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THE ECONOMICS OF CONFLICT IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES: INSTITUTIONAL STICKINESS AND THE MORO INSURGENCY

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Abstract

The ongoing insurgency in the southern Philippines is generally believed to be a religious war. Historical evidence shows that this belief is unsatisfactory. Viewing the conflict through the framework of institutional stickiness leads to a more robust explanation of the insurgency by exposing the institutional misalignments that are at the root. These institutional misalignments lead to conflict over property rights, protection of indigenous culture, and fair provision of government services. This approach also informs policy by highlighting the problems with the national government's attempts to quell the insurgency through the use of force. If the national government's goal is to end the insurgency, a policy response that focuses on the use of local knowledge and that increases local autonomy is most likely to succeed.

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Abbreviations

ARMM	Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
NPA	New People's Army
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

I. Introduction

"One of Asia's longest and deadliest conflicts"[1] has roiled the Philippines since 1968,[2] with insurgents fighting against the government of the Philippines. The number of deaths due to the rebellion are generally estimated to exceed 100,000.[3] Displacement is also a major problem, with many people displaced internally and more who have fled abroad.[4] The conflict is multidimensional. The New People's Army (NPA), which is the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines, has perpetrated violence throughout the country. Several other groups based in the southern islands have also fought against the national government. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) are arguably the most important of the southern insurgent organizations.

All three groups operate and recruit primarily in the south, especially in the islands and provinces of Basilan, Mindanao, Palawan, and Sulu. The MNLF was the most powerful of the three groups from the 1970s through the 1990s, but its power has faded. The MILF, however, has gained power and is now the dominant rebel group. Although the ASG has proven that it has the capability to carry out attacks, kidnappings, and other violent crimes, it does not have popular support or political legitimacy.[5] Over the years, there have been numerous rounds of unofficial talks and peace negotiations between the national government and rebel representatives, first from the MNLF and more recently from the MILF. Several negotiations have ended with agreements. However, as the continued occurrence of violence proves, these agreements have not been successful at ending the conflict.[6]

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[1] "Moro Islamic Liberation Front," GlobalSecurity.org, 2015, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/milf.htm.

[2] Scholars disagree about when the insurgency started. Some say that it dates back to the period of Spanish colonial rule, while others say that the modern insurgency did not truly begin until the late 1960s. See Soliman M. Santos Jr., "War and Peace on the Moro Front: Three Standard Bearers, Three Forms of Struggle, Three Tracks (Overview)," in *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines*, ed. Diana Rodriguez (Geneva, Switzerland: Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2010), 58–91.

[3] Frederik Kok, "Death in Displacement: Why the Philippine Government Must Allow Zamboanga's IDPs to Go Back Home," Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, July 4, 2014, http://www.internal-displacement.org/blog/2014/death-in-displacement-why-the-philippine-government-must-allow-zamboangas-idps-to-go-back-home.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Patricio Abinales, "Philippines Country Profile: Situation Report," Tony Blair Faith Foundation, 2014, http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/religion-geopolitics/country-profiles/philippines/situation-report.

Attempts to end the violent insurgency in the south have failed in large part because the complexity of the issue is not adequately understood. News reports, which tend to focus on the religion aspect and to frame the violence as a conflict between Muslims and Roman Catholics, are indicative of this misunderstanding. An August 1, 2014, editorial in the *New York Times* said, "Muslim insurgency in the southern island of Mindanao has bedeviled the largely Catholic country for over a century."[7] The BBC's "Guide to the Philippines Conflict" is largely devoted to three groups that the BBC says form the Muslim separatist movement.[8] *NBC News* struck the same note as the BBC when it called the southern Philippines "America's forgotten frontline" in a fight against "a separatist Muslim insurgency."[9] To an extent, this analysis is understandable given that the MILF is explicitly religious by name and the ASG claims to fight for Islam and publicizes its ties with extreme Islamist groups.

The Roman Catholic influence on law and culture in the Philippines may also contribute to the way that the conflict is perceived.[10] When the state and religion overlap, attacks on one are more likely to be perceived as attacks on the other as well. Furthermore, the Philippine government has perpetuated the religious view of the conflict. Officers in the Philippine military have written reports on the conflict, and these tend to focus on religion as the primary cause of violence.[11]

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[6] The Global Terrorism Database at the University of Maryland provides details on individual acts of terrorist violence around the world. Searching this database for incidents in the Philippines shows that no agreement has brought a complete end to violence. See https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?country=160.

[7] "The Philippines' Insurgency Crisis," editorial, *New York Times,* August 1, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/02/opinion/the-philippines-insurgency-crisis.html.

[8] "Guide to the Philippines Conflict," *BBC News,* October 8, 2012, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-17038024.

[9] Adrienne Mong, "America's Forgotten Frontline: The Philippines," *NBC News,* October 1, 2010, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/39444744/ns/world_news-asia_pacific/t/americas-forgotten-frontline-philippines/#.Vif9B8WrTIW.

[10] More than 80 percent of Filipinos are Roman Catholic, according to the Pew Research Center, and there are roughly as many Catholics in the Philippines as there are in the United States. Divorce is illegal in the country, so

Finally, foreign powers and multilateral institutions contribute to this view by drawing attention to the religious dimension of the conflict. Malaysia, Libya, Egypt, and Pakistan have cited religion as a motive for providing material support to the insurgents,[12] and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation has been involved in the peace negotiations since 2007.[13]

With so much focus on the religious aspect of the rebellion, it would be reasonable to believe that the insurgency is simply a religious war. However, this is not the full story. Whereas religion is an important part of the insurgency, there are other important factors at play. I argue that there is evidence that clearly shows religion is not the only, and perhaps not even the most important, motivating factor in the Moro Insurgency. I focus on three key issues that underpin the insurgency.

One key issue is secure property rights. To encourage southern migration, the national government gave migrants titles to lands in the south and granted access to natural resources, despite the fact that these lands were often already occupied by others. In a report on migration in the Philippines, Charles Keely said that the roots of the conflict are not in religion but rather in

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marriages must be terminated through a church annulment. Regional officials have at times banned the distribution of birth control at public health centers because of religious objections.

[11] For examples, see thesis papers by officers, including Alan Luga, "Muslim Insurgency in Mindanao, Philippines," thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 2002; and Ricardo C. Morales, "Perpetual Wars: The Philippine Insurgencies," thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, December 2003, 16–17, http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a420548.pdf.

[12] Mapping Militant Organizations, "Moro Islamic Liberation Front," Stanford University, Stanford, CA, https://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/379?highlight=mnlf.

