



The Politics of Municipal Merger in the Philippines

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Abstract

Contemporary municipal merger is an extraordinary case in the Philippines. The two rare cases of merger are explained using the Theory of Consolidation, but is found inadequate in explaining consolidation in the Philippines. Using an institutional choice framework, the following propositions were raised and substantiated: resident-voters will likely support merger if local elected leaders are united, and if there is no strong opposition from the community; local councils will likely support merger if their respective mayors with same party affiliation support merger, and if they see it as opportunity to stay in power, and mayors will likely support merger if they see it as opportunity to stay in power, and if they belong to the same party as the congressman, the reform agent. Interview with 58 key respondents is the primary method employed, complemented by the use of existing statistics, government records and other secondary materials.

Keywords: Municipal Merger / Territorial Reform / Decentralization / Theory of Consolidation / Institutional Choice/ Philippines

Introduction

Fragmentation predominantly characterizes local territorial reform in the Philippines. At least 30 cases of municipal fragmentation have been recorded since the implementation of the 1991 decentralization law, as opposed to only two cases of municipal consolidation. There is at least one accessible literature on municipal consolidation in the Philippines: Zipagan (2007) argues that consolidation does not guarantee financial viability. Although the impact of consolidation has been explored in many developed countries, it has not been thoroughly examined in the Philippines. Likewise, the rationale and politics of consolidation are uncharted territories in Philippine literature. Municipal consolidation, therefore, needs further investigation in the Philippines, since it is possibly the only democracy in Southeast Asia since the 1990s to have exhibited an extreme case of territorial and political consolidation at the municipal level through direct democracy, i.e., plebiscite.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are as follows: (1) to describe the dynamic decision-making process of municipal consolidation in the Philippines; (2) to develop and empirically examine, using case studies, factors that may explain association between behavior of key stakeholders (politicians and voters) and decision to consolidate; and (3) to test, criticize and suggest new propositions to the Theory of Consolidation.

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Review of the literature

The term consolidation is used in this study to refer to both merger and annexation. The former represents the formation of territories by combining at least two independent territories, whereas the latter, the process of territorial enlargement through addition of contiguous territories. A cross-country comparative study on this area has yet to be undertaken, as studies on political motivations and dynamics, while abundant, are country-specific. Some refer to the politics in voluntary consolidation, such as those that require public participation either through petition, consultation or referendum, while some to limited dynamics (mostly in central or regional government) in forced or top-down consolidation. The United States has one of the largest literatures on local government consolidation, whether forced or voluntary. A theoretical model of successful consolidation has been proposed since 1974. Outside the US, the politics of consolidation has not been extensively examined using empirical data.

Kawaura (2010) investigated the incentives for local Japanese politicians to decide to merge with neighboring municipalities. His proposition is that long-serving mayors of small villages will be reluctant to merge with larger municipalities. The study used 549 cases of consolidation, with 418 identified dominant municipalities and 925 subordinate municipalities, using population as criterion. Results show that long-serving mayors are potential obstacles in consolidation if it could jeopardize their political career.

Using a different approach, Yamada, Horiuchi and Saito (2009) recognized electoral motivations and local politics as important segments of national politics in municipal consolidation in Japan. Using empirical tests, they hypothesized that the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) used municipal consolidation as a quasi-gerrymandering strategy. The authors constructed a dyad dataset of 1,880 cases of mergers from 1998 to 2006. Using a bivariate probit model, results show that LDP-dominated areas are more likely to consolidate. Yamada et al. conclude that perpetuation of LDP power, or change in the balance of power, through reallocation of votes and resources from rural to urban areas is a very strong motivation for consolidation.

Sorensen (2006) found similar results on power perpetuation and party politics at the local level, using position and influence as the operational definition of power. He studied the impact of political transaction costs in municipal amalgamation in Norway, by looking at revenue disparities, central government grants, diverging policy preferences, and elite interests. He conducted a survey in 120 municipalities and used data on the preferences for merger of all elected politicians and administrators. He observed that high-income municipalities will tend to not merge with poor municipalities; small municipalities are more unwilling to merge, particularly when there are expected changes in party strength; and senior politicians are more likely to oppose merger due to changes in position and influence.

On the other hand, the study by Sancton (2003) showed no internal political dynamics at the municipal level in Canada. In his quest for academic explanations on municipal amalgamation in Canada, he identified three possible answers: forces of globalization,



internal political forces, or provincial government forces. His study analyzed the experiences of Halifax, Toronto and Montreal in early 1990s to early 2000s, based on events that occurred, decisions taken, and policies adopted by key actors, while comparing these to experiences in the US. Results show that the recent amalgamations in Canada occurred due to strong provincial governments, whose leaders advocated such policy fit for the circumstances with very little or no public demand.

Theory of consolidation

The processes and politics of local consolidation have been well discussed in the United States. The comparative case study of Rosenbaum and Kammerer (1974) led to the development of the Theory of Consolidation. Although several other comparative studies had been conducted,¹ the growing literature remains a “patchwork of theoretical concepts and causal models that lack careful synthesis” because many factors were identified to affect decisions (Leland & Thurmaier, 2004, p. 5).

Consequently, Leland and Thurmaier revised the Rosenbaum and Kammerer (R&K) model based on criticisms and suggestions². The model’s predictive power is assessed as moderate-to-low due to inability to extend beyond agenda-setting stage, minor attention to role of civic elites, neglect of peculiar situation, legal context and social structure. Thus, their revision engendered the city-county consolidation hypothesis (herein referred to as C³ model), where a referendum campaign stage was added. Thus, the consolidation process was divided into two as evident in the focus on both elite agenda-setting activities that culminate (or not) in a consolidation charter proposal, and in campaigns for and against the proposal.

