

# Mobilizing for Accountability: Contentious Politics in the Anti-Estrada Campaign

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ARIES A. ARUGAY

## Abstract

The anti-Estrada campaign that culminated in the so-called People Power II last January 2001 can be viewed as a testament to the efficacy and strength of collective mobilization in the Philippines. This paper discusses the mobilization in the form of protests and other mass actions as a strategy of civil society aimed at eliciting accountability from President Estrada. Utilizing the theory of contentious politics and the different strategies of the societal accountability framework, it examines the mobilization conducted by some civil society organizations (CSOs) from October 2000 to January 2001. It argues that the interplay of available mobilizing structures such as the *Kongreso ng Mamayang Pilipino* (Kompil II) and the Estrada Resign Movement (ERM), the collective action frames that focused on failure, impunity and injustice, the traditional and innovational forms of contention, and the existence of crucial political opportunities made the protest actions in the anti-Estrada campaign possible. It concludes by arguing that the shape and dynamics of future political mobilizations by civil society would be greatly influenced by this contentious political episode.

## Introduction

The anti-Estrada campaign that culminated in the so-called People Power II (or EDSA 2) last January 2001 can be viewed a genuine testament to the efficacy and strength of collective mobilization in the Philippines. In this highly contentious episode, societal actors came to challenge the legitimate rule of a very popular leader on charges of cronyism and corruption. The range and intensity of contention spearheaded by the country's civil society had not been witnessed since the struggle against the Marcos regime in the 1980s. One could observe that they were both exercises of accountability by societal

actors after the breakdown and failure of formal institutions and state processes.

Existing literature have documented the extraordinary power of collective action in the Philippines both in critical periods of its history, as well as in otherwise 'normal' conditions. From the struggle against colonial rule (Putzel 1992; Schirmer and Shalom 1987) and attempting to dismantle post-colonial legacies (Boudreau 2001; Hedman 1998; Kerkvliet 1979; Sidel 1999) to engaging government policy processes (Clarke 2000; Magadia 2003) and electoral struggles (Franco 2000), civil society has proven time and again that they are dynamic participants whose voice

and visibility has been an indispensable element in the country's politics.

This paper discusses mobilization in the form of protests and other mass actions as the strategy of civil society aimed at eliciting accountability from the Estrada regime. Utilizing the concept of societal accountability derived from democratization studies (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2005) and basic insights from the theory of contentious politics (McAdam et al. 2001; McAdam et al. 1996; Tarrow 1994), it examines the mobilizations conducted by two major civil society coalitions—the *Kongreso ng Mamamayang Pilipino* [Congress of the Filipino People] II (Kompil II) and the Estrada Resign Movement (ERM), during the contentious episode<sup>1</sup> from October 2000 until the People Power II Revolt on January 2001. This paper argues that the collective action generally aimed at exacting accountability from President Estrada was successfully mounted using the framework of resignation, impeachment, and ouster (RIO). In conjunction with other strategies of societal accountability in different periods of the campaign, civil society organizations (CSOs) were able to expose the President's political scandals, maintain these issues in the public agenda, acquire media attention and national visibility, activate and exercise oversight over political institutions and legal processes, and generate public support and participation.<sup>2</sup>

The following discussion offers two general explanations why collective mobilization was able to generate societal accountability. On one hand, it was made possible to a great extent by the coalitions' internal conditions such as their available mobilizing structures, framing processes, and repertoires of contention. On the other hand, significant exogenous political opportunities were also influential in encouraging civil society actors to carry out protest actions and call for the participation of the otherwise unorganized citizenry. To conclude, this paper examines the implications of collective mobilization geared towards accountability in the country's democratization, and highlights the need for further research on political protest in the Philippines using the conceptual handles provided by the theory of contentious politics.

### **Contentious Politics in Pursuit of Societal Accountability**

There seems to be a consensus in the literature regarding the inability or failure of fledgling democracies to address certain gaps and deficits in fostering more accountable democratic regimes (Diamond 2000; Schedler et al. 1999; Zakaria 1997; O'Donnell 1994). The Philippines shares this so-called 'accountability deficit' as its traditional mechanisms of accountability have been observed to be fraught with several limitations and weaknesses

(Arugay 2004a). However, a nascent form of enforcing accountability—grounded on an increasing recognition of the important role of civil society and independent media in making politicians accountable—seems to be emergent.

