
PART III
COMPARATIVE POLITICS AND ADMINISTRATION

**Power, Social Responsibility, and
Citizen Participation in the
Process of Governance: Introductory Notes**

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A major concern in the study of politics and government is the phenomenon of power and the problem of its use for socially desirable goals and objectives. Institutional arrangements have been devised to encourage the responsible use of power and authority, e.g., periodic elections of certain officials, division of powers into executive, legislative, and judicial functions and their assignment to separate branches of the government, and the establishment of *ombudsman*-type agencies. These arrangements must be seen in the light of two equally attractive but seriously conflicting views.

If the powers of government are exercised mainly by a limited group of technocrats and senior administrators, unity of vision, comprehensiveness of planning, societal coordination of effort and more rational allocation of resources to meet competing needs become feasible. This is the view of those who could opt for centralized powers of political action. Contradictory to this is the view of those who see development as the growth of initiative and effort in the whole society. Social responsibility, they believe, can only result from people having the power to decide on matters affecting their lives. Thus, a political system wherein political power is decentralized provides a firmer basis for development.

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To maintain the legitimacy of the political order and attain a more responsive and accountable government, the participation of the citizens in the process of governance is an essential element. Citizens may be involved in the governmental process through participation in the selection of the leadership in the country both at the national and local levels and in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs. The citizens are time and again called upon to select their leaders according to their abilities and promises. In spite of major limitations, periodic elections of certain officials remain the most acceptable form of leadership selection in a political system. Such a procedure hopefully gives the citizens the chance of deciding who should represent and serve their interests. That such a situation does not happen at all times is not an argument against elections. The requirements for free elections must, however, be satisfied, namely, freedom of expression, independent institutions of public opinion, strictly enforced and generally accepted electoral laws and procedures, and well-developed political parties.

Elections of government officials, particularly at the local level have a number of advantages. Primarily, the people wish to share power and to more actively participate on matters of the level of government closest to their experience. The choice of these officials would be facilitated and improved with the selection done by citizens within a limited area. Better local officials would be selected in the sense that the people would have "better" knowledge, standards, and means of enhancing responsibility. Local elections would also relieve the President of a heavy burden, thus, freeing him for the growing national and international demands. Finally, local elections would provide a more authentic basis and a more accurate gauge of a regime's legitimacy.

Related to periodic elections is the division of powers into executive, legislative and judicial functions with the corresponding branches of government. This division and distribution of powers provide the necessary environment for greater citizen participation because such a division afford additional points of popular access to government.

The establishment of *ombudsman*-type agencies provides an institutional arrangement where feedback is provided to promote responsible use of power and authority.

The Case for Citizen Participation

The need of governments to have the scope of authority and ad-

ministrative institutions adequate to the challenge of development does not justify omnipotent and capricious regimes. While popular participation must be structured and governance institutionalized to some degree, these could remain free and democratic if political institutions and processes are organized to divide and share power and functions between governmental and non-governmental entities, and within the government itself. This procedure would secure the right of people to express themselves, to know and understand issues, to defend their beliefs and to gain access and appeal to alternative sources of power at different levels of government.

Such a division and sharing of power and functions could be arranged among national institutions, and between them and sub-national ones, including local government. Although intermediate institutions have been increasingly required to integrate or coordinate developmental efforts, local governments remain indispensable in any attempt to decentralize power and administration and to encourage popular self-reliance and participation in development.

Popular participation is developmental in that it enables and encourages groups and individuals to cultivate and use their own capabilities for need determination and satisfaction. It acquires its critical meaning in the opportunity that participation affords for the underprivileged to share power with elites, parties and bureaucracies, and to induce its responsible and legitimate use for the well-being of the people.

When taken seriously, popular participation in government serves to modify ideas of political and administrative development that stress the improvement of the state capacities to make and implement decision. It must serve to give the people an effective voice in the consideration and choice of policies and in the selection and regular alternation of policy-makers. It would facilitate the use of power to satisfy popular needs, the policies that it crystallizes would be more legitimately binding, and cooperation in administration would be easier to obtain.

A case for citizen participation can also be made from the fact that a harmony of interests cannot be assumed between the people and the government; that people have their own values and needs to pursue that do not necessarily correspond with government's definition of what they are; and that they also have their own ideas on how pursue them.

Citizen participation in development corrects the results-orientation that has marked development efforts. Goulet, in fact,

finds the term "development" inappropriate because of the priority it gives to results; it is indifferent to the means used to get these results. He opts for the term "liberation" which stipulates that people decide for themselves what they want and how they should get them. Here, participation is viewed as a matter of right; the consequences of its exercise is not a bone of contention.

