

## Chapter Ten

# The Multimember Plurality System in the Philippines & Its Implications

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### 1 Introduction

Of the over 18,000 posts at stake every election in the Philippines, about 80% are decided by the Multimember Plurality System (henceforth MPS). These include seats for 12 nationally elected senators, 24 members of the regional assembly of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, 776 provincial board members, and 13,450 city and municipal councilors. The MPS is simply the use of plurality voting in multimember districts: the candidates with the most votes win, even if they have not managed to secure a majority of the votes.<sup>1</sup> As it applies in the Philippines, MPS gives voters as many votes as there are seats to be filled in their district, as well as the ability to vote for individual candidates regardless of party affiliation.

Notwithstanding the extensive use of MPS in the Philippines, it hardly takes the spotlight in the discourse on the discontent with democracy in the country. The absence of well-functioning political parties, the economic and financial dominance of the major political families, and the particularistic response of elected officials to citizens' demands are, by and large, attributed to "deep" institutions – persistent informal rules that operate at the micro-level (North, 1990). The usual suspects include norms such as the importance of patron-client ties; the central role of the Filipino family in social network structures; and the strength of regional and linguistic affinities (Timberman, 1991). Other problems are viewed as a product of American colonial legacies: the

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<sup>1</sup> In the political science literature, the MPS is also known as the "block vote." I avoid using the latter term, however, since it tends to have a different meaning in the Philippines (as it is often used to refer to straight-party voting). As explained in Chapter Three, MPS is one of the two major types of plurality systems. When there is one member per district, it is appropriately called a single-member district plurality (SDMP) system. When there is more than one member per district, we speak of MPS.

exclusion of the masses and elite hegemony over democratic institutions; the provincial basis of national politics; and a powerful presidency (De Dios, 2007, Hutchcroft and Rocamora, 2012). Much less attention is given to electoral rules. Yet rules such as the MPS shape the incentives of political elites and the function of party-like organizations not only during election campaigns but also while holding office. Institutions, by their very nature, are self-reinforcing and require rather heroic efforts or extraordinary events to be overcome. *Electoral rules are malleable in comparison.* Therefore, bringing electoral rules to the fore of the debate is important because of their potential to improve democratic accountability and undermine Philippine democracy's pernicious institutions.

In this chapter, I bring MPS to the centerstage of the discourse. In particular, I explore how MPS creates a range of incentives for political actors to behave in ways that strengthen or impair democratic accountability. I discuss features specific to each of the elective offices where MPS is used, and analyze how the system a) encourages intra-party competition, b) produces multiple short-lived coalitions, and c) weakens the incentives of politicians to respond to broad constituencies. Given that MPS is the system used in the selection of over 14,000 of the country's some 18,000 elected officials, it is safe to conclude that the deficiencies of MPS translate quite directly into deficiencies of Philippine democracy more generally. I then draw lessons from countries that formerly used versions of MPS and decided to move away from them – in particular, Japan and Thailand – and recommend pathways for reform. I focus on the advantages of retaining the multi-member nature of districts while shifting to closed-list proportional representation (CLPR), and discuss complementary non-electoral reforms that would reinforce the efficacy of redesigning the electoral system.

## **2 Multimember Plurality System in Senate elections**

### **2.1 Senate elections**

One of the more attractive features of MPS is that it is straightforward and easy to use. The fact that voters can choose individual candidates becomes especially handy when choosing nationally-elected senatorial candidates. There are 24 members of the Senate. Senators sit for six-year terms, with half of the seats for reelection every three years, so each voter may vote for up to 12

candidates. Because Senators are elected by plurality-at-large voting by the entire national electorate, choosing senatorial candidates is analogous to choosing a presidential candidate, except voters may use as many, or as few, votes as they wish.

## **2.2 Implications of MPS in Senate elections**

At the same time, one of the implications of the MPS is that it tends to undermine the value of party label and encourage candidates to develop personalized networks of support that are independent of party (Carey and Shugart, 1995, Hicken, 2009). Candidates for Senate, by necessity, compete with as many as eleven co-partisans and this intra-party competition means that relying primarily on party labels as a campaign tool is a poor strategy (Hicken and Ravanilla, 2015). When candidates need to differentiate themselves from members of their own party, it can obviously not be on the bases of a different party platform.