Societal accountability is defined here as 'a nonelectoral, yet vertical mechanism of control that rests on actions of a multiple array of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), citizen's associations, social movements, and the media' (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2005:9). There are three interrelated strategies employed by civil society in the exercise of societal accountability. The first is the juridical or legal strategy that entails the submission by societal actors of legal claims or of legally framed petitions to the courts or to other accountability agencies. Societal mechanisms are able to control since they can activate horizontal agencies and force them to intervene in issues that government may want to avoid or ignore. The reliance upon the power of media to transmit claims against abuses of authority to a wider audience thereby increasing both their intensity and extensity constitutes the second strategy. Lastly, societal control can be achieved through the mobilizational strategy. By exposing and denouncing perceived wrongdoings, protest action could bring issues to light in ways that the citizens can relate to, help put them on the public agenda and as a result, the number of matters for which public officials can be

held responsible increases. In the end, it is argued that successful imposition of societal accountability depends upon the careful utilization and coordination of the three strategies. For example, 'the media follows and reports about the organization and mobilization of civil society; civil society informs and is informed by media; and, at the same time, it activates legal actions and forces state institutions to take up once-neglected problems' (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2005: 16-17).<sup>3</sup>

As this paper focuses on the third strategy of societal accountability, it acknowledges that it is considered inadequate particularly if the task is to lay down the factors that led to its utilization in the anti-Estrada campaign. Utilizing the theory of contentious politics, it attempts to arrive with an analysis that has more explanatory power and appeal in three particular ways. First, by treating the struggle to exact accountability from the President under the framework of contentious politics,<sup>4</sup> it provided the imperative for collective mobilization since they are usually performed by organized people who lack regular access to institutions and embody or 'act in the name of new or unaccepted claims and behaved in ways that fundamentally challenged authorities' (Tarrow 1994:2). Given this, it could be asserted that civil society actors dared to defy the belief that the burden of accountability should be confined to the formal sphere of the state

by also sharing some of the responsibility to enforce it. Specifically, they typified an unusual challenge to state authority, as they exerted pressure for Estrada to resign, became guardians of the impeachment process, and eventually mobilized for his ouster. Second, societal accountability is silent on how the mobilizational strategy is carried out nor does it indicate the different factors that determine its successful application. Since it is obvious that this particular strategy definitely revolves around collective action, concepts of contentious politics such as mobilizing structures, political opportunities, collective action frames, and repertoires of contention may offer valuable insights and contribute to explaining the emergence, development, trajectory, and even the outcomes of societal accountability initiatives. Also called the 'political process' school, this branch of social movements theory<sup>5</sup> focuses on the dynamics behind the emergence of movements that embarked on collective action, how it was sustained, and the various factors and conditions that were necessary for its success (or failure). They argue that social movements often face what is called a collective action problem—'how to convince rational, unorganized, autonomous, and dispersed individuals to act on behalf of collective goods or interests'. The classical literature stated that appeals to material interests often have to be made in order to solve this dilemma (Olson 1965). However, they also

contended that given the lack of access to political institutions and stable resources (unlike political parties or interest groups), movements often have to draw upon external resources such as opportunities, social networks, understandings, and conventions. This, in turn, effectively lowers the social transaction costs of collective action (Tarrow 1994: 13-16).

One of the crucial factors that influence contentious collective action has been the existence of formal organization and networks known as mobilizing structures. It refers to 'the collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action' (McAdam et al. 1996: 136). Tarrow emphasized these to be the links between leaders of the center and the periphery that permits 'movement coordination and allowing movements to persist over time. Generally, the most effective mobilizing structure has been the loose umbrella organizations that served to coordinate rather than internalize collective action.

Contentious politics also identified another crucial factor, the presence of political opportunities, which is defined as 'formal, permanent or national dimensions of the political environment that convinces people from undertaking collective action by affecting their expectations for success' (Tarrow 1994: 18). A societal challenge would be most likely to be embarked on the basis of perceived changes in the

institutional structure or informal power relations of a given national political system. Being an exogenous factor, pivotal developments in the political sphere have the ability to tilt the balance of power in favor of collective actors. McAdam (1996: 27) synthesized the various dimensions of the 'political opportunity structure' as: (1) the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system; (2) the stability or instability of the broad set of elite alignments; (3) the presence or absence of elite allies; and (4) the state's capacity and propensity for repression.<sup>6</sup>

The third factor is the process of collective framing. Considered necessary to produce the consensus that would galvanize collective actors for mobilization, it is 'the conscious and strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action' (McAdam et al. 1996: 6) from 'potential adherents and constituents, garner bystander support, and demobilize antagonists' (Bedford and Snow 2000: 614). Basically, many of the framing processes revolved around stressing the seriousness and injustice of a social condition or condemn an action or decision by the authorities as unjust or immoral. Recent articulations of this concept underscore the condition that people at least should feel 'aggrieved' but 'optimistic' that mobilizations would redress their problem. This will enable them to ascribe to themselves a collective identity and foster unity (McAdam et al. 2001: 41).

