

The youth speak: Forms, facilitators and obstacles to their political participation

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Drawing on results from four focus group discussions with high school students in rural and urban environments, the researchers explored youth perceptions about their roles as political agents in Philippine society. Participants were also asked to share their ideas on what could hinder and facilitate their engagement of their roles. Both urban and rural youth groups emphasized their avoidance of criminal activities as a way by which they could contribute to societal change. While the rural youth were more particular about their engagement in community activities and the use of resources within the community in the engagement as political actors, the urban youth gave greater importance to participation in mass activities for the common good. Both youth groups saw the lack of appreciation from others for their efforts at participation as a hindrance, and the sense of civic commitment as a facilitator to their participation. Differences between the two groups in their constructions of what could hinder or spur their activities as political actors could be found in the way the rural youth emphasized self-related factors, such as agency and knowledge, and in the way the urban youth emphasized non-self related factors, such as time and nature of political activity in the country.

Keywords: Youth, political participation, civic engagement, agency, youth groups

Filipino youth's voices to the current issues in society and in governance, such as corruption, child abuse, armed conflict or poverty, seemed to remain subdued. Many have judged the silence to be caused by an underlying apathy and cynicism among the youth. Velasco (n.d.), in her documentation of reports from 1996 to 2002 on Filipino youth's political participation, reported that the youth's less than positive attitude towards being responsible voters, their

minimal participation in the form of social involvement, or their lack of knowledge on the structures of governance, have remained unchanged. The decision to remain uninvolved was said to be due to a fear that their involvement may have negative repercussions on their school performance. According to the Velasco report, they may have also held the belief that their involvement is not likely to make any difference, or that they may be branded as communists when they participate in political actions.

What can be observed among Filipino youth was likewise exhibited by many of the youth around the globe. Johnson (2005), for example, mentioned that researchers on youth development point to the civic disengagement among the young. According to Johnson, these researchers feared that if this disengagement should continue, political and social systems would gradually deteriorate, and materialism and individualism would be valued more than community participation, and the concern for nurturing family and for other relationships with others.

The general impression of disengagement exhibited by young people was said to take the forms of apathy and cynicism. According to Johnson, cynicism was a kind of pessimism characterized by a mocking attitude and distrust of the motives of figures of authority. Apathy, Johnson continued, is described as consisting of a lack of interest and concern for the well-being of others and of society. When a person is apathetic, he or she was usually socially disengaged and would exhibit political withdrawal. He or she is likely to be disinterested in current societal issues, and would withdraw from communal activities

These representations of youth apathy and cynicism have been presented very often to describe the young people in our country. Sandoval, Mangahas and Guerrero (1998) reported that even as the Filipino youth recognize that economic matters remain to be an important problem to address in the country, they feel helpless and less interested compared to adults. A study conducted by Trends-MBL for Global Filipino Foundation in 2001 also reported young Filipinos' apathy towards cultural values and national affairs. The same study documented that by the time they reach 19, the Filipino youth would have become cynical about government, politics, and about life in general. They would also eventually lose their links with community and with social and political realities. The McCann Erickson Youth Study in 2000 (cited in Mendoza, 2001) reported that the consequences of this lack of hope in government and politics was an upsurge on self-reliance among the youth, or the feeling that they needed to rely mainly on themselves when faced with the difficulties in their communities.

The impeachment trial of President Joseph Estrada and the consequent EDSA 2 event raised the youth's political awareness, but these events left them with an attitude of disillusionment and fear (McCann Erickson, 2000, as cited in Mendoza, 2001). They shared the feeling that political agenda can be articulated by various personalities for their own motives. They realized that these individuals with agenda of their own gather a crowd for an empty, dishonorable cause. The McCann Erickson Youth Study further showed that the youth felt the restrictions of expressing their honest views in highly politically charged discourses, wherein statements that are unpopular are rebuked and disregarded. According to the Philippine Social Science Council (PSSC, 2003), young Filipinos believed that when they choose to act, they could influence changes in the country's political processes. This feeling of efficacy was however not clearly discernible from their participation in formal political processes and in organizations that serve the youth in political affairs, such as the Sangguniang Kabataan (PSSC, 2003).