Given intra-party competition, the most successful candidates are those who are able to employ a combination of strategies for developing large, personally tailored national followings. Candidates whose bases of electoral support are their regional/co-ethnic-lingual supporters differentiate themselves by engaging in traditional styles of building a personal vote – providing constituency services, promising material benefits (pork barrel and other forms of patronage), and making personalistic appeals to local leaders in their home regions. These are especially effective among candidates from the National Capital Region (NCR) as it is the most densely populated region in the country. Incumbents that have served multiple terms in office are also capable of extending patronage and clientelistic linkages with local vote-brokers beyond their home-region. This is a strategy commonly undertaken by Senators with presidential and vice-presidential ambitions.

However, given the nationwide size of the electorate, relying on regional/ethno-lingual affinities with local brokers and voters is no longer enough to secure seats for many senatorial candidates. Most of them have to rely on other means of mobilizing votes. Table 1 summarizes strategies that proved most successful in the past few elections and the winning senatorial candidates that employed them. Although certainly not exhaustive, these strategies include: (1) family ties with prominent historical personalities (typically presidents) with their attendant advantage of name recall; (2) celebrity status based on long-standing media presence (e.g., as actors, television personalities, sports stars, etc.) or on recent high-profile media exposure (e.g.,

involvement in nationally-televised plunder case trials); and (3) ties with the military (including involvement in past military coup attempts). It helps if the candidate is also well-qualified (e.g., a “top notcher” on the national bar exam), or has served as a former cabinet secretary or held other high-profile government posts.

Another implication of the MPS is that it results in multiple parties fielding candidates. Given that MPS fosters competitions among co-partisans, and winning elections is all about building a personalized network of support, candidates have very little incentive to coordinate campaigns and policy stances along party-lines. Political parties are by no means absent during elections, but they are best viewed as merely labels and nothing more. It is therefore no surprise that there are multiple parties represented in any given Senate elections. Table 2 lists the parties represented by candidates in Senate elections since 1995. There are a total of 32 parties, most of which are short-lived, that fielded at least one candidate since 1995 (see Table 2). Moreover, only one of these parties ever fielded a full slate of candidates – with some fielding only one candidate! During the same period, nearly one-fifth of senatorial candidates chose to give up on party labels altogether and run as independents. With parties having little or no meaning, the organizations that really matter for candidates are the temporary and *ad hoc* teams and coalitions that are formed in the run-up to elections.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Among the candidates who have been elected to the Senate since 1995, only four won without a team/coalition affiliation: Francis Pangilinan and Gregorio Honasan in 2007, Vicente Sotto III in 2010, and Sherwin Gatchalian in 2016.

**Table 1: 2016 Senatorial candidates and their bases of national followings**

Candidate	Family ties with a former president	Son/daughter of prominent (non-president) politician	Celebrity status	Regional following	Media exposure	Military ties	High-profile cabinet position
Paolo Benigno “Bam” Aquino IV	X			X			X
Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo	X			X			X
Manuel “Mar” Roxas II	X			X			X
Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III	X			X			
Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr.	X			X			
Francis Joseph “Chiz” Escudero		X		X	X		
Grace Poe		X	X		X		
JV Ejercito-Estrada	X		X	X			
Leila de Lima					X		X
Emmanuel “Manny” Pacquiao			X	X	X		
Miriam Defensor-Santiago				X			X
Sergio Osmeña III	X			X			
Alfredo Lim			X	X			
Antonio Trillanes					X	X	
Edgardo Angara				X			
Ma. Ana Consuelo “Jamby” Madrigal					X		
John Henry Osmeña	X			X			
Juan Flavier					X		X
Juan Miguel Zubiri		X		X			
Lito Lapid			X	X			
Manuel “Manny” Villar Jr.					X		
Nancy Binay		X		X			
Noli de Castro			X		X		
Ralph Recto		X	X				
Risa Hontiveros			X		X		
Juan Edgardo “Sonny” Angara		X					
Sherwin “Win” Gatchalian				X	X		

**Table 2: Parties represented by candidates for the Senate elections, 1995-2016**

<b>Political Party</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Total</b>
Independents	4	2	13	6	3	5	5	22	60
Lakas	4	12	5	8	6			2	38
Liberal		2	2	2	2	10	3	8	29
LDP	6	8	7		1		1		23
KBL	1		4	3	7	5		1	21
NPC	9	1			4	2	2	2	20
Nacionalista	1		1		2	7	3	1	15
UNA							8	6	14
Ang Kapatiran					3	7	3		13
KNP				11					11
Aksyon			1	6	1			2	10
Bangon Pilipinas						8	1		9
IBID				9					9
PMP		1		1		5		2	9
Reporma-LM		8		1					9
PDP-Laban	1	1	1		1	2	1		7
Lakas-KAMPI						6			6
PRP	3		1	1		1			6
KPPP		5							5
DPP							3		3
PDSP	1		1		1				3
UNO					3				3
Akbayan							1	1	2
Makabayan							1	1	2
PMM								2	2
Bagumbayan-VNP					1				1
Bayan Muna						1			1
GAD						1			1
KAMPI					1				1
PIBID			1						1
PGRP					1				1
PROMDI						1			1
Social Justice Society							1		1

