



東南亞研究中心
Southeast Asia Research Centre

COLLEGE OF
**LIBERAL ARTS AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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Distributive Strategies and Democratic Politics
in India, Thailand and Philippines**

Working Paper Series

No. 133
December 2012



The Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC) of the City University of Hong Kong publishes SEARC Working Papers Series electronically

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Sources of ‘Sandwich Coalitions’: Distributive Strategies and Democratic Politics in India, Thailand and Philippines

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This paper is prepared for the 6th Asian Political and International Studies Association (APISA) Congress Nov. 30 - Dec. 1, 2012

This paper addresses the influence of distributive conflict on democratic consolidation in India, Thailand and the Philippines by examining the conditions conducive to a political strategy that I term a ‘sandwich coalition’. Sandwich coalitions are formed when political actors occupying or seeking the apex of a political hierarchy undercut the power of middle level actors by championing the needs of politically excluded or marginalized actors further down. They can occur in both electoral and non-electoral settings and in a variety of social structures. The paper argues that institutional factors are the most important determinant in whether sandwich coalitions are built successfully.

Sandwich coalitions are Janus-faced when it comes to democratic consolidation. They provide social or state elites with a method to weather the challenge electoral competition poses to their control of the policy agenda. By offering elites a potentially less costly approach to distributive issues than the demands of more organized middle class or ‘popular sector’ interests, sandwich coalition can remove the potentially destabilizing incentive for elites to overthrow democratic procedures altogether, while also incorporating the needs of groups who are often neglected by more organized popular sector interests. On the other hand, by appealing to the poor over the heads of power brokers or intermediate social organizations sandwich coalitions can facilitate ‘electoral authoritarianism,’ often stimulating middle class support for military intervention.

The association of sandwich coalitions with electoral authoritarianism accounts for the low regard in which they are held by pro-democracy activists and scholars. The Latin

America literature on “neo-populism” is typical. In the 1990s, ‘neo-populist’ leaders presiding over ‘neo-liberal’ economic programs courted the informal sector and rural poor with targeted welfare policies, while cutting social benefits to organized popular sector constituencies like labor unions (Roberts 1995; Weyland 1996, 1999, 2003). This connection to the very poor was often put in service of a personalistic and authoritarian approach to politics. Peru’s Fujimori, commonly thought of as an exemplar of this strategy, was eventually overthrown and sentenced to prison for his crimes in office.

However, as I have argued elsewhere, this pessimistic view of sandwich coalitions is mistaken (Swamy 1996, 2003, 2012). While sandwich coalitions have an elective affinity for electoral authoritarianism, they can be championed by institutionalized parties as well. Moreover, even sandwich coalitions established by personalistic and authoritarian leaders have survived the leaders’ departure from the political scene, allowing for the institutionalization of a voice for the unorganized poor through a political party or even a political ‘brand,’ rather than through corporatist or other interest group representation. They thereby deepened and stabilized the prospects for democracy in the long run. In India, sandwich coalitions have supported democracy by providing the Congress Party with a way to survive successive crises of mobilization. In Thailand, where the enduring legacy of Thaksin Shinawatra was affirmed by his sister’s victory in recent elections, and even in Latin America, where sandwich coalitions helped to consolidate democratic regimes in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, the long-term consequence of sandwich coalitions appears to be to deepen democracy. There is, however, one Asian country with a long history of electoral competition and recurring attempts at sandwich coalitions that has not seen the institutionalization of a pro-poor political alternative. That country is Philippines.

This paper examines the reasons for the ineffectiveness of sandwich coalitions in the Philippines through a comparison with India and Thailand. I argue that institutional constraints rather than socio-economic conditions are the primary obstacle to successful sandwich coalitions. The paper will focus on the careers of three important leaders—

Indira Gandhi, Thaksin Shinawatra, and Ferdinand Marcos. The next section lays out the theoretical argument. The case studies come next, followed by the conclusion.

Sandwich Coalitions

Sandwich coalitions try to align actors at the apex of a political pyramid, with the most marginalized or actors at the base, against those in the middle. Thus, a sandwich coalition is not defined by specific social groups but by relative positions: it is an a *positional* coalition building strategy, rather than representing a concrete set of substantive interests.¹ The terms “apex,” “middle” and “marginal” refer not to specific social actors, but to relative positions *in the politically relevant population* at a particular point in time. The occupants of these positions can vary. As socioeconomic changes and political mobilization occur, groups that once occupied the bottom rungs of a political hierarchy may find themselves in the middle, or at the top, and accordingly they would become alienated from the sandwich coalition or return to it on different terms.

It is the flexibility of sandwich coalitions that makes them useful to politicians in developing countries in meeting a variety of political challenges -- fostering economic development, creating an effective state, building a sense of national identity and surviving democratization – where scholars have traditionally foreseen that distributional conflicts would produce insurmountable obstacles.

In the case of democratization, scholars now regard the genesis of most democratic regimes as lying in decisions by rival elites to avoid the risks of all-out confrontation in favor of rules that allow competition for power on a circumscribed set of issues. For this to last, however, elites need to protect themselves from the distributive pressures that accompany broader political participation in poor countries. Sandwich coalitions not only

¹ The term “positional strategy” is inspired by Huntington’s (1957) description of conservatism as a “positional ideology.” Another example of a positional coalition-building strategy is an *anti-hegemonic alliance* (Swamy 2010).

provide such a method but, when elites perceive that this is possible, it might increase the likelihood of elites acquiescing in democracy.