[13] "OIC, Philippine Government, and MNLF Peace Talks Agree on Agenda for Ministerial Meeting," Organisation of Islamic Cooperation*,* 2015, http://iag.org.ph/index.php/news/1216-oic-gph-and-mnlf-peace-talks-agree-on-agenda-for-november-2015-ministerial-meeting.

land tenure law.[14] Many southerners feel that they, not migrants from the north, hold the rightful claim to the natural resources. This tension over who rightfully has the property rights over southern land and resources is one of the most important causes of conflict.

Another key issue is the freedom to live according to local cultural norms. Migrants brought new economic and cultural practices, and although it is common for different cultures to exist in the same space, problems can arise if one set of norms carries legal or de facto privileges over others. Many in the south wanted to decide how their children would be educated and to conduct business and family affairs in line with their own traditions and practices. However, northern customs and practices became law when migrants came to the south. Examples include legislation regarding marriage, commercial transactions, inheritance, and the adjudication of disputes.

A third key issue is fair access to publicly provided goods and services. Many southerners resented the privileges that migrants received, such as access to low-interest loans and preferential treatment from bureaucrats within the Philippine government. Many also felt that law enforcement and military personnel served the interests of migrants at the expense of the indigenous community. Thomas McKenna describes bureaucrats as being indifferent to Muslims but working proactively to help northern migrants.[15] This type of treatment can lead to resentment and can undermine the government's legitimacy in the eyes of those who are treated unfairly.

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[14] Charles B. Keely, "Philippine Migration: Internal Movements and Emigration to the United States," *International Migration Review* 7, no. 2 (1973): 177–87.

[15] Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

Those three issues deserve mention not just because they demonstrate that the conflict is about more than religion, but also because secure property rights, individual freedom, and fair access to state-provided goods and services are all necessary components of a well-functioning society that enables peaceful cooperation between individuals. Many economists have pointed out the importance of private property in economic development. Hernando de Soto's work showing the role of secure property rights and land titles in the developing world is clearly relevant to the southern Philippines.[16] Sociologists, political scientists, and economists have written a great deal on the connection between state capacity, economic development, and conflict. A state that cannot provide equal access to widely valued goods and services, and cannot protect individuals' safety and freedom, lacks capacity and is more likely to experience violence. Timothy Besley and Torsten Persson have explored the determinants of state capacity and development and have noted the connection between weak states and internal violence. They also point out the complementarity of political and economic institutions.[17] Many governments face the same problems that underlie the insurgency.

If the widely accepted belief that the insurgency in the southern Philippines is a religious war is incorrect, a more accurate and robust explanation is necessary. Using the concept of institutional stickiness to analyze the conflict provides this needed explanation. Applying an institutional stickiness framework demonstrates the complexity of the conflict and helps to explain the roots of the conflict. This approach proves that it is more accurate to see the conflict as a result of an attempt to forcefully impose a set of institutions on a group of people with existing, incompatible institutions, and it shows how this imposition explains the grievances that drive the conflict.

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[16] Hernando de Soto, *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

[17] Timothy Besley and Torsten Persson, "State Capacity, Conflict, and Development," *Econometrica* 78, no. 1 (January 2010): 1–34; Timothy Besley and Torsten Persson, "The Origins of State Capacity: Property Rights, Taxation, and Politics," *American Economic Review* 99, no. 4 (September 2009): 1218–44.

This paper begins with an overview of the concept of institutional stickiness. It then presents historical background to illustrate the relevance of institutional stickiness to this particular case of insurgency. The final section covers policy implications in the context of this richer understanding of the conflict.

II. Institutional Stickiness

In "Institutional Stickiness and the New Development Economics," Peter Boettke, Christopher Coyne, and Peter Leeson explain that ". . . the stickiness, and therefore likely success, of any proposed institutional change is a function of that institution's status in relationship to indigenous agents in the previous time period."[18] They apply this framework to economic development, noting the repeated failures of attempts to replace pre-existing institutions that seem to be detrimental to growth. Problems can arise if indigenous actors feel that the new, imposed institutions do not align with their existing institutions. If there is misalignment, they are more likely to resist the imposition. This resistance means that the imposers must engage in coaxing or coercion to try to make imposed institutions stick. Said another way, imposers must apply the use of force to try to make the institutional change successful. These actions are costly to the imposer. Paying and outfitting police and military to control the population is an example. Another example is using bribes to secure compliance. Indigenous people are likely to bear costs as well. For example, they may suffer repression or physical harm as imposers force them to obey.

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[18] Peter Boettke, Christopher Coyne, and Peter Leeson, "Institutional Stickiness and the New Development Economics," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 67, no. 2 (2008): 331–58.

When imposed institutions do not mesh with existing institutions, perverse or even destructive outcomes can arise. Individuals may not comply with new institutions in the spirit that had been intended, or they may use them selectively to benefit some people at a cost to others. This can compound the aforementioned enforcement costs because the perverse or destructive application may create even greater resistance. More simply, but perhaps more important, members of the indigenous community may not want to abandon their pre-existing institutions and may resent the institutional change even if it is done by altruistic actors with the best of intentions.

To understand how institutional stickiness explains violent conflict and to make it possible to conduct systematic and transparent analysis of different cases of conflict, it is helpful to have an explicit framework for categorizing institutions. Boettke, Coyne, and Leeson present such a taxonomy.[19] They distinguish between institutions that are imposed from the top down and those that emerge spontaneously, calling the former exogenous and the latter endogenous. Endogenous institutions emerge spontaneously as the result of individual actors pursuing their desired ends. These actors, as members of the indigenous community, have a deep knowledge of the context within which they act. This deep knowledge is composed of both tacit and explicit knowledge. Endogenous institutions, then, are rooted in the knowledge and experiences of indigenous actors. Appreciating the role of local knowledge is vital to the success of endogenous institutions at facilitating peaceful cooperation and the attainment of individually desired ends.

Boettke, Coyne, and Leeson[20] also distinguish between institutions that are created by outsiders and those that are created by members of the indigenous community. These institutions are called foreign and indigenous, respectively. The result is three categories: foreign exogenous, indigenous exogenous, and indigenous endogenous. (Foreign endogenous does not exist because it is impossible for an institution to be endogenous if the source is foreign.) For the purposes of this discussion, the important distinction is between exogenous and endogenous. This framework can be applied to insurgency by seeing the insurgents' institutions as endogenous and the state's institutions as exogenous. In the same way that stickiness can prevent the realization of desired economic development, it can lead to violent conflict. More specifically, understanding whether exogenous and endogenous institutions align helps to explain why individuals rebel. As was stated previously, historical evidence shows that the Moro insurgency, dating from the founding of the MNLF in 1972,[21] began as a case of exogenous institutions imposed on a group (or groups) of people, and these exogenous institutions do not align with endogenous institutions in many ways other than religion.