**Table 3: Parties represented by elected members of the Senate, 1995 – 2016**

Political Party	1995	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010	2013	2016
Lakas	5	8	7	6		3	1	
LDP	14	5	5	2	1	1	1	1
Independent	2	2	5	2	5	4	4	5
Liberal		1	1	4	4	4	4	6
Nacionalista				2	3	5	5	3
NPC	2	2	1		1	2	2	3
PDP-Laban		1	2	2	1	1	1	2
PMP		1		4	2	2		1
PRP	1	2		1	1	1	1	
UNA							5	2
Lakas-KAMPI					4			
Aksyon		1	1					
Akbayan								1
Bagumbayan-VNP					1			

As candidates organize themselves into teams, the goal is either to affiliate with the administration party to enjoy the benefits of the administration machinery, or to affiliate with other strong candidates whose bases of electoral support would complement rather than erode one’s own personal networks of support. As a result, these coalitions do not last beyond a single election, and some candidates simultaneously become members of two (or occasionally even more) rival senatorial slates.

Consequently, multiple parties are represented in the Senate. As shown in Table 3, nineteen of the current 24 members of the upper house are dispersed across eight parties, with the remaining five declaring themselves to be independent of any party affiliation. This is, quite obviously, a remarkable demonstration of the highly fractured nature of the party system in the Philippines. Moreover, legislative coalitions are commonly formed around the party of the president. Hence, since 2016, even though PDP-LABAN has only two sitting senators (Aquilino “Koko” Pimentel III and Emmanuel “Manny” Pacquiao), the majority party came to be PDP-LABAN by virtue of Pimentel’s position as Senate President. Policy stances are by no means absent but they are highly individualized.

In sum, the MPS in Senate elections generates incentives among candidates to compete against co-partisans for votes, to build personalized networks of support instead of relying on a well-functioning party machinery, and to form temporary and *ad hoc* coalitions to consolidate and streamline each candidate's networks of support. Consequently, multiple parties and independent candidates stand for and win office; party labels are meaningless; there is no true party majority in Senate; and policy stances are individualized (e.g. votes for important national bills have nothing to do with party affiliation). Thanks to MPS, we can therefore conclude, the party system in the upper house of the Philippine legislature is effectively dysfunctional.

### **3 Multimember Plurality System in local elections**

The Philippines also uses the MPS to elect legislators at the subnational level. Each of the 81 provinces of the Philippines elect provincial board members. In addition, each of the 145 cities and 1,489 municipalities elect city and municipal Councilors, respectively.

#### **3.1 Elections for City and Municipal Councilors**

Municipalities in the Philippines have eight councilors elected at-large.<sup>3</sup> Cities, on the other hand, are sub-divided into as many as six districts. Some cities have 10 to 12 councilors elected at-large, while most other cities have four-, six- and eight-seat districts.

City and municipal councils also mandated to have (but do not always fill) three seats for ex-officio councilors: the municipal chapter presidents of the *Liga ng mga Barangay* (League of Barangays) and *Pederasyon ng Sangguniang Kabataan* (Federation of Youth Councils) and the Indigenous People's (IP) Representative. The Local Government Code of 1991 provides for an additional three sectoral representatives from groups of women or laborers or other specified sector (urban poor, indigenous cultural communities, or disabled persons) or alternatively from another sector that may be identified by the Council. This provision, however, has yet to be implemented with any consistency.

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<sup>3</sup> Pateros in Metro Manila is the sole exception. Pateros is divided into two districts, each electing six councilors.