Leland and Thurmaier (Ibid, P.10) also expanded the crisis climate by including institutional framework, included voter alienation as one alternative government response in R&K model, and emphasized impact of provisions of proposed charter on attitudes of interest groups. Lastly, they highlighted the role of civic elites “both in leading . . . [the] charter proposal and in the campaign to gain voter approval” and their stance, whether they are united or divided. Their comparative study included 21 cases of attempts since 1970 in 13 areas: eight cases are successful city-county consolidation, of which one case is city-city consolidation; there are also 13 failed attempts in five areas. They acknowledge the bias toward southern states because of the presence of state-enabling legislation. They see the consolidation model as a process-based theory that tends to analyze “the cause-effect mechanisms at each stage or step of the process to the neglect of a more general analysis of the model” (p. 291). Moreover, crisis climate was absent in some cases, thus the identification of alternative explanations for successful consolidation: tax burden disparity, vision for economic development, normal progression of various events leading to the idea of consolidation, all of which never translated into major crises. They concluded that the

¹ For example, Leland and Thurmaier 2004 cited the works of Messinger, 1989; Durning and Edwards, 1992; Fleischmann, 2000; and Feiock & Carr, 2000.

² Other than their own, Leland and Thurmaier cited the suggestions of Messinger, 1989; Johnson & Feiock, 1999; Feiock & Carr, 2000; and Fleischmann, 2000.



agenda-setting aspects of the C³ model do not strongly predict consolidation as evidences are mixed in the influence of crisis climate, and evidences on the necessity of accelerator events are limited.

Revisions to the revision

Such weaknesses had led Leland and Thurmaier to shift discussion from developmental to constitutional politics. Two major challenges for elites were identified: “crafting a charter that meets economic development needs without losing political support,” and “crafting a campaign message that resonates with ordinary citizen-voters instead of alienating them” (p. 303). Thus the academic debate shifted its focus to charter provisions, which matter more than power deflation or accelerator events (Johnson, 2004a). These provisions include the sheriff, public employees, taxation, status of minor municipalities, council structure and the mayor.

They further explain that referendum campaign is not about outspending opponents. The message of campaign is key to campaign either for or against consolidation. On the part of consolidation supporters, power deflation is still necessary, not before, but after charter proposal is set and referendum is defined. Put differently, voters must be convinced that governance must be altered through consolidation to allow for economic development. As for opponents of consolidation, they can neutralize argument on economic development, and be successful so long as they are supported by local officials. Table 1 summarizes the predicted results in campaigning for or against consolidation based on the strength of arguments (rhetoric) and group composition.

After testing, they accordingly modified the model to put more emphasis on how elites set the agenda and on how campaign for consolidation is structured. They note that the importance of elites lies in their ability to define a bigger economic development vision, to determine inadequacy of current political structure to support and implement such vision, and to convince citizens that benefits accrue to all and not only to a few elites.

Critique to the revised theory of consolidation

The original C³ model was further criticized by Feiock, Carr and Johnson (2006), who discussed the use of heresthetics in campaign for consolidation as opposed to rhetoric. They explain that the latter simply intends to persuade people, whereas the former is used to induce voters “to change sides, not by persuasion, but by reinterpretation of the issue” through these tactics: introduce new dimensions to the debate, suggest alternative proposals to divide majority group, and attempt to control the decision-making process (Riker, 1990, p. 49 as quoted in Feiock et al., 2006, p. 275). The first two tactics were evident in some cases in Leland and Thurmaier. The third was acknowledged by Leland and Thurmaier but did not include the internal processes where decisions can be influenced through strategic use of institutional rules.

Moreover, whereas Leland and Thurmaier implicitly prescribe economic development as key factor in consolidation, Feiock et al. see it otherwise: it is “about political losers trying to be



winners and the current (2001, P.278) winners trying to prevent this turn of events” (p. 278). Thus, they highly advocated use of heresthetics as a framework for consolidation efforts to strengthen theoretical basis and generalizability of the model.

Thurmaier and Leland (2006) concurred but replied that such is the central argument in their revision of Rosenbaum and Kammerer's Theory of Successful Consolidation. They note the critique on rule manipulation as an interesting point, which was only evident in one case. They also disagree to the comment by Feiock et al. that manipulation of attitudes is more central than economic development: there is “no evidence of latent community attitudes toward consolidation,” and that “substance of the argument matters” (Ibid, p. 280).

Other lapses and weaknesses were highlighted in Seroka's (2005) book review. The identification of myriad variables and the limited number of cases constrained empirical analysis. While emphasis on elites' role was placed, there was no common effect or principle to demonstrate its impact on consolidation. Furthermore, while a clear and common framework was used, “tendencies rather than empirically-based generalizations” emerged on decisions to hold referendum. Although failed attempts were included, there was no hypothesis on the number of attempts to achieve consolidation.

The study by Savitch and Vogel (2004a, 2004b) in the consolidation of Louisville-Jefferson County, Kentucky formed part of Leland and Thurmaier's compilation of case studies to test and improve the R&K model. They argue that the motivating force of power is an overlooked factor. Their case study emphasizes the power dimension of consolidation by examining three variables: shifts in territorial boundaries, management reforms, and political rules. Their case demonstrates that political realignment best explains consolidation through a logic of opportunity (political and monetary), where advocates are mostly politicians, business leaders, professional firms, and newspapers.

Similarly, the study by LeDuc (2003) shows that referendum campaigns in general are dominated by political parties, who in turn influence opinion formation of voters by providing partisan cues through campaigns. He conducted a comparative study on national and state referendums in 39 countries from 1975 to 2000, examined 22 cases and two state models of referendum, and found that voting results are more unpredictable in referendum than in elections because issues in the former were not accompanied by strong opinions compared to the latter. Campaigns, as in regular elections, matter in referendum, because “the short-term impact of opposing campaign strategies and tactics can easily make the critical difference” (Ibid, p. 173). He argues that voters depend on campaigns and require time to decide “when parties are split or when the ideological alignment is unclear” (Ibid, p. 174). In investigating voting behavior and outcomes, he illustrated in a continuum the relevant variables that may influence stability or volatility of referendum voting (see Figure 1).

LeDuc explains that the impact of these elements vary according to issue in the context of referendum. Thus, not all variables appear or become prominent in each referendum. When elements at the left side of the continuum are predominant,



referendum results will be more predictable as they are driven more by voters' predispositions. Conversely, when campaigns or other elements on the right end predominate, voting results will be more unpredictable.

Elements from both sides of the continuum were the subject of the micro-level analysis of Butzer and Marquis (2002), who showed the significant impact of elite among the factors affecting ballot outcomes in referendum. Using Zaller's receive-accept-sample model, they examined 32 federal referendums (1981-1996) in Switzerland and used advertising campaigns and voters' opinion. They found that voters' decisions—considering their awareness, ideology or political predispositions—were influenced by elite discourse in campaigns. Although voters are not completely ignorant, they likely mirror the position of their elites.