In his monograph, Lanuza (n.d.) presented an overview of Filipino youth participation spanning from the early part of 1970 until the early years of the 20th century. Political socialization among Filipino youth was observed in two trends, youth in government-led activities and in organization and students' political activism. According to Lanuza, participation in organizations were seen by Filipino youth as beneficial. It provided them with an opportunity to perform a role in their community and develop their leadership skills. Those who actively participated in political processes, i.e., electoral process, joining political parties and holding a seat in their community as Sangguniang Kabataan, manifested their need in espousing a different kind of politics. This was also evident in the research of Diestro (2007) about the political socialization of Filipino student activists. Diestro found that activist groups also serve as a venue in which students get support and acquire the necessary skills for actively participating in political demonstrations, debates, and mobilizations.

The reviewed empirical and historical accounts of student activism also in Lanuza (n.d.) provided a rough description of Filipino youth's current state. Discussions were focused on their values, traits, and orientation about specific (e.g., school-related) and broad (e.g., national) issues. Other forms of participation were also noted by Lanuza. Involvement in non-political organizations and volunteerism were among these. However, some of these youth reported that their participation was only compulsory or a requirement. Thus, non-involvement was also apparent in the account of political participation among Filipino youth. Wide-scale surveys (e.g., CBCP, 2002;

SWS, 1996; SWS, 1997) corroborated this finding and specified political immaturity (characterized by lack of political knowledge, easily influenced by mass media, belief that actions make no difference) and the priority they gave to their education as reasons for non-involvement.

These descriptions about the seeming political apathy and cynicism among the Filipino youth in the current times led us to ask the following questions: What would make them participate politically? What forms of political participation were they ready to engage in? What would hinder them from civic or political participation?

We chose to ask these questions to the Filipino youth who are now in the period of early adolescence. We decided to have them speak and allow them to construct their notions of political engagement in a focus group discussion. Through this format, their collective representations of political agency which form the basis of their actions would be captured. Although the present study did not aim to produce conclusive findings regarding the differences between rural-based and urban-based youth's construction of their political engagement, preliminary comparisons could provide some indications about the choices and values offered in these environments for political action (Bucholtz, 2002). Throughout this paper, the terms youth and young people referred to Filipino adolescents-the group represented in the study by the high school urban- and rural-based respondents.

Past accounts on the political engagement of Filipino adolescents seemed to present a somewhat contradictory depiction about the young Filipinos' sense of themselves as political agents. On the one hand, these young people realized that they are a potent force in causing change in society (e.g., Episcopal Commission on Youth of the Catholic Church/Catholic Bishops's Conference of the Philippines, 2002; Lanuza, n.d.; PSSC, 2003). On the other hand, the Filipino adolescent seemed to refrain from displaying actions that make for the desired societal changes. For example as the 2000 report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) indicated, youth participation in political activities remained low despite the formal policy framework put in place by the government. To understand these contradicting views, the researchers presented the concept of political agency which need to be clarified. Also important to consider were the contexts in which this agency is exhibited.

Political Agency

Studies showed that the construct of agency is constituted by the following interrelated components: a well-differentiated and integrated

positive sense of self (Kuperminc, Blatt, Shahar, Henrich & Leadbeater, 2004), a fusion of values and self-efficacy beliefs towards the production of behavior (Caprara & Steca, 2007), and an ability and determination to initiate and sustain movement towards a goal (Venning, Elliott, Whitford & Honnor, 2007). To have self-efficacy in producing political change was therefore not sufficient to initiate or maintain political action. Ingredients of viewing the self in a positive way, as well as the abilities and values that promote political action, were equally essential. Further, a positive sense of self and an awareness of relevant values could be said to be reinforced by the presence of others who would welcome the young person's articulation of political ideas. Tedin (1980), for example, stated that the conditions that must be present for the exercise of political agency are: 1) the opportunity to communicate about the political subject with others, and 2) the receptivity of these ideas by others with whom one has emotional ties, e.g., family and friends.

Researchers pointed to the importance of providing the youth with a sense of personal agency when young people's commitment to civic participation was to be developed (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Sears & Hyslop-Margison, 2007). However, the greater exercise of agency would depend on the context within which political action was realized. According to Shanahan (2000), enhanced agency in life course was experienced in modern societies because of the freedom an individual achieved from traditional constraints of family and community. In societies which are less urbanized, an individual's life was significantly influenced by the demands of family life. Shanahan added that greater agency is manifested by the youth in more urbanized settings in the selection of institutional involvement, organizational participation, and interpersonal relationships. What Shanahan suggested here are differences in political socialization experiences within urban and rural environments. To explore these differences further, the researchers further examined youth development in these two environments.