Latin American neo-populism illustrates the point well. While the literature on “neo-populism” has emphasized the negative consequences of sandwich coalitions for democratic consolidation, the experience of neo-populism has been relatively benign when compared to Latin America’s history with democracy, or to the concerns of scholars at the outset of the democratic transitions of the 1980s. In the narrative favored by Latin America scholars the original populist coalitions in the region were alliances of workers, business and middle classes against the landed oligarchy between the 1930s and the 1950s (e.g. Collier and Collier 1991). In the 1970s, distributive pressures were blamed for the overthrow of most democracies in Latin America, either directly, because of the challenge posed by left-leaning regimes to property rights as in Chile, or indirectly by contributing to slow growth and high inflation (e.g. O’Donnell 1988). But while the military regimes that replaced these failed democracies kept a lid on labor organization in their pursuit of foreign investment, they continued to expand social benefits for the organized sector of the economy (e.g. Mesa-Lago 1990) which contributed to the debt crisis that in turn helped produce a series of rapid exits by the military from politics. The result was that in the 1980s, Latin American countries were faced simultaneously with two transitions, one from authoritarian to democratic rule and the other from an economy built on expansive state benefits to the organized sector to a policy of privatization and reduced state spending required by international financial institutions.

However, the political challenge of managing these transitions simultaneously proved to be less difficult than scholars anticipated. The constituencies that supported the expansive state sector in earlier periods – including organized labor -- typically represented a relatively organized and privileged segment of the “popular sectors” namely industrial working class and white collar workers. Moreover, in most Latin American countries the bulk of the informal sector and peasantry had been excluded from the suffrage during earlier periods of competitive politics, which used a literacy qualification, and therefore

had not been included in the populist bargains of earlier periods. They were enfranchised for the first time in the democratization of the late 1980s and proved critical in meeting the challenges of the dual transition. “Neo-populists” like Alberto Fujimori of Peru, Carlos Menem of Argentina used inexpensive social policies to win support from the poor for re-election while cutting the more expensive policies favored by organized labor and the middle class. So, too, however, did other figures, not usually included in the neo-populist pantheon, like Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil (Smith and Massari 2001). And while Fujimori’s administration took an authoritarian turn, in Brazil and Argentina, and arguably in Mexico, sandwich coalitions fixed democracy firmly in settings where it had previously taken shallow root. In short, what appeared to be a crippling confluence of distributive conflicts – opening up the political process to new actors while cutting benefits for those same actors – proved not to be crippling because the transitions opened up the possibility of a sandwich coalition between reformers and the very poor against organized interests associated with the old populist coalition.

The account provided above leads to an obvious question: are there some circumstances that allow sandwich coalitions to flourish more than others? Two possibilities are suggested by the Indian case. First, certain socio-economic conditions might be more conducive to sandwich coalitions. It is possible that in societies with high levels of inequality in income and ascriptive social status it is easier to open a fissure between middle and lower segments of society than in a society characterized by broad levels of social inequality among ‘subaltern’ groups. A second possibility is that institutional factors affect the likelihood that sandwich coalitions can be formed, especially under electoral conditions.

Here it is important to note that sandwich coalitions ultimately rest on a transaction between rulers and the very poor or marginalized, the former providing direct benefits in the form of security or services, and the latter providing political support in exchange. The three preconditions for a successful sandwich coalition are that (a) rulers should have channels to bypass local power brokers and obtain support from the poor directly; (b)

rulers should be in a position to deliver benefits directly to the poor in exchange for their support; and (c) rulers should have an *incentive* to undertook this risky transaction, either by losing alternate channels of support, or having the option to seek re-election. It is possible that institutional factors that prevent one of these will also prevent sandwich coalitions from forming.

While the Indian case is consistent with both of these hypotheses, a comparison to Thailand and Philippines suggests strongly that institutional factors are the most convincing explanation for whether sandwich coalitions succeed or fail. While India's social structure certainly exhibits high levels of social and economic inequality, the comparison suggests that a tradition of inequality is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for sandwich coalitions to occur as it is Philippines, not Thailand, that resembles India in this regard.

However, institutional factors clearly did impede the direct transactional relationship between leaders and the rural poor in Philippines, preventing Marcos from consolidating a sandwich coalition. Especially when compared with India, the prevalence of vote-buying and electoral fraud, clientelism within the bureaucracy, the inherent conflict between the presidency and the legislature and the limits on the number of terms Marcos could serve, would all explain why, in the end, Marcos' efforts at building a sandwich coalition gave way to massive vote fraud and martial law. This analysis is strengthened by Thailand, where a similar situation with respect to vote-buying was altered by the political reforms of 1997, which then permitted the emergence of Thailand's first electoral sandwich coalition, under the leadership of Thaksin Shinawatra.

India

India is the largest, poorest and most culturally diverse of the three countries considered here. With over a dozen linguistically distinct regions that rival most countries in terms of

population, an elaborate social hierarchy (“caste”) with many regional variations, an elaborate – and equally regionally variegated – rural class structure, and deeply politicized religious cleavages India was, by most criteria one of the least likely countries to sustain democratic rule. While it is now recognized that these many cleavages may have proven to be an asset for democracy by endowing India with cross-cutting cleavages (Weiner 1989), few scholars have attempted to consider systematically how these many cleavages influenced political strategy or what role political strategy played in making use of the possibilities afforded by so many cleavages.

