

**POLITICAL DYNASTIES AND PROVINCE CREATION: THE POLITICAL
ECONOMY OF DECENTRALIZATION IN THE PHILIPPINES**

By

CHENG, Ranel Ram

THESIS

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KDI School of Public Policy and Management

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Committee in charge:

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ABSTRACT

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By

Ranel Ram C. Cheng

This study explores the role of “political dynasties” in the creation of new provinces as a feature of decentralization reforms in the Philippines. This research looks into whether political dynasties are able to create new provinces through gerrymandering in order to achieve political ends, thus indicating local elite capture of decentralization reforms. Co-optation of local elite families into representative institutions is a colonial legacy that manifests through the persistence of political dynasties in present-day institutions. By using historical institutionalism as analytical lens, key historical junctures in center-local relations were identified, parallel to the formation of the Philippine state, while situating local elite families within each juncture. In this way, this study distinguished between “Executive-led gerrymandering” and “Legislative-led gerrymandering” across different time periods. While the former fits the prevailing view of gerrymandering as a “strategic choice” of the central authority to accommodate rent-seeking by local elites, the latter shows how the Philippine Congress as an institution evolved as an amalgamation of local elites from across the country with the power to create the rules for decentralization, including that of province creation, to suit their own political interests in the first place.

Key words: decentralization, local elite capture, political dynasties, gerrymandering

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**Dedicated to my family,
Papa, Mama, Inday,
and to my grandparents**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Context and motivations for undertaking decentralization reforms is an important dimension in analyzing the political economy of decentralization.¹ In the Philippines, such reforms have been introduced over the past decades supposedly to bridge the gap between the national or central government and various local communities. However, there is evidence that so-called “political dynasties”, wherein members of a family or clan are elected to different positions at the same time or in succession with each other,² are able to thrive under decentralization. These political dynasties constitute local elite families who are able to exercise influence in policymaking and the allocation of government resources, not only through local government positions in practically every single province in the Philippines but also their relatives who make up the national Congress. In this regard, this thesis seeks to answer the main research question: *Was there local elite capture of decentralization reforms in the Philippines?*

In the formative years of the Philippine nation, members of elite families represented their respective provinces in the early national representative institutions (i.e. Congress) and their local counterparts (i.e. municipal councils). Their descendants continue to hold on to electoral power to this day. The persistence of political dynasties weakens democratic governance as it encourages corruption through personality-based patronage across the country³ and gives these dynasties undue electoral advantage which limits opportunities for

¹ Kent Eaton, Kai Kaiser, and Paul Smoke, *The Political Economy of Decentralization Reforms: Implications for Aid Effectiveness*, (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2010).

² Ronald Mendoza, Edsel Beja, Jr., Victor Vendia, and David Yap II, *Political dynasties and poverty: Resolving the “chicken or the egg” question*, 2013. Retrieved from Munich Personal RePEc Archive website <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/48380/>

³ Sheila S. Coronel, Yvonne T. Chua, Luz Rimban, and Booma B. Cruz, *The Rulemakers: How the Wealthy and Well-Born Dominate Congress*, (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2004).

reform-oriented, non-dynastic candidates to effectively compete during elections⁴. This has wide implications for institutional reforms such as decentralization in the Philippines that seeks empowered governance at the local level.

Decentralization is currently implemented through the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991, which guarantees greater devolution of powers and authority from the central government to local government units (LGUs) in the country and a higher share in the national revenue collections for these LGUs. Assessment of decentralization reform in the country, however, indicates that there is low quality of local services and uneven growth across the regions of the country under the current framework.⁵ Yet, despite the apparent lack of capability among LGUs, there has been a “trend of [...] splitting up of a local government into two or more smaller jurisdictions” which takes away the ability of these new LGUs to maximize economies of scale and special externalities.⁶ In the Philippines, provinces, as the first-level of subnational administrative division, are the largest local government units.⁷ Today, the Philippines with 81 provinces, has one of the most number of first-level administrative divisions in the world.

This trend of creating new subnational administrative jurisdictions or local government units as part of decentralization reform has been observed in other countries as well. Although the creation of new units can help in the de-concentration of the bureaucracy at the central government level, there has been indication that new local *administrative* units

⁴ Pablo Querubin, “Family and Politics: Dynastic Persistence in the Philippines,” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 11 no. 2 (2016): 151-181. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1561/100.00014182>

⁵ Joseph J. Capuno, “The Quality of Local Governance and Development under Decentralization,” in *The Dynamics of Regional Development: The Philippines in East Asia*, eds. Arsenio M. Balisacan H. Hill, 204-244. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2007)

⁶ Joseph J. Capuno, *Fiscal transfers and gerrymandering under decentralization in the Philippines* (DP 2013-04: 2013), 14

⁷ “First-level subnational administrative division” is a standard term for the largest subnational administrative division following the central government. Other countries may have different names for their respective first-level divisions, such as province, state, district, department, or even county. The extent of their functions and authority may also vary depending on the country.

are done to accommodate *political* motives. In his study of decentralization in Uganda, an “extreme case of unit creation” has been observed as attempts by its President to put patronage resources in the newly created districts in order to gain electoral support.⁸ This process of “selection of jurisdiction boundaries, both physical and fiscal... to serve electoral objectives by dividing the electorate into units that are easier to target in exchange for votes” is known as gerrymandering.⁹ Green notes that even though there has been extensive literature on decentralization as a whole, little focus has been given on the *creation* of new subnational units through gerrymandering under the pretext of decentralization reform.¹⁰

Often, these administrative units also constitute the electoral jurisdictions that constitute a national legislature such as parliament or congress, thus one explanation as to *why* gerrymandering happens under decentralization is that it is a strategic choice of *national* actors in order to gain the support of local elites, who in turn are considered as mere rent-seekers who want to maximize their share of national resources.¹¹ Hence, this view also emphasizes the greater agency put on central state actors with regard to the creation of subnational units as part of the decentralization process, and relegates local elite capture of these reforms to mere rent-seeking behavior. However, this would assume a powerful set of actors at the central level, particularly national political parties that can implement gerrymandering. But in the Philippines, as Hutchcroft noted, a unique characteristic of the Philippine polity in comparative politics is how the combination of a weak state bureaucracy complemented by weak political party system at the national or central level became an

⁸ Elliott Green, *District Creation and Decentralisation in Uganda* (Working Paper No. 24: 2008). Retrieved from Crisis States Research Centre Working Papers website

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08b9fed915d3cfd000e28/wp24.2.pdf>

⁹ Stuti Khemani, *Gerrymandering Decentralization: Political Selection of Grants-Financed Local Jurisdictions*, 2008. Retrieved from World Bank website

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEC/Resources/Khemani_GerrymanderingDecentralization.pdf

¹⁰ Green, *District Creation and Decentralisation in Uganda*

¹¹ Khemani, *Gerrymandering Decentralization*

opportunity for local elite families to exert their influence and power as rule makers throughout the country.¹² This “weak center” allows political dynasties to thrive in their respective localities where decentralization reforms are introduced and implemented.

In light of the persistence of political dynasties across the country and the particular trend of creating *new* subnational jurisdictions through gerrymandering under the guise of decentralization reforms, this thesis also seeks to answer: *can the creation of new provinces indicate local elite capture of decentralization reform?*

¹² Paul D. Hutchcroft, “Linking Capital and Countryside: Patronage and Clientelism in Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines,” in *Clientelism, Social Policy, and the Quality of Democracy*, (eds.) Diego Abente Brun and Larry Diamond (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 174-203.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. ELITE FAMILIES AND INSTITUTIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Bello et al. pointed out that a “weak central authority coexisting with a powerful upper-class social organization” emerged following the colonization of the Philippines, in contrast to the strong development state among its East Asian neighbors such as South Korea and Singapore.¹³ In studying the history of the Philippines, it is important to note that prior to the arrival of the Spanish colonizers in the 16th century, there was no one “country” that ruled over the islands. Instead, what existed were various settlements scattered and separated by mountains and seas, living in communities called *barangays* that consisted of up to a hundred households bonded by kinship, each having their own village chieftains called *datus*.¹⁴

To exercise authority over the archipelago, Spanish authorities concentrated power in the capital Manila while colluding with the pre-existing traditional elite structure by granting them special status as intermediary between locals and the Spanish authorities. As practiced in Europe at the time, appointments to government posts were usually sold to the highest bidder but opportunities for natives or *indios* were limited and so a slot in the colonial administration was based largely on patronage rather than merit.¹⁵ By the time the Americans displaced the Spaniards and established their own colonial regime over the islands in the 1900s, a system of patronage had already defined the dynamics between the central authority and local elites.

¹³ Walden F. Bello, Marissa de Guzman, Mary Lou Malig, and Herbert Docena, *The Anti-Development State: The Political Economy of Permanent Crisis in the Philippines*, (New York: Zed Books, 2005).

¹⁴ Danilo R. Reyes, “History and Context of the Development of Public Administration in the Philippines,” in *Introduction to Public Administration in the Philippines: A Reader* (3rd ed.), (eds.) Danilo dela Rosa Reyes, Prosperpina D. Tapales, Ma. Olivia Z. Domingo, and Ma. Fe Villamejor-Mendoza (Quezon City: University of the Philippines National College of Public Administration and Governance, 2015), 51-74.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 54-55

The Americans added to the existing bureaucracy representative institutions in their quest to “civilize” Filipino natives on the ideals of democracy. In order to steer away from supporting pro-independence movement, the Americans shared some of their political power to elites who by then have already established a strong economic base across the country.¹⁶ Elections were introduced at both the national and local levels, but those who participated and took office were mostly from the traditional elites themselves.¹⁷

The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism identified four clans that served in the 12th Congress (2004 to 2007) whose forebears were in the very first Congress that declared independence from Spain and another 44 families whose ancestors were elected in the first legislative elections under American rule.¹⁸ The same study found that 15 percent of all members of Congress were third- or fourth-generation politicians.¹⁹

The paradox of weak institutions and strong families was borne out of the system of patronage that first emerged under Spanish rule and the co-opting of these ruling families by the American insular government, which later on reflected post-independence, with the proliferation of political dynasties, especially in local government. These families used different ways in order to solidify their hold over their respective turfs, be it business or politics. Case studies in the book *An Anarchy of Families* demonstrate the “elite capture” of Philippine institutions whereby elite families, through their intimate relationships with politicians in government, including some of their own clan members in office, have maintained their resilience and exerted their influence over Philippine society.²⁰ Coronel further elaborates that, local elites in the form of political dynasties have found various ways

¹⁶ Hutchcroft, “Linking Capital and Countryside,” 189

¹⁷ Sheila S. Coronel, Yvonne T. Chua, Luz Rimban, and Booma B. Cruz, *The Rulemakers: How the Wealthy and Well-Born Dominate Congress*, (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2004).

¹⁸ Coronel, et al., *The Rulemakers*, 2004

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Alfred W. McCoy, *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

to consolidate their power, be it through their economic clout, social ties and machinery, the use of media and celebrity, intermarriages, force or violence, the perpetuation of myths, or through mergers and alliances.²¹

As part of the democratization movement that emerged after decades of authoritarian rule under President Ferdinand Marcos, a new constitution was ratified in 1987, which included *in principle*, the prohibition of political dynasties to guarantee equal opportunity for public office, but left it to Congress to enact legislation that would operationalize its definition and regulation. More than three decades since, more than 40 proposed legislation to regulate these dynasties have been filed in Congress, yet no comprehensive law has been successfully enacted that would prohibit political dynasties in all elective posts. In the same time period, six Presidents have since taken office. All of them belong to a political dynasty who owed their rise to power from their ancestors who began their political careers in local governments. That the state is unable to stop or at least mitigate the clout of political dynasties in its representative institutions has become a major roadblock for genuine democratic representation.

2.2. LOCAL GOVERNANCE UNDER DECENTRALIZATION

A study by Mendoza and Banaag, pointed out that in the past four election cycles from 2007 to 2016, the percentage of provincial governors and vice governors belonging to a political dynasty has risen from 70 to 81 percent and 62 to 81 percent, respectively, while up to 77.6 percent of members of the House of Representatives (Congress) come from political

²¹ Sheila Coronel, “The seven Ms of dynasty building,” *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism*, March 2007. Retrieved from <http://pcij.org/stories/the-seven-ms-of-dynasty-building/>

dynasties.²² Members of these local elite families have been able to clinch top local government positions tasked with drafting and implementing decentralization reforms.