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation also echoes this sentiment. It calls for "another development" — a critical feature of which is that it is self-reliant and autonomous. "Another development" requires the people's own definition of their wants, not as these are dictated by others.

Objections have been raised against citizen participation in development. These call attention to organizational strains: that participation can only be effective in small groups and only for purposes of idea exchange, communication, coordination; that citizens lack expertise and revere authority. All these, however, are not "iron laws". It does not mean that if they occur, they cannot be prevented or minimized. Systems of interest articulation and decision-making can be devised so as to maximize citizens' resources at their levels. Expertise, after all, refer to different levels.

Other objections to participation center on the notion that participation will mobilize the apathetic who may pursue ends other than those of the regime. Participation is viewed as leading to system breakdown, to instability. But what is not recognized is that their non-involvement may have made them apathetic; that violence may have been resorted to because the "legitimate" channels are not effective. Participation may, contrary to these objections, provide the ballast to conflict and make way for compromise.

Participation of citizens can be justified not only as a countervailing force to government or as an end in itself. Management-oriented justification, such as those suggested in the preceding paragraph, can also be forwarded. This adds a utilitarian appeal to citizen participation.

Participation of citizens can perform such input functions to government as those identified by Almond: interest articulation, aggregation, socialization and recruitment. By providing policy inputs on goals and objective conditions in society and by implementing policies arrived at, citizen participation can contribute to governmental management.

Assessment of New Participative Mechanisms

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Citizen participation is a categorial term for citizen power. There is a critical difference between going through the ritual of participation and having the power to affect the outcome of the process (Arnstein).

The proclamation of martial law on September 21, 1972 was accompanied by the dismantling of the participative mechanisms of elections both at the local and national levels, political parties, and national legislature. In their place were installed new mechanisms—the referendum, the barangay and the Sangguniang Bayan. This paper attempts to evaluate these new mechanisms in terms of their ability to affect decision-making or, following Lasswell, the amount of power they exercise. This can be done by examining two related factors: 1) the conditions under which new participative mechanisms operate, and 2) the power they exercise relative to other actual/-potential seats of power. These variables define the amount of power exercised by these participative mechanisms, that is, “their ability to affect the policies of others with the help of actual or threatened severe deprivations for non-conformity with the policies intended.” (Lasswell)

More specifically, this paper seeks to evaluate participative mechanisms as countervailing forces to the executive. This will bear

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on our judgments of the referendum, barangay, and Sangguniang Bayan (SB) as mechanisms promoting the responsible use of power, in this special case, by the executive.

Data used for this paper were obtained from analyses of remarks written in during the 1973 and 1976 referenda. The first study used a sample of remarks drawn from all the regions of the Philippines. The first was conducted by the U.P. College of Public Administration; the the second by a group of consultants, mostly deans from the U.P., and a group of COMELEC researchers. Both studies were sponsored by the COMELEC.

An independent study of the 1976 referendum was also undertaken by the U.P. CPA and the Philippine Political Science Association. This study is different from the first 2 studies; instead of analyzing remark sheets, what it did was to trace the evolution of issues and to evaluate the conduct of the referendum.

There have been 4 referenda since the proclamation of martial law; only 2 are accounted for here.

Other sources of materials include case studies on a number of barangay and SBs—both in Metro Manila and other regions. Their generalizability may be questioned but they yield insights that could be tested on larger samples in the future. Given conditions that generally hold in the country, they may be indicative of some general patterns and trends.

I

The referendum constitutes a system of consultation in which issues of local and national concern are referred to the people. So far, there have been 4 referenda since martial law was proclaimed. In these referenda, however, voters clearly operated under very tangible constraints which, in turn, call into question the suitability of referenda as mechanisms for demand articulation an independent feedback. Maybe the most critical is the political framework under which the referenda were conducted, namely, conditions of martial law. The low turnout of voters who wrote in-remarks during the second referendum—only 64% of total number of registered voters—may be partly explained by apprehensions of voters about possible retaliations despite assurances of confidentiality and security. There are also evidences of influence in the other direction: enthusiasm or more accurately, over-enthusiasm over the referendum. It was not uncommon to find remark sheets filled with long

English sentences submitted verbatim by voters. This may have been done by local government officials who in their desire to have their projects approved by the administration felt they had to "deliver the goods." This becomes more plausible when it is recalled that days before the referendum, the papers headlined news about certain mayors expecting to deliver 95-98% "yes" votes. Moreover, barangays also had some "consensus meetings." In contradiction to all these, campaigns against the referendum or the regime were considered "subversive." It is true that in the 1976 October referendum, free debate was allowed. Non-government groups such as the Civil Liberties Union and the Bishops' Conference were allowed to campaign against the referendum. Even the Huk Veterans, Inc. headed by erstwhile Huk Chief, Luis Taruc, distributed position papers. Former Senators, Salonga, Rodrigo, Roxas—known oppositionists—also aired their views on the referendum issues. However, these must have been nullified by the fact that groups working under the supervision of the government such as the COMELEC, Kabataang Barangay, and the Department of Education had greater access to the use of media.