The Youth in Rural and Urban Environments

Modernization of societies was usually associated with changes in the life course. Shanahan (2000) described one change in the increasing rigidity in the life course, e.g., school completion, marriage, parenthood, or beginning one's career. The author also mentioned the changes are also to be found in the life course sequence patterns. For example, in more modern societies there are overlaps to be observed in familial and nonfamilial transitional markers. These overlaps made for greater diversity in sequence patterns

and an individualization of the life course brought about largely by greater educational attainment and longevity, as well as lower infant mortality. In modern societies, the young person's transition to adulthood was therefore less determined by the family and the community.

The changes in an urbanizing community made the rural-urban background a basic variable in most sociological researches. It was usually assumed that growing up and residing in these different environments would produce differences in attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and practices (Yi, Kung, Chen, & Chu, 2008). Yi and his associates mentioned that in the studies conducted on urban-rural differences in adolescent socialization, distinctions are evident in the resource allocation, parental expectations, social positions, and life chances. These distinctions, they note, were important in delineating the effects of environment in the formation of the young person's value orientation. This value orientation was a concept that cover even political participation.

The rural-urban continuum concept had its roots in the writings about *Gemeinschaft* or community, and *Gesellschaft* or society, by Tönnies in 1887, and in the ideas of the anthropologist Redfield in 1958 with his treatise on the urbanization effects on Mexican peasantry (Salamon, 2003). Recently, Greenfield (2009) took these two sociodemographic prototypes and tried to elaborate on the distinctions in developmental pathways within these, or what she now considers as, contrasting sociocultural ecologies. Greenfield argued that their forms of adaptation to each environmental prototype were on the levels of cultural values, learning environments, and human development. The sociodemographic characteristics found in each environment type influenced the learning environments, which, in turn, influenced developmental pathways. It was important to note that the sociodemographic characteristics had impact on both cultural values and learning environments.

As an example of this impact, Amon, Shamaï and Ilatov (2008) compared adolescent development in rural and urban communities. This research examined the importance of peer groups by focusing on the factors of teenagers' preferences in leisure time activities, preferences for help providers, and their sense of attachment to the community. Questionnaires were administered to young people in a secondary school in the northern part of Israel. The study found that teenagers in the urban communities were more "home-centered," spending more time with their families and doing homework, while the rural teenagers were more community centered as evidenced by their greater participation in youth movement activities. Attachment to the community was also found to be high among rural

teenagers. The teenagers of the rural communities were, therefore, more community oriented, with the females being more satisfied with community events, and more attached to their communities. The reason for this satisfaction and attachment was attributed to their having places of their own and the relative autonomy they enjoyed as they played out their roles in the youth movement. Amon, et al. (2008) also mentioned the important aspect of the community called the "sense of place," which consists of meanings and qualities a person would associate with a given locality.

Bauch (2001) also mentioned how in rural communities, relationships and connections to other people are more dominant, with direct verbal communication as the norm. Community norms, values, and attitudes were said to be strengthened by the "dense relational networks and strong intergenerational closure" (p. 211). Salomon (2003) suggested that the trust and commitment that exist in rural communities, as exemplified in joint acts of raising youth, provide the stimulus for the socialization of the youth as engaged citizens in their communities.

The importance of political agency as it is shaped in a particular environment provided a picture of how individuals may view and express their political participation differently because of their specific environmental influences. How these environmental influences impact political participation was discussed in the next section.

Environments and Political Participation

Studies that have directly examined the influence of environments on the youth's political participation were showing more involvement among the youth in rural communities. Jones and Perkins (2006) demonstrated that rural youth were significantly more positive on the construct of youth involvement than their urban counterparts. Atkins and Hart (2003) proved that youth from urban neighborhoods were less likely to participate in community service than rural youth. Political knowledge, a requirement of political participation, however, was observed to be higher among the urban youth compared to those who lived in rural areas (Pienaar, 2000). Kahne and Sporte (2008) and Amon, et al. (2008) referred to social capital as an explanatory construct in accounting for the greater civic participation exhibited by rural youth. Social capital, according to Amon, et al., was central in community building. The authors explained that social capital is made up of three elements: social networks, trust among people, community institutions and community leaders, and norms of reciprocity. These elements were said to enhance both solidarity and civic engagement. Young people

who witness the reciprocity and concern for the community in their homes, in school, or in the neighborhood were more likely to also be committed to civic participation (Kahne & Sporte, 2008). In other words, observing how social capital is being demonstrated in the community in the forms of dealing with problems together, of adults looking after children, of neighborhoods supporting young people, influenced the youth to exhibit greater civic commitment, a precursor to any form of political participation.