Lange sought to describe how the political power of local elites can lead to different development outcomes by comparing two neighboring provinces in the Philippines with different elite local elite structures.²³ His case study showed how, competing local families in one province and virtual monopoly of one family in another, was related to the types of industries which flourished in these areas and later led to different development outcomes.²⁴ He highlighted, however, that aside from these differences, both provinces under the influence of their respective local elites, did not differ in the effectiveness of institutional planning of their respective LGUs since elite families were still engaged in promoting their own respective electoral, even commercial, agenda.²⁵ Incidentally, a study by Virola et al. found a correlation in which provinces having lesser dynastic prevalence (proportion of local elected positions occupied by political dynasties) scoring higher points in the recently formulated “Good Governance Index” developed by the Philippine Statistics Authority that covers outcomes such as education, economic performance, voter participation, crime, among others.²⁶ These indicate how the presence of these political dynasties and their influence affect the strength of institutional governance in local governments.

²² Ronald U. Mendoza and Miann S. Banaag, *Dynasties Thrive under Decentralization in the Philippines* (Ateneo School of Government Working Paper 17-003), 2013. Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2875583. In the Philippines, local elections are held simultaneously across the country every three years wherein voters choose a provincial governor and vice governor, city/town mayor and vice mayors, provincial council members, city/town council members, and Members of the House of Representatives (the Philippine Congress).

²³ Andreas Lange, “Elites in Local Development in the Philippines,” *Development and Change*, 41 no. 1 (2010): 53-76.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Romulo A. Virola, Kristine Faith S. Agtarap, Priscille C. Villanueva, and Mai Lin C. Villaruel, “The 2016 Elections and the Good Governance Index: Performance, Promises, or Political Dynasties?” Paper presented at the 13th National Convention on Statistics, Mandaluyong City, Philippines, October 2016. Retrieved from <https://psa.gov.ph/content/2016-elections-and-good-governance-index-performance-promises-or-political-dynasties>

Provinces, as the first-level of subnational administrative division, are the largest local government units in the country. Despite the greater autonomy granted to them however, provinces remain largely dependent on the national government for funds. Table 1 shows that local governments today remain largely dependent on the national government for funding through intergovernmental transfers, also known as the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) mandated by the Local Government Code, even though the same law empowers LGUs to collect local taxes and find other revenue sources within their respective jurisdictions.

Table 1. *Average LGU Dependency Ratio (2011-2015)*

LGU Type	IRA	Local Revenue Sources
Provinces	84.75%	12.36%
Cities	66.18%	31.38%
Municipalities	82.65%	11.68%

Source: Bureau of Local Government Finance

2.3. CREATION OF NEW UNITS UNDER DECENTRALIZATION

The national and local governments are often caught in constant “tugs of war” due to the fragmentation of basic services and the failure to properly ensure fiscal independence of LGUs in carrying out their devolved functions.²⁷ Yet, the general trend appears to be towards further subdivisions. From the 42 provinces that already existed by the end of the Spanish colonial rule²⁸, the total number of provinces in the Philippines has almost doubled to 81 at present. In contrast, much larger countries in terms of geography and population have fewer subnational units (see Table 2) but appear to exercise much stronger local autonomy.

²⁷ Capuno, *Fiscal transfers and gerrymandering under decentralization in the Philippines*.

²⁸ Maximo Kalaw, *The Development of Philippine Politics (1872-1920)*, (Manila: Oriental Commercial Company, 1927). Retrieved from The United States and its Territories Collection, University of Michigan Archive:

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/philamer/afj2233.0001.001/5?page=root;size=100;view=image;q1=the+malolos+constitution>

Table 2. Government Structures in Selected Countries

Country	Population (millions)	Area ('000 sq. km)	No. of State/Provinces	Government Structure
USA	323.99	9,833.52	50 states	Federal
Canada	35.36	9,984.67	13 provinces and territories	Federal
China	1,373.54	9,596.96	32 provinces, autonomous regions, and special units	Unitary
India	1,266.88	3,287.26	36 states and territories	Federal
Indonesia	258.32	1,904.57	33 provinces and autonomous regions	Unitary
Philippines	102.62	300.00	81 provinces	Unitary

Source: CIA World Factbook, estimates as of 2016

Green attempted to understand *why*, in Uganda, the subdivision of the country into many districts was a major component of its decentralization reform.²⁹ His analysis first pointed out that decentralization reform occurred simultaneous to other government reforms introduced after the coup led by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. He concluded that Museveni used the gerrymandering of new districts in the country under the guise of decentralization, so as to create new sources of patronage by pouring central government resources to district allies and to remain in power for over three decades.

Similarly, it was also intergovernmental funds from the central government that was found by Capuno to be a significant motivation for municipal (town) mayors in the Philippines to lobby for the conversion of the status of their municipalities into new, full-fledged cities (metropolitan governments) which is entitled to bigger allocations of these fund.³⁰ At present, creation of new LGUs or change in status is determined by the central government through legislation passed by Congress. Interestingly, it was mayors facing term limits who were more likely to push for conversion of their towns into cities and when successful, the succeeding mayor of the newly converted LGU would most likely be a

²⁹ Green, *District Creation and Decentralisation in Uganda*.

³⁰ Capuno., *Fiscal transfers and gerrymandering under decentralization in the Philippines*.

relative.³¹ This study, however, focuses more on towns and cities. Provincial governments, as LGUs themselves, not only receive their own share of central government grants, they also exercises authority over smaller LGUs such as towns and cities under their jurisdiction.

Both these examples demonstrate what Khemani calls “gerrymandered decentralization” which considers these “reforms” being made as a political choice in which new local government units are formed for the purpose of pouring in grants from the central government targeted to gain support from these localities.³² By subscribing to the theory of decentralization as a strategic choice, the underlying assumption would be that the “reform” or in this case, the creation of new subnational units fits the political interest of *national* actors, be it the President as in Uganda or Congress as in the Philippines, with local actors simply lobbying for or out to get a share of available grants, rather than attributing it to the local elite capture of decentralization reforms.

However, to frame decentralization simply in terms of these political choices can prove inadequate, as found by Sudhipongpracha and Wongpredee who analyzed why it took so long and slow for Thailand to adapt decentralization reforms.³³ They argued that the slow progress of decentralization in Thailand was not due to a “lack” of a democratic tradition in their culture, nor the constant compromises between national and local politicians; but rather, can be traced to the historical development of Thailand as a modern state.

Sudhipongpracha and Wongpredee identified “critical historical junctures” that defined the dynamics between central and local elite.³⁴ From a feudal nation with multiple centers of power, the modern Kingdom of Thailand began to exert direct rule over formerly

³¹ Ibid.

³² Khemani, *Gerrymandering Decentralization*

³³ Sudhipongpracha, Tatchalerm and Wongpredee, Achakorn, “Demystifying Decentralization and Its Setbacks: Evidence from Thailand’s Decentralization Reform,” *International Journal of Public Administration*, 39 no.6 (2016): 437-448.

³⁴ Ibid.

semi-autonomous regions and vassal states, fearing annexation by European imperialists who were actively engaged in neighboring kingdoms in Southeast Asia in the early 20th century. Electoral fraud and cases of corruption in the late 1980s spurred a democracy movement that rewrote the constitution to enshrine local autonomy in government affairs but the new government put a highly ineffective Ministry of Interior to be in charge of implementing decentralization reform, which allowed collusion between central bureaucrats and local elites. Decentralization in Thailand has likewise featured an increase in the number of local government units, doubling in just a period of 10 years. The inability of local governments to deliver on services became the rationale for Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawarta to implement his highly centralized “CEO-style” policies that relegated the role of provincial governors as Prime Minister Assistants instead of local chief executives in their own right.

The case of Thailand demonstrates how the set-up of decentralization reforms allows or constrains the influence of national and local elites. Similarly, the Philippines has also undergone periods of centralization and decentralization in governance, but unlike Thailand, Philippine institutions were borne out of a colonial legacy. The period of colonization is described as the centralization of authority and resources towards the colonial administration based in Manila and later during the authoritarian regime under former President Ferdinand Marcos.³⁵ Decentralization in its current form emerged after the 1986 EDSA People Power uprising³⁶, which served as a counteraction against the legacy of one-man dictatorial rule.³⁷ In other words, decentralization in the current context is considered an integral part of democratization in the Philippines.

³⁵ Alex B. Brillantes, Jr., “Decentralization, Devolution and Democratization: Old Concepts, Contemporary Applications,” *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* 12, no. 1 (1996): 83-88.

³⁶ The Epifanio de los Santos Avenue in Metro Manila, more popularly known by its acronym EDSA, was the site of protests and mass demonstrations on February 1986 that led to the fall of the Marcos dictatorship.

³⁷ Hal Hill, Arsenio M. Balisacan, and Sharon Faye A. Piza, “The Philippines and Regional Development,” in *The Dynamics of Regional Development: The Philippines in East Asia*, (eds.) Arsenio M. Balisacan H. Hill (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2007), 2.

Yet, political dynasties continue to dominate in both national and local governments. Although the 1987 Constitution that emerged from the democratization movement in the Philippines after two decades of authoritarian rule, sought to restore democratic governance in the country, the continuing prevalence of political dynasties is a bane to the maturing of the Philippines as a truly democratic state. Indeed, “democratic decentralization” does not guarantee deeper democratization at grassroots levels.³⁸

Their persistence throughout the history of the Philippines is an important point to consider in studying the political economy of decentralization. With the devolution of services and financial resources, these ruling families have access not only to public funds but also to special powers granted by law to Congress and local governments. Among these powers are provisions that allow the creation of subnational local government units, through special legislation crafted by Congress.

2.4. PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This thesis seeks to answer the main research question: *Was there local elite capture of decentralization reform in the Philippines?* In particular, this research looks into the politics behind the creation of new local government units that occur under decentralization, which has been given little focus on the overall literature about these reforms.

In the Philippines, new provinces are created through laws drafted by Congress, which are mostly comprised of political dynasties themselves. In most cases, congressmen, who are elected from legislative districts drawn based on the provinces, are often related to local officials from their home province. By contextualizing this issue in the Philippine

³⁸ Paul D. Hutchcroft, “Centralization and Decentralization in Administration and Politics: Assessing Territorial Dimensions of Authority and Power,” *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, 14 no. 1 (2001), 23-53.

setting, this thesis argues that the creation of subnational jurisdictions *can* be a symptom of local elite capture of decentralization reforms. In order to describe the nature of possible local elite capture, this thesis shall seek to specifically answer: ***can the creation of new provinces indicate local elite capture of decentralization reform?***

This research shall focus on the interaction between historical process of center-region relations and the formation of local elites in the country. In this regard, this thesis aims achieve the following research objectives. First, to identify the role of political dynasties as actors in the decentralization process—how they emerged and how they maneuver through institutions. Another important objective is to describe how provinces were created throughout the history of the Philippines.

Using the case of the Philippines as an example, this research can contribute to a deeper understanding on the process of local elite capture in decentralization reforms. Previous studies have already begun scratching the surface on the effects of elite families such as political dynasties on economic development and democratic participation, but there is a need to connect dynastic politics with overall decentralization reform. This thesis seeks to contribute to the research on the interplay between elite families and the state by focusing on how political dynasties can influence and also possibly benefit from the creation of new subnational jurisdictions.

3. STUDY FRAMEWORK

3.1. INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF DECENTRALIZATION

Much of the literature on decentralization focus on the assessment of decentralization reforms in terms of outcomes that encourage efficiency and accountability in governance. These classical economic theories have been useful in identifying issues such as asymmetries between local and national government under the fiscal decentralization framework, as well as the social welfare policies in local areas. Although the beauty of such framework is its empirical testability, this paradigm does not entirely capture *context* in which decentralization reforms were initiated in the first place.

Decentralization, like many governance reforms, does not exist in a vacuum. Historical institutionalism as an analytical lens in comparative politics takes into account the various interactions within and among institutions.³⁹ Newer theories on decentralization have now emphasized *how* such policies are designed, in terms of representation, fiscal arrangements among different levels of government, and the political party system, while considering such institutional arrangements as endogenous.⁴⁰

Decentralization in itself, however, is not simply one uniform process of shifting power and resources away from a central authority towards specific localities. Brillantes describes specific modes or forms of decentralization in the Philippines: (1) “deconcentration” which is the *administrative* transfer of functions from a central office to field counterparts in local areas; (2) “devolution” which is the transfer of *political* powers and authorities from the

³⁹ Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo, “Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics,” in *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*, eds. Sven Steinmo, Kathleen Thelen, and Frank Longstreth (New York: Cambridge University Press), 1992.

