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Institutional change, corruption and e-government transformation in the Philippines: The Benigno Simeon Aquino III administration

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ABSTRACT

Institutions direct the enduring features of political and social life and of all human behavior. While standard institutionalisms explain why these institutions continue to exist, they fall short in providing a coherent explanation for why they change. Similarly, the focus of mainstream theories of institutional change on crises as structures, disregarding agential properties, challenges their explanatory ability. Anchored on the theory of institutional change and through the utilization of archival research and documentary analysis, this paper addresses the transformation of domestic political institutions by determining the nature and direction of institutional change in the Benigno Simeon Aquino III (PNoy) administration's (2010–2016) e-governance agenda. His and the country's resolve to follow *daang matuwid* (straight and righteous path) saw the transformation of damaged public institutions into more transparent and responsive ones. This would not have been possible, even with the presence of both domestic and international triggers, had the President not used his institutional preferences and capacity to effectuate the change needed. Arguably, while the institutional context creates both opportunities and constraints for policy makers, the purposive actors decide whether to seek change in their structural environments.

Introduction

That institutions direct the enduring features of political and social life and of all human behavior cannot be discounted. While humanly devised, as they are a product of social interaction among people (Kingston & Caballero, 2009), institutions following the rules of the game in a society (North, 1990) in the form of formal rules such as laws and constitutions and informal ones such as conventions and norms, influence the strategies of actors by acting as incentives and constraints for and mediating mechanisms between state and social actors (Pilapil, 2006). While

mainstream institutionalists explain very well why these institutions continue to exist, they are challenged in providing a coherent explanation for why institutional change transpires (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). The exaggeration of the persistence and homogeneity of institutional and social reproduction of sociological, rational choice, and historical institutionalisms account for this failure (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002).

For example, as Mahoney and Thelen (2010) noted, sociological institutionalists usually point to an exogenous entity and often provide compelling accounts in which new actors manage to unsettle dominant practices or scripts and impose their own alternatives but omit what properties of institutional scripts make some of them more vulnerable to that type of displacement. Questions such as how may it

change, or where is the locus of the dynamism and transformation are not usually answered. While the theory provides a very powerful explanation for continuity, the causal mechanisms considered on why institutions are perpetuated provide few clues about the possible sources of endogenous change. Similarly, rational choice institutionalism and historical institutionalism face difficulties in dynamically explaining the problematic of change. Rational choice institutionalism in this case subscribes to punctuated equilibrium models of institutional change, where periods of stability are temporarily subject to changes (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008) and traditionally, historical institutionalism stressed continuity over change explaining the persistence of institutional patterns over long periods of time. Those working in the former lens just redefine exogenous variables as endogenous factors while the latter tend to fall back to a discontinuous model of change in which historical pathways are periodically punctuated by moments of agency and choice (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010).

Given these challenges, theorists have offered frames as to how institutional transformation transpires and what effects they have on individual behavior and political outcomes. The extant literature on institutional change focused on both abrupt and gradual ways of transformation and to both exogenous and endogenous forces of change. Research on institutional change has been ruled by the ideas of isomorphism, which looks at change being driven towards established and legitimized practices by the processes of mimeticism, coercion, and normative conformity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983 as cited in Delbridge & Edwards, 2008). On the other hand, gradual transformations and adaptive informal institutions are considered important in the study of change. For instance, Mahoney and Thelen (2010) claimed that institutions often change in subtle and gradual ways over time once they are created. These slow transformations can be significant for directing human behavior and for molding substantive political results even though less dramatic than abrupt ones. Also, although working on historical institutionalism, Tsai (2006) advanced that adaptive informal institutions can serve a vital role in explaining the process of endogenous change. In this case, the informal coping strategies devised by local actors to evade the restrictions of formal institutions are at the core of formal institutional transformation and institutional change is possible in the absence of cataclysmic or institutional collapse.

