

**WHY CHANGE OUR PRESIDENTIAL GOVERNMENT
TO A PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT?
A PRIMER**

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I. Introduction.

1. Since 1946 when we regained our independence from the United States, our government has been presidential in form and unitary and highly centralized in structure.
2. In the presidential form of government, legislative power is vested in Congress (Senate and House of Representatives), executive power in the President, and judicial power in the Supreme Court and lower courts. This form of government is based on the principle of “separation of powers and checks and balance” among the three branches of government.
3. However, during the authoritarian (dictatorial) rule from September 1972 to February 1986, Ferdinand Marcos exercised executive and legislative powers in a pseudo parliamentary government, and controlled the whole judiciary and the media. He governed with the military and national police. The people lost their political freedom and civil rights.
4. After the EDSA revolt which ended the dictatorship, democracy was restored under the 1987 Constitution. This included the presidential form of government and the unitary structure where power, authority and revenues are concentrated in the national government. Most local governments are weak and dependent on the national government.
5. Eighteen years since we restored our democracy—with its presidential form and unitary structure—we have failed to check our problems of poverty, unemployment, social injustice, corruption, rebellion, inadequate education, health, housing, and so on. So many of our people have to go abroad to find jobs and support their families.
6. Our government always lacks funds and is heavily in debt from too much borrowing. We are in deep trouble financially although new taxes and fiscal reforms have been initiated.
7. Our people are very dissatisfied with the way our democracy works. Taking advantage of our political instability and economic problems, some groups are proposing undemocratic and authoritarian alternatives to our system of government thus putting our constitutional democracy and future as a nation at great risk.
8. We fully realize the weakness and ineffectiveness of our political institutions in solving our problems and meeting our challenges. For this reason we are proposing their reform and modernization by revising our Constitution and other ways. We are proposing

changing our presidential government to a parliamentary government, and our highly centralized unitary structure to a decentralized structure of autonomous local governments and regions preparatory to a shift to a federal republic.

II. What is wrong with our present presidential government? Or why do we want to change it?

1. Separation of the executive power of the President and the legislative power of Congress (the Senate and the House of Representatives) causes intense rivalry and competition for power among them in a system that has turned very adversarial. Especially because, like the President, the 24 senators are elected nationwide.
2. Constant conflict and even gridlock among the President and the House and the Senate, and too many congressional investigations of executive policies and actions, delay and obstruct legislation. In this system it is difficult to institute reforms.
3. Because our political parties are weak, undemocratic, unstable, and not program-oriented, our leaders and political parties cannot be held responsible and accountable to the people. With power diffused and the leadership fragmented, in our presidential form of government it is difficult to know who are responsible and accountable for the quality of national governance.
4. Because of the power of the media and cinema, candidates for President and the Senate are increasingly being selected mainly for their personal popularity or “win-ability” and wealth rather than political leadership. This has resulted in the deterioration in the quality of our nationally elected leaders.
5. Our presidential government is unstable because the President may want to extend his fixed term of office by amending the Constitution (Manuel L. Quezon in 1940; President Fidel V. Ramos in 1996), or by martial law (Ferdinand Marcos in 1972).
6. It is unstable because of the resort to “people power” and military intervention in removing an incumbent President when impeachment fails (Joseph Estrada in 2001).
7. Rising cost of elections, especially national elections of the President and senators, corrupt the system. It also takes too long to determine the results of nationwide elections. With the high stakes involved in politics and widespread poverty, vote-buying is rampant and cheating is not uncommon.

IV. What kind of parliamentary government is being proposed ?

1. A unicameral Parliament in which legislative and executive powers are vested.
2. Most Members of Parliament (MPs) shall be elected in parliamentary districts (starting with the present congressional districts).
3. Thirty percent of all the MPs shall be chosen by proportional representation of the political parties according to their share of the total party votes in the previous parliamentary election. The political parties shall ensure the proper representation of the

labor, peasant, urban poor, veterans, indigenous peoples, women, youth, differently-abled, and other such sectors.