⁴⁰ Jonathan A. Rodden, “Federalism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, eds. Barry R. Weingast and Donald A. Wittman, (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2006), 364-366.

national government to local governments such as provinces or cities; and (3) “debureaucratization” which is the transfer of functions and authorities towards the private sector or civil society.⁴¹ Atienza adds another form of decentralization called “delegation” of powers and functions to semi-autonomous organizations such as public corporations and development authorities, which are not necessarily under direct control of central government agencies.⁴² Hutchcroft provides a simpler view of decentralization that summarizes the different modes described above as a “complex interplay” occurring within and between two distinct spheres: the *administrative* that largely deals with the bureaucracy and the *political* which covers the power play among institutions.⁴³

However, *how* policies and reforms were carried out is only one dimension in analyzing the political economy of decentralization. Studying *why* countries pursue decentralization recognizes that different countries had different motivations in pursuing decentralization. Depending on whom you ask, decentralization can be framed as a means for efficient delivery of services, a way to effectively govern vast territories, or a method for checks and balance that exact accountability from leaders.⁴⁴ They can come as a result of a shift in the economic structure, or as a way to ease ethnic tensions, or as a way of deepening democratization, among others.⁴⁵

Finally, the study of key actors *who* pursue and implement of reforms is likewise important in understanding the process of decentralization. No one individual or group—be they elected officials or career bureaucrat—can implement, support, even block,

⁴¹ Brillantes, “Decentralization, Devolution and Democratization.”

⁴² Maria Ela L. Atienza, “Local Governments and Devolution in the Philippines,” in *Philippine Politics and Governance: An Introduction*, eds. T.S. Encarnacion Tadem and N.M. Morada (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 2006).

⁴³ Hutchcroft, “Centralization and Decentralization in Administration and Politics.”

⁴⁴ Rodden, “Federalism,” 357-370.

⁴⁵ Jennie Litvack, Junaid Ahmad, and Richard Bird, *Rethinking Decentralization in Developing Countries*. (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1998).

decentralization reforms on their own.⁴⁶ The UNDP further notes that decentralization is not confined to government, but rather, it goes beyond other sectors such as private individuals and civil society organizations.⁴⁷ In relation to actors, the incentives to implement such reforms are also important with reference to the context under which they take place.⁴⁸

3.2. WHY STUDY ACTORS?

Actors are inherently both rule makers and rule takers; while institutions are borne from the decisions and compromises made by actors and groups, the institutions themselves serve to construct the identities and positions of these actors.⁴⁹ Although historical institutionalism puts the analytical locus on the institutions, one can also argue for the need to focus even more on *particular* actors or set of actors that maneuver through these institutions since they can be both objects and agents of the historical process. Though there have been studies on decentralization in the Philippines that focused on specific groups such as NGOs and civil society organization, indigenous peoples, and cultural minorities, they are often framed in terms of how they *responded* to the reforms introduced.

On the other hand, existing literature on the *introduction* of these reforms focused more on formal government actors. For example, Eaton zeroed in on the role of the national legislatures in introducing economic reforms, including fiscal policies under decentralization following democratization movements in Argentina and the Philippines. The extensiveness of these policies was molded relative to the preferences of multiple individual members and the legislature as a whole, which in turn has serious implications in terms of how a country can

⁴⁶ Eaton, Kaiser, and Smoke, *The Political Economy of Decentralization Reforms*

⁴⁷ UNDP, *Decentralization: A Sampling of Definitions*, [PDF], 1991. Retrieved from http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/decentralization_working_report.PDF.

⁴⁸ Eaton, Kaiser, and Smoke, *The Political Economy of Decentralization Reforms*.

⁴⁹ Gregory Jackson, "Actors and Institutions," in *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Institutional Analysis*, eds. Glenn Morgan, John Campbell, Colin Crouch, Ove Pederson, Peer H. Christensen, and Richard Whitley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 65.

absorb external shocks.⁵⁰ In connection, this thesis will touch on the political dynasties that make up a significant proportion of the national legislature.

With regard to theories on institutional actors, there has been a trend to move towards “actor-centered institutionalism under the so-called “new institutionalism” paradigm, which for all intents and purposes, is a relatively new understanding of institutions that somehow combines rational thought and historical institutionalism wherein the intentional actions and the structured interactions of actors are seen as shaping specific policy outcomes.⁵¹ Unlike in strategic choice theory, both formal and informal institutions can influence actor’s preferences since actors are not considered rational. Additionally, unlike in “traditional” historical institutionalist perspective, an actor’s agency in a particular process is emphasized over the role of the critical junctures of history since actions are not determined by the constraints or prescriptions of institutions.

This rather new “new institutionalism” was used by Alexandra Boessen in the analysis of health policy-making in the Europe by identifying the strategic behavior of various actors such as the European Union in order to exert influence towards harmonizing the healthcare system policies of individual countries even though they are technically exempt from EU laws.⁵² Their interests were already set as a given, thus analysis was made on their strategic behaviors in relation to interactions with other actors and institutions.

However, by considering actor’s attributes as a given, actor-centered institutionalism fails to consider the dynamic process of identity-formation and how actors can actually

⁵⁰ Kent Eaton, *Politicians and Economic Reform in New Democracies: Argentina and the Philippines in the 1990s*. (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

⁵¹ Eva-Maria Maggi, *The Will of Change: European Neighborhood Policy, Domestic Actors and Institutional Change in Morocco* (Berlin: Springer VS, 2015).

⁵² Alexandra Cornelia Martina Boessen, *The politics of European Union health policy-making: An actor-center institutionalist analysis* (Doctoral dissertation). 2008. Retrieved from Maastricht University <https://cris.maastrichtuniversity.nl/portal/files/643299/guid-33ea2961-baf9-46cd-ac21-450151abd759-ASSET1.0>

change or evolve their interests *at different points in time*. While there is, indeed, the need to focus more on actors in the analysis of institutional processes, the influence of critical historical junctures in the formation of institutions and these changes in interests among actors cannot be downplayed.

It is important to remember that as actors maneuver through institutions, institutions will still be the reference point in which these actors will be defined or how they make their own definitions institutions.⁵³ Methodologically, this means that studying an entire process such as decentralization can be made by comparing variations in patterns of institutional change, either across place (e.g. cross-country comparison) or across time (e.g. historical comparison), while situating the intentional action of actors within these institutional variations as a legitimate subject of research.⁵⁴

3.3. METHODOLOGY, SCOPE, AND LIMITATIONS

This thesis seeks to determine whether there was local elite capture of decentralization reform in the Philippines by focusing on the role of local elites, in the form of political dynasties, as institutional actors. Similar to the study of Sudhipongpracha and Wongpredee in Thailand, this research shall use historical institutionalism as analytical lens by using the institutional process of decentralization as reference point in identifying the “critical historical junctures” in the relationship between the central government and local governments in the Philippines. This means looking at the evolution of center-local relations across time, parallel to the formation of the modern state. Laws on local government administration, especially how local government units are created or defined, shall also be explained in depth.

⁵³ Jackson, “Actors and Institutions,” 79-80

⁵⁴ Ibid., 70

However, as literature by Bello et al. and Hutchcroft point out, institutions in the Philippines are themselves a product of colonial legacy borne out of a system of patronage and collusion with elite families. As such, this research shall also trace how these elite families evolved into becoming the “political dynasties” that we know of today. By situating the process of how local elites and their interests were formed along the critical historical junctures of center-local relations, we can better understand the role of political dynasties as actors, vis-à-vis the evolution of local administration, the introduction of decentralization reforms, and their interaction with other actors in the development of the Philippine state.

Finally, in order to “locate” local elite capture of decentralization reforms in the Philippines, the creation of provinces through gerrymandering shall serve as the variable of interest. Similar studies as the one by Green in Uganda assumed that gerrymandering was a strategic choice by national actors. This time, the locus shall be on local elites in the form of political dynasties to demonstrate how the creation of new subnational jurisdictions can, in fact, indicate local elite capture of decentralization reforms.

This study uses historical case study approach as the main method for data gathering by using primary sources such as archival documents, legal documents (constitutions, laws, executive issuances, court decisions), government reports, constitutional records; and secondary sources such as investigative reports, news articles, and a review of existing literature, in order to establish the “historical base” or context of the relationship between decentralization and institutional actors.⁵⁵ Existing databases on political dynasties from the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, the AIM Policy Center, and media organizations, as well as election results from the Commission on Elections, also provide valuable insight on the family ties among elected officials.

⁵⁵ Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research* (6th ed.), (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2016), 165.

Whereas the strength of this approach is the depth of the analysis of the case of the Philippines,⁵⁶ certain contexts unique to its institutional set-up may not be applicable to other countries. Instead, historical analysis offers a method to examine and reexamine other possible angles of a particular problem,⁵⁷ which in this case is local elite capture in decentralization reforms.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 19

⁵⁷ Ibid., 165

4. CRITICAL JUNCTURES IN CENTER-LOCAL RELATIONS

This section discusses the parallel evolution of center-local relations vis-à-vis the maneuvering of elite families within institutions, leading up to the present implementation of decentralization reforms. Particular attention was given to how new provinces were defined and created throughout history. Building upon the work of previous researches, this thesis identified the following critical historical junctures: (1) the establishment of a central authority under Spanish colonization, (2) the establishment of the first democratic representative institutions with provincial elite collusion under American colonization, (3) the approval of the first decentralization laws after full independence from foreign rule, (4) the regionalization program under the Marcos dictatorship, and (5) decentralization as a key feature of the democratization movement following the EDSA People Power uprising.

4.1. ESTABLISHING A CENTRAL AUTHORITY OVER THE ISLANDS UNDER SPANISH RULE (16th-19th centuries)

Because there had never been any central government authority controlling the entire archipelago that would eventually become the Philippines, the Spanish conquistadors took advantage of various internal feuds among ethnic groups and pitted them against each other.⁵⁸ The Spanish Crown granted *encomiendas* for Spanish expedition leaders as authority to collect tribute from locals as compensation for their contribution to the expansion of the empire.⁵⁹ A number of the established barangays (villages) were combined to form the first *pueblos* or towns for effective control of the conquered natives. The Spanish authorities

⁵⁸ Albert F. Celoz, *Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines: the Political Economy of Authoritarianism*, (West Port, CT: Prager, 1997), 10

⁵⁹ Reyes, "History and Context of the Development of Public Administration in the Philippines," 54-55

effectively retained the nobility of the ancient *datus* (village chieftains) and appointed them as *cabeza de barangay* (head of the barangay). From among the *cabezas*, one *gobernadorcillo* was chosen to lead the *pueblo*. The descendants of the ancient *datus* who became *cabezas* and *gobernadorcillos*, made up a new *principalia* class, a special status granted to a select group of native families who served as intermediary between locals and the Spanish authorities, and later making up the middle class of colonial society.⁶⁰

The Spanish authority effectively consolidated the scattered indigenous structures to form the first local governments that would answer to a centralized bureaucracy led by the Governor General seated in the capital Manila.⁶¹ Immediately under him were the *alcaldes-mayor* or governors who exercised authority over the provinces (*alcaldia*), which in turn were a cluster of *pueblos* organized through royal decree.⁶² The Spanish Governor General and the *alcaldes-mayor*, however, relied on the local *cabezas* and *gobernadorcillos* to collect the tributes and taxes from the communities in order to effectively run the colonial government.⁶³ Appointment of natives or *indios* in the colonial administration, pooled from the *principalia* class, was based largely on patronage rather than merit.⁶⁴ Ironically, some of the wealthier members of the *principalia* who received education in Europe became the elite scholars who led the reformation movement calling for representation of natives in colonial affairs,⁶⁵ which later served as inspiration for the Philippine revolution against Spain, funded largely by a section of the *principalias*.

⁶⁰ Emmanuel S. de Dios, "Local Politics and Local Economy," in *The Dynamics of Regional Development: The Philippines in East Asia*, (eds.) Arsenio M. Balisacan and Hal Hill (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2007), 157-203.

⁶¹ Mario D. Zamora. "Political History, Autonomy, and Change: The Case of the Barrio Charter." *Asian Studies: Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia*, 5 no. 1 (1967): 79-100.

⁶² Celozza, *Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines*, 11

⁶³ de Dios, "Local Politics and Local Economy," 162

⁶⁴ Reyes, "History and Context of the Development of Public Administration in the Philippines," 54-55

⁶⁵ Celozza, *Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines*, 13

In 1898, the Philippines declared independence from Spain with General Emilio Aguinaldo as President of the Revolutionary Government (now known as the First Republic of the Philippines). However, infighting among the revolutionary forces and factions of the *principalia* made this new government weak and failed to fend off the advances of the Americans, who began their own venture into empire with the acquisition of former Spanish colonies, including the Philippines, after their victory in the Spanish-American War in the same year. The short-lived First Republic of the Philippines⁶⁶ ceased when American forces captured Aguinaldo and a new colonial government was established.

