The enactment of Republic Act No. 11054 or the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) is seen as a welcome development in the quest for peace and development in the most impoverished parts of the country where prolonged conflict has repeatedly displaced communities and prevented the delivery of essential services to the people. At the same time, it is welcomed by some advocates of federalism who see in the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) an example of how a federal system of government could work in the Philippines. While current discussions on federalism have tended to dwell on principles and general statements about what it promises to accomplish, Filipinos could find in the BOL and its implementation a concrete example of how a federal setup might work from the perspective of one sub-state. Although federalism can take many forms and the BOL represents only one possible model, delving into the operational details of the BARMM could offer insights into the merits as well as challenges of a federal system before Filipinos decide on whether or not the entire country should make the shift to this new form of government.

This issue of the Intersect Quick Facts presents basic information on what the new law contains and the changes the law will bring to the governance of the BARMM.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON THE BOL

WHO AND WHERE ARE THE BANGSAMORO?

“Those who, at the advent of the Spanish colonization, were considered natives or original inhabitants of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago and its adjacent islands, whether of mixed or of full blood, shall have the right to identify themselves, their spouses and descendants, as Bangsamoro” (ARTICLE II, SECTION 1).

The Bangsamoro’s territorial jurisdiction (ARTICLE III, SECTION 2), subject to a plebiscite to be conducted not earlier than 90 days or later than 150 days after the effectivity of RA No. 11054, shall be composed of the following:

- Present geographical area of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), provided that the cities and provinces of the present ARMM will vote as one geographical area
- 6 municipalities in Lanao del Norte that voted for inclusion in the ARMM during the 2001 plebiscite, provided that the province will vote favorably for the inclusion of the municipality
- Cotabato City and Isabela City
- 39 barangays in 6 municipalities in North Cotabato that voted for inclusion in the ARMM during the 2001 plebiscite, provided that the municipality to which the barangay belongs will vote in favor of inclusion of the barangay

All other contiguous areas where a resolution of the local government unit or a petition of at least 10% of the registered voters in the area seeks for their inclusion at least two months prior to the conduct of the plebiscite.
Inland waters. The preservation and management of all inland waters (lakes, rivers, rivers systems, and streams within its territorial jurisdiction) shall be under the Bangsamoro Government (ARTICLE III, SECTION 3). “The Bangsamoro Government shall have exclusive powers over inland waters, including lakes, marshes, rivers, and tributaries within its territory, except those that provide energy to power generating plants” (ARTICLE XIII, SECTION 22). Inland waters used for energy outside its territory will be co-managed with the National Government through the Department of Energy.

Municipal and regional waters. “The municipal and regional waters of the BARMM shall extend up to 15 kilometers and 19 kilometers, respectively, from the low-water mark of the coasts that are part of the Bangsamoro territorial jurisdiction” (ARTICLE III, SECTION 4).

**WHAT ARE THE POWERS OF THE BARMM VIS-À-VIS THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT?**

### POWERS OF THE BARRM

- administration of justice
- administrative organization
- agriculture, livestock, and food security
- ancestral domain and natural resources
- barter trade and countertrade
- budgeting
- business name registration
- cadastral land survey
- civil service
- classification of public lands
- cooperatives and social entrepreneurship
- creation, division, merger, abolition or alteration of boundaries of municipalities and barangays
- creation of government-owned or controlled corporations and pioneer firms
- creation of sources of revenues
- cultural exchange, and economic and technical cooperation
- culture and language
- customary laws
- development programs and laws for women, labor, the youth, the elderly, the differently-abled, and indigenous peoples
- disaster risk reduction and management
- ecological solid waste management and pollution control
- economic zones, industrial centers, and free ports
- education and skills training
- eminent domain
- environment, parks, forest management, wildlife, and nature reserves conservation
- fishery, marine, and aquatic resources
- grants and donations
- Hajj and Umrah
- health
- housing and human settlements
- humanitarian services and institutions
- human rights
- indigenous peoples’ rights
- inland waters
- inland waterways for navigation
- Islamic banking and finance
- labor, employment, and occupation
- libraries and museums, and historical, cultural and archaeological sites
- loans, credits, and other forms of indebtedness
- mechanisms for consultations for women and marginalized sectors
- people’s organizations
- power sector investments
- public utilities’ operations
- public works and infrastructure
- quarantine regulations
- registration of births, marriages, and deaths (copies to be furnished the Philippine Statistics Authority)
- regulation of the manufacture and distribution of food, drinks, drugs, and tobacco
- science and technology, research councils and scholarship programs
- social services, social welfare, and charities
- sports and recreation
- technical cooperation for human resource development
- tourism development
- trade and industry
- urban and rural planning development
- urban land reform and land use
- water supply and services, flood control, and irrigation systems

**POWERS OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT**

The National Government will continue to hold all the powers, functions, and responsibilities that are not granted to the Bangsamoro Region (ARTICLE V, SECTION 1). These include foreign affairs, defense, and security.