The gap in the growing literature on the politics of consolidation is the apparent lack of application of the theory outside the United States to further test its generalizability. More specifically, as previously discussed, literature on the behavior of politicians and voters in the context of direct democracy in the Philippines needs further exploration, description and explanation, which this study aims to achieve.

An institutional choice framework, embedded in the theory and models of consolidation, is adopted. Consistent with the framework developed by Feiock and Carr (2001, 2000) and Feiock (2004) in the examination of boundary change as a collective action. Inherent in this framework is the free-riding problem, which, according to them, can be resolved by enacting laws that do not require public participation (e.g., referendum, petition signatures), by presence of special groups to pursue territorial reform, or by presence of an elite group (entrepreneur) to spearhead reform. The framework is consistent with the two-stage process found in C³ model: agenda-setting and decision-making, where the key actors are the public officials, business associations, and residents, all of whom behave according to their collective and selective goals (see Table 2).

Inherent in this framework is the assumption that individuals are rational and self-interested beings. Geddes (1994, p.11) explains that politicians' behaviors are influenced “by the incentives shaped by party politics or higher-level party officials.” She adds that patronage acts as an anchor of success for politicians, whose career depends on reelection, thus future votes are always calculated in their actions.

Reformulated hypotheses

Although the C³ model is tested and criticized in this study, new hypotheses, inspired by the institutional choice framework, are proposed in accordance with the decision-making process in the Philippines. Due to the multi-level and multi-player nature of local politics in Philippine municipal consolidation, the dependent variable “decision to consolidate” is operationally defined for this study in a four-stage successive progression (see Figure 2).



For each stage, two key political factors affecting the behaviors of the decision-makers are identified. At the preliminary agenda-setting stage (where the mayors of affected municipalities decide to support or reject consolidation), the variable “opportunity to stay in power” (defined as term in office) is selected due to the rational self-interests that guide mayors’ behaviors to prolong term in office. In the Philippine context, a change in political jurisdiction may allow them to run anew with a clean slate. Additionally, outgoing officials are more likely to support unpopular or controversial policies, such as consolidation or cityhood. Equally important is the variable “political party affiliation” (i.e., same party as the congressman or not). Congressmen are bearers of pork barrel funds for local development projects, as well as funders of local electoral campaigns. Hence, if opportunity to stay in power can be improved through affiliation with supra-municipal³ elected officials, particularly congressmen, then mayors will likely stand behind such officials for political survival. Conversely, mayors who are not aligned with the congressman and/or are newly elected in office will likely oppose.

For the local legislation stage, which is considered the final agenda-setting stage (affected local councils decide whether or not to pass a resolution to support consolidation), same variables are employed but with different operational definition. The variable “opportunity to stay in power” is defined as rank in council, whether elected as first to fourth or fifth to eighth councilors, according to election results. The rationale for such division is as follows: as only four out of eight seats in the council would remain after municipal consolidation, councilors at the lower half of the council ranking will likely resist consolidation as they will likely lose in the next elections, i.e., seeing their rank in previous election results as an indicator of their ‘winnability.’ Hence, as they consider their political survival, those who are aligned with the pro-consolidation mayor or congressman will likely support the proposal to merge, thus the inclusion of the variable “political party affiliation” (same with mayor or not). Conversely, councilors who are affiliated with opposing mayors will likely reject consolidation.

At the final stage (where citizen-voters decide to ratify or reject consolidation through local referendum), two elements are examined: “position of the mayor and the council” and “consolidation campaign.” As for the former, as discussed by LeDuc, political party and leaders are important elements in elections: voters take partisan cues from their elected officials during campaigns, thus, when they are united and supportive, voters will likely mirror their stance. Alternatively, if they are divided, voters will likely reconsider taking cues from both sides. Thus, the latter variable, which is drawn from the C³ model, is crucial particularly in opinion formation of voters. It has two criteria: presence or absence of opposition group, and strength of campaign (measured as use of special tactics, media, rhetoric or heresthetics). Table 3 summarizes all variables investigated in this study.

The hypotheses in this study are drawn to reflect succession and relationship with each other against a backdrop of complexity of decision-making process in the Philippines. Given the nature of politicians and local politics in the Philippines, where

³ *These are elected officials above the municipal level, such as congressman, provincial governor and provincial board members.*



prominent political families play a pivotal role, the following propositions are made:

1. Residents will likely support the law to consolidate if their local elected leaders are united *and* if there is no strong opposition from other stakeholders.
2. The local councils will likely support the proposal to consolidate if their respective mayors with same party affiliation support the proposal *and* if they see it as an opportunity to prolong power.
3. Mayors will more likely support the idea of consolidation if they are on their last term, i.e., seeing it as opportunity to perpetuate power, *and* if they belong to the same party as the congressman who proposed the idea to consolidate.

Methodology

This study is bounded by core questions: why and how did municipalities in the Philippines consolidate? The previous chapter shows the development of new propositions based on the existing models of consolidation and in accordance with the multi-level, multi-player decision-making process in the Philippines.

All two cases of consolidation in the Philippines were examined, a case study protocol was designed, data were collected and triangulated through archival research and interviews, propositions were used as guides in case study analysis, and strategies of pattern-matching logic and cross-case synthesis were applied. This study employed a two-case study design, as there are only two cases of municipal consolidation in the Philippines since 1991: the Island Garden City of Samal and City of Sorsogon. These two cases have five embedded “sub-cases,” i.e., the five former municipalities that decided to merge. Case study approach is deemed as most appropriate method to document and investigate the rare phenomenon as it allows examination of multiple variables, use of multiple sources of evidence, and detailed and concrete reporting of cases.

The author gathered preliminary information, particularly history of the cities and their respective socio-economic profiles, through archival research and desk review, which were then verified in the field. Key informant interview (face-to-face and telephone) is the principal method of inquiry. Investigation employed both data triangulation—by the use of archival records, documents and interviews—and respondent triangulation, by selecting 58 respondents, representing various positions on the issue, and positions in the community in all five former municipalities.