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

III. History

Background

Muslim traders reached the Philippine islands in the 9th century and had repeated contact with locals as they sailed through the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, leading to the establishment of Islam in Sulu by the early 14th century.[22] As the religion spread, so did the concept of political organization by sultanate. By the early 16th century, the Sultanate of Sulu controlled most of Sulu, Palawan, Basilan, some of what is now Malaysian Borneo, and western Mindanao, while the Sultanate of Maguindanao controlled most of the rest of Mindanao. These areas are shown in figure 1. Although there was a shared religion and similar political institutions, there were differences along tribal, linguistic, and geographic lines.[23] These divides show that identity for southern Filipinos was composed of much more than religion and that local institutions, both formal and informal, went beyond religion. It is also important to note that Islam spread through the southern Philippines not by force, but primarily through voluntary conversion. The same is true of the institutions that tended to coincide with religious conversion but were not religious per se.[24]

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[21] Some historians note that violent conflict has existed in the region for centuries, and they claim that the modern insurgency should be seen as a continuation of this rather than a distinct rebellion. The purpose of this paper is not to enter that discussion, and the argument made here is not undermined by changing the assumed date that the insurgency began. Evidence from the colonial-era insurgency is consistent with the institutional stickiness explanation, but including this period would greatly expand the scope of this paper.

[22] Peter Gowing and Robert McAmis, *The Muslim Filipinos* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974), 2.

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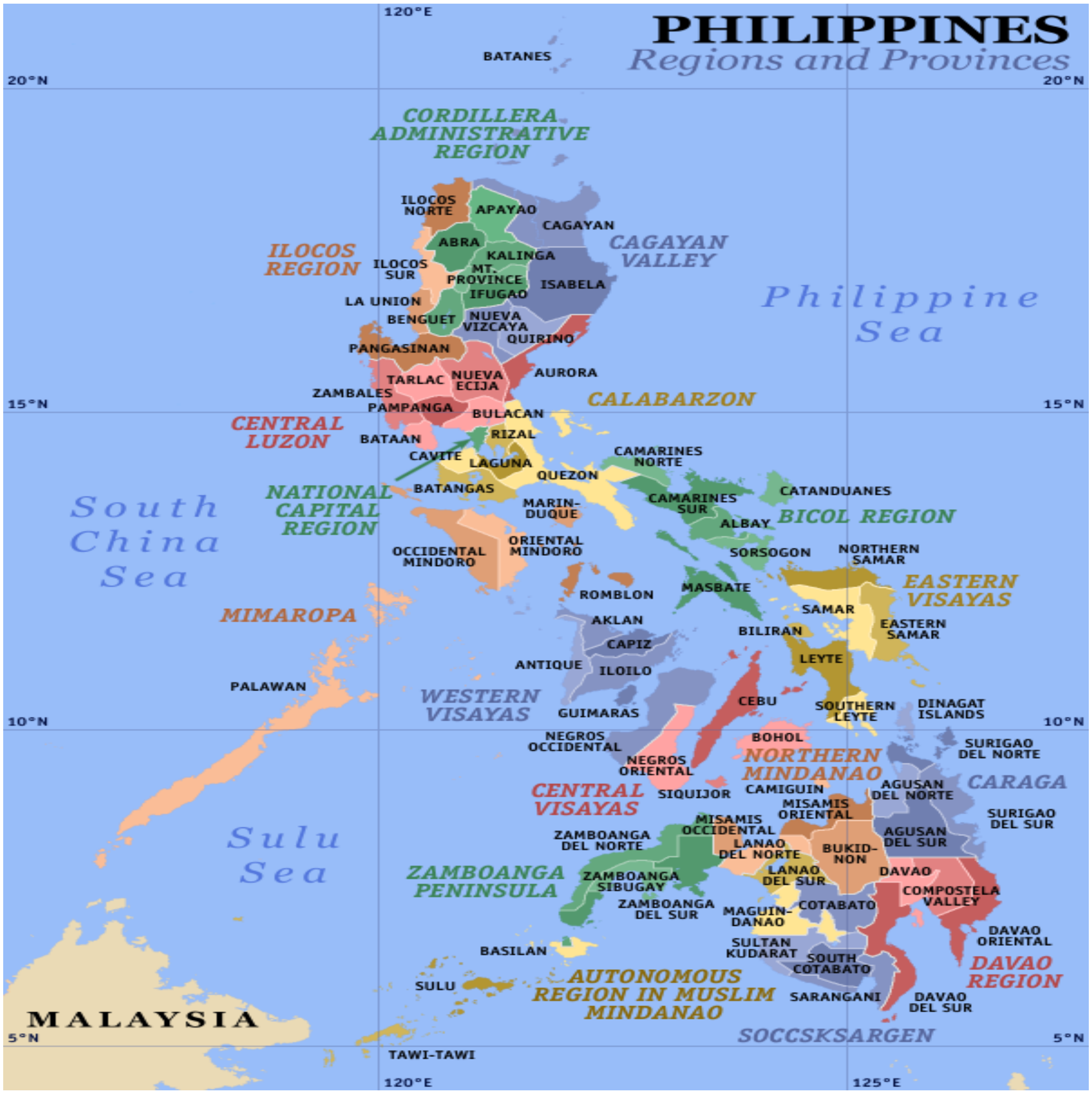
[23] Ronald Dolan, ed., *Philippines: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, 1991), 82.

[24] Whereas a sultanate is by definition a Muslim state, a political system could be structured and operate in the same manner but be connected to a different religion. The same could be said for economic and cultural institutions that emerged in the southern Philippines. They were connected to Islam, but could emerge from any system of religious beliefs.

