

## **Institutional Change in the Philippines: The Case of E-Government Transformation in the Benigno Simeon Aquino III Administration**

Prince Aian G. Villanueva

Political Science Program, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Colegio de San Juan de Letran, Intramuros, Manila,  
The Philippines  
E-mail: nuevazz@yahoo.com

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### **Abstract**

Using a theory of institutional change from Cortell and Peterson (1999), the paper addresses the transformation of domestic political institutions by determining the nature and direction of institutional change in the current Philippine e-governance agenda. As such, the paper intends to identify what triggered institutional changes in e-government policy during the Benigno Simeon Aquino III administration and how the policy agent himself, the President, took advantage of these triggers to effectuate the said institutional transformations. Through the utilization of archival research and analysis of government data, public opinion and relevant literature, the transformation of e-governance in the country under the Benigno Simeon Aquino III (2010-2016) administration is discussed. Data analysis followed the theoretical underpinnings of the paper, with government data assessed as against expert views from the literature. The findings are that his and the country's resolve to follow *Daang Matuwid* (straight and righteous path) saw the transformation of damaged public institutions into more transparent and responsive ones. This would not have been possible, even at the presence of both domestic and international triggers, had the President not used his institutional preferences and capacity to effectuate the change needed. Arguably, while the institutional context creates both opportunities and constraints for policy makers, the purposive actors decide whether to seek change in their structural environments. Through an examination of e-government policy transformation in the Philippines, the paper finds strength on the argument that while domestic and international triggers create windows of opportunity, the policy agent's will, institutional preferences and institutional capacity determine when change follows the said opportunities.

**Keywords:** *institutions, institutional change, human agency, Daang Matuwid, e-governance, anti-corruption*

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### **1. Introduction**

Institutions direct the enduring features of political and social life and all of human behavior cannot be discounted. While humanly-devised as they are a product of social interaction among people (Kingston & Caballero, 2006), institutions as the rules of the game in a society (North, 1990) in the form of formal rules such as laws and constitutions and informal ones such as conventions and norms influence the strategies of actors by acting as incentives and constraints for and mediating mechanisms between state and social actors (Pilapil, 2006). The significance of institutions in addressing the corruption problem is widely highlighted in the extant literature. Open and transparent political institutions (Alt & Lassen, 2003; Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010), strong rule of law and well-established political-legal structures (Zhan, 2012) including the justice system institutions (Rios-Figueroa, 2012), electoral rules and constitutional framework (Kunicova & Rose-Ackerman, 2005), the design and structure of government institutions and political processes (Shleifer & Vishny, 1993) and anticorruption commitment rules (Collier, 2002), and agencies and enforcement organizations (Yang, 2009) inhibit corruption.

Similarly, several studies highlight the importance of these institutions in the anticorruption agenda through e-governance. E-government as an integral component of administration modernization is a serious challenge that any government faces in the information age (Stier, 2015). Definitely, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have fundamentally altered the ways in which governments function. They serve as a key driver of government modernization and act as mediating systems to support interaction between governments and citizens and other governmental agencies and businesses (Khan, 2015). One of the primary purposes of using mediating technologies in the public sector governance is to bring about greater transparency in governmental transactions and in the delivery of public services (Patrice, 2010). This claim, and the many other positive effects of ICT in governance, is supported by a number of scholars (see Gronlund, 2010; Gronlund & Flygare, 2011; Habtemichael & Cloete, 2009;

Pirannejad, 2014; Elbahnasawy, 2014; Lee & Lio, 2014; Sturges, 2004; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013; Lupu & Lazar, 2015; Shim & Eom, 2008). Institutionalists aver that the creation and implementation of an effective e-government system is not possible without the political influence of institutions. In the process of ICT-adoption, implementation and enhancement, institutions are significant as they regulate (Kim, Kim, & Lee, 2009) and define formal roles of several policy actors (Yang, 2003; Eom, 2012), lay interagency operation, protect information and drive citizen participation (Chen & Shieh, 2009).