4. Parliament elects the Prime Minister who exercises the executive power with the assistance of the Cabinet, and the President who is the head of State.
5. The Prime Minister is normally the leader of the majority party in the Parliament. The Prime Minister and the Cabinet shall be responsible to the Parliament for the program of government and shall determine the guidelines of national policy.

IV. Why do we want a parliamentary government? What are its expected advantages over our traditional presidential government?

1. In a parliamentary government, Parliament exercises both legislative power and executive power. Parliament will therefore ensure the coordinated, efficient and effective exercise of legislative and executive powers—the making of laws and policies and their implementation. Especially if we have a unicameral parliament (only one house or chamber).
2. At the same time the majority party in Parliament is checked by the major opposition party, helped by other minority parties, and other centers of power in the community—the media, interest groups, and religious and civil society organizations. The major opposition party has a “shadow Cabinet” to check on the Cabinet and is prepared to take over when necessary.
3. The Prime Minister and the Government (the governing party headed by the Prime Minister) assume collective responsibility and accountability to the Parliament and the people for governance.
The people will therefore know whom to reward for good governance and administration, or punish for failure and corruption.
4. Parliamentary government is more likely to ensure the election of the head of government—the Prime Minister—for his leadership and experience in the party and in the public service, as known to party members.
5. It will help prevent election of the head of government on the basis largely of wealth, personal popularity, or “win-ability,” not on proven competence and experience as a leader.
6. It will be easier to change the head of government and the ruling party whenever it becomes necessary, by a vote of no confidence in Parliament. No need for impeachment, people power revolts, and military intervention that cause political instability, disrupt the economy, discourage foreign investors, and hurt the people, especially the poor.
7. Unlike in our presidential government where the President is both head of government and head of state, the function of head of state is assigned to a ceremonial President elected by the Parliament. This will lighten the burden on the Prime Minister who can concentrate on governance. At the same time the President, who symbolizes the people’s sovereignty and national unity, can be a rallying point as a leader who is above partisan politics.

8. Parliamentary government and electoral reform will empower the people to choose not only the candidates for the Parliament but also the political party they want to govern the country and the regional and local governments.
9. Parliamentary government will help us develop political parties that are democratic, disciplined, united, and effective in making and carrying out a program of government that can secure popular support. It will encourage the formation of a stable two-party system.
10. The people elect the members of Parliament among candidates in parliamentary districts and also by proportional representation of the rival political parties in the parliamentary election. It will be easier and faster and less costly to administer elections and proclaim the winning candidates.
11. It will reduce the high cost of electing the head of government, by choosing the leader of the majority party (or coalition) in Parliament as Prime Minister.
12. The selection of additional members of Parliament through proportional representation of the political parties will allow the leading political party to select competent leaders (among professionals, business leaders, scholars, and sectoral representatives) to serve in Parliament and the Cabinet. These would be leaders who are not willing to run for public office.
13. Parliamentary government can lead to continuity in policy and administration if the majority party or coalition governs well and the people are satisfied, because the people will learn to reward or punish the ruling party for its success or failure in governance. The people will know that the ruling party, not just individual leaders, is responsible and accountable for the government's performance.

Most stable and progressive countries in the world have a parliamentary government. These include Japan, Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain, Norway, Sweden, and also India, Singapore, and Malaysia in Asia.

In sum, a parliamentary government will help us to have “good governance”: *ang mabuti at mabisang pamamalakad ng ating gobyerno at bayan.*

Charter change to a parliamentary government, along with decentralization and devolution of powers to the regional and local governments and eventually Federalism, will enable us, Filipinos, to respond more efficiently and effectively to our problems, meet our challenges, achieve our goals as a nation, and compete in the global economy.

Charter change to a parliamentary government and autonomous local and regional governments will help us to reduce poverty and corruption. It will empower us to achieve the peace, prosperity, justice and security we all want for ourselves and our children.

Government will be better able to help in attracting investments, creating more jobs, raising incomes, providing better education, health, welfare, and security to our people. And we can build and maintain more schools, hospitals, waterworks, roads, bridges, seaports and airports. Especially when we remove unnecessary restrictions on foreign investments in our country under safeguards to be provided by law.