Figure 1. Map of the Philippines



PHILIPPINES
Regions and Provinces
120°E
125°E
20°N
15°N
10°N
5°N
BATANES
CORDILLERA ADMINISTRATIVE REGION
ILOCOS NORTE
APAYAO
CAGAYAN
ABRA
KALINGA
CAGAYAN VALLEY
ILOCOS REGION
ILOCOS SUR
MT. PROVINCE
ISABELA
IFUGAO
LA UNION
BENGUET
NUEVA VIZCAYA
QUIRINO
Philippine Sea
PANGASINAN
AURORA
TARLAC
NUEVA ECIJA
ZAMBALES
PAMPANGA
CALABARZON
BULACAN
CENTRAL LUZON
BATAAN
RIZAL
CAVITE
LAGUNA
CAMARINES NORTE
QUEZON
NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION
BATANGAS
CATANDUANES
South China Sea
MARINDUQUE
CAMARINES SUR
BICOL REGION
ALBAY
OCCIDENTAL MINDORO
ORIENTAL MINDORO
SORSOGON
NORTHERN SAMAR
EASTERN VISAYAS
MASBATE
ROMBLON
SAMAR
MIMAROPA
AKLAN
EASTERN SAMAR
BILIRAN
CAPIZ
LEYTE
ANTIQUE
ILOILO
PALAWAN
WESTERN VISAYAS
CEBU
GUIMARAS
SOUTHERN LEYTE
DINAGAT ISLANDS
NEGROS OCCIDENTAL
BOHOL
SURIGAO DEL NORTE
NEGROS ORIENTAL
NORTHERN MINDANAO
CARAGA
CENTRAL VISAYAS
SIQUIJOR
CAMIGUIN
AGUSAN DEL NORTE
MISAMIS ORIENTAL
SURIGAO DEL SUR
Sulu Sea
MISAMIS OCCIDENTAL
ZAMBOANGA DEL NORTE
AGUSAN DEL SUR
LANAO DEL NORTE
BUKIDNON
ZAMBOANGA PENINSULA
ZAMBOANGA SIBUGAY
LANAO DEL SUR
DAVAO
COMPOSTELA VALLEY
ZAMBOANGA DEL SUR
MAGUINDANAO
COTABATO
DAVAO ORIENTAL
BASILAN
SULTAN KUDARAT
SOUTH COTABATO
DAVAO REGION
AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO
SULU
SARANGANI
DAVAO DEL SUR
MALAYSIA
SOCCSKSARGEN
TAWI-TAWI

Source: Top-destination-choice-the-philippines.com, http://www.top-destination-choice-the-philippines.com/detailed-map-of-the-philippines.html, accessed June 2, 2016.

In the 16th century, Spanish conquerors arrived and introduced Roman Catholicism. The Spanish recruited Roman Catholic Filipinos from the north to fight Muslims in the south, who the Spanish called "Moros."[25] The religious institution of Roman Catholicism, and the social and economic institutions that accompanied it, did not align with the existing institutions of the south. Indigenous actors resisted this imposition, and the colonial authorities used coercive measures in an attempt to make the institutional change stick.

This dynamic persisted after the United States defeated Spain in the Spanish-American War and the Philippines became an American colony. The Americans continued the Spanish practice of encouraging northern Christians to migrate to the south.[26] They also gave Christian Filipinos positions in the colonial administration. Christians therefore dominated the systems of education, tax collection, and land registry, and they were supported by the force of the military and law enforcement.[27] Filling the bureaucracy with Christians from the north exacerbated the deeper institutional conflicts. Whereas the Spanish focused mainly on religious conversion, a government and bureaucracy dominated by northern Filipinos necessarily involved institutional impositions involving nonreligious government functions.

Western colonial rule was interrupted when Japanese forces occupied the Philippines from 1942 to 1945 during World War II. Guerrilla units fought against the Japanese occupiers, and the American military provided material support and personnel to many of these resistance fifg guerrilla leaders were often local datus—chieftains with political and religious authority. Some datus gained recognition for their skills in leading the resistance and, therefore, attracted greater followings. Datus tended to have wealth from land and trade, and some added to their wealth during and immediately after the occupation by acquiring more lands and engaging in smuggling.[28] In addition, many Moros and non-Muslim southerners gained experience as guerrillas. These skills and organizational structures would prove to be useful to insurgents, years later, in the rebellion against the Philippine government. Furthermore, the proliferation of firearms during the guerrilla campaign meant that future rebels had access to weapons.[29]

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[25] Mariano Dumia, "The Moro National Liberation Front and the Organization of the Islamic Conference: Its Implications to National Security" (National Defense College of the Philippines, Quezon City, 1991).

[26] Thomas R. McHale, "American Colonial Policy Towards the Philippines," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 3, no. 1 (March 1962): 24–43.

[27] McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*.

The Philippines achieved independence on July 4, 1946. In the decades following independence, the government in Manila accelerated the program of southern migration and granted Christian migrants title to Moro-occupied lands. From 1948 to 1970, the number of Christian settlers in the south more than tripled to more than 2.3 million.[30] In the 20th century, the population of Mindanao changed from roughly 75 percent Muslim to less than 20 percent Muslim.[31] Christians, who had been in positions of power under the colonial system, consolidated their political power in the south after independence and used this power to secure privileges, such as preferential access to government loans and favorable decisions in legal disputes. Southerners rarely had legal title to their land and often found that they were at a disadvantage when dealing with government offices staffed by immigrants from the north.[32] The government also claimed the right to natural resources that southerners believed were rightfully theirs. This example shows the importance of secure property rights, and it also demonstrates how an institutional change can be destructive. Imposing a new political institution on the south led to conflict over ownership of land and resources and enabled some individuals to gain at the expense of those who inhabited the land but lacked the knowledge or connections necessary to obtain official title.[33] Expropriating resources also disrupted economic and social relationships as existing trade connections and patterns disappeared. Rather than achieving economic development, some regions in the south have stagnated and fallen further behind.[34]

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[28] Lela Garner Noble, “The Moro National Liberation Front in the Philippines,” *Pacific Affairs* 49, no. 3 (1976): 407.

[29] Morales, “Perpetual Wars: The Philippine Insurgencies,” 16–17.

[30] Thomas McKenna, “Muslim Separatism in the Philippines: Meaningful Autonomy or Endless War?” Asian Social Issues Program, Asia Source, 2003**.**

[31] Santos Jr., “War and Peace on the Moro Front,” 61.

[32] Ibid., 406.

With tensions already high, violence erupted in the lead-up to elections in 1970.[35] Political party orientation tended to correspond to religion, and both Muslims and Christians were the victims of politically motivated violence. Some foreign powers, notably Libya and Malaysia, responded by providing support to Filipino Muslims.[36] In 1972, in what he claimed was a response to threats from both Muslims and Communists, President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law. This action criminalized most political activity, made the private possession of firearms illegal, and gave the military and local law enforcement significant leeway to use force against opponents of the regime.

Under the leadership of Marcos, the central government also adopted economic policies that it claimed were meant to boost growth throughout the country and to narrow differences in development between the regions.[37] These policies encouraged resource extraction and industrialization in the south. However, as was mentioned, these efforts were not successful at closing the development gap. Even worse, the central government's development policies aggravated problems in the south. Firms in the extractive industries operated on lands claimed by

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[33] Walden Bello et al.'s *The Anti-Development State: The Political Economy of Permanent Crisis in the Philippines* (London: Zed Books, 2005) includes a chapter that chronicles some examples of the corruption and crony capitalism that have occurred in the Philippines. Some of these examples involve land grabs and development projects in the southern islands.