One of the earliest studies on Philippine politics by Kalaw in 1927 identified 42 provinces that were created by the end of the Spanish rule, which would have corresponded to the provinces to be represented in the National Assembly under the First Republic.⁶⁷ An interesting note is that the provinces represented did not include the Muslim-dominated regions in Mindanao, which the Spanish colonial regime had failed to completely pacify but were nonetheless included in colonial maps at that time. Although the exact membership or the manner of selection of this National Assembly has not been recorded properly, existing documents indicate that the representatives either elected or appointed were mostly made up of the *principalia* class. At least four modern political dynasties, the Apacibles and Laurels of Batangas, the Aquinos of Tarlac, and the Ocampos of Manila, had forebears who were first elected during the First Republic.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Philippine Independence from Spain was declared on June 12, 1898. The Constitution of this newly independent Republic of the Philippines was ratified January 21, 1899, though it did not gain international recognition at the time due to the Treaty of Paris where the United States acquired the former Spanish colonies, including the Philippines. In February 1899, a month after the ratification of the Constitution, the Philippine-American War broke out and so this Constitution was not effectively enforced.

⁶⁷ Kalaw, *The Development of Philippine Politics (1872-1920)*

⁶⁸ Coronel, et al., *The Rulemakers*, 72

4.2. THE CREATION OF REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS UNDER AMERICAN RULE AND COLLUSION WITH PROVINCIAL ELITES (1901-1946)

Having inherited what remained of the colonial government structure left by Spain, the Americans had the two-fold challenge of building upon a “residual architecture” of government while at the same time eliciting support from pro-independence groups in the Philippines.⁶⁹ The American response was a mix of centralizing administrative authority while decentralizing political powers. The US government established the Philippine Commission led by Governor General William Howard Taft to exercise both executive and legislative powers in the country.⁷⁰ All laws and regulations, including budget appropriations and the creation of agencies, emanated from the Commission. The Americans sought to distinguish themselves from other colonial powers in their explicit support for local autonomy, inspired in part by the US federal system. Acts No. 82 and 83 passed by the Philippine Commission organized municipal governments and provincial governments throughout the archipelago. In his instruction to the Commission, US President William McKinley emphasized “native control” of local affairs:

In the distribution of powers among the governments organized by the commission, the presumption is always to be in favor of the smaller subdivision, so that all the powers which can be properly be exercised by the municipal government shall be vested in that government... following the distribution of powers between the States and the National Government of the United States.⁷¹

However, the American colonial government’s support for local autonomy stemmed not only from its goal of providing “political tutelage” to Filipinos; there was also a pragmatic recognition that in order to steer the moneyed *principalia* away from supporting

⁶⁹ Hutchcroft, “Linking Capital and Countryside,” 188

⁷⁰ Paul D. Hutchcroft, “Colonial Masters, National Politicos, and Provincial Lords: Central Authority and Local Autonomy in the American Philippines, 1900-1913,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 59 no. 2 (May 2000), 277-306.

⁷¹ U.S. Division of Insular Affairs, “Public Laws and Regulations Passed by the United States Philippine Commission,” 1901, Hathi Trust Digital Library. Retrieved from <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100221210>

pro-independence movement, the Americans also had to distribute political power to elites who by then have already established a strong economic base across the country.⁷² Municipal and provincial councils were composed of Filipinos, elected by Filipinos, but in practice, only those wealthy enough to pay taxes were qualified to vote or take office, while American military supervision was still deployed to local governments⁷³ and the Philippine Commission retained the power to remove local officials.

Another peculiarity of the Philippine colonial experience under the Americans was that the latter emphasized the formation of Philippine representative institutions before strengthening the professional bureaucracy.⁷⁴ In other words, unlike other colonizers, the Americans intentionally reined in local elites *with* them to take part in the exercise of political authority, rather than building the administrative institutions to exercise authority *over* them.⁷⁵ The American authorities recognized the influence of these local elites whom they called *caciques* “who combined local office with landed wealth to gain extraordinary control over the countryside.”⁷⁶ Ironically, by focusing on building representative institutions at the expense of professionalizing a central bureaucracy worked, the Americans were able to co-opt the *cacique* class to successfully secure their interest in the process of Filipinization of institutions while encouraging, to an extent, rent-seeking behavior practiced by local elites in municipal and local governments, whereby the colonial administration still did not have qualms in asserting central government control when needed.⁷⁷ **Thus, it appears that the American colonial regime simply took advantage of this need for Filipinos to be represented in administration, and introduced decentralization as an avenue for**

⁷² Hutchcroft, “Linking Capital and Countryside,” 189

⁷³ Brillantes, “Decentralization in the Philippines: An Overview,” 134

⁷⁴ Hutchcroft, “Linking Capital and Countryside,” 189

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ McCoy, *An Anarchy of Families*, 12

⁷⁷ Atienza, “Local Governments and Devolution in the Philippines,” 421

***political* representation through the newly established democratic institutions, but retained administrative control over national and local affairs.**

In 1907, the US Congress established a bicameral Philippine legislature: the Philippine Commission became the upper house and an all-Filipino National Assembly became the lower house. This provided additional opportunities to local elites to run for office not only on the municipal and provincial level, but also at the national level.⁷⁸ In 1917, the Philippine Commission was replaced by the Philippine Senate as the new upper house of the legislature and the National Assembly was renamed as the House of Representatives. For the first time, Filipinos controlled two chambers of its legislative branch.

With the Executive branch headed by an American Governor-General, the Philippine legislative became the new locus of power for Filipino native elites.⁷⁹ The relationship between the colonial government and elites can perhaps be described by one of the first major landmark legislation passed by the all-Filipino legislature: the Administrative Code of the Philippine Islands⁸⁰ which included, among others, a harmonization of laws and regulations covering local governments. The Code, named the different provinces along with their respective component municipalities, and the City of Manila as the “grand divisions” of the Philippines, together with the definition of their borders.⁸¹ The “grand divisions” made by the Americans were patterned after the existing provinces during the Spanish era, albeit with some modifications including the division of some provinces like Camarines and Misamis, as well as the merging of others to create new ones such as Palawan and Mountain Province. Some provinces were renamed such as Rizal while new provinces were carved out such as

⁷⁸ Hutchcroft, “Linking Capital and Countryside,” 189

⁷⁹ Celozza, *Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines*, 15

⁸⁰ The first Administrative Code was passed as Act No. 2657 on December 31, 1916. However, it was later revised four months after by Act No. 2711 passed on March 10, 1917. Unless stated otherwise, any mention of the American-era Administrative Code shall refer to the revised Act No. 2711.

⁸¹ Act No. 2711, Sections 42 to 63

Tayabas and Romblon. The Administrative Code also officially organized and incorporated seven Muslim-majority provinces to be supervised by the “Department of Mindanao and Sulu” even though residents continued to resist control by colonial authorities as they did under the Spaniards. In specific cases, “sub-provinces” were also organized, supervised by a lieutenant governor who answered to a provincial governor. These sub-provinces were usually smaller islands or isolated mountainous areas that were far from the provincial capital. Some of these sub-provinces would later become full-fledged provinces.

Interestingly, there were different rules governing the selection of local government officials. The Administrative Code made a distinction between provinces covered by “election laws” and those that were not. Provinces that the American colonial authority deemed fit to exercise local autonomy were allowed the direct election of provincial and municipal officials, while those that were needed to be under direct control by the colonial authority had local officials appointed by the American Governor-General. Yet, even with such distinction made, the American Governor-General still exercised expansive powers over all local governments, including powers to determine which provinces to be covered by election laws, to remove any local official and fill any vacancies, to fix boundaries, to create new subdivisions, and to make any necessary redistricting of territory.⁸² In this regard, the creation of new provinces was still essentially, in accordance to whether the Americans can “allow” them to exercise local autonomy. Furthermore, even though Filipino elites were now able to participate and engage in elective office both at the local and national levels, at the end of the day, they were still subject to the central authority of the Governor-General.

⁸² Act No. 2711, Sections 80 to 87

Another distinct characteristic of the American colonial regime was how it oversaw the creation of political parties as part of its mission to provide political tutelage.⁸³ Governor-General Taft, for example, lent his support for the Federalistas, a Filipino party that campaigned for the annexation of the Philippines as a US state, by giving party members a key role in the appointment of local officials.⁸⁴ Taft, who hailed from the state of Ohio, which itself was known for patronage-based party system, saw no wrong in the same style of political party formation in the Philippines.⁸⁵ In this regard, the formation of political parties in the Philippines was also weaved intricately into the system of patronage politics.

One party in particular, the Nacionalistas, would later dominate Philippine politics in the decades that followed by combining “provincial base with access to national power” as perfected by their party leaders, Manuel Quezon and Sergio Osmeña—provincial governors who became the first Senate President and the first Speaker of the National Assembly, respectively.⁸⁶ The two would also becoming leading figures in the negotiations with the US federal government that laid the groundwork for later independence. They would eventually succeed and become respectively, the first and second Presidents of the Commonwealth of the Philippines. It was also during this early foray into representative democracy when at least 44 modern political dynasties entered into politics, including clans that would later on produce Quezon and Osmeña’s successors.⁸⁷

Following successful lobbying by Filipino politicians, the US Congress passed the Philippine Independence Act (also known as the Tydings-McDuffie Act), which established

⁸³ Hutchcroft, “Colonial Masters, National Politicos, and Provincial Lords,” 287-288

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Hutchcroft, “Linking Capital and Countryside,” 190

⁸⁶ Hutchcroft, “Linking Capital and Countryside,” 189-190

⁸⁷ Coronel, et al., *The Rulemakers*, 72

the Commonwealth of the Philippines in 1935. A ten-year transition period was prescribed before “complete independence” was granted to the Philippines.⁸⁸

The 1935 Constitution of the Philippines instituted a republican form of government with three co-equal branches patterned to that of the United States. However, this Constitution emphasized a strong central authority embodied by a strong Executive branch since advocates for empowering local governments lost during the drafting convention.⁸⁹ In fact, there was no separate provision detailing the extent of the relationship between the central government and local governments, except that the President had “general supervision of local governments, as provided by law.”⁹⁰ In effect, this passed on to the President of the Commonwealth of the Philippines as head of government the same powers exercised by the American Governor General to define borders, create new administrative jurisdictions, and appoint local officials as needed. This gave the elected President of the Commonwealth Manuel Quezon, centralized control of “patronage resources” rather than incentives to strengthen central government *institutions* to carry out effective administration.⁹¹ Notably, during this period, Quezon did not wield his power to create new provinces.

With regard to decentralization in the Philippines, the legacy of the 1935 Constitution was the enshrinement of provincial representation in the legislative branch through the creation of single-member districts in the Congress and guaranteeing a representative for every province.⁹² Single-member district representation meant that members of the *cacique* can now focus on elections within their districts, thereby strengthening their electoral

⁸⁸ *Philippine Independence Act*, Public Law 73-127, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 84 (1934): 456-465

⁸⁹ Atienza, “Local Governments and Devolution in the Philippines,” 422

⁹⁰ The 1935 Constitution, Article VII, Section 11

⁹¹ Hutchcroft, “Linking Capital and Countryside,” 191

⁹² Coronel, et al., *The Rulemakers*, 74

prospects and eventually, monopolizing power *within* their respective local bases.⁹³ Large landowning families have taken advantage of this set-up and so in certain areas, a single family can effectively take hold of a legislative district for generations.⁹⁴

The period of American colonization in the Philippines ushered many of the peculiarities that would later become a persistent feature in the politics of the country. The Americans encouraged local autonomy that took advantage of the existing patronage system from the Spanish era, allowing local elites to take part in the representative institutions while ensuring strong centralization of administrative authority, embodied by the American Governor-General, as a sort of check on the influence of the *caciques* in provinces and municipalities. The American colonial regime also made a distinct mark in not only colluding with these provincial elites, but even going as far as supporting the formation of Philippine political parties, though they were patterned after the patronage-style party system in the United States at that time.

The Commonwealth period also set the precedent for a strong central Executive but did little to improve on central *administration* overall. Instead, the institutionalization of single-member districts and guaranteed representation of provinces in the legislative body in the fundamental law of the land set the precedent for bailiwick politics even after the full independence of the Philippines in 1946.