Although these works have provided new insights into institutional change, there are also limitations. The most important of these is their focus on crises as structures, disregarding agential properties. To overcome this very significant problem, Cortell and Peterson (1999, p. 177) put forward a theory of institutional change, coherent and comprehensive at that, which marries both structure and agency in the process. They claim that (1) international and domestic events open windows of opportunity that give policy officials the potential to transform existing institutions; (2) whether an institutional change follows a window of opportunity depends on the actions and interests of state leaders; and (3) state officials' ability to capitalize on a window of opportunity depends on their institutional position or capacity and that the existing institutional arrangements create opportunities for or place limits on the officials' ability to make change. As such, their theory explains when individuals attempt to alter their structural environments, when they succeed and when they are thwarted by existing structures. This three-part framework explains that if institutional change is to occur, all three factors—triggers, change-oriented preferences, and institutional capacity—must exist. Using this, I therefore attempt to provide an explanation of institutional transformation and demonstrate that change is not only caused by structure but is also dependent on the agent, using the Philippine case, specifically that of e-governance transformation in the Benigno Simeon Aquino III administration.

Literature Review

The literature on corruption involves an array of academic traditions and a vast number of theoretical perspectives. As Breit (2011) aptly put it, the question "What is corruption?" is not easily answered, as it can possibly take different forms and is explained in many varied ways. The World Bank's (1997) straightforward definition of corruption is that it is the abuse of public office for private gain. Accordingly, the World Bank looks at it as a complex phenomenon that has its roots deeply entrenched in bureaucratic and political institutions and its effects on societal development varies with country conditions. Similarly, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (1998) defined corruption as any behavior that involves the improper and unlawful enrichment of people in both the public and private sectors through the misuse of the position in which they are placed. The ADB's Anticorruption Framework clearly stated that corruption is a shorthand reference for a large range of illicit or illegal activities. Transparency International (TI), a leading international non-governmental organization in the anticorruption campaign, also shared the same definition of corruption as that of the World Bank and the ADB. It considered that corruption involves a behavior on the part of officials in the public sector, whether politicians or civil servants, or those close to them, characterized by the misuse of the public power entrusted to them. That it is an abuse of public power or position for personal advantage is a widely accepted definition in the extant literature (Amundsen, 1999; Chang & Chu, 2006; Desta, 2006; Fazekas & Toth, 2014; Gerring & Thacker, 2004; Manzetti & Wilson, 2007; Rose-Ackerman, 2008, pp. 551–566; Shleifer & Vishny, 1993; Sung, 2002).

The significance of institutions in addressing the corruption problem is widely highlighted in the extant literature. Open and transparent political institutions (Alt & Lassen, 2003; Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010), strong rule of law, and well-established political-legal structures (Zhan, 2012), including justice system institutions (Rios-Figueroa, 2012), electoral rules and constitutional framework (Kunicova & Rose-Ackerman, 2005), the design and structure of government institutions and political processes (Shleifer & Vishny, 1993), and anticorruption commitment rules (Collier, 2002) and agencies and enforcement organizations (Yang, 2009) inhibit corruption. Similarly, several studies highlighted the import of these

institutions in the anticorruption agenda through e-governance. E-government as an integral component of administration modernization is a serious challenge that any government faces in the information age (Stier, 2015). Definitely, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have fundamentally altered the ways in which governments function. They serve as a key driver of government modernization and act as mediating systems to support interaction between governments and citizens and other governmental agencies and businesses (Khan, 2015). One of the primary purposes of using mediating technologies in public sector governance is to bring about greater transparency in governmental transactions and in the delivery of public services (Patrice, 2010). This claim, and the many other positive effects of ICT in governance, is supported by a number of scholars (see Elbhanasawy, 2014; Gronlund & Flygare, 2011; Gronlund, 2010; Habtemichael & Cloete, 2009; Lee & Lio, 2014; Lupu & Lazar, 2015; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013; Pirannejad, 2014; Shim & Eom, 2008; Sturges, 2004). Institutionalists aver that the creation and implementation of an effective e-government system is not possible without the political influence of institutions. In the process of ICT-adoption, implementation and enhancement, institutions are significant as they regulate (Kim, Kim, & Lee, 2009) and define the formal roles of several policy actors (Eom, 2012; Yang, 2003), lay interagency operation, protect information, and drive citizen participation (Chen & Hsieh, 2009).