[34] The *Philippine Human Development Report 2005* (Quezon City, Philippines: Human Development Network, 2005) shows that southern regions tend to be poorer than the north and that welfare indicators correlate closely with the incidence of violence in a region. Furthermore, rather than closing the gap, some southern regions have fallen further behind since the early 1980s.

[35] The Corregidor Massacre, also known as the Jabidah Massacre, created significant tension. When a group of Moro soldiers in the national army mutinied, their officers had them all killed.

[36] The chief minister of the Malaysian province Sabah established training camps and provided material support for Moro rebels. The Corregidor Massacre is often cited as a major cause of this.

[37] Anne Clausen, "Economic Globalization and Regional Disparities in the Philippines," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 31, no. 3 (2010): 301.

Moros and Lumads (non-Muslim indigenous Filipinos), and subsidies from the central government boosted their profits. Many of these firms opposed, and some still oppose, efforts to grant land titles to indigenous southerners. This opposition is in part to blame for the slow pace of retitling expropriated land, which remains an issue for insurgents and their supporters.[38] Meanwhile, the central and northern islands benefited the most from the revenues the government received from extractive industries.[39]

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)

As has been seen numerous times in many places, prohibition has negative consequences.[40] Prohibiting political activity often leads to an increase in political violence, perhaps because actors who do not have recourse to the law are more likely to use violence or because the act of repressing political expression breeds resentment and motivates violence.[41] When political activity became illegal, some students from the Muslim Independence Movement chose to continue their resistance through violence and underground opposition. These students created the MNLF.

An accurate understanding of the MNLF's goals and purpose is important to understanding how institutional stickiness applies to the Philippine insurgency. Although the

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[38] Christopher R. Duncan, ed., *Civilizing the Margins: Southeast Asian Government Policies for the Development of Minorities* (Singapore: National US Press, 2008), ix–xx and 56–86.

[39] Kim Cragin and Peter Chalk, *Terrorism & Development: Using Social and Economic Development to Inhibit a Resurgence of Terrorism* (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2003), 15–22.

[40] Prohibition of alcohol in the United States is one example of this dynamic. Other examples include modern day Venezuela and Argentina, where prohibitions on numerous activities have led to black markets, higher prices, and more violence. The global war on drugs is yet another example.

[41] Edward N. Muller and Erich Weede, "Cross-National Variation in Political Violence: A Rational Action Approach," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 34, no. 4 (1990): 624–51; Will H. Moore, "Repression and Dissent: Substitution, Context, and Timing," *American Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 3 (1998): 851–73; Mark Irving Lichbach, "Deterrence or Escalation? The Puzzle of Aggregate Studies of Repression and Dissent," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 31, no. 2 (1987): 266–97.

MNLF's founding manifesto of 1974 uses some Islamic terms, it is not rooted in Islam,[42] and the ultimate goal put forward in the manifesto is an independent Moro state that is described in secular terms.[43] The use of secular terms indicates that MNLF leaders desired a government that had closer connections to endogenous institutions that went beyond religion. If the institutional misalignment was limited to religion, it would not make sense for MNLF leaders to express a desire for an independent secular state. The fact that a desire for an independent state was explicitly declared as the goal shows that the institutional conflict was grounded in issues of routine governance and culture.

The first issue of the group's newsletter *Mahardika* supports this point. It called for readers to put aside their tribal, ethnic, and religious identities in favor of Moro identity, noting that other loyalties should not distract from the bonds shared by those who live in the Moro territory.[44] This indicates a rejection of exogenous institutions and a call for a government based on institutions endogenous to the southern Philippines. Asking for people to put aside other loyalties in favor of Moro identity implies that there were institutions commonly associated with Moro identity and that those institutions were generally accepted by southern Filipinos of different tribes, ethnicities, and religions. If there were no institutions commonly associated with a secular Moro state, or if the institutions were not attractive to different groups, the MNLF would achieve little through its call for unity.

A commander in the MNLF military further reinforced this point when he claimed that the three most important reasons for the formation of the MNLF were (1) the Corregidor Massacre (when Muslim soldiers in the national army were killed for refusing to invade

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[42] Mapping Militant Organizations. "Moro National Liberation Front."
[43] Misuari, Nur, "Moro National Liberation Front Manifesto," MNLF, Sulu, Phillipines, 1974.
[44] Rizal Buendia, "The State-Moro Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Unresolved National Question or Question of Governance?" *Asian Journal of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (2005): 115–16.

Malaysia); (2) land grabs; and (3) government failure to solve social, political, and economic problems.[45] These reasons demonstrate the multifaceted nature of Moro identity. Whereas the mention of the Corregidor Massacre shows that religion was a part of the problem, the mention of property rights and the state's lack of capacity to address social concerns reinforces the fact that insurgents perceived a misalignment of economic and political institutions as well.[46]

As further proof of the extent of the institutional conflict, MNLF Chair Nur Misuari described the organization's objective as "a revolution for national salvation and human justice," while spokesperson Abdurasad Asani said, "Colonialism is the root cause of the problem . . . the issue therefore is essentially political in character."[47] This evidence indicates that the MNLF saw the problem as a fight against exogenous institutions imposed by a foreign power. Efforts at national salvation require an outside threat to be saved from. In line with this, the MNLF sought to bring together numerous different ethno-linguistic groups in the south and to rally supporters around nationalist and territorial grievances rather than religious ones.[48] The emphasis on Moro nationhood, colonial grievances, and an independent state are consistent with a desire to escape the forcible imposition of exogenous institutions. Although the imposing agents at this point were also Filipino nationals, there is clearly reason to believe that the MNLF saw them as foreign actors. This position is similar to that taken by Moro and Lumad rebels in the southern Philippines for centuries in their fight to defend their independence, way of life, resources, and religion.[49] Just as earlier rebels had fought against foreign impositions to defend traditional culture and ways, the MNLF wanted a state that would protect local institutions.

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[45] Noble, "The Moro National Liberation Front in the Philippines," 409.

[46] If the conflict were only about religion, the same political and economic complaints would have existed previously, when the region was governed by an Islamic political system. The lack of a widespread insurgency in the sultanate period is perhaps because of the voluntary spread of religion and associated institutions.

