



Mobilizing EDSA People Power II in the Philippines: Lessons from the political process theory

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ABSTRACT

Years after the first people power movement was organized in the Philippines, a new people power movement, namely the EDSA People Power II, came into fruition during the presidency of Joseph Ejercito Estrada whose eventual downfall and ouster is attributed to the incipience of the movement. This paper probes into the dynamics of mobilization, activity, and success of EDSA People Power II through the lens of political process theory. In terms of mobilization and outcomes, the political opportunity structures, the strength of indigenous organizations, and the people's sense of cognitive liberation all contributed to the emergence and success of the movement. In the context of the Philippine case, it is found that the sense of cognitive liberation played a more crucial part as it served as internal motivation for the participants to challenge the inherent weaknesses of the Philippine political system such as weak state autonomy, defective political party system, and patronage-oriented politicians, thereby rendering them capable of creating a shared alternative reality that is favorable to them.

Keywords: Cognitive Liberation, EDSA People Power, Political Process Theory, Social Movements

People power movements are defined as “challenges to the policies or structures of authoritarian regimes that primarily incorporate methods of nonviolent action, such as protest demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience, and interventions” (Schock 1999, p. 355). These movements have become bastions of opposition against the communist rule in Czechoslovakia in 1968

and throughout Eastern Europe as well as the Soviet Union during the late 1980s (Oberschall 1996; Schock 2005). Authoritarian regimes in the Third World have witnessed people power protests with strategies ranging from violent guerrilla insurgencies to unarmed rebellions and various forms of nonviolent action (Zunes 1994; Schock 2005). Social movement literature shows that the disparate experiences of non-democracies in people power movements are imperative in understanding how these movements are organized and mobilized. More so, the outcomes of people power movements vary

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from one country to another. In Burma and China, for instance, citizen demonstrations during the 1980s were violently quelled by militaristic regimes (Schock 1999; Schock 2005). In the Philippines and South Africa, sustained protests against authoritarian rule resulted in regime change and restoration of democracy (Ackerman & Kruegler 1994; Schock 2005).

However, recent publications emphasize the dynamic role of people power movements not just in non-democratic regimes but in democracies as well. Gatmaytan (2006, p. 1) notes that people power movements can be construed as: (1) Expressions of outrage against a public officials and (2) withdrawal of support from the official in favor of another. Fidel Ramos (2001), former Philippine president, believes that people power in democracies attests to “the sovereign people’s ultimate right to intervene—when political institutions fail—to undertake a last effort to make democracy work the way it should” (p. 371).

In this paper, I aim to analyze people power movement mobilization and outcomes through the lens of the political process theory (PPT), building on the foundational work of Charles Tilly (1978) and his more recent publication along with colleagues Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow (2001). The paper is structured as follows: The succeeding section expounds the fundamental tenets and core dimensions of the political process theory. Next, as a contextual prelude, the paper discusses the shortcomings of Western liberal democracy and how it relates to the present crisis of Philippine democracy. After this, a historical background of people power movements in the Philippines, with emphasis on the EDSA¹. People Power II movement, is presented. The paper then examines the EDSA People Power II movement from the perspective of

1. EDSA stands for Epifanio de los Santos Avenue. EDSA is considered historic as it is a site where massive protests and demonstrations in the Philippines have been held.

the political process theory and evaluates the theory in terms of its relevance and application to the mobilization and outcomes of the movement. The paper concludes by reiterating its main arguments and summing up the discussion.

POLITICAL PROCESS THEORY: CORE DIMENSIONS

Political process theory (PPT) is an influential theory in social movement research. PPT argues that social movements regard a favourable political environment as a major consideration for mobilization and attaining successful outcomes. In other words, the dynamic nature of societies suggests that the timing of movement activity and the motivation for individual participation can be explained by analyzing various power relationships and changes in these relationships over time (McAdam 1982). PPT identifies three elements that assume an important role in explaining the emergence and development of a social movement: Political opportunities, strength of indigenous organizations, and cognitive liberation (Smith & Pagnucco 1992; Caren 2007; Jasper 2012).