I have previously described the role sandwich coalitions played in making the Indian National Congress the pre-eminent political organization before independence and cementing a commitment to electoral democracy and universal suffrage In brief, in the 1930s, when the Congress was faced with a challenge to its claims to speak for all Indians by the leaders of religious, regional and caste minorities, Congress leaders launched a mass movements that drew in property-owning peasants, effectively building a sandwich coalition against leaders of cultural minority groups, to make good its claim to speak for the Indian people. This claim was confirmed through elections under British auspices in the 1930s that used a relatively broad property franchise. Congress’ success in the 1936 elections, in turn, helps to account for the willingness of Congress leaders – many of whom were quite conservative – to countenance universal suffrage upon gaining independence (Swamy 1996, 2003, 2010)..

Two important legacies of the 1930s mobilization for the post-Independence Congress were the expansion of the Congress organization into the countryside and the emergence of Jawaharlal Nehru as the party’s principal leader. The former was based on incorporation of small farmers as the core of the party’s rural coalition, a situation lasted until the 1960s. The method of this incorporation, however, was through a massive patron-client machine, in which rural patrons – often rich peasants -- delivered the vote using vote-buying and vertical ties, much in the manner of other Asian political organizations (Sisson and Roy 1990a, Weiner 1967, Brass 1984a). In this, they were

assisted by the popularity of Jawaharlal Nehru, British-educated scion of an upper class family prominent in the nationalist movement, and a self-declared socialist, who, as India's first prime minister, is widely credited with ensuring the consolidation of democracy in the first seventeen years after Independence.

To these legacies we may add two more, courtesy of the British. One was the tradition of a meritocratic and apolitical civil service which maintained a relatively effective administrative presence as far down as district headquarters. Among other things this allowed India to enjoy a record of fairly clean – although far from unblemished – elections, administered by an Election Commission staffed by career civil servants. While this did not prevent vote-buying or election violence entirely, it did ensure that when voting behavior changed it would largely be reflected in the results. The second was the Westminster-style parliamentary system, with single-member district plurality (SMDP) voting. This allowed the Congress to win legislative majorities without over reaching 50 percent of the popular vote, ensuring a degree of central control over policy making that in other Asian countries required authoritarian governments to achieve. It also guaranteed that there would be no obstacles to a successful leader winning re-election.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Nehru's only child, became prime minister, not on his death but on that of his successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri, in 1966, a year before elections were due. Concerned with the party's declining popularity in the face of inflation and food shortages, leaders of the ruling Congress Party selected her as their leader and, therefore as prime minister. The leaders who made the decision were regional party bosses who controlled the party organization in the states.

The principal conflict in the 1960s was between the national leadership of the Congress party and regional, mainly agrarian interests represented by the Congress provincial bosses. The Congress has been extremely centralized party since its organizational

overhaul by ‘Mahatma’ Gandhi in 1920. Nonetheless, with the task of delivering the vote largely in the hands of local party organizations composed of extensive patron-client networks, the regional bosses were largely seen as indispensable to Congress party’s electoral fortunes. Whereas Nehru had had a stature and independent electoral appeal that gave him a measure of autonomy from them, Mrs. Gandhi was initially dependent on the party bosses. Nehru’s death therefore represented a significant shift in power from the party “High Command” to the provinces.

Elections in 1967 changed the power balance within the Congress Party dramatically. Facing opposition parties united around a call to decentralize power in a variety of ways, as well as voter disaffection, Congress candidates lost in record numbers, failing to win a majority in many states. Anecdotal evidence and research in certain states indicate strongly that an important factor was the breakdown of vote-buying, as voters began to trust in the secrecy of the ballot. These setbacks led to further defections from the Congress, as factions representing peasant or agrarian interests joined with opposition parties to form coalition governments in many states.

Here, it is important to note that the late 1960s were a period of major social upheaval and distributive conflict in India. While in the 1950s the Congress had been able to largely localize social grievances, in the late 1960s it failed to do so in, both the electoral and the non-electoral arena. Political parties representing regional identities took power in several states, communist parties emerged as contenders for power in others, and political violence representing both ethnic and class grievances became common. Most importantly, the 1960s saw the emergence of a broad social and economic cluster that would upend the Congress’ reliance on the rural peasantry and provide the basis of challenge to the Congress for the next two decades. This was a newly assertive constituency composed of the overlapping categories of independent farmers and middle-status castes.

At the national level, Mrs. Gandhi's opponents among the regional party bosses began pushing for the abandonment of Nehru's economic policy which, with its focus on state investment in heavy industry, they had always disliked (Frankel 1978). The party split into two factions in 1969, with the bulk of the party organization opposing the prime minister, but the majority of members of parliament supporting her. Over the next two years, Mrs. Gandhi reinvented herself as a socialist, adopting policy recommendations proposed by former communists who had joined the party a few years earlier.