The Bangsamoro Region will not have its own army and foreign policy. Similarly, a Police Regional Office in the BARRM will be under the direct control and supervision of the Philippine National Police (ARTICLE XI, SECTION 2). On police matters affecting the Police Regional Office in BARRM, the National Police Commission shall consult the Chief Minister.

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS**

As issues may arise from the exercise of the powers mentioned above, an Intergovernmental Relations Body will be created to coordinate and resolve issues on intergovernmental relations through “regular consultation and continuing negotiation in a non-adversarial manner” (ARTICLE VI, SECTION 2). The Bangsamoro Government and the National Government shall each appoint representatives to this body.

The following shall also be created: Intergovernmental Fiscal Policy Board, Joint Body for the Zones of Joint Cooperation, Intergovernmental Infrastructures Development Board, Intergovernmental Energy Board, and Bangsamoro Sustainable Development Board (ARTICLE VI, SECTIONS 4-8). These bodies shall be composed of representatives from the Bangsamoro and National Governments.

Unresolved issues shall be elevated to the President through the Chief Minister.

### A TIMELINE OF THE BANGSAMORO STRUGGLE

**1946**

After the American occupation, the Philippine government promoted the settlement of Christians from other parts of the country to the fertile lands of Mindanao, displacing Muslim and indigenous peoples and causing huge land ownership problems.

**1968**

The killing of at least 28 Moro soldiers in Corregidor Island, an incident now known as the Jabidah Massacre, sparked the Muslim “revolution” in Mindanao. The recruits were to undergo a “specialized training,” in preparation for “Operation Merdeka,” an alleged top-secret plan of the Marcos administration to invade Sabah, Malaysia, but were killed allegedly to preempt their grievances from getting publicized.

**1972**

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), led by Nurullaji Misuari, was made public. On this year, Marcos declared martial law to deal with threats from communists and Muslim secessionists.

**1976**

The Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the MNLF signed the Tripoli Agreement in Libya. The MNLF shifted its demand from independence to right to self-determination.

**1983**

Ideological differences within the MNLF forced its vice chairman Salamat Hashim to form the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and pursue the establishment of an independent state and government and the implementation of the Shari’ah (Islamic Law).

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**SOURCES:** BACONCO 2018; BACUS 2015; CONCILIATION RESOURCES n.d.; INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP 2012; OFFICIAL GAZETTE; MARCELO 2018; WHITMAN n.d.
WHAT ARE THE FEATURES OF THE BARRM GOVERNMENT?

WALI

ARTICLE VIII
- ceremonial head
- duties include: opening the session of the parliament, administering the oath of office, dissolving the Parliament upon the advice of the Chief Minister, calling for election of a new Parliament, and attending public ceremonies
- shall be chosen by the Parliament from the list of names of eminent residents of the Bangsamoro Region submitted by the Council of Leaders

CHIEF MINISTER

ARTICLE VII, SECTIONS 4, 30-34
- head of the Bangsamoro government
- powers include: appointment of the heads of ministries, agencies, and bureaus; issuance of executive orders and policies; and proclamation of a state of calamity

DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTERS (2)

ARTICLE VII, SECTION 35
- will come from the other two sub-regions different from that of the Chief Minister
- may hold a Cabinet position
- in case of death, permanent physical or mental incapacity, removal from office, or resignation of the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister, more senior in age, shall act as the Chief Minister until the Parliament shall have elected a new Chief Minister

MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENT (80)

ARTICLE VII, SECTIONS 2-3, 5-29
- 50% for party representatives
- not more than 40% for district representatives
- at least 10% for reserved seats and sectoral representatives:
  - two seats each for non-Moro indigenous peoples (IPs) and settler communities
  - one seat each for women, youth, traditional leaders, and the Ulama

Registered voters will elect their representatives in the Bangsamoro Parliament.

THE DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT UPON A VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE

“Within 72 hours upon a vote of no confidence of at least two-thirds (2/3) of all the members of the Parliament against the government of the day, the Chief Minister shall advise the Wali to dissolve the Parliament and call for a new parliamentary election. The election for a new parliament shall be held not later than 120 days from the date of dissolution. The incumbent Chief Minister and the Cabinet shall continue to conduct the affairs of the Bangsamoro Government until a new Parliament is convened and a new Chief Minister is elected and qualified” (ARTICLE VII, SECTION 36).