These findings highlight the possibility that differences in political participation among the youth resulted from their perceptions about community/group life. Therefore, existing evidence called for an exploration of the youth's understanding of political participation, as well as their views regarding nonparticipation. The purpose of the present study was to describe the nature of youth political participation as described by high school students in urban and rural environments. What they saw as facilitators of, and hindrances to forms of participation were likewise investigated.

Focus groups, as Seal, Bogart and Erhardt (1998) note, were effective data-gathering techniques in two ways: 1) focus groups encourage investigation into the participants' experiences, and 2) focus groups stimulate discussion and expression of multiple ideas in a supportive environment. In a focus groups format, participants were also made to listen to other participants' points of view and respond to these views. The content analysis of the resulting focus group discussions may provide insights into the salient issues experienced by the respondents regarding their political participation.

METHOD

Participants

Thirty-six participants (18 males and 18 females) were purposively recruited for the study. They were 3rd and 4th year high school students with an average age of 15. They were selected based on their residence, whether in an urban- or rural-community setting. Nineteen participants came from two high schools in an urban community setting (Espiritu Santo High School in Tayuman, Manila and Teodora Alonzo Public High School in Bambang, Manila), while 17 of the participants came from a rural community setting (Sto. Angel Public High School in San Pablo, Laguna). They were specifically chosen by their respective class advisers and/or school administrators. For the urban group, they were commonly from top classes in their respective schools. For the rural group, they were chosen based on availability and their ability to articulate their experience well.

Procedure

Key persons in the host learning institutions facilitated the recruitment of the participants. All necessary permissions were sought in all three schools through a letter written by the primary researcher. Schedules for the FGD sessions were arranged to suit the availability of the participants. A total of four FGD sessions were held. There were two sessions for each community setting. During the scheduled day of each FGD session, the participants were either excused from their class or from the day's school activity.

At the start of all FGD sessions, pertinent ethical considerations were observed. Specifically, permission was sought from the respondents regarding the use of a digital voice recorder and the eventual presentation of their responses in academic conferences or any research-oriented endeavor. Respondents were also given an opportunity to ask questions about the research.

Guide questions were used to facilitate the flow of all the FGD sessions (see Appendix A). The questions focused on the following: (1) problems of the youth, (2) sources of information about social problems, (3) forms of political participation, (4) blocks to participation, and (6) promoters of participation. The duration of each FGD session averaged one hour. After each session, a quick recap was facilitated by the note-taker. During this time, the participants were again encouraged to check the accuracy of information noted down during the session. They were also instructed to correct misperceived responses and to give additional information if ever the researchers missed important things in the discussion. After each FGD session, the researchers thanked and gave snacks to the participants as a gesture of appreciation. All the FGD sessions were later transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to extract themes from the transcribed FGD. Data segments, single words or short sequences of words (Flick, 2006), were lifted from the transcriptions using the main FGD questions as start list for the analytical domains. The FGD questions comprised the domains used for the open coding of the data segments. Specifically, themes from the data segments were independently identified by both authors. The process of identifying themes from the data segments continued until all the data segments were analyzed. Both researchers noted the similarities in the themes and contrasts were reconciled. Themes were then clustered to form categories.

As a reliability check, the categories and data under each category were presented to the other research project teams during a project meeting. The resulting categories were discussed in the next section.

RESULTS

The findings showed the themes under the domains for both urban and rural environments. This general presentation preceded the identification of themes emerging that were particular to each environment.

Forms of Political Participation

Some participants expressed their intention not to engage in any form of political participation. They felt that they should be focusing on their studies. This desire to remain uninvolved was expressed by the participants in the following manner:

Wag na lang muna makialam. (trans. Don't get involved yet.)
Pabayaan mo na lang muna sila, kasi trabaho rin naman nila iyon.
(trans. For now, just leave it up to them. Besides it's their job anyway.)
Di mo naman trabaho ang makialam sa pulitika. kailangan ko po munang -prioritize ang studies ko...Sa school muna ang pag, kunwari nasa school po ako, school muna ang iisipin ko. (trans. It's not your job to get involved in politics. I need to prioritize my studies first... School should be first, while I'm at school, I have to focus my mind on it.)

However, some participants contended that focusing on one's studies can also be a way to contribute to change. As one participant stated: "*yung pinakamadali na kaya naming gawin eh yung mag-aral nang mabuti.*" (trans. the easiest for us to do is to study hard.)

