

BREAKTHROUGH

ELFREN S. CRUZ

Social democracy in the Philippines



Social democracy is a political, economic and social system that combines the principles of a free market economy with the values of social justice.

This was my topic a week ago. However, I noticed that in my column and almost all readings on social democracy always use as examples developing countries mainly in northern and central Europe. This includes the Scandinavian countries – Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland – Germany and the United Kingdom.

Is social democracy a luxury only rich nations can afford? Since the 1980s, social democratic countries are historically ascribed to wealthy western European examples characterized by universal welfare, inclusive economic growth, democratic institutions and regulated capitalism.

The book "Social Democracy in the Global Periphery: Origins, Challenges, Prospects" by Richard Sandbrook, Marc Edelman, Patrick Heller and Judith Teichman (Cambridge University Press, 2007) argues that social democracy is feasible in non-Western states or the Third World. The authors even maintain that social democracy is essential for equitable and sustainable development in these non-Western states.

In most books on this topic, the assumption is that social democracy is a product of unique historical and cultural circumstances such as industrialization, class compromise and strong labor movements. The usual argument is that these circumstances cannot be replicated in the non-Western world.

Sandbrook and his co-authors reject these arguments. The book defines social democracy broadly as a mode of governance that combines representative democracy, state regulation of markets, progressive redistribution of wealth and investments in public services such as health and education. These goals can be found even in the poorest of Third World countries.

To substantiate their argument, the book provides detailed case studies of four countries: Mauritius, Costa Rica, Chile and the state of Kerala in India. These cases serve to demonstrate the conditions under which social democratic practices can emerge and persist outside the West.

Here are the summaries of the four case studies.

Mauritius stands out for its successful blend of ethnic pluralism, democratic governance and state-led development. Despite its small size and limited resources, Mauritius has managed to sustain a generous welfare system and competitive export economy. The authors attribute this to elite consensus, an inclusive political culture and robust institutions.

Costa Rica is highlighted as a Latin American anomaly. The country abolished its military in 1949 and redirected resources towards education and health care. The authors emphasize the role of a reformist middle class and a strong public sector spirit, even amidst strong pressures from the political left and political right in the Central American region.

Chile presents a more complex trajectory. The brutal military dictatorship under Pinochet gave way to a democratic transition marked by a pragmatic social democracy under the Concertación coalition. While Chile retained many neoliberal policies, it also implemented significant social spending and poverty reduction programs. The case illustrates the compromises and achievements of post-authoritarian reform movements.

Kerala, a state in southern India, offers a subnational example. With high human development indicators despite low per capita income, Kerala demonstrates how political mobilization, specially through leftist parties and mass organizations, can drive pro-poor policies in a democratic framework.

According to its authors: "The lesson of these cases is not that there is a single path to social democracy but rather that political will, strategic coalitions and inclusive institutions can refrain the possibilities for equitable development in the global periphery." The term "global periphery" refers to the non-western world.

The important lesson for the Philippines is that economic growth and social justice are not opposing goals. The usual argument in a capitalist economy is that in order to accelerate economic growth, a country must sacrifice social justice such as a living wage for the labor sector.

It is possible that in Third World countries, social democratic reforms with its goal of equitable distribution of wealth might be difficult to achieve in countries where authoritarianism, weak institutions and crony capitalism prevail. Because the authors rightly stress the importance of grass roots mobilization, social democracy faces obstacles in countries where civil society, mass movements and nongovernmental organizations are

DIPLOMATIC POUCH

ENDO KAZUYA

A cause for celebration: The Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers' 60th anniversary

It is quite well-known that Japan has long been the Philippines' top source for official development assistance. In 2024, it remained to be the largest donor, followed by the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, according to data by the DEPDev.

Japan's involvement in large-scale infrastructure projects, including the North-South Commuter Railway, the Metro Manila Subway and the Davao City Bypass, has also signaled its role in the country's development.

Beyond the scale of support, what has mattered equally are our experiences – shared joys and sorrows in walking side by side for the betterment of the local community.

Among our most enduring partnerships, the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers have walked alongside us for decades in our shared journey toward progress.

The Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, or JOCV for short, has enabled promising volunteers from Japan to work with local communities to address a variety of issues on a close, grassroots level.

With 2025 marking the program's 60th anniversary, let us reflect on their extraordinary stories and the truly equal partnership they embodied.

The Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers

JOCV started in 1965 as one of the programs managed by the Overseas Technical Cooperation Agency, a precursor of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Together with Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia and Kenya, the Philippines was part of the JOCV program's inaugural dispatches to five countries. The Philippines received 12 volunteers – the largest share out of 29 total volunteers at the time.

Since then, JOCV operations have widened its reach dramatically in region, areas of cooperation and numbers, having dispatched a total of 57,000 cumulatively in continuing its work in 99 countries.

Unlike typical JICA assistance, JOCVs engage more directly as they live with their host communities for two years. This allows them to dive deeper into the local community and eagerly work to improve their well-being.

Through JOCVs, Japan's diverse human talents are well utilized for a wide range of support including agriculture, education, primary health and social welfare.

Even with its remarkable growth, the program has still kept to its objectives: making a difference in communities, while promoting mutual understanding and international goodwill.

JOCVs in the Philippines

Over the years, the journeys of JOCVs in the Philippines have provided the richest examples of our cross-cultural exchanges.

To appreciate the depth of these volunteers' dedication to friendship, we begin with Ms. Watanabe Juri's story, a volunteer who served in Mayoyao, Ifugao from 2012 to 2016.

With her rich experience and research

relatively weak.

In the Philippines, however, there is already sufficient groundswell for social democratic principles to have solid following. Some examples of these is the movement to raise the minimum wage substantially in spite of the strong opposition from certain business sectors. There are also social democratic policies that are strongly gaining support, like strengthening universal health care, free meals for grade school children and the repeal of the Rice Tariffication Law

in the field, Ms. Watanabe used her passion for aquaculture research to help her community capitalize on their abundance of loach fishes. She aimed to work with locals on a sustainable and accessible method to raise loaches for sustenance.

Difficulties such as securing breeding stock initially led to declining morale among her colleagues. Undeterred, she repurposed a neglected municipal fish farm and steadily worked with her community and the resources available.

Through trust and cooperation, Ms. Watanabe ended her four-year stay, including an extension, with the locals significantly capable of managing the farm. What started as simple volunteer work transformed into a whole community-driven project.

Meanwhile, Ms. Kamehama Chihiro began her assignment in 2024 at a special need center supporting children with disabilities in Oton, Iloilo. The seasoned teacher in Japan faced some difficulties with a community that mainly communicated in Hiligaynon.

Driven to grow with the community, she studied Hiligaynon and American Sign Language while she worked daily. Through sheer will, she was able to build better relationships with her students and their parents, even realizing opportunities for eventual vocational training to this very day.

Boasting a vast tapestry of stories at present, the long history of JOCVs in the Philippines has also included lasting legacies such as that of Mr. Nakagaki Osamu.

In the early days of the JOCV program, in the 1970s, he worked in mango cultivation in San Fernando City, La Union. The mango orchard he established, now known as the La Union Public Botanical Garden, continues to captivate visitors with its lush greenery.

Hearteningly, the JOCVs' efforts would culminate in a Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2016 for their unwavering devotion. Earning a commendation from one of its pioneering partners, with the "Nobel Prize of Asia" no less, remains an unsurpassable honor.

To date, over 1,700 JOCVs have served the Philippines since its maiden journey. Having met a new group of volunteers in June this year, I can say the legacies of JOCVs are in truly capable hands.

Dedication through decades

Backed by a proud history of service, the JOCV program continues strongly to this day, anchoring our people-to-people exchanges on passionate collaboration.

With future deployments focusing on human resource development, industry growth and disaster risk reduction, we can expect to share more stories and triumphs together.

I salute the JOCVs, here and all over the world, on their special year. Here's to the spirit of volunteerism connecting Japan to the world.

Mabuhay ang JOCV! Maraming salamat at Arigatou Gozaimasu!