While these definitely point to the significance of institutional analysis in e-governance for anticorruption, the study of the causal mechanisms for and effects of institutional change in relation to this issue remains relatively unexplored. If institutions are seen as rules or policies that structure the behavior of policy officials, it is material to ask why and how do they change. In relation to the objectives of this paper, how and why e-governance policies change and what effects does this transformation have on the anticorruption agenda of governments and states deserves to be explored. Consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of the study, the institutional capacity of the officials determines whether structural change succeeds a window of opportunity. While triggers create a window of opportunity that produces societal costs and demands for structural change, when policy actors lack capacity to capitalize on these, the opportunity for change maybe blocked by others given a role in the policy making process. Cortell and Peterson's (1999) arguments highlight a central issue in both social and political thought: the agency-structure problematique. The institutional context creates both opportunities and constraints for policy makers, but the purposive actors decide whether to seek change in their structural environments.

Methods

Through archival research and an analysis of government data and publications, public opinion and relevant literature, I provide a historical discussion of the institutional transformations in the Philippine e-government agenda with a focus on the Benigno Simeon Aquino III administration (2010—2016).

Results

Institutional Reform and E-Government Transformation: the Philippine Case

Institutional, legal and policy frameworks of Philippine e-governance

The use of ICT in governance in the Philippines can be ascribed to the creation of the National Computer Center (NCC) in 1971 during the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos through the issuance of Executive Order 322. The use of IT resources, automation of projects, and provision of computer-related programs were administered through the NCC (Philippine E-Government Master Plan, 2012; Rye, 2002). The NCC became the principal agency in directing the use of ICT for national development and in rationalizing computerization in the country in 1978, thus providing technical and professional assistance to both national and local government agencies, the IT industry, and civil society from then on (Llana, Pascual, & Soriano, 2002).

In the early 1990s, the Philippines was envisioned to become one of the Southeast Asian tiger economies and a knowledge society by the year 2000. In 1994, through Executive Order 190 issued by President Fidel Ramos, the National Information Technology Council (NITC) was formed and designated as the primary policy agency on ICT-related matters in the country. Five years later, in 1999, it was reorganized and it became the highest policy planning and advisory body on IT concerns via the issuance of Executive Order 469.

Consistent with and vital to achieving this vision of a knowledge society, in 1995, the Philippine Congress enacted Republic Act 7925, also known as the "Public Telecommunications Policy Act of the Philippines". The law enabled the creation of a competitive environment that pushed for private ownership of telecommunication services and at the same time established a foundation for both mobile and land-based telecommunication networks (Philippine E-Government Master Plan, 2012). The promotion and enhancement of public-private partnerships for the development of e-commerce in the country was pushed in 1998 through the creation of a coordinating body known as the Electronic Commerce Promotion Council (ECPC) by virtue of Executive Order 468.

In mid-2000, under the administration of President Joseph Estrada, the e-Commerce Act (Republic Act 8792) was enacted. Policies on electronic transactions and engagement in e-commerce were defined under this policy. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) was the chief agency in the e-commerce development and promotion under the e-Commerce law but the NCC was also given a role in e-Commerce policy planning and implementation. A month after, in July 2000, the Government Information Systems Plan (GISP), a presidential level initiative that laid down the framework for the computerization agenda in the government was adopted through Executive Order 265. The GSIP aimed to, among many others, enable the government to provide faster and efficient delivery of public goods and services, create greater transparency and accountability in governmental operations, increase public sector organizations' capacity, and generate citizen

participation in governance. The creation of an "on-line government" under the GISP and the development of the Philippine Strategic ICT Roadmap for 2006—2010 to update it, were both aligned with the government's medium-term development plans.

It was also during this same period that the NITC and ECPC were merged, creating the Information Technology and Electronic Commerce Council (ITECC) under Executive Order 264. The ITECC was tasked to streamline the formulation and implementation of ICT policies in the country including the National Information Technology Action Agenda for the 21st Century (IT21) apart from it being considered as the central body for the GISP implementation. The DTI Secretary initially served as its Chairman until its reorganization in 2001 when the President replaced him through Executive Order 18 issued by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (GMA). The ITECC looked at the development of Online Government Frontline Service, compliance to e-Commerce Act and the creation of a Philippine Government Portal. It also envisioned a separate Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), seen as a crucial regulatory body in the Philippine e-government agenda (Llana et al., 2002).

