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## Political Values of the Philippine Middle Class: Evidence from the World Values Survey

Anna Marie Karaos

A quite influential school of development thought in the 1950s and 60s, Modernization theory has long been discredited for its Eurocentrism and historically inaccurate claims. Yet one of its tenets that has seemingly survived its demise concerns the role of the middle class as a modernizing and democratizing force in hitherto underdeveloped societies. There are two elements in this argument concerning the middle class. First, its size; and second, the attitudes, values and behavior of those considered to belong to it.

It is postulated that economic development is accompanied by a growth in the size of the middle class consisting of people with reasonably adequate education and income. Second, their level of education and their being employed in manufacturing and industry predispose them to adopt “modern” attitudes and behavior such as openness to new experiences, independence from authority, belief in science, interest in public issues, and joining voluntary associations. Extending this argument further, it is believed that those belonging to the middle class possess values and engage in behavior that are consistent with and promote both economic growth and democracy.

As neat and elegant as the theory appears, historical evidence of the last forty years points instead to widely divergent paths taken by formerly poor and agrarian societies in terms of their rates of economic growth and the types of political systems they have chosen to adopt. Still, the role of the middle class has not escaped attention in so far as its influence on both economic development and democratic governance is concerned.

This article primarily explores the political values of the so-called Philippine middle class drawing on data from the Philippine segment of the World Values Survey (WVS) for the years 1996, 2002 and 2012. To do so, however, it first attempts to identify who belong to this group and what changes have occurred in its size between 1996 and 2012. The WVS is periodically conducted in the Philippines by the Social Weather Stations.

The WVS asks respondents to select the class status with which they identify from five class status categories, namely lower class, working class, lower middle class, upper middle class and upper class. Hence the results are subjectively determined since they are based on the self-identification or perception of the respondents.

Using the results of Tuaño’s analysis of FIES data based on Martinez’s expenditure classes (Tuaño, this chapter), Tables 1, 2 and 3 present an attempt to relate the WVS results to a set of “objectively” determined class categories. Presenting the data using the original class categories, Table 1 compares the percentage of households by expenditure class using FIES data with the percentage of respondents using the World Values survey data.

Table 1. Comparison of percentage of households by expenditure class and percentage of respondents by perceived class status

	Percentage of households		Percentage of respondents
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Expenditure Class (Martinez)	1997	2003	2012	Perceived class status (World Values Survey)	1996	2002	2012
Top	0.40	0.20	0.20	Upper class	2.83	2.33	2.67
Upper middle class	4.84	5.06	5.35	Upper middle class	13.75	16.25	19.67
Economically secure	26.82	27.14	27.88	Lower middle class	33.58	42.08	41.42
Vulnerable	27.63	27.60	28.96				
Poor	23.92	23.17	24.5	Working class	20.42	22.17	19.67
Extremely poor	16.39	16.84	13.11	Lower class	28.67	16.75	16.42

Sources: Tuano using FIES data categorized into expenditure classes as defined by Martinez (2016); World Values Survey data sets on the Philippines, Years 1996, 2002 and 2012

Table 2 and 3 present the same data based on two ways of clustering the original class categories.

Cluster A, shown in Table 2, merges the top and upper middle class of the expenditure classes into one class group, the economically secure and vulnerable classes into another group and the poor and extremely poor into a third group. The lower and upper middle classes of the WVS are merged into one class group as well as the working and lower classes. This clustering yields three class groupings.

Table 2. Comparison of percentage of households by expenditure classes and percentage of respondents by perceived class status (Cluster A)

Expenditure Class (Martinez)	Percentage of households			Perceived class status (World Values Survey)	Percentage of respondents		
	1997	2003	2012		1996	2002	2012
Top and Upper middle class	5.24	5.26	5.55	Upper class	2.83	2.33	2.67
Economically secure, and Vulnerable	54.45	54.74	56.84	Upper and Lower Middle classes	47.33	58.33	61.09
Poor and extremely poor	40.31	40.01	37.61	Working and Lower classes	49.09	38.92	36.09

Cluster B is similar to Cluster A except that the upper middle-class category of the expenditure classes is merged with the economically secure and vulnerable categories, leaving the top expenditure class by itself. This clustering of the middle-class categories shows a closer correspondence between the expenditure and perceived class status categories.