The 1971 election was a crucial turning point in Indian elections with a direct appeal to the poor, over the heads of power brokers carrying the day for the prime minister. As in the Philippines, where Marcos was doing something similar at exactly the same time, this effort at political centralization was aided by a growth in the patronage powers of the central government – in particular its control over industrial licenses which was a source of considerable rents for the ruling party (Sisson and Roy 1990a: 25). The electorate was presented with an essentially binary choice between Mrs. Gandhi's Congress (R) party and a Grand Alliance of opposition parties representing largely middle status social groups and agrarian and business interests. To their one-point slogan, removing her from power for her allegedly dictatorial tendencies, she responded with an equally simple one point slogan: "Remove Poverty" ("Garibi Hatao"). Mrs. Gandhi's Congress (R) won over two-thirds of the seats in Parliament, albeit with only 44% of the popular vote. More importantly, the party clearly expanded its base beyond the traditional Congress vote in most states (Swamy 2004), with much of the expansion coming from the poor, minorities, and women (Sisson and Roy 1990a, 1990b).

By mid-1970s, however, Mrs. Gandhi faced challenges that would be familiar to a Fujimori or Thaksin. Middle class and labor union disaffection with rising prices, primarily due to the 1973 oil crisis, as well as to her increasingly high-handed attitude toward her opponents produced widespread opposition to her tenure. When a lower court ruled her election to parliament invalid in 1975 for fairly minor reasons, she declared a state of internal emergency and used constitutional provisions to suspend civil liberties.

This period, known in India as the Emergency, is India's one authoritarian interlude in the last sixty-five years.

Remarkably, however, the Emergency was lifted and elections held after only eighteen months. Mrs. Gandhi's party dropped to 34 percent of the popular vote and lost power in a landslide to the Janata Party, a hastily formed alliance of non-Communist opposition parties, including breakaway factions of the Congress itself. The prime minister and her son both lost their own seats in parliament. When compared to the relatively long periods of authoritarianism experienced by other countries after undergoing similar crises, and the fraudulent elections that typically accompanied the demise of these regimes, what stands out about the Emergency is Mrs. Gandhi's willingness to face the electorate without attempting large-scale fraud. Without being able to ascertain her state of the mind at the time, it seems reasonable to assume she felt personally confident in her ability to hold on to the votes of the poor and minorities. More importantly, it was undoubtedly this reservoir of support among the most disadvantaged sections that allowed her to return to power in 1980 when the Janata Party fragmented.

Survey evidence suggests strongly that the Congress Party had, by the late 1980s, established itself as the party of the poor (Swamy 2003), and it was this “pro-poor image” that allowed the party to survive its greatest crises – the assassinations of two prime ministers and defeats in repeated elections.² Scholars in the 1980s were routinely bemoaning the weakening of India's political institutions as a result of Mrs. Gandhi's personalistic style (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987; Kohli 1990). In the 1990s most expected the Congress to fade, to be replaced by the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and parties representing peasants and low-status groups.³ Instead, the Congress revived its organization and remained in contention, offering an alternative to the BJP's Hindu chauvinist vision of an Indian nation, returned to power in 2004, and in 2009 became the

² Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated in 1984, as a byproduct of a separatist conflict in Punjab. Her son Rajiv was assassinated in 1991, as a byproduct of India's intervention in Sri Lanka's civil war. Congress lost in 1989, 1996, 1998 and 1999, and won in 1991, 2004 and 2009.

³ The BJP formed the government from 1998 to 2004. Coalitions of agrarian and regional parties formed coalitions during 1989-91 and 1996-98.

first government to be re-elected after a full term in twenty years. A crucial reason for this was the party's continued support among the poor, as well as among the most marginalized ascriptive groups and women (Swamy 2003, 2004; Sisson and Roy 1990a, 1990b).

How was this support among the poor achieved? In the 1970s, the efforts of various Congress state governments to promote more radical land reforms by lowering land ceilings ran into resistance. By the 1980s food subsidies and a massive targeted loan program for micro-financing took center stage. In the 1990s the emphasis of Congress welfare was increasingly on expanded public works projects in the countryside designed to support the employment of landless and marginal peasants in the countryside as well as on the expansion of school lunch programs. When the Congress returned to power in 2004 after eight years in opposition the party launched an expensive but popular rural employment guarantee program, contributing greatly to its victory in 2009. And, moreover, it did all this with an unassuming technocrat as prime minister, a testament to the ability of Indira Gandhi's sandwich coalition, and her party to outlive her personalistic style and authoritarian functioning.

Thailand

If India is the exception to conventional theories of democracy in developing countries, Thailand appears a textbook case. Never having undergone European colonialism, Thailand's political modernization was undertaken by indigenous political forces, albeit in response to external pressures. After eighty years of royal absolutism, the 1932 coup reduced the monarchy to a symbolic role, leaving the military as the most prominent force in politics. During a brief spell of elected civilian rule in the 1940s and 1950s, the former military strongman, Phibulsongkram (Phibun) remained the principal political figure, manipulating a system of money politics dominated by parties based on rural notables. This ended in 1957, when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat established direct military control. Sarit's "despotic paternalism" (Thak 2007) is Thailand's first modern

experience with a sandwich coalition. Sarit's system survived him and produced significant economic growth (Muscat 1994) until 1973 when student protests led to a short-lived and unstable democratic regime which ended in 1976 (Saitip 1995).