4.3. THE FIRST DECENTRALIZATION LAWS POST-INDEPENDENCE (1946-1972)

Formal independence began with the inauguration of the Third Republic in 1946. At this time, the 1935 Constitution was still in place, but Congress passed important legislation that formally institutionalized decentralization by empowering local governments. Republic

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Act No. 2264 or the Local Autonomy Act of 1959 reorganized provincial, city, and municipal governments and became the first of its kind in Philippine legislative history to set the precedent for a liberal interpretation of “local autonomy” in favor of local governments in the exercise of power and general welfare in their respective jurisdictions.⁹⁵ Among its salient provisions include empowering the local board to pass its own budget, to impose its own municipal taxes or fees, to adopt its own zoning and planning ordinances, and to make their own procurements within their jurisdictions. The law also set clear provisions on the succession of local officials that no longer necessitated appointment by the President, except only in extreme cases. In addition, provincial governors and city and municipal mayors were empowered to make appointments for positions such as treasurer within their own respective jurisdictions. In practice, the provincial governor became more powerful, as he now had, to a certain extent, supervisory powers over municipal mayors and the provincial government can check on actions and ordinances passed by municipal councils. **Thus, decentralization went beyond mere representation, and focused on building local autonomy through the devolution of administrative and political powers to local government.**

At the national level, the Philippine Congress took a more proactive stance in creating new provinces. Within a decade after the passage of the Local Autonomy Act, 14 new provinces were created. At that point, the last time major changes in provincial borders made were during the early years of American colonial rule up to the 1920s. Congress also passed the Republic Act No. 5185 or the Decentralization Act of 1967 that granted additional powers to local government units, as well as greater autonomy to undertake actions without the need for national government approval such as settling disputes between municipalities within a

⁹⁵ Republic Act No. 2264, Section 12

province, among others.⁹⁶ Though it did not outline the criteria as to what can constitute a new province, the Decentralization Act did require the direct election of officers for newly created provinces and local government units, effectively taking away that power from the President.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, the law retained the power of the President to suspend and remove local officials on legal grounds.⁹⁸

The post-War period saw a much more assertive Congress as a national institution but one made up of local officials with strong provincial bases. The President relied on provincial *caciques* that dominated the legislature for votes in order to pass important legislation while local officials needed to ensure a share of centrally administered funds to reach their districts.⁹⁹ It is not surprising as well that the Presidents of the Third Republic, much like their Commonwealth predecessors, began their political careers as locally elected officials who relied on established bailiwicks by other provincial *caciques* to reach national office. This dynamic, however, would change with the imposition of authoritarian rule by President Ferdinand Marcos in 1972.

4.4. REGIONALIZATION AND CRONYISM UNDER THE MARCOS DICTATORSHIP (1972-1986)

In 1971, President Ferdinand Marcos, himself a second-generation politician who began his career in provincial politics, called for a Constitutional Convention to replace the Commonwealth-era constitution. This was largely viewed as a way for him to remove term limits by shifting to a parliamentary form of government.¹⁰⁰ A year later, with the

⁹⁶ Republic Act No. 5185, Sections 11 and 12

⁹⁷ Republic Act No. 5185, Sections 8, 9, and 10

⁹⁸ Republic Act No. 5185, Section 5

⁹⁹ Coronel, et al., *The Rulemakers*, 75

¹⁰⁰ Celozza, *Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines*, 44

Constitutional Convention still in place, Marcos declared Martial Law throughout the Philippines, citing multiple security threats across the country. By that time, there was mounting pressure among delegates to speed up the process despite misgivings on transitory provisions that created an Interim Batasang Pambansa (National Assembly) without a clear time limit and granted lawmaking powers to the President in violation of the principle of separation of powers.¹⁰¹ Under Martial Law, the draft constitution, including these contentious provisions, was ratified in 1973 to mark the beginning of the Fourth Republic of the Philippines, through a plebiscite which Marcos himself ordered via presidential proclamation.

The imposition of Martial Law effectively put the country under one-man rule with a President who made the rules and a rubber stamp parliament that only served to give some semblance of separation of powers. What was interesting was that although dictatorial rule essentially centralized power to the Presidency, there was conscious effort to implement administrative decentralization across the country.¹⁰² Among the very first policies implemented under the Martial Law regime was the “Integrated Reorganization Plan” (IRP). The IRP granted the President the power to create or dissolve government agencies. Under the guise of improving bureaucratic efficiency, the IRP also included a regionalization plan, wherein Central government offices, including ministries, would open regional offices supposedly to decongest services already concentrated in Manila. In this regard, Marcos clustered the provinces into twelve different regions and established Metropolitan Manila as the National Capital Region.¹⁰³ Regional Development Councils (RDCs) were also created in

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 49

¹⁰² Brillantes, “Decentralization, Devolution and Democratization,” 86

¹⁰³ Celozza, *Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines*, 87

order to coordinate policy planning among the provinces and with the central government socio-economic planning ministry.¹⁰⁴

On paper, there was also support for promoting decentralization in governance and the promotion of local government autonomy. In contrast with the previous 1935 Constitution, the 1973 Constitution became the first for the country to have specific provisions on local government. It required the Batasang Pambansa to create a local government code that would set parameters for the creation of new provinces.¹⁰⁵ It also required a majority approval of citizens, through a plebiscite, in creating or abolishing new provinces, cities, municipalities, or other subnational jurisdictions.¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, the new Constitution also changed the composition of the Batasang Pambansa which had members elected at-large by region, though the provinces and previous local autonomy laws applicable were still retained.

In practice, however, the decentralization framework and policies set in place under Martial Law became merely instruments for legitimizing the authoritarian regime set in place by Marcos. Despite the explicit institutionalization of local autonomy in the constitution, the transitory provisions practically handed to Marcos the power to retain incumbent officials or appoint new ones¹⁰⁷, thus rendering the provisions on local government practically inutile. Likewise, with the power to make laws granted to President Marcos, his Proclamation 1081 which put the Philippines under Martial Law, and General Order No. 1, which put the entire government, including local governments, under presidential rule, rendered these institutions subordinate to Marcos himself.

The Marcos regime has been largely defined by the proliferation of cronyism and the suspension of civil liberties such as the freedom of expression and the right to assembly.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ The 1973 Constitution, Article XI

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ The 1973 Constitution, Article XVII

Using the government bureaucracy, both civilian and military, as his power base, Marcos rewarded allies with government posts and control over government-owned corporations while punishing critics and members of the opposition.¹⁰⁸ In line with the regionalization scheme under the IRP, Marcos appointed as “Presidential Regionals Officers for Development” members of the military, as well as key supporters coming from prominent families in each region such as the Enriles of Cagayan Valley, the Romualdezes of Leyte, the Duranos of Cebu, and the Dimaporos of Lanao.¹⁰⁹ He even appointed his wife, the First Lady Imelda Marcos as governor of the Metro Manila region. These regional leaders in turn, recommended to the President whether to retain incumbent officials or to appoint new ones, thus practically turning local government posts as political favors vulnerable to the system of patronage. ¹¹⁰ **Decentralization under Marcos was implemented based on the regionalization of the bureaucracy but with a strong central figure that gained legitimacy from local elites by retaining existing local government structures.**

Reacting to external concerns about the legality of martial rule in the Philippines, Marcos ordered the conduct of elections for the Batasang Pambansa (National Assembly) in 1978 and for local elections in 1980, while the country was still technically under Martial Law.¹¹¹ These elections, however, were merely for show in a sense that almost everything had the touch of Marcos himself. Marcos created a new coalition called Kilusan ng Bagong Lipunan (KBL or Movement of the New Society) supposedly composed of members from the old political parties. To gain access to the national machinery and electoral resources, it was in the interest of local candidates to join the KBL. It also served as a loyalty check for the

¹⁰⁸ Celozza, *Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines*, 76

¹⁰⁹ Celozza notes that at different points, these regional leaders were called by different titles such as Presidential Regional Monitoring Officers, Presidential Action Officers, among others, but all serving under the pleasure of the President.

¹¹⁰ Celozza, *Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines*, 87

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 62-67

dictator since, incidentally, the Minister of Local Government at the time was also the national party chairman of the KBL.¹¹² Not surprisingly, 68 governors out of 73 provinces and 91% of the Batasang Pambansa were members of KBL.¹¹³

Decentralization under Martial Law was one in which the central government maximized scale economies by administering based on regional clusters but at the same time retaining political legitimacy by colluding with existing provincial elites thus maintaining the status quo in the provinces. Under Martial Law, Marcos did not wield the power to create new provinces often despite his sweeping lawmaking authority, doing so only twice, with the creation of the province of Tawi-Tawi and the division of Cotabato. In each occasion, Marcos circumvented the plebiscite requirement mandated by the 1973 Constitution and even granted to himself the power to appoint new local officials.

The cunning of the Marcos dictatorship was that it allowed political competition among local elites, but only to win favor from the President. At least 25 modern political clans first emerged during the Martial Law years.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, branding oneself as an opposition against local incumbents meant opposing Marcos himself. One of the most popular opposition figures during the Martial Law years was Senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, Jr. whose assassination in 1983 became a rallying point for opposition forces.

Under mounting pressure from the international community, Marcos called for snap elections in 1986. This time, there was a clear opposition with the widow of Senator Aquino, Corazon Aquino, as its standard bearer. Massive cheating in the snap elections and a coup attempt by a reformist faction of the military culminated in the EDSA People Power uprising. Marcos fled the country and Aquino took her oath of office as President of the Philippines. In

¹¹² Hutchcroft, “Linking Capital and Countryside,” 193

¹¹³ Celozza, *Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines*, 63; *Philippine Electoral Almanac*, 122

¹¹⁴ Coronel, et al., *The Rulemakers*, 73

the wake of this popular uprising, Aquino appointed a commission that would draft a new constitution to mark a new chapter in the country's history.

4.5. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CODE AND POLITICAL DYNASTIES IN THE POST-EDSA DEMOCRACY (1986-present)

The 1987 Constitution, ratified months after the EDSA People Power uprising, marked the inauguration of the Fifth Republic of the Philippines. This new constitution was in essence, a direct repudiation and attempt at undoing the authoritarian regime set-up by former President Marcos. There was a conscious effort among the framers of the new constitution to introduce safeguards that were a direct reaction to the experience under Martial Law. It also included significant constraints to the power of the President such as the introduction of a single six-year term and the need for legislative approval in declaring Martial Law.

In word and in form, it did not completely erase, but rather built upon certain provisions of the 1973 Constitution, including the provision on local governments. For one, the new constitution mandated a “just and fair share” of national revenues that should be automatically released to local governments¹¹⁵, with the hope of lessening the possibility of central government to use revenue allotments as a tool for patronage. There was also an in-depth discussion of supporting the entry of “new blood” in politics even at the local level, with the introduction term limits for local officials as well. The new constitution ruled that local officials could enjoy three consecutive three-year terms only, with possibility of future re-election, only after a gap of at least three years.¹¹⁶ One major source of contention among

¹¹⁵ The 1987 Constitution, Article X

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

the members of the Constitutional Convention, was how to deal with the phenomenon of “political dynasties.”

Under the Declaration of Principles and State Principles, “The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service, and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law.”¹¹⁷ The wording of this particular section was intentional. During the debates, there was an outright consensus that public service should not be used to accumulate political power; term limits were introduced to ensure that an individual could not do so, as in the case during Martial Law.¹¹⁸ However, proponents for an outright prohibition of political dynasties felt that term limits were not enough, noting that incumbency afforded built-in advantages not just to an individual but also to members of his or her family. One of these anti-dynasty proponents at the Constitutional Convention, Jose Nolleto, described a scenario that has since be used in defining what a political dynasty is and the rationale for banning such:

“In the case of local government officials like governors, for example, we allow them to have two reelections. If he is reelected twice, he can no longer run for reelection in which case, he will ask his close relative — a son or a daughter or a brother or a sister — to run for public office under his patronage. And in this case, we circumvent the rule against further reelection because it may also happen that his younger son may run for governor and he is still strong enough to exercise moral as well as effective influence upon the son. And the son becomes a sub-altern, subjecting himself to the will of the father who has apparently retired.”¹¹⁹

However, in the ensuing debates, there was concern that a sweeping ban on political dynasties would be an additional restriction that would contradict equal access to public office. The debate on political dynasties ended up as a discussion of definition, and who would best define such, resulting in the compromise which was to declare a prohibition of political dynasties as a matter of principle but leaving it up to Congress to make the

¹¹⁷ The 1987 Constitution, Article II

¹¹⁸ Records of the Constitutional Commission No. 39

¹¹⁹ Records of the Constitutional Commission No. 90

definition.¹²⁰ To be fair, the 48-member Constitutional Convention itself was composed of individuals from different sectors, including the Church and civil society, and not just traditional politicians. Yet, their failure to settle the question of political dynasties has created a loophole that was since been taken advantage of by political dynasties themselves.

More than half of the composition of the House of Representatives during the first four congressional terms under the Fifth Republic (8th to 12th Congress) belonged to political families (Table 3). Members of the House of Representatives are elected from legislative districts drawn by province. This period covers the crucial first decade since the end of the authoritarian regime, when the foundations for democratic reforms were supposed to have been built.