### 3.2 Implications of MPS in the election of City and Municipal Councilors

The MPS in local elections has at least two major implications for outcomes of democracy. First, these multi-seat districts tend to produce multiple parties in each district as well as encourage candidates to run as independents. Table 4 compares the number of parties represented in the municipal council elections, by election year. Statistics in the top panel show that more party/coalitions are represented in elections for councilor than in elections for mayor and vice-mayor. Moreover, there tend to be more candidates running as independents for council office than for mayor or vice-mayor. The large number of parties represented in elections naturally results in the presence of a large number of parties in local governments (see bottom panel of Table 4). In just three election years (2001, 2004, and 2007), candidates for city or town mayor ran under a total of 202 party banners while those elected to the post represented a still quite remarkable 101 political parties. With local Philippine mayors thus affiliating themselves across literally dozens of political parties, one sees further evidence—as in the Senate—of a highly fractured party system. This also reflects a very low degree of party coherence or coordination from the national level to subnational levels.

**Table 4: Number of party/coalitions and independent candidates by office, for election years 2001, 2004, and 2007.**

Office	2001	2004*	2007	All Years
<u>All candidates</u>				
Mayor	41 (633)	129 (660)	91 (604)	202 (1,897)
Vice-Mayor	44 (803)	121 (877)	95 (622)	197 (2,302)
Councilors	56 (10,478)	246 (9,698)	43 (230)**	297 (20,406)
<u>Winners</u>				
Mayor	29 (60)	58 (62)	51 (38)	101 (160)
Vice-Mayor	31 (128)	70 (134)	58 (102)	116 (364)
Councilors	37 (1352)	122 (1,601)	20 (11)**	146 (2,964)

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are the count of independent candidates. \*Presidential election. \*\*Based on incomplete data.

In terms of local dynamics, what is especially notable is the particularly large number of party/coalitions in 2004, which is a presidential election year. While further research is required, I suspect that this is because candidates for councilors are mobilized to become supplementary brokers for national candidates. More candidates stand for office and run under different party/coalitions even if they have little chance to win, if only to arbitrage campaign funds from national candidates in exchange for supplying the latter with a ready corps of supporters.

The second major implication of the MPS is that it pits candidates against co-partisans in the same district. Although candidates typically run under the same party label, they often tend to mobilize their own personal networks of support rather than work collectively to get voters to support all of the party team with all of their votes. This intra-party competition exacerbates the meaninglessness of party labels to candidates and voters. This is reflected in the rampant party-switching prior to every election, as well as in the split-ticket voting of voters.

Table 5 reports the incidence of party switching of candidates for city and municipal Council between election years 2001 and 2004 as well as 2004 and 2007. The numbers indicate that a great majority of candidates for city and municipal councils switch party affiliations (80.47% between 2001 and 2004, and 50.81% between 2004 and 2007). These numbers are roughly the same as the incidence of party-switching among mayoral and vice-mayoral candidates, suggesting that (vertical) realignments between local candidates widely occur.

**Table 5: Incidence of party switching of candidates for City and Municipal Council across election years 2001, 2004, and 2007.**

Office	2001 to 2004	2004 to 2007
Mayor	1,358 /1,683 (80.69%)	832/1,360(61.18%)
Vice-Mayor	928 /1,164 (79.73%)	676/1,011(66.86%)
Councilor	10,571/13,136(80.47%)	188/370** (50.81%)

Notes: Each entry is presented as a fraction, where the denominator is the number of candidates running for election in both years specified in the respective columns, and the numerator is the number of candidates changing party affiliation from one election year to the next. Numbers in parentheses are percentages of party-switching from one election to the next.

\*\*Election returns for Council Elections are missing for most localities, hence the numbers reported here are for a small subset of the full sample.

Tables 6 & 7 report the number of voters who split their votes between parties represented in a city council elections. The data is from a survey of 902 randomly selected voters in Sorsogon City in 2013. Only 157 voters out of 902 report not splitting their votes.<sup>4</sup> In fact, only 42 voters who used all four of their votes voted for candidates from the same party. This represents less than 5 per cent of the sample; all the rest split their votes in various combinations of political parties including independent candidates.

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<sup>4</sup> These 157 voters include those who used 4 votes toward 1 party, 3 votes toward 1 party, 2 votes toward 1 party, and only 1 vote.