Results and discussion

The two cases share many similarities. The Island Garden City of Samal was created in 1998 from the merger of Babal, Samal and Kaputian towns. Under the same legal framework of the 1991 Local Government Code, in 2000, Bacon and Sorsogon towns replicated the success of Samal to create Sorsogon City. Both congressmen belong to political families, which are just some of the prominent clans in their respective provinces. Both have relatively homogeneous communities, and have history of shared identity: in the former, most of the inhabitants came from Samal tribe, whereas many Sorsogon residents trace their roots in Bacon, an older settlement area.



Geographical condition is favorable in both cases: in the former, all three towns are situated in Samal island, whereas in the latter, both are coastal towns sharing geothermal energy. Economic performance was relatively similar in the former, while in the latter, Sorsogon town was more developed than Bacon..

In the investigation of the question “why would municipal governments consolidate,” the answers lie on the behaviors of key decision-makers, primarily at the level of plebiscite or local referendum. In the Philippines, where plebiscite results are binding, the residents are final decision-makers. Residents will likely support the law to merge if their local elected leaders are united *and* if there is no strong opposition. In testing this hypothesis, results show that position of elected local officials, presence of opposition groups and strength of their campaign all influenced the voting results of the plebiscite (see Table 5).

In Babak and Samal—where the key political entrepreneurs, i.e., the mayor and the whole council, were all supportive *and* there was no strong opposition—the affirmative votes in the plebiscite were very high, above 80 percent. In Bacon, where the mayor and the whole council were supportive but some village leaders opposed and campaigned against consolidation, the affirmative vote only garnered 63.2 percent. In Kaputian, where the mayor and majority of the council were supportive but an opposition emerged, a much lower affirmative votes were garnered: 61.8 percent. Lastly, in Sorsogon where the council was split, the mayor opposed, and opposition was strong, the affirmative vote recorded the lowest among five municipalities: 60.9 percent.

Thus, the share of affirmative votes varied according to position of elected local officials, whether united or divided, and the presence and strength of opposition campaign. This effect was salient when results (i.e., margin of votes) were compared among the three towns in Samal island.

However, when results are compared in Bacon and Sorsogon, there was no significant difference (2.3 percentage points) in the margin of affirmative votes, although the mayor and the whole council in Bacon were supportive, whereas, in Sorsogon, the mayor and half of the council were opposed. This result may be explained by the effect of the presence of strong opposition group in Sorsogon, whose anti-consolidation campaign reached the electorate of Bacon, largely through radio. The divided position of key local officials in Sorsogon, particularly the provincial governor, may have contributed to low voter turnout. The other plausible explanations were the heavy rain during the plebiscite day and a misinformation of voters as observed in Bacon.

Regardless of position of elected local officials, presence of opposition groups and strength of campaign, the affirmative vote won in both cases, i.e., more than 50 percent of the votes. This finding is consistent with Leland and Thurmaier's predicted results based on the use of arguments. The use of issues of increase in internal revenue allotment or IRA (i.e., block grant from central government) and economic development—which are strong arguments, according to Leland and Thurmaier—in framing the rhetoric of the pro-consolidation group helped garner more affirmative votes, but not overwhelmingly due to the presence of strong opposition groups in Bacon (63.2 percent), Sorsogon (60.9) and Kaputian (61.8).



The use of heresthetics, as suggested by the same authors, was not reported, except in Sorsogon. Doloiras, then-president of business chamber in Sorsogon counterattacked the issue of increased IRA by reinterpreting the issue and adding the dimension of corruption: IRA increase “is unnecessary if not used wisely” because “we know it would go to their pockets,” he explains. Additionally, the use of efficiency as an argument for pro-consolidation campaign was absent in both cases.

The findings are also consistent with that of Rosenbaum and Kammerer's: campaign is more likely to succeed—in this case, to make a marginal difference in plebiscite results—when civic elites are involved, as shown in the case of Kaputian (i.e., *Kaminos*) and in Bacon and Sorsogon (i.e., business chamber and other political elites). Specifically, as shown in Table 5, the stance of “their elites,” which was rendered into rhetorics or heresthetics in referendum campaigns, was taken and mirrored by the voters, similar to what Butzer and Marquis observed in Switzerland. The findings also bear similarities to the observations by LeDuc on the strong influence of political parties and their leaders in referendum campaign. In all five embedded cases, the congressman's political party was influential in the decision-making by local councils. Additionally, the window for opinion formation for voters in both cases were described by some respondents as “fast” and “abrupt,” thus the plausible application that, as shown in Figure 2, the prominence of key elements of *political party* and *leaders* made the referendum stable in Babak and Samal (i.e., similar and predictable overwhelming results as indicative of their support to the law authored by their congressman), whereas the presence of opposition campaign in Kaputian rendered the results volatile and eventually garnered significantly lower affirmative votes than in its other neighbors in the island. Similarly, the presence of strong *opposition* groups and *campaigns* as well as use of *media* in the Bacon-Sorsogon case made voting results in that area unpredictable.

But how do pro- and anti-consolidation groups form? These groups were organized by members of the local council. The local councils will likely support the proposal to merge if their respective mayors with same party affiliation support the proposal, *and* if they see it as an opportunity to stay in power and/or build political career. This hypothesis is confirmed.

As shown in Table 6, all top-ranked councilors⁴ in five municipalities, except three in Sorsogon and two in Samal, were supportive of consolidation/cityhood. The ranking was a key factor in their decisions as it served as gauge for their “winnability” in the next elections. Besides, only four seats per district (i.e., former municipality) were approved in the charter, except for Sorsogon, which retained eight.

Here, a puzzle emerges: why would top-ranked councilors in Sorsogon vote negatively? A plausible explanation is their affiliation with the mayor/governor who opposed. In Samal, two top-ranked councilors were not affiliated with the administration party (party of mayor and congressman). Table 6 shows that council opposition was strong when mayor (and governor) opposed consolidation/cityhood, as demonstrated in Sorsogon. In the case of Kaputian, two out of three anti-consolidation

⁴ *Those elected and ranked first to fourth in the election of council members.*



councilors had low rankings in the council. The other opposition was an ex-officio member (i.e., representing the youth population).