Table 3. *Members of the House of Representatives belonging to Political Families*¹²¹

Generation	8 th Congress (1987-1992)	9 th Congress (1992-1995)	10 th Congress (1995-1998)	11 th Congress (1998-2001)
1 st Generation	31	32	34	37
2 nd Generation	66	59	59	59
3 rd Generation	22	34	31	32
4 th Generation	3	3	12	11
Total from Political Families	122 (52.3%)	128 (59.3%)	136 (60.7%)	139 (62.1%)
Total Members of the House	214	216	224	224

Source: Coronel, et al., *The Rulemakers*, 60

The figures show that in the post-EDSA People Power era, political dynasties continue to proliferate in the Philippine Congress, envisioned to be the highest lawmaking institution in the country as a coequal branch of government, in contrast to the Martial Law-era rubber stamp parliament. In this regard, the 1987 Constitution, which was supposedly the institutionalization of the democratization movement in the Philippines following

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ These are members who have relatives that hold elective positions, including in-laws. First generation members were elected simultaneously with their relatives. Second to fourth generation members include those whose relatives were elected simultaneously or prior to them. The figures do not include those without relatives.

authoritarian rule, was not able address the dynastic nature of its representative institutions. Inasmuch as it was a repudiation of one-man rule and cronyism, it appeared that the regime “change” simply became an entry point for a new faction of elite families or a simple shift in political alliance by ruling families.¹²² Not surprisingly, efforts to pass legislation in Congress that would define and prohibit political dynasties had consistently failed ever since.

Congress did, however, comply with another constitutional obligation: the enactment of the Local Government Code. Under Martial Law, the Batasang Pambansa had passed the Local Government Code of 1983 (Batas Pambansa 337) but it was never effectively implemented since former President Marcos had essentially usurped powers that could circumvent its provisions. In fact, the enactment of a new Local Government Code to promote “genuine” decentralization became one of the key policy pledges of the President Corazon Aquino to contrast the new government from the authoritarian regime.

Republic Act No. 7160 or the Local Government Code of 1991 (LGC) operationalized decentralization in the context of the Philippines to include not just local autonomy among local government units (LGUs), but also greater participation of the private sector in governance. On top of the existing power of LGUs to collect their own local taxes, the new law guaranteed that 40% of the total Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) or the total internal revenue collection by the national government would go to all LGUs. Furthermore, LGUs at every level were now guaranteed a share of the IRA based on the formula laid out by the law. In other words, 23% of the total for example, would be subdivided among the 81 provinces of the Philippines (Table 4). To determine how much would go to every individual province, those with a bigger population or with a larger area are expected to receive more, but the law also stipulates an equalizing fund regardless of size (Table 5).

¹²² Bello, et al., *The Anti-Development State*

Table 4. *Share of LGUs in the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA)*

LGU Type	Total Number	IRA Share
Provinces	81	23%
Cities	145	23%
Municipalities	1,489	34%

Source: Republic Act No. 7160 (Local Government Code of 1991); Philippine Statistical Authority

Table 5. *Formula to Determine IRA Share of each LGU*

Criteria	IRA Share
Population	50%
Area	25%
Equal Sharing	25%

Source: Republic Act No. 7160 (Local Government Code of 1991)

The LGC also recognized the role of other institutions and actors beyond the government bureaucracy in implementing decentralization reforms, such as non-government organizations and civil society (i.e., debureaucratization) and public corporations and development authorities (i.e., delegation). **In this way, decentralization became one important feature of post-EDSA democratization.**

The LGC of 1991 also set clear parameters as to what new provinces (and other LGUs in general) can look like based on income, area, and population, with consideration for smaller islands. Congress was granted the exclusive power to create new provinces through law but it can only be activated through a majority approval via plebiscite. Elections for new officials would be synchronized with the next local election or through a special election organized by the Commission on Elections. Interestingly, despite considering the province as the largest subnational unit, the 1987 Constitution and the laws passed under it (including the LGC) still retained the Marcos-era region scheme in its administrative function. National ministries still maintained offices at the region level. Provinces and cities still were lumped together under Regional Development Councils (RDCs) for socio-economic development planning. In other words, inasmuch as LGUs were granted greater autonomy politically and

administratively, the national government still recognized the need, as it did under the previous regionalization plan, to maximize economies of scale. Thus, a newly created province would simply be welcomed into existing RDCs.

The idea of decentralization as democratization supposedly went beyond mere representation, and idealized greater access among citizens in governance. However, although the socio-political atmosphere that emerged post-EDSA People Power formalized larger democratization in the legal framework but in practice, it has been hijacked by certain actors, most especially elite families under the so-called “EDSA system.” It is in this regard that there is a need to critically assess the dynamic process of decentralization by looking into particular, the role of elite families that have been a fixture in the Philippine polity.

5. FINDING LOCAL ELITE CAPTURE IN DECENTRALIZATION REFORMS

5.1. ELITE FAMILIES IN EVOLVING CENTER-LOCAL RELATIONS

Historical institutionalism as an analytical lens allowed us to situate local elite families as actors throughout the dynamic *process* of decentralization. The previous section showed how the central-level administrations exercised varying degrees of centralized and decentralized governance over local governments. Whereas the concept of “decentralization” has been difficult to define precisely, the analysis of critical historical junctures showed different rationales for decentralization emerged at different points in time.

What is interesting was how central governments, whether the colonial authority or the post-independence republic under full Filipino control, had to deal with members of provincial-based elites across different parts of the country. The colonial administration of both Spain and the United States ensured that there was a strong central figure in the person of the Governor-General who had the final say in all matters of both national and local affairs. But the colonial regimes also needed to ensure their legitimacy over the natives and did so by colluding with certain sectors of the pre-existing society. The colonial government under Spain created a system of patronage wherein descendants of pre-colonial royal families took part in the exercise of colonial administration such as tax collection, and later on formed what became the *principalia* class. By the time the Americans took over, the *principalias* had gained significant political economic clout in their respective areas and were known as the *caciques* who owned vast tracts of lands and commerce.

The American colonial administration needed to gain the support of these provincial elites who have previously financed the Philippine revolution against Spain and so introduced political representation of Filipinos in the colonial government. With the promise of “local

autonomy,” the Americans introduced elections for a new Philippine Legislature and local provincial and municipal councils across the country. Thus, the Americans “decentralized” governance by allowing *representation* through the newly established democratic institutions, in which members of provincial elites were invited to run for office and take part in policymaking but effectively giving the Governor-General the final say in the exercise of both national and local affairs.

Two key state institutions that would later play important roles in the implementation of decentralization reforms emerged: the Executive and the Legislative. Post-colonization, the modern Executive branch of the Philippines headed by the President emerged from the tradition of a strong central authority embodied by the colonial-era Governor General. Whereas the Governor General was the source of authority and resources during colonization, the President post-independence simply took over while retaining highly centralized powers. However, the Filipino President became one who was able to consolidate the various elites who formed provincial or even regional ethno-linguistic blocs. The first post-Independence presidents like Manuel Quezon and Sergio Osmeña were provincial leaders who were able to create a national base which eventually brought them to the highest office in the country.

Unlike the Executive, the first Filipino legislature was first organized by inviting local elites from different provinces and consolidated them into one national body, Congress. In addition, political parties in the country were woven into the clientelistic system of patronage that began since colonization, thus making them rife for personality-based elections that make it easier for political dynasties to simply bank on their family name to win votes. Furthermore, the institutional arrangement wherein legislative districts were arranged according to provinces encouraged a kind of bailiwick politics in which a particular family can solidify their control over a particular area from generation to generation. Over time,

descendants of these local elites formed the political dynasties that continue to dominate Congress and local positions today.

Both the Executive and the Legislative branches in the Philippines have exerted significant influence in the introduction and implementation of institutional reforms such as decentralization, though as Eaton had previously noted, the two branches may have different motivations behind supporting such reforms.¹²³ Tracing how state institutions were formed can help us “locate” possible local elite capture of decentralization reforms in the Philippines.

5.2. THE CREATION OF PROVINCES IN THE PHILIPPINES

As there was no “Philippines” as a nation prior to the establishment of a central authority under colonial rule, the creation of provinces is essentially a part of the overall formation of institutions in the Philippines, thus linking it to evolving center-local relations and the institutional interactions that occurred among the various actors throughout this historical process. Throughout the history of the Philippines, the creation of provinces was carried out either by order of the chief executive of the central government or through legislation passed by Congress, though the role shifted between them throughout different time periods that reflect changing rationales and motivations in the implementation of decentralization reforms. Table 6 summarizes the origins of the provinces in the Philippines, categorized according to the historical junctures identified in the previous section.

Previous studies have shown that as part of decentralization reforms, certain actors can push for the creation of subnational jurisdictions through the process of gerrymandering. One explanation for “gerrymandered decentralization” to occur is that it is a strategic choice of central actors to accommodate rent-seeking among local elites by pouring of patronage

¹²³ Eaton, *Politicians and Economic Reform in New Democracies*, 210

resources over these newly created jurisdictions. Earlier, we have traced how the Executive and Legislative branches of government evolved into two distinct institutions over time, while noting how political dynasties emerged throughout the formation of these institutions.

While the modern Executive (i.e. the President) evolved into a national figure from a local base who eventually became the “central figure of the center” that can share patronage resources or authority, Congress became a national-level body but one made up of elites with strong local bases that can support or block the initiatives of the President. As such, a simple dichotomy between “national elites versus local elites” may not necessarily paint a complete picture in studying decentralization in the Philippines. One can even argue that there really is no true “national” elite inasmuch as it is an amalgamation of various local elites scattered across the country. **By focusing on the evolution of local elite families into political dynasties within the historical-institutional context of center-local relations in the Philippines, we are also able to analyze how local elite capture of decentralization reform can be possible by distinguishing between Executive-led gerrymandering versus Legislative-led gerrymandering.**

Table 6. Philippine Provinces by Historical Juncture

Spanish Colonial Era (including First Republic)	American Colonial Era (including Commonwealth)	Post-War Era (Third Republic)	Marcos Dictatorship (Fourth Republic)	Post-EDSA (Fifth Republic)
Ilocos Norte				
Ilocos Sur				
La Union				
Pangasinan				
Cagayan				
Batanes				
Isabela				
Nueva Vizcaya		Nueva Vizcaya		
		Quirino		
Abra				
Lepanto	Mountain Province			
	<i>Kalinga</i>	Kalinga-Apayao		Kalinga
	<i>Apayao</i>			Apayao
Padre Burgos	<i>Benguet</i>	Benguet		
	<i>Ifugao</i>	Ifugao		
Bulacan				
Bataan				
Nueva Ecija	Nueva Ecija			
	Tayabas	Quezon		
		<i>Aurora</i>	Aurora	
Marinduque				
Pampanga				
Tarlac				

Zambales			
Batangas			
Cavite			
Laguna			
Rizal (formerly Morong)			
Mindoro		Oriental Mindoro	
		Occidental Mindoro	
Paragua	Palawan		
Calamianes			
Albay	Albay	Albay	
Catanduanes		Catanduanes	
Camarines	Camarines Norte		
	Camarines Sur		
Masbate			
Sorsogon			
Capiz	Capiz	Capiz	
		Aklan	
	Romblon		
Antique			
Iloilo		Iloilo	
		<i>Guimaras</i>	Guimaras
Negros Occidental			
Bohol			
Cebu			
Negros Oriental	Negros Oriental		
	<i>Siquijor</i>	Siquijor	
Leyte	Leyte		
	<i>Biliran</i>	Biliran	

		Southern Leyte		
Samar		Samar (Western Samar)		
		Eastern Samar		
		Northern Samar		
Zamboanga	Zamboanga del Sur	Zamboanga del Sur	Zamboanga del Sur	
			Zamboanga Sibugay	
		Basilan		
	Zamboanga del Norte			
Misamis	Bukdinon			
	Misamis Occidental			
	Misamis Oriental	Misamis Oriental		
		Camiguin		
	Lanao	Lanao del Sur		
		Lanao del Norte		
	Davao	Davao del Sur	Davao del Sur	
			Davao Occidental	
		Davao del Norte	Davao del Norte	
			Compostela Valley	
	Cotabato	Cotabato (North)	Cotabato (North Cotabato)	
			Sultan Kudarat	
			Maguindanao	
		South Cotabato		South Cotabato
			Sarangani	
Agusan	Agusan del Norte			
	Agusan del Sur			
Surigao	Surigao del Norte		Surigao del Norte	
	Surigao del Norte		Dinagat Islands	

	Surigao del Sur
Sulu	Sulu
	Tawi-Tawi

Sources: Kalaw (1927), PCDSPO (2016), The Administrative Code of 1917, The 1987 Constitution

Notes: The creation, subdivision, consolidation, or renaming of provinces can be traced chronologically from left to right. Provinces are listed from north to south as they appear in the Philippine map, to reflect present-day regional clustering and geographical proximity, as far as practicable. The “creation” of a province is based on the establishment of a formal subnational government entity under the supervision or authority of the central government. Places listed in *italics* indicate sub-provinces created under the provinces immediately above it.