It is also the assertion of contentious politics that the modalities of collective action are derived from previous experiences and encounters. Tarrow (1994: 19) called the last factor as the repertoire of contention. Attributing this concept to Tilly (1978), he reiterated that 'people cannot employ routines of collective action of which they are ignorant' as 'each society has a stock of familiar forms of action that are known by both potential challengers and their opponents—and which become habitual aspects of their interaction'. However, as most movements have to rely on orthodox or accepted means to carry out collective action against their targets, they must also consider the imperative for innovation not only to diversify their arsenal of engagement but also to sustain their momentum through the continuous participation of its members. Furthermore, novelty of tactics will increase their visibility in media, often considered a powerful contemporary tool for conveying their advocacies (Tarrow 1994: 113-115).

The third way in which the theory of contentious politics is able to address the limitations of the societal accountability framework lies in going beyond its heavily institutionalist slant. As it is primarily anchored in the context of strengthening democratic institutions, societal accountability might be insufficient in analyzing the instance when formal institutions of accountability

were incapable of accomplishing their functions. This has been the case in the RIO campaign against Estrada wherein the impeachment trial was aborted and civil society had to resort to collective mobilization as the ultimate means of exacting accountability. By situating it as a contentious episode, the explanation could escape the 'conservative' and limiting tendencies of an approach that is deeply concerned with political institutions.

### **Background: Issue-based Protest Actions Against Estrada**

Like his predecessors, President Estrada faced his share of protest demonstrations launched by militant or left-leaning organizations on several controversial policies that he either proposed or supported. These groups opposed highly contested, divisive, and unpopular proposals like the Marcos burial issue, the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the United States, and amending the 1987 Constitution. In these three issues, the last one is noteworthy since it generated a broad alliance of civil society organizations albeitly located at both ends of the politico-ideological spectrum.

The alliance of anti 'Cha-cha' (Charter change) forces active during the Ramos administration was composed of moral leaders like former President Cory Aquino and Archbishop of Manila Jaime

Cardinal Sin, social development NGOs, civic associations, church groups, and progressive social movements. Opposition to Estrada's proposal was seen in a massive mobilization in Manila and other urban centers aptly titled as 'Maninidigan para sa Demokrasya' [Vigilance for Democracy], an event that also commemorated the death anniversary of Ninoy Aquino. The coalition of CSOs were conscious that their objective was not to attack the President but to make their opposition known against extremely controversial propositions that he was espousing (Arugay 2005a). In the end, it was a gathering of various blocs and groups with diverse political interests and advocacies. While most of these groups organized their own initiatives independent of one another, the anti 'Cha-cha' mobilization highlighted the possibility of CSOs being united under a single objective. Retroactively, this protest action could even be interpreted as a pilot test or an experiment in coalition-building among different and even conflicting groups.

Several other protest actions emerged. For example, a more permanent coalition among progressive forces, opposition politicians, and democracy activists was forged as seen in the 'Never Again' protests to commemorate the declaration of martial law. The convenors' objective was to propagate caution against the perceived authoritarian inclinations of Estrada as seen in his acts to repress media freedom. Major protest rallies attended

by thousands of demonstrators were assembled in popular rally sites in Manila—Mendiola Bridge, Liwasang Bonifacio, and Welcome Rotonda that also snowballed along the streets of provincial cities in Visayas and Mindanao. As much as the mass actions were aimed to affirm civil society's vigilance to defend democracy, they also carried a condemnation of the 'cronyism, corruption, and economic ruin under the Estrada administration' (Javellana and Herrera 1999). Kalinaw Mindanao, a similar alliance of militant forces, together with peace advocates and other personalities and organizations in Mindanao, was founded when Estrada declared his all-out war policy against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Its main rationale was to expose the decision as a remedial device employed to shore up the plummeting popularity ratings of the President. Furthermore, it criticized the projection that Estrada was a strong, decisive leader and condemned the irreparable damage wrought to the affected communities that were all sacrificed in the name of Estrada's macho image (Casiño 2001; Ocampo 2001).