The first element, *political opportunities*, comprises exogenous factors that can improve prospects for mobilization and influence of the movement in mainstream institutional politics (Meyer & Minkoff 2004). Political opportunity structures ensure the capacity of social movements “to mobilize depending on opportunities and constraints offered by the political-institutional setting in which collective action takes place” (Koopmans & Olzak 2004, p. 201). Further, they can be viewed as a cluster of power relationships within a society and the balance of power that exists among these various actors. As new contenders for power emerge or old contenders lose their influence, the likelihood of collective action increases (Smith & Pagnucco 1992). The core dimensions of political opportunities are the following: (1) relative openness or closure

of the political system (2) relative stability or instability of existing political alignments (3) presence of influential allies and (4) decline in the state's repressive capacities (McAdam 1996; Tarrow 1998; Edwards 2014).

The second element, *strength of indigenous organizations*, draws upon the organizational resources that are available to the movement. As Caren (2007) clarifies, these indigenous organizations pre-exist among the aggrieved community and are not established in the heat of the struggle. These organizations provide members a plethora of resources such as potential members to recruit, potential leaders, communications networks, and individual links. Aside from providing interpersonal networks and movement leaders, indigenous organizations are also able to provide the context for movement frames that can be interpreted, diffused, and converted to collective action (Smith & Pagnucco 1992).

The third element, *cognitive liberation*, is concerned with the social-psychological processes that enable individuals to create a sense that the current political system lacks legitimacy and that meaningful change is possible (Caren 2007; Jasper 2012). The sense of cognitive liberation among prospective and existing participants of the movement occurs in a collective setting and flows from political opportunities to indigenous organizations. The two fundamental aspects of cognitive liberation are: (1) the attribution of group conditions to systemic rather than individual inadequacies, and (2) the definition of unjust conditions that can be altered through collective action (McAdam 1982; Smith & Pagnucco 1992). As McAdam (1982) affirms, the lack of a shared account supporting group action can be a challenge for mobilization, as people could become reluctant to spend time and resources for mobilization-related activities if they feel disassociated with the movement.

Having discussed the political process theory, the next section discusses how the lack of substantive democracy in the Philippines set the stage for the rise of popular mobilization in a democratic setting.

THE SHORTCOMINGS OF PHILIPPINE DEMOCRACY

In colonized countries such as the Philippines, the adoption of democracy as a framework of government is one of the vestiges of their colonial past (Gordon 2010). Compounded by the decline of socialism and the fall of the Soviet Union, it appeared that Western liberal democracy had triumphed in this part of the world. Francis Fukuyama (as cited in Rocamora 2000) argues that the universalization of the Western brand of liberal democracy signals the ultimate end of ideological evolution and the final form of human government. Liberal democracy appeals to the senses because, in essence, it paves the path for peace-building and prosperity (Rocamora 2000; Call & Cook 2003), and any nation would not resist having such. While defenders of this view lavished on this triumphalism, challenges wrought by the structures of democracy began to beleague states one after the other.

Democracy underscores the importance of political participation, political competition, and attainment of civil liberties in society. While it is not surprising (and also, not unholy) to loosely associate democracy with free elections and open party systems, associating various qualifiers to democracy could be reflective of the confusion and disagreements that will ensue once one is tasked to conceptualize democracy. After all, democracy as a phenomenon is not monolithic, which explains why several forms of democracy exist and will continue to diversify as long as the tides of history will allow.

For the sake of this discussion, it behooves me to give two pertinent classifications of democracy: That which is *formal*, and that

which is *substantive* (Eckstein 1990; Hague & Harrop 2004). Formal or procedural democracy is achieved when democratic institutions ensure the right of the people to elect their representatives. The electoral process is incumbent for the system to be called democratic. Substantive democracy, on the other hand, is attained when the role of the citizens in the state is not limited only to voting and elections. While electoral participation is an important feature, substantive democracy recognizes the people as rights-bearing citizens and vital actors in processes of decision and policy making. Substantive democracy carries much depth as compared to formal democracy, as the former regards the engagement of the public in matters outside the realm of the electoral as important, especially those matters that could make or break the welfare of the state entire (Eckstein 1990; Hague & Harrop 2004).