While mainstream institutionalists explained very well why these institutions continue to exist, they are challenged in providing a coherent explanation for why institutional change transpires (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). The exaggeration on the persistence and homogeneity of institutional and social reproduction of sociological, rational choice and historical institutionalisms is accounted for this failure (Dacin, Goodstein and Scott, 2002). To overcome this very significant problem, Cortell and Peterson (1999) put forward a theory of institutional change, coherent and comprehensive at that, which marries both structure and agency in the process. This is the guidepost of the current study. Cortell and Peterson (1999) claim that (1) international and domestic events open windows of opportunity that give policy officials with the potential to transform existing institutions, (2) whether an institutional change follows a window of opportunity depends on the actions and interests of state leaders, and (3) state officials' ability to capitalize on a window of opportunity depends on their institutional position or capacity and that the existing institutional arrangements create opportunities for or place limits on the officials' ability to make change. As such, their theory explains when individuals attempt to alter their structural environments, when they succeed and when they are thwarted by existing structures. This three-part framework explains that if institutional change is to occur, all three (3) factors— *triggers*, *change-oriented preferences* and *institutional capacity*—must exist.

## 2. Objectives

Using this theory of institutional change, the paper addresses the transformation of domestic political institutions by determining the nature and direction of institutional change in the Benigno Simeon Aquino III (PNoy) administration's (2010-2016) e-governance agenda. As such, the paper intends to identify what triggered institutional changes in e-government policy during the Benigno Simeon Aquino III administration and how the policy agent himself, the President, took advantage of these triggers to effectuate the said institutional transformations.

## 3. Materials and methods

Through an analysis of Philippine e-government data and publications, public opinion and relevant literature, I provide an historical discussion of the institutional transformations in the Philippine e-government agenda with a focus on the Benigno Simeon Aquino III administration (2010-2016). Data analysis was dependent on the three-part framework by Cortell and Peterson (1999). As such, using archival research and analysis of relevant literature, the *triggers*, *change-oriented preferences*, and *institutional capacity* were identified, explained, and related with the general agenda of anti-corruption and reform of the present administration.

Cortell and Peterson (1999) set out criteria and specifications in analyzing institutional change. What do *triggers* comprise in the theory of institutional change then? They argued, every environmental trigger, whether a crisis or non-crisis, creates the opportunity for institutional change if it challenges existing structures or raises concerns about the adequacy of current policy making processes. These windows include revolution, civil war, coup d'état, election or change of government, economic growth rate, demographic change, social movement or conflict as domestic triggers and war, geopolitical conflict, changing balance of power, technological change, macroeconomic change, dislocation and shock, and international norms, organizations, and treaties as international triggers.

Apart from *triggers*, *change-oriented preferences of policy officials* matter. Building on previous works of rational choice and historical institutionalists, they identified four (4) factors that determine policy officials' perceptions, preferences and calculations, which mediate between a window of opportunity and structural change. These factors are (1) environmental conditions, (2) domestic political calculations, (3) ideology and (4) position within the institutional structure. These factors can lead policy makers to exploit

environmental triggers and actively work for domestic structural change as they can influence officials' perceptions on the efficacy of existing institutions and thus of the desirability, feasibility, and scope of institutional change.

The third factor that is crucial to the process of institutional change is *institutional capacity*. A policy maker's ability to alter prevailing institutions is contingent on his position within these particular structures. They used the term institutional capacity to capture how institutional arrangements create opportunities for, or place limits on, an official's ability to translate his desire to usher structural change into policy. It is further argued that agents may alter their structural context only when they find the context less, rather than more, constraining—that is, when the structures themselves enable these policy actors to advance such institutional change.

These three factors were then identified, analyzed, and related with each other to provide a dynamic and objective presentation of the institutional transformation in e-government policy in the Philippines during the Benigno Simeon Aquino III administration (2010-2016). Expert views culled from relevant literature are also used to triangulate with the results.

#### 4. Results

##### Institutional Reform and E-Government Transformation: The Philippine Case

The results section is divided into three parts. First, I provide a historical-institutional discussion of the development of Philippine e-Governance policy to show how policies changed through time. Second, the current e-government framework in the Philippines, considered as the case of institutional change in this study, is discussed. Third, I present the case of the Benigno Simeon Aquino III administration as a source of institutional change by discussing the relationship between and among the three factors in institutional transformation—triggers, change-oriented preferences and institutional capacity.

##### The Institutional, Legal and Policy Frameworks of Philippine e-Governance

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

In the early 1990s, the Philippines was envisioned to become one of the Southeast Asian tiger economies and a knowledge society by the year 2000. In 1994, through Executive Order 190 issued by President Fidel Ramos, the National Information Technology Council (NITC) was formed and designated as the primary policy agency on ICT-related matters in the country. Five years later, in 1999, it was reorganized and it became the highest policy planning and advisory body on IT concerns via the issuance of Executive Order 469. The promotion and enhancement of public-private partnerships for the development of e-commerce in the country was pushed in 1998 through the creation of a coordinating body known as the Electronic Commerce Promotion Council (ECPC) by virtue of Executive Order 468.