Table 3. Comparison of percentage of households by expenditure classes and percentage of respondents by perceived class status (Cluster B)

Expenditure Class (Martinez)	Percentage of households			Perceived class status (World Values Survey)	Percentage of respondents		
	1997	2003	2012		1996	2002	2012
Top	0.40	0.20	0.20	Upper class	2.83	2.33	2.67

Upper middle class, Economically secure, and Vulnerable	59.29	59.80	62.19	Upper and Lower Middle classes	47.33	58.33	61.09
Poor and extremely poor	40.31	40.01	37.61	Working and Lower classes	49.09	38.92	36.09

Given the divergent characteristics of the social groupings that comprise this segment of the population between the top and bottom classes, it seems more accurate to refer to it as the middle classes instead of the middle class.

Using the data based on the Cluster B grouping as shown in Table 3, the growth of the middle classes seems to have occurred most significantly, albeit at a modest rate of 2.39 percentage points, between 2003 and 2012. Interestingly, the FIES data (Tuano, this chapter) show an even higher rate of growth of 4.65 percentage points in the proportion of households belonging to the middle classes between 2012 and 2015. Unfortunately, there is no comparable data set on perceived class status from the WVS for the same period.

Based on the data on perceived class status, the growth in the self-identified middle classes seems to have occurred most significantly between 1996 and 2002, although a noticeable increase also occurred between 2002 and 2012.

Comparing the FIES and WVS results, the income and perceived class status distributions are quite close or similar for the years 2002/2003 and 2012, providing some justification for considering the clustered income and class groupings as more or less equivalent. In contrast, the expenditure and class status distributions for 1996/1997 differ quite significantly, with the percentage of WVS respondents considering themselves as belonging to the working class and lower class being markedly higher (49%) than the percentage of households belonging to the poor and extremely poor (40%) based on the FIES data. Correspondingly, the percentage of WVS respondents considering themselves as belonging to the upper and lower middle classes is lower (47%) compared to the percentage of households belonging to the clustered middle classes (59%) consisting of the upper middle class, economically secure and vulnerable categories. Although there is a one-year gap between the two surveys, the difference could mean that in those years (1996-1997), some members of the middle classes perceived their class status to be lower than their actual expenditure class standing. Another way to interpret this finding is that the actual improvement in expenditure class standing preceded the upward movement in perceived class status. In other words, a good proportion of those who considered themselves as belonging to the lower classes in 1996 /1997 were already exhibiting expenditure levels consistent with the middle classes (although they could have been among the so-called “vulnerable “ category) and experienced an upward movement in their perceived class status between that year up to 2002. By 2002 and up to 2012, the clustered middle classes by expenditure group and by perceived class status seem to have achieved an equivalency in terms of size, if not in composition, at around 60% of the population.

The WVS data set provides some indication of the change in economic well-being of the different class status groups between 2002 and 2012 using “family savings during the past year” as an indicator. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Family savings during the past year, World Values Survey -Philippines, 2002 and 2012

	2002				2012			
	<i>Saved money</i>	<i>Just got by</i>	<i>Spent some savings</i>	<i>Spent savings and borrowed money</i>	<i>Saved money</i>	<i>Just got by</i>	<i>Spent some savings</i>	<i>Spent savings and borrowed money</i>
<i>Upper class</i>	38.24	41.18	8.82	11.76	15.63	43.75	21.88	18.75
<i>Upper middle class</i>	33.94	44.85	12.73	7.88	22.46	56.78	13.98	6.78
<i>Lower middle class</i>	14.14	63.03	12.90	8.93	7.85	63.18	14.08	14.89
<i>Working class</i>	10.61	67.76	11.84	9.39	5.51	55.08	17.37	22.03
<i>Lower class</i>	3.49	66.86	13.08	16.28	2.54	58.88	11.17	27.41
<i>Total number of responses</i>	164	742	151	136	115	709	174	202

The data indicate a common pattern across income groups showing a decline in the percentage of respondents that had saved during the past year, where the decrease is highest for the upper and upper middle-class status groups. Although the modal response for all status groups remained “just got by” (*“nakaraos lang”*), the percentage of respondents that “spent savings and borrowed money” (*“gumastos ng naipong pera at nangutang”*) increased for all status groups except the upper middle class, with the increase highest for the working and lower classes. These results indicate that saving declined across all status groups and most significantly among the wealthier groups, while borrowing increased across all status groups except the upper middle class and especially among the lower status groups. These findings are indicative of an overall decline in economic well-being across all income groups between 2002 and 2012.

Having more or less delineated the middle classes and provided an indication of the direction of change of their economic well-being, what can be said about their political attitudes, beliefs and practices and how they have changed, if they did change, between 2002 and 2012? To answer these questions, we turn to the WVS results. We examine the responses to an admittedly limited set of five variables.

#### Interest in politics

Modernization theory holds that middle and upper classes would tend to have greater interest in public, including political, issues given their level of education and exposure to the industrial and urban way of life. Given their heightened interest in public affairs, they also tend to join voluntary associations and to engage in associational activities on public interest concerns. We again turn to the WVS data to see if there is evidence to support this view.