In an attempt to further these goals, an e-Government Fund (EGF) was established through the General Appropriations Act (GAA) for FY 2003 under Republic Act 9206. The ITECC proposed the creation of EGF by setting aside 5 percent of the mandatory cuts on maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) and capital outlays (CO) from the proposed 2003 national budget to support "mission-critical, high-impact, and cross-agency ICT projects" in the government (ICTO, 2016). The EGF was institutionalized in 2004 through Executive Order 269, and became a separate item in the national budget with the amount of PHP 1,000, 000, 000. Moreover, the Commission on Information and Communications Technology (CICT), under the Office of the President, composed of the National Computer Center (NCC), Telecommunications Office (TELOF), and all other operating units of the DOTC, which directly support Communications, including the Telecommunications Policy and Planning Group that became the Plans, Policy, and Research Support Services (PPRSS) was created. The CICT has the power and function to provide an integrating framework and oversee the identification and prioritization of all E-Government Fund (Section 4e).

In July 2004, the ITECC was abolished and the Council's budget, assets, personnel, programs, and projects were transferred to the CICT through Executive Order 334. The CICT was reorganized, renamed as the Information and Communications Technology Office (ICTO) and transferred to the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) in June 2011 through Executive Order 47 issued by President Benigno S. Aquino III. The ICTO is mandated to "formulate the Government Information Systems Plan and administer the E-Governance Fund" (Section E) and together with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) prescribed the criteria and guidelines for ICT projects under the EGF, the annual allocation of which was increased to PHP 2,478, 900, 000 under GAA for FY 2014, Republic Act 10,633 (ICTO, 2016).

Current Philippine E-Government Framework

While the country had an early start in its computerization efforts and despite progress in various government ICT policies and initiatives, its counterparts in the region have overtaken the Philippines in the use of ICT in government (Llana et al., 2002). This is shown by the country's performance, a continuous slide for the past decade, in the United Nations E-Government Development and E-Participation Indices (Figures 1 and 2).

The Benigno S. Aquino III administration is cognizant of this state of e-Government in the country. Similar to the GISP and the Philippine Strategic Roadmap for the ICT Sector, the Philippine Digital Strategy (PDS) (2011—2016) lays down the current overall government plan for the utilization of ICT for Philippine development. Devised by the former CICT in 2011, the PDS, which envisions a connected and networked Philippine society, aims for improved efficiency in government operations, public online services becoming increasingly interactive, transactional and networked, increased citizen participation in governance and innovation, enhanced public trust and increased transparency in government, enhanced competitiveness of the country's industries, and more empowered citizens and communities. In order to meet these targets, the PDS laid down four strategic thrusts that target e-government, e-business and e-society: open/transparent government and efficient social services, ICT industry development and business innovation for national development, internet opportunities for all (digital inclusion) and investing in people (digital literacy and education for all). As in the GISP, the PDS aligns ICT-related efforts with the Philippine Development Plan (2011—2016).

Given that limited resources, political priorities, and isolated and disjointed ICT plans challenge e-governance in the Philippines, the E-Government Master Plan (EGMP) (2013—2016) was formulated. Aimed at the creation of valuable and meaningful public services through interoperability and maximization of resources, the EGMP is a blueprint for the ICT integration for the whole of
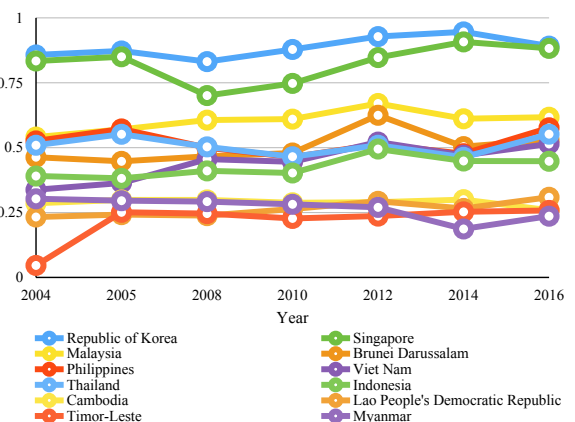

Figure 1 E-Government Development Index in Southeast Asia with Asian Leader, South Korea (2004—2016)
Source: UNE-Government Development Survey (2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016)