**Table 6: Number of voters who split their votes between parties.**

Type of split	District			Total
	Bacon	East	West	
0-0-0-1-0	0	1	1	2
0-0-1-0-0	14	13	9	36
0-0-1-1-0	0	2	5	7
0-0-2-0-0	10	5	10	25
0-0-2-0-1	0	0	2	2
0-0-2-1-0	0	3	2	5
0-0-3-0-0	3	4	11	18
0-0-3-0-1	0	0	2	2
0-0-3-1-0	0	1	9	10
0-0-4-0-0	5	5	24	34
0-1-0-0-0	2	9	5	16
0-1-0-0-1	0	0	2	2
0-1-0-1-0	0	1	0	1
0-1-1-0-0	8	10	14	32
0-1-1-1-0	0	1	5	6
0-1-1-1-1	0	0	2	2
0-1-2-0-0	5	12	8	25
0-1-2-0-1	0	0	1	1
0-1-2-1-0	0	6	21	27
0-1-3-0-0	4	30	70	104
0-2-0-0-0	0	5	3	8
0-2-0-1-0	0	1	1	2
0-2-1-0-0	3	23	9	35
0-2-1-1-0	0	10	4	14
0-2-2-0-0	3	47	27	77
0-3-0-0-0	0	1	1	2
0-3-0-0-1	0	0	1	1
0-3-0-1-0	0	3	0	3
0-3-1-0-0	1	33	7	41
0-4-0-0-0	0	6	2	8

Notes: Data is from self-reports of 902 randomly selected voters in Sorsogon City after the 2013 city council elections. Four parties are represented in these elections. The type of split is coded as split-voting between “Independents - UNA - NPC - NP - LP”. So for example, 0-1-1-1-1 means a voter has split his/her vote evenly between UNA, NPC, NP, and LP.

**Table 7: Number of voters who split their votes between parties, continued**

Type of split	District			Total
	Bacon	East	West	
1 - 0 - 0 - 0 - 0	4	0	0	4
1 - 0 - 1 - 0 - 0	11	0	1	12
1 - 0 - 2 - 0 - 0	20	1	2	23
1 - 0 - 2 - 1 - 0	0	1	4	5
1 - 0 - 3 - 0 - 0	38	3	2	43
1 - 1 - 0 - 0 - 0	6	2	1	9
1 - 1 - 1 - 0 - 0	9	1	2	12
1 - 1 - 1 - 1 - 0	0	1	0	1
1 - 1 - 2 - 0 - 0	28	10	8	46
1 - 2 - 0 - 0 - 0	2	1	0	3
1 - 2 - 0 - 0 - 1	0	0	1	1
1 - 2 - 1 - 0 - 0	8	7	1	16
1 - 3 - 0 - 0 - 0	2	1	1	4
2 - 0 - 0 - 0 - 0	3	0	0	3
2 - 0 - 1 - 0 - 0	9	1	0	10
2 - 0 - 2 - 0 - 0	28	0	0	28
2 - 1 - 0 - 0 - 0	3	0	0	3
2 - 1 - 0 - 0 - 1	0	0	1	1
2 - 1 - 1 - 0 - 0	21	0	0	21
2 - 2 - 0 - 0 - 0	5	0	0	5
3 - 0 - 0 - 0 - 0	1	0	0	1
3 - 0 - 1 - 0 - 0	3	0	0	3
3 - 1 - 0 - 0 - 0	2	0	0	2
Refused-to-answer	30	33	35	98
Total	291	294	317	902

The combination of intra-party competition, weak party labels and relatively small districts encourages council candidates to cultivate and respond to relatively narrow constituencies. Across the ubiquitous practice of vote-buying, as is discussed in Chapter Eight, pre-existing, family-based social network structures offer logistical advantages for targeting private inducements. Voters, similarly, use personal ties as heuristics for choosing local candidates, and the most successful candidates are those who have the financial resources for vote-buying and those who come from prominent families (Cruz, Labonne and Querubin, 2015, Davidson, Hicken and Ravanilla, 2016).

Moreover, evidence suggests that dynastic candidates for the local elections and those who are able to build alliances with upper-level candidates (as reflected in the number of party/coalitions they represent) tend to garner higher vote-shares and effectively win seats. Table 8 illustrates the advantages that accrue to candidates who are members of political dynasties as well as to candidates who run under multiple party banners. Compared to the average vote-share

of a mayoral candidate (34%), the average vote-share of candidates from a political dynasty are 3% higher at 37%, and the average vote-share of candidates representing multiple parties are even higher at 41%. In terms of likelihood of winning elections, the average mayoral candidate has a 34% chance of winning, but a mayoral candidate from a political dynasty and those representing multiple parties have an even higher chance of winning at 37% and 41%, respectively.