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

and the development of the Philippine Strategic ICT Roadmap for 2006-2010 to update it, were both aligned with the government's medium-term development plans.

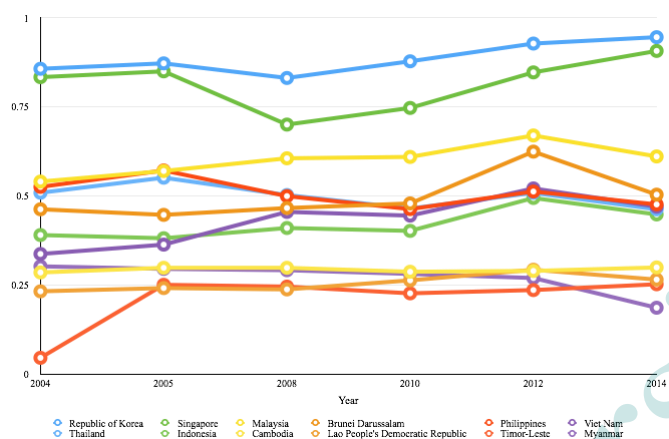
It was also during this same period that the NITC and ECPC were merged, creating the Information Technology and Electronic Commerce Council (ITECC) under Executive Order 264. The ITECC was tasked to streamline the formulation and implementation of ICT policies in the country including the National Information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

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

In July 2004, the ITECC was abolished and the Council's budget, assets, personnel, programs and projects were transferred to the CICT through Executive Order 334. The CICT was reorganized, renamed as the Information and Communications Technology Office (ICTO) and transferred to the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) in June 2011 through Executive Order 47 issued by President Benigno S. Aquino III. The ICTO is mandated to "formulate the Government Information Systems Plan and administer the E-Governance Fund" (Section E) and together with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) prescribed the criteria and guidelines for ICT projects under the EGF, the annual allocation of which was increased to Two Billion Four Hundred Seventy Eight Million Nine Hundred Thousand (Php 2,478,900,000) under GAA for FY 2014, Republic Act 10633 (ICTO, 2016).

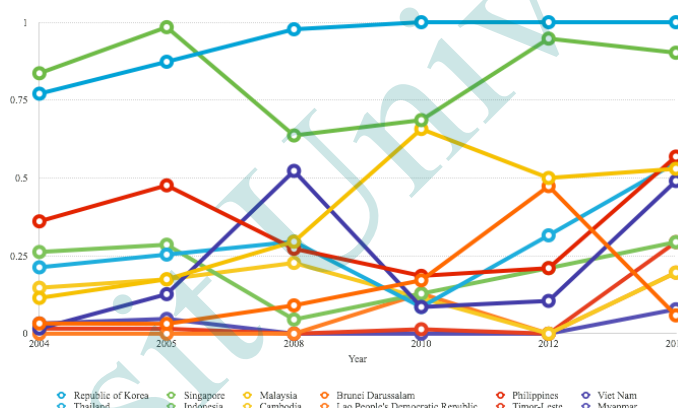
#### The Current Philippine E-Government Framework

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



**Figure 1** E-Government Development Index in Southeast Asia with World Leader, South Korea (2004-2014)

Source: UN E-Government Development Index<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 2** E-Participation Index in Southeast Asia with World Leader, South Korea (2004-2014)

Source: UN E-Government Development Index<sup>2</sup>

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

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



all 19 departments in the Philippine government under a “center of excellence” so as to eliminate duplication of tasks and direct initiatives toward building an e-government system.