Figure 2 E-Participation index in southeast Asia with Asian Leader, South Korea (2004–2016)
Source: UNE-Government Development Survey (2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016)
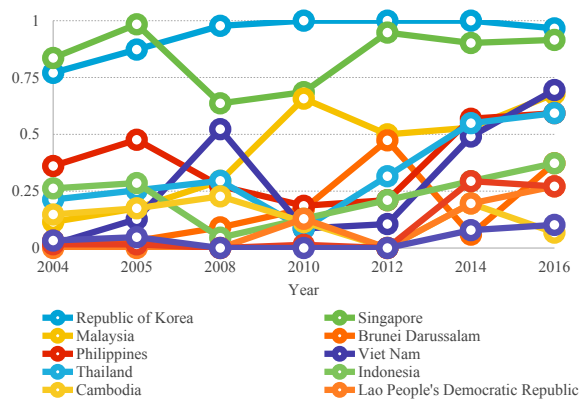
government. The plan is to link all 19 departments in the Philippine government under a "center of excellence" to eliminate duplication of tasks and direct initiatives toward building an e-government system.

With the intent to operationalize the thrust of the PDS, the EGMP's strategy for implementing e-government is the Medium-Term ICT Harmonization Initiative (MITHI), which places centrality on government interoperability, collaboration, and shared resources. One of the priority projects under this is the Integrated Government Philippines (iGovPhil) (ICTO-DOST, 2016). Based on Executive Order 47, the primary purpose of the iGovPhil Project which is managed by the DOST-ICTO and DOST-Advanced Science and Technology Institute (ASTI) is to "use and maximize the benefits from already developed applications, install and operate secure government email system, and develop and deploy common applications and shared services" in order for the government to operate as one "government online". For this purpose, the iGovPhil Project developed a Philippine e-Government Interoperability Framework (PeGIF) which "addresses not only the technical issues in using operating resources but also the interaction of organizations, the means of exchange of data, the rules and agreements on the sharing of information and knowledge, and policies on interaction among government agencies, citizens and businesses" which the previous institutional arrangements from the previous administrations did not provide. As a progressive step towards e-government transformation, the projects MITHI and iGovPhil, among many others, under the EGMP, are a resounding affirmation of the administration's ICT reform initiatives.

What could have possibly led to this transformation in the administration of President Benigno Simeon Aquino III and what effects did this institutional change have on one of the current thrusts of the government—greater transparency and accountability? Apart from institutional transformation, why and how have normative changes in the government's use of ICT to address corruption and provide efficient public services transpired? The next section addresses these questions.

Benigno Simeon Aquino III's "Daang Matuwid" and e-governance for anticorruption

The Liberal Party's presidential standard-bearer, Benigno Simeon Aquino III, or PNoy as he is popularly called, was elected into public office in May 2010. When his mother died, Benigno Simeon Aquino III was conscripted to run as president against a resurgent former president, Joseph Estrada and a moneyed candidate, former Senator Manuel Villar. As the son of charismatic former president, Corazon Aquino, PNoy's rise into power is considered as an important conjuncture in Philippine politics (Holmes, 2012). Campaigning on the platform *daang matuwid* ("The Straight Path"), he was able to get a sizeable plurality vote through the reformist mantra, *kung walang corrupt, walang mahirap* ("If there are no corrupt individuals, there are no poor individuals") with a promise of a cleaner government as compared to the previous administration led by Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (GMA) (Batalla, 2015). Compared to other presidents in the post-1986 political transition, PNoy assumed the presidency with the most political capital. He came into power in a political environment characterized by a context of regained hope and heightened optimism, which closely resembled his mother's, former President Corazon Aquino, time (Holmes, 2012).