The dissolution of parliament will necessitate an additional—most likely unplanned—election with budgetary consequences for the government.

JUDICIARY

ARTICLE X
Shari’ah courts will exercise jurisdiction over cases solely involving Muslims. It may have jurisdiction over cases involving non-Muslims upon their voluntary submission. Traditional/tribal justice system which applies to disputes of IPs in the region and regular courts shall continue to exercise their judicial functions. SECTION 20 provides for alternative dispute resolution, which can be utilized by Shari’ah and traditional/tribal courts as a mode of settlement and resolution of cases.
HOW AND WHEN WILL THE TRANSITION FROM ARMM TO BARMM HAPPEN?

PLEBISCITE The establishment of the BARMM and the determination of its territorial jurisdiction shall take effect upon ratification of the BOL by majority of the votes cast in a plebiscite in the LGUs within the Bangsamoro territory as stated in the law. The plebiscite shall be conducted not earlier than 90 days nor later than 150 days after the effectivity of the BOL (ARTICLE XV, SECTIONS 1-2). This period would roughly be in November to December 2018.

INTERIM GOVERNMENT A Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) to be led by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), without prejudice to the participation of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in its membership, will be created to function as the interim government during the transition to BARMM. The BTA shall be composed of 80 members to be appointed by the President, and will include representatives from non-Moro indigenous communities, youth, women, settler communities, traditional leaders, and other sectors. During the transition period, the powers of the Bangsamoro Government shall be vested in the BTA (ARTICLE XVI, SECTIONS 1-3).

TRANSITION PLAN Within the first 60 days of the transition period, the interim Chief Minister shall submit a proposed transition plan containing an organizational plan, and an implementation schedule. The Bangsamoro Transition Authority shall vote on the approval of the proposed transition plan within 10 days of its submission. The transition plan shall be implemented within 15 days from its approval (ARTICLE XVI, SECTION 6). All powers, functions, assets, capital, records, funds, receivables, equipment, and facilities of the ARMM shall be transferred to BARMM except those properties, land, and structures located outside the ARMM (ARTICLE XVI, SECTION 10).

FIRST ELECTION The first regular election for the Bangsamoro Government shall be held in 2022, synchronized with the national elections. Immediately upon the election and qualification of the Chief Minister under the first Parliament, the Bangsamoro Transition Authority will be deemed dissolved (ARTICLE XVI, SECTIONS 12-13).

NORMALIZATION As defined in the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB), normalization refers to “the process whereby communities can achieve their desired quality of life, which includes the pursuit of sustainable livelihood and political participation within a peaceful deliberative society.” Its components are: decommissioning or the gradual laying down of weapons of the MILF; strengthening efforts for rehabilitation, reconstruction, and development of the Bangsamoro; and correcting historical injustices and addressing grievances.

SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT FUND The National Government shall provide a special development fund to the Bangsamoro Government for the rebuilding, rehabilitation, and development of its conflict-affected communities. The amount equivalent to P50 billion, at P 5 billion per year, for a period of 10 years from the ratification of the BOL, shall be allocated for this purpose (ARTICLE XIV, SECTION 2).

2008
The Arroyo administration held talks with the MILF which culminated in the “secret signing” of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in Malaysia. MOA-AD outlined the creation of a Bangsamoro Juridical Entity with its own police, military, and judicial systems. In October, The Supreme Court declared the MOA-AD unconstitutional, triggering clashes in Central Mindanao that displaced thousands of families.

2010
The MILF abandoned its demand for independence. In December, former MILF commander Ameril Umbra Kato separated his unit from the MILF and formed the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

2011
President Benigno S. Aquino III met with MILF chair Al Haj Murad Ibrahim in Tokyo. He was the first president to meet with the MILF.

2012
In October, the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the MILF signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB), which served as a roadmap for the creation of a new self-governing region called the Bangsamoro. In December, the 15-member Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) was established to craft the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

2014
After signing the main annexes to the FAB (on transitional arrangements and modalities, on revenue generation and wealth sharing, on power sharing, and on normalization and water territories) on various dates in 2013 and early 2014, the GPH and the MILF inked the final peace agreement known as the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). In September, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) and the BTC submitted the first draft BBL to Congress.