Endo Kazuya is the Ambassador of Japan to the Philippines.

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to help small farmers.

One of the biggest obstacles to an equitable society is to drastically minimize the scourge of graft and corruption that is currently pervasive in our society.

The realization of the Philippines as a social democratic state where social justice and the equitable distribution of wealth is a pragmatic, not a utopian, goal.

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VIRTUAL REALITY

TONY LOPEZ

Sara Duterte should resign forthwith



Sara Z. Duterte should resign as vice president. Forthwith. Immediately. Now.

That is the only solution I see from the political and constitutional quagmire that has engulfed the two major branches of our government – the legislature, or the House of Representatives (HOR) and the Senate, and the judiciary, specifically, the Supreme Court of the Philippines.

Civil society has been galvanized into action. It sees the Supreme Court and the Senate enabling Sara Duterte to get away – literally – with murder and plunder of the most outrageous kind. Aside from saving Sara's skin, the Supreme Court has also made nearly impossible all future impeachment initiatives by imposing so-called seven requirements of due process.

Former Supreme Court Chief Justice Reynato Puno argues that under the Constitution, impeachment is *sui generis*. One of a kind. It is political and at the same time a criminal proceeding. Political is the House of Representatives having the exclusive power to initiate all cases of impeachment. Criminal is the trial by the Senate.

A vote of one-third of the entire House membership, without need for hearing and trial, is enough to impeach an official. Impeachable officials are the president, the vice president, the Supreme Court justices, the ombudsman and the members of the constitutional commissions like the Comelec, Commission on Audit and the Civil Service Commission. The guilty is removed from office by two-thirds vote or 16 of 24 senators of the Senate acting as the Impeachment Court. The crimes include: culpable violation of the Constitution, treason, bribery, graft and corruption, other high crimes or betrayal of public trust.

The Supreme Court's credibility has sunk into a quagmire of public outrage. The public is mad at the highest court of the land. It seems the SC issued an unjust decision. It declared the impeachment case against Sara unconstitutional and void *ab initio* – without calling a public hearing, without calling for oral arguments, without consulting constitutional experts, without checking its facts and without checking its math. Like counting the voided impeachment case as Number Four, when there were No. 1, no No. 2 and no No. 3 impeachment cases, per the House claim.

Our 15-year-olds cannot read, cannot write, cannot count, per international test results, but for our jurists, senators and congressmen to succumb to the same malady, isn't that the height of political and judicial stupidity?

The SC issued its decision on July 25, 2025, while many parts of the country were buffeted by a trifecta of super storms that flooded the capital and nearby provinces and exposed the systematic stealing by our congressmen and senators of up to P1 trillion of flood control money.

The SC's 97-page decision was penned by Associate Justice Marvic Leonen and concurred with by 12 other justices, by coincidence, nearly all of them appointees of former president Rodrigo Roa Duterte, Sara's dad.

Legislators stole P1 trillion (that is 1,000 billions) of flood control money. Sara, among her so-called crimes, stole P612.5 million, according to the Articles of Impeachment (AI). Seemingly peanuts, the money was intelligence and confidential funds.

Sara had enough intelligence to waylay the funds. Per the AI, to make the wastage confidential, Duterte and her staff showed receipts sporting names of restaurants and snacks as recipients (like Mary Grace Piattos, Tempura, Mango) and surnames of celebrities, including senators (Beth Revilla, Janice Marie Revilla, Diane Maple Lapid, John A. Lapid Jr., Clarisse Hontiveros, Kristine Apple-gate Estrada). Of 1,992 recipients, 1,322 were not born yet, without birth records, nor death records, but they still pocketed at least P254.98 million.

Aside from waylaying P612.5 million of our tax money, Sara is accused of six other crimes: plotting to kill President Marcos Jr., the First Lady and the Speaker; graft and corruption (she has hidden wealth of P2 billion); murder; political destabilization, sedition and insurrection; and conduct constituting betrayal of public trust, culpable violations of the Constitution and graft and corruption.