To bring about the needed changes in society, some participants stated that they should engage in prosocial acts. Prosocial behavior could be exhibited by providing assistance to those who were in need:

Tulongan po yung walang mga trabaho, halimbawa po nawalan po sila ng pagkain, kung meron po akong pambili maaari ko po silang suportahan. (trans. Help those who are jobless, say for example they don't have food, and if I have some money to spare, I could support them.)

Another form of prosocial activity would involve giving advice to, or assisting youth who have gone astray:

yung mga estudyante na naliligaw ng landas gawa po ng mga kabarkada eh pwede pong kausapin nang walang pagtatalo na nagaganap, para po mabago yung kanilang ugali na po mag-aral sila ng mabuti kasi para din sa kanila yun. (trans. students who are misguided because of their peers can be persuaded without resulting to arguments, so they can change their ways, they should study hard because it's for their own sake)

Another way of participating politically was to avoid criminal activities, by avoiding deviant peer groups, by being good citizens who follow laws, or by choosing to act in morally-steadfast ways. As one participant stated, a person was able to effectively engage in political actions when "*Hindi niya magpapasok ng masama kahit sino po ang magbuyo sa kanya o kaya sabihin sa kanya.*" (trans. He/she won't get into bad things no matter who'll tease him/her or ask him/her to do it.)

Participating in political mass actions was another way of getting politically engaged. As one participant shared: "*Ipaparating natin ang nais nating iparating sa isang rally.*" (trans. We can convey whatever we want in a rally.) However, the participants were aware of the abuse that could be committed by others in these forms of mass actions. As a participant expressed:

ngayong meron na, kumbaga, ngayong meron na tayo [karapatang magsalita], may binigay na sa atin, parang umaabuso na po ang mga tao (trans. now that we have the right to speak up, it was given to us, it seems like some people abuse this right)

Political participation for some of the participants also meant making full use of community resources and activities. When there were, for example, opportunities to learn, one should not hesitate to take advantage and make full use of these. This was a way for one to be engaged. As one participant mentioned:

Pag po kunwari may libreng edukasyon susubukan ko na po, sayang po kasi ang pagkakataong binibigay sa atin kung hindi po natin susubukan iyan. (trans. For example there is access to free education, I will surely try, the opportunity will only go to waste if we will not try.)

Blocks to Political Participation

The participants identified the lack of self-efficacy, the lack of desire to learn, or sense of complacency as important hindrances to engagement:

Yun pong ano, yung kawalan ng tiwala sa sarili, kasi minsan po meron kang gusto gawin pero maiisip mo na hindi mo kaya, yung wala kang kakayanan. (trans. For example, lack of trust in oneself. There are times when you want to do something but you're held back by the thought of your own lack of capability.)

Yung iba po ayaw na po nila mapaganda yung kanilang buhay kasi sanay na po sila, kapag hindi mo po papaganahin iyan kung may maiisip ka puro katangahan lang. (trans. There are others who don't want a better life because they are used to what they have, if you don't use your head right, you will only think of stupid things.)

Not having adequate time for engagement was another identified block. According some participants:

Minsan po kunwari talagang gusto nating tulong or may gusto tayong gawin, kaya lang hindi po natin magawa dahil po sa ano sa lack of time. (trans. Sometimes we really want to help or we want to do something but because of lack of time, we don't have the chance to do it.)

Kumbaga siyempre may mga things din pong kailangan nating i-prioritize na ung parang... ang hirap pong.. katulad sa aming... sa mga estudyante po. 'di ba ang dami na pong ginagawa assignment, projects (trans. We simply have others things to prioritize. For us students, we have lots of assignments and projects)

Another important block to participation was what they observe to be the lack of encouragement from others. As one participant expressed:

Pero kung tutulong po ako tapos ung tao ung parang susumbatan pa ako kasi naman hindi ko kailangan ng tulong ... parang nawawalan po ako ng gana. (trans. If I will extend myself to others and yet I will hear someone who doesn't appreciate it, I don't really need help... it seems like I'm losing my interest)

Promoters of Political Participation

There were five important themes that emerged from the participants' responses to the question regarding what can facilitate their political participation. The first theme had to do with trust in oneself. The statements on this theme were all similar and were best represented in one of the participants' statement:

kaya po lahat ng di mo makakayang gawin eh magagawa mo pag may tiwala ka sa iyong sarili. at kung may tiwala ka sa sarili mo kaya mong gawin lahat para sa ikakabuti ng sarili mo (trans. that is why everything you think you won't be able to do, you'd be able to do it if you trust yourself. With it, you can also do everything for your betterment)

The second theme was related to the young person's courage and determination, which the participants often referred to as "*lakas ng loob*," or what can be referred to as the strength of the inner self. According to the participants, a young person would have to have resolve and not to waiver when facing challenges or when accomplishing a task. Here were some excerpts from the participants' responses:

Dapat lang po eh lakas ng loob.. ang hahadlang eh balewalain lang po. (trans. All you need is strength of the inner self... you'll disregard everything that will hamper [your goals.]

