

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS IN THE SIXTH DISTRICT OF MANILA THROUGH POLICY FORMULATION PROCEDURES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

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ABSTRACT

The Philippines has been known as one of the nations which follow the democratic type of government. Democracy, also known as the rule of many, has been used for many years. However, democracy, although it boasts that the people have freedom, is not absolute. There are laws and limitations because it would be chaos without control. Mostly, the citizens elect people who will represent them. But there is a thing called direct democracy wherein the people, or the electorate themselves, meddle with the government's affairs. The main problem that can be seen is that, even though the people have the right to initiate to make and amend laws, some just do not care or do not want to involve themselves in politics. This paper's primary aim is to focus on policy formulation procedures in local government units and to determine how involved the people are in exercising their rights in their locale. To be more specific, this paper also aims to evaluate how informed the citizens are of their rights in exercising their rights in direct democracy, to determine whether the citizens only engage in it when they see it as beneficial for them, and to analyze whether policymakers should only be for those who have knowledge and wisdom in the field. The theory that the researcher contextualized in this study is Herbert Simon's Decision-Making Theory. In conducting this research, the qualitative approach was used through descriptive phenomenology. The gathered data shows that citizens are not aware of their right to initiate new policies and that they rely on their contribution to elect representatives to formulate policies without directly engaging with them. The initiative to participate in policy formulation is close to non-existent as the citizens are either not aware that they have the right to do so or think that they are not the right persons to partake in the said affairs.

Keywords: democracy, direct democracy, political participation, policy formulation, local government units

INTRODUCTION

Direct democracy can be exercised when mandated in the constitution. Initiative and referendum are forms of practicing and exercising one's rights in direct democracy. In a direct democracy, the people have the power themselves, in which they can act as the government, just like what democracy means: the rule of many. The rights of the people to participate in politics do not end after the elections. The

political rights of the people do not only limit them to vote for a certain candidate through ballots. In Local Government Units (LGU/s), like cities, provinces, municipalities, and the like, there are procedures wherein the people can directly propose policies for their locale.

Many Filipino citizens have not even finished elementary because of poverty. Some would first try to think of ways to get food on their plates; getting an education is not the priority. Even if there are public schools that are owned by

the state, some still cannot afford to send their children to school. It is not surprising that many citizens do not know their rights, except for the basic rights, like the right to live, to have a name, and the like. When it comes to political rights, no one bats an eye until it is the elections. It is as if this is the only right, they have when it comes to politics or the government.

The electorates or the citizens themselves are probably the most important people in a politician's perspective. In the Philippines, wherein democracy is practiced, politicians, like the president, vice president, congressmen, and even barangay officials, are elected by registered voters. These voters, however, have way more power than just shading a ballot every election. Registered voters can also propose bills to be enacted as laws, provided that the criteria needed are fulfilled.

The general objective of this paper is to describe how politically involved the citizens are in terms of policy formulation under the procedures of their locale (attending meetings/seminars with regards to the topic and participating in the proposal of policies). However, to further provide supporting data on the said objectives, the researcher specifically added three more aims: (1) to determine how the citizens initiate in exercising their rights to direct democracy; (2) to describe whether citizens only engage in politics if they can benefit from it; and (3) to explain why those who can formulate policies should be limited only to those who have enough knowledge legally and politically.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The "Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organization" is a book written by Herbert Alexander Simon. The said book states that "decision-making is the heart of the administration, and that the vocabulary of administrative theory must be derived from the logic and psychology of human choice," and it attempts to describe administrative organizations "in a way that will provide the basis for scientific analysis." He believed that it should be for the welfare of all, or at least most of the members of the organization. Organizational inducements, rewards, and sanctions are all designed to form, strengthen, and maintain this identification.

Simon's theory of administrative behavior helped this research in reaching its objective as this paper focuses on the participation of the citizens in policy formulation procedures in local government units. In policy formulation, there are

important factors to consider, and decision-making is one of them. This theory best describes how these factors affect and complement each other's relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Direct Democracy

In an article written by Epstein, he wanted to remind the readers about what Aristotle felt about democracy: that it was impolite. And that, according to him, republican was the preferred form because it was known to avoid the populist will. Although the researcher agrees that we must all be reminded that democracy is a perverted type, it still needs to be appreciated as it is widely used. Epstein's article focuses on the design of constitutional democracy and its role for the people.