In the end, both councils, decided, not unanimously, to support cityhood through municipal consolidation. If their decisions are partly influenced by mayor's position and party affiliation, then why would mayors support or oppose consolidation?

Mayors will more likely support the idea of consolidation if they are on their last term and see consolidation/cityhood as opportunity to stay in power, *and* if they belong to the same party as the congressman who proposed the idea. This hypothesis is confirmed in both cases. In other words, opportunity to stay in power and party affiliation strongly influence municipal consolidation in the Philippines. As shown in Table 7, in both cases of consolidation, the affected mayors who supported the consolidation/cityhood were all aligned with their respective congressmen and were all on their last term. The lone opposition mayor of Sorsogon was on his first term and was not affiliated with the congressman. The result of this particular hypothesis is comparable to the findings by Kawaura (i.e., political survival of mayor) and Yamada et al. (i.e., perpetuation of power through reallocation of votes).

Examination of rival explanations

In general, this study minimized threats to construct validity, which is also a rival explanation, by employing the method of data and investigator triangulation. However, the triangulation method faced threats from possible poor recall of key respondents because the phenomenon is at least ten years old for both cases, as well as from absence of data due to poor records management system.

This study identified economic factor, i.e., economic incentives from increase in IRA and faster economic development, as a plausible direct rival for three hypotheses. The rival hypothesis “economic incentive will likely influence the local politicians and voters to support consolidation” is tested based on documents and interviews. Both authors (congressmen) of consolidation indicated faster economic development as key justification of the bill. Such development would be possible due to significant increase in the share in IRA, the financial incentive for cityhood through merger. Such incentive was used in their rhetoric to garner the support of local leaders.

Among the interviewed political leaders from both camps, 11 out of 16 cited the benefit of increase in IRA and the promise of faster economic development in the area as key deciding factors. Among residents and employees, 19 out of 42 indicated increased budget and economic development as reason for affirmative vote. However, the economic incentive is not the only factor when decisions were made at all three levels. Among the interviewed elected local officials, at least three cited party loyalty or support to mayor/congressman as key factor in decision, while two local leaders thought consolidation was designed to “accommodate” politicians. Among residents and employees, three cited support to mayor/congressman as reason. One respondent declared “*bayad utang na loob kay del Rosario dahil sa kuryente*” (paying debt of gratitude to [Congressman] del Rosario due to his electrification project in the island) as her justification for her affirmative vote on the issue (Tumanut, 2013). As initially



observed by Timberman (1991 as cited in Rood, 1998), such is an indication of the Filipino value of *utang na loob* as being ingeniously invoked in campaigns.

When asked why politicians advocated consolidation, at least three voters identified strong personal motives of the politicians. For instance, in the case of Samal island, according to Camporedondon and a few anonymous residents, the del Rosario-Floirendo families own properties and businesses in Samal island. Cityhood would therefore increase valuation of their real properties, as well as improve income for their resorts and other businesses.

In summary, economic factor was explicitly stated by many respondents, both politicians and residents, due to nature of consolidation: to be qualified for cityhood, which in turn would increase IRA share and trigger economic development. Hence, it can be argued as a necessary condition in decision-making. However, it is neither the sole nor a sufficient condition for consolidation. If it is, then more cases of consolidation would have emerged. Instead, an increasing number of municipalities have been continuously converted into cities without resorting to consolidation or any territorial reform.

Thus, the direct rival hypothesis is rejected (i.e., economic factor by itself does not result to consolidation) but is considered a commingled rival. The interplay of both political and economic factor explains municipal consolidation in the Philippines. Bundling of goals/issues of consolidation *and* cityhood allowed for both factors to influence decision-making. Moreover, the effect of these factors on result must be placed under several assumptions or contexts, where municipal consolidation was achieved: democratic country, unitary system of government where one legal framework applies, culture of patronage and clientelism, and presence of political dynasties (see Table 9).

Another rival or threat to validity is the possible reverse causality in the first hypothesis: “local leaders will likely unite and support consolidation if they think their residents will agree,” vis-a-vis the original proposition “residents will likely support the law to merge if their local elected leaders are united.” Such reverse causality is plausible according to the logic of representation of people's will as well as of gaining support or votes for reelection, but this rival is rejected by the following procedural and behavioral/institutional reasons: (1) according to case study reports, positions of local officials were taken even before consultation with and campaign among their constituents were made (i.e., the councilors' positions were immediately taken in the form of council resolution to justify the bill in Congress), thus it was unlikely for them to gather the residents' initial opinion; (2) accordingly, the residents' opinion formation was largely dependent on campaigns, as discussed by LeDuc, which in this case had been conducted afterwards (and inadequately in some areas); (3) the multi-level, multi-player decision-making process had given local officials the leeway for their decisions to be influenced more by their rational self-interests instead, because, in any case, voters make the final decision through referendum, the final stage of decision-making process; (4) moreover, at least four residents/employees cited support to local officials (either mayor or congressman) as key factor in their decisions; (5) in interviews with political leaders, the position of the people was never



explicitly identified or alluded to as a factor in their decisions; (5) and lastly, due to rampant electoral fraud (as well as a culture of clientelism), the rationale behind the reverse causality is further weakened because local elected officials *can* influence voters behavior and/or election results.

Testing the R&K theory and C³ model

Evidences in the two case studies in the Philippines confirm the findings of Leland and Thurmaier regarding the inapplicability of the R&K Theory of Consolidation. In the Philippines, all key variables in the three-stage model of Rosenbaum and Kammerer were absent, and are therefore proven to be unreliable predictors of municipal consolidation. These variables are: presence of crisis climate, inadequate or inappropriate local government response, power deflation, and presence of an accelerator.

As for the first variable, a crisis climate did not lead to the idea of consolidating municipalities in the Philippines to create new cities. Instead, the consolidations were designed with the collective goal of “ensur[ing] the holistic human development and ecological integrity” in the island of Samal and of attaining “the benefits of agro-industrialization that will come as a consequence of urbanization” in Sorsogon. The second and third variables become irrelevant without a crisis climate to refer to. As for the final variable, an accelerator event or situation was not evident in both cases, as the consolidation process followed legal procedures, schedules and actions as required by law (e.g., readings in Congress, justification of bill through council resolution, campaign period).

