

Analysing the philippine political party system politics essay



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First, there is a need to know the difference between strongly institutionalized party systems from weak ones. For a party system to be considered as strongly institutionalized, it must have two characteristics: (1) the stability in the policies and patterns of inter-party rivalry, and (2) the view of political actors on parties as legitimate and crucial parts of the democratic process. On the other hand, a weakly institutionalized party system has the following characteristics: (1) there is a high degree of instability in the policies and patterns of inter-party rivalry; (2) the birth and death rates of parties are high- there are a lot of new political parties entering the system and a lot of existing parties leaving the system; (3) high degree of electoral instability-the fate of the individual parties depend on the results of the election, and last; (4) the political actors' view of parties as just spare at best and as a danger at worst (Allen Hicken).

Analysis of the Philippine Party System

For a party system to be considered as strongly institutionalized, the inter-party rivalry must be stable and the political actors must view political parties as legitimate and important. However, in the Philippine setting, these two characteristics seem to be missing.

Stability of Interparty Rivalry

Electoral Volatility

A good indicator of the stability of interparty rivalry of party systems is the gauge of electoral volatility. Electoral volatility determines the level to which there is variation in aggregate party vote shares from one election period to another. When there is a low volatility score, it affirms that the same political

parties receive constant degrees of support from one election period to another, therefore, the pattern of inter-party rivalry is considered as stable. A high volatility score indicates that there is instability in the preferences of voters from one election period to another and/or there is elite-driven changes made to the party system, such as the termination of existing parties, the birth of new parties, party coalitions, party factions, etc (Mainwaring and Zoco 2007). In spite of all these, electoral volatility is not a perfect gauge of the stability of interparty rivalry because finding party vote shares is tremendously complicated where there are many party coalitions or factions, or where a candidate's party affiliation is difficult to determine. The latter remains a problem in the Philippine party system because some candidates often claim to be affiliated with several parties. That fact alone tells that party labels in the Philippines are so fluid that it becomes hard to measure the volatility of electoral results (Ufen 2008). It is also significant to consider that electoral volatility does not allow one to distinguish among the sources of instability-whether they are indecisive voters or temporary parties (Hicken and Kuhonta). Another problem with the Philippines is that it lacks the updated information needed to measure electoral volatility. During the 2001, 2004 and 2007 elections, the information needed regarding party vote shares was not yet released and there was even a scandal involving accurate vote counting during the 2004 elections. However, even though updated information are missing, Allen Hicken was still able to measure electoral volatility of the Philippines using only the vote shares information available and supplemented those information with available data from party seat shares. The only available data was from the elections during 1992, 1995 and 1998 elections.

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Table 1 Electoral Volatility

Period

Number of

Elections

Volatility of 1st

& 2nd elections

Volatility of

Last election

Average

Volatility

Philippines

1992-1998

3

46.4

28.2

37.3

(Source: Hicken and Kuhonta)

Electoral volatility is measured by taking the sum of the net change in the percentage of votes achieved or lost by each party from one election to the next and then dividing it by two. A score of 100 indicates that the political parties winning votes are utterly different from the one election to the other. A score of 0 indicates that the same political parties achieved exactly the same percentage of votes from two different elections. The higher the volatility score, the less stable the pattern of inter-party rivalry and vice versa (Allen Hicken). Because the Philippines' electoral volatility score are quite high, it is clear that the inter-party rivalry in the Philippine party system is still not stable, contributing to the party system being weakly institutionalized. Voters still do not have loyalty to parties and parties have not yet established a certain support base that would vote for them each and every election. The absence of loyalty and continued support by voters indicate that they still do not see certain political parties as groups that would promote their welfare so they seek and try to vote for other parties every election. The instability of inter-party rivalry in the Philippines makes the party system weaker and political parties less reliable in consolidating the democracy of the country.

Birth and Death Rates of Parties

The rate of the birth and death of parties in the party system of a country is another factor in determining whether a party is strongly or weakly institutionalized. If there is a high birth and death rate in the party system, it means that the inter-party rivalry is not stable and there are a lot of parties entering and leaving the system. In the post-Martial law period up to 2007, because of the conversion of the Philippine party system from a two party

system into a multi-party system, the birth and death rates became high. Stabilization around parties was not present. A large number of political parties continue to enter and leave the system every election, and these rates contribute as well to the electoral volatility of the party system (Allen Hicken).