**Table 8: Candidate vote-shares and probability of winning, by office**

	<i>Vote-shares</i>			<i>Probability of winning</i>		
	Mayor	Vice-Mayor	Councilor	Mayor	Vice-Mayor	Councilor
Candidate is from a political dynasty	37%	37%	3.9%	0.37	0.37	0.31
Candidate is aligned with multiple parties	41%	40%	4.5%	0.41	0.38	0.38
Average across all candidates	34%	35%	3.8%	0.34	0.34	0.29
Number of observations	12,417	12,462	79,125	12,549	12,578	79,822

Note: Numbers reported are based on coefficient estimates from Ordinary Least Squares regressions of vote-shares (first three columns) and indicator for winning the election (last three columns), and are significant at the 5% significance level. Robust standard errors are clustered at the candidate-level and not shown. Outcome in columns (1) to (3) are vote-shares of candidates and in columns (4) to (6), an indicator for winning. Dynastic is an indicator for having a candidate with the same family name in the municipality/city, and ‘aligned with multiple parties’ is an indicator for representing more than one party. All regressions include municipality/city and year fixed effects.

## 4 Pathways for electoral system redesign

The previous sections emphasized how the widespread discontent with Philippine democracy today is very much a function of the electoral rules that impose constraints on the behavior of political actors. Specifically, the Multimember Plurality System generates incentives for political actors to behave in ways that undermine democratic accountability and consolidation. Therefore,

any reforms or redesign of the electoral system must anticipate how they might alter the behavior of political actors. Before I discuss possible pathways for reform, I briefly survey the experience of Japan and Thailand – two countries that formerly used versions of the MPS and decided to move away from them.

#### **4.1 Lessons from Japan**

*Pre-reform.* From 1947 through 1993 Japan used a different version of MPS, called the single non-transferable vote (SNTV), to elect the more powerful lower house of the Diet. In this Japanese-style MPS, each voter has only one vote to cast for a single candidate in a multi-candidate race for multiple seats in a district. Posts are filled by the candidates with the most votes. The number of seats ranged from one through six, and most districts had between three and five.

The primary problem with SNTV was that it forced candidates from the same party to compete for votes, much more so than is the case with Philippine-style MPS (where, as explained above, voters can cast as many votes as there are seats in a district). The dominant party throughout this period, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), ran multiple candidates in most districts. An LDP candidate who needed a few more votes to gain a seat found it easier to attract voters from other LDP candidates than from one of the opposition parties. This intra-party competition then fostered factionalism inside the LDP (Cox, Rosenbluth and Thies 1999). But the competition that SNTV generated within the LDP was not primarily among ideological camps, as ideological and policy differences became muted; rather, it was competition among camps over constituency service. Since the party in power possesses the advantage in any competition to perform every greater constituency service, SNTV facilitated one-party dominance in the Diet. Combined with this was the concomitant disadvantages that the system posed for opposition parties, which were unable to access the government resources that the ruling LDP could deploy for the benefit of its constituents. The Japan Socialist Party (JSP), the largest opposition party, found it increasingly difficult to field multiple candidates. It and other opposition parties fragmented as they competed for the progressive vote.

*Consequences of electoral reform.* As explained in Chapter Four, the 1993 reforms dramatically changed the Japanese electoral system. In the new system, 300 seats in the lower house of the Diet are now elected via first-past-the-post from single-member districts (in a system, as explained in Chapter Three, that is known as single-member district plurality, or SMDP).

Another 200 members of the Diet are elected via closed-list proportional representation (CLPR) in eleven districts ranging in magnitude from seven to 33. There is no compensatory mechanism linking SMDP and CLPR votes. The only connection between the two parts of the system is the double candidacy provision, that a candidate may run both in the geographically based SMDP system and also be included on a CLPR list. Parties may also rank several candidates equally on their lists, allowing the tie to be broken by the SMDP results.

With the SMDP system, political parties now have only one candidate per district. This marks a major change for the LDP. In the past, when more than one candidate sought the LDP nomination, the decision was often left to the voters: let all the candidates run as independents and whoever wins will join the LDP. This option is now much more dangerous. Candidates may be tempted to accept the support of other parties and the winner might not join the LDP, which now has a strong incentive to act in a more coherent way at the local level. For instance, the LDP is making rapid progress toward appointing a single person as the head of the local branch, and thus the prospective nominee for the next election, in every district. There are also indications that the factions have been weakened within LDP, due in large part to the fact that there is no longer as strong a structural basis for intra-party competition.