Determinado ka sa lahat ng bagay, determinado ka sa lahat ng gawain mo. (trans. You are determined in all aspects, in all your activities.)

Para wala pong takot na kung sino man po.. dapat laang po eh lakas ng loob, ang hahadlang eh balewalain lang po. (trans. It's like you don't have fear, no matter who they are, it is only a matter of strength of the inner self, you'll disregard everything that will block your way.)

A third theme had to do with the possession of knowledge. Growing in knowledge was important to enable one to reach a certain level of maturity to address social and moral problems. This theme was best captured by the following statement from a participant: "*Para sa akin po eh yung paganahin po iyong utak, kasi po matured na naman kami kaya dapat paganahin yung utak namin.*" (trans. Personally, I think you just have to use your head, we are all matured people so it's only fitting for us to use our heads.)

The fourth theme was concerned with the sense of commitment one has in performing one's duties in society. This commitment or devotion to duty was expressed in the following statement from a participant: "*Sa mahalin mo ang ginagawa mo ... gusto ko itong trabahong ito, mahal ko itong trabahong ito, bakit ko gagawin itong trabahong ito kung makakasama sa akin.*" (trans. Just love whatever you're doing ... I like my job, I love it, why will I do this job if it will only put me to harm.)

The last had to do with the support provided by the family. The family would serve as an inspiration and strength to move into the world and engage in its activities. The love found in the family prevented one from doing acts detrimental to others in society. One participant expressed this in a particular way:

kasi po ang pamilya po ay isang inspirasyon po. Kunyari ang isang bagay na gusto mong gawin, siempre iisipin mo lang pamilya na kaya ko itong gawin. Kaya po nagagawang makihalubilo ng isang kabataan sa ibang tao. (trans. family is one of many inspirations. For example, you will think of your family whenever you want to do something. It will make you feel that you can do it. For this reason, the youth is able to mingle with others.)

In summary, different themes on the forms of political engagement, and the barriers to and promoters of engagement highlighted the importance given by the youth to the interactions with others in the conduct of political activities. The emphasis on prosocial behaviors as forms of political action and the encouragement from others as an important support for the maintenance of political action was noteworthy. The young people of the study seemed to regard self-related factors as the main impetus for action. The inner courage, a sense of determination, a resolve to increase one's knowledge, and an emphasis on commitment to the performance of one's duties were indicative of the youth awareness that political action springs from within and not from inducements from others. The succeeding section would have us compare the differences in notions of political engagement between the youth from urban environments and those from rural environment. Table 1 indicated the presence and absence of the above-mentioned themes in the discussions of the youth in these environments.

It was evident that among the urban youth, political participation takes the form of exercising what they are expected to do as youth and as citizens of society. In some instances, when political mass actions are staged, they saw these as opportunities for engagement. Among the rural youth, political engagement involved a movement towards others and into the community.

TABLE 1
*Themes for each dimension among the youth in urban
 and rural environments*

Dimension	Themes among Urban Youth Participants	Themes among Rural Youth Participants	Themes common to Urban and Rural Youth Participants
Forms of Participation	Focusing on one's studies Participating in mass actions Being good citizens by observing laws	Engaging in Prosocial Acts Making use of available community resources and opportunities	Avoiding engaging in criminal activities
Blocks to Participation	Lack of time	Lack of self-efficacy, lack of trust in one's capacities	No appreciation from others for young person's political engagement
Promoters of Participation	Commitment to one's civic duties	Trust in oneself Growth in knowledge Support from the family	

The blocks for participation among the rural youth would therefore be that which would hinder this movement, which they find to reside within themselves, i.e., when they no longer have trust in themselves, when they no longer have a sense of self-efficacy. Among the urban youth, it was important that they have time to focus on their studies and participate in political

activities. Compared to the rural youth, the blocks presented by the urban youth did not reside within the self, but in the way by which their lives are structured around activities that need to be performed in their daily lives. Both groups, however, emphasized the importance of others' judgment of their behavior as political actors. It is apparent that importance is being placed on the encouragement whenever acts of engagement were exhibited. There seemed to be a need for these acts to be validated by their social world to establish the impact of their acts on others.