Table 2 Party Birth and Death Rates During House Elections (Seats)

Birth Rate

Death Rate

Number of Parties

1987

NA

NA

8

1992

0.43

0.50

7

1995

0. 13

0

8

1998

0. 50

0. 50

8

2001

0. 33

0. 25

9

2004

0. 73

0. 11

30

2007

0. 33

0. 40

27Birth Rate Death Rate # of Parties(Source: Allen Hicken)

The shift of the nature of the party system from a two-party into a multi-party system seems to have given the chance for other parties to evolve and get involved in the system, however, it seems that this change only brought unsteadiness to the birth and death rate of parties in the Philippines.

Because of the multi-party system, parties can enter and leave the party system freely, although looking at it in different point, it may seem good for the inter-party rivalry basing on the fact that not only a few number of parties can compete and gain seats in the government, it is still not considered good for the institutionalization of the party system for it makes the party competition unstable. The high rate of the death and birth of parties only makes the Philippine party system weaker.

View of Political Actors on Parties

The perception of political actors on political parties is one of the most important factors for a party system to be considered as strongly institutionalized. If the major political actors doubt the legitimacy and importance of political parties, then it means that there is a lack of institutionalization. The Filipino people or the public are part of the government and they are also considered as political actors. Their views on political parties are very important in determining whether democracy in the Philippines is working well. Conversely, there seems to be a detachment on the principle of real democracy and on the truth of Filipino democracy. For instance, a great number of Filipino people surveyed (around 55 percent)

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were reported to have been discontented with the way democracy works in the Philippines (Hicken 2009b). This discontentment is strongly interconnected with the doubt of the Filipino people on the genuineness of Philippine political parties. This survey was just among the ordinary Filipino citizens, that is why there is also a need to analyze the view of the major political actors themselves on the existing Philippine political parties. Major political actors like the military seems to have been dissatisfied with government a lot of times as well, since military interventions and rumored plans of coups have been present in the country for a couple of times, especially during the 1986 and the 2000 elections (Allen Hicken).

Electoral volatility, birth and death rate of parties and the perception on political parties show how weakly connected are the parties to the different social interests/groups in the country. Filipino voters do not have specific parties in which they are loyal to, they do not vote candidates coming just from one political party, they often times vote candidates from different political parties and it is not even consistent with their votes in the previous elections. An instance would be during the 1992, 1998 and 2010 presidential elections, the presidents and the vice-presidents voted were from two different political parties. It is also very hard to identify one political party from another based on their party platforms and ideologies, this difficulty in distinguishing one party from another makes the strings connecting Philippine parties and societal interests and social groups very frail. The number of voters who can genuinely identify with any political party is very small. In one SWS 2006 survey, it has been reported that two-thirds of the people surveyed said that no party truly endorsed their welfare (SWS 2006,

Allen Hicken). Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, a professor, summed up the state of Philippine political parties: “ Far from being stable, programmatic organizations, the country’s main political parties are nebulous entities that can be set up, merged with others, split, resurrected, regurgitated, reconstituted, renamed, repackaged, recycled or flushed down the toilet anytime (Quimpo 2005). What Quimpo wants to point out is that there is no certainty among political parties in the Philippines. They tend to be unsteady and impermanent, every election, parties tend to change, either through factions, coalitions or merges-even members of the parties tend to leave their respective parties once they feel that their own interests are not being pursued. In summary, through the different measures (electoral volatility, birth & death rates, perception) used, one can conclude that Philippine political parties and the Philippine party system display a low level of institutionalization, or even, a very weak and fragile institutionalization. The pattern of inter-party rivalry stays fluid and political actors including voters even doubt if political parties are legitimate and necessary for the country’s democracy (Hicken).

Analysis of the Thai Party System

Political parties and the party system in Thailand, just like those in the Philippines, are also weakly institutionalized. The two characteristics needed for a party system to be considered strongly institutionalized seem to be missing as well in Thailand’s party system.

Stability of Interparty Rivalry

Electoral Volatility

Having a weakly institutionalized party system, the electoral volatility of the Thai party system is one of the highest in Asia (Kuhonta 2009). However, it is still notable that the electoral volatility of the Thai party system is lesser than that of the Philippine party system (Average volatility of Philippine party system is 37.3, see Table 1 for more details). This means that the interparty rivalry in the Thai party system is more stable compared to that of the Philippines. However, the difference is not that big and, because of the lack of Philippine data, the period measured in the Philippines is only until 1998 while the period measured in Thailand is until 2005.