In the thirty years following Sarit's death, Thailand largely returned to the Phibun era pattern of mutual accommodation and tension between military and bureaucratic elites and elected politicians, but oscillating more sharply between military and electoral dominance. Following a period of turmoil in the 1970s, with popular mobilization, democratic interludes and military interventions alternating in rapid succession, the 1978 constitution established a system that has come to be termed "semi-democratic." Elected parliaments co-existed with a cabinet of unelected technocrats headed by a former general, Prem Tinsulanonda. A crucial motive – or at least pretext – for military intervention in this period was the perceived growing threat of communist insurrection in Thailand's northeast.

Despite the turmoil, this period was one of the most dynamic in Thai economic history. Economic growth, fueled in the early years by the US war in Vietnam and building on the foundation that Sarit had laid, led by the 1980s to Thailand's description as Asia's "fifth tiger" (Muscat 1994). Moreover, unlike earlier decades, while Bangkok remained the primate city, growth occurred in provincial towns and the countryside as well (McVey 2000). In these places, however, the agents of economic growth were provincial businessmen who straddled the line between organized crime and legitimate businesses, often with a stake in construction or logging, industries where this marriage came easily. Noting "the problem of defining the boundary between licit and illicit," Ruth McVey (2000:13-14) observes that "for those playing the power game, whether bureaucrats or entrepreneurs, the state's rules do not set boundaries so much as they set the price."

By the mid-1980s these rural 'godfathers', or *chao pho*, came also to dominate electoral politics. The centrality of *chao pho*—and of provincial businessmen generally – came in

part from the electoral system and in part from their centrality to the rural economy. Thailand used a Block Vote system which combines multimember constituencies with the ability to choose all the members of one party with a single vote. The *chao pho* dominated rural constituencies, and the Block Vote ballot, with a combination of muscle and money – the era is widely characterized as one of “money politics” -- but not, apparently, through traditional allegiances. The Thai countryside was traditionally characterized by smallholders, with the exploitation of farmers occurring through exchange – in their interactions with traders, brokers and bankers -- rather than rent or wages. The *chao pho* were businessmen – often of Chinese origin – not landlords. Vote-buying was the norm.

McVey (2000:12-13) places the rise of the *chao pho* in the context of a broader convergence between democratic forms of governance and the interests of business, generally, and provincial business in particular. Noting that the “old system had presented businessmen with a relatively small number of potential patrons” she argues that “this created a serious bottleneck, especially for new economic actors in the provinces, where the range of potential bureaucratic patrons was limited.” In contrast, political parties “were an alternative source of patronage, one even more sensitive to local interests and the power of money.”

For much of the 1980s the ascendancy of the *chao pho* was kept in check by Prem, who showed some inclination towards forming a sandwich coalition himself, by championing rural development programs while promoting a level of coordination of government policy with big business associations that had not been seen previously (Saitip 1995: 217). However, Prem did not himself hold elective office, and consequently did not pursue a mass constituency. His appointment as prime minister required the assent of parliament but not membership in it. By 1988 he had largely alienated “the educated urban middle class, student organizations, academics, and certain groups of politicians” who successfully pressed for a prime minister drawn from the parliament. (Saitip 1995: 217-18).

The next decade in Thai politics witnessed ever more dizzying displays of corruption and vote-buying, with the dominance of the electoral process by *chao pho* widely seen as the culprit. By the middle of the decade, there was a growing reform constituency pressing for constitutional reform. Their efforts received an unexpected boost when, in 1997, the collapse of the Thai baht due to speculation by Western currency traders triggered an Asian economic crisis that exposed, and was widely seen as exposing “crony capitalism.”

The reform movement of the 1990s was the first attempt to form a sandwich coalition to limit the power of the *chao pho*. It drew its leadership from the Bangkok intellectual elite and middle class, with tacit support from Bangkok-based big business and explicit support from NGOs, including those who worked in rural areas on issues of sustainable development and rural livelihood, and saw a political reform as a way to further their cause (Connors 2002). Where the interests of the two converged was in reducing the hold of rural capitalists on the electoral process.

That the agenda of reformism in the 1990s was driven primarily by its elite constituency is clear. Connors (2002: 42-45) shows in detail that the vision of reform supported by the movement owed more to the World Bank’s good governance agenda, with its emphasis on a technocratic state than to democratic ideals per se. In this vision, democracy played a crucial role in supporting transparency and efficient administration rather than in shifting power downward. For this reason, the emphasis of reform agendas was more on reducing the influence of elected politicians on economic policymaking than on deepening popular control. Thus, for example, reformers proposed cabinet members should not be allowed to be members of parliament, heralding a return to the technocratic cabinets of the 1980s.

The 1997 Constitution sought to reduce the power of the *chao pho* in two ways. First, it replaced the Block Vote system with a Mixed Member Majoritarian system (single-member districts supplemented with seats elected by party list proportional

representation). This ensured that Bangkok based notables could get elected without relying on provincial warlords. Second it introduced measures to prevent vote-buying ranging from enforcing a secret ballot to empowering a newly created election commission and constitutional court to investigate, check and punish electoral abuses, thereby weakening the ability of *chao pho* to deliver votes.