Another salient point that may be seen as springing from the martial law situation is the fact that the questions asked in the referenda are those that are approved by the COMELEC. There are critical areas that are not asked as referendum questions, the most serious of which is whether martial law should have been imposed at all. Moreover, the questions may be faulted on the way they were asked. In the second referendum, for instance, the major question asked was: "Under the present Constitution, the President, *if he so desires*, can continue beyond 1973. Do you want President Marcos to continue beyond 1973 and finish the reform he has initiated under Martial Law?" (Underscoring supplied) This implies that regardless of voters preference, it is the pleasure of the President that goes. Moreover, the question is a leading question. It has a "halo" effect.

Another factor involves the administration of the referenda. In the October 1976 referendum, only three weeks were utilized for disseminating and discussing the 2 questions. This is too short a time for the whole country to consider such issues. Participant observers in the same referendum found that most of the ballots were printed in English. There might have been sample ballots outside the polls that were freely distributed in the local dialect but these were not readily available in the precincts. "Yes" leaflets were also widely distributed.

There are cases uncovered by a team of participant observers of the October 1976 referendum of violations of the sanctity of the ballots. One booth was occupied simultaneously by more than one voter. Those who extended help to those who could not grasp English felt free to convey their own stand. If votes and remarks are registered under these conditions, their validity should be called into question.

II

Barangays were created by the national government. According to PD 86, barangays serve to broaden the base for the people's participation in the democratic process of government.

However, the kind of activities barangays undertake indicate that they are primarily transmission belts of the national government rather than independent sources of policy inputs and feedback.

Barangays have been mobilized for referenda which as we discussed earlier raised issues approved by the Administration. Barangays have been utilized in the distribution of rice, gasoline coupons and cooking oil at the height of the scarcity of those commodities. There is nothing wrong with this but an examination of the programs that barangays undertake during "normal" times as against "crises" shows a wide disparity between what barangay members perceived to be their most pressing problems and what activities the barangays actually undertake. This was documented in a study of Bicol barangays. While transportation, livelihood, and irrigation and water supply were considered the 3 most urgent problems, it was cleanliness and beautification, green revolution, and peace and order which constituted the top three barangay activities.

Barangays implement national programs but these may not be relevant to their needs. The Green Revolution, for example, may not be relevant in Manila. On the other hand, cleanliness and beautification may be relevant in Manila but not in rural areas where the need for transportation or for irrigation is much more urgent.

There is a more problematic case. There are certain barangay activities that are almost totally devoid of developmental implications. In an informal discussion with Metro Manila barangay officials in the U.P. College of Public Administration last year, one barangay official claimed that what his barangay has been doing was to go to Roxas Boulevard to welcome and wave at foreign visitors like Gina

Lolobrigida or at the President and/or First Lady when they arrive from one of their foreign trips.

Barangays are entitled to a share of 10% of the real property taxes in their areas but the programs where this amount is to be used are defined by the national government, specifically, the Department of Local Government and Community Development.

In the same informal discussion with Metropolitan Manila barangay officials, one articulated problem was the irrelevance of programs. With a share amounting to over a million pesos, the barangay in the Manila Hilton area did not know what to do with this amount. The installation of irrigation pumps was one such priority program but this was definitely not needed in this particular Ermita area.

In other cases, the problem is availability of funds. For example, a study of barangays in 4 districts of Metro Manila found that not all receive their 10% share in real property tax. Logistics may not be the most important power base but it is surely one of them. In some Iloilo municipalities, barangays only get ₱20 to ₱50 because municipal funds, limited as they are, are earmarked for various national government programs.

III

The Sangguniang Bayan (SB) like the barangay, owes its existence to a presidential decree and aims "to give the people greater voice in the administration of their local affairs and a better perception of the problems and solutions thereof . . ." The SB seeks to broaden the base of citizen participation in local policy-making by giving access to sectors, barangays, and youth to the local legislative machinery.