The first few protests in the Estrada administration had a different set of dynamics and conditions. In terms of their nature, it was obvious that they were issue-based and to a great extent, did not revolve around directly antagonizing the President. Rather, these were carried out to express either criticism or opposition to

certain policies and decisions. Hence, the collective action was carried out without an intention to remove or oust Estrada. In terms of the actors that were involved, except for the anti 'Cha-cha' mobilization that was participated by a myriad of civil society organizations and groups, militant street parliamentarians undertook most of the mass actions. It was not surprising for these groups to be adversarial since they had also exhibited a similar mood from previous administrations. Other relevant actors such as the business sector, the political opposition and the middle and conservative groups chose to stay in the sidelines, as they were still unprepared to directly confront Estrada.<sup>7</sup>

There was nothing episodic about the collective action against Estrada from the moment he took office until the end of 1999. The media coverage of these early protest actions against Estrada was ephemeral. Leaders of progressive movements that principally organized these activities stated their inability to sustain media visibility and public interest. According to Behrend (2003), this only confirms the limitations of depending on media to transmit the claims of societal actors engaged in a mobilizational strategy. As 'media companies often have their own news agendas' (p. 11), one must not rely that they will always cover civil society mobilization, especially if these are no longer perceived to be interesting or within the issues considered relevant by

society. However, the features of this form of collective action would be dramatically modified through the introduction of new actors, objectives, and tactics by the year 2000.

### **Kompil II and ERM as Mobilizing Structures for Accountability**

Both Kompil II and ERM were two civil society coalitions formed in the midst of the anti-Estrada campaign that became the mobilizing structures of the societal actors. They were established as a means of galvanizing the different, sporadic, and unorganized efforts of CSOs to demand accountability from Estrada. Thus far, both are retrospectively considered to be the broadest civil society alliances in post-Marcos Philippine politics.

Kompil II was a revival of an alliance, labeled then as 'cause-oriented groups' that coalesced during the latter part of the anti-dictatorship struggle (Thompson 1995).<sup>8</sup> Like its predecessor, it also wanted to present itself as an 'alternative Congress' given that the legislature has not been quick and efficacious in responding to public demands (Perlas 2000). It was considered a very practical idea since the social capital was already present and they could harness existing national networks. The proposal was overwhelmingly accepted such that a heavily attended launching was held with

barely a month of preparation. Leaders also attributed this to the fact that there was already an atmosphere that invited the urgency for organizing and the necessity for action, given favorable developments in the political arena. It is argued that it possessed two basic features that made it very effective: diversity and flexibility.

This coalition was characterized as a convergence of multi-layered diversity as its composition came from across social and economic cleavages and groups representing different political ideologies. It was not simply a movement of the counter-elites or the marginalized sectors but a robust gathering of civil society groups determined to exact accountability from Estrada.<sup>9</sup> Velasco (2002) made an astute observation that it brought together contending groups who could not even be seen in the same place or occasion under 'normal circumstances' such as the various leftist camps, opposing labor and peasant formations and even rival party-list organizations. In addition, Kompil II's flexibility was demonstrated since it did not intend to replace or override existing efforts from segments of civil society but sought to bring all of these endeavors together under a single organizational framework and entity through the RIO framework, a fusion of very distinct strategies. In the end, it did not force the body to adopt a single approach but gave enough free rein for member organizations



to pursue their activities so long as they fell within the RIO framework. Moreover, the documentation of its workshops and meetings revealed that it has a flat and loose organizational structure and the existence of a small body of convenors that would hasten decision-making while maintaining a communication network and a web-based information system that facilitated information exchanges and updates. There were also special committees tasked to manage critical aspects such as media relations, mobilization, and logistics.

Just like its other predecessors such as the 21 September Committee and Kalinaw Mindanao, the ERM was another offshoot of the leftist militant segment of Philippine civil society.<sup>10</sup> Because the component organizations had previous experiences of coalition-building, it was not difficult to organize the ERM. It was formally convened as a 'multi-sectoral, multi-political persuasion movement that seeks to persuade, pressure, and, if necessary, force Estrada to resign from office'. However, it was said that the crucial organization that joined ERM was an alliance with the Council on Philippine Affairs (COPA), known for having key public personalities with extensive political connections and abundant logistical resources (Casiño 2001).

It must be emphasized that while Kompil II and the ERM are organizationally distinct, the communication lines between

them were very open such that joint activities between the two coalitions became possible. For example, the first grand mobilization called the 4 November 2000 Prayer Rally that was held was very much participated by both coalitions. Furthermore, the National Day of Protest<sup>11</sup>—a massive labor strike—was also jointly planned and conducted. This arrangement would also be seen in the four-day People Power II mobilization.

### **Political Opportunities: Estrada's Changing Fortunes**

It is highly uncertain that the collective action launched against President Estrada would generate a significant impact if political opportunities were not present. The 1987 Constitution bestows fundamental recognition to civil society as actors entitled to participate in political and governmental processes. Operating in such a democratic context, ample political space was provided and this effectively made all of the initiatives of societal actors within the legitimate scope of democratic and representative politics. Furthermore, the forms of the expression of dissent against the President could be placed in the context of asserting civil and political rights and thereby ensuring that they were considered legal and acceptable.