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

#### Benigno Simeon Aquino III’s “Daang Matuwid” and E-Governance for Anti-Corruption

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

Previously, the GMA administration introduced several reforms to address corruption in the government. Amongst the reform packages, government procurement occurred during this time. The over 100 procurement rules and regulations necessitated the creation of the Philippine Government Electronic Procurement System (PhilGEPS), an electronic portal for government procurement, under Republic Act 9184 otherwise known as the Government Procurement Reform Act in January 2003. Under the system, transparency in government transactions were claimed to have improved as the number of bid notices and award notices posted increased from 126,501 in 2006 to 222,149 in 2008 and 19,282 to 34,580 in the same years, respectively. Accordingly, savings on procurement generated through the PhilGEPS increased from 21.55% in 2006 to 48.28% in 2008 (PhilGEPS Report, 2009). However, this and many other reforms were overshadowed by a series of corruption scandals in the GMA administration (Batalla, 2015). The “Hello Garci” scandal, GMA’s talks over the phone with a Commission on Elections commissioner while canvassing was going on in the 2004 presidential elections, rocked the administration’s legitimacy. Similarly, the misuse of close to three Billion Pesos (Php 3,000,000,000) in the Department of Agriculture in what was dubbed as the Fertilizer Fund Scam in 2004, just before the said presidential elections; this proved the presence of fund disbursement anomalies, hurt her popularity. Moreover, in 2007, the \$329-million National Broadband Network (NBN) deal with Chinese telecommunications firm, ZTE, which supposedly was geared to improve government communications capabilities, mired her administration on accounts of massive pay-offs. While the administration temporarily contained the controversy for the rest of 2007 when the NBN-ZTE deal was cancelled, this has ignited an intense public debate and calls for action, truth and, accountability.

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

PNoy's order from the outset since assuming the presidency was for national government agencies to publish information on disbursement of budgets, notice and results of bids, status of projects, and accomplishment reports, among many others. Holmes (2012) noted that the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) has taken the lead in implementing the said policy as early as August 2010, just roughly three months after PNoy assumed the position, and by 2011, 90% of Local Government Units (LGUs) in the Philippines have already complied with the policy. Apart from this, the Electronic Transparency and Accountability Initiative for Lump-sum Funds (e-Tails) Project that provides information on the disbursement of Priority Development Assistance Funds (PDAF) and the *Pera ng Bayan* ("The Nation's Money"), a Department of Finance initiative to provide information on government's revenue collection and serve as a feedback mechanism for citizens to provide information pertaining to graft and corruption were created. Similarly, the pre-existing PhilGEPS was improved following a report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2009, which noted that "since PhilGEPS was first implemented in 2006, while compliance with the publication of procurement notices has been high, the requirement to publish contract awards as well has still to be fully complied with. Moreover, despite having unlimited access to the system, not all government agencies use it. While the system is designed to provide information about procurement opportunities and contract awards, it does not cover bidding and has no payment facility. Thus, the current PhilGEPS functionality falls short of addressing the efficiency and economy objectives of public procurement." To address this, as part of the Aquino administration's new way to fight corruption in government agencies and as part of its EGMP, in January 2013, the PhilGEPS was expanded when it launched its e-payment facility, a pioneering cashless and paperless transaction, which allows government agencies to purchase their needed supplies online. As Florencio Abad, Secretary of the DBM during this period noted, "cash-based transactions have long been the norm for our public institutions, but this system has also opened up considerable spaces for irregularity and abuse. We're tapping digital technology not only to close the gaps that have allowed corruption to take root in the bureaucracy, but also to make service delivery much more efficient than it is now."

These developments are aligned with the administration's E-Government Master Plan. During its launch, PNoy claimed "through the E-Government Master Plan, we lay the groundwork for an effective and transparent e-government information systems for 2014 to 2016, providing agencies a framework that will strengthen and integrate existing information systems that are vital to the delivery of services and information." The EGMP, an update of the GISP, advocates a whole-of-government approach where government agencies need to convene and agree on priority projects they can implement for particular period and they will focus funding, monitoring and evaluation as a whole, unlike in the past e-government initiatives where each government agency was doing their own components. The EGMP emphasizes the import of collaboration, interoperability, shared services and openness, and it includes mechanisms that create and ensure an environment that institutionalizes open government (ICTO, 2013). Vowed mainly to

address systemic corruption in the country, as it was his ticket to the presidency, the e-government initiatives created were structured to reflect the *Daang Matuwid* philosophy of the administration. At the onset of the reform in e-government, corruption perceptions (Table 1) in the governmental institutions have changed, that is their net sincerity improvement ratings have considerably increased, as evidenced by the positive marks as compared to the base year, 2005, when GMA was president. However, based on the data from the World Bank's World Governance Indicators on Control of Corruption and the Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), the Philippines still belongs to the highly corrupt societies, slightly improving during the time of PNoy.