Electoral democracy in the Philippines is strong and flourishing but substantive democracy leaves much to be desired. Corporate actors and elites, rather than the people, are gaining more from the political system. Substantive democracy is farfetched as democratic processes remain restricted to free elections, giving more leeway for elites to manipulate processes to their own liking. As Dressel (2011) explains:

Despite free and competitive elections, universal suffrage, and a vivid civil society, democracy in the Philippines is marred by persistent procedural weaknesses in accountability and the rule of law, incomplete achievements in areas of equality and rights, and generally poor political outcomes exacerbated by patrimonial practices. The Philippines can reasonably be classified as a 'deficient' or 'reduced' democracy (p. 541).

Although paving the path to achieving substantive democracy in the Philippines is

not without challenges, some civil society actors such as social and protest movement activists work toward increasing levels of political participation among the citizens and promoting a political culture founded on rights and social justice (Dressel 2011).

PEOPLE POWER MOVEMENTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

In February 1986, Filipinos assembled in Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) to voice opposition against Ferdinand Marcos' authoritarian rule. Marcos declared martial law in 21 September 1972, which signaled the end of democratic politics in the Philippines that had been in effect since World War II. The EDSA People Power Revolution (EDSA I) ended Marcos' 21 year hold on power and ushered in the restoration of democracy in the Philippines (Timberman 1991; Schock 1999; Gatmaytan 2006).

EDSA People Power II (hereinafter referred to as EDSA II) happened more than a decade after the first EDSA People Power was organized. EDSA II is a series of demonstrations held from 16-20 January 2001 that became instrumental in the downfall of President Joseph Ejercito Estrada. Estrada was elected president in the 1998 national elections with a large margin of victory. However, barely halfway in his term, he was embroiled in various political scandals, faced administrative charges, and was accused of corruption and embezzling public funds. Because of the severity of these allegations, Estrada became the first Philippine president and public official to be successfully impeached under the new constitution (Gatmaytan 2006). In his impeachment trial televised by major networks in the country, the Senate voted against the examination of evidence that prosecutors claimed would have convicted Estrada (Kasuya 2003). The public was angered by the Senate's decision and took to the streets the call for Estrada's resignation. The public uproar was

so strong that Estrada, shortly thereafter, left the Presidential Palace. By then, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the vice president during that time, had taken the presidential oath (Gatmaytan 2006).

The focus of the paper shall be on EDSA II, as studying the intricate dynamics of its mobilization, activity, and success provides a compelling contribution to the existing literature on people power movements. EDSA I (1986) and EDSA II (2001) people power mobilizations differ as the former occurred in a non-democratic context while the latter in a democratic context. Also, EDSA I is lauded as a crucial agent of Philippine democratization, whereas EDSA II, as Gatmaytan (2006, p. 2) comments, “hovers over the political horizon as a reminder to incumbent public officials that election results in the Philippines are subject to a subsequent veto by the people and that public officials can be recalled through spontaneous popular uprisings.”

EDSA II VIS-À-VIS POLITICAL PROCESS THEORY

EDSA II marked the ouster of former Philippine president Estrada. In terms of mobilization and outcomes, political opportunity structures, strength of indigenous organizations, and the people’s sense of cognitive liberation all contributed to the emergence and success of the movement.

While I believe that these three dimensions are equally important, I argue that the sense of cognitive liberation among the Filipinos played a more central role in mobilizing people to join EDSA II and achieving the intended outcomes of the movement. My argument is premised on the fact that the substance of liberal democracy in the Philippines remained lacking for so long that maintaining a minimalist and formalistic standard of democracy is no longer sufficient to maintain people’s trust in the legitimacy of the government. The Filipinos have long

desired for a democracy where institutions and processes would respond to and consider their needs with greater effectiveness (Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2003).

Structure of political opportunities

In terms of the polity’s *degree of openness or closure*, the government under the Estrada administration offered openings for political decision-making. As Estrada was democratically-elected, the democratic setting of the time offered opportunities for openness. After the 1986 People Power Revolution (EDSA I), there were two successful turnovers of power, as evidenced by the 1992 and 1998 national elections, which are considered a mark of democratic consolidation. Tarrow (1998) also argues that elections provide the opening and expansion of access to political actors, both old and new.

The second element of political opportunity structures is *the instability of political alignments and apparent division among the elites*. As defining characteristics of Philippine politics, weak party system and political turncoatism were contributing factors to Estrada’s demise as president.