While access to the political arena was a constant element in the political

opportunity structure of the Philippines, it is considered insufficient especially if one bears in mind the experience of the Silent Protest Movement (SPM). It was the first organized attempt among several civil society organizations and personalities to instigate contentious collective action against Estrada. However, the SPM failed to sustain the momentum it enjoyed in the beginning for various reasons. Aside from the dearth of credible leadership that could unite different groups, invite them to participate, and inspire protest actions, there was a failure to coordinate its launching activity which was supposed to be a nationwide noise barrage. There was also the absence of the crucial support of institutions like the Catholic Church, the political opposition, and the business community. But the more overriding factor seem to be the lack of willingness on the part of CSOs (and the public at large) to unite and join the cause of the movement in part because the President's trust and approval ratings were still considerably high.<sup>12</sup>

A key component of the shift that made Estrada vulnerable to protest was the explosion of several scandals linking the President to acts of corruption and particularism in extreme proportions. The most damning was the testimony of Ilocos Sur Governor Luis 'Chavit' Singson that incriminated the chief executive in illegal gambling, among others.<sup>13</sup> According to Kompil II leaders, it definitely enraged and thus invited more participation from other

civil society organizations in their efforts. But the more important ramification has been its impact among the politicians. Intra-party maneuvering inevitably transpired that resulted in the massive withdrawal of allegiance of the members of the House of Representatives from Estrada's ruling coalition and transformed the previously ignored impeachment project led by civil society, into a feasible option for his accountability.<sup>14</sup> The 'Chavit' factor became the powerful catalyst that led to the crucial loss of support among his erstwhile allies, despite pressures from the President, and also convinced public opinion that he has lost the moral legitimacy to govern.

Repression against collective protests, even the threat to impose it in the Philippines since 1986 has relatively been minimal given the state's observance of rights of assembly and expression and its relatively high tolerance for expressions of dissent. However, in the context of the anti-Estrada campaign, the violent string of bombings across Manila that occurred on 30 December 1999 was perceived by civil society as an attempt to stifle the growing antagonism against the Estrada regime. The bombings only intensified the sentiments of opposition against the President.

Perhaps the strongest indication of the salience of political opportunity has been the unfortunate breakdown of the impeachment trial that opened the

floodgates for widespread discontent eventually leading to the withdrawal of popular support from Estrada. As much as the Chavit exposé was a catalyst for the launching of the RIO campaign, the same could be said with the refusal of the senator-jurors to allow the contents of the 'second envelope', allegedly containing substantial evidence against the President. The refusal could have multi-faceted interpretations (Doronila 2001; Palabrica 2001) but from the viewpoint of civil society, it provided the rationale to carry out the grand and massive mobilization known as People Power II. The societal actors refused to reduce the incident to a minor defeat of the prosecution and confirmed a good many of their speculations and hunches about the credibility and efficacy of the people behind the political institutions in the country. It also opened their eyes to the insincerity of Estrada, which previously declared that the trial would afford him the opportunity to construct his defense from the charges of corruption. This form of deceit was unmistakably exemplified in the blatant move of his defenders to collaborate with the jury to suppress evidence on the basis of a technicality.

The maneuvering of loyal senator-jurors and their outright bias for the President also validated the highly political nature of the impeachment mechanism. For civil society, it was an 'in-your-face' expression that political

institutions are very much characterized by the prevalence of informal norms such as patronage, particularism, and personal loyalties. No amount of pressure and appeal to the public welfare exerted by civil society in the end was able to persuade these representatives of the people to heed their demands for fairness and integrity. Lastly, as legal experts advised, the most probable scenario following this would be the decision to suspend the trial or to eventually acquit the President. For civil society, it was a pure indication that the trial was a mockery and that the impeachment court will not serve the justice and accountability they wanted. It also manifested that the Senate as an accountability mechanism did not accomplish its responsibility as their partisan loyalties clouded their role as jurors and ultimately jeopardized their responsibility as custodians of the people's fiducial trust. This inevitably resulted in a political vacuum that compelled civil society to use their weapon of last resort—to pour out into the streets and demand for Estrada's accountability.

### **Failure, Impunity and Injustice as Collective Action Frames**

The collective action frames that were generated laid emphasis on the imperative to launch a moral crusade against corruption with civil society assuming a legitimate claimant of the citizen's right to

transparent and accountable governance. According to the convenors of both aggruppations, actual framing processes have started as early as 1999 by the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO) and the National Peace Conference (NPC), given the negative result of their assessments of the Estrada administration on delivering social development and peace. Disenchantments and disappointments of civil society attributed towards the President's lackluster performance became their motivation to embark on a campaign to impose accountability. Meanwhile, anti-corruption NGOs like Konsensyang Pilipino (KP) highlighted the seeming impunity that the chief executive enjoyed on several corruption scandals that implicated either himself or his relatives and friends. What is noteworthy is that KP went a step further by framing the entire issue into a proposal to impeach Estrada.