The impeachment was signed by 215 congressmen. On Feb. 5, 2025, the House submitted its AI to the Senate which, under the Constitution, must proceed forthwith and conduct a trial.

The Senate did not proceed forthwith because Senate President Chiz Escudero understood "forthwith" to mean "after six months *pa*." Because in Chiz's reasoning, if the idea was to conduct trial immediately, the Constitution should have used the easier to understand "immediately." In the interregnum or while Escudero was hemming and hawing, Sara and her lawyers filed two cases before the Supreme Court.

At this writing, the Senate still had to decide whether to proceed with Sara's trial and defy the SC order, which is immediately executory, or respect the high court, come hell or high water. After all, the Supreme Court is always right, even when it is wrong.

In ponente Justice Leonen's view, a public office – being the president, vice president, Supreme Court justice or a constitutional commission officer – is private property; therefore, one cannot be removed, by impeachment, from the position, without due process. He imposed these requirements of due process, requirements not enumerated in the Constitution:

- The articles on impeachment (AI) must be accompanied by evidence which must be sufficiently clear and convincing, must not be *ex parte* or one-sided.

- Both the AI, the evidence, the comment of the respondent must be furnished to all members of the House.

- The AI and the evidence must be furnished to the official being impeached. Defendant must be given sufficient time to study the complaint and the pieces of evidence and given an opportunity to respond "within a reasonable period" to each piece of evidence.

- Each congressman must be given "a reasonable period of time" to reach an independent decision, whether or not to endorse an impeachment complaint.

- The charges must refer to only acts or omissions while the defendant is in office.

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SINGKIT

DOREEN G. YU

Health, wealth

Health, they say, is wealth, but with the exorbitant costs of health care, the reality is that, in many cases, wealth is health.

The Universal Health Care Law, RA 11223, is supposed to make health and medical care within reach of all Filipinos. But health care, especially tertiary or specialized health care, is far too often beyond the means of ordinary citizens. Cost for a surgery can easily run up to six figures. With illnesses that require continuing treatment – such as cancer that may require surgery followed by multi-session chemo and/or radiation therapy – you're talking of millions.

Even with the newly announced Zero Billing (only in DOH hospitals) and other benefit packages offered by PhilHealth and the assistance from various government agencies like the DSWD and PCSO – which are gathered together in Malasakit Centers set up in many government hospitals – a serious illness can wipe out whatever savings a family may have and, very often, leave them in debt.

While the poorest of the poor can, with patience and

perseverance to wait in line after line, avail of government and charitable assistance, the salaried worker, the small business owner or someone with a means of livelihood – most likely a taxpayer – who may not qualify for such total assistance could be faced with a hefty medical bill. Private health insurance can help, if one is lucky to have such coverage (usually company sponsored), but unless your policy is top of the line, the exclusions and deductibles significantly limit what will be covered.

A recent medical emergency brought me face to face with the realities of health care in this country. Precisely because it was an emergency I could not wait for pre-approval of my HMO for the many tests that had to be done as well as the surgical procedure itself, so I ended up having to pay the full hospital bill and filing for reimbursement afterwards. With the invaluable help of my agent the paperwork got filed, and forthwith – as in the next day – I got an acknowledgment text that said my claim was being processed. I don't know how much will be approved for reimbursement; still recovering I didn't have the strength or the mental capacity

to fill up the six-page form. I turned over my medical records and just left it up to my agent to maneuver the reimbursement process, an imponderable maze of whereases and subject to's outlined in very fine print in the multi-page policy.

In all this I know I am one of the very fortunate ones, receiving top-notch medical care at the Chinese General Hospital (more on that another time) for what I am told is a fraction of what it could have cost at other hospitals. One take-away from this experience is a reaffirmation of the high quality of medical care available in the country – the incredible skill of the doctors, the most advanced diagnostic and other equipment (I had my laparoscopic surgery in the operating theater with the dual console surgery robot watching) and, crucial to faster recovery, the competence and compassion of the support staff of nurses and nursing aides, technicians and even orderlies. No hospital stay is ever a holiday, but it can be made as painless and non-traumatic as possible by the human touch, and that is priceless.

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