Theoretically, moving to SMDP should produce incentives for the opposition to coalesce around a single candidate capable of defeating the LDP, but so far the opposition parties continue to be fragmented. This is probably because the incentives toward the consolidation of a two-party competition are weakened by the presence of the 200 CLPR seats with only a 2% minimum election threshold within regional blocs.<sup>5</sup>

Lastly, the move to SMDP did little to change the incentives of individual candidates to build a personal vote based on constituency service and the disbursement of pork-barrel projects. However, the potential for policy competition among parties has increased.

## **4.2 Lessons from Thailand**

*Pre-reform.* Prior to 1997, Thailand used a version of MPS to elect the lower House of Representatives. As in the Philippine-style of MPS, voters cast votes for candidates regardless of party affiliation, and were allowed to vote for as many candidates as there were seats in a district.

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<sup>5</sup> In practice, the effective threshold is about 4.3%, which is still low enough for smaller parties to have a chance at winning seats (Jou 2009).



They could also vote for as many, or as few, candidates as they wished. Seats were awarded to the top vote-getters on the bases of the plurality rule.

The key difference is that parties in Thailand were required to field a full team of candidates for any district they wished to contest. The country's electoral districts were broken down into one-, two- and three-seat districts, with most districts having more than one seat. Hence, for example, a party was required to field three candidates in a three-seat district.

The MPS in Thailand had tended to produce multiple parties in each district, which in turn had contributed to the presence of a large number of parties in the House. Consequently, no party has commanded a majority since 1957. Instead governments were made of multi-party coalitions that were generally indecisive and short-lived.

The system also pitted candidates from the same party against one another in the same district. Although each party nominated a team of candidates, they often tended to campaign against each other by building personalized networks of support. As in Japan, this intra-party competition undermined the value of party labels to candidates and voters and contributed to incohesion and factions within parties.

*Consequences of electoral reform.* In 1997 Thailand adopted a new constitution which paved way for the replacement of the MPS with a parallel system made up of SMDP and CLPR elements. In this new system, 300 seats in the House of Representatives were now elected via SMDP, and 100 seats from a single nationwide district by CLPR. A party needed to reach a threshold of at least 5 per cent of the party list votes in order to be eligible for seats in this tier. Each party was required to submit a list of candidates for voters to consider, and voters cast two votes, one for a district representative and one for a party list. There was no compensatory mechanism between SMDP and PR votes. Unlike in Japan, double candidacy was not allowed.

An outcome of the move to single-member districts and the 5 percent electoral threshold in the party list tier was the reduction of the number of parties in Thailand. In the 2001 election for the House of Representatives, the effective number of parties in the legislature fell by half from an average of 6.2 before 1997 to 3.1 (Hicken 2006). For the first time since 1957 a single party, the newly formed Thai Rak Thai party, nearly captured a majority of the seats. It later gained a majority after a smaller party disbanded and joined its ranks.

Adding a national party list tier and shifting to SMDP also encouraged voters and candidates to focus more on party policy positions regarding national issues. In 2001, for example,

political parties, led chiefly by the Thai Rak Thai party, put significant effort into developing coordinated party-centered electoral strategies. Parties began to differentiate themselves in terms of their policy platforms and in some cases made those differences an important campaign issue. However, the shift towards party-centered strategies was primarily confined to the campaign for party list seats, while contests in the 400 single-member districts generally remained candidate-centered affairs. This is not surprising since single-member districts still generate incentives to cultivate personal support networks, especially when the district size is small and candidates only need to mobilize a small subset of the district electorate to win elections.

### **4.3 Redesigning the electoral system in the Philippines**

If there is anything to be learned from the experiences of Japan and Thailand, it is that policymakers need to try to anticipate how electoral reforms will shape politicians' incentives. As they seek to advance their careers, are they likely to keep, modify, or abandon existing strategies?

In Japan, the shift to SMD has largely addressed the problem of intra-party competition and prompted the leadership of the dominant party to be more cohesive in terms of nominating candidates for single seats in every district. The incorporation of CLPR in the reforms also encouraged coordination in terms of policy platforms among members of the party. Factions within LDP began to be undermined, but the reforms did little to encourage smaller opposition parties to coalesce into a single opposition party to defeat LDP, partly because CLPR does not eliminate the incentive of smaller parties to win seats in this tier given the low electoral threshold. Within the new SMDP system, individual candidates continued to promise material benefits to their districts and to make personalistic appeals as this is what delivers the votes.