[47] Victor Taylor, "Ideology-Based Conflict," in *Challenges to Human Security in Complex Situations: The Case of Conflict in the Southern Philippines,* ed. Merlie B. Mendoza and Victor M. Taylor (Kuala Lumpur: Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network, 2010), 39–45.

[48] Julkipli Wadi, "Radical Islamic Movements Complicate Moro Struggle," *Philippine Daily Inquirer,* February 14, 1999.

More recent evidence shows that the institutional conflict remains broadly focused on governance issues. Since 2000, the MNLF has claimed that the national government has neglected economic and social policies that it promised to adopt. The group also says that the national government has continued to violate local rights over ownership of natural resources and has not funded Moro education as it said it would.[50] Choosing to highlight these failures by the central government shows that there is still a conflict over cultural and economic issues.[51]

Despite the evidence, one might still wonder how much of the insurgency is truly motivated by nonreligious issues. After all, if the majority of the insurgents were Moros, and were appealing to a predominantly Moro audience, it could be the case that shared political and economic grievances existed but were not as important as religion. Perhaps rebel leaders exaggerated these institutional conflicts to gain international support or to discredit the national government. However, following the declaration of martial law and the confiscation of all firearms, many insurgents, including non-Muslims, joined the MNLF.[52] Insurgents joined in part because the MNLF, through support from foreign backers, had a steady and reliable supply of firearms. Many in the south, including non-Muslims such as the Lumad, feared the government's policy of integration because they saw it as a threat to their identity and desired physical protection.[53] In addition to defense, the MNLF also offered a chance to fight for indigenous institutions. Lela Garner Noble wrote that under the circumstances created by Marcos, "the Front's supporters in the Philippines are more united in their desire for freedom" than from anything else.[54] This statement is grounded in the fact that many MNLF supporters and some MNLF leaders indicated that they would accept autonomy rather than independence so long as it meant greater self-determination. This statement indicates that some non-Muslims must have thought that joining the MNLF was an effective way to defend their endogenous institutions against impositions by the central government and to fight for the reestablishment of lost institutions. It also indicates that the MNLF valued freedom and good governance first. The MNLF's talk about nonreligious complaints and secular institutions must have been more than window dressing for a religious war.

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[49] Noble, "The Moro National Liberation Front in the Philippines," 406.

[50] Abdul Sahrin, "Message to the Bangsamoro National People's Congress, December 2003," reprinted in *Bangsamoro Parsugpatan* 2, no. 1 (March 2004).

[51] Insurgents are not alone in noting problems with property rights in the Philippines. In "Land Issues in Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Development Agenda: Philippines," Gilberto Llanto and Marife Ballesteros of the Philippine Institute for Development Studies say that illegal occupation of lands, inappropriate land valuation, arbitrary settlement of boundary disputes, and unlawful granting of titles are some of the problems that have bedeviled the Filipino land market for years. See Llanto and Ballesteros, "Land Issues in Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Development Agenda: Philippines" (Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) Discussion Paper Series no. 2003-03, PIDS, Makti City, Philippines, 2003).

[52] Both McKenna in *Muslim Rulers and Rebels* and Noble in "The Moro National Liberation Front in the Philippines" report that communists, members of the Free Farmers Federation, Lumads, and Christians who had lost relatives in government offensives allied with the MNLF.

Noble is not the only scholar to have written about the broad institutional nature of the insurgency since the founding of the MNLF. Soliman Santos Jr. and Macapado Abaton Muslim have described the fight as a conflict between the Filipino and Moro nations, with the Moros' main grievances being economic marginalization, political domination, physical insecurity, and threatened identity.[55] They note that Spanish and American colonial rulers supported Christian administrators who confiscated Moro lands and destroyed Moro political systems, and this continued under the Philippine national government. Existing political structures were replaced with bureaucrats and military officers who violated the rights of southern Filipinos and perpetrated violence against them. As Santos Jr. and Abaton Muslim point out, the central government imposed new institutions that did not align with the endogenous institutions that supported property rights, local culture, and civil order.

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[53] Peter G. Gowing, "Muslim Filipinos Between Integration and Secession," *Southeast Asia Journal of Theology* XIV, no. 2 (1973): 66.

[54] Noble, "The Moro National Liberation Front in the Philippines," 416.

[55] Santos Jr., "War and Peace on the Moro Front," 59.; Abaton Muslim, Macapado. "The Moro Armed Struggle in the Philippines: The Nonviolent Autonomy Alternative," Marawi City: Office of the President and College of Public Affairs, Mindanao State University, (1994): 52-133.

Thomas McKenna has also noted the complexity of the insurgency. In his survey of individuals in Cotabato, on the island of Mindanao, he found that "the notion of a Philippine Muslim nation (Bangsamoro) had little or no resonance among the movement's rank-and-file adherents."[56] If the idea of a religious state was not important to most supporters of the insurgents, it must be the case that religion was not as important as other issues were to noncombatant supporters. Economic, political, and social concerns must have carried significant weight for these people, proving that the institutional conflict goes well beyond religion.

Another indication that religion was not the sole nor the most important reason for the MNLF's rebellion, and therefore that the institutional conflict was more complex, was that the MNLF's secular orientation was a key factor in motivating a number of officers to break away and form the MILF in 1977.[57] This occurred shortly after a round of negotiations that led to the Tripoli Agreement of 1976, which introduced the idea of an autonomous Moro territory and paved the way for the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The Tripoli Agreement listed a number of conditions for the ARMM, including separate schools and universities; separate administrative, economic, and financial systems; separate security forces and courts; and a guaranteed share of the proceeds from the sale of natural resources from the region.[58] These conditions prove that MNLF negotiators wanted to achieve much more than religious freedom. They desired a return to the institutions that had governed the south before the central government's impositions.

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[56] McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels.*

[57] Mapping Militant Organizations, "Moro National Liberation Front."

[58] "Peace Agreement: The Final Agreement on the Implementation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front with the Participation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Ministerial Committee of the Six and the Secretary General of the

After the autonomous region was created, 13 provinces held referendums. Only four voted to be included in the ARMM, which was officially founded in 1990. Many MNLF leaders won elections for positions in the new region, and Chair Misuari served as governor from 1996 to 2001. Former rebels also occupied lower-level positions. Thousands of former insurgents took positions in the local police and bureaucracy, as well as in locally stationed units of the national armed forces. However, Misuari's administration earned a reputation for corruption.[59] When the central government attempted to remove him from office, he called for the MNLF to resume violence and fled to Malaysia. Despite years of support for Misuari and the MNLF and no extradition treaty with the Philippines, Malaysia turned him over to Philippine law enforcement, citing his misuse of power as their reason for handing him over.[60] It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the MNLF's standing eroded around this time. This decline allowed the MILF, which had insisted that the ARMM was not an acceptable solution to the grievances of the Moro people, to rise in stature and to become the most powerful rebel organization in the south.[61]

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

Hashim Salamat, vice chair of the MNLF, led the 1977 split in the ranks of the MNLF leadership. He formed the New MNLF Leadership, which later became the MILF. Although the

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Organization of the Islamic Conference," Government of the Republic of the Philippines and Moro National Liberation Front, September 1996, http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/PH_960902_Final%20Agreement%20Implementing%20the%20Tripoli%20Agreement%20between%20GRP%20and%20MNLF.pdf.; Paul Oquist and Alma Evangelista, *Peace-Building in Times of Institutional Crisis: Ten Years of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement* (Makati City, Philippines: United Nations Development Programme–Manila, 2006).