Previously, the GMA administration introduced several reforms to address corruption in government. Among the reform packages during this time was that of government procurement. The over 100 procurement rules and regulations necessitated the creation of the Philippine Government Electronic Procurement System (PhilGEPS), an electronic portal for government procurement, under Republic Act 9184 otherwise known as the Government Procurement Reform Act in January 2003. Under the system, transparency in government transactions was claimed to have improved as the number of bid notices and award notices posted increased from 126,501 in 2006 to 222,149 in 2008 and 19,282 to 34,580 in the same years, respectively. Accordingly, savings on procurement generated through the PhilGEPS increased from 21.55 percent in 2006 to 48.28 percent in 2008 (PhilGEPS, 2009). However, this and many other reforms were overshadowed by a series of corruption scandals in the GMA administration (Batalla, 2015). The "Hello Garci" scandal, GMA's talks over the phone with a Commission on Elections commissioner while canvassing was going on in the 2004 presidential elections, rocked the administration's legitimacy. Similarly, the misuse of close to PHP 3 billion in the Department of Agriculture in what was dubbed the Fertilizer Fund Scam in 2004, just before the said presidential elections, which proved the presence of fund disbursement anomalies, hurt her popularity. Moreover, in 2007, the USD 329-million National Broadband Network (NBN) deal with Chinese telecommunications firm, ZTE, which supposedly was geared to improve government communications capabilities, mired her administration on account of massive payoffs. While the administration temporarily contained the controversy for the rest of 2007 when the NBN-ZTE deal was canceled, this ignited an intense public debate and calls for action, truth, and accountability.

This served as the political environment for PNoy to address graft and corruption and promise a cleaner political

leadership than his predecessor through e-governance. Apart from the Philippines having experienced prolonged leadership legitimacy, the country also suffers from systemic corruption and poverty and PNoy used these as a backdrop to push for his reformist and populist philosophy of governance. Following the *daang matuwid* path as opposed to *daang baluktot* (crooked path) of the previous administrations, PNoy's initiatives to promote transparency, accountability, and participatory governance involved: (1) pursuit of graft and corruption cases, (2) changes in administrative systems and practices, and (3) engagement of civil society groups in governance processes (Holmes, 2012). Under the second initiative, in order to address the accountability of all line agencies and ensure that transactions are transparent, the Philippine government under the administration of PNoy committed to the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a "multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance" (OGP, 2012). As part of the administrative measure to review existing processes in the government to address issues like red tape and of adoption of a full disclosure policy, the administration has used e-government to facilitate the dissemination of information on government activities. As Holmes (2012) contended, PNoy has started a number of measures that re-interpret existing rules and has halted the drift of Philippine politics from the state of predation that characterized the GMA administration.

PNoy's order from the outset since assuming the presidency was for national government agencies to publish information on disbursement of budgets, notice and results of bids, status of projects, and accomplishment reports, among many others. Holmes (2012) noted that the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) has taken the lead in implementing the said policy as early as August 2010, just roughly three months after PNoy assumed the position, and by 2011, 90 percent of Local Government Units (LGUs) in the Philippines have already complied with the policy. Apart from this, the Electronic Transparency and Accountability Initiative for Lump-sum Funds (e-Tails) Project that provides information on the disbursement of Priority Development Assistance Funds (PDAF) and the *Pera ng Bayan* ("The Nation's Money"), a Department of Finance initiative to provide information on government's revenue collection and serve as a feedback mechanism for citizens to provide information pertaining to graft and corruption were created. Similarly, the pre-existing PhilGEPS was improved following a report by the ADB in 2009, which noted that "since PhilGEPS was first implemented in 2006, while compliance with the publication of procurement notices has been high, the requirement to publish contract awards as well has still to be fully complied with. Moreover, despite having unlimited access to the system, not all government agencies use it. While the system is designed to provide information about procurement opportunities and contract awards, it does not cover bidding and has no payment facility. Thus, the current PhilGEPS functionality falls short of addressing the efficiency and economy objectives of public procurement." To

address this, as part of the Aquino administration's new way to fight corruption in government agencies and as part of its EGMP, in January 2013, PhilGEPS was expanded when it launched its e-payment facility, a pioneering cashless and paperless transaction, which allows government agencies to purchase their needed supplies online. As Florencio Abad, Secretary of the DBM during this period noted, "cash-based transactions have long been the norm for our public institutions, but this system has also opened up considerable spaces for irregularity and abuse. We're tapping digital technology not only to close the gaps that have allowed corruption to take root in the bureaucracy, but also to make service delivery much more efficient than it is now."