Combining the “very interested” and “somewhat interested” responses into a general response of “interested” and the “not very interested” and “not at all interested” responses into a general response

of “not interested”, Table 5 shows the percentage of respondents within each class status category giving an “interested” and “not interested” response to the question: “how interested would you say you are in politics?”. The net interest rating was also computed for each class status category.

Table 5. Interest in politics, World Values Survey – Philippines, 2002 and 2012

Indicator 1: Interest in politics		How interested would you say you are in politics? Very interested, somewhat interested, not very interested, not at all interested <i>Gaano ba kayo ka-interesado sa pulitika? Talagang interesado, medyo interesado, hindi gaanong interesado, talagang hindi interesado</i>						
Social class (subjective)	% of Total	2002			% of Total	2012		
		Interested	Not interested	Net interest		Interested	Not interested	Net interest
Upper class	2.83	61.66	38.23	23.43	2.67	62.5	37.51	24.99
Upper middle class	13.75	56.97	43.04	13.93	19.67	58.9	41.1	17.8
Lower middle class	33.58	49.13	50.37	-1.24	41.42	56.94	43.06	13.88
Working class	20.42	48.57	50.61	-2.04	19.67	58.05	41.95	16.1
Lower class	28.67	47.67	52.03	-4.36	16.42	57.36	42.64	14.72
Total	99.25				99.83			

The percentage increase in the net interest rating from 2002 to 2012 is quite high for the lower middle, working and lower classes, ranging from 15 to 19 percentage points and turning from negative to positive. The upper and upper middle classes also increased their net interest rating but to a much lower degree. Given that the lower middle class accounts for the biggest proportion of respondents of all the status groups at 33% in 2002 and 41% in 2012, and registered the biggest percentage increase in size within that period, it can be said that the increased size of this status group and its increased level of political interest would have had the biggest impact on the changing political attitude of the middle classes within that period.

#### Forms of political action

To what extent has the increased interest in politics, particularly among the middle classes, translated into a change in actual behavior? Selecting two indicative forms of political action – signing a petition and attending peaceful demonstrations, Table 6 presents the number of respondents in each class status category that answered “have done” to the question “For each form of political action, state whether you have done it, you might do it or would never under any circumstances do it”. Note that the total number of “have done” responses for both forms of political action is small – 125 and 123 in 2002 and 2012 respectively for signing a petition, and 81 and 86 in 2002 and 2012 respectively for attending peaceful demonstrations – out of a total sample size of 1,200 respondents.

Table 6 also presents the percentage of respondents in each class status category that gave a “have done” response. On both types of political action – signing a petition and attending peaceful demonstrations – there appears to be a divergence in the direction of change between the upper, upper middle and lower classes on the one hand and the lower middle and working classes on the other. The upper, upper middle and lower classes saw an upward movement from 2002 to 2012 in attending peaceful demonstrations. The upward change is also evident for the upper and lower classes in signing a petition but the upper middle class experienced a slight decline in this form of political action. By contrast, the lower middle and working classes appear to have slackened in engaging in these forms of political action. The increased interest in politics apparently did not translate into increased political action particularly among the lower middle and working classes which account for the majority of the WVS respondents at 54% and 61% in 2002 and 2012 respectively.

Table 6. Forms of political action done in the past year – signing a petition and attending peaceful demonstrations, World Values Survey – Philippines, 2002 and 2012

Indicator 2: Signing a petition	For each form of political action, state whether you have done it, you might do it or would never under any circumstances do it – <b>Signing a petition</b> <i>Sa bawat uri ng aksyong pampulitika, pakisabi ninyo kung nagawa na ninyo ito, maari ninyong gawin o hindi ninyo kahit kailan gagawin ito - <b>Pagpirma sa isang petisyon</b></i>							
Indicator 3: Attending peaceful demonstrations	For each form of political action, state whether you have done it, you might do it or would never under any circumstances do it – <b>Attending peaceful demonstrations</b> <i>Sa bawat uri ng aksyong pampulitika, pakisabi ninyo kung nagawa na ninyo ito, maari ninyong gawin o hindi ninyo kahit kailan gagawin ito – <b>Pagdalo sa mga mapayapang demonstrasyon</b></i>							
Social class (subjective)	<b>Signing a Petition</b>				<b>Attending Peaceful Demonstrations</b>			
	<b>2002</b>		<b>2012</b>		<b>2002</b>		<b>2012</b>	
	<i>Have Done</i>	<i>No. of respondents</i>	<i>Have Done</i>	<i>No. of respondents</i>	<i>Have Done</i>	<i>No. of respondents</i>	<i>Have Done</i>	<i>No. of respondents</i>
<i>Upper class</i>	11.76	4	21.88	7	8.82	3	12.50	4
<i>Upper middle class</i>	15.15	25	14.41	34	7.27	12	9.75	23
<i>Lower middle class</i>	11.66	47	9.26	46	8.68	35	6.24	31
<i>Working class</i>	14.29	35	6.78	16	8.98	22	6.36	15
<i>Lower class</i>	4.07	14	10.15	20	2.62	9	6.6	13
		125		123		81		86