These framing processes and the build-up towards Kompil II as the final mobilizing structure were evident in the initiative of these CSOs to file an impeachment complaint against Estrada. While it was an option for civil society groups to disregard this constitutional process, as the political institutions assigned for this responsibility were captives of awesome presidential power, they still treaded the democratic route and gave a chance for political institutions to prove their efficacy. By becoming the initiators, advocates,

and campaigners in the impeachment of Estrada, they were able to provide another angle in the highly politicized interplay between politicians. Assuming the role of the people's representatives, it also gave the impeachment project what Peruzzotti and Smulovitz called a 'legitimacy seal'. The active role of civil society prevented the demand for his accountability from becoming an all-traditional elite affair. It also refuted the allegations that it was an attempt of the marginalized political elites to sabotage Estrada and his administration and forwarded the impression that it was a genuine and broad popular movement to demand for his accountability (Arugay 2005b: 77-78).

These examples of 'attributional' and 'prognostic' framing (Bedford and Snow 2000: 616) eventually facilitated societal actors to fashion their claims to an injustice frame that effectively generated a 'call to arms' for all to mount collective action in order for Estrada to be held accountable. According to Bautista (2001), the motivation to be indignant was greatly determined by a 'shared sense of ethical breach and injustice' (p. 189) particularly after the refusal to open the 'second envelope' capitalized by societal actors in order to stage various demonstrations and protests across the country.

Kompil II and ERM leaders revealed the relative ease in consensus formation on matters like interpreting the events

surrounding Estrada, constructing viable alternatives, and mapping a feasible plan of action. This could be explained by the consistency of the claims of the groups that composed the coalition, their credibility or proximity with reality, and the good reputation of the faces of the alliances—the leaders or ‘frame articulators’. The indispensable role of framing processes also could explain why the coalitions have given much importance in the role of media since the latter has an essential contribution particularly in the diffusion of the impunity and injustice frames. For example, the investigative reports produced by the highly reputable Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) greatly substantiated the claims of civil society regarding certain anomalies that directly involved the President. Backed by this evidence, the unraveling of the political scandal that involved Estrada attained high levels of reach and legitimacy, validated civil society’s widely recognized perceptions, and galvanized them to coordinate efforts directed towards the President’s accountability.

### **Repertoires of Anti-Estrada Contention: Tradition and Innovation**

Philippine civil society has a rich tradition of mobilizations and other forms of contentious collective action that were primarily directed to oppose and

challenge the authoritarian regime of Marcos (Racelis 2000; Constantino-David 1998) primarily through mass actions and demonstrations. The temper of the time created fertile ground for planning, coordination, and interaction of efforts from very diverse groups. It was estimated that around 165 rallies, marches, and other demonstrations took place a month after the assassination and 100 more between October 1983 and February 1984 (Thompson 1995: 117). Nothing less than this precedent set during the anti-Marcos struggle provided the societal actors with an available arsenal of how to launch collective challenges against Estrada.

One of the best practices the societal actors were aware of is the conduct of nonviolent forms of collective action, a legacy of the anti-dictatorship struggle experience. It became the characteristic of the mobilization against Estrada whether they were structured as a prayer rally, a national strike or a mass demonstration, among others. The pacific nature of the protest actions also became an incentive for otherwise apolitical individuals to participate since it considerably lowered the social transaction costs of collective action. The mounting of mass protests, cleverly labeled as the ‘parliament of the streets’,<sup>15</sup> became the modern nonelectoral expression of political dissent in post-Marcos Philippines. The mobilization against the proposals to amend the 1987 Constitution during the

Ramos and Estrada administrations unleashed by certain societal actors were also important models for the RIO campaign. Being 'veteran' street demonstrators, the ERM groups also did not have much difficulty in launching a stream of protest actions against the President. With mastery of the craft, they were not treading new ground but were benefiting from practices and norms established in the past.

While banking on orthodox means became very fundamental for the success of the anti-Estrada campaign, one necessarily must also consider the extent of innovation engendered by societal actors. Basically, this was grounded on the necessity to alleviate 'rally fatigue', to invite participation from unorganized sectors in society, and to maintain media attention. There was novelty on the demonstrations from the Catholic Church-led 4 November Prayer Rally, the unified and coordinated national labor strike, and the conduct of a caravan that culminated in the so called 'People Power Lunch' between the elite and the peasants, to the Biblical-inspired Jericho March and the daily vigils at the Senate. This genuine display of creativity and ingenuity on the part of civil society groups added new elements in their repertoire of collective action and in so doing, maintained their issues of accountability against the President in the public's attention.