Direct democracy has emerged as a central part of the government in the United States in the 21st century and has been playing an important role in the explanation of institutional trust (Matsusaka, 2010; Freitag and Ackermann, 2016). Matsusaka did a case study in California regarding voter initiatives, while Freitag and Ackermann did one on Switzerland, which is the most advanced country worldwide in terms of direct democracy. Its role in explaining institutional trust is what makes the article different. It was mentioned that "conscientious" individuals do not want to meddle with politics and that these individuals gave a lower trust rate because they feel like they were forced to become politically involved even if they do not want to. With this, I can say that direct democracy plays a huge role in many countries in the world. Through this, people engage in the government without changing the fact that there are elected representatives. And that upon reading these, its interpretation can also be varying.

Though democracy might be giving people many things to enjoy, it also gives some problems, especially when people overuse their free will. However, democracy can still be seen as a beautiful thing because of what it has given to the citizens of the Philippines as described by Corazon Ignacio. Also stated by the same person in an article is that the biggest threat to democracy in the Philippines is no other than the people who the electorates voted for: the politicians. In this, many may agree. Many people assume that politics is dirty mainly because of the people in it. However, we all are a part of politics because it is natural. The problem though is in the higher part of the hierarchy. These politicians have power,

something that not every individual has, and power in the wrong hands is indeed a terrifying threat.

In 2016, Davies explained how referendums take part in constitutional reform. In the literature, it is said that referendums are made to superficially invite the people themselves to directly choose an option with regards to a certain political question. Also included in the article is that even though referendums may be seen appealing as it involves people directly, there are serious questions about their genuine legitimacy. This article defines and describes what referendums do. The main thing that caught the researcher's attention, though, is that the article is questioning the referendum's legitimacy. The article explained that the problem is on the "elite control" over the process.

Political Participation

Political participation comes in many shapes and sizes. Participating in politics does not only mean that a person should be able to learn and live the language of politicians. Political participation does not necessarily require a person to want to become a politician. It goes beyond what the name suggests. Being able to be involved and engaged in the government is not something you see every day. It is said that political participation happens only in the election season because, in the Philippines, the people directly elect the representatives, senators, and even the president through plurality vote. But being a simple individual who genuinely cares about his/her community makes him/her politically involved. That occurs when that person tries to become a better citizen by knowing and learning his/her rights by heart and becomes even better by sharing them with others. Political participation is when you attend meetings and seminars organized by the barangay, depending on its agenda. Political participation is when you go out to the streets and fight for what you believe in and what you know is right. In RA 7160, Section 397, meetings, or assemblies are to be done in a barangay, which is composed of all the actual residents for at least six (6) months, fifteen (15) years of age or over, citizens of the Philippines, and duly registered in the list of barangay assembly members.

Groshek and Dimitrova (2013) studied the relationship between political participation and online media use. They focused on the use of weblogs. It was regarding the campaign news and information on the United States presidential elections in 2008. The results were surprising. Many people would probably assume that the relationship of the two

would fall on the positive side, but it is not. Most of the well-visited blogs are not that informed when it comes to politics, so the popular ones are not involved, which means there is less audience. The study did not focus on social networking sites since they cannot find any sensible and significant effect related to the topic. This study would help compare and contrast the past and the present. Nowadays, it is not unknown that social media has played a vital role in campaigns and that many people are more "involved" and "politically inclined." Since many realize that being involved does not only end in voting and that it does not have an age requirement, many more are now brave to voice out their opinions and express their thoughts through social media platforms.

Policy Formulation

RA 7160 is known to be a code that delegates autonomy and accountability to local government units. Specifically, this provision also includes how the citizens can participate in the law-making body.

Section 398. Powers of the Barangay Assembly. - The barangay assembly shall:

(a) Initiate legislative processes by recommending to the Sangguniang barangay the adoption of measures for the welfare of the barangay and the city or municipality concerned.

(b) Decide on the adoption of initiative as a legal process whereby the registered voters of the barangay may directly propose, enact, or amend any ordinance; and

(c) Hear and pass upon the semestral report of the Sangguniang barangay concerning its activities and finances."

Craft and Howlett (2012) assessed the policy formulation and the decision-making factors related to it. In the article that they authored, they argued that the utility of both the implied content and the locational dimensions of traditional models of policy advice systems are challenged by the emergence of advisory sources and polycentrism. In their literature, the focuses are only on the actors and their training in decision-making. The authors, however, suggested that there is a required step in the development of an improved understanding of the structure and functioning of policy advice systems, and that is a more articulate conceptual depiction and detailed specification of the interactions affecting the actors related to providing advice to decision-makers. The researcher believes that this step is important.

Formulating a policy is not something that someone can do instantly. Just like many other critical things, it must be thought upon thoroughly for it to be efficient.