These developments are aligned with the administration's E-Government Master Plan. Banking on the failure of the previous administration to concretize an e-government policy as manifested by the incoherent ICT plans and given the declining status of e-government development in the Philippines and its current commitment to the OGP, PNoy laid down this strategy. During its launch, PNoy claimed "through the e-Government Master Plan, we lay the groundwork for an effective and transparent e-government information system for 2014 to 2016, providing agencies a framework that will strengthen and integrate existing information systems that are vital to the delivery of services and information." The EGMP, an update of the GISP, advocates a whole-of-government approach where government agencies need to convene and agree on priority projects they can implement for a particular period and they will focus funding, monitoring, and evaluation as a whole, unlike in past e-government initiatives where each government agency was doing their own components. The EGMP emphasizes the import of collaboration, interoperability, shared services, and openness and it includes mechanisms that create and ensure an environment that institutionalizes open government (ICTO, 2013). Promised mainly to address systemic corruption in the country, as this was his ticket to the presidency, the e-government initiatives created were structured to reflect the *Daang Matuwid* philosophy of the administration. At the onset of the reform in e-government, corruption perceptions (Table 1) in the governmental institutions have changed, that is their net sincerity improvement ratings have considerably increased, as evidenced by the positive marks compared to the base year, 2005, when GMA was president. However, based on the data from the World Bank's World Governance Indicators on Control of Corruption (2016) and the Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) (2016), the Philippines is still placed in the highly corrupt societies, slightly improving during the time of PNoy.

Discussion

The e-governance reform—specifically that which focuses on government interoperability and the creation of a single regulatory agency, the DICT, of President Benigno Simeon Aquino III—provides vital lessons on how the human agency determines the nature and direction of institutional change. The change of administration may have been a lesser if not a non-critical trigger but the notion that it created opportunities for domestic institutional

Table 1
Net sincerity ratings in fighting corruption

Government office	Year						Average net sincerity rating[*]	Net sincerity improvement (since base year)[*]
	2005	2006	2007	2009	2012	2013		
DTI	−	−	+54	+38	+59	+58	52.25	+4
Social Security System	−	+38	+52	+40	−	+52	45.5	+14
Department of Health	+40	+26	+32	+37	+61	+53	41.5	+13
Supreme Court	+48	+40	+45	+40	+24	+36	38.83	−12
Department of Education	+11	+3	+10	0	+51	+49	24.8	+38
Office of the President	+10	−15	−3	−37	+80	+77	18.67	+67
Sandiganbayan	+19	+13	+14	+8	+27	+15	16	−4
DBM	+24	0	+5	−17	+23	+9	15.4	−15
Commission on Audit	+5	+5	+20	+8	−	+22	12	+17
Ombudsman	+22	+5	+9	−	−	−	12	−13
Department of Justice	+13	−20	−19	−5	−	+35	0.8	+22
DILG	−17	−32	−18	−25	+30	+20	−7	+37
DOTC	−	−22	−13	−30	+10	+8	−9.4	+30
COMELEC	−	−59	−36	−8	−13	+7	−21.8	+66
DENR	−44	−39	−23	−34	+1	−4	−23.83	+40
PNP	−42	−36	−23	−17	−12	−24	−25.67	+18
Land Transportation Office	−45	−38	−31	−39	−26	−32	−35.17	+13
Bureau of Internal Revenue	−59	−58	−49	−57	−20	−10	−42.17	+49
DPWH	−66	−66	−55	−65	−21	−22	−49.17	+44
Bureau of Customs	−75	−74	−68	−69	−46	−63	−65.83	+12

[*] Author's calculations
Source: Social Weather Stations (SWS) Enterprise Surveys on Corruption (2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2013)

change cannot be discounted. Arguably, the rise into the presidency of PNoy challenged and raised concerns over the inadequacy of the previous e-governance and anticorruption policy-making processes. International triggers like that of the open government, the pressures coming from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank to sustain economic growth rates, and the need for an improvement in the credit ratings of the Philippines under the current administration determined the windows of opportunity that opened for PNoy to take advantage of. Aquino capitalized on these needs to demand policy and institutional change in order for the country to deal with new challenges. These are, in the words of John T. S. Keeler, macrowindows that made possible far-reaching policy change not only in e-governance but also in the entire anticorruption campaign of the government.