Findings in the case study also show the weaknesses of the original C³ model, which wholly subsumes the R&K model and adds nine more variables: institutional framework (V1), treatment of taxes (V6), law enforcement (V7), council structure (V8), executive (V9), status of minority voters and districts (V10), status of minor municipality (V11), pro-consolidation campaign (V12) and anti-consolidation campaign (V13).

As for the first of the additional variables, the institutional context or environmental factors (V1) has many embedded variables: homogenous communities, similar economic performance, favorable geographical features and location, history of shared culture and identity, presence of elites, among others. As discussed above and shown in Table 16, both cases have relatively homogeneous communities. The economic performance is relatively similar among the three towns in Samal, whereas Sorsogon had substantially higher economic output and activity than Bacon. Moreover, although political elites were present and influential in all five municipalities in two cases, the other civic elites were not as organized and influential in all municipalities, except Sorsogon. Nonetheless, these elements generally represent the conditions or context under which municipal consolidation is possible.

As for the second variable (V2 or emergence of either united civic elites with economic development vision for community or divided elites), which is an enhanced variable from the R&K model is the subject of further exploration in this study. While



this variable is an important indicator of consolidation, elites may not refer to civic elites in general (e.g., politicians, media, academe, etc.), but may only refer to political elites. Hence, this variable is reintroduced and reinterpreted as “position of the mayor and council” as well as subsumed in the variable “consolidation campaign.” As elaborated in the subsection *Testing New Hypotheses*, this variable, alongside campaign, affect the margin of votes in plebiscite results.

Four of the next six variables, which pertain to the key details of the proposed charter, were found to be significant issues discussed during the campaign at various levels (i.e., elected municipal officials, employees, and residents in general). These elements of the proposed charter or bill could have been subsumed in the variable of referendum campaign, as these are the issues used to convince other local officials and the voters to support or oppose consolidation through the use of rhetoric or heresthetics. Nonetheless, this study examined whether these key details were included in the proposed bill in the Philippines cases, as well drew criticism, apprehension, discussion or resistance.

As for the issue of taxes (V6), a five-year tax moratorium was immediately proposed by the congressmen in both cases to allay the fear of tax increase by the residents, particularly the businessmen. Law enforcement (V7), particularly the jurisdictions of law enforcers, was absent in both cases due to differences in the authorities and structures in local public safety between the US (the source of the model) and the Philippines. As for the council structure (V8), legislators in both cases proposed the creation of special districts: three in Sorsogon City (one in Bacon and two in Sorsogon), and three in Samal (one for each former municipality). However, the crucial and residual issue was the number of seats per district, which affected the local councilors in all municipalities, except Sorsogon, which had two districts (due to larger population) and retained eight seats in the city council.

The issue of executive (V9) was corollary to the issue of consolidation, as the latter would result in one seat for mayorship. The other crucial issue in the executive division was the consolidation of offices, and position and salary of employees. Consolidation was expected to affect the ranks of employees, but all regular employees were guaranteed placement in the proposed city organization and management. An option for early retirement program was also proposed, while employees also expected their remuneration to significantly increase to city-level salary grades. As for the status of minority voters and districts (V10), prior to consolidation/cityhood, such minorities were absent in both cases. However, in a related variable (status of minor municipality or V11), inclusion of Bacon, a minor municipality in Sorsogon-Bacon consolidation, did generate some discussion and opposition. Even in the relatively comparable towns in Samal island, Kaputian was viewed as the minority due to its population, geographical location, and political maturity.

For this study, the variables pro-consolidation campaigns (V12) and anti-consolidation campaigns (V13), were not treated as discrete variables and, thus, were combined to create a variable “consolidation campaign,” which is found to be a strong indicator of municipal consolidation, i.e., it influences the margin of votes in plebiscite results.



In summary, some variables in the revised C³ model, which has never been tested before, are now proven to be insignificant (i.e., unreliable predictors) when tested using the two cases of municipal consolidation in the Philippines.

In general, these models were developed under several assumptions: (1) government is democratic (i.e., public participation is present), (2) referendum is the final decision-making process of consolidation, and (3) civic elites are present and active. However, democracy in the Philippines or in other countries are not as stable or as liberal as in the United States, such that civic elites (aside from political elites) may be present but not necessarily active at all times as exhibited in the case of Samal, Babak and Bacon during the campaign leading to the referendum for consolidation and cityhood.

On the two-stage process in the C³ model: since the Philippine government and politics are patterned after the American system, the two-stage process of consolidation (i.e., agenda setting and referendum campaign) is also evident in the Philippines. However, it was modified to fit the Philippine process of municipal consolidation, which resulted in the development of an original analytical framework (see Figure 2).

Conclusion

The redemocratization in 1987 and decentralization in 1991 have ushered in an era of transformed institutions in the Philippines. However, evidences are not forthcoming in all areas. The politics of municipal merger and the local referendum it entails are uncharted territories in the Philippines, whereas literature on this area in other countries, such as the United States, is rich. Accordingly, this exploration, documentation and explanation aimed at charting such domain.

The discussions in the preceding chapter have demonstrated how local elites strongly influence local decision-making process of municipal merger in the Philippines. Analysis has confirmed that local politicians behave according to their rational self-interests. While this study has corroborated local political dynamics that is familiar and predictable in Philippine socio-political milieu, it has empirically shown a set of causal mechanisms linking the multi-level decisions regarding municipal consolidation to the behaviors of multiple key decision-makers in the Philippines: largely influenced by referendum campaigns of both sides, the voters' decisions mirror the stance of their respective political elites (particularly the local councils and mayors), whose decisions, in turn, are largely influenced by partisanship (particularly the party of the congressman who introduced the bill to consolidate) and selective goal of power perpetuation through control of local office. In addition, the rational behaviors of all key decision-makers in municipal consolidation are likewise influenced by economic incentive of increased revenue share from the national government.