SIMULACRUM

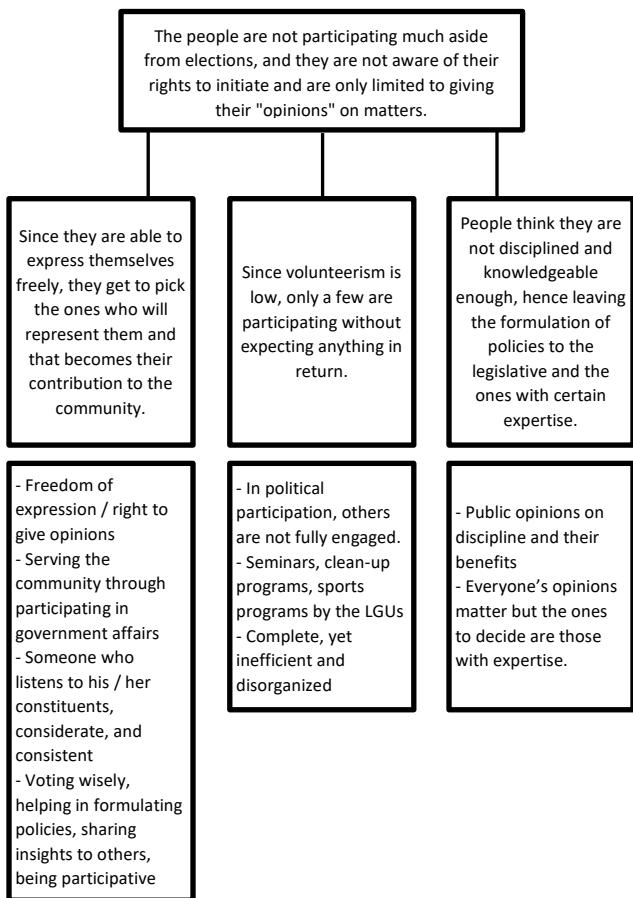


Figure 1. Research Simulacrum

METHODOLOGY

The researcher of the study used the qualitative approach in conducting this study as it is the best approach for the respondents to be able to answer the questions with appropriateness and honesty. The research design that was used was descriptive phenomenology. The respondents of this study were five (5) registered voters from the district who have been residents of the district for at least 3 years equivalent to the officials' tenure of office. All of them were also able to vote for at least two elections already, which

shows that they have politically participated and have exercised their rights. Also, the researcher thought that it is fair to also ask for the sentiments of two (2) government officials, one of which is a city councilor. It is only proper that this has been done as it erased the possibility of having a biased outcome.

The researcher conducted a face-to-face, one-on-one interview on registered voters as well as local government officials. The one-on-one interview was voice recorded and transcribed, wherein the researcher incorporated the answers into themes, which were used to analyze the data further and thoroughly. To further strengthen the gathered data, the researcher also went to the Department of Interior and Local Government - Manila for records on the government activities/assemblies done by the local government in the district. The researcher was permitted to analyze the data on the documented reports by the barangays of District 6.

This study was done in the sixth district of Manila, under District Representative Rosenda Ocampo, with a land area of 7.79 km² and an estimated population of 295,245. Under District 6 are Pandacan, Sta. Ana, San Miguel and Sta. Mesa. The forty-four barangays included in this study were based on the given records of the Barangay Bureau in the City of Manila, under the Department of Interior and Local Government.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Since they can express themselves freely, they get to pick the ones who will represent them and that becomes their contribution to the community

Voting in the elections is one of the people's rights to direct democracy. Through voting, the electorates are also participating in politics. The Philippines is a republic-democratic country and that is why we elect representatives that will govern the nation. These few individuals will legislate and implement laws and policies for the people's welfare. Registered voters can choose who they want based on their criteria, and that becomes their contribution. Direct democracy is focused on the people's rights and how they can affect and influence the government. Indeed, if you vote for the right persons, then progress is not impossible to achieve. However, in most cases, because of this right of the people—their right to suffrage—it is being taken for granted. Many

think that politics has become a popularity contest, which is wrong in a sense. Your popularity does not directly affect your competence; hence, it should not be the sole basis of the people. Also, based on the answers of the respondents, people tend to vote for those who give “something” as a gift before elections, and through that, the people believe in the kindness of that individual’s heart, not knowing their real agenda—which is to gain their trust, then their votes. To be able to contribute, one must think of the things that might affect his/her “contribution” and its impact afterward.