It was the financial crisis of 1997 that catapulted Thaksin from being a minor player to the fulcrum of the political system. A former police official who had used his connections in government to make a fortune in telecommunications, Thaksin was reputed to be Thailand's richest man. In the early 1990s, after making his fortune, he entered politics as the leader of a small party which obtained cabinet berths for him in various coalitions. When the so-called 'Asian flu' began in Thailand, with the run on the Thai baht it hit Thailand the hardest. Major business houses were wiped out while the apparent connection to crony capitalism indicted the system of "money politics" that had grown up around it. Thaksin himself was one of the major business figures left with his fortune intact. He became a spokesman for Bangkok based big business, which resented the impact of many of the IMF's conditions.

It is telling that, as Pasuk and Baker detail (2008: 63-4) , Thaksin launched his bid for the prime ministership in 2001 not as a populist, but as a technocrat who wanted "to rescue Thai businessmen from the 1997 financial crisis and to restore economic growth.... In the statement of his political ideas at this time, there is no social agenda..." While telling, it is not unusual for this brand of politics. As noted above, leaders are not drawn to sandwich tactics out of conviction but out of convenience. However they are available for use because of real disaffection and cleavages. The manner in which Thaksin arrived at his new strategy confirms both points – that Thaksin's shift to a sandwich coalition was tactical, but not accidental: the shift was available to anyone who sought it.

Seeking advice on how to win the support of rural voters, Thaksin assembled a variety of consultants including former radicals and NGO leaders. Out of these consultations came three principal promises made to rural voters that formed the linchpin of Thai Rak Thai's political campaign. Two were standard fare in populist approaches to the predominantly rural electorates of Asia: promises to reduce farmers' debt burdens and a proposal to distribute block development grants to villages. The third was unusual: a promise to provide health care for a nominal payment of 30 baht (less than US\$1) per visit. These promises were then communicated to rural voters using large billboards with a simple message – listing the party's three promises, a simple and effective method of communication that perhaps reflected Thaksin's business background.

What was unusual about Thaksin's shift to populism, however, as Pasuk and Baker (2010: 93) note was the speed with which he implemented them. They ascribe this in large measure to the legal challenges to his election and his need to intimidate the Constitutional Court with a display of popular power. This is consistent with the authoritarian tendencies of the neo-populist style, and sure enough, in the years following his election, Thaksin manifested increasingly authoritarian tendencies. He also appeared to enrich himself and his own businesses at the expense of other Thai business conglomerates. Thaksin was removed from power and in a 2006 coup that was welcomed by the same Bangkok middle class that had brought democracy to Thailand in 1992. Thaksin himself was forced into exile, where he remains, while his party was formally dissolved.

However, the important long-term consequence of Thaksin's implementation of his program was the consolidation of his support among the rural poor, especially in the troubled northeast. This not only propelled him to a victory in the next election but continued to keep him relevant in Thai politics after he had been forced into exile. Over the next five years, events demonstrated the power of Thaksin's legacy and its benefits for democratic consolidation. One testament to the consolidation of democratic expectations among the Thai public is the short duration of military rule this time. After a

little more than a year in power, during which the constitution was amended again, elections were held again which was won by the People's Party, successor to Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party. Over the next eighteen months two successive People's Party prime ministers were forced out of office by massive protests organized by the Bangkok middle class, and trumped up legal charges. Eventually, the People's Party itself was banned by the Constitutional Court, allowing Democrat Party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva to become prime minister. For three years, Bangkok was the site of repeated mass mobilizations by rural followers of Thaksin, known as the Red Shirts, and middle class opponents of Thaksin, known as Yellow Shirts. After the most violent, a month-long occupation of Bangkok in the spring of 2010, the Thai establishment decided that it would allow a Thaksin-based party to compete in the elections. In July 2011 the Pheu Thai party swept to a landslide victory and Thaksin's sister, Yingluck, became the first woman prime minister of Thailand.

Philippines

The historical background to democracy in Philippines is quite different from either India or Thailand. Spanish rule in Philippines began in the 16th century and, unlike India, left little trace of pre-colonial political forms. Moreover, it was replaced for fifty years by American rule, which led to an entirely new set of institutions being superimposed on the highly decentralized polity established by the Spanish. As scholars of Philippine politics routinely observe, by initially instituting elections for local offices and legislatures on a narrow property franchise, but keeping the executive branch under its own control the United States created an electoral system which strengthened the power of local landed elites and their patronage networks. Not until the creation of the Commonwealth of the Philippines in 1935, with an elected president, was the national executive brought within the purview of the electoral system.

Manuel Quezon, the President during the Commonwealth period, was the first to attempt to attempt a sandwich coalition, both in order to bolster the authority of the president –

and the central government generally – and in order to meet the challenge of agrarian radicalism posed by the Sakdal movement. His efforts had at best modest success, meeting stiff resistance in areas such as land reform where they directly threatened elites. With the Japanese invasion, this period came to an end. After the Japanese were defeated and the Philippines received independence, politics reverted to an essentially decentralized contest over control of patronage resources between Quezon's Nacionalista party and the Liberal party, which came into being after the war.

An important consequence of the war was the further fragmentation of coercive capability in the country. Quezon's efforts to establish a modest national army were largely swamped by the decentralized resistance to the Japanese invasion. Much though not all of this occurred with US approval. The exception, a peasant-based resistance movement, the Hukbalahap, was perceived by the US and by Philippine elites as a Communist threat. Following the war, the Huk, as it is known, was crushed by landlords' private armies with US assistance. Subsequently, efforts to rein in the prevalence of private armies in the countryside remained an important challenge for the central political authorities in Manila. It also directly affected the electoral system.