[59] Morales, "Perpetual Wars: The Philippine Insurgencies," 51.

[60] "Philippines Rebel Leader Arrested," *BBC News*, November 24, 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/1673857.stm.

[61] "Agenda," MILF Technical Committee on Agenda Setting, Mindanao, Philippines, February 25, 1997.

proximate cause of the divide was a disagreement about methods, with Misuari calling for armed resistance and Salamat favoring negotiations, there were also deeper disagreements.[62] The MILF included "Islamic" in its name to represent an emphasis on Islamic political and social institutions.[63] Like the MNLF, though, the MILF desired a homeland governed by traditional Moro political institutions in which Moro identity would not be under threat and Moro rights were recognized. It is important to note that, while the MILF did place a greater emphasis on religion, the group also placed great importance on the political, social, and economic institutions that were endogenous to the southern Philippines. [64]

In the 1990s, the MILF gained support in the south by proving to be competent and reliable at providing basic administrative services in the areas it controlled, as compared to the ineffective and corrupt MNLF government in the ARMM. These services included issuing marriage and birth certificates, adjudicating disputes, maintaining order, and operating schools and clinics. Although these services were intended for and mostly used by Moros, some non-Muslim southerners also used them. [65] This breadth of services and inclusiveness demonstrates the organization's focus on issues beyond religion, as well as its willingness to provide valued services to non-Muslims. It indicates that MILF leaders understood the importance of institutions related to family, basic welfare, and market exchanges. If religion were the sole focus, there would seem to be no reason to devote time and resources to the provision of commonly desired nonreligious goods and services. It is worth noting that education, clinics, and law enforcement were provided by local representatives of the central government as well. The fact that individuals preferred the services offered by the MILF is further proof of the breadth of institutional conflicts. When locals were presented with endogenous alternatives to exogenous institutions, they gave their support to the provider of the endogenous options.

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[62] The MILF is not the only group that traces its origins to a break with the MNLF. The formation of the ASG is also due, in part, to the MNLF's secular orientation. Some Philippine insurgents went to Afghanistan to join the mujahedeen against the Soviet army. When they returned to the Philippines, some of these individuals wanted the MNLF to become a more religious group. The ASG formed when they broke away to create a more radical religious organization. See Morales, "Perpetual Wars: The Philippine Insurgencies."

[63] Santos Jr. and Santos, "War and Peace on the Moro Front," 64.

[64] Wadi, "Radical Islamic Movements Complicate Moro Struggle," 1999.

[65] Thomas Wilson Jr., "Extending the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front a Catalyst for Peace," monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 2009.

When Salamat died in 2003, Al Haj Murad Ebrahim took over as leader of the MILF. He had a record of being secular and pragmatic, thereby declaring that the MILF should be willing to accept autonomy rather than independence, provided that it didn't undermine the group's goals.[66] Despite sporadic hostilities between MILF units and the national government, negotiations recommenced under outgoing President Benigno Aquino III. These negotiations led to the Bangsamoro Basic Law, which, if passed by the legislature, would replace the ARMM with the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region. The new region's legal structure and relationship with the central government were designed to be more satisfactory to MILF leaders, as compared to the ARMM. Passage of the law was in doubt, though, as hostilities with splinter groups and a disastrous confrontation between police and the MILF at Mamasapano turned public sentiment against the peace process.[67]

A close look at the text of the Bangsamoro Basic Law[68] reveals that religion is subordinate to other institutional grievances. There is no mention of religion in article II, which defines Bangsamoro identity, nor in article IV, which lists the general principles and policies of the Bangsamoro government. Religion is also absent from most other articles, but it seems to be especially telling that the description of the Bangsamoro identity and the description of the general purpose of the Bangsamoro lack any reference to Islam. In conjunction with what is included in article V, which lists how powers will be divided between the national government and the Bangsamoro government, the act shows that religion is not the only focus of the MILF insurgents.

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[66] Santos Jr., "War and Peace on the Moro Front," 66**."**

[67] Ted Regencia, "Philippines Prepares for Historic Peace Deal," *Al-Jazeera,* March 25, 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/03/philippines-prepares-historic-peace-deal-milf-201432411220461644.html.

[68] Bangsamoro Basic Law, Bill No. 4994 of 11 September 2014, 16th Congress of the Republic of the Philippines.

Section three of article V lists the powers that shall be reserved for the Bangsamoro government. These powers include authority over economic exchange; contract loans and credits; regulation and registration of business; regulation of finance and banking;[69] education; official recognition of cultures and languages; dispute resolution regarding customary laws; land management, classification, and eminent domain; and disputes over ownership and use of wildlife resources. These powers deserve mention because they are clear illustrations of the broad institutional misalignment in the southern Philippines. If a return to endogenous economic and social institutions was not important to the MILF and its supporters, it was unlikely that so much time would be spent listing powers related to economic, social, and cultural issues. If the institutional conflict was limited to religion, the text of the act would focus much more on religious freedom and Islamic governance and less on nonreligious institutions.

Since the Mamasapano incident in February 2015, the Bangsamoro Basic Law has stalled. Violence continues as the ASG, MNLF, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, and breakaway MILF units continue to engage in guerrilla warfare. Thus, despite years of martial law, all-out military campaigns, numerous rounds of talks, several cease-fires, the legal establishment of an autonomous region, and the framework for a new autonomous region, people of the southern Philippines must still live amid a violent insurgency.

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[69] The regulation of shari'ah-compliant Islamic banking is specifically mentioned.