When asked about their rights to direct democracy, most of the respondents answered their right to express their thoughts and opinions, also known as their freedom of expression. One respondent shared his insight on direct democracy, and I quote, “Direct democracy is a form of democracy where people have direct participation in policy/decision-making through a proper consensus. Even though our country currently enacts a policy via representation, we can effectively affect our corresponding representative by sharing our insights (especially for controversial bills such as the death penalty and reproductive health bills) using different social media platforms. One of them is Facebook.” Freedom of expression is widely used and is exercised by all, be it a registered voter or not. But when talking about direct democracy, the expected answers are actions that involve the people and the government directly, hence the term. Good examples are election, initiative, and referendum, which involve the public in government affairs.

Aside from paying taxes and obeying the laws, policies, and ordinances being implemented, many respondents said that people are participating in government affairs, such as the clean-up drives and sports leagues that the LGUs do in the communities. Respondent one described the participation of his community in government affairs as active. He also reiterated that the programs are good as it is really helping in the progress of the community, especially the sports league in which the youth is more involved. That through this, their time and attention is focused on the program, diverting them away from doing bad vices like drug addiction. Since not everyone knows how the government and politics work, the ones who know these try to inform those who do not. In this, the researcher learned that it is a big help to inform others and help them understand how politics work. These small steps are vital in the development of the community.

It is very important to know how the people want their officials to be. The assumed result for this is positive since everyone should always be vigilant and always choose the right persons for the positions. They were also asked if they think the elected representatives are enough to represent and govern the people. The answers vary and that is not surprising at all, knowing that each one is unique, and that includes each one’s perception. As what is mentioned above, the answers varied; however, there were also significant similarities. The people want someone who listens to them. They know their rights and that they should have a voice in the things the government should do. Further, the people want a considerate leader, who knows how to weigh things and how to balance their priorities and give importance to the affecting factors in any case. What the respondents also want to see is how the government officials engage with the people and how they adjust to the status of their constituents. Also, the citizens and the government must both commit to be able to cooperate to attain the goals and aims of each. The people know what they like to see in an individual who must represent them well. The respondents believe that the number of representatives that they have is enough because just like what a respondent said, it is hard to lead with so many voices, because there will be dissenting opinions, and that makes it hard to decide on certain things.

Since volunteerism is low, only a few are participating without expecting anything in return

The volunteerism of the citizens when it comes to political participation is so low that both the citizens and the government know that the people only attend if they can get something in return. Based on the gathered data, it has been known that most have little participation when it comes to assemblies. The researcher asked the barangay captain in the vicinity for an honest description of the people’s participation in their area specifically on barangay assemblies. She answered without filter that in their barangay when they invite people to participate, most of them ask them first if they will be given “stubs.” By “stubs,” she meant the stubs being given to families that shall be presented in exchange for food or gift bags, that without these “stubs,” people become passive about attending seminars or assemblies. According to her, some would even tell excuses like they have a lot of work to do, or that they still have house chores that they must work on just to find reasons not to join the forum, hence her statement that the people only participate when they can take something home. But of course, she told the researcher that

she does not want to generalize, and that is when she mentioned that the senior citizens are the ones who she can always go to. She said that the elders go without saying and expecting anything at all, even though it is a hassle because they are more sensitive due to their age. She said that she is grateful that there are people like them who are always willing to give their time to engage with the LGU's affairs. That even with the heat and all, they have the senior citizens who they can always count on. With all of that said, the researcher has come to analyze that indeed, volunteerism is something the citizens can work on to help achieve their goals to genuine progress.

The citizens play an essential role in the government and politics. In participating politically, one must be fully engaged. And since most of the activities of the local government happen in the barangay, in terms of assemblies, the attendees must not show apathy on the tackled issues because these are the things that need to be addressed. But unfortunately, nowadays, it seems like people are always asking for benefits in exchange for their participation.

The reports from DILG were mostly composed of the pictures of the actual event, the people who attended, the attendance, and the minutes on addressing the topics and issues that were raised. One of the most recurring issues that were addressed in the aforementioned assemblies was about the senior citizens. Other issues like health, education, and environmental aspects were frequently discussed. Unfortunately, numbers don't lie, and the number of attendees is far from what one would expect in an assembly.