The emphasis on citizenship was apparent among the urban youth. They described their engagement to be facilitated by a sense of devotion and commitment to their civic duties, which is not highlighted in the rural youth's discussion. The rural youth, on the other hand, placed greater emphasis on the self and self-growth, and on the value of the family as another source of action.

DISCUSSION

The study is conducted to explore young people's notions of political participation and to uncover the possibility of discovering differences among the youth based in urban and rural environments. The findings show that political participation is conceived in at least two ways among the youth in this study. The first way is to view participation in terms of doing one's duty, to perform what is expected, and not to engage in behaviors that are detrimental to the peaceful and orderly existence of the community. The second way is to see participation in terms of one's connection with others and with one's community. The first notion of political participation, articulated mostly by the urban youth in this study, is a common notion of political participation in civic education. More emphasis seems to be placed on civic responsibility, rather than on "making a difference." The second notion of political participation is found to be expressed mostly by the youth in rural environments. They see participation in terms of varied forms of assistance they may provide to others in society, and in terms of their involvement in community activities. These results are analogous to the findings of Amon, et al. (2008) which shows that teenagers in urban communities are more centered on the activities in their homes, while rural teenagers are more community centered. It should be noted that the urban-rural juxtaposition presented here with regard to the youth's political participation does not fully explore the dimensions of the two environments presented earlier. Future studies need to take up the suggested differences explored in the present study. Evidence needs to be provided to establish the

linkage between contextual features vis-à-vis the political action and activities of Filipino adolescents.

What the findings of the present study suggest is that political participation among the rural youth may be more centered on building social capital, and as such, much of the political actions they find themselves engaged in revolve around the elements of social capital (Kahne & Sporte, 2008). Participation in social networks, being involved in interactions that serve to enhance trust in leaders and institutions, and behaving in ways that serve to reinforce community norms, form the avenues for political socialization for the rural youth. The rural youth participants in the study talk about the relations within the family as a facilitator of their engagement in political actions. The importance of social relations in promoting political participation leads us to the notion of social capital.

Amon, et al. (2008) have defined social capital to be made up of social networks, trust among people, community institutions and community leaders, and the norms of reciprocity. In their review of the literature on the conceptual model provided by social capital, Ebstyne King and Furrow (2008) point out these three aspects of social capital by referring to these in terms of structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions. The structural dimension, according to these authors, relates to the location and frequency of interactions within a given social structure. The frequency of contacts with family members is an example of the structure of social capital. The relational dimension refers to the quality of relationships built on trust, which form the basis of reciprocity. Finally, the cognitive dimension involves a shared vision that helps in the achievement of expectations and collective goals within a social system. Therefore, the cognitive and socio-emotional skills, and the social networks that develop when a person participates in public life are in themselves forms of social capital (Winter, 2003).

The study of social capital is said to be the foundation by which civic participation and engagement can be understood (Winter, 2003). Kahne and Sporte (2008), for example, mentions the association that exists between the reciprocity and concern witnessed by young people in homes, schools, and neighborhoods, and their commitment to civic participation. The exposure to interactions that display social capital provide the youth with the mental models and value orientations to behave in socially committed ways. Kahne and Sporte (2008) observes that higher levels of commitment to civic participation are reported by the youth who regard their communities as places where youth are cared for and where adults work to make the community better. It is the enhanced opportunities for socialization into the dimensions of social capital, or for socialization into the norms, social

networks, and relationships that make for the close bond between the young person and the community (Bauch, 2001).

Indeed, both rural- and urban-based youth in the present study construe political participation in terms of relationships with others. Specifically, they claim that their capacity to participate and their being empowered are brought about by the endorsement of significant people in their social groups. What may be evident here is how the cognitive dimension of social capital can be an important driving force for participation for the Filipino youth. It seems that the Filipino adolescent needs to know that his or her actions in the community are consistent with the expectations of others within the group. Again, there is a need to probe into this aspect of political action among the youth in the next studies.