As Article XI, Section 3 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution stipulates, the House of Representatives (i.e. the Lower House) holds the exclusive power to initiate all cases of impeachment. When at least one-third of the members of the House affirms the articles of impeachment, the Senate (i.e. the Upper House), acting as the impeachment court, tries and decides the case. When the impeachment complaint against Estrada was filed before the Lower House, it was expected to fail as majority of the members of the Lower House (161 members out of 220, to be precise) were Estrada’s allies and fellow party members (Kasuya 2003). However, within three weeks’ time, the impeachment pushed through as a considerable number of Estrada’s allies defected from the party line

and joined the opposition parties. The most notable among the defectors was Manuel Villar, who was then the House Speaker and known as an ardent Estrada supporter at that time. Prior to this, elite support for Estrada had already been waning. Chavit Singson, Estrada's longtime friend and staunch supporter, was the whistleblower of the so-called *Juetengate* scandal, where he publicly divulged that the former president siphoned off billions of Philippine pesos coming from syndicate groups that ran illegal businesses in the country (Hutchcroft & Rocamora 2003; Kasuya 2003; Gatmaytan 2006). Upon knowing this, vice president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo resigned from Estrada's Cabinet. Calls for Estrada to resign, by this time, were starting to intensify and the protest groups' social base was broadening. As Estrada was left with no robust party and elite support to hold onto, it did not take too much time for protests and demonstrations calling for his resignation to take off.

The *presence of influential allies and support groups* for the movement, as the third element of political opportunity structures, is embodied by the Catholic Church and prominent business associations publicly calling for Estrada's resignation (Hutchcroft & Rocamora 2003; Kasuya 2003). The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippine and Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Manila both issued statements that condemned Estrada's scandals and misconduct. Jaime Cardinal Sin, former Archbishop of Manila who is regarded as an influential figure during the EDSA I movement and the fall of Marcos dictatorship in 1986, released his own statement asking Estrada to resign. Since their economic interests were at stake, business associations such as the Makati Business Club, whose members include the owners of the largest Filipino corporations, took leadership roles and even organized street demonstrations alongside other groups (Kasuya 2003). Leftist groups and opposition parties in the

Congress were equally vocal about Estrada's resignation.

Lastly, the *decline of the state's repressive capacities* became evident when the military and police both withdrew its support from the administration. These secretary of the Department of National Defense, chief commander of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and chief of the Philippine National Police, had all at once resigned from their posts in a televised coverage. Their resignation was viewed to have been influenced by former defense secretary and retired General Fortunato Abat, who was a pivotal force within the military during this time (Symonds 2001). More so, some news reports stated that prior to their resignation, the military chiefs were already in contact with the Arroyo camp, planning for Estrada's ouster (Symonds 2001). Due to this announcement, protesters in the EDSA Shrine swelled in numbers and the volume of people in the shrine began to pour. As Kasuya (2003) writes, "the enormity of street unrest compelled the military and police forces to unanimously defect" (p. 56).

Strength of indigenous organizations

The indigenous organizational strength in EDSA II mobilization was remarkable. Three leadership groups were deemed pivotal for street mobilization prior and during the movement. These are the Catholic Church, leftist groups, and business associations (Hutchcroft & Rocamora 2003; Kasuya 2003). The influence of these groups goes beyond the scope of the protest movement.

The endorsement of the movement by the Catholic Church gave Filipinos, especially Catholics, a sense of moral ground to participate in the protests. For instance, the Presbyteral Council wrote a statement calling on the Catholics to participate in peaceful forms of expressing indignation against the incumbent government (Kasuya 2003). Prayer rallies were held at religious sites and

several statements were issued calling for the active involvement of the faithful in the resign-Estrada movement. Church leaders encouraged people to join the protests “until evil is conquered by good” (Kasuya 2003, p. 59).

Leftist groups were already critical of the Estrada administration long before EDSA II was organized. Kasuya (2003) states that among these leftist groups, the *Sandigan ng Lakas at Demokrasya ng Sambayanan* (Court of Citizen’s Authority and Democracy) and *Kongreso ng Mamamayang Pilipino* (Citizen’s Congress of the Philippines) are among those that provided the most influence in broadening the movement’s base and providing participation and leadership guidance for the movement.