People think they are not disciplined and knowledgeable enough, hence leaving the formulation of policies to the legislative and the ones with certain expertise

Policy formulation is a difficult task and a challenging process. According to the city councilor that the researcher was able to interview, there is a so-called parliamentary procedure. The term is difficult to understand. It was said to be a long procedure. Before publishing a policy or an ordinance, the councilor said that they conduct public consultations and public hearings first before anything. These are done to be able to get the opinions and reactions of the people. He said that this is an important step in policy formulation. Included in the interview protocol is the respondents' knowledge of the "policy advice system," which unfortunately many are not aware of and have not heard of

before. Though when asked if the people must have a say in policymaking, the respondents were quick to respond that they must be heard. If you ask them why –they will respond that it is because they are the ones who know what they lack and what they need. True enough and that goes without saying. Though others disagree that everyone must be heard, and that is because they have reservations. They said that some do not care, and they are saying only what they want to say for their benefit. One said that the opinions must always have a basis to be valid. Upon interpretation, it is agreed that the opinions must be first validated; if it has weight, it will be the process of formulation. Also, the people can still have a say through the means of initiating or asking for help on how to come up with policies that they know would help their community develop. It is only a matter of educating the public on simple steps in helping to formulate simple policies that could lead to a gradual breakthrough.

DISCUSSION

The researcher made an in-depth study to contextualize the importance of the people's knowledge of their rights. It is known that most people are aware of their basic rights, like their rights to life, liberty, property; to have a name; to have an education; and the like. But this study is focused on the citizens' knowledge and awareness of their political rights. To be able to participate in government affairs is a gift of democracy, and it must be maximized. However, as this study has concluded, it has been known that most of the citizens are not aware of the so-called local initiatives, wherein there are procedures in policy formulation that they can use as ordinary citizens. After all the analysis the gathered data has gone through, the researcher came up with the outcome that the people are not participating much aside from elections and that they are not aware of their rights to initiate and are only limited to giving their "opinions" on matters.

One observation that the researcher has established is that the government's lack of effort to introduce the topic of initiative and referendum to the public greatly affects their lack of participation in policy formulation. Listening to the constituents' opinions is one thing and involving them in the process is another. The low amount of volunteerism can also somehow be interrelated with the lack of public trust in the government and its officials. The people do not want to do anything with the government unless it can directly benefit

them. The local government units could have been more proactive in this sense as the people's engagement would allow them to gather raw inputs from the ground which could address more issues in the locale.

Taking everything into account, the researcher concludes that the people are not directly participating much aside from elections, that they are not aware of their rights to initiate and are only limited to giving their "opinions" on matters. They cannot maximize their rights as they are not well-educated on things like such. The political participation of the people is not that intact, and they are not aware of their rights and the procedures in policy formulation. The theory on administrative behavior helped in the analysis of the data wherein it is important in decision-making. Again, mentioned in the book of Simon is that "Decision-making is the heart of the administration, and that the vocabulary of administrative theory must be derived from the logic and psychology of human choice." The researcher concludes that decision-making is the heart, not only of administration but also of policy formulation.

As discussed above, the process is long and that makes it challenging and gruesome that, in a sense, is the make or break of the publication of the policy. Deriving from the logic and psychology of human choice is interpreted by the researcher as though it is kind of limiting the decision-making to those who have enough knowledge and expertise in a certain aspect as it is, again, by human choice. It cannot be done by just anyone not possessing the level of reasoning it requires. This proves the assumption of this paper that the formulation of policies should be limited to those who have enough knowledge in the field, which, in this case, is more on legal and political. But this does not disregard the fact that the people's opinions are a crucial factor in the decision-making itself. Also proven by the respondents themselves is the assumption that the people are only participating in activities wherein they can get something out of. The researcher also claims that it is based on the human choice as to why or why not they want to engage. As to the deduction on how the citizens initiate their rights to direct democracy, it is unsurprisingly low. They are only aware of their voting rights and rights to free speech. All in all, the objectives of this paper were obtained.

After conducting this study on the political participation of Manila - District 6 citizens on policy formulation procedures in LGUs, the researcher has come with the following recommendations:

- The citizens should be educated on their political rights. Local government units, such as barangay officials should encourage their constituents through regular meetings whether they have suggestions for policies that they would like to see in their respective communities. Further, they must help the people fulfill the same whenever they try to formulate a certain policy in hopes of motivating them. The researcher felt that citizens tend to limit themselves on the simplest forms of rights and they cannot maximize their rights to be engaged in the government. Through the LGUs intervention, the citizens will become more aware of their certain democratic powers collectively. Currently, wherein people are more politically involved, people from the "ground" can be a huge factor in progressive policymaking by providing them with readily available and accessible information.
- The government should conduct extra measures on their activities. Make sure that the people know what the government does for them. Through this, the people's political trust will increase because they know and they see where their taxes are going, and that their elected officials are working hard for the sake of the community's development.
- The public should learn to initiate and volunteer, not only for their sake but also for the whole community. They should try to propose policies that would need small steps but come up with a big impact.

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