Apart from being the son of Benigno Simeon "Ninoy" Aquino Jr, a former senator and vocal opponent to Marcos, and former President Corazon Aquino, instrumental for the country's return to democracy and constitutionalism, PNoy not only enjoys a reputation of probity inherited from his parents but also has a clean record for public service despite showing little track record on how he could manage the top executive position. Having created a normative philosophy inspired by his parents' work in governance by virtue of *Daang Matuwid*, conceived as a universal and an impartial anticorruption campaign, the administration through him was able to reduce political and institutional opposition. This, plus the considerable plurality vote he attained during the 2010 Presidential elections and sustained political support he enjoyed from the Congress and public opinion, given high public trust ratings despite some high-profile scandals involving his cabinet and key officials in his administration (Batalla, 2015), point to the fact that he had the most political capital compared to the presidents of the post-martial law period. Despite not having experience in the executive

branch of the government as he served nine years in the House of Representatives and three years in the Senate, his and the country's resolve to follow this straight and righteous path saw the transformation of damaged public institutions into more transparent and responsive ones as the data on net sincerity ratings above provide. These would not have been possible, even with the presence of both domestic and international triggers, had the President not used his institutional preferences and capacity to effectuate the change needed. As Yang (2003) noted, e-governance reform in the form of institutional and policy transformation is contingent upon the agents' strategic choice, initiative, and entrepreneurship. The strong agency of public administrators in relation to these institutions thus becomes all the more material.

However, other important institutional and normative innovations are yet to be considered and these similarly come with challenges. For instance, while the transfer of the ICTO to the DOST provided further opportunity for the PDS to be integrated with the innovation agenda of Aquino, the creation of a single agency that is concentrated on ICT as a strategy of governance remains to be realized. It can be remembered that the ITECC, during the GMA administration and even in the previous ones envisioned this goal. Interestingly, now, through the efforts of Senate President Franklin Drilon, the Chairman of the Liberal Party and an ally of PNoy, the bill creating a DITC was set as a priority bill and has passed both houses of the Philippine Congress and has been submitted to the President for approval (Romulo, 2016). While such a bill was overshadowed by other legislative concerns in the previous 15th Congress during the time of Aquino, it was signed into law (Republic Act 10,844) on May 23, 2016. Thus, there is more reason to believe that the administration is focused on the integration of government ICT systems for greater transparency and efficiency in the delivery of public goods and services. In the most recent E-Government Development Index (2016)

result, the Philippines has substantially improved its ranking from 95th in 2014 to 71st at present. This is, by itself, a strong indication of the meaningful use of ICTs to improve government operations, as pushed by the Aquino administration.

While the MITHI and iGovPhil are geared toward interoperability, Romulo (2016) cautioned that only an independent and regulatory agency could develop and implement an ICT architecture, which all government agencies will adopt. No less than the World Bank welcomed the passage of the DICT law noting that it is a positive development as it not only promotes transparency and ensures accountability but also promotes Open Data to improve good governance and address corruption. The legal and institutional framework set can, after all, structure the behavior and interactions of these government agencies in relation to transparency and accountability (Chen & Hsieh, 2009; Eom, 2012). Considering the case of the Asian leader (and at several times a world leader) in e-government development, South Korea, the institutional forces were instrumental in the success of e-governance for anticorruption. Most notably, the presence of a regulatory/coercive mechanism through the Audit and Inspection Bureau that intervened and regulated the implementation of the Seoul Metropolitan Government's anticorruption system known as the Online Procedures Enhancement for Civil Application (OPEN) was considered the most influential and strongest mechanism for its success. OPEN was initially seen with much skepticism by different government agencies and actors alike, but the political influence of the said office made the implementation of the new system not only possible but also successful (Kim et al., 2009).

Conclusion

There is no denying that in the state's project of an integrated e-government system to mitigate corruption, state institutional capacity is crucial in policy innovation and change, specifically for continued innovation in e-government (Tolbert, Mossberger, & McNeal, 2008). However, whether the size of the windows of opportunity created by environmental triggers are macro or micro and whether institutions obstruct or permit institutional transformation, how the administrators exploit these opportunities matters. Indeed, in the prospect of government integration through ICT, the political will (Elbahnasawy, 2014; Mahmood, 2004), clarity of goals (Chen, 2012), and type of leadership and strategic vision of a clean government (Kim et al., 2009) of an agent become significant and necessary though maybe insufficient a condition. After all, as leading Filipino corruption scholar Batalla (2000) aptly put it, the most important factor in the fight against corruption in the Philippines involves strong national leadership, embodied by the President who is expected to provide direction, coordination, and assurance to anticorruption initiatives from various sectors.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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