The selection of representatives in SBs, however, is questionable. There are people who are ignorant about who their representatives are and how they got elected, as case studies of a number of localities show. The same case studies show that it is persons close to politicians, e.g. mayor's daughter or protege, who get selected as SB members. There are also election protests against sectoral representatives, protests that may not be decided upon quickly. Farmers rarely get represented in SBs.

The question of representatives also arises when one considers who of the SB members participate in its deliberations. Discussion and sponsorships of resolutions are dominated by the old members;

KB representatives are generally shy; new members may have their own ideas but they cannot match the rhetoric of old members.

These conditions under which SB operates affect the representativeness of the interests it articulates. A critical factor, namely, the definition of its functions, may also constrain its ability to affect decisions. The SB enjoys only recommendatory powers. It is not truly a legislative body with co-ordinate and co-equal powers as the executive; it is a creation of the executive. It is described as an advisory legislative body, which may be contradiction in terms.

IV

The existing participative mechanisms follow the logic of corporatism—" . . . a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports" (Schmitter). In short, corporatism involves "the regimentation from above of interest representation into a preordained set of hierarchical categories" (*Ibid*).

The participative mechanisms instituted under martial law display these features in various ways.

The calling of referenda, regardless of the origin of demand, is done by the government. The issues to be taken up are also sanctioned by the government. Regimentation from above manifests itself in what issues are included, or more importantly, excluded.

In earlier referenda, campaign against the regime was considered subversive; in later ones, this was not the case; debate was allowed. However, this must have been nullified by the greater access to media of "yes" groups, the lack of sufficient time with which to discuss the issues, and may be more importantly, the subjective feelings of the voters induced, namely, fear of reprisal, on the one hand, and the temptation to please the administration, on the other.

It is true that the government allowed people to vote and write their remarks. But even in this area, government imposed constraints to, or failed to offer opportunities for, meaningful participation.

Every qualified voter is required to vote; if he does not, he is

penalized. While liberalizing voting requirements, the government, however, did not make available a sufficient supply of ballots and remarks sheets in the local dialect. Due to the lack of voting booths, moreover, the sanctity of the ballot was violated in some cases.

The barangays are also corporatist. They are creations of the national government. Their powers, functions, and organizations are governed by presidential pronouncements.

Their functions are largely implementing national programs which are not necessarily relevant to the needs and problems they perceive. Their perceived needs and the activities they undertake are far from congruent. Some of them even engage in purely symbolic functions.

Barangays are given a power base—10% share in the real property taxes collected in their areas. However, for some reasons, this is only partially not given at all. Moreover, programs to which they could be used must meet the guidelines set by the national government.

The Sangguniang Bayan is also corporatist. Its organization, powers, and functions are also governed by presidential pronouncements.

A corporatist feature it clearly exhibits is its hierarchy of municipal, city, provincial, and regional categories, each level with a corresponding area of coverage and competence and each higher level exercising control over lower levels. Lower level categories are integrated with higher ones by the simple mechanism of having them represented in the higher ones. To top it all, the Sangguniang Bayans at all levels can only exercise recommendatory powers. Final decision rests with the President.

There is also a lack of effective mechanisms to insure representativeness in the Sangguniang Bayans.

How effective then are the new participative mechanisms in promoting citizen power? The preceding discussion indicates that they are not effective. A summary reason for this is that while there are citizen bodies at the periphery or local level namely, the barangay and the Sangguniang Bayan, decisional resources are concentrated at the center or national level. Moreover, through the barangays and Sangguniang Bayans, the government can now penetrate extensively the local levels.

It may not be a coincidence that these two elements offered by corporatism, namely, 1) intensive concentration of decisional resources at the center, and 2) extensive penetration by government agen-

cies of the periphery, are the same elements on which rests the institutionalization of authoritarian rule (Schmitter) or in the Philippine case, of martial law. So, far from promoting citizen power, the referenda, the barangays, and the Sangguniang Bayans as corporatist mechanisms have served to consolidate the gains of martial law. They have not shared or distributed power; they have concentrated power at the center.

At best, these participative mechanisms have given a semblance of citizen power. Referendum and barangay and Sangguniang Bayan meetings are like attitude surveys, neighborhood meetings and public hearings: they offer no assurances that citizen ideas, remarks, and demands will be taken into account in decision-making. It is a form of tokensim and citizen power in this form is assessed in terms of how many registered voters actually voted, how many said "yes," how many wrote in remarks. These are by no means valid measures of citizen power.

Of course, it can always be argued that accelerated national development requires increasingly comprehensive scope and strong direction by government, but this argument begs a lot of questions. It assumes a harmony of interest between government and the people, but this is not necessarily the case. More importantly, this government, though strong to promote the human welfare, may equally be strong to repress people.