Under the 1935 Constitution, the right to vote was limited to literate adults – first to men and then, after 1937, to women (Wurfel 1988:93). Scholars provide conflicting accounts as to when the literacy restriction was lifted. According to some accounts it lasted formally until 1973, when the constitution was altered during Marcos' martial law period (Wurfel 1988: 93; Quezon 2009) although, in practice, it may have been enforced as loosely as possible. However Rood (2002:150) states that “the literacy criterion was dropped” after 1946 and others, too claim that independence brought universal suffrage (Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2003: 271, citing Rood; Hedman and Sidel 2000:14-15). The rather loose interpretation of literacy described by Wurfel, combined with a relatively high rate of literacy in actuality, perhaps accounts for the disparity.⁴

⁴ Machado (1974, fn 9), too, describes a gradual expansion of the franchise by lowering procedural hurdles, but no change in formal eligibility.

What is clear, however, is that the method of voting reinforced patronage machines as the necessary intermediaries for illiterate or barely literate voters. The Philippine ballot allowed two kinds of voting – a block vote for a party, accomplished by writing a party's name at the designated spot on top of the ballot, or a write-in vote for each candidate.⁵ In other words, regardless of whom they were voting for, voters had to correctly write the name of each candidate they supported for each office, or of the party which they wished to support for all offices. The sample ballots which political machines distributed begin to take on a far more significant role.

From the 1930s on, the relationship between voters and leaders was more instrumental and transactional than affective. The local political *lider* “provided specific services in return for specific support. If the voter regarded services as inadequate ... or was disappointed by the price for the vote, he would not provide the *lider* with the support requested” (Wurfel 1988:99). Accordingly, the major challenge for politicians was to ensure that a vote, once bought, “stayed bought” – that is, that voters delivered themselves of their bargain. Wurfel (1988: 99-100) reports a number of methods by which party machines sought to ensure that voters lived up to their end of the bargain including paying voters only half the promised amount before and half after “presentation of proof of having voted ‘right’ (for example a carbon copy of the ballot, the buyers graciously providing the carbon).”

This highly transactional relationship evolved over time, as the source of patronage resources shifted from the local to the national level. Machado (1974) famously argued that traditional factions (*banda*), which connected the localities to national politics in the colonial era and had commanded allegiance locally through a combination of material and affective ties, were giving way, at least in areas characterized by high levels of “social mobilization” to “machines” – more centrally controlled and instrumentally

⁵ Block voting was abolished in 1951 but the write-in ballot remains to this day (Rood 2002: 152).

oriented networks run by professional politicians. Underlying this shift was a shift in the economic basis of elite status: where once the power of local politicians was grounded in dominance of the local economy, and local notable families drew on patron-client ties to dominate politics, by mid-century the bargaining power of the local and national arenas was reversed. Beginning in the 1930s and accelerating after independence, when the Liberal Party broke away from the Nacionalistas to set in motion a period of competitive party politics, a new breed of local politicians arose. These politicians were dependent on obtaining resources from the national arena to maintain their influence, and delivered votes to national politicians in exchange for it (Machado 1974: 524-7 and *passim*).

Wurfel (1988: 78-88) details the various interlocking mechanisms of patronage politics that drove vote-buying. Patronage infused the bureaucracy and other state institutions from top to bottom, with virtually all government appointments effectively subject to presidential approval. Members of Congress, in turn, spent most of their time securing appointments for their clients and allocations for pork barrel spending in their districts. Gardner (1986: 77) gives a vivid description of the consequent “characteristic … stage(s) of the Philippine political cycle” as follows: “resounding promises of costless reform” in the “post-election stage” followed by “abandonment of reform – which inevitably had costs – for more focused political payoffs, sometime before the mid-term election.” She notes (1986: 79) that this cycle

“assumed limited resources. The shifts from program to pork barrel occurred not simply because Filipinos were culturally predisposed toward more personalistic methods of distributing benefits, but also because in the short run the pork barrel appeared to be a more economically efficient way of getting votes. However, because both funds and positions were limited, the distribution of patronage was likely to alienate as many as it attracted.

Attempts at electoral reform began early, in the 1950s, and are a recurring feature of Philippine politics. The National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), “a supposedly non-partisan but actually pro-Magsaysay federation of citizen groups” played

a crucial role in ensuring the integrity of the vote and the election of Ramon Magsaysay in 1953 (Wurfel 1988: 104-5). Despite having a constituency similar to that of the 1990s reform movement in Thailand, a middle class constituency composed of “civic-minded professionals and businessmen,” NAMFREL sought not to change the law but, using existing laws, to “guard against fraud and ensure fair vote counting” (Abinales and Amoroso 2005: 179). NAMFREL had allies among other organizations including church and business-based associations (Hedman 2006: 44-66) but its main support came from the Philippines Veterans’ League which had the rural infrastructure necessary to monitor the vote and close ties to the reform presidency of Ramon Magsaysay. The reform movement’s support of Magsaysay came with considerable support from the United States and ultimately ensured Magsaysay’s victory (Hedman and Sidel 2000: 55-6).