2015
The BBL was sailing smoothly in Congress until the controversial Mamasapano incident happened on January 25. The operation to track down a “high value” terror target turned out to be a fatal encounter between Special Action Force (SAF) troopers and combined MILF and BIFF fighters. The incident, which left 44 commandos, 18 MILF fighters, and five civilians dead, sparked public outcry, prompting the legislators to put the BBL on the back burner.

2016
The 16th Congress failed to pass the BBL when it adjourned in February 2016. In November, President Rodrigo Duterte expanded the BTC with six additional members representing indigenous peoples, local government, sultanates, and other groups.

2018
After many public consultations and discussions on the BBL and after President Duterte certified the proposed BBL as urgent, Congress approved its respective versions. The bicameral committee produced the draft Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. On July 27, President Duterte signed RA No. 11054, the Bangsamoro Organic Law.
THE BARMM AS AN EXAMPLE FOR FEDERALISM

This section presents provisions in the BOL showing the institutional changes that will bring about the redistribution of governmental powers, as well as resources, between the national government and the Bangsamoro Government. These institutional changes, including the creation of new offices and agencies, will effectively reconfigure the delegation of powers, functions and responsibilities to the BARMM, according it greater autonomy while affirming the primacy of the Constitution and national laws.

NATIONAL GOVERNMENT SUPERVISION

General supervision of the Bangsamoro Government will be exercised by the President of the Philippines to ensure that laws are faithfully executed (ARTICLE VI, SECTION 1). This implies that the President will have the responsibility to see to it that no action of the Bangsamoro Government violates the Philippine Constitution or national laws.

A number of regional offices to be established in the BARMM will still fall under the control and supervision of the National Government, among them the Regional Civil Service Field Office, Police Regional Office, National Police Commission Regional Office, and the Bangsamoro Electoral Office.

CIVIL SERVICE

The Bangsamoro Government shall enact a civil service law in accordance with existing national laws. In case of conflict with the national laws, the Constitution and existing national civil service laws, rules, and regulations shall prevail. As with many provisions, this provision explicitly upholds the supremacy of the Philippine Constitution and national laws. The Civil Service Commission shall establish a Regional Civil Service Field Office (ARTICLE VII, SECTION 39).

BANGSAMORO ELECTORAL OFFICE

The Commission on Elections shall establish a Bangsamoro Electoral Office under its supervision and control which shall implement and enforce its orders, rulings and decisions. The budget of the Bangsamoro Electoral Office shall be part of the yearly budget of the Commission on Elections (ARTICLE VII, SECTION 40).

SUBSTANTIVE AUTONOMY

Greater substantive autonomy is granted to the BARMM with respect to three critical government functions: the preparation of the budget, taxation, and the delivery of justice. Still in all cases, the supremacy of Philippine laws and consistency with existing laws in the execution of the mandates of the newly created bodies is explicitly articulated.

Budget. Greater autonomy is granted to the BARMM in the form and manner of preparing the budget. However, consistency with Philippine laws is always affirmed. The Parliament of the Bangsamoro will enact a law prescribing the form, content, and manner of preparation of the Bangsamoro budget consistent with existing Philippine laws, rules, and regulations of the National Government. A Bangsamoro Budget Office will be created by the Parliament for this purpose (ARTICLE VII, SECTION 28).

Justice system. A Shari’ah High Court is created by the BOL within the Bangsamoro territorial jurisdiction, as part of the Philippine judicial system. It shall exercise exclusive appellate jurisdiction over cases under the jurisdiction of the Shari’ah District Courts within or outside the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region. The decisions of the Shari’ah High Court shall be final and executory, except on questions of law which may be raised before the Supreme Court following the procedure for appeals from the Court of Appeals to the Supreme Court (ARTICLE X, SECTION 7).

Nothing in the BOL shall affect the original and appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court as provided in the Constitution. Regular courts in the BARMM shall continue to exercise their judicial functions, as provided by national law (ARTICLE X, SECTION 19).

Treasury. The BOL creates a Bangsamoro Treasury Office whose primary function is to receive and safeguard all the revenues generated and collected by the Bangsamoro Government. The Office shall be headed by a Regional Treasurer to be appointed by the Chief Minister and whose term shall be determined by a law to be passed by the Parliament (ARTICLE XII, SECTION 4).

Taxation. Where all taxable elements are within the Bangsamoro territorial jurisdiction, the Parliament may impose the following taxes to the exclusion of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) of the National Government and in accordance with the National Internal Revenue Code of 1997, as amended: capital gains tax, documentary stamp tax, donor’s tax, and estate tax (ARTICLE XII, SECTION 9). In case the Parliament does not impose the abovementioned taxes, the BIR shall continue to levy and collect said taxes. In no case shall the abovementioned taxes be imposed and collected by both the BIR and the Bangsamoro Government.