### Political system

How do the Philippine middle classes view democracy as a system of governing the country? Certain types of political systems were presented and the respondents were asked to say if a particular system is very good, fairly good, bad or very bad as a system for governing the country. This article examines the responses to two political systems to answer this question; one roughly describes an authoritarian system and the other a democratic political system. The “very good” and “fairly good” responses were combined as a response of approval while the “bad” and “very bad” responses were added up as a response of disapproval. Table 7 presents the net approval rating on the two political systems for 2002 and 2012

Table 7. Net approval for having a strong leader and having a democratic political system, World Values Survey – Philippines, 2002 and 2012

Indicator 4: Having a democratic political system	For each type of political system, what do you think about it as a way of governing this country - <b>Having a democratic political system?</b> <i>Sa bawat klase ng sistema ng pulitika, ano ang inyong opinion dito bilang paraan ng pagpapatakbo ng gobyerno sa bansang ito –Pagkakaroon ng isang demokratikong sistema ng pulitika?</i>					
Indicator 5: Having a strong leader	For each type of political system, what do you think about it as a way of governing this country - <b>Having a strong leader</b> who does not have to bother with Congress and elections? <i>Sa bawat klase ng sistema ng pulitika, ano ang inyong opinion dito bilang paraan ng pagpapatakbo ng gobyerno sa bansang ito –Pagkakaroon ng isang malakas na lider na hindi kailangan ang Kongreso at eleksyon?</i>					
<i>Social class (subjective)</i>	<b>Having a democratic political system</b>			<b>Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with Congress and elections</b>		
<i>Year</i>	<i>% of Total</i>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2012</b>	<i>% of Total</i>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2012</b>
<i>Upper class</i>	2.83	41.17	37.51	2.67	35.29	56.25
<i>Upper middle class</i>	13.75	64.85	48.31	19.67	24.85	22.04
<i>Lower middle class</i>	33.58	65.52	48.69	41.42	27.06	11.07
<i>Working class</i>	20.42	68.58	54.65	19.67	13.05	17.38
<i>Lower class</i>	28.67	60.46	53.82	16.42	27.91	18.79

There are a number of striking results. One is the noticeable decline in the respondents’ net approval of democracy as a political system for governing the country across all the class status groups, with the biggest decline among the upper and lower middle classes of 16.54 and 16.83 percentage points respectively. The question did not describe the democratic political system and it is highly probable that the respondents have differing views on and appreciation of different elements of democracy. Nevertheless, the commonality in the direction of change across all income groups is striking.

A second noteworthy finding is that the working and lower classes appear to have a higher net approval of a democratic political system as a way of governing the country compared to the middle and upper classes, with the latter seeming to have the least approval of this political system.

Third, across all the social classes, there is a positive net approval of “having a strong leader who does not have to bother with Congress and elections” as a political system for governing the country. Interestingly, although the respondents have a high regard for having a democratic political system, they also take a somewhat positive view of a political system where a strong leader rules without accountability to parliament or to the electorate. This sentiment is strongest among the upper and upper middle classes which comprised 23% of the respondents in 2012 and weakest among the lower middle class which comprised 41% of the respondents. What this result possibly reveals is that high approval of democracy is not to be interpreted as an absolute commitment to this political system; it does not necessarily exclude support for authoritarian rule.

To summarize, the WVS results seem to provide evidence for a noticeable growth in the size of the middle classes from the mid-1990s in terms of perceived class status. Despite indications of a decline in the perceived economic well-being of all class status groups including the middle classes, between 2002 and 2012, the size of the self-perceived middle classes has remained stable between 1996 and 2012 at roughly 60% of the population. Within that same period, interest in politics increased particularly among the lower middle, working and lower classes, but this did not translate into more active engagement in public issues through actions such as signing petitions or attending peaceful demonstrations. There is also high regard for democracy as a political system for governing the country across all class status groups but at the same time there is some support expressed for non-democratic or autocratic types of rule, a sentiment strongest among the upper and upper middle classes and weakest among the lower middle class.