Equally important, consolidation of municipalities in the Philippines was successfully accomplished twice under historical, legal and social contexts: public participation is mandated and practiced, where referendum is binding and is the final decision-making process of consolidation; civic elites are present; culture of patronage/clientelism is rampant; and political dynasties abound. Moreover, this study has demonstrated how the American consolidation models are not best suited to explain municipal consolidation in the Philippines. As previously discussed, the three-stage model of Rosenbaum and Kammerer are proven to be unreliable predictors of consolidation as key variables were absent in all the embedded cases examined in this study. The C³ model (both original and revised) is also found insufficient in explaining municipal consolidation in the Philippines due to the inclusion of many variables, most of which were context-dependent. Both models also highlighted the general step-by-step process and dynamics of consolidation, rendering inadequate the identification and explanation of the predictors of elite behaviors in the context of municipal consolidation.

However, two central variables from consolidation models, i.e., the “emergence of civic elites” and “referendum campaigns,” were reinterpreted, tested and found significant in this study. Therefore, a set of causal mechanisms between context-specific incentives, behaviors and decisions is the contribution of this research to the ongoing discourse on municipal consolidation in general and to Philippine local politics and democracy in particular.

While the findings of this study have reflected the rational behavior of decision-makers in the context of municipal consolidation, they also pose several normative/policy questions: Should national governments deliberately use incentives and promote municipal consolidation to inject impetus towards local economic development? In an era of ballooning government expenditure, should pro-consolidation actors also aim for efficiency? In democracies, should governments mandate the use of referendum as final? If so, should local referendum require a minimum threshold of voter participation?

In the Philippines, the specific policy implication on the distribution of the internal revenue allotment among various local government tiers is striking. The economic incentive of increased revenue share from the central government is present and substantial only if consolidation will result in the creation of a new city. Accordingly, cityhood through this route will alter the pool of revenues shared among the different local government units in the Philippines. Therefore, promotion of municipal consolidation, and the new cities it will create, may be detrimental to cities that are highly dependent on IRA.

This study also raises possible areas for future research. The reformulated hypotheses developed in this study may be tested in other local governments in the Philippines that recently exhibited local territorial reform, such as the creation of new local governments through division or fragmentation, as well as the conversion of municipalities, or several *barangays* of municipalities, into cities. Additionally, this study encourages testing the new propositions in other democratic and developing countries that use binding referendum, and possibly in any local territorial reform characterized by multi-level, multi-player decision-making process.



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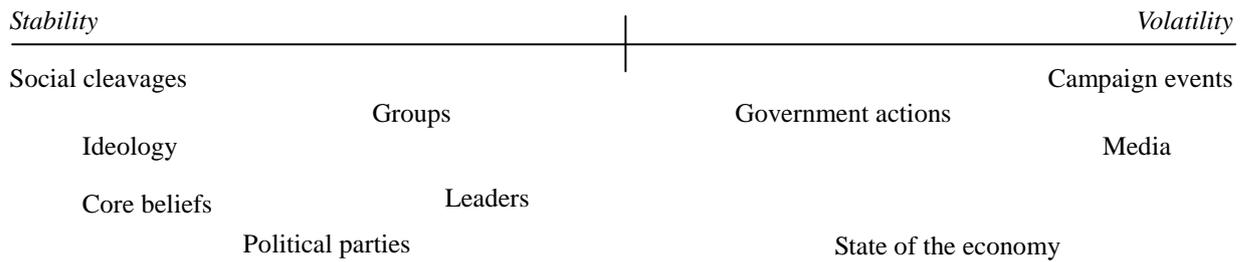
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Appendix



Source: LeDuc (2003, p. 179)

Figure 1. Elements leading towards stability or volatility in referendum voting

Table 1. Predicted results for combinations of consolidation campaigns

	Pro-consolidation campaign	
Anti-consolidation campaign	Strong arguments	Weak Arguments
Strong opposition	Even odds	Fail
Weak opposition	Pass	Fail

Note: Economic development is example of a strong argument; efficiency, equity are examples of weak arguments
 Source: Leland & Thurmaier (2004, p. 316)

Table 2. Definition and goals of boundary actors

Actor	Definition	Collective goals	Selective goals
Public officials	Municipal elected officials County elected officials Government employees	Community leadership Community leadership Public service	Political power and reelection Political power and reelection Job protection and greater autonomy
Business associations	Chamber of commerce and merchants, media Manufacturers Developers and contractors	Community image and status Economic development Economic development	Financial gain Financial gain Financial gain
Resident/citizen organizations	Civic groups, good government organizations Academics and professional organizations (ASPA) African-American community, racial and ethnic minorities Homeowners associations; tax control groups	Accountability and “good government” Progressive reform and “good government” Representation Lower taxes, greater access, and efficiency	Status, prestige, and membership Influence and program expansion Greater influence, access to government Lower individual taxes, exclusion

Source: Feiock, 2004, p. 299; Feiock & Carr, 2001, p. 393

Table 3. Variables and operational definitions, according to level of decision made

Level of decision	Variables	Operational definition
<i>Decision level no. 1 (Agenda-setting stage 1: Mayors)</i>		
Dependent variable	Decision of mayors to support consolidation	Yes or no
Independent variables	(1) Opportunity to stay in power	Term in office (whether first, middle or last)
	(2) Political party affiliation	Same party as the congressman who proposed the consolidation or not



<i>Decision level no. 2 (Agenda-setting stage 2 or local legislation stage: Local councils)</i>		
Dependent variable	Decision of local councils to support consolidation	Enacted a council resolution or not, i.e., majority 50% + 1 vote; and individual votes, whether yes or no
Independent variables	(1) Opportunity to stay in power	Rank in council, whether elected as first to fourth or fifth to eighth councilors
	(2) Political party affiliation	Same party as mayor/congressman or not
<i>Decision level no. 3 (Legislation stage) (Not included in the study)</i>		
<i>Decision level no. 4 (Referendum stage: Citizen-voters)</i>		
Dependent variable	Decision of citizens to support consolidation	Plebiscite results (in percentage)
Independent variables	(1) Consolidation campaign	Presence or absence of opposition group; Strength of campaign (according to use of issues in rhetoric/argument, use of special tactics and media)
	(2) Position of the mayor and council	Whether united or divided (according to the number of support or opposition in council)