As already mentioned, business associations such as the Makati Business Club, arguably the most prominent among these associations, took leadership roles and provided necessary resources, financial and otherwise, for the benefit of the movement. Pro-Estrada business associations had soon joined the clamor and organized street demonstrations that were in consonance with the movement (Kasuya 2003).

Sense of cognitive liberation

In any protest movement, internal motivations, albeit understudied by scholars (Flam & King 2005), assume an important role for movement mobilization and attainment of intended objectives. Participants of the movement must share a belief that the current political system lacks legitimacy and they can bring about change only if they act upon the issue collectively. EDSA II is a brilliant example of a movement where people’s frustrations with the inadequacies of their government in particular, and the political system in general, have crystallized to the point of social unrest.

The sense of cognitive liberation among EDSA II participants is made more manifest

by the crisis of Philippine democracy wrought by the country’s dark authoritarian past and a system marred by the inherent flaws in the Philippine political system evolving over time, such as weak state autonomy, defective political party system, dominance of political dynasties, and patronage-oriented politics (Anderson 1988; Magno 1989; Sidel 1989; Kerkvliet 1995; Hutchcroft & Rocamora 2003; Dressel 2011). It must be emphasized that this crisis is not due to the public losing its trust in the fundamental values of democracy, but “is manifested, rather, in a deepening frustration over the inability of democratic institutions to deliver the goods, specifically goods of a public character” (Hutchcroft & Rocamora 2003, p. 260). The restoration of democracy in 1986 remained “democracy in form but not always in function” (Mydans 2001), as political institutions from the national level down to the local level were still driven by corruption and patronage.

The first aspect of cognitive liberation in relation to EDSA II is *the attribution of group conditions to systemic rather than individual inadequacies*. These systemic inadequacies did not exclusively materialize during Estrada’s presidency but continued to be a glaring weakness of Philippine democracy after the fall of Marcos’ authoritarian rule. This implies that the weaknesses in the political system were deeply entrenched in its structure; hence, addressing it required political will and serious commitment to the government mandate. When President Corazon Aquino came into power through the historic People Power Revolution (EDSA I), there were high hopes for restored democracy in the country, only to be crushed when oligarchical politics was reinstated. Democratic structures were characterized by particularistic demands coming from the ruling oligarchy and the newly formed parties that emerged were oriented towards patronage, coalition of local elites, non-ideological character, and constantly shifting

membership (Hutchcroft & Rocamora 2003). In 1992, Fidel Ramos succeeded Aquino and promised stronger reform initiatives and robust development plans, but the economy's laggard status persisted and Ramos' reliance on oligarchies did not bring much of a solution to the country's deepening economic crisis. Tired of being led by technocrats, millions of Filipinos, especially those from the low-income classes, enthusiastically supported the presidential candidacy of Joseph Estrada, who with his populist rhetoric had won the vote of the masses. As it turned out, Estrada was nothing short of a traditional politician who used his strong following among the masses as political leverage and went on to redistribute patronage among friends and family (Hutchcroft & Rocamora 2003; Gatmaytan 2006).

The failures of the system as attributed to the Estrada administration facilitated collective pressures from societal groups whose interests were long relegated to the sidelines (Hutchcroft & Rocamora 2003). History shows that the degree of attribution of grievances by the populace to the system is not surprising, given that time and again Philippine politics had ostensibly worked in favor of the ruler and not of those who are ruled.

The second aspect, i.e. the *definition of unjust conditions that can be altered through collective action*, can be seen when the Senate during Estrada's impeachment trial voted against opening a sealed envelope that supposedly contained damning evidence for Estrada's conviction. In a nationwide survey, about 90% of middle-class respondents viewed the Senate decision as unjust (Kasuya 2003). The unjust conditions, it must be clarified, are not limited to procedural dimensions but were also present in functional dimensions. Hutchcroft & Rocamora (2003) argue that the Philippines during the Estrada presidency suffered from a high democratic deficit caused by the government's longstanding failure to

effectively deliver public goods. The widening gap between the rich and the poor, alongside a host of political, economic, and institutional deficiencies, made participation in EDSA II compelling. In a system driven considerably by patronage, a weak political party system, and political institutions long hostile to the interests of the marginalized, collective action was viewed not just as one of the options available for the aggrieved public to use when the need arises but rather as the final resort.