However, the present findings suggest that the youth in urban and rural communities may be politically socialized in different ways. It is evident from the findings that, in contrast to their rural counterpart, the young person in an urban environment is exposed to political action as described in ways that involve one's performance of civic duties, or in one's compliance to government laws and ordinances. This type of political action is perhaps what the youth learn in the classroom. These youth are also exposed to mass action as documented by media. They, then, see participation in these actions as possible ways of engaging themselves politically. Therefore, for the urban youth in this study, political engagement takes the form of those actions described in school courses on citizenship, or documented in media. Social capital in the form of community activities and interactions may not have so profound an effect on the political socialization of these youth, as these have among their rural-based counterparts. However, it is likewise possible that this trend is observable only among the respondents of the present study selected by school authorities to participate in the study because of their initiative in school-related tasks. These students may therefore be those who are active in school activities on citizenship and are more influenced by these activities than the other urban-based youth who did not participate in the study.

Nevertheless, the differences initially evident in the political participation among the urban and rural youth seem to clarify the contradiction posed in the McCann Erickson Youth Study (as cited in Mendoza, 2001) and the monograph of Lanuza (n.d.). Some of the youth who are regarded as inactive, non-participative, and cynical may have expressed their participation elsewhere in varied forms as indicated in the study. This also implies that the political participation of the youth may be seen as broad spectrum of actions through differing patterns of socialization. Forms of participation

will eventually depend on several factors: the expectation of reference groups like the family, the practices of participation the young person is exposed to, and the understanding the young person has of his or her own identity as a political actor and of his or her role within the community.

In addition, the consequences of socialization experiences can be seen in what the respondents view as blocks to their engagement. The urban-based youth see blocks that are largely external, while the rural youth see themselves as responsible for any lack of participation. This trend evident in the data leads to the possibility of observing differences in political agency. As mentioned earlier, agency is a fusion of positive sense of self, values, self-efficacy beliefs, and a determination to initiate and sustain a behavior (Caprara & Steca, 2007; Kuperminc, et al., 2004). This is the picture given by the rural youth in their descriptions of what it takes to be politically active: to have trust in one's capacity to deal with challenges. Will this construction of political participation lead to the hypothesis that the sense of political agency may be more enhanced among the rural youth?

It is important to reiterate here that common to both categories of participants is their view about how important the appreciation of others is in the maintenance of their political actions. This finding is consistent with Tedin's (1980) statement that underscore the exercise of political agency occurring only when there are opportunities to communicate ideas with others, and when there is a receptivity of these ideas by significant others. For both rural and urban youth, the lack of recognition is expressed and stressed as an important factor that can lead them to disengage. This lack of recognition may be what the youth are experiencing if we take into account once again the present observations of apathy and disengagement among the Filipino youth. In what ways, under what conditions, and through which messages are the youth experiencing this lack of recognition is important to be explored in further studies.

Another interesting point emerging from the analysis is the difference that can be noted between the urban and rural samples in their views about the role of schooling in their participation. Among the urban youth respondents, schooling is considered to be in itself a form of participation. They would say, for example, that they become most effective agents of change when they study well. Among the rural youth respondents, on the other hand, schooling or opportunities for educating oneself, is a promoter of participation. Among these young respondents, the school serves as a transition in terms of the knowledge gained in this setting to the performance of their roles within the community. Therefore, for the rural youth, school provides the avenue for eventual community involvement; for the urban

youth respondents, on the other hand, the school provides the venue for participation. This difference in viewpoints apparent between the two respondent groups highlights once again the possible differences in messages regarding political participation in the school in the two environments. Further studies can look deeper into the values and norms prevalent in rural and urban school settings as the young person prepares for community involvement.

The validity and trustworthiness of the findings of this study need to be gauged against its limitations. As mentioned, the students who took part in the discussions are purposively selected by school administrators. Their criteria for selection may have contributed to the bias in the responses from both environments. Moreover, the selection of schools is likewise done by convenience. The respondents who took part in the study may not be representative of the youth in both environments. It also has to be noted that the use of focus groups affords the researcher access to self-report data. The present researchers are aware that the nature of data consists of perceptions and are gathered to address the research questions.

These limitations prompt the conduct of future researches that will allow more definitive conclusions regarding the young Filipino's political participation. Several hypotheses may be tested in more quantitative studies. More qualitative studies may be undertaken with other student groups in other school sites. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods will allow a deepening of our understanding of the contexts that shape political participation among the Filipino youth.

The results of this study, however, allow us to draw several conclusions about political participation among the youth respondents in the study. Political participation entails the recognition of one's agency. Moreover, the young person's world of political participation incorporates the others' support and approval of youth's actions as they engage in political participation