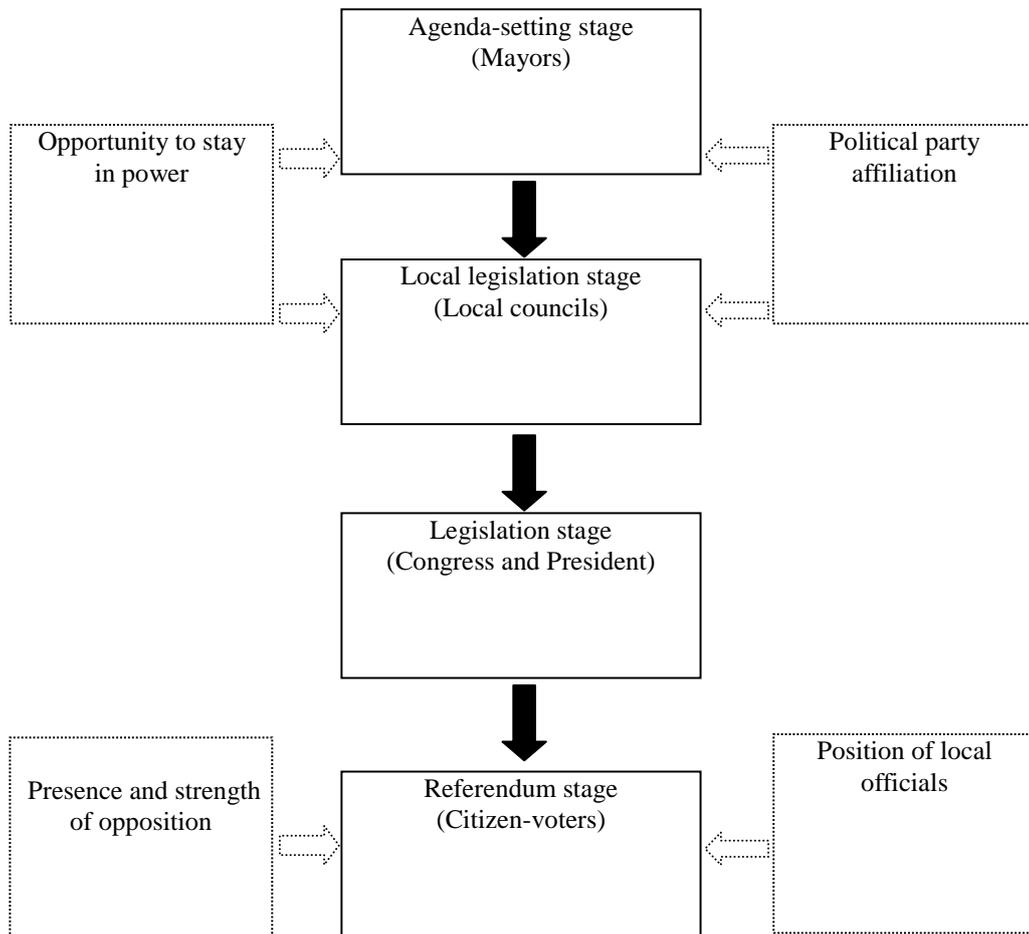


Figure 2. Visual model of successive progression of decision-making process in Philippine municipal consolidation



Table 5. *Plebiscite results, unity of local officials, presence of opposition group, and strength of opposition campaign*

Municipality	Share of yes votes	Pro-consolidation local officials	Anti-consolidation group	Strength and reach of pro-consolidation campaign	Strength and reach of anti-consolidation campaign
Bacon	63.2	Mayor and whole council	Incumbent governor, former governor, a few <i>barangay</i> leaders	Strong campaign (support of congressman, mayor) and moderate-to-wide reach (due to proximity and access to media from Sorsogon, and support of many <i>barangays</i>) Argument: IRA increase and more development projects; faster economic development; increased employment opportunities	Moderate-to-strong campaign (due to semi-organized group in Sorsogon and the opposition of the provincial governor) and weak-to-moderate reach (due to proximity and access to media from Sorsogon) Argument: loss of identity for Bacon; increase in social problems; Bacon will become minority area and will be left behind; tax increase; more resources for corruption
Sorsogon	60.9	Half of the council	Incumbent governor, former governor, mayor and other local officials	Strong campaign (support of congressman and some councilors) and moderate-to-wide reach (due to presence and use of media) Argument: IRA increase and more development projects; faster economic development; increased employment opportunities	Strong campaign (due to semi-organized opposition from local officials) and moderate-to-wide reach (due to presence and use of media) Argument: loss of identity for Bacon; increase in social problems; Bacon will become minority area; tax increase; more resources for corruption
Babak	83.0	Mayor and whole council	None	Strong campaign (support of local elected leaders and congressman), moderate-to-wide reach (due to organized meetings in every <i>barangay</i>) Argument: IRA increase; faster economic development; more investments; improved tourism	Nonexistent-to-weak campaign (due to absence of opposition group and media)
Samal	*80 - 95	Mayor and whole council	None	Same as above	Same as above
Kaputian	61.8	Mayor and majority of the council	<i>Kaminos</i>	Same as above	Moderate campaign (due to organized but small opposition) and weak-to-moderate reach (due to organized meetings in some <i>barangays</i>)



					Argument: Kaputian will be the minority area and will be left behind; increase in social problems; citizens are not ready; tax increase; loss of identity
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Sources: Various documents and interviews

Table 6. *Local council decision, opportunity to stay in power and partisanship*

Municipality	Decision of council	No. of anti-consolidation councilors (out of 10)*	No. of anti-consolidation councilors who were ranked 5 th to 8 th in the council	No. of anti-consolidation councilors who were under the same party as the mayor	Mayor is champion of consolidation
Bacon	Affirmative (unanimous)	0	0	0	Yes
Sorsogon	Affirmative (split)	5	4	4	No
Babak	Affirmative (unanimous)	0	0	0	Yes
Samal	Affirmative (unanimous)	0	0	0	Yes
Kaputian	Affirmative (majority)	3	2	0	Yes

Source: Various interviews; *including two ex-officio members

Table 7. *Support of mayor, opportunity to stay in power and partisanship*

Municipality	Support of mayor to consolidation	Term in office	Under same party affiliation as the congressman
Bacon	Yes	Third (Last)	Yes
Sorsogon	No	First	No
Babak	Yes	Third (Last)	Yes
Samal	Yes	Third (Last)	Yes
Kaputian	Yes	Third (Last)	Yes

Source: Various interviews