Calimbahin (2010: 165-176) notes, though, that despite NAMFREL’s storied role in the 1953 elections its success may have depended as much on cooperation from the Commission on Elections (COMELEC). The continued vulnerability of COMELEC to patronage in large measure explains why it did not play this role in the Marcos era, especially in 1986, or even subsequently (Calimbahin 2010: 176-185) This possibly explains why a similar citizens’ push for clean elections in 1969, when Ferdinand Marcos was running for re-election, had so little effect (Hedman 2000: 67-87). Wurfel (1988: 104-5) argues further that a major effect of various reforms was to make it increasingly difficult to ensure that voters were complying with their end of the vote-buying bargain. This had the unintended consequence of increasing the level of violence or coercion in elections. By the 1960s, therefore, private armies came to dominate vote-gathering as much as money.

The rise of Marcos, first elected in 1965, represents the most pronounced effort at a sandwich coalition in the half-century following the establishment of the Commonwealth and, accordingly, the most concerted push to centralizing authority in Philippine history. It is notable that Marcos begins with a reformist agenda. Lela Gardner Noble (1986:75) notes that upon assuming office in his first term Marcos took a number of steps aimed at

a introducing a more professional economic administration and improving tax and customs collection. He

assembled a team of technocrats who devised what appeared to be a realistic four-year development plan. To raise revenues he focused on curbing smuggling and improving tax collections. By appointing a vigorous and honest customs commissioner he immediately increased revenues, then moved to discipline corrupt Constabulary and Navy officers who were in collusion with smugglers. He justified a plan to centralize administration of the police, who heretofore had come under the authority of elected mayors, by reference both to their dishonesty and to their frequent involvement in vendettas. He moved to implement the 1963 Land Reform Act in the province of Pampanga, where a resurgence of the Huks was evident. The four year budget for land distribution was matched by a military budget for 1967 that was twice the defense budget for 1962.

At the same time, Marcos made a concerted effort to shore up his authority by centralizing patronage and breaking the cycle of Philippine politics described above. As Gardner (1986: 75) describes it, “If many of his programmatic initiatives fizzled, some of the projects – schoolhouses and roads, for example – continued.” And while these might have “produced few immediate economic returns” Marcos recognized that “they were useful politically, functioning essentially as a more sophisticated pork-barrel, without the disadvantages of reform programs: virtually all villagers would perceive themselves as benefiting immediately from a road or a school, for example, whereas land reform would produce both winners and losers, at least in the short run.” Since Marcos also continued the practice of giving “gifts from the public treasury to local officials” he “kept his old supporters, gained new ones, and pushed the country closer to bankruptcy.”

Other scholars describe Marcos approach to patronage in terms that are typical of a “sandwich coalition.” By increasing the “flow of resource and executive contacts beneath the congressmen and into the municipalities” he reduced both his own and local politicians’ “dependence upon the political brokers in the legislative branch who have

historically proven to be such a disappointment to incumbent presidents seeking re-election” (Shantz cited in Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2003: 275).

Unlike his predecessors he “ran deficits even in off years to fund a massive infrastructure program that was parceled out for maximum political advantage” (Thompson cited in Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2003: 274) while he “augmented the already enormous budgetary powers of the Philippine presidency with new discretionary funds that could be distributed directly to officials at the barrio level for ‘community projects.’” After declaring martial law in 1972, Marcos formed a new party, Kilusang Bagong Lipunang (KBL) or New Society Movement which practiced such “a masterful centralization of patronage resources” that “politicians flocked to the KBL” (Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2003: 275).

Marcos’ centralization efforts, it should be noted, were considerably less well focused and more authoritarian than Indira Gandhi’s or Thaksin’s and, even more than either of those, resulted in accusations of massive corruption and abuse of power. This fact itself, however, is not unrelated to the clientelistic nature of Philippines elections. They explain why, unlike Indira Gandhi or Thaksin, Marcos was unable to use electoral processes – or sandwich coalitions -- to ensure his own survival in power and resorted to massive electoral fraud in 1969. The crisis that led to martial law, moreover, was caused by Marcos’ inability under the constitution to run for a third term. When a Constitutional Convention (CONCON) convened in the early 1970s showed every sign of barring him and his wife from holding future office, it confirmed the eventual end of the Commonwealth constitution.

Conclusion

The challenge for elite-led democracies, once established, is to offer elites a way to address these distributive concerns in a manner that does not either undermine their own

privileged position or impede long-term economic growth. As I have argued, using the example of India, this is what sandwich coalitions permit.

While India's multi-layered social structure with its many cross-cutting cleavages might appear to be tailor-made for sandwich coalitions, Thaksin's success in creating a sandwich coalition in Thailand with a far less stratified social structure suggests, rather, that relevant cleavages can be engineered by political entrepreneurs. This finding is strengthened through a further comparison to the Philippines where a far more stratified social structure than in Thailand has not sustained sandwich coalitions. By contrast, institutional factors both explain the failure of sandwich coalitions in the Philippines and provide a necessary condition for their occurrence.

For sandwich coalitions to work, they need to serve the interests of all the parties concerned. This requires both that political elites be in a position to deliver goods to the target constituency and that the latter be in a position to provide politically meaningful support to the elites. In India, these conditions were largely met, in part owing to the legacy of imperial state-building and in part due to the legacy of party-building during the Independence movement. In Thailand, they were met after the reform movement of the 1990s. In the Philippines, however, they were never fully met, with the result that Marcos, who is the most complete example of a politician attempting a sandwich coalition, turned instead to direct authoritarian rule via martial law.

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