**Table 1** Net Sincerity Ratings in Fighting Corruption

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

Source: Social Weather Stations (SWS) Enterprise Surveys on Corruption (2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2013) <sup>1</sup>

\*Author's Calculations

## 5. Discussion

Apart from being the son of Benigno Simeon "Ninoy" Aquino Jr, a former senator and vocal opposition to Marcos, and former President Corazon Aquino, instrumental for the country's return to democracy and constitutionalism, PNoy not only enjoys a reputation of probity inherited from his parents but also had a clean record for public service despite showing little track record on how he could manage the top executive position. This, plus the considerable plurality vote he attained during the 2010 Presidential elections and sustained political support he enjoyed from the Congress and public opinion, given high public trust ratings despite some high-profile scandals involving his cabinet and key officials in his administration (Batalla, 2015), point to the fact that he had the most political capital as compared to the presidents of the post-Martial law period. The e-governance reforms would not have been possible, even at the presence of both domestic and international triggers, had the President not used his institutional preferences and capacity to effectuate the change needed. As Yang (2003) noted, e-governance reform in the form of institutional and policy transformation is contingent upon the agents' strategic choice, initiative and entrepreneurship. The strong agency of public administrators in relation to these institutions thus becomes all the more material.

However, other important institutional and normative innovations are yet to be considered and these similarly come with challenges. For instance, while the transfer of the ICTO to the DOST provided further opportunity for the PDS to be integrated with the innovation agenda of Aquino, the creation of a



single agency that is concentrated on ICT as a strategy of governance remains to be realized. It can be remembered that the ITECC, during the GMA administration and even in the previous ones envisioned this goal. Interestingly, now, through the efforts of Senate President Franklin Drilon, the Chairman of the Liberal Party and an ally of PNoy, the bill creating a DICT was set as a priority bill and has passed both houses of the Philippine Congress and has been submitted to the President for approval (Romulo, 2016). While such bill was overshadowed by other legislative concerns in the previous 15<sup>th</sup> Congress still during the time of Aquino, upon its realization, there is more reason to believe that the administration is focused on the integration of government ICT systems for greater transparency and efficiency in the delivery of public goods and services. While the MITHI and iGovPhil are geared towards interoperability, Romulo (2016) cautioned that only an independent and regulatory agency could develop and implement an ICT architecture, which all government agencies will adopt. No less than the World Bank welcomed the passage of the DICT bill noting that it is a positive development as it not only promotes transparency and ensures accountability but also promotes Open Data to improve good governance and address corruption. The legal and institutional framework set can after all structure the behavior and interactions of these government agencies in relation to transparency and accountability (Chen & Shieh, 2009; Eom, 2012). Taking the case of world leader in e-government development, South Korea, the institutional forces were instrumental in the success of e-governance for anticorruption. Most notably, the presence of a regulatory/coercive mechanism through the Audit and Inspection Bureau that intervened and regulated the implementation of Seoul Metropolitan Government's anticorruption system known as the Online Procedures Enhancement for Civil Application (OPEN) was considered the most influential and strongest mechanism for its success. The OPEN was initially seen with much skepticism by different government agencies and actors alike, but the political influence of the said office made the implementation of the new system not only possible but also successful (Kim, Kim, & Lee, 2009).

## 6. Conclusion

Through an examination of e-government policy transformation in the Benigno Simeon Aquino administration (2010-2016), the paper finds strength on the argument that while domestic and international triggers create windows of opportunity, the policy agent's will, institutional preferences and institutional capacity determine when change follows the said opportunities. There is no denying that in the state's project of an integrated e-government system to mitigate corruption, state institutional capacity is crucial in policy innovation and change, specifically for continued innovation in e-government (Tolbert, Mossberger, & McNeal, 2008). However, whether the size of the windows of opportunity created by environmental triggers are macro or micro and whether institutions obstruct or permit institutional transformation, how the administrators exploit these opportunities matter. Indeed, in the prospect of government integration through ICT, the political will (Mahmood, 2004; Elbahnasawy, 2014), clarity of goals (Chen, 2012) and type of leadership, and strategic vision of a clean government (Kim et al., 2009) of an agent becomes significant and necessary though maybe insufficient a condition. After all, as leading Filipino corruption scholar Batalla (2000) aptly put, the most important in the fight against corruption in the Philippines involves strong national leadership, embodied by the President who is expected to provide direction, coordination, and assurance to anti-corruption initiatives from various sectors. While this is the case, the paper is limited on its scope. It is thus recommended that in order to strengthen the claims made in this study, a comparison with the reform experiences of the past administrations in the Philippines or even institutional change in other countries be done. After all, this is the value of comparative political research.

## 7. Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the Letran Research Center, Colegio de San Juan de Letran, Manila, The Philippines for funding this research.

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