IV. Policy Implications

Ending the insurgency will require appropriate policies. One of the most notable weaknesses of seeing the conflict as a religious war is that it leads to policies that do not address the variety of causes of the insurgency. The history of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Muslim Mindanao demonstrates this problem. One goal of the program was to foster a shared sense of Filipino nationalism.[70] However, the nature of some parts of the program prove the existence of significant institutional misalignments, including the use of shari'ah law for civil disputes, the creation of autonomous local schools, the use of languages other than Tagalog and English in official business, and legal recognition of local banking and contracting practices.[71] The fact that addressing local financial norms, trading practices, and languages was part of the program shows that there was conflict surrounding institutions other than religion. Nonetheless, hostility toward Muslims helps to explain why these parts of the program were not effectively or completely implemented. A more complete understanding of the conflict would have helped to avoid this problem.

Paul Oquist of UNDP has identified three distinct policy prescriptions that have existed in the Philippine national government, all of which have been implemented to some extent. One is unconditional military victory, and another is negotiating the concessions necessary to end hostilities. The third is institutional peacebuilding,[72] which includes political, economic, social, and cultural policies that rely on meaningful local autonomy. Although all of the three prescriptions have been tried—sometimes concurrently—the military approach has generally been dominant,[73] and the global war on terror since September 11, 2001, has bolstered it.

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[70] Cesar Adib Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1999).

[71] Lela Garner Noble, "Muslim Politics and Policy During the Aquino Era" (manuscript, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA, 1992).

[72] Paul Oquist, "Mindanao and Beyond: Competing Policies, Protracted Peace Process, and Human Security," *Fifth Assessment Mission Report,* Multi-Donor Programme for Peace and Development in Mindanao, United Nations Development Programme–Manila, October, 2002.

A necessary prerequisite for any of these approaches to succeed is the use of local knowledge. A military victory hinges on the use of local knowledge because effective military operations require an understanding of the conditions on the ground. These conditions can be complex and dynamic. Officers must know who can be relied on as allies, which insurgent groups work together and which groups are at odds, and how to work with the local civilian community. The current wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria demonstrate how difficult it is for a military force to succeed in an environment with many groups and shifting alliances and goals. The southern Philippines is no different. Although the MILF is the dominant insurgent group at this time, the number of splinter factions show that it is not a highly cohesive unit, and this is to say nothing of the numerous other rebel organizations. As the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria show, it is not likely that a military force will be able to collect and use all of the local knowledge necessary for a military victory. Furthermore, the prevailing one-dimensional view of the conflict makes the military approach more attractive, as it mistakenly supports the belief that the enemy can be identified and defeated on the basis of a single characteristic. Unfortunately, this also means that the true causes are less likely to be understood and addressed. If religion is the only motivating issue for insurgents, there is no need to understand other issues.

Returning to the explanation of institutional stickiness given by Boettke, Coyne, and Leeson, one sees another reason the policy of a total military victory is highly unlikely to succeed.[74] The likelihood that an institutional change is successful depends on the status of the institution among the indigenous community, and a policy that relies on the use of force may well be counterproductive. To achieve peace, individuals in the southern Philippines must accept the institutions imposed by the national government. Using the armed forces is likely to decrease the status in the south of the national government and the accompanying institutions, leading to more and stronger resistance. As long as the national government attempts to impose change through the barrel of a gun, the status of the government and its institutions is likely to decline. To put it another way, people do not like being forced to do things they do not want to do.

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Boettke, Coyne, and Leeson, "Institutional Stickiness and the New Development Economics."

Like the military approach, the policy of negotiating terms necessary to end the conflict depends on the use of local knowledge. Also like the military approach, it is unlikely to succeed. As has been shown, the southern Philippines is a heterogeneous region, and the insurgency is not merely about religion. The rebels may all share the desire to resist institutions that have been imposed on them by the national government and predominantly Christian immigrants, but this does not mean that all of the rebels want to live under the same institutions. The MNLF is willing to accept terms different from those the MILF would accept, and the ASG will not accept the same terms as either. This is to say nothing of the terms that other insurgents, such as Lumads, may be willing to accept or how different factions in the MILF might respond to negotiated terms. Even if the MILF were to dictate the terms without any internal divides, it is unlikely that the institutional conflict would end—there would simply be a change in the group imposing its institutions on others. Lumads, the ASG, the MNLF, and other insurgent organizations could be expected to resist the institutions imposed by the MILF just as they oppose institutions imposed by the central government.

Applying the institutional stickiness framework shows that the likelihood that this policy approach will be successful increases as the degree of local autonomy increases. The reason for this is that negotiating terms that maximize local autonomy means that communities will have the freedom to operate under their chosen institutions. The greater the local autonomy, the more likely it is that a community will be able to adopt their desired endogenous institutions. If negotiations result in a system that perpetuates the imposition of exogenous institutions on communities, individuals in those communities are more likely to continue the insurgency.

The policy of institutional peacebuilding is the approach that is most likely to succeed because it recognizes the importance of local knowledge and autonomy. Allowing individuals more freedom to determine how they will be governed helps to address the myriad institutional conflicts at play. For this to succeed, though, the autonomy must be meaningful and must occur within the context of secure rights. For example, legal recognition of communal ownership of assets is meaningless if assets can be easily expropriated by the government or stolen by other private actors. As another example, permitting education in a local language or dialect is meaningless if speaking the language results in legal victimization, the loss of rights, or the inability to access government-provided services. Because of the heterogeneity of the southern Philippines and the insurgents, it is especially important for people to have the greatest possible autonomy to live according to the institutions they choose.

One way to think of how a successful approach of institutional peacebuilding might look is to think of the devolution of power. Devolving power means that the central government transfers powers to a subnational level. A distinction between this policy approach and the previous one is that this approach does not require negotiations. The central government can unilaterally take action to increase local autonomy. Devolving authority over education, courts, finance, commerce, and culture to regional or local governments could go a long way in solving the institutional conflicts that are at the root of the insurgency. As in the previous approach, though, the devolution must be done in such a way that it maximizes local autonomy. Devolving authority to a single regional government encompassing all of the south is less likely to alleviate the institutional grievances because it relies on minimal use of local knowledge and minimal local autonomy.

V. Conclusion

The conventional explanation of the insurgency in the southern Philippines—that it is a religious conflict—is not robust in the face of historical evidence. Applying the concept of institutional stickiness to the rebellion provides a more compelling explanation. Furthermore, using institutional stickiness to explain the insurgency results in a better understanding of why given policy approaches are more or less likely to succeed. The narrative of a religious war helps to perpetuate the forceful imposition of institutions on one side as well as the resistance to institutional change on the other. This narrative also masks the depth of the institutional conflict by implying that there are two sides fighting over one issue. As long as the conventional explanation persists and the complexity of the institutional conflict remains largely unrecognized, there is little reason to believe that the hostilities will end.

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