5.3. EXECUTIVE-LED GERRYMANDERING

During the period of colonization, both under Spain and the United States, the creation of provinces was done by the authority of the Governor General as chief executive of the islands. Local officials were relegated to the mere execution of decisions made at the center and their authority to do so was incumbent upon the colonial administration, even with the introduction of elections and representative institutions by the Americans, wherein Filipinos, or at least a certain section thereof, were able to take part in policymaking. By prioritizing the creation of representative institutions to share in political power, at the expense of professionalizing the bureaucracy in exercising administrative control, the Americans were able to quell separatist sentiments among the section of the population that had the economic clout to fund revolutions in the first place. So much so that by the time the Americans left, Filipino elites who made their way to national prominence under American rule simply took over the void left by the former colonizers.

The Commonwealth government and the early years of the post-independence Republic of the Philippines saw a strong central authority under a Filipino President, who exercised supervisory powers over the entire bureaucracy, including that of local affairs. While Filipinos now took reins of government, supporters of a strong central government prioritized national consolidation over those who wanted stronger local governments. The new President essentially replaced the old Governor General as the primary source of administrative authority and control of patronage resources. Interestingly, this period did not see the creation of any new provinces in the country.

Similarly, when President Marcos declared Martial Law, he essentially centralized decision-making authority to himself and cunningly created a system of patronage masked as his regionalization scheme. In halting the conduct of local elections, he was able to retain

incumbent officials in their positions indefinitely, and then, by granting himself the power to dismiss the same local officials and replace them with new ones, he became the main source of all power and authority under the authoritarian regime. Loyalty to the dictator became crucial for local elites to get their share of patronage resources. His regionalization scheme not only relegated the legislative branch as a rubber-stamp parliament, it also changed the makeup of membership to Congress at the regional, instead of the provincial level. Despite having the power to do so, Marcos only authorized the creation of four new provinces, but he also ensured that the resources to actually run these local governments would come from the Office of the President himself. The rubber-stamp parliament did not assert their power to create provinces either. Perhaps they themselves did not see the need to do so, since by that time, seats were appropriated on a per region basis and electoral advantage was determined by allegiance to Marcos.

The power relations between the central executive and local provincial officials under Executive-led gerrymandering fits well with the dynamics described under the “strategic choice” theory of gerrymandering. In the Philippine setting, it appears that the strong “central” authority described by previous literature pertains to a powerful President, with largely unchecked control by a legislative branch, and who exercises great authority *over* local governments.

5.4. LEGISLATIVE-LED GERRYMANDERING

Within a decade after the passage of the Local Autonomy Act in 1959, the division of large provinces into smaller jurisdictions was carried out through legislation. A number of sub-provinces were “upgraded” as full-fledged provinces that can now enjoy representation in Congress while at the same time, practice full autonomy without the supervision of a

“mother province.” The provinces of Southern Leyte and the division of Samar were formed following the borders of existing *legislative* districts, something that has never been done before. Meanwhile, the large provinces in Mindanao, Lanao, Cotabato, and Davao, that used to have only one representative in Congress before, were divided into two new provinces that were each represented as “lone legislative districts” in Congress (Table 7).

Although legislators could pass laws to create new provinces, the power to render the law in effect, was still legally vested at the discretion of the President, through an official proclamation. Also, the transitory provisions of these laws granted the President the power to appoint the first set of officials of a new province until the regularly schedule local elections were to take place. This created an interesting dynamic between Congress and the President.

By becoming the initiators in the subdivision of provinces or the creation of new ones, the Legislative branch was now able to assert the power to define its membership on its own since every province was entitled to automatic representation in Congress. By defining the borders of the new province through law, Congress in essence, was also able to define the jurisdiction of a new legislative district. On the other hand, it did not completely usurp power from the President since he still retained the power to “activate” the law while at the same time, having the opportunity to appoint allies to key local posts *before* elections were held in accordance with the transitory provisions of the law. Obviously, this provided appointed officials the advantage of incumbency by the time citizens got to vote while giving the central appointing authority a chance to consolidate a new local base. After all, the pathway to the Presidency, almost always began at the local level. To win elections, the President had to appease local elites who had a strong base in their respective areas. Thus, the President did not necessarily veto legislation of this kind.

An interesting note on these new provinces at the time was that the incumbent representatives prior to division almost always became the congressman to represent the new province created. Additionally, the creation of new provinces also brought “fresh” members of Congress who had never served in the national legislature before. Out of the 25 political families that emerged in Congress during this period, nine began to solidify their footing in the newly subdivided provinces.¹²⁴ While majority of the legislators were able to hold on to their seats up until President Marcos abolished Congress under Martial Law, some never made a comeback. The nine political families that emerged during the creation of these new provinces either persisted as part of Marcos’ coalition (i.e., the Cosalan of Benguet, the Sarmientos and Cagas of Davao and the Plazas of Agusan del Sur) or made a comeback after the reorganization of local governments following the People Power uprising (i.e., the Badelles of Lanao del Norte, the Lumauigs of Ifugao, and the Chiongbian of South Cotabato).

Similarly, the period after the passage of the Local Government Code in 1991 saw an accelerated pace in the creation of new provinces through legislative action. The LGC of 1991 formalized the power to create new provinces exclusively to Congress, leaving the President only with the power of the veto as with any other legislation. It also opened a new dimension in the creation of subnational jurisdictions. In addition to guaranteed local autonomy and representation in Congress, new provinces were assured of a share in national revenue collections, determined by a formula set by law.

However, the LGC of 1991 also featured a number of institutional constraints that had not been present before, such as term limits for local officials, as well as minimum requirements in size, area, and income as to what could constitute a province. One interesting

¹²⁴ Coronel, et al., *The Rulemakers*, 72-73

note is that, according the LGC, a province should have at least 250,000 inhabitants, which is the same requirement the Constitution set in creating legislative districts in Congress. Thus, it is not surprising that many of the provinces created after 1991 followed the territorial boundaries of existing legislative districts. (See Table 8.) In other words, one province represented as two legislative districts in Congress, for example, became two distinct provinces with two separate “lone” legislative districts. The LGC also did away with sub-provinces altogether and constituted them as provinces in their own right.

In this regard, an interesting pattern emerged. Similar to the case in the 1950s and 1960s, some incumbent representatives at the time of province creation secured their spot as the representative of the new province, as in the case Chiongbian in Sarangani or Ecleo in Dinagat Islands. However, unlike before, a number of congressmen who helped shepherd the legislation to create a new province eventually either became governor of the province they helped create in the first place or had a family member become governor. Facing term limits, some congressmen simply ran for governor and had a family member run for their seat in Congress. This was the case of Chiongbian in Sarangani, Bulut in Apayao, Ecleo in Dinagat Islands, and Bautista in Davao Occidental. The reverse can also be true wherein local officials such as governors or former Mayors were now able to enter Congress by running to represent the new province as in the case of Nava in Guimaras and Amatong in Compostela Valley.

In most cases, the new province became a “safe seat” for certain political clans, weeding out competition and securing both the governorship and a congressional seat (see Table 8). In the Dinagat Islands for example, although Glenda Ecleo had served as the representative of the 1st District for decades, their family was not able to clinch the governorship of Surigao del Sur due to competition with the Barbers clan that controlled the

2nd District, which included the provincial capital. Similarly, the Bautista clan had fought bitterly over the governorship of Davao del Sur with the Cagas family, although both clans had secured their seats representing the two districts of the province for decades. In the case of the Bautista family, which only emerged as a formidable provincial clan after the EDSA People Power, they were no match to the Cagas family that held the provincial capitol when the province was first created during the first division of Davao. Ironically, the members of the two rival clans were able to put political differences aside and actually became co-authors in the bill that created the province in the first place.

That said, the gamble to create new province did not necessarily work out in the long term for some clan members. The Hofer clan of Zamboanga Sibugay, for example, has struggled to retain the governorship of the province which clan patriarch George Hofer sponsored as the former Representative of the 3rd District of Zamboanga del Sur. Many of his relatives had failed to win province-wide seats and their influence has been limited to only one district. Likewise, the Sarmiento clan of Compostela Valley whose members had controlled the former 1st District of Davao del Norte and sponsored the creation of the new province had failed to make their mark in the province they helped create. Instead, the governorship fell into another newer clan that defeated them.

What is clear, however, is that political dynasties were able to maneuver through constraints set in place by the LGC of 1991 that was supposedly crafted in the era of decentralization as democratization. To an extent, the creation of new provinces did allow the entry of new political players in these new jurisdictions, but as often the case, they were most likely to be new dynastic clans themselves. The Espinas of Biliran and Navas of Guimaras were local dynasties that gained membership to Congress by running in their respective bailiwicks. On the other hand, some congressmen who had influence over a small portion of a

large province were able to establish their dynasty over an entirely new province on their own. The division of the former Kalinga-Apayao province, whose capital was located in the sub-province of Kalinga, was too far from the hometown of the Bulut clan, whose influence largely centered in the Apayao area. In establishing two separate provinces, they were able to become among the few clans who held long uninterrupted rule over *both* the governorship and congressional seat, by rotating these positions among three family members only.

In creating new provinces through legislation, lawmakers in Congress were able to secure the power, not only to define its own membership, but also to create entirely new jurisdictions with all the benefits entitled by law. Because of the dynastic makeup of Congress, however, the supposedly national lawmaking body acts to assert parochial claims rather than a “national” interest. In other words, despite being a national-level institution that constitutes a “national” elite, Congress becomes more of a vehicle in which local elites can forward their own respective interests. With the lack of a cohesive party system at the national level, these parochial interests are essentially tied with the personal interest of individual lawmakers themselves.

Table 7. Provinces Created from 1959 to 1969 (under Local Autonomy Act)

Province	How Territory was Defined	Enabling Law and Date	First Congressman After Creation	Family Dynasty? (Yes or No)	Years Individual or Family Held District/Province
Southern Leyte	Towns comprising former 3 rd Legislative District of Leyte	Republic Act No. 2227 (May 22, 1959)	Nicanor Yniguez, former Representative of the 3 rd District of Leyte	No	29 years (1957 to 1986)
Lanao del Norte	Defined by law dividing the province of Lanao	Republic Act No. 2228 (May 22, 1959)	Laurentino Badelles, former Representative of the District of Lanao (undivided)	Yes	28 years (1957 to 1965; 1987 to 2007)
Surigao del Sur	Defined by law dividing the province of Surigao	Republic Act No. 2786 (June 19, 1960)	Vicente Pimentel	Yes	23 years (1961 to 1965; 1987 to 1998; 2010 to present)
Eastern Samar	Towns comprising former 3 rd Legislative District of Samar	Republic Act No. 4221 (June 19, 1965)	Felipe Abrigo, former Representative of the 3 rd District of Samar	No	15 years (1957 to 1972)
Northern Samar	Towns comprising former 1 st Legislative District of Samar	Republic Act No. 4221 (June 19, 1965)	Eladio Balite, former Representative of the 1 st District of Samar	Yes	14 years (1957 to 1971)
Benguet	Towns comprising the former sub-province of Benguet under former 2 nd District of Mountain Province	Republic Act No. 4695 (June 18, 1966)	Andres Cosalan, former Representative of 2 nd District of Mountain Province	Yes	26 years (1965 to 1972; 1978 to 1984; 1995 to 2001; 2010-present)
Ifugao	Towns comprising the former sub-province of Ifugao under former 3 rd District of Mountain Province	Republic Act No. 4695 (June 18, 1966)	Romulo Lumauig	Yes	8 years (1969 to 1972; 1987 to 1992)

Kalinga-Apayao	Towns comprising the former sub-province of Kalinga-Apayao under former 1 st District of Mountain Province	Republic Act No. 4695 (June 18, 1966)	Felipe Almazan	No	3 years (1969 to 1972)
Camiguin	Former sub-province, separated from province of Misamis Oriental	Republic Act No. 4669 (June 18, 1966)	Jose Neri	No	5 years (1969 to 1972; 1984 to 1986)
Quirino	Former sub-province, separated from province of Nueva Vizcaya	Republic Act No. 4734 (June 18, 1966)	(represented in Congress through Nueva Vizcaya until 1984)	-	-
South Cotabato	Defined by law dividing the province of Cotabato	Republic Act No. 4849 (July 16, 1966)	James Chiongbian	Yes	18 years (1965 to 1972; 1987 to 1998)
Davao del Norte	Defined by law dividing the province of Davao	Republic Act No. 4867 (May 8, 1967)	Lorenzo Sarmiento, former Representative of the Lone District of Davao	Yes	21 years (1965 to 1972; 1984 to 1998)
Davao Oriental	Defined by law dividing the province of Davao	Republic Act No. 4867 (May 8, 1967)	Constancio Maglana	No	3 years (1969 to 1972)
Agusan del Sur	Defined by law dividing the province of Agusan	Republic Act No. 4979 (June 17, 1967)	Democrito Plaza	Yes	34 years (1969 to 1972; 1984 to 1998; 2001 to present)

Notes: The provinces listed here were those that were created within the first decade after the passage of the Local Autonomy Act of 1959. The criteria to create these provinces, including their territorial boundaries, were determined by the enabling laws indicated here. For Kalinga-Apayao, South Cotabato, and Davao del Norte, the number of years was counted up until these provinces were further subdivided after the enactment of the Local Government Code of 1991 under the Fifth Republic. Unless otherwise indicated, the first Congressman elected after the creation of a province had not served in Congress prior to his election.