The Parliament shall establish by law the Bangsamoro Revenue Office for the assessment and collection of Bangsamoro taxes, as well as all other collectible taxes in the BARMM (ARTICLE XII, SECTION 11).

The Parliament shall enact a Bangsamoro tax and revenue code, which shall cover the taxing powers of the Bangsamoro Government, in accordance with the Constitution and the BOL (ARTICLE XII, SECTION 14).

FISCAL AUTONOMY

Seventy-five percent (75%) of National Government’s taxes, fees, and charges collected in the BARMM (excluding tariffs and customs duties) will be granted to the region, inclusive of its constituent local government units (ARTICLE XII, SECTION 10). This is a 5% increase from the current share of ARMM from the taxes collected by the National Government.

Aside from this, an annual block grant shall be automatically appropriated in the General Appropriations Act to the Bangsamoro Government. The annual block grant shall be the share of the Bangsamoro Government in the national internal revenue tax collections of the Bureau of Internal Revenue and collections of the Bureau of Customs. The amount of the block grant will be 5% of the net national internal revenue tax collection of the Bureau of Internal Revenue and the net collection of the Bureau of Customs from the third fiscal year immediately preceding the current fiscal year (ARTICLE XII, SECTIONS 15-16). Currently, ARMM government officials justify the ARMM annual budget before the Congress. Critics reason that this undermined the autonomy of the ARMM as it created dependency on and subservience to the national government (Marcelo 2018b).

THE PRESIDENT’S APPOINTING AUTHORITY

The appointing authority of the President of the Philippines is preserved with respect to the Bangsamoro Human Rights Commission. The chairperson and two commissioners of the commission shall be appointed by the President upon recommendation of the Chief Minister (ARTICLE IX, SECTION 7).

CREATION OF NEW AGENCIES

The Parliament of the Bangsamoro Government is empowered to create a number of new agencies to perform specialized functions to more effectively meet the needs of the people (see box on page 6), among them the Ministry for Indigenous Peoples and the Housing and Human Settlements Agency.
**Indigenous Peoples.** The Bangsamoro Government shall create a ministry for indigenous peoples that will formulate and implement policies, plans, and programs to promote the well-being of all indigenous peoples in the BARMM in recognition of their rights to their ancestral domain. The BOL categorically states that it shall not in any manner diminish the rights and benefits of the non-Moro indigenous peoples in the BARMM under the Constitution and national laws, particularly RA No. 8371 or the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act of 1997 (ARTICLE IX, SECTION 3).

**Housing and Human Settlements.** The Parliament shall pass a law creating a housing and human settlements agency to address the lack of shelter, settlements, and livelihood for the disadvantaged and homeless, especially victims of conflicts and atrocities (ARTICLE IX, SECTION 9).

**RETENTION OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY**

The National Government retains significant responsibility for certain critical government functions, among them auditing and national defense, public order and safety.

**Auditing.** The BOL provides that, pursuant to the Constitution, the Commission on Audit shall be the exclusive auditor of the Bangsamoro Government and its constituent local government units. The Bangsamoro Government shall establish an auditing body which shall have internal audit responsibility in accordance with RA No. 3456 or the Internal Auditing Act of 1962 (ARTICLE XII, SECTION 2).

**National defence, security, public order, and safety.** The defense and security of the BARMM shall be the responsibility of the National Government (ARTICLE XI, SECTION 1). The Police Regional Office in the BARMM shall be under the direct operational control and supervision of the Philippine National Police (ARTICLE XI, SECTION 2).

**SHARING IN NATURAL RESOURCE USE AND REVENUES**

Government revenues generated from the exploration, development, and utilization of all the natural resources in the BARMM, including mines and minerals, shall pertain fully to the Bangsamoro Government. In the case of uranium and fossil fuels such as petroleum, natural gas, and coal, the same shall be co-managed and the revenues shared equally between the National Government and Bangsamoro Government, subject to the limitations provided in the Constitution (ARTICLE XII, SECTION 34).

Subject to the Constitution, the Bangsamoro Government shall have the power, authority, and right to explore, develop, and utilize the natural resources, including surface and subsurface rights, inland waters, coastal waters, and renewable and nonrenewable resources in the BARMM. The Bangsamoro Government shall also have the power to declare nature reserves and aquatic parks, forests, watershed reservations, and other protected areas in the BARMM (ARTICLE XIII, SECTION 8).

**REFERENCES**


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