The anti-Estrada campaign was also remarkable from previous political protest actions in the country given the extraordinary role of information and communications technology. The case of the Internet-based initiative such as the eLagda.com<sup>16</sup> was indicative of the power of technology as a means of political participation. What started as a reactive signature campaign aimed at pressuring Estrada to resign, the campaign of eLagda.com soon included active lobbying and participation into the protest actions in alliance with other groups. The novelty stemmed from the inclusion of the politically apathetic middle class and the disempowered overseas Filipinos working abroad that provided a channel to voice their claims and participate in the affairs of their country even if they were miles away. In the end, eLagda.com campaign manifested that the Internet is not just a mechanism for information exchange regarding the issues confronted by Estrada but could be a potent weapon for societal accountability as it mobilized its constituencies separated by time, developed agendas for political participation and collective action, and generated public pressure on powerful politicians.

The power of short messaging service (SMS)-or 'text' in Filipino parlance-of the mobile phone was also an added feature that greatly assisted the two civil society coalitions. As an organizational device, emergency meetings among civil society groups could be announced and passed

around leaders instantly. SMS also provided a cheap, effective, and efficient medium to diffuse information on protest actions and other similar activities. For the unorganized part of the citizenry, there was a periodic swapping of thousands of jokes and slogans about Estrada through their mobile handsets before and during the impeachment trial got under way (Rafael 2003; Pertierra et al. 2002). Perhaps the mobilizing potential of the text service was exemplified in the spontaneous gathering that led to the People Power II Revolt at the famous EDSA Shrine a few hours before the collapse of the impeachment trial. In the four-day grand mobilization, 'texting' mainly provided the meeting schedules, locations, and even the proper attire for the protest actions.

## Conclusion

This paper shows how basic insights from the theory of contentious politics could become conceptual handles in explaining the collective mobilization embarked by two civil society coalitions—Kompil II and the ERM—in the context of exacting societal accountability from Estrada. By underscoring that a predominantly institutionalist explanation as provided by the concept of societal accountability framework is insufficient in explaining the protests against the President, this paper shows that the anti-Estrada campaign was greatly influenced by the interplay

of four factors (i.e., mobilizing structures, collective framing, repertoire of contention, and political opportunities), both internal and external to the societal actors that were studied. Being umbrella coalitions, Kompil II and ERM became practical mobilizing structures because of their loose organization, tolerance of diversity, and a modicum of flexibility in the adoption of strategies for collective action. Another contributing factor was the relative ease they experienced in consensus formation on various matters that led to the generation of collective action frames structured along the issues of Estrada's performance failure, his impunity from alleged wrongdoing, and finally his abuse of authority that to a great extent rallied members of these aggrupations, external bystanders or the unorganized citizenry. Furthermore, the application of both the existing repertoire of contention learned from the anti-dictatorship experience and in post-Marcos protest actions as well as the introduction of innovative features to mass actions gave the campaign a distinct character and contributed to its success. These internal factors that influenced collective action were also aided by the existence of crucial political opportunities from the political space afforded to civil society participation and the availability of political allies, to catalytic events such as the political exposés and dramatic episodes.

The coalitions that were studied indeed mobilized all resources available to them.

The quickness with which the organized forces were able to respond to a rapidly developing crisis underscores the depth and richness of the country's civil society. However, as this paper ended its analysis with the ouster of Estrada, further studies need to examine the collective mobilization after this contentious episode including the backlash of his supporters that happened shortly after the People Power II. By serving as a snapshot of the explanatory power of the societal accountability framework as well as the concepts of contentious politics, this paper hopes to encourage more in-depth research on collective mobilization in the Philippines both in highly eventful episodes as well as the everyday 'normal' engagement of the country's social movements. This synergy of distinct disciplinary traditions seems to provide a better analysis and perspective that could be conducted by students of both Philippine society and politics.