Table 8. Provinces Created from 1992 to 2016 (under Local Government Code)

Province	How Territory was Defined	Enabling Law and Date	First Congressman After Creation	Family Dynasty? (Yes or No)	Years Individual or Family Held District/Province
Sarangani	Towns comprising former 3 rd Legislative District of South Cotabato	Republic Act No. 7228 (March 16, 1992)	James Chiongbian, former Representative of the 3 rd District of South Cotabato	Yes	23 years (1987 to 2010)
Biliran	Towns comprising the former sub-province of Biliran under former 1 st Legislative District of Leyte	Local Government Code (May 11, 1992)	Gerardo Espina, former Mayor of Naval (capital)	Yes	23 years (1995 to present)
Guimaras	Towns comprising the former sub-province of Guimaras under former 2 nd Legislative District of Iloilo	Local Government Code (May 22, 1992)	Catalino Nava, former Governor of Sub-province of Guimaras	Yes	24 years (1988 to 1992; 1998 to present)
Apayao	Defined by law separating the province of Kalinga-Apayao	Republic Act No. 7878 (February 14, 1995)	Elias Bulut, former Representative of Lone District of Kalinga-Apayao	Yes	26 years years (1992 to present)
Compostela Valley	Towns comprising former 1 st Legislative District and parts of 2 nd Legislative District of Davao del Norte	Republic Act No. 8470 (January 31, 1998)	Rogelio Sarmiento, former Representative of 1 st District of Davao del Norte	Yes	14 years (1987 to 2001)
			Prospero Amatong, former Governor of Davao del Norte	Yes	29 years (1987 to 2016)
Zamboanga Sibugay	Towns comprising the former 3 rd District of Zamboanga del Sur	Republic Act No. 8973 (February 22, 2001)	Belma Cabilao, former Representative of 3 rd District of Zamboanga del Sur	No	12 years (1992 to 1998; 2004 to 2010)
Dinagat Islands	Towns comprising some	Republic Act No. 9355	Glenda Ecleo, former	Yes	26 years (1987 to 1995;

	maritime portion of the former 1 st District of Surigao del Sur	(December 2, 2006)	Representative of 1 st District of Surigao del Sur		2001 to present)
Davao Occidental	Towns comprising the former 2 nd District of Davao del Sur	Republic Act No. 10360 (October 28, 2013)	Franklin Bautista, former Representative of 2 nd District of Davao del Sur	Yes	31 years (1987 to present)

Notes: The provinces listed here were those that were created the passage of the Local Government Code. The criteria to create these provinces were set by the LGC, while the territorial boundaries were determined by the enabling laws indicated here. The count for number of years starts from 1987 after the inauguration of the Fifth Republic.

Table 9. Political Dynasties in the New Provinces Created under 1991 LGC

Province	Governor	Vice Governor	Representative
Sarangani	Priscilla Chiongbian (1995 to 2004) Steve Chiongbian Solon (2013 to present)	Steve Chiongbian Solon (2007 to 2013) Bridget Chiongbian-Huang (2004 to 2007)	James Chiongbian (1987 to 2001) Erwin Chiongbian (2001 to 2010)
Biliran	Rogelio Espina (2001 to 2010) Gerardo Espina Jr. (2010 to present)		Gerardo Espina (1995 to 2004) Gerardo Espina Jr. (2004 to 2007) Rogelio Espina (2010 to 2016)
Guimaras	Catalino Nava (1988 to 1995 as sub-province)		Catalino Nava (1995 to 1998) Joaquin Carlos Nava (2007 to 2016) Lucille Nava (2016 to present)
Apayao	Elias Bulut (2001 to 2010) Elias Bulut Jr. (2010 to present)		Elias Bulut (1992 to 2001) Elias Bulut Jr. (2001 to 2010) Eleanor Bulut-Begtang (2010 to present)
Compostela Valley	Prospero Amatong (1987 to 1998 in Davao del Norte)		Prospero Amatong (1998 to 2007) Rommel Amatong (2007 to 2016)
Zamboanga Sibugay	George Hofer (2001 to 2010)		George Hofer (1998 to 2001)

			Dulce Ann Hofer (2001 to 2004; 2013 to present)
Dinagat Islands	Geraldine Ecleo-Villaroman (2007 to 2010) Glenda Ecleo (2010 to present)	Geraldine Ecleo-Villaroman (2010 to 2016) Benglen Ecleo (2016 to present)	Glenda Ecleo (1987 to 1995; 2001 to 2010) Ruben Ecleo (2010 to 2013)
Davao Occidental	Benjamin Bautista Jr. (2001 to 2007) Claude Bautista (2007 to 2010 in Davao del Sur; 2016 to present in Davao Occidental)	Franklin Bautista (2016 to present)	Benjamin Bautista Sr. (1987 to 1998) Franklin Bautista (1998 to 2001; 2007 to 2016) Claude Bautista (2001 to 2007) Lorna Bautista-Bantigan (2016 to present)

Notes: The provinces listed here were those that were created the passage of the Local Government Code. The criteria to create these provinces were set by the LGC, while the territorial boundaries were determined by the enabling laws indicated here. The count for number of years starts from 1987 after the inauguration of the Fifth Republic.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. LEGISLATIVE-LED GERYMANDERING AS EVIDENCE OF LOCAL ELITE CAPTURE

One key assumption of the strategic choice theory of gerrymandering considers the relationship between national actors and local elites as one between rent-giver and rent-taker. By situating local elites in the historical process of decentralization in the Philippines, we are able to distinguish differences in the formation of two national institutions that had authority to create provinces in the country: the Executive branch and the Legislative branch. Whereas Filipino involvement in state administration began with the co-option of local elites by colonial authorities into national institutions, two distinct paths emerged. The Executive branch, represented by the President evolved to replace colonizers as the central source of patronage but one who had to consolidate his/her own provincial base and securing support of others, while the Legislative branch evolved to become a congregation of provincial elites in supposedly representing local interests.

With the absence of platform or ideology-based political parties, itself a colonial legacy that relegated party formation as a means to exercise patronage politics, Congress evolved to perpetuate personality-based interests rather than platform-based debates. This created an environment for the perpetuation of political dynasties since electoral succession was not based on party interests but rather family interests. By the time decentralization was introduced in its current form under the Fifth Republic and the Local Government Code of 1991, the body tasked to set the “rules of the game” were themselves members of local elites who happen to constitute a national body. Even with the introduction of additional institutional constraints such as term limits, members of these political dynasties were able to

persist by using available loopholes in the laws they created (such as a Congressman running for provincial governor and vice versa) or by collectively ignoring Constitutional requirements (such as providing a legal regulation over political dynasties). In this regard, an interesting interplay between the Executive and Legislative branch emerged. Despite the President being barred from serving another term, alliance with a popular President can be beneficial for the re-election prospects of a congressman (or any other local politician for that matter) while the opposite may hold true. Moreover, for a President to accomplish a policy agenda, he or she needed support not only from his or her own local based but also that of other potential provincial or regional blocs in Congress.

Under this situation, a simple dichotomy between center actors versus local elites is not enough to analyze the phenomenon of elite capture of institutions. Rather, the very nature of the institutions themselves shows that in the Philippines, what is considered “central” is in fact merely an amalgamation of “local.” The creation of new provinces initiated by a strong central executive (i.e. colonial Governor-General or post-independence President) appears to fit in the current understanding of the strategic choice theory of decentralization reform. The strong central executive taking control over patronage resources can likewise appease local rent-seekers.

However, when compared with province creation initiated by Congress, which itself evolved to cater to its dynastic members, legislators were able to create safe seats for themselves or for their kin. This way, they were able to maneuver through institutional constraints such as term limits and even the constitutional ban on political dynasties. Moreover, by creating new provinces carved out of old legislative districts, they are able to gain access to intergovernmental transfers reserved for provinces.

In this context, local elite capture can be viewed *not* as the rent-seeking *response* of local elites to the creation of provinces as a strategic choice by national authorities. Instead, the creation of provinces itself can be considered as the local elite capture of national institutions that has the power to create the rules for decentralization in the first place. Thus, this thesis presents some evidence of the creation of new provinces as an indicator of local elite capture.

6.2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Even though institutional constraints supposedly to promote greater opportunities for more citizens to engage in public service have been introduced following the democratization movement, including the express ban of political dynasties in the 1987 Constitution, only a few families continue to hold power in both the national and local level. Dynasties continue to persist, and as some authors have noted, thrive under decentralization reforms. The actions of these families are not surprising from the historical-institutional standpoint.

This also raises an important point in analyzing recent developments in the Philippines such as the election of former Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte as President and the ongoing push to amend the Constitution and create a federal form of government in the country. Prior to Duterte, no local government politician, let alone the mayor of a faraway southern city in Mindanao, has directly ascended to the Presidency. While he has been considered by some as a “disruptor” in Philippine politics, it is still important to point out that Duterte himself, like almost every other Philippine President belongs to a political dynasty. His father was a former governor, his daughter replaced him as Mayor and his son was elected Vice Mayor of their hometown. That said, should his push to revise the country’s Constitution succeed, without addressing the problem of political dynasties, not much can be

expected from these so-called “reforms” though it will definitely usher in a new critical historical juncture in center-local relations in the Philippines.

On the other hand, this thesis also highlights the need for new actors to counter the influence of political dynasties in Philippine institutions. To this end, it is also important to bear in mind how institutions themselves have evolved, no matter how painfully slowly, over time. After decades under authoritarian rule, new features of decentralization reform as part of democratization introduced new actors such as civil society groups and the private sector into the overall governance process. Though their influence may be small in the face of elite-dominated dynastic politics, they are a significant starting point in creating better opportunities for ordinary citizens to take part in governance.

Finally, this thesis also provides a different perspective of local elite capture of decentralization reforms, which has great implication for developing countries, especially those with a history of colonization. In studying how *national* institutions were formed we were able to demonstrate how central government bodies such as Congress, can become an avenue for local elites, especially in the absence of clear platform-based political parties, to engage in rulemaking, rather than simply rule-taking.

6.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study highlights how research on political dynasties is important, given their persistence in Philippine institutions. Historical institutionalism was a useful analytical framework to situate political dynasties, as local elite families who are actors in the decentralization process, parallel to the formation of institutions in the Philippines. The focus on local elite families can be used as an important lens in studying how decentralization emerged in other countries as well.

This thesis also sheds light in the nature of gerrymandering that may occur under decentralization reform. For one, the differences between Executive-led gerrymandering and Legislative-gerrymandering can be a potential angle for research in the future. Previous studies have pointed out that these two branches of government may have different priorities to begin with. This study provides some historical basis as to why this is so.

Due in part to limitations in data available, this thesis focused on the creation of provinces as the largest and most important subnational administrative unit in the country. With improvements made in the creation of databases down to the municipal and village levels, perhaps future studies can explore the persistence of political dynasties or the phenomenon of gerrymandering at these grassroots levels. One avenue for research is the investigation of smaller political dynasties whose influence may not necessarily go beyond the confines of their villages, towns, or cities, but can still benefit from the resources afforded to these local government units under decentralization reform.

Finally, from a policy perspective, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding the contexts as to which certain reforms are made. Indeed, decentralization, as with other government reforms, do not exist in a vacuum. Whereas, development can be pursued from different aspects, individual policy interventions are inevitably part of much larger complex processes that can be understood from differing, sometimes even opposing, paradigms. This is especially true in establishing relationships among important actors under institutional reforms such as decentralization.

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