EVALUATING THE POLITICAL PROCESS THEORY

While the political process theory provides cogent points in analyzing movement mobilization and outcomes, some noteworthy points need to be addressed. I focus on the explanatory weight of the three dimensions that were identified in the preceding section.

I argue that cognitive liberation played a much more important role than political opportunities and indigenous organizational strength. While political process theorists typically place equal weight on all these three dimensions (Smith and Pagnucco 1992), the case of EDSA II proves otherwise. In their study of the 1989 Chinese student movements as analyzed from the political process model, Smith & Pagnucco (1992) write:

While a favorable structure of political opportunities is key in allowing for the development of social movements, McAdam notes that 'in the absence of a shared account supporting collective action [i.e., cognitive liberation], it is highly unlikely that people will be willing to expend time and energy on the other mobilization processes.' In other words, changes in the political opportunity structure simply provide the 'cognitive cues' that – when defined or 'framed' in a way that allows aggrieved groups to identify their situation as unjust and mutable – trigger cognitive liberation

processes and facilitate the emergence of movement activity (p. 178).

That EDSA II occurred in the context of democracy ensures availability of political opportunity structures that are not usually readily accessible in non-democratic contexts. Democratic regimes present a favorable political environment where collective action can be utilized as a means to voice indignation against an oppressive ruling order. But even with the absence of political opportunity structures and a gamut of strong indigenous organizations, popular mobilization will still be possible if there are dominant claims on the political system's lack of legitimacy and a recognition that the government is not anymore capable of fulfilling its mandate. Although it remains true that political opportunities and organizations can be used for resource mobilization, the sense of cognitive liberation allows the aggrieved community to make sense of their shared reality and come up with a common goal to remedy systemic flaws through group action. Without this, having a constellation of political opportunities and indigenous organizational strength would not suffice for successful movement mobilization.

It might appear that I am privileging an agent-centered view of movement mobilization and activity rather than structural. I argue, however, that this sense of cognitive liberation among EDSA II participants shows the enmeshing of agency and structure, a product of how they perceive both the realities of their society and their own in the context of the prevailing political environment of the time. Here, I am reminded of Anthony Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration, which argues that society and individuals are in relationship with each other. People can make choices and exercise their agency on their own but these choices are facilitated by who they are and by their situation at the time of making the choice. The sense of cognitive liberation then becomes a more

potent factor because the Filipino populace have long been subject to an environment that paints them a contradictory picture of what an effective democracy should be, i.e. one that is able to consider their socio-economic grievances and address them accordingly. Internal motivations matter because political opportunities and the presence of potential movement networks can only do so much to sustain the movement until desired outcomes are reached. In the case of EDSA II, when the political system's incapacity to serve the public interest bordered on the pathological, cognitive liberation propelled the people to create an alternative reality favorable to them. When the sense of cognitive liberation became so strong, rendering it as a force to reckon with, the opening up of political opportunities and receiving support from indigenous organizations became inevitable in EDSA II.

CONCLUSION

Most studies on people power movements have problematized their emergence and outcomes in authoritarian contexts, but the paper departs from this focus and instead offers an analysis of people power movements in a democratic context. The paper chooses the EDSA II movement in the Philippines as a case study and analyzes it from the perspective of political process theory.

EDSA II movement's mobilization, activity, and success can be attributed to the constellation of political opportunities that were accessible to the movement, the presence of strong indigenous organizations that supported the aggrieved community, and the strong sense of cognitive liberation among the participants of the movement. But as can be gleaned from the Philippine case, the reasons why Filipinos participated in the movement have more to do with the meanings they attached to their external political environment, which was characterized by high democratic deficit and lack of effectiveness to respond to people's

needs. As such, the sense of cognitive liberation, among the three dimensions, is the most significant factor in the mobilization, activity, and success of the EDSA II movement, as it takes into account the agency of the movement participants, and at the same time considers the structural-political context that facilitates the actors' interpretation of their present reality and aspirations of creating an alternative, more favorable one.

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