There is no doubt that the series of mobilizations that culminated in EDSA 2 would definitely set a precedent on the shape, form, and dynamics of future political contention in the country. But it must be interpreted that it could be 'Janus-faced', implying both positive and negative repercussions, especially with regard to its impact on Philippine democratization. It is significant to examine the likely implications of civil society's ability to mobilize with much force vis-à-vis the

inherent capacity of the state to manage, aggregate, and include their demands (Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2003). While it may be indicative of the active and dynamic state of political participation, it may not necessarily lead to the refusal to respect democratic political institutions and processes. Indeed, People Power II was caused by the unfortunate breakdown of the impeachment court that apparently lost the impartiality that it promised, which to a certain extent jeopardized this form of institutional accountability. However, it must be argued that the contribution of societal (i.e., 'extra-institutional') forms of accountability towards democratization could only happen if it is directed to consolidating and deepening the political institutions that have the legitimate mandate to exact accountability. More than collective mobilization, the contribution of civil society could be to restore trust in the democratic order, inspire popular involvement in institution building and strengthening, and to produce a minimum of consensus for support of the rule of law and other principles of democracy. The challenge for civil society is how to make the crucial shift of collective mobilization from the predominantly adversarial mode of protest to the constructive and facilitative mode of participation in the pursuit of political accountability.



## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup>An episode means 'an extraordinary stream of events that falls outside the regular intervals and activities of politics in a country and involves contention among authorities and its challengers' (McAdam et al. 2001).

<sup>2</sup>This paper is an offshoot from the author's masteral thesis (Arugay 2004b). In that study, a combination of key informant structured interviews supplemented by documentary material was used to extract the necessary data.

<sup>3</sup>For a more elaborate discussion of how societal accountability was exercised against Estrada using these three strategies, see Arugay (2004b).

<sup>4</sup>Contentious politics is defined as 'collective activity on the part of claimants—or those who claim to represent them—relying at least in part on noninstitutional forms of interaction with elites, opponents, or the state' (Tarrow 1996: 874).

<sup>5</sup>Other schools of thought on social movements include the rational choice perspective and resource mobilization theory. See Foweraker (1995) and Lichbach (1998).

<sup>6</sup>For a recent review of the literature on political opportunity as a concept in contentious politics theorizing, see Meyer (2004).

<sup>7</sup>Furthermore, it should be remembered that it was during this period that much of civil society organizations was still engaging Estrada through legitimate channels and even participating in its programs.

<sup>8</sup>In January 1984, the various anti-Marcos groups and individuals convened Kompil (I). It was the broadest and largest gathering of pro-democracy forces and attracted participants from all regions and sectors as well as the political spectrum from the left to the democratic right. The name of the coalition was in recognition that the *Batasang Pambansa* at that time was a rubber-stamp parliament and was not exactly representing the will of the people. Thus, it was decided that they adopt the name in order to act as an alternative Congress of the people.

<sup>9</sup>According to Luz (2001), while the class base of the first Kompil were ultimately the middle and upper classes in urban

areas, the second Kompil was also represented by organized urban poor and peasant organizations. This has not been concurred by some of the leaders that this author interviewed as well as the reviewer of this article. The author thanks the latter for raising this important insight.

<sup>10</sup>ERM leaders stated that they declined to be part of Kompil II alliance in order to be afforded more leeway in their tactics and collective mobilization. Kompil II leaders and other informants revealed that another reason might be the ideological conflicts it has with the democratic left and the 'social democrats'.

<sup>11</sup>This mobilization was held on 30 November 2000 also to commemorate the anniversary Philippine revolutionary Gatpuno Andres Bonifacio, considered as the symbol of the Filipino masses.

<sup>12</sup>Other considerations include the inability of the SPM to exonerate itself from allegations that it favors a military takeover and its purpose was to destabilize the Estrada administration and its failure to provide a clear alternative to Estrada if he is removed from office thereby rendering the political future of the country in a more uncertain state (Arugay 2004b: 234-239).

<sup>13</sup>Singson is a recognized close confidante of the President, a member

of the notorious Midnight Cabinet and a self-confessed gambling lord. Not only did he offer specific details, it was the first scandal that directly involved the president in a corruption scandal (Doronila 2001; Laquian and Laquian 2002).

<sup>14</sup>This led to the formation of a new majority in the lower chamber of Congress that facilitated the impeachment resolution at the committee level. The defection could be partly explained by the fact that most of the congressmen were running for reelection in the May 2001 elections. Given that there was popular clamor behind the impeachment of Estrada, many of the legislators had to consider the sentiments of their constituencies since they needed their votes in 2001 (Arugay 2004b:215-217).

<sup>15</sup>The concept was borne out of the realization that the parliament during that time was a mere rubber-stamp institution just to legitimize the decrees and policies of Marcos. Thus, civil society organizations embodied themselves as an alternative parliament that performed the vital function of articulating and aggregating the issues of the people.

<sup>16</sup>'Lagda' is a Filipino term which means signature. eLagda.com was a web-based initiative to demand for Estrada's resignation through an electronic signature campaign through email.

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