public Opinion Report June 1986. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University and Social Weather Stations, June 1986a.
-
- _____. Public Opinion Report December 1986. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University and Social Weather Stations, December 1986b [In press]
- Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) Research for Development Department. A Final Report on the Social Weather Station Project, September 2, 1981. Pasig: Development Academy of the Philippines, 1981
- Philippine Social Science Council. Report on the Philippine Social Science Council National Opinion Survey of September 1985. Quezon City: PSSC, 1985
- Porio, Emma, Frank Lynch and Mary R. Hollnsteiner. The Filipino Family, Community and Nation: The Same Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow? (Final report submitted to the PSSC by the Institute of Philippine Culture, April, 1975). Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 1975