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Title: Presidentialism, Veto Players, and the Weakness of Democratic Consolidation in the Philippines.

From the Western perspective a movement from authoritarianism to democracy represents a transition to greater individual freedom and recognition. Thus, the recent stagnation of democratic consolidation in Latin America and Southeast Asia has presented researchers with the possibility of regression to authoritarianism or perpetual weakness of purely formal (election based) democratic systems. With the fall of the authoritarian rule of President Marcos in 1986 the Philippines have had almost two decades to deal with issues of transition and consolidation. Within this time though the Philippines have stagnated and some, such as Freedom House, have argued that the Philippine state has actually regressed politically. Yet, a comparative examination of other recent transitions to democracy within Asia and Europe, such as those in South Korea, Spain, and the former countries of the Soviet Union support the contention that democratic consolidation can be accomplished in a very short time frame. Thus, we are left with the question of why the Philippines have stagnated in their efforts at consolidation.

The weakness of Philippine democracy is best explained by examining the role, of what the literature calls “veto players,” within Presidential systems. More specifically, my thesis is that the weakness of Philippine democratic consolidation can be accounted for by the dominance within the constitutional framework of the government by “power blocs” of actors who block paths to more inclusive power-sharing and therefore,

consolidation. This implies that actors act in a rational fashion to maintain their political position or political goals at the expense of institutional efficacy and legitimacy.

My thesis requires an examination of the literature on agent-centered theories of consolidation, most prominently the literature on institutional design but this does not necessarily preclude the impact of structural forces upon actor behavior. I also adopt an agent-centered perspective because the transitions to democracy in Southeast Asia have occurred without strong economic growth. Structural approaches provide a compelling explanation of democratic consolidation in North America, Europe, and East Asia yet tend to be problematic when applied to cases of transition to democracy which have occurred without strong economic growth. Structural forces though may play a strong role in explaining “veto player” behavior under presidential systems with strong economic growth.

Institutional design is most closely associated with Juan J. Linz. Linz has written extensively on the implications of the adoption of presidential or parliamentary systems upon democratic consolidation. Empirical studies have borne out the correlation between successful consolidation and parliamentary systems. However, the literature is weak in depth and breath in examining the interaction of “veto players” under presidential systems that have arisen out of transitions without strong capitalist growth. This paper attempts to bridge the theoretical gap by looking at multiple case studies of presidential systems cross-regionally and regionally.

The primary methodological strategy I employ to test my thesis is analytical induction. Cases are drawn from Latin America (Bolivia, Mexico) and Southeast Asia (Indonesia) that meet the criteria of presidentialism, low to moderate economic growth,

and weak democratic consolidation. Using this strategy I test the generalizability of my thesis cross-regionally. A secondary strategy is also employed; this strategy is a binary comparison of similar systems in Southeast Asia. The two cases I employ are the Philippines and Indonesia. The rationale for employing a Most Similar Systems (MSS) design is to test the presidential/veto player thesis against a case which seems to have similar characteristics in terms of colonial history, authoritarianism, development, and political system (presidential) as the Philippines yet seems to exhibit a faster trajectory to democratic consolidation, Indonesia. If it is the case that there exists a strong correlation between president/veto player configuration and weak democratic consolidation cross-regionally this would provide a solid foundation for using the thesis as a theoretical “benchmark” in examining weak consolidation at the regional level. If it is the case that Indonesia does not exhibit the same type of president/veto player configuration as the Philippines yet seems to be consolidating its democracy as a faster pace then these findings would support the theoretical contention that we can expect to find weak consolidation efforts in countries with presidential systems that exhibit strong “veto players” within the institutional framework.

In testing my hypothesis the evidence I will focus on will be qualitative in nature. Primarily I am looking at data that is extremely hard to quantify, that is, I am looking at the distribution of power within the political institutional setting and its effect on blocking, through rational behavior of actors, of democratic checks and balances and effective state control. Since power is hard to quantify I must focus on the behavior of elites and the masses. It should be noted that my thesis does not rule out mass protests or special interest groups as “veto players.” Therefore, the most logical strategy, in relation

to my thesis, is to look for such things as pressures and cross-pressures within institutions. This may take the form of blocking or killing legislation, voting requirements, cronyism, corruption, presidential decrees, judicial weakness, nongovernmental organization behavior, etc. In addition I will seek to specify as precisely as possible the historical and socio-economic context of each case so as to control or take into account unforeseen variables as they relate to the findings.