Period

Number of

Elections

Volatility of 1st

& 2nd elections

Volatility of

Last election

Average

Volatility

Thailand

1992-2005

6

38. 1

28. 0

35. 0

With the given electoral volatility, it is clear that just like the Filipino voters, Thai voters also lack the loyalty to parties. The numbers stated indicate that Thai voters do not have enough allegiance to a certain party that they tend to vote different parties every election. The commitment of the followers is unsteady and the parties haven't established a well grounded support even with the " support bases" that they claim to have.

Birth and Death Rates of Parties

The history of Thailand will provide evidence that the parties in the Thai party system come and go like that in the Philippines. The birth and death rate of parties is also high, making the pattern of inter-party rivalry, all the more unstable. Parties in Thailand are especially susceptible to the influence and power of party factions. Party factions are also present in the Philippine party system, but not as much like in the Thai party system. The Thai party system has more factions, while the Philippine party system has a lot of varieties of " identical" parties being founded, identical meaning having the same ideologies and platforms. These party factions in Thailand, however, do

not bring any excellence to the party system but it even makes the birth and death rates of parties become unsteady each and every election period. The factions made by parties themselves do not have sufficient interest to make the party system and the government work well, these factions merely see parties as just roads to their own drives and tours for self interests and political power. As an effect, parties in Thailand tend to just come and go every election (Kuhonta 2009). Although it is right to say that there are exceptions, like the Democrat Party which remains as the longest standing party in Thailand, we still cannot presuppose that the constancy of the lives of just a few parties make the inter-party rivalry more stable. The government of Thailand has done things to make up for the unstable inter-party rivalry of Thai politics parties. Constitutional amendments have been enacted, one of which is included in the 1997 Thai Constitution, it is considered as one of the strongest ways to minimize if not eliminate the practices of party switching. According to the 1997 Constitution, “ MPs who left their parties within 90 days of registration for a new election would not be able to run in that upcoming election.” (Kuhonta 2009). The 1997 constitution seems to have strengthened the party system minimizing the amount of party hopping and switching. However, the amendment only has a limited effect and what needs to be done is to let democracy and the party system take their course in strengthening the government (Kuhonta 2009).

View of Political Actors on Parties

Electoral volatility can already indicate how loyal Thai voters are to their supported parties, however, the calculated electoral volatility of Thai political parties would already state that parties do not have constant support bases

and that those voters do not have constancy when it comes to their votes. Like political actors in the Philippines, it is also evident that political actors in Thailand do not have the best perception on their political parties. The mere fact that voters switch their support from one party to another, every election, means that the parties have not yet cultivated their own mass support bases. The absence of loyalty to particular parties leads to a conclusion that Thai voters are dissatisfied with their political parties. Moreover, the lack of ideology and programmatic platforms and goals also makes it harder for parties to maintain their own support bases. The divided constituency returns supply adequate proofs that parties in Thailand lack their social bases, since this implies that voters do not have loyalty to a certain party. From the year 1986 to the year 1996, it has been recorded that more than 50 percent of constituencies had divided votes. This is with the exception of the two dominant parties that time, which are the Democrat Party and the Thai Rak Thai. Parties do not have connections with social groups like labor unions, women's groups, ethnic communities or other groups who make up most of the voting population. This shallow nature of party roots in society mirrors only the superficial aspect of party organizations (Kuhonta 2009). This is one of the problems of Thai political parties-they do not represent social interests which lead social groups to not extend votes and support to any particular party. Political actors themselves do not think of parties as representatives of their interests and as supporters of their welfare, that is why their perception of parties is not good most of the time. Like in the Philippines, one major political actor that could be considered as an excellent aspect contributing to the view of political actors on parties is the military. The weak connection of the political parties to

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social groups made them vulnerable to military counteraction. Military often times involved themselves in politics and when they oppose the governance or the reign of one political party, they would counterattack the government through coups. The military is very influential and often times, when they are dissatisfied with the system, they resort to using their power to overthrow a regime. However, Thailand has gone through more coups than the Philippines. Thailand has experienced 18 coups since the concept of party politics began in the year 1932 (Kuhonta 2009).