In Thailand, the shift to SMDP and CLPR succeeded in reducing the number of parties and allowed the Thai Rak Thai to gain a majority in the lower house. The addition of the national party list tier started to encourage voters as well as candidates to focus more on policy positions regarding national issues. However, the shift to a plurality system in the new single-member districts continued to remain as candidate-centered affairs. As in Japan, candidates continued to cultivate personal networks of support even when intra-party competition was no longer a consideration. On the plus side, SMDP has the advantage of ensuring the representation of geographic interests.

### **4.3.1 Shifting to Closed-list PR**

The lessons from Japan and Thailand both imply that, first, a shift to SMDP for the election of either local legislators or Senators (via single-member regional/state districts) would be ill-advised. Such a shift would surely eliminate intra-party competition. However, it would do little in terms of reducing the number of parties, and in changing the incentives of individual candidates to build personal networks of support and to employ money politics, especially when candidates know that these strategies are what fundamentally deliver votes.

A second option might be a shift to an open-list PR (OLPR) type of system, in which parties choose the candidates but the voters are able to rank candidates within parties. Relative to the existing MPS (admittedly a very low bar of comparison, given how systematically it produces a highly fractured party system), OLPR could encourage political parties to coordinate policy platforms and positions regarding national issues. But as explained in Chapter Six, the experience of Indonesia cautions very strongly against the adoption of OLPR. There, the shift from CLPR to OLPR led to a shift from a more party-centric system to one that was far more oriented to candidates. In the Philippines, where parties are still at the nascent stage of development, OLPR would be sure to perpetuate the candidate-centric nature of the political system and provide little chance for parties to mature into more stable and coherent organizations.

In light of the above considerations, shifting to closed-list PR while maintaining the multimember nature of districts might offer some traction and prove successful in improving democratic outcomes in the Philippines. The use of CLPR in the Senate elections would mean that individual candidates are compelled to join a viable political party to have a chance of winning a seat. Because parties would decide the rankings in the slate, its members now have the incentive to coordinate amongst each other, so that campaign strategies tend to be more party-centered. If there is a significant threshold in place, members of smaller parties, especially the viable candidates, would also have the incentive to join ranks with other parties to form a stronger opposition party that stands a better chance against the ruling party.

The danger to moving to a closed-list PR in Senate elections, however, is that without clear laws governing the conduct of political parties, the system is prone to capture by the ‘list maker(s)’ within the party – those controlling who gets to be included in the party slate and how they are to be ranked. Moreover, for as long as it is costless to switch parties and join temporary and ad hoc teams/coalitions, those that can effectively consolidate the personalized networks of support of its

members would dominate in the elections. The result of such an unfortunate and unintended consequence would be a dominant (but still meaningless) party label composed of powerful individual candidates who continue to rely on their personal networks of support to be included and maintain or improve their rankings within the team/coalition.

Pursuing reforms at the local level by also shifting from MPS to CLPR may help mitigate the formation of meaningless political parties at the national level. A shift to CLPR would mean that local candidates are also now compelled to join a viable political party to have a chance of winning a seat. And as long as the local chief executives (mayors and governors) are up for election at the same time as national politicians, candidates will tend to align with parties that have national followings—further implying a smaller number of political parties.

It is of course very likely the case that, at least in the beginning, such political parties will coordinate campaigns and styles of governance that are largely based on money politics and patron-client relationships. That is, coordination within such political parties may be confined only to the streamlining of retail money politics during elections and patronage when in office, and in the consolidation of each candidate's personalized networks of support. But for as long as there is real competition among a small number of viable national political parties (and not between powerful individuals), such competition has the virtue of bringing out the best in these organizations. It also has the power eventually to undermine the pernicious institutions that rule national and local politics.

To facilitate the development of stable and well-organized parties from these 'unified clientelistic machines', nonprofit and international organizations can actively help build party organizational capacity and a leadership team within the party that would outlast the careers of individual members. Entrepreneurs within these political parties can take advantage of social media to build grassroots membership and sustain off-election-cycle accountability through online updates of the activities of the party and its leaders.

No process of political reform is without challenges, and regardless of the type of reform there is always the risk of unintended consequences. This includes electoral system reform. As the Philippines considers a highly ambitious package of political reforms, however, it would do well to recognize that electoral system redesign poses relatively fewer risks of unintended consequences as compared to other reform proposals that are on the table. If the overarching goal is to facilitate democratic accountability and consolidation, develop well-functioning political parties, improve

representation, and shift campaign strategies as well as governance styles from personalistic to programmatic, then electoral system reform is a critical first step.

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