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Achieving Reforms in Oligarchical Democracies: The Role of Leadership and Coalitions in the Philippines

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The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) is an international research initiative that aims to increase understanding of the political processes that drive or constrain development. DLP's work focuses on the crucial role of home-grown leaderships and coalitions in forging legitimate institutions that promote developmental outcomes. DLP's independent program of research is supported by the Australian aid program.

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Executive summary¹

This paper examines the role of developmental leadership in two major reforms introduced in the Philippines in 2012: the passage into law in December of excise tax reform which significantly raised taxes on cigarettes and alcohol – generally referred to as the Sin Tax Reform – and, in July, the re-registration of voters in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). These reforms have a) strengthened government finances and healthcare; and b) improved the quality of elections and promoted good governance and conflict resolution in the southern Philippines.

These reforms were not achieved exclusively through the executive leadership of Philippine President Benigno Aquino III, this paper argues. A broader form of developmental leadership was critical to their passage into legislation and their subsequent implementation, comprising reform coalitions that incorporated elements of government, the legislature, and civil society. While these coalitions were diverse and flexible in their form and composition, their core strength came from established advocacy groups and experienced activists. These groups and activists used highly labour-intensive, specialized and complex forms of mobilization.

The success of these reform coalitions, it is argued, has implications for economic and governance reform in the developing world, particularly in systems characterised by oligarchical democracy, where competition for elected office is closely linked to the entrenched interests of business and industry.

Methodology

This paper is based on iterative participatory ‘action research’ in connection with the Coalitions for Change Program in the Philippines, a joint program of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Asia Foundation since April 2012 and continuing to the present.

It is based on more than 20 interviews conducted in April 2013. Interviewees ranged from reform coalition activists to senior officials of the presidential administration, members of Congress and of the Senate, and officials of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Commission on Elections, the Philippine National Police. It also draws on a review of documentation including policy and research papers, copies of draft legislation, extensive transcripts of congressional hearings and election records. Press reports, internet text and video postings were also monitored and analyzed.

Help with interviews and access to documents was given by the Asia Foundation and, in the Philippines, DFAT and the two key advocacy groups involved in the reforms – Action for Economic Reforms, and the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting.

Key findings

The success of the two reforms can in part be explained by leadership in its narrowest sense, the presidential leadership of Benigno Aquino III who has a reputation as a ‘reformist’.

¹ The author would like to thank Jaime Faustino, Steve Hogg, Heather Marquette, and Steve Rood for their insightful comments, questions, and suggestions for revision on successive drafts of this paper. The remaining errors, limitations, and shortcomings of this paper remain the responsibility of the author alone.

However, even in a national context where presidential powers and prerogatives are especially strong, this paper shows that narrowly construed forms of executive leadership do not explain the Philippines' 2012 reform achievements. The efforts of reform coalitions were crucial in helping President Aquino overcome considerable resistance to the changes.

These coalitions drew together disparate elements within the Aquino Administration, Congress and civil society. They mobilized various forms of support: behind-the-scenes lobbying, number-crunching, Powerpoint presentations, intelligence-gathering in the halls of Congress, monitoring electoral wards in rural areas and far-flung islands, and multimedia productions on radio, television, websites and in the blogosphere. This all helped to:

- set the stage for reform initiatives;
- stimulate coordination among disparate actors and interests;
- communicate with audiences likely to support the reforms;
- use highly labour-intensive forms of mobilization to overcome resistance to change and ensure reforms were implemented.

These reforms were in large measure the product of strong executive leadership: A crucial determinant of change, and the driving force behind these reforms, was the Aquino Administration.

However, even with strong government leadership, reform coalitions were key to the successful drafting of legislation and implementation of the new laws: The Aquino Administration relied on encouragement and assistance from coalitions to enact and implement the reforms, demonstrating that developmental leadership in the Philippines is made up of various branches of government and elements of civil society.

Reform coalitions were not necessarily made up entirely of reformers, and political compromises and alliances of convenience were necessary: The success of the 2012 reforms was achieved through a highly complex political process that required collaboration with a wide variety of actors.

The reform process was highly labour-intensive and required committed activists from experienced advocacy groups to bring the process to fruition.

Success required careful and continued attention not only to legislation, but also to implementation: Activists were vigilant and worked hard after the reforms were drafted and after they were given legal status to make sure they were not watered down.

The emergence of reform activists and advocacy groups in the Philippines had been a long-term process: The success of the Philippine reform coalitions depended not only on the activists' commitment to these issues, but also on their accumulated experience from earlier reform campaigns in the country.

Policy implications

What are the implications for international development agencies and other proponents of reform? What tactics are likely to work best in similar contexts?

Monitoring changing signals from a government makes it possible to exploit openings to exert influence and encourage action: Proponents of reform who are closely attentive – and adaptive – to shifts in government reform agendas and approaches are likely to have the most success, especially if they consistently work to expand access to policy-makers.

A government's own reform agenda may be more effective if assisted by reform coalitions: Reform coalitions can supplement an incumbent government's political resources to help advance reform.

Reform initiatives do not have to be confined to 'backstopping' the reform agendas of incumbent governments and ruling parties: Playing this kind of supportive role can of course produce concrete results, but the Philippine reforms of 2012 demonstrate that it is possible for reform coalitions to be proactive instead of confining themselves to the agenda of an incumbent government.

Reform achievements are difficult to plan or predict, and reform movements are complicated, often throwing up uncertainty and ambiguity: As demonstrated by this case study, pragmatic alliances may have to be made with unlikely partners – another reason why flexibility is a valuable asset for reformers.

A few experienced, well-connected partners can mobilize large-scale support: Successful advocacy coalitions require a small cadre of committed activists with expertise, access, and a common vision.

Local activists are likely to have valuable experience and expertise: The best activists know what they are doing and may need very little costly guidance or 'incentivizing' from international development agencies.

Activists are created through the political process of campaigns for reform: Beyond the concrete, measurable achievements of each reform, there is a longer-term legacy that provides the foundations for future reform campaigns.

Reform coalitions and the process of reform can benefit from consistent long-term support, rather than episodic support for each individual campaign: Campaigns come and go but reform coalitions that have long-term support can strengthen the implementation of any reform victory, and sustain the broader infrastructure for further reforms in the future.

Introduction

Over the course of 2012, two important reforms were achieved in the Philippines. The first of these achievements was the so-called Sin Tax Reform, a bill passed by the Philippine Congress and signed into law by President Benigno Aquino III in December 2012. This law dramatically raised excise taxes on cigarettes and, to a somewhat lesser extent, alcohol. The second of these achievements was the re-registration of voters – and the drastic reduction of ‘ghost voters’ from the electoral rolls – in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in July 2012. While highly selective in focus, the first reform achieved qualitative advances for revenue collection and healthcare, and the second improved the integrity of elections. The two reforms also represented victories over entrenched anti-reform interests, whether the tobacco industry with its strong allies in Congress or long-time mayors, governors, and congressional representatives in the southern Philippines.

This paper has been written to provide an explanation for these reforms in the Philippine context and to examine the implications for policy-makers and other proponents of reform elsewhere across the developing world. On the one hand, as discussed in the pages below, these two reforms can in part be explained in terms of leadership, in the narrow sense of presidential leadership on the part of Benigno Aquino III. Both reforms, as we shall see, were undertaken at the initiative of the President, with investment of political capital and fiscal resources necessary to enable their achievement. Viewed from this perspective, the two reforms provide confirmation both of Aquino’s reputation as a ‘reformist’ in the Philippine context (Thompson, 2010) and, more importantly, of theories and practices emphasizing the role of executive – national or local – leadership for the achievement of reforms in developing countries in general (Lyne de Ver, 2008). Whether such leadership itself is attributed to structures of incentives and opportunities, socialization, social context and social forces, or the vagaries of human agency, ability, and inclination, the determining factor for reform is ultimately the nature and extent of personal leadership, by presidents or prime ministers, governors or mayors (Lyne de Ver, 2009).

On the other hand, however, as further discussed below, these two reforms must also be understood in terms of a broader conception of developmental leadership, as explored and extended by the Developmental Leadership Program in recent years (Leftwich and Hogg, 2007; Leftwich and Wheeler, 2011). Developmental leadership is defined here as the agency and skills of individuals, organizations, and coalitions in crafting strategies and engaging in collective action to build and/or reform the formal and informal institutions that enable sustainable economic growth, human security, good governance, and social development.

The two reforms of 2012 in the Philippines owed much to the active efforts of reform coalitions to help President Aquino overcome considerable obstacles and resistance by anti-reform forces. These reform coalitions drew together disparate elements within the Aquino Administration, Congress, and civil society, and also used preceding experiences and achievements of reform to help place these reforms on the President’s agenda and to help set the stage for reform campaigns. Over the course of 2012, moreover, these reform coalitions engaged in intensive activity to coordinate various forms of mobilization in support of the two reforms, ranging from behind-the-scenes lobbying, number-crunching, PowerPoint presentations, and intelligence-gathering in the halls of Congress to precinct-watching in the remote islands of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, and multimedia productions on radio, television, websites and the blogosphere. Finally, over the course of 2013, these reform coalitions began to remobilize to ensure the implementation of the reforms achieved in 2012 and to explore possibilities for further reforms. Overall, this paper argues that the achievement of important reforms in the Philippines in 2012 and their implementation in 2013 demonstrate the importance of coalitions for advancing reforms in developing countries.

This paper is based on a national context where presidential powers and prerogatives are especially strong, under a president who demonstrated developmental leadership, and a set of reforms which his administration actively promoted. Even under such decidedly propitious conditions, the paper shows, narrowly construed forms of executive leadership and purely ‘top-down’ modes of analyzing the impetus for change do not sufficiently explain these reform achievements. Instead this paper shows how reform coalitions played crucial roles in a) setting the stage for reform initiatives, b) stimulating and facilitating

coordination among disparate actors and interests and communication to supportive audiences in support of the reforms, and c) undertaking highly labour-intensive forms of mobilization to overcome resistance to reforms and ensure reform implementation. Even under conditions of strong presidential leadership, it is thus concluded, coalitions play a necessary role in the making of reforms.

In arguing for the importance of reform coalitions, this paper draws on previous research and writings by Leftwich and others working with the Developmental Leadership Program, as well as a broader body of related scholarship (Leftwich and Laws, 2012). Here it is particularly worth noting the 'advocacy coalition framework' developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, on the one hand, and the literature on 'bootleggers and Baptists' first developed by Yandle, on the other. As with Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's account, the reform coalitions observed in the two Philippine cases demonstrate the importance of advocacy groups who have an abiding focus on, and commitment to, the advancement of policy changes in the public interest (Sabatier, 1987; Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). But as with the 'bootleggers and Baptists' who famously coalesced to promote Sunday restrictions on the sale of alcohol in various American states in the early twentieth century, these advocacy groups forge coalitions which align their reformist goals, however briefly and opportunistically, with the narrower aims and advantages sought by special-interest groups (i.e. the 'bootleggers') (Yandle, 1983; Yandle, 1999). Thus as they evolve and expand, reform coalitions interact with and absorb decidedly non-reformist elements. Reforms are not made by reformists alone. But at the core of these reform coalitions are reform activists who are highly committed, full-time, experienced, and knowledgeable, and who play a crucial if not starring role in achieving – and implementing – reforms otherwise so often and so easily ascribed to 'leadership' in the narrow sense of the term. This is the core finding of the case studies of recent reforms in the Philippines, and the core lesson of potential interest and value for policy-makers and others interested in promoting reforms of various kinds across the developing world.

This paper is the result of iterative, participatory 'action research' in connection with the Coalition for Change in the Philippines, a joint program of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Asia Foundation.² The paper is written on the basis of more than 20 interviews and hundreds of pages of documentation. The interviews were conducted in April 2013 and ranged from reform coalition activists to senior Aquino Administration officials; members of Congress and senators; and officials of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Commission on Elections, and the Philippine National Police. Documentation includes policy and research papers, copies of draft legislation, extensive transcripts of congressional hearings, election records, and press reports, along with Internet postings, including videos. Interviews and access to documentary materials were facilitated by the offices of the Asia Foundation and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Manila, and by the activists of Action for Economic Reforms (AER) and the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV), the two key advocacy groups whose activities and achievements in 2012-2013 are treated at length in the pages below.

Before examining these episodes of reform, it is necessary to situate them within the specific context of the Philippines, so as to suggest both the distinctiveness of this particular setting and its potential relevance for other countries elsewhere across the developing world.

2 A separate methodology paper on iterative action research in the study of developmental leadership is currently being written and will soon be made available on the DLP website in 2014. More papers on the Coalitions for Change in the Philippines program will follow as well in due course.

1

Context for reform: Oligarchical democracy in the Philippines

The political backdrop for the reforms of 2012–2013 in the Philippines is that of an oligarchical democracy.³ The Philippines has its own distinctive institutional and social specificities but is also amply emblematic of an increasingly common kind of polity found across the developing world. Under oligarchical democracy in the Philippines, as elsewhere, lively competition for elected office combines with the entrenched interests of an oligarchy and the importance of machinery and money in voter mobilization to present a mixed set of opportunities and obstacles for economic and political reform.

In institutional terms, Philippine democracy has in large measure followed the model the United States imported and imposed during the period of American colonial democracy in the early twentieth century, with a directly elected president, a bicameral legislature, and local powers devolved to directly elected municipal and city mayors and provincial governors. As in the US, the bureaucracy is weakly insulated from intervention by elected officials, whether the President and Congress at the national level, or mayors and governors at the local level. Elections are based on a 'winner takes all' principle rather than proportional representation. Presidentialism, the early introduction of competitive electoral politics (first locally, then nationally) prior to independence and industrialization, and the absence of a period of mass mobilization against colonial rule have combined to prefigure a weak political party system. Parties do not have explicit policy platforms, mass memberships, or internal discipline, and both cross-party alliances and party-switching are very common in politicians' careers.

In institutional terms, Philippine democracy is distinguished by decentralization, by peculiar features of its bicameral legislature, and by the strength of the presidency. In line with the Local Government Code of 1991, directly elected mayors and governors enjoy considerable discretion over local agencies of the state, in the appointment of personnel (such as police chiefs, school superintendents, district engineers) and the allocation of budgetary resources. Special provisions for regional autonomy have been in place in the southern Philippines under the auspices of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which is due to be replaced by a new autonomous 'Bangsamoro regional entity' over the next few years. In the Congress, some 20% of the 289 seats in the House of Representatives are occupied by representatives of parties elected on a national basis, but otherwise members of Congress represent specific local districts across the archipelago, serving three-year terms. The Senate, by contrast, consists of 24 nationally elected members, serving six-year terms (Hodder, 2005).

Presidents serve single six-year terms but command considerable powers vis-à-vis the House of Representatives and the Senate. The 1987 Constitution preserved the presidential prerogative of the line-item veto over appropriations, revenue, and tariff bills, and to date not a single presidential veto has ever been overridden by Congress. Alongside this form of executive interference and influence vis-à-vis the congressional budgetary process, presidents enjoy great discretionary power over the disbursement of congressional appropriations, including the 'pork barrel' allocations of individual members of Congress, and over funds largely shielded from congressional oversight. Small wonder that successive presidents have enjoyed control over the House of Representatives, with most members of Congress aligning with the incumbent administration and backing the president's choice for House Speaker. Given their nation-wide constituencies, their staggered six-year terms, and their smaller numbers, senators have been less amenable to presidential control. Indeed, Senators have made use of their membership on the bicameral Commission on Appointments, their investigative powers, and their control over the legislative process to exert leverage over – and extract favours from – the President (Hodder, 2005).

Beyond these specific institutional features, democracy in the broader social and political context of the Philippines bears a general resemblance to structures of oligarchy and practices of corruption and rent-seeking found elsewhere in many parts of the developing world (Winters, 2011). Given the persistence of poverty and economic insecurity among the broad

³ Winters defines oligarchy as a set of actors "who command and control massive concentrations of material resources that can be deployed to defend or enhance their personal wealth and exclusive social position." (Winters 2011: 6). An 'oligarchical democracy' can be defined as a political system whose institutional structures and electoral contests are directly or indirectly dominated by such an oligarchy.

mass of the population, and the continuing importance of state resources and regulatory powers in the economy, electoral competition revolves largely around money and other parochial and particularistic economic benefits. At the local level, voters are mostly mobilized through a combination of monetary, clientelistic, and coercive inducements and pressures, in a wedding cake-like structure of vote brokerage and intermediation. In some towns and provinces, mayors, members of Congress, and governors have succeeded in constructing extensive local political machines and diversified economic empires, as seen in high rates of incumbency, the entrenchment of 'dynasties', and the weakness – or absence – of effective opposition and turnover (McCoy, 2009). The House of Representatives is dominated by such provincial dynasties, with congressional seats serving as vantage points for the promotion of family business interests, and the manipulation of state resources and regulatory powers in their districts and beyond. Well-heeled corporate lawyers and nationally renowned machine politicians have loomed large in the Senate, serving as brokers for the diverse business interests of the Philippines's entrenched oligarchy, ranging from agro-business to banking, construction, consumer goods, industry, inter-island shipping, mining, real-estate, telecommunications, and (privatized) public utilities (Coronel, 2004).

With electoral politics confined to politicians with access to the money and machinery needed for voter mobilization, elected officials in the Philippines are unsurprisingly concerned above all else with obtaining – and exploiting – access to state resources and regulatory powers for particularistic benefit, whether for purposes of securing re-election, advancing their family business interests, or assisting financial backers. The structural imperative of fund-raising for elections bolsters the structural power of entrenched business interests and their privileged influence over policy, contracts, and regulatory and tax breaks. Democracy in the Philippines thus works to reinforce and reproduce forms of monopoly at the local level and forms of oligopoly in many sectors of the national economy (Sidel, 1999; Hutchcroft, 1998).

Yet alongside the self-perpetuating and self-limiting tendencies of oligarchical democracy in the Philippines are dynamics and forces driving economic and political change. Over the years, industrialization, urbanization, economic diversification, overseas migration, and the expansion of the urban middle class have weakened the linkages between local politicians and their constituencies, diminishing the importance of patron-client relations as well as the possibilities for monopolistic forms of control over local economies. With nearly universal literacy, mass education and access to national media, and, more recently, computerization of elections, the linkages between local-level machine politicians and candidates for national office have become increasingly attenuated, if not fully decoupled. With the extension of mass media has come the triumph of polling, 'public opinion', and personality/popularity politics, as seen in the prominence of celebrities – movie/television personalities and sports stars – in the ranks of the Senate and the election of the much loved movie actor Joseph 'Erap' Estrada to the presidency in 1998. Whether 'reformist' or 'populist' in inflection, candidates for national office must now appeal directly to the national electorate – in the media, and in the polls – to become sufficiently 'bankable' to win the backing of major financiers and to achieve a bandwagon effect among vote-brokering local machine politicians across the archipelago (Hedman, 2010).

At the same time, the constellation of economic interests entrenched under oligarchical democracy has also shifted with industrialization, urbanization, and liberalization of trade and finance in the Philippines. Alongside the 'rents' and profits to be garnered from monopolistic and oligopolistic practices and privileged access to state resources and regulatory powers are the broader benefits of economic growth through increased consumer demand and purchasing power, rising real-estate and stock-market share prices, and growing opportunities for investment, production, services, and sales. With this deepening and broadening 'addiction to growth' comes the evolution and expansion of interest in the competitiveness of the Philippines in global trade and investment, the creditworthiness of the Philippines in the eyes of the international financial markets, the openness, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness of various sectors of the Philippine economy, and the efficacy and reliability of Philippine government policies and practices (Hedman and Sidel, 2000: 65-117).

Against the backdrop of these ongoing structural shifts in the economy, society, and politics, oligarchical democracy in the Philippines has experienced a range of challenges and transformations. From 1972 until 1986, democracy gave way to an unprecedented experiment in authoritarian rule under long-time president Ferdinand Marcos, leading to a profound economic, political and social crisis in the mid-1980s. This crisis gave rise to diverse forms of political mobilization, ranging from left-wing organizing efforts among peasants, workers and urban slum-dwellers, through revolutionary guerrilla warfare, to more conservative campaigns for reform promoted by business, the Catholic Church, and the urban middle class. Such mobilization largely subsided with the restoration of oligarchical democracy in 1986, only to return to the fore in another wave of mobilization in 2000-2001 during the brief presidency of the quasi-populist Joseph Estrada (1998-2001) (Hedman, 2006).

After nearly a decade under Estrada's successor, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2001-2010), pent-up pressures for change once again came to the surface with the election of Benigno Aquino III to the presidency in 2010. The son of former president Corazon Aquino (1986-1992) and the scion of a dynasty known for its vast landholdings and diversified business empire, Aquino's election in many ways signalled continuity and conservatism within the confines of oligarchical democracy in the Philippines. But Aquino won the presidency in the country's first automated, computerized election, with a landslide victory untainted by the allegations of fraud which had haunted his predecessor.

Aquino's victory in the presidential campaign had, moreover, come in the context of growing dissatisfaction with the avarice and authoritarian tendencies of the Macapagal-Arroyo administration, in the wake of his mother's death from cancer in 2009,

and in something of a nostalgic re-enactment of the passing of the presidency from the dictatorial Ferdinand Marcos to the democratic Corazon Aquino in 1986. With his slogan 'kung walang corrupt, walang mahirap' ['if no one is corrupt, no one will be poor' or 'if there's no corruption, there won't be any poverty'], Aquino promised good, clean governance as a recipe for poverty reduction, thus inspiring some hope for reform (Thompson, 2010).

Thus, against the backdrop of an entrenched system of oligarchical democracy in the Philippines, the election of Benigno Aquino III to the presidency set the stage for the reform achievements of 2012 and further efforts at reform implementation in 2013. The 'reformist' Aquino, it seems clear, provided the crucial ingredient of presidential leadership. Yet these reforms required not only presidential leadership by Aquino, but also the active mobilization of a set of reform coalitions in the Philippines, drawing on earlier waves of activism and achievement as well as accumulated access and experience, as detailed in the pages below.

2

'Sin Tax' reform

The first of the two major reform achievements of 2012 worthy of consideration was the passage of the 'Sin Tax' Reform bill by the Philippine Congress and its enactment into law as Republic Act 10351 in late December 2012. The new law dramatically raised excise taxes on cigarettes and on alcohol, with the lion's share of revenues earmarked for the government's public health care programme. In examining 'Sin Tax' Reform, it is first necessary to evaluate the significance of this reform measure, with 'reform' in the context of economics, health, and politics. More importantly, however, the process of reform legislation itself merits careful examination, with close attention to the complex dynamics of coalitional politics and the specific contribution of Action for Economic Reforms (AER) to the successful passage of the bill and the ongoing effort to craft implementing rules and regulations for the new law.

The significance of the Sin Tax Reform in the Philippine context can be understood in economic, health, and political terms.

In economic terms, the importance of the reform lies in its identification and exploitation of a source for expanded tax revenue collection which can be effectively and increasingly tapped in years to come without deterring investment and economic growth. The Philippines, after all, is a country which has been identified by the World Bank as caught in a 'low-revenue, low-expenditure trap', with tax revenues declining from 17% to 12.8% of GDP from 1997 to 2009, and two-thirds of this revenue decline has been caused by falling collections from excise taxes not indexed to inflation. Public spending in priority areas like basic education, health, and transport has likewise declined as a share of GDP, comparing unfavourably to other countries in the region. Rising revenue and expenditure shortfalls have hampered the Philippines' efforts to attract investment, boost economic growth, reduce poverty, enhance competitiveness, and achieve other sustainable developmental goals through improvements to public infrastructure and upgrading of human capital (World Bank, 2011).

Despite the passage of the Expanded Value Added Tax (E-VAT) Law in 2005 (Bernardo and Tang, 2013), these trends deepened over the administration of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2001-2010), leading to a belated effort to improve government revenue collection under the leadership of President Benigno Aquino III (2010 to the present). The first two years of the Aquino administration witnessed strenuous efforts by Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) Commissioner Kim Henares to improve and expand tax collection, as well as parallel efforts to reduce corruption and inefficiencies in the collection of customs duties and in government procurement and public works projects. These efforts produced some results. By 2012, fiscal prudence had drawn down the government deficit to 2% of GDP and reduce indebtedness. This combined with increasing foreign reserves (US\$76.5 billion) to enhance the Philippines' credit-worthiness and this was reflected in a credit upgrade for the Philippines by leading ratings agencies. Yet even with improved collection and enforcement, tax revenues remained below 13% of GDP, with low government spending continuing to restrict opportunities to protect and promote economic growth (World Bank, 2012).

It is against this backdrop that the economic attractiveness and importance of excise tax ('Sin Tax') reform can be understood. Excise taxes on alcohol and tobacco products are relatively easy and inexpensive to implement, such taxes have been very low in the Philippines, and established patterns of consumption of cigarettes, beer, and spirits allow for relatively reliable calculation of the tens of billions of pesos in annual tax revenues foregone in the past and anticipated in the post-reform years to come. For a president who came into office promising 'no new taxes', a strategy of reforming existing taxes carried obvious appeal (ABS-CBN News, 2010). Given the narrow focus on a small range of consumer products and the concentration of ownership and market share in beer, spirits, and cigarettes in the Philippines, moreover, 'sin taxes' had additional economic advantages and few risks in terms of unanticipated and undesirable knock-on economic consequences.

In the event, the passage of the bill has secured billions of pesos in annual new tax revenue for the government, with a 46% rise in excise tax collections already registered in the first six months of 2013 and legislated tax increases guaranteed to see steady revenue collection growth in the years ahead (Dela Peña, 2013). In the short term, moreover, the passage of the Sin Tax Reform bill in December 2012 has contributed to growing confidence in the Philippines, as seen in the 2013 upgrade to

investment-grade credit status by prominent ratings agencies, as well as continuing rises in foreign direct investment, in share prices on the Philippine stock market, in the strength of the peso, and in overall economic growth in the country (World Bank, 2013).

The Sin Tax Reforms have significant health implications as well. Research on the consequences of excise tax increases on alcohol and cigarette consumption in a wide range of other contexts suggests ample reason for confidence in the inevitability of marked declines in smoking and (to a lesser extent) drinking, along with commensurate reductions in heart disease, lung cancer, and other illnesses (Chaloupka, Grossman and Saffer, 2002; Elder *et al.*, 2010; Levy, Chaloupka and Gitchell, 2004). The earmarking of excise taxes promises a steady and growing stream of revenue to help support and expand the universal healthcare (PhilHealth) program of the Department of Health. Thus the Sin Tax Reform is not simply, as some of its critics allege, a 'revenue bill', but a piece of legislation which is certain to have meaningful and measurable benefits for the health of millions of Filipinos (Dans, 2012; Latuja-Diosana, 2013; Sta. Ana and Latuja, 2010).

However, there are important, if immeasurable, potential political consequences as well. First of all, the passage of the bill has demonstrated that it is possible for reform legislation to overcome resistance from powerful special interests, thus emboldening reformist elements within the administration and beyond. Judging from the 2013 mid-term election results, the passage of the bill would appear to have had its own political rewards, as seen in the strong performance of Aquino's endorsed candidates for local executive and congressional seats and the strengthened position of the Administration in the Senate. Aquino's political gamble for 'reform' – and more revenue – paid off. Secondly, as this paper discusses later in more detail, the passage of the bill has also helped to strengthen the political capacities, knowledge, and connections (and sense of connectedness) among a network of 'reform entrepreneurs' within the administration, in Congress, and in civil society.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly (if subtly), the passage of the bill also promises to strengthen the key link between government revenue collection, on the one hand, and social welfare entitlements for Filipino citizens – and, crucially, Filipino voters – on the other. In this sense, the Sin Tax Reform bill may constitute an important step in the slow, molecular process of democratization in the Philippines. Under oligarchical democracy in the Philippines, votes have long been bought, commanded, or manufactured and delivered up the proverbial food chain of machine politics, and the resources and regulatory powers of the state have long been exploited for particularistic benefits by elected officials and their patrons, clients, families, and cronies. But, as suggested above, Philippine democracy is experiencing, in regular cycles of crisis and re-equilibration and in fits and starts of 'reform', a process of political transformation in which forms of vote brokerage and rent extraction are becoming more attenuated. Direct links between voters and politicians and a sense of universal – rather than discretionary and conditional – entitlement to government benefits and services are growing among the population (Hedman, 2010; Hodder, 2000).

In this sense, the enactment and implementation of the Sin Tax Reform law may have a certain subtle impact or influence on Filipino citizens and voters, as well as Filipino politicians, on their understanding and practice of Philippine democracy. It would be needlessly naïve to think that all the legislated excise tax revenues will be collected and spent on healthcare and other government programs without interference and extraction by rent-seekers of various kinds. But it would also be short-sighted to ignore the potential significance of the close connection between revenue collection and the avowedly universal healthcare program of the government. The Sin Tax Reform law affirms an understanding of the Philippine government as responsible for the social welfare of its citizens, underlines the connection between revenue collection and universal provision of public benefits and services, and thus arguably encourages both politicians and voters to adjust their political calculations and choices in accordance with such understandings and expectations. In this sense, the Sin Tax Reform law encapsulates not only tax reform and health reform, but political reform as well.

Presidential leadership: The 'null hypothesis'

If the significance of the Sin Tax Reform law is fully appreciated, what about the conditions and processes which enabled its passage and are facilitating its implementation? Here the role of a diverse coalition of reformist actors and organizations, most notably the advocacy group Action for Economic Reforms (AER), merits close and careful consideration. But a prior discussion of the 'null hypothesis' is also needed. Could the Sin Tax Reform bill have been passed without the involvement and activism of this reform coalition, and of AER in particular?

Here, at first glance, a strong argument could indeed be made that the Sin Tax Reform law was passed at the insistence of President Aquino and through the efforts of his administration to overcome resistance to the legislation, and thus that it was simply presidential leadership which explains the successful enactment of this piece of reform legislation. Studies of major reform initiatives in a wide variety of contexts, after all, have stressed the central importance of leadership, whether conceived as a set of personal skills and/or predispositions, or a set of resources and relationships structured by constellations of institutions, political parties, and social forces. As already noted above, Philippine democracy is characterized by a

very strong presidency, with the executive enjoying considerable leverage over the legislative branch (especially the House of Representatives) through control over disbursement of pork barrel budgetary allocations and other discretionary powers. The presidential administration is thus capable of overcoming congressional resistance to its legislative agenda. So perhaps the success of the Sin Tax Reform bill was simply due to presidential leadership, to the initiative and efforts of President Aquino, a testimony to his commitment to reform and his capacity to push through the reforms to which he is committed.

Indeed, as emphasized by virtually all the key actors in the Sin Tax Reform bill's passage interviewed by the author in April 2013, President Aquino played a crucial – direct and indirect – role from the beginning to the end of the legislative process. In early-mid 2012, Aquino seized upon excise tax reform as a piece of priority legislation, cleverly timing this initiative to precede the 2013 mid-term election campaign so as to maximize his leverage with legislators in both houses of Congress. Aquino had identified the bill as a priority in the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) meeting in August 2011, and it was the secretary-general of Aquino's Liberal Party, then House Majority Leader and Appropriations Committee Chair Representative, Emilio 'Jun' Abaya (now Secretary of Transportation and Communication), who sponsored the original bill in the House of Representatives.

Aquino communicated his commitment to the excise tax reform bill to members of Congress and senators throughout the legislative process and deputized cabinet secretaries and other key figures in the executive branch to oversee and ensure the progress of the legislation as it moved from the House of Representatives to the Senate, and into the bicameral conference committee that ironed out differences between the versions of the bill passed by each house of Congress. Key figures with a direct line to Aquino could and did invoke his name as they persuaded legislators to support the Administration's line. Aquino likewise entrusted the negotiation of legislative hurdles at the committee level in the House of Representatives and the Senate, on the floors of both houses of Congress, and in the 'bicam' to key members of Congress and senators affiliated with his Liberal Party and otherwise in regular contact with the key 'point men' and 'point women' for the bill within the Administration. The chairs of the Ways and Means Committee in both the House of Representatives and the Senate were forced to resign in the course of the passage of the Sin Tax Reform bill. Their replacement by legislators working closely with the Administration was crucial for the timely passage of strong versions of the bill at committee level and movements to vote on the floors of both houses of Congress. Finally, Aquino also personally intervened at key junctures with phone calls and personal meetings with individual legislators to persuade them to support his preferred versions of the bill (Drilon interview; Henares interview; Paul interview; Ungab interview).

Viewed from this perspective, then, the passage of the Sin Tax Reform bill can be chalked up to presidential leadership, Aquino's leadership, pure and simple; the success of reform legislation depended on top-down leadership; and the role of reform coalitions in the passage of the Sin Tax Reform bill was essentially superfluous.

But this kind of top-down, state executive-centred explanation suffers from obvious limitations and weaknesses. First of all, as some of those interviewed by the author recalled, an earlier effort to raise excise taxes on alcohol and cigarettes foundered in the 1990s despite the supposedly strong support of then president Fidel Ramos and his allies in Congress (Guevara interview; Eaton, 2002). There is thus no *a priori* reason to assume that presidential leadership will be sufficient to push reform legislation through Congress (whether in the Philippines or elsewhere). Presidential leadership may be necessary for the achievement of reform, but it may not be enough.

Meanwhile, the political strengths and skills of President Aquino were fairly matched by those of the opponents of excise tax reform. The 'Northern Alliance' of members of Congress from the tobacco-producing provinces of northern Luzon was very well represented in the Ways and Means Committee in the House of Representatives, and its members worked hard to keep the bill from reaching the House floor; to discredit the bill as 'anti-farmer', and to cut the tax hikes on cigarettes and other tobacco products (Latuja interview; Sta. Ana interview; Ungab interview). In addition, Philip Morris Fortune Tobacco Corporation (PMFTC), claiming more than 90% of the Philippine cigarette market, led what experts have described as the single most influential 'Tobacco Lobby' in Asia (Alechnowicz and Chapman, 2004). Indeed, prior to their forced resignations, the chairpersons of the Ways and Means Committee in both the House of Representatives and the Senate were closely identified with PMFTC, as were a number of other influential legislators, most notably in the Senate. In some key cases, such legislators' linkages to PMFTC clearly overrode shared party affiliation with the Administration, as seen in their assiduous efforts to stall the legislative process and/or to water down the provisions of the bill (Drilon interview; Latuja interview; Sta. Ana interview; Ungab interview).

The political influence of the 'beer lobby' was also considerable. Many legislators in both houses were affiliated with the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC), a party founded by Eduardo 'Danding' Cojuangco, Jr., the long-time chair of the San Miguel Corporation, which dominates the beer market in the Philippines. It was only through an early agreement to restrict excise tax increases for beer and spirits that NPC legislators' support for serious tax hikes on cigarettes was secured (Ungab interview). Overall, the evident difficulties experienced by the Aquino Administration in achieving the passage of the Sin Tax Reform bill were of such magnitude that the final version enacted into law only passed by a single vote in the Senate, thus attesting to the strength and significance of resistance to the legislation, and the contingent nature of the outcome even in the context of strong presidential leadership and support.

Finally, close and careful analysis of the specific provisions of the Sin Tax Reform bill makes clear that the specific provisions of the legislation changed – and were in some measure seriously watered down – as the bill moved from committee to the floor in the House and then the Senate, and once again in the bicameral conference committee. These changes, however seemingly arcane and esoteric, had demonstrably important implications for the tax revenues and health benefits associated with the reform initiative, as a reading of the impassioned speeches of senators squabbling over different versions of the bill in November 2012 (or a close comparison of the provisions of various versions of the bill) makes clear (Abaya et al., 2012; Congress of the Philippines, 2012a; Recto, 2012b; Santiago, 2012).

On the one hand, the final version of the bill passed into law in December 2012 was characterized by compromises limiting the extent of excise tax increases on alcohol, scaling back the initial extent of excise tax increases on cigarettes, and earmarking some of the revenues for 'livelihood projects' in the tobacco-producing provinces of northern Luzon. On the other hand, the final version of the bill did dramatically raise excise taxes, especially for cigarettes. The new law also eliminated the previous 'freeze' on tax rates based on 1997 product prices, indexed taxes to inflation, institutionalized the simplification and eventual unification of the tiering system along with a set of annual tax increases in the years ahead, and earmarked the lion's share of the revenues for universal healthcare (Congress of the Philippines, 2012a).

In other words, the outcome of the legislative process was the passage of an excise tax reform law whose provisions bore only partial resemblance to those found in the original version launched by the Aquino Administration. Thus even if we should credit Aquino's presidential leadership for passage of a Sin Tax Reform bill, it is clear that the Sin Tax Reform bill which was eventually enacted was shaped by political processes not fully within the control of President Aquino. Whether we view the final outcome of the legislative process as a reform 'glass half empty' or 'glass half full', the nature and extent of the reform were clearly not determined by presidential leadership alone. A broader form of developmental leadership was required.

The reform coalition and Action for Economic Reforms (AER)

It is against this backdrop that the role of a reform coalition – and of Action for Economic Reforms in particular – in the passage of the Sin Tax Reform bill in December 2012 should be understood. Alongside presidential leadership, a reform coalition emerged over the course of the legislative process, and the formation and mobilization of this coalition was crucial to the passage of the law. Complementing and combining with reformist presidential leadership, the emergence, evolution, and active intervention of this reform coalition were necessary elements of the pre-conditions and processes enabling successful excise tax reform. A close analysis of the contribution of this reform coalition to the passage of the Sin Tax Reform law reveals a broader form of developmental leadership at work in the making of reform.

In the case of the Sin Tax Reform bill, a reform coalition played a key role in developments leading up to the submission of the bill by the Aquino Administration in mid-2011 and evolved and expanded as the legislative process unfolded over 2012. Here it is worth recalling that in January 2010, five months prior to his election to the presidency, then senator Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III had delivered a speech to the prominent Makati Business Club in which he had promised to "refrain from imposing new taxes or increasing tax rates" should he be elected as President of the Philippines. Instead, he promised to focus on improving tax administration at the Bureau of Internal Revenue and to enhance the performance of the Bureau of Customs by curbing and punishing tax evasion and smuggling (Calica, 2010). This very minimalist approach to tax reform at the outset of the Aquino Administration was echoed in the newly elected president's first State of the Nation Address in July 2010, when he spoke only of rationalizing government budgeting and spending and improving revenue collection through tighter enforcement. In other words, Aquino did not assume office with any aims or ambitions in the realm of excise tax reform, or structural tax reform of any kind whatsoever.

Policy advocates associated with Action for Economic Reforms (AER) played a key role in placing the Sin Tax Reform bill on the menu of policy options for President Aquino over the course of 2010-2011. Using their access to key Cabinet members, they also provided assistance and encouragement in pushing the bill towards the prioritized front of the legislative agenda of the Aquino Administration, achieving success on this front in the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) meeting held in August 2011 (Faustino interview; Sta. Ana interview). Leading policy advocates from AER were in close and regular touch with leading reformists in the Administration from the outset, and they provided assistance in the formulation and presentation of materials used to make the case for excise tax reform and in the drafting of the legislation (Sta. Ana interview; Lataja interview). What was retrospectively passed off as 'presidential leadership' in putting the bill on the legislative agenda was thus in fact driven largely by AER and its allies in the Administration.

Meanwhile, the economic reform-focused activists of AER, moreover, had also developed close linkages with prominent doctors active in anti-smoking advocacy work, such as Dr Maricar Limpin, who had spearheaded the campaign to win Philippine government accession to the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in 2005 (Limpin interview). As the bill moved into the House of Representatives in 2011-2012, AER and other activists and their allies

in the Aquino Administration and Congress coordinated closely to monitor the legislative process, to manoeuvre in the face of obstacles and resistance from various quarters, and to mobilize support from an expanding contingent of members of Congress through a combination of backroom politicking and media-savvy public relations work (Drilon interview; Henares interview; Paul interview; Ungab interview).

As the legislative process unfolded over the course of 2012, the reform coalition expanded in its composition and evolved in its modus operandi. To win sufficient support to secure passage of the bill in the House, a compromise was forged with the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC), the party of San Miguel Corporation Chair Eduardo 'Danding' Cojuangco, Jr., through an agreement to limit excise tax increases on alcohol, thus securing support from a solid bloc of members of Congress in the Ways and Means Committee, on the House floor, and in the bicameral conference committee (Ungab interview). At the same time, the committee hearings in the House of Representatives occasioned the appearance of prominent specialist doctors to provide expert testimony as well as the mobilization of a diverse array of health-related organizations (Dans interview; Leachon interview; Limpin interview).

As the bill reached the Senate in the late summer of 2012, this expanded coalition continued to evolve and to innovate. Individual senators were approached and in some cases incorporated into the coalition, even as more and more doctors and health-related organizations were mobilized, and engagement with the media moved into high gear, including campaigning through social media and the Internet (Dans interview; Drilon interview; Herbosa interview; Leachon interview). AER's analytical work and influence helped to generate a spate of articles and op-ed pieces in prominent Manila newspapers, even as popular television and radio shows, websites and blog spots featured sound-bites and special appearances by AER-linked economists as well as activist doctors and other health specialists.

A steady stream of expert analysis and information flooded the public sphere through the combined efforts of AER and its allies in the medical establishment. Full page manifestos and petitions endorsed by a long list of doctors' associations were published, even as prominent doctors made regular public appearances in support of the excise tax reform bill (see, for example, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHEXlnRtYBM>). As the bill moved from the Ways and Means Committee to the floor of the Senate to the bicameral conference committee and finally to the floors of both Houses, the full cast of characters and range of repertoires of the coalition were deployed.

Following the passage of the bill in December 2012, the core elements of the coalition – the activists of AER and their reformist allies in the Aquino Administration – have reassembled in 2013 to ensure successful implementation of the new law. Some of this work has focused on the drafting of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRRs) of the Sin Tax Reform law, with AER activists providing advice and assistance to key officials in the Department of Health and the Department of Finance. In addition, AER activists and their coalition partners in the Administration and Congress have been both investigating the current limitations and weaknesses of the government's universal health care program (PhilHealth), and initiating public consultations and campaigns to promote more effective and extensive health care coverage under the program, for which the lion's share of the Sin Tax Reform revenues have been earmarked (personal communications with Jaime Faustino and Filomeno Sta. Ana III).

Looking back at this reform coalition as it evolved and expanded, manoeuvred and mobilized, in support of Sin Tax Reform, at least five key elements of its composition and modus operandi are especially worthy of note, especially in the way they combined to enable successful passage of the legislation.

Diverse components

First of all, the reform coalition included diverse components, namely:

- a) 'reform entrepreneurs', activists, experts, and policy wonks from the world of civil society, non-governmental organizations, and the academe;
- b) reform 'champions' from within the incumbent administration, lodged in various departments, agencies, and the Office of the President;
- c) reform 'champions' within Congress, represented in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, and in key committees in both houses;
- d) advocacy groups, allied associations, organizations, and pressure groups with some kind of mobilization capacity;
- e) media outlets, ranging from investigative journalists to newspaper reporters and columnists, to social media and Internet websites.

Looking back at the legislative process, it is clear that each component of the coalition played an important role in the passage of the Sin Tax Reform bill. Reform 'champions' from within the Aquino Administration and in Congress assumed direct responsibility for sponsorship of the legislation, winning support from legislators in both houses, and crafting the compromises that allowed the bill to overcome successive procedural and political hurdles to passage. At the same time, AER's experts, anti-smoking activists, and prominent doctors worked with the media to provide expert advice and informa-

tion and to exert and amplify public pressure on members of Congress and senators in support of the reform legislation. Insofar as the specific outcome of the legislative process was contingent on diverse competing political pressures, then the multi-sectoral nature of the coalition maximized the vantage points through which influence and effort could be exerted to help shape the ultimate form of the Sin Tax Reform legislation.

Allies of convenience

Secondly, as the reform coalition evolved and expanded, it incorporated, however opportunistically, a set of allies of convenience of decidedly 'non-reformist' variety, along lines reminiscent of the 'Baptists and bootleggers' who famously sponsored laws banning the sale of alcoholic beverages on Sundays in the United States years ago. Indeed, in the case of Sin Tax Reform in the Philippines, the reform coalition found itself in alignment with British American Tobacco (BAT), which openly sought to 'reform' a tiered tax classification scheme which greatly inhibited the entry of its products into a market monopolized by PMFTC (Latuja interview; Sta. Ana interview). Within the House of Representatives, the vanguard of members of Congress affiliated with the Liberal Party leadership was too small in number to suffice for purposes of railroading through the original version of the bill sponsored by the Administration, so new allies needed to be found to overcome hurdles in the Ways and Means Committee, on the floor of the House, and later on in the bicameral conference committee. Here the alliance with the 'beer lobby' of the San Miguel Corporation Chair Eduardo 'Danding' Cojuangco, Jr.'s Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC) provided crucial bloc support at key moments in the legislative process (Yamsuan and Domingo, 2012). More broadly, members of Congress primarily interested in their pork barrel allocations and in the promotion and protection of their family business interests were likewise drawn into support for the Sin Tax Reform bill through explicit identification of the new revenues which would flow into their districts (Ungab interview; Henares interview).

In the Senate, moreover, the much weaker position of the Liberal Party forced the coalition to work closely with a wide range of individual senators, whose support for the Sin Tax Reform bill came less out of any proven constancy of commitment to 'reform', and more out of idiosyncratic openness or susceptibility to pressures from the Administration and from economic reform and anti-smoking activists working in the coalition (Drilon interview). At crucial junctures throughout the legislative process, the reform coalition kept the door open to such (potential) partners, tempering attacks on opposition to the Sin Tax Reform bill with efforts to encourage more and more members of Congress and senators to shift their positions so as to be able to claim 'shared ownership' of the reform legislation (Latuja interview; Sta. Ana interview). Overall, this openness – if not opportunism – in coalition-building meant that the reform coalition positioned itself and promoted the legislation in ways that enabled the attraction of a very broad range of members of Congress and senators into support for the excise tax reform bill. Ultimately, it might be concluded, 'reformists' alone do not a reform coalition make.

Experienced activists

Thirdly, while the reform coalition operated in virtually around-the-clock, full-throttle mode through the key months of the legislative process in 2012, it built on a longer history of activism and experience. Contacts between AER activists and key officials in the Aquino Administration date back many years, with well established relationships of mutual trust and understanding (Faustino interview; Latuja interview; Sta. Ana interview). These activists and officials also had long experience of efforts to push through reform legislation, dating back to the 1990s, including previous encounters with 'Big Tobacco' in its earlier incarnations (prior to the merger of Philip Morris International and Fortune Tobacco). Alongside the lessons learned and the solidarities forged through these shared experiences, these activists and officials also had accumulated an impressive knowledge of the tax system, of the alcohol and tobacco industries, and of the broader economic and political context within which the reform effort was launched. There was an enormous accumulated stock of 'intellectual capital', experiences, educational achievements, expertise, and intelligence – in all senses of the term – shared among these activists and 'policy entrepreneurs'. There was also a dense web of organizational and interpersonal linkages among the doctors who joined the coalition to support passage of the Sin Tax Reform bill (Dans interview; Faustino interview; Guevara interview; Herbosa interview; Latuja interview; Leachon interview; Sta. Ana interview).

The reform coalition also built on achievements in the realms of economic and health reform in previous decades. Here it is worth mentioning not only the E-VAT reform law of 2005 but also the Tobacco Regulation Act of 2003 and the accession of the Philippines to the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in 2005. In terms of the success of the coalition in framing Sin Tax Reform as a health-care measure rather than a 'revenue bill', the many years of anti-smoking activism and public awareness campaigns clearly paid off. As one experienced coalition insider noted, previous excise tax reform efforts had failed to make this connection, whereas by 2012, the link between cigarettes and health problems was well established in Philippine public life (Guevara interview). Indeed, Congressman Isidro Ungab, who took over as Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee to oversee the early stages of the legislative process for the bill, had played a role as a city councillor (and close lieutenant of the long-time mayor) in Davao City's imposition of an ordinance banning smoking in public places in 2002 (World Health Organization, 2011). Thus by the time President Aquino's Sin Tax Reform bill hit Congress in 2012, economic reform and anti-smoking activists could build not only on previous experiences of legislation, but on this sea change in public awareness of – and politicians' sensitivity to – the connection between cigarette consumption and health issues.

Tactical planning and response

Fourth, in the heat of the legislative process, the coalition drew on its combined strengths in terms of the commitment of its activists, the communications and coordination among its constituent members, and their capacity for sustained trench warfare on the front lines of Philippine politics. Here AER played a crucial role, providing a steady stream of expert briefings and background papers, carefully crafted presentations, rigorously reviewed data sets, and informal advice and political intelligence. As the legislative process unfolded, in fits and starts, alternating between drawn-out hearings, backroom horse-trading, and public grandstanding, AER activists remained in situ, unblinkingly focused on the sometimes mind-numbingly arcane details of various versions of the bill and projections of impact on public revenue and health.

These activists were simultaneously engaged in round-the-clock intelligence-gathering, counter-intelligence, data analysis and production, tactical operations, team management, internal communications, public relations, and strategic thinking for the coalition as a whole. All of those involved who were interviewed by the author stressed the importance of 'homework', of 'being there', of timely responses to rapidly changing circumstances, and of maintaining a close watch on the minutiae of the legislation as well as the multiple political games simultaneously unfolding as Sin Tax Reform moved forward (Dans interview; Latuja interview; Leachon interview; Paul interview; Sta. Ana interview). This was an incredibly labour-intensive process, requiring continuous investment of human capital. The term 'activist' is clearly appropriate here.

Multi-media campaign

Fifth and finally, the reform coalition owed much of its success to the effective framing of the Sin Tax Reform bill and mounting of a multi-media campaign in support of the legislation. Doctors were mobilized to make very visible appearances en masse, first in the House, and then in the Senate, with prominent specialists making impassioned presentations at hearings, delivering sound-bites to the media, and rallying a diverse range of medical associations to sign petitions, paid full-page newspaper advertisements, and formal letters in support of the legislation. Activists set up a 'Bawas Bisyo Bill' website (www.bawasbisyo-bill.com) and Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/BawasBisyoBill>), and worked closely with sympathetic journalists and columnists to counter the 'envelopmental journalism' that the tobacco lobby supported throughout the legislative process. The popular investigative media outlet Rappler produced a seven-part documentary film that provided a muckraking account of the tobacco industry and its success in thwarting previous excise tax reform efforts (<http://www.rappler.com/video/specials/13019-bisyo-a-special-report-on-sin-tax%E2%80%8E>).

The significance of media for the coalition's work on the Sin Tax Reform bill was exemplified by the resignation of Senator Ralph 'Raffy' Recto from the Senate Ways and Means Committee in mid-October 2012. Earlier that month, AER activists drew upon their experience and intelligence-gathering in the House of Representatives to uncover – and expose – evidence that Recto's proposal for a watered-down version of the excise tax reform legislation was based on a Philip Morris position paper obtained by AER. Recto, whose home province plays host to Philip Morris Fortune Tobacco Corporation's headquarters and main plant in the Philippines, was thus publicly discredited, with media reports following AER in dubbing his proposal as a 'Recto Morris Bill' (Balea, 2012; Bordadora and Santos, 2012). A team of prominent doctors closely linked with AER made a highly publicized visit to Recto to voice their outrage and demand his resignation, then holding a press conference in which they were photographed giving their 'thumbs down' to Recto, who resigned later the same day (Limpin interview). This kind of active media campaigning continued even as the bicameral conference committee negotiated the final version of the bill, with Sin Tax Reform champion Congressman Ungab breaking from standard practice to provide regular updates to the media, and threatening resignation should the provisions of the bill be further watered down (Drilon interview; Latuja interview; Ungab interview).

Overall, then, the passage of the Sin Tax Reform law in December 2012 represented the victory of a diverse reform coalition linking the Aquino Administration and allied legislators in the House and Senate to a network of economic reform and anti-smoking activists, doctors' groups, and the media. President Aquino's leadership was a necessary pre-condition for the passage of a Sin Tax Reform bill and was crucial for the passage of the Sin Tax Reform law in December 2012, but such leadership was not sufficient to guarantee this outcome. Instead, a reform coalition supplemented Aquino's leadership through close communications and coordination, and effective use of information and media as well as accumulated achievements from previous years of economic reform and anti-smoking activism. At the heart of this reform coalition were the activists of Action for Economic Reforms (AER).

3

Electoral reform in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)

Alongside the passage of the Sin Tax Reform law and the ongoing efforts to promote its implementation, the re-registration of voters in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) represents a second substantial reform achievement in 2012 in the Philippines. As with Sin Tax Reform, electoral reform in ARMM merits close and careful examination in terms of its broader significance in the context of conflict resolution and governance challenges in the southern Philippines. More importantly, this episode of electoral reform should be analyzed in terms of the formation and mobilization of a reform coalition in ARMM, and the role of the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) and its local partners in this coalition. While the content and context of electoral reform in the southern Philippines obviously differ greatly from the passage of the Sin Tax Reform law in Manila, the parallels in the processes and outcomes of these two efforts are illuminating and instructive.

The significance of the voter re-registration effort of July 2012 in ARMM should be understood in the broad context of machine politics and electoral skulduggery in the Philippines as a whole, and in the specific context of 'locked-in-electorates' and wholesale electoral fraud in the southern Philippines in particular. The dependence of elected officials on local powerbrokers for the delivery of votes has corrupted relations between the executive branch and the national legislature and between national, provincial, city, and municipal levels of government (Sidel, 1999). The dependence of candidates for office on money to mobilize voters, to oil political machines, and to manufacture votes underlies the structural imperative of rent-seeking by elected officials and the structural power of an entrenched oligarchy of business interests. Overall, then, if the nature of elections lies at the heart of the problems of oligarchical democracy in the Philippines, then electoral reform must be a crucial element of efforts to promote democratization and good governance in the archipelago (Hedman, 2006).

In the ARMM, moreover, the nature and extent of wholesale fraud and other problems with elections have proven not only exceptional, but also integral to the broader political and developmental impasse which has persisted in the southern Philippines since the restoration of democracy in the country in 1986. Alongside the forms of voter mobilization – and demobilization – observed elsewhere in the archipelago, local powerbrokers in the majority-Muslim provinces of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago have enjoyed much greater autonomy and impunity in terms of the use of violence and intimidation in electoral competition (and otherwise), and they have also exploited this broader latitude and control over 'locked-in electorates' in their relations with the national government in Manila (Gutierrez, 2000). The extent of this problem became abundantly evident in the wake of the 'Maguindanao Massacre' of November 2009, in which 58 people were killed in a local political feud in central Mindanao. The 'warlord'-style rule of the Ampatuan clan in Maguindanao Province was revealed in great detail in both sensationalist and serious investigative media reports (International Crisis Group, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2010) which followed the massacre.

Since at least the senatorial elections of 1987, moreover, successive presidential administrations have relied on local powerbrokers in the southern Philippines to deliver large blocks of manufactured votes, both to secure victories for presidential candidates and to strengthen the chances of pro-administration candidates for the Senate. Comelec, PNP, and AFP officials have colluded in such exercises. With the shift to a multi-party system in the post-Marcos era, both presidential and senatorial elections have often been won by very narrow margins and without the pre-martial law checks afforded by a zero-sum two-party system of vote delivery and vote counting. Thus successive elections have seen repeated delays in vote canvassing in the southern Philippines (whether due to election-related violence or otherwise), and recurring reports of negotiated deals between parties in Manila and ARMM that have effectively determined the subsequent electoral outcomes for senatorial and presidential candidates. While the most recent and memorable example of this pattern is probably the 'Hello Garci' scandal involving then president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and senior Comelec officials in 2004 (Linantud, 2005; Calimbahin, 2009: 198-226), earlier episodes along these lines were noted in the (Corazon) Aquino administration's virtual sweep of the senatorial elections in 1987 and the very slim and highly suspect victory of Fidel Ramos in the presidential elections in 1992 (Tancangco, 1992).

Thus the persistent reliance of incumbent and aspirant politicians at the national level on local powerbrokers in the southern Philippines has profoundly constrained the relationship between the national government and the ARMM (Lingao, 2013). Small wonder that the Ampatuan clan enjoyed close relations with the Macapagal-Arroyo Administration, or that successive governors of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao have consistently been the favoured candidates of the administration in Manila, such as Zaldy Ampatuan from 2005 through 2009 (International Crisis Group, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2010). Ironically, democracy in the ARMM has actually been less autonomous of the dictates of incumbent administrations in Manila than anywhere else in the Philippines, with subnational authoritarianism promoted instead.

In this context, elections in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao have involved not only especially coercive forms of voter mobilization and demobilization, but also forms of 'wholesale' fraud involving Commission on Elections (Comelec) officials in the southern Philippines and Manila. Here the so-called *dagdag-bawas* (vote-padding/shaving) system of fiddling the votes at successive stages of the canvassing process stands out as the prevailing mechanism for wholesale fraud, requiring the active assistance and intervention of colluding Comelec officials (Tancangco, 1992; Calimbahin, 2009). With computerization of elections by 2010, opportunities for *dagdag-bawas* ostensibly disappeared, making other forms of electoral fraud more important (ANFREL, 2010). Here local politicians' use of so-called 'flying' and fictitious voters is particularly worthy of note (Arguillas, 2012a; Arguillas, 2012b). ARMM, after all, has long been notorious for its 'ghost voters', alongside its 'ghost schools' and 'ghost roads', with Comelec (like other national government bodies) unable or unwilling to distinguish between fact and fiction on the ground. Indeed, knowledgeable observers have noted that census figures for ARMM have long appeared to be artificially inflated by a considerable margin, in order to facilitate commensurate exaggeration of claims with regard to voters, residents, school pupils, and other nominal beneficiaries of government resources and services. A revalidation of the 2007 census by the National Statistics Office in 2010 revealed that the population of ARMM had indeed been inflated by nearly 25% (Congress of the Philippines, 2012b).

It is against this backdrop that the significance of the July 2012 voter re-registration drive and the election-monitoring effort of May 2013 should be understood. Prior to the voter re-registration drive, some 1.88 million voters were registered in ARMM as of 2010. During the voter re-registration drive, some 1.57 million applicants for re-registration were recorded. But of these 1.57 million, some 280,000 were disqualified, whether on the basis of age or multiple registration applications in different precincts. Over 250,000 were discovered to have attempted to register in multiple districts, while nearly 30,000 were identified as under eighteen years of age, leaving a total of 1,288,562 voters registered in ARMM. Thus almost 600,000 fictitious or underage voters were 'cleansed' from the ARMM electoral rolls in 2012, nearly a one-third reduction overall (Santos, 2012).

Viewed in quantitative terms, the voter re-registration drive was clearly highly successful in reducing 'ghost voters' and thus reducing opportunities for certain forms of wholesale electoral fraud. In measurable terms, ARMM re-registration thus a) reduced the ability of local powerbrokers in ARMM to use blocks of manufactured, fraudulent votes to ensure their own (re) election and to assist favoured candidates for national offices; b) reduced the ability of presidential and senatorial candidates to rely on wholesale fraud in ARMM; and c) weakened the symbiotic relationships between Manila-based and ARMM politicians which have compromised local governance in the southern Philippines and, arguably, the quality of democracy in the country as a whole.

Viewed in terms of qualitative political change, however, the results of ARMM voter re-registration in 2012 have been mixed. On the one hand, the 'cleansing' of the electoral lists of fictitious and under-age voters may have drastically reduced opportunities for certain forms of electoral fraud in ARMM, but it left intact a wide range of instruments for the application of coercive and monetary pressures on voters in the region. Thus any celebration of the success of the ARMM re-registration drive must be seriously qualified. Local powerbrokers in ARMM still have at their disposal ample forms of influence over voters, including intimidation and violence. The high rates of poverty in ARMM suggest the continuing susceptibility of many voters to vote-buying, even as enduring conflict, insecurity, and weaknesses in infrastructure limit voters' autonomy from local powerbrokers and access to independent sources of information, thus leaving much of the underlying structures of 'locked-in' electorates' essentially unchanged. Indeed, the May 2013 mid-term elections in ARMM saw many incumbent officials running for re-election unopposed. For example, nine out of 19 municipalities in Sulu Province reportedly saw mayoral races (pre-) decided in this fashion (Uyan, 2013).

Additional caveats are also in order. Internal displacement induced by recurring conflict in ARMM may well have complicated the re-registration drive, leading to some disenfranchisement in the process. Indeed, scholars who have closely studied electoral reform in a variety of contexts (including the Philippines) have noted the dangers of disenfranchisement inherent in re-registration campaigns (Schaffer, 2008). While the ARMM re-registration drive of July 2012 seems to have dramatically reduced the ability of local powerbrokers to mobilize fictitious and/or under-age voters, it may also have worked to discourage some voting-age and otherwise eligible residents from re-registering. It may thus have demobilized legitimate voters, driving down electoral participation in the process. The increased clustering of precincts has made it harder for residents of some remote barangays (villages) to cast their votes in elections. Thus electoral reform has not only left intact 'traditional' forms of voter mobilization, but also arguably enhanced incentives and perhaps opportunities for voter demobilization as well.

On the other hand, the drastic reduction of 'ghost' voters in the 2012 ARMM voter re-registration drive may have contributed to a broader effort to reform the institutions of local governance in the southern Philippines. The July 2012 ARMM voter re-registration campaign, after all, was justified by the decision to postpone regional elections and synchronize them with the May 2013 mid-term elections throughout the country. These moves were undertaken under the appointed interim administration of ARMM Governor Mujiv Hataman, who was explicitly tasked by President Aquino with the overhaul and upgrading of the regional administration. Thus the 'purging' of the voters' lists was part and parcel of a broader planned effort to promote clean government in a region whose administration has been notoriously corrupt and negligent in terms of delivery of public goods and services (International Crisis Group, 2011).

In addition, the 2012 ARMM voter re-registration campaign's contribution to electoral and broader administrative reform may also enhance the Aquino Administration's broader efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and to resolve a broader range of conflicts in the southern Philippines (International Crisis Group, 2012) through the creation of a new Bangsamoro regional entity to replace the ARMM. These efforts bore fruit in the signing of a Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro in October 2012 and then a Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in March 2014, with a Bangsamoro Basic Law to be submitted for congressional approval in mid-2014 and a plebiscite in the southern Philippines anticipated in early 2015.

In this context, the voter re-registration drive of July 2012 in ARMM assumes special significance. If elections become more credible, local elected officials become more responsive to local voters and constituencies, and local institutions of government become more responsible, it is hoped, then there will be more support for the new Bangsamoro regional entity in the southern Philippines and elsewhere. With improved elections and governance, it is argued, there should be more reason to hope that the new Bangsamoro regional entity will not degenerate into the morass of factionalism and corruption that has haunted the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao since the 1990s (Gutierrez, 2000). For political mobilization, participation, and representation in the southern Philippines to be channelled into – and confined within – the formal structures of locally elected autonomous government, elections need to be credible. Coupled with computerization and biometric voter identification, the cleansing of the voters' lists in the ARMM voter re-registration drive of 2012 should thus be seen as contributing in significant ways to the unfolding peace process as a whole.

Presidential leadership: 'The null hypothesis'

If the significance of the July 2012 ARMM voter re-registration drive is fully appreciated, what about the conditions and processes which enabled its imposition and implementation? Here the role of a diverse coalition of reformist actors and organizations, most notably the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV), merits close and careful consideration. But a prior discussion of the 'null hypothesis' is also needed. What if the re-registration drive and the cleansing of voters' lists in ARMM would have been undertaken and achieved in 2012 even without the involvement and activism of this reform coalition, and without PPCRV in particular?

Here, at first glance, a strong argument could indeed be made that the ARMM voter re-registration drive was undertaken at the insistence of President Aquino, that his administration overcame resistance to voter re-registration and efforts to undermine its implementation, and thus that it was simply presidential leadership which explains the achievement of electoral reform in the southern Philippines. Indeed, it was President Aquino who pushed Congress to pass legislation postponing the 2011 regional elections in ARMM, as well as a resolution mandating annulment of the voters' lists and re-registration throughout the region (Congress of the Philippines, 2012b; Drilon, 2012). It was likewise President Aquino who prodded the Commission on Elections into grudging acceptance of this task (Naval, 2012; Uy, 2012), and whose administration positioned and policed the Comelec, PNP, and AFP personnel charged with implementing the voter re-registration drive in the southern Philippines (Larrazabal interview; Sarmiento interview; Naval, 2012).

Viewed from this perspective, the purging of 'fictitious', under-age, and 'command' voters from the ARMM electoral rolls in 2012 unfolded in response to presidential leadership, and it was President Aquino's independence vis-à-vis local powerbrokers and active interest in promoting governance reform and conflict resolution in the southern Philippines that explains the initiative and its effective implementation. The role of the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting in the re-registration drive can thus be seen as essentially superfluous.

But this kind of top-down, state executive-centred explanation suffers from at least one obvious limitation and weakness. As with the Sin Tax Reform, there is no a priori reason to assume that presidential leadership would suffice for purposes of implementing the re-registration of voters in ARMM, effecting a dramatic reduction of 'fictitious' and under-age voters from the electoral rolls, and improving the quality and credibility of elections in the southern Philippines. The region, after all, is one in which government offices and institutions are weakly established and institutionalized, with limited resources and capacities, and in which local powerbrokers are entrenched in local state offices and local society, compromising

the potential integrity of any top-down internal 'reform' process as it unfolds on the ground. Indeed, there is abundant evidence that the voter re-registration process in July 2012 was compromised by the efforts of many local politicians to register 'flying voters' in multiple locations and to register under-age voters as well (Procalla interview; Larrazabal interview; Sarmiento interview).

Meanwhile, the primary vehicle for electoral reform in ARMM, the Commission on Elections, is also a very problematic institution, with ample potential for under-delivering or actively undermining the electoral reform process (Calimbahin, 2009). Here it is worth noting not only wide-ranging accusations of partisan bias voiced against Comelec Chair Sixto Brillantes Jr. from the time of his appointment, but also the even more serious allegations repeatedly raised against Attorney Rey Sumalipao, the ARMM Regional Director of Comelec. Sumalipao, it has often been noted, was directly implicated in the 'Hello, Garci' scandal, allegedly assisting in the manufacture of huge margins of victory for Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in the presidential elections of 2004 in Lanao del Sur, where Sumalipao then served as provincial director of Comelec (Burgonio, 2011; Chua, 2011; Dinoy and Señase, 2010; Esguerra, 2011).

If, as critical commentators have suggested, the Commission on Elections – both in its central offices and in ARMM itself – remains compromised by corrupt and collusive involvement in election fraud, then there is little reason to trust its ability or inclination to implement computerization, voter re-registration, biometric voter identification, and other elements of electoral reform in a thorough-going, straightforward, or effective manner (Calimbahin, 2009). Indeed, Comelec Chair Brillantes dragged his heels, even publicly denying the Aquino Administration's request for re-registration as late as April 2012 (Naval, 2012; Uy, 2012), while ARMM Regional Director Sumalipao's performance in the May 2013 mid-term elections was subjected to critical commentary and speculation in the press (Rufo, 2013b). In addition, questions have been raised about the extremely slow transmission of election results in ARMM and the highly suspicious 100% voter turnout in 54 clustered precincts in the region in these elections (Rufo, 2013a).

It is thus essential to acknowledge that the Aquino Administration's role in initiating and implementing electoral reform in ARMM was a necessary, but insufficient, condition and component of the successful outcome achieved. Even with President Aquino's insistence on vote re-registration, implementation rested in the hands of government agencies whose integrity and intentions remained open to doubt, thus jeopardizing both the real results of the reform and public perceptions of the outcome. Alongside presidential leadership, a broader coalition was clearly needed to implement effective electoral reform in the southern Philippines.

The reform coalition and the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV)

It is against this backdrop that the role of a reform coalition – and of the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) in particular – in ARMM voter re-registration in 2012 and election-monitoring in 2012 should be understood. Alongside presidential leadership, a reform coalition emerged during the re-registration campaign and re-emerged in the May 2013 mid-term election, and the formation and mobilization of this coalition was crucial to electoral reforms. Combining with reformist presidential leadership, this reform coalition helped to enable successful electoral reform. A close analysis of the contribution of this reform coalition to the July 2012 ARMM voter re-registration and the May 2013 mid-term election is thus in order.

As with the passage of the Sin Tax Reform bill, the ARMM voter re-registration effort involved officials within the Aquino Administration and Congress as insider advocates of electoral reform – and broader administration and governance reform – in the southern Philippines. Here the late Jesse Robredo, then Secretary of the Interior and Local Government, has been cited as especially influential, even as Senator Franklin Drilon has been noted as crucial for the passage of the initial legislation postponing the 2011 ARMM elections and the congressional resolution requiring re-registration in the region in 2012 (Drilon, 2012; Larrazabal interview; Sarmiento interview). When the Commission on Elections dithered and dragged its heels in early-mid 2012, these forces in the Aquino Administration and Congress made sure that the President was well placed to insist on implementation of ARMM re-registration. In the face of collusion in electoral fraud in ARMM by entrenched career officials of the Commission on Elections, moreover, recent appointees and other reliable allies within Comelec were deployed in ARMM and provided information and points of access to outside groups mobilized to promote successful re-registration in 2012 (Larrazabal interview; Sarmiento interview). A somewhat similar pattern could also be detected in limited fashion among the Philippine National Police (PNP) and Armed Forces (AFP) officers involved in enforcing the election code during the mid-term elections of May 2013 in the southern Philippines. ARMM Governor Mujiv Hataman's support for voter re-registration and his broader role in advancing the Aquino Administration's reform agenda are also well known, providing a local political environment in which incumbent officials were made to pay at least formal lip service to the cause of electoral reform in ARMM.

But, as suggested above, successful implementation of the July 2012 voter re-registration drive in ARMM required active participation and mobilization from beyond the ranks of local government officials. Even if local Comelec officials and the local schoolteachers on the Boards of Election Inspectors had been scrupulously honest, they faced enormous challenges and difficulties in implementing voter re-registration. With more than one hundred municipalities, over two thousand barangays (villages), some 1,164 voting centres, 9,342 precincts, and 2,946 clustered/group precincts, the limited resources and powers of the Commission on Elections were woefully inadequate for the implementation of electoral reform (Arnaiz *et al.*, 2013). Local powerbrokers exerted considerable pressure on local Comelec officials and schoolteachers/election inspectors, and there was ample evidence of intimidation, harassment, and occasional outright violence (Arguillas, 2012a; Arguillas, 2012b). Logistical problems were abundant, given the relative inaccessibility of some precincts and polling centres, and the unreliability of communications due to power cuts and limited satellite coverage (Procalla interview). In terms of law and order, some 6,500 Philippine National Police (PNP) personnel and perhaps a similar number from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) confronted a diverse array of armed groups across the provinces of the ARMM, rendering enforcement of the gun ban and of the election code more broadly a very difficult and dangerous exercise (De los Reyes interview).

In this context, the role of the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) in coordinating with Comelec, PNP, and AFP officials and in mobilizing volunteers was crucial for the implementation of the July 2012 voter re-registration campaign across ARMM and once again for the integrity of the May 2013 mid-term elections in the region. PPCRV recruited and deployed thousands of volunteers to monitor the voter re-registration process in 2012 and the elections in 2013, and to deter and document electoral fraud. PPCRV also engaged in active efforts to publicize the ARMM voter re-registration campaign in 2012 and to promote voter participation in 2013, working closely with local media outlets – ranging from radio stations to websites and social media – to raise voter awareness across the southern Philippines. At the same time, PPCRV won accreditation and worked closely with the Commission on Elections, the PNP, and the AFP, joining a ‘Task Force Rehistro’ in 2012 and forging a similar pact for ‘Clean, Honest, Accountable, Meaningful, and Peaceful’ – CHAMP – elections in 2013. In short, PPCRV spearheaded a coalition that played a crucial role in enabling effective implementation of electoral reform in ARMM (Procalla interview).

Insofar as PPCRV was able to mount a credible campaign to oversee and advance the July 2012 voter re-registration drive and to monitor the May 2013 mid-term elections in ARMM, its success is especially interesting and arguably impressive on at least two counts. First of all, as its name suggests, PPCRV has since its founding in the early 1990s relied heavily on the infrastructure of the Catholic Church and on Catholic lay associational networks (Hedman, 2006). Thus its ability to mobilize volunteers in majority-Muslim provinces represents a departure from its standard operating procedures for the recruitment and deployment of volunteers and for the representation of the organization as an independent and unbiased observer of elections and advocate for electoral reform. Insofar as Catholics have remained a small minority in ARMM, and insofar as issues of religious difference have corresponded to political cleavages in the region, the ability of PPCRV to mobilize volunteers and to assume a leading role in the promotion of electoral reform in the southern Philippines certainly merits special consideration and commendation.

Secondly, and less obviously, election-watch efforts in the Philippines have in the past relied heavily not only on the infrastructure of the Catholic Church and its affiliated lay associations, but also on the resources of business people and business organizations at national and local level. Alongside the institutional autonomy of the Catholic Church, it has been crucial for business people with some claim to relative independence from politics to throw their considerable financial, social, and cultural capital behind the cause of ‘clean elections’ (Hedman, 2006). In much of ARMM, however, business and politics have remained intimately intertwined, and the limited economic development of the region has not yet produced a set of genuinely local business interests – much less business associations – which lie outside the interlocking directorate of local political alliances and antagonisms. Thus the ability of PPCRV to recruit and deploy volunteers across the full breadth of ARMM without either a region-wide infrastructure of Catholic parishes and local lay activists, or a region-wide association or informal alliance of business interests, is especially striking and significant.

The head of PPCRV in ARMM, Father David Procalla, is a Catholic priest, and the occasional priest or lay Catholic activist can be found among the ranks of the PPCRV’s local coordinators. But overall, instead of relying on networks of Catholic lay activists and business people, PPCRV turned to a range of locally rooted Muslim non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide the essential infrastructure for the promotion of the ARMM voter re-registration campaign of July 2012 and, once again, for the monitoring of the May 2013 mid-term elections in the region (Mindanao Cross, 2012). PPCRV forged a coalition with 17 partner NGOs, six from Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi, four from Lanao del Sur and Marawi City, and seven from Maguindanao and elsewhere in the greater Cotabato region. It was the activists of these 17 NGOs who provided the human resources for PPCRV of provincial- and municipal-level coordinators and who oversaw the recruitment, evaluation, deployment and management of the thousands of volunteers who monitored voter re-registration in July 2012 and the mid-term elections in May 2013 in thousands of barangays across ARMM. Ultimately it was, for the most part, these NGO activists who ran PPCRV and who thus represented the cause of electoral reform in the southern Philippines (Olendo-Abendano interview; Procalla interview).

In essence, then, in the ARMM voter re-registration effort of July 2012 and the election-monitoring effort of May 2013 PPCRV represented a coalition not only between Catholic Church and lay association-based networks and a cluster of Muslim NGOs, but among these Muslim NGOs themselves. Most of these NGOs have long been engaged in local community-level development work, typically involved in the implementation of projects funded by foreign development agencies. In recruiting volunteers for PPCRV, these NGO activists have drawn on the extensive network of contacts they have developed through their community-level development and/or conflict management/mitigation work. In terms of local knowledge and political intelligence, credibility in the eyes of local communities, access to local Comelec, PNP, and AFP personnel, and leverage with local politicians their minions, these NGO activists have more broadly drawn upon their experiences and their accumulated reputations and established positions to 'make PPCRV work' (Asia Foundation, 2013).

Also noteworthy are the PPCRV-led coalition's methods to promote the ARMM voter re-registration effort in July 2012 and to monitor the mid-term elections of May 2013 in the region. Here, as noted above, it is important to emphasize the close coordination between PPCRV at the local and regional level and Comelec, the PNP, and the AFP. Such coordination was extensive throughout the July 2012 voter re-registration period under the auspices of 'Task Force Rehistro' and again the lead-up to the May 2013 elections, as the author witnessed during a two-day workshop in which teams composed of provincial representatives of all four organizations met for hours to develop plans in anticipation of a variety of problems. For PPCRV, this level of interest on the part of the PNP and the AFP (and, to an unsurprisingly lesser extent, Comelec) facilitated what appears to have been an unprecedented level of coordination, and obviously the broader context of the Aquino Administration's support for electoral reform in ARMM set the stage and the 'mood music' for this development (De Los Reyes interview; Jocson interview; Olendo-Abendano interview; Procalla interview).

At the same time, PPCRV also actively engaged with various forms of media in support of its efforts to promote the integrity of the ARMM voter re-registration effort in 2012 and the mid-term election in 2013. Here it is worth noting that local PPCRV activists included prominent local media personalities, as seen perhaps most spectacularly in the case of a popular radio show host in Tawi-Tawi (Kano-Omar interview). PPCRV, it is also worth noting, also recruited into its ranks some local members of Kabalikat Civicom, an association of ham radio operators whose communications network spans the Philippines and enables rapid transmission of information from remote localities in ARMM (http://www.kabalikatsmr.org/about_us/; <https://www.facebook.com/kabalikatcivicombangasamorocouncil>). At the same time, PPCRV arranged for publicity in newspapers and on websites and promotional slots on radio programs.

With its well-established communications network and media access, PPCRV was thus well placed to transmit information about problems in precincts around ARMM to responsible government officials and to provide updates and commentary to the broader public about the general state of the voter re-registration process in July 2012 and during the mid-term election in May 2013. This information infrastructure not only enabled PPCRV to respond to a variety of problems – ranging from technical mishaps to violence, intimidation, and attempted fraud – but also, undoubtedly, to deter some would-be spoilers from electoral skulduggery. Through its extensive grassroots network of volunteers, PPCRV thus greatly increased voter awareness of re-registration in 2012 and of election procedures in 2013 while likewise enhancing the self-consciousness, transparency, and rectitude of the electoral process across ARMM.

Overall, as with Action for Economic Reforms (AER) in the enactment and implementation of the Sin Tax Reform, PPCRV played a crucial role in accomplishing electoral reform in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. Responding – like AER – in a timely and effective manner to President Aquino's initiative, PPCRV coordinated closely with key Aquino administration insiders, allied legislators, and sympathetic government officials to promote the integrity of voter re-registration in ARMM in 2012 and to monitor the mid-term elections in the region in 2013. As with AER's deployment of doctors and anti-smoking activists, PPCRV mobilized a diverse coalition of activist groups who could credibly represent universal rather than particularistic interests in order to help the Aquino Administration to overcome resistance from entrenched forces eager to undermine the reform process.

Like AER, PPCRV drew on knowledge, experience, contacts, and reputation – what some might term intellectual, cultural, social, and symbolic capital – accumulated over many years of activist work, generously supported by a range of international development agencies. As with AER's expert briefings, strategy sessions, and media campaigns during the key moments in the legislative process, PPCRV engaged in highly labour-intensive monitoring efforts. Its activists worked around the clock to gather and transmit massive amounts of complex information effectively in close coordination with diverse coalition partners of varying reliability and trustworthiness. Overall, much like AER and the Sin Tax Reform bill, PPCRV provided a nodal point in a broad-based coalition. Its activists provided not only crucial assistance and information to the Aquino Administration but also esprit de corps and an appealingly idealistic frame for the broader cause of 'reform'.

4

Conclusion

Looking back at Sin Tax Reform and ARMM voter re-registration in 2012 – and at related follow-up activities in 2013 – what can we conclude about lessons and implications for ‘reform coalitions’ in the Philippines and elsewhere across the developing world? Here it is worth considering the two reform initiatives on their own terms, and the similarities and differences between them. But it is also worth considering how these two reform initiatives suggest broader lessons for proponents of reforms in developing countries and for policy-makers interested in linking developmental assistance to the promotion of reforms.

The power of coalitions

The success of the two reforms can in part be explained by leadership in its narrowest sense, the presidential leadership of Benigno Aquino III who has a reputation as a ‘reformist’.

However, even in a national context where presidential powers and prerogatives are especially strong, this paper shows that narrowly construed forms of executive leadership do not explain the Philippines’ 2012 reform achievements. The efforts of reform coalitions were crucial in helping President Aquino overcome considerable resistance to the changes.

These coalitions drew together disparate elements within the Aquino Administration, Congress and civil society. They mobilized various forms of support: behind-the-scenes lobbying, number-crunching, Powerpoint presentations, intelligence-gathering in the halls of Congress, monitoring electoral wards in the far-flung islands of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, and multimedia productions on radio, television, websites and in the blogosphere. This all helped to:

- set the stage for reform initiatives;
- stimulate coordination among disparate actors and interests;
- communicate with audiences likely to support the reforms;
- use highly labour-intensive forms of mobilization to overcome resistance to change and ensure reforms were implemented.

Significant achievements

The Sin Tax Reform law and the ARMM voter re-registration drive in 2012 represent substantial achievements. Both reform efforts were launched to address crucial problems hampering economic development and good governance in the Philippines. Both reform efforts produced concrete, measurable results. Both reform efforts were launched in the face of considerable foot-dragging and resistance from entrenched interests, and demonstrated that reforms could be achieved despite opposition from such seemingly formidable foes as ‘Big Tobacco’ and ‘Muslim warlords’. Both reform efforts left in their wake legacies of shared experiences, expertise, and access for the coalitions who mobilized (and arguably for a broader audience of sympathetic spectators), as well as new causes and challenges to confront to protect and extend the gains achieved. In all of these ways, both reform efforts arguably contributed to a longer-term process of promoting economic development, good governance, and conflict resolution in the Philippines.

Developmental leadership

Both Sin Tax Reform and ARMM voter re-registration were reform initiatives sponsored by the Aquino Administration and thus emblematic of the importance of developmental leadership by national-level state leaders. That said, in both Sin Tax Reform and ARMM voter re-registration, presidential leadership did not suffice for purposes of guaranteeing enactment and implementation of the reforms, and reform coalitions were absolutely necessary to overcome – or at least to counterbalance – the considerable resources and resistance mustered by opponents of these reforms. Thus even when and where

there is evidence of strong executive leadership in support of reform, coalition-building that spans the executive and legislative branches of government, civil society, and the media may also be necessary as well.

What are the implications for international development agencies' efforts to support 'reform' initiatives in developing countries in general? Insofar as both reform initiatives shared this component of developmental leadership by the Aquino Administration, it is important to acknowledge that they may be unrepresentative of a larger universe of cases of reform efforts in the Philippines – as elsewhere – which have unfolded without strong sponsorship or support from incumbent presidential administrations. The two reform initiatives under close consideration here may be seen as representing a specific mode of operation in which reform coalitions enhance and perhaps increase an incumbent government's ability to enact and implement a reform agenda. Thus one strategy for promoting reform in developing countries like the Philippines is simply to provide support for government reform initiatives that need and deserve the backing of a reform coalition organized by advocacy groups like AER and PPCRV. Sin Tax Reform and ARMM voter re-registration are in fact amply emblematic of the strengths and weaknesses, possibilities and limitations, and advantages and disadvantages, of this specific kind of strategy.

If the achievements of Sin Tax Reform and ARMM voter re-registration are taken into account, then what might be the drawbacks of this kind of strategy for international development agencies and other proponents of reform? Obviously, this strategy may be more passive than pro-active, more inhibited than adventurous, and more opportunistic than innovative in terms of approach and allocation of resources and energies. There is also the danger of inadvertent 'capture', co-optation, and collusion. After all, in the 2013 mid-term elections, the incumbent administration 'swept' ARMM, winning all the congressional seats and gubernatorial positions in the region. In addition, there is the danger of simulating 'reform' or exaggerating its transformative nature as incumbent administrations advance their own political interests with 'reformist' cover and packaging provided by reform coalitions and their backers. Thus it is essential to be selective, systematic, and steadfast in the evaluation and identification of government reform initiatives fully worthy of coalition support, and to be active, assiduous, assertive, innovative, and intellectually impressive in exploiting access to government to influence the very setting – and re-setting – of agendas for 'reform'. Reformers and their supporters must remain open to the possibility of opposing an incumbent government and/or supporting opposition forces in one or another policy arena or issue area in the interest of promoting reform.

How coalitions organize

The successful enactment and implementation of Sin Tax Reform and ARMM voter re-registration in 2012 offer a set of lessons with regard to how coalitions can – and must – organize and operate to promote reforms. At the core of both reform campaigns were what some political scientists (Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993) call advocacy coalitions, with experienced, specialized advocacy groups like AER and PPCRV clearly and consistently committed to specific kinds of reform from the outset and for the foreseeable future. These advocacy groups played a crucial role in terms of communications with allies in the administration, in various government agencies, in Congress, and in civil society, with a diverse range of partner NGOs or CSOs operating under their leadership as well as accumulating, hoarding, and selectively disseminating information within the coalition. They also played a crucial role in 'framing' the reforms, in liaising with the media, and in publicizing the reform campaign through television, radio, and the Internet, like 'legitimacy coalitions' elsewhere (Trumbull, 2012).

But the nature and extent of the successes achieved by these advocacy coalitions depended not only on these core advocacy groups, but on a broader engagement with government agencies and political actors not fully committed to excise tax or electoral reform. These reform coalitions consisted not only of 'Baptists' but also of 'bootleggers', allies engaged or incorporated on an ad hoc, opportunistic basis in order to overcome opposition and resistance to reform. In the case of the Sin Tax Reform bill, such 'bootleggers' obviously included the 'beer lobby' represented by the bloc of NPC members of Congress in the House of Representatives (and the House Ways and Means Committee in particular), and British American Tobacco (BAT) was an unacknowledged silent partner of the coalition as well. Meanwhile, in ARMM, the 'Baptists' of PPCRV were living and working in the heart of 'bootlegger' country, with Comelec, PNP, and AFP personnel – and local government officials like ARMM Governor Mujiv Hataman – sharing an interest in 'credible' re-registration and election results, but less than a wholehearted commitment to thorough-going electoral reform in the southern Philippines. Overall, it would be naïve to assume – and unfair to expect – that AER or PPCRV 'Baptists' would always get the better of the various 'bootleggers' who loom so large not only in the halls of Congress and the polling precincts of ARMM but in so many other spheres of Philippine politics and social life. In both cases, the core advocacy coalition faced challenges both getting these 'bootleggers' to buy into the formal reform process and preventing them from undermining implementation of reforms on the ground.

Skills and resources

Alongside their elasticity and flexibility in coalition-building, the core advocacy groups at the heart of these coalitions were notable – and commendable – for the skills, resources, and activities which marked them as activists. Both the passage of the Sin Tax Reform bill in Congress and the re-registration of voters in ARMM unfolded as complex, multifaceted processes whose ultimate outcomes hinged on multi-level inter-personal dynamics as well as manifold legal technicalities. Thus the work of AER and PPCRV was highly labour-intensive, requiring sustained, round-the-clock activity and vigilance over many days and weeks, as well as close attention to detail, heavy loads of 'homework', and the acquisition and operationalization of real technical expertise. At countless moments in the legislative process, and in countless precincts in ARMM, the eventual outcome of reform – glass

half empty or glass half full – was shaped by the interventions of reform advocacy coalition activists, and by their varying success in overcoming resistance from powerful entrenched interests opposed to reform. As one examines the complex process of reform enactment and implementation, it becomes clear that on the one hand human capital, agency, courage and conviction and, on the other, human foibles and fallibility all played a role in the eventual outcomes.

Experienced activists

Beyond the brief bursts of activism and human drama that these reform advocacy coalitions engaged in during 2012, there is a longer history of sustained involvement and engagement that provided an underlying infrastructure for AER and PPCRV's coalition-building efforts in support of reform. AER and PPCRV, after all, are advocacy/watchdog groups whose origins date back more than two decades, and their accumulated experience, expertise, and access to networks stretching deep into government and across civil society were absolutely crucial to their work over 2012 and again in 2013. In these two reform efforts, AER and PPCRV did not build coalitions from scratch, but rather resurrected, reconfigured, and redeployed pre-existing coalitional elements already established in years and decades past. Here it is worth not only looking back on a long history of support from a range of international development agencies, but also looking ahead to years to come. After all, some of the reform achievements of 2012 are already apparent in mid-2014, but their longer-term legacies should help to enable and inspire further reform coalition efforts for years to come.

This underlying infrastructure for reform coalitions needs to be placed in both historical perspective and in international institutional context. On the one hand, the reform coalitions of 2012 drew not only on many years of 'local' experience in the arenas of economic and electoral reform, but also on the enduring legacies of earlier political crises in the Philippines. Action for Economic Reforms (AER), after all, emerged out of a network of activists – underground and otherwise – who had fought against the dictatorship of long-time president Ferdinand Marcos (1966-86) and worked to promote reform during the tumultuous years of the transition to democracy in the mid-late 1980s. The Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) similarly emerged out of the earlier involvement of the Catholic Church in the election-watch campaign of NAMFREL (the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections) in the 'snap' presidential elections which preceded the 'People Power Revolution' in Manila in February 1986 (Hedman, 2006). Indeed, the diverse roster of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other 'civil society organizations' (CSOs) in the Philippines today owes much to the variegated responses – from the Left, the Church, and the business community – to the Marcos dictatorship and the economic, social, and political crisis of the early-mid 1980s in the Philippines (Silliman and Noble, 1998; Clarke, 2002). In somewhat similar fashion, the local NGOs and CSOs providing the foot-soldiers (and some of the municipal and provincial coordinators) for PPCRV in the 2012 ARMM re-registration drive emerged amidst the resurgence of conflict and the humanitarian and political crisis in the southern Philippines that erupted at the turn of the 21st century. The skills and solidarities – and the commitment and credibility – of today's reform activists owe much to this earlier history of mobilization in the Philippines.

On the other hand, the reform coalitions of 2012 in the Philippines also drew considerable strength from the support they received from a wide range of international development agencies and transnational advocacy networks. AER enjoyed financial support from USAID, and from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Asia Foundation through their jointly run Coalitions for Change in the Philippines program. AER also benefited from technical assistance and advice from the World Bank office in Manila. At the same time, anti-smoking activists and other health activist groups drew on extensive information, empirical research, and advice provided by transnational tobacco control advocacy groups and research networks, not only in the battle for the Sin Tax Reform bill of 2012, but in the preceding decade of increasing activism on this front in the Philippines. Meanwhile, PPCRV enjoyed financial support from the Australian DFAT- and Asia Foundation-supported Coalitions for Change in the Philippines program, in line with a long history of international assistance for election-watch campaigns in the Philippines (dating back to CIA support for NAMFREL in 1953, and the National Endowment for Democracy's backing of NAMFREL in 1986) (Hedman, 2006). PPCRV likewise drew much of its local coordinators from the ranks of NGOs and CSOs which receive generous funding from international agencies working to promote economic development, good governance, and conflict resolution in the southern Philippines.

Beyond these direct forms of financial and technical assistance, the reform coalitions which mobilized in support of economic and electoral reform in the Philippines in 2012 also drew on broader and deeper foundations of international support. Encouragement from the World Bank helped to embolden and impel disparate elements of the reform coalition in their efforts to push through the Sin Tax Reform bill, given hopes that successful excise tax reform would be rewarded by international financial institutions, credit ratings agencies, and investors. The accumulated empirical research and policy expertise of transnational tobacco control advocates and researchers similarly strengthened the hand of doctors' associations and anti-smoking activist groups in the Philippines in their fight against the well-oiled propaganda machine of 'Big Tobacco'. The global hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the interlocking international directorate of election-watch groups likewise helped to enhance PPCRV's role in determining the public 'credibility' of the re-registration effort in ARMM in 2012 and of the 2013 elections. Electoral reform was also undertaken in a broader climate of international support for governance reform and conflict resolution in the southern Philippines. The reform coalitions mobilized in 2012 in the Philippines sprung up neither suddenly nor entirely on their own, but through complex historical processes and with strong international and transnational support.

Key findings

Overall, then, several lessons of potentially broader significance are suggested by the passage of the Sin Tax Reform law and the re-registration of voters in ARMM in 2012. To understand the conditions and processes enabling these reforms, six lessons stand out as especially significant:

These reforms were in large measure the product of strong executive leadership: A crucial determinant of change, and the driving force behind these reforms, was the Aquino Administration.

However, even with strong government leadership, reform coalitions were key to the successful drafting of legislation and implementation of the new laws: The Aquino Administration relied on encouragement and assistance from coalitions to enact and implement the reforms, demonstrating that developmental leadership in the Philippines is made up of various branches of government and elements of civil society.

Reform coalitions were not necessarily made up entirely of reformers, and political compromises and alliances of convenience were necessary: The success of the 2012 reforms was achieved through a highly complex political process that required collaboration with a wide variety of actors.

The reform process was highly labour-intensive and required committed activists from experienced advocacy groups to bring the process to fruition.

Success required careful and continued attention not only to legislation, but also to implementation: Activists were vigilant and worked hard after the reforms were drafted and after they were given legal status to make sure they were not watered down.

The emergence of reform activists and advocacy groups in the Philippines had been a long-term process: The success of the Philippine reform coalitions depended not only on the activists' commitment to these issues, but also on their accumulated experience from earlier reform campaigns in the country.

Policy implications

What are the implications for international development agencies and other proponents of reform? What tactics are likely to work best in similar contexts?

Monitoring changing signals from a government makes it possible to exploit openings to exert influence and encourage action: Proponents of reform who are closely attentive – and adaptive – to shifts in government reform agendas and approaches are likely to have the most success, especially if they consistently work to expand access to policy-makers.

A government's own reform agenda may be more effective if assisted by reform coalitions: Reform coalitions can supplement an incumbent government's political resources to help advance reform.

Reform initiatives do not have to be confined to 'backstopping' the reform agendas of incumbent governments and ruling parties: Playing this kind of supportive role can of course produce concrete results, but the Philippines 2012 reforms demonstrate that it is possible for reform coalitions to be proactive instead of confining themselves to the agenda of an incumbent government.

Reform achievements are difficult to plan or predict, and reform movements are complicated, often throwing up uncertainty and ambiguity: As demonstrated by this case study, pragmatic alliances may have to be made with unlikely partners – another reason why flexibility is a valuable asset for reformers.

A few experienced, well-connected partners can mobilize large-scale support: Successful advocacy coalitions require a small cadre of committed activists with expertise, access, and a common vision.

Local activists are likely to have valuable experience and expertise: The best activists know what they are doing and may need very little costly guidance or 'incentivizing' from international development agencies.

Activists are created through the political process of campaigns for reform: Beyond the concrete, measurable achievements of each reform, there is a longer-term legacy that provides the foundations for future reform campaigns.

Reform coalitions and the process of reform can benefit from consistent long-term support, rather than episodic support for each individual campaign: Campaigns come and go but reform coalitions that have long-term support can strengthen the implementation of any reform victory, and sustain the broader infrastructure for further reforms in the future.

In the view of this author, such are the broadest and most basic lessons to be learned from the two major reform achievements of 2012 and the ongoing follow-up efforts in 2013-2014 in the Philippines. It is to be hoped that this paper has not only shed some light on these instances of developmental leadership in the contemporary Philippine context but also suggested broader implications for the study and practice of developmental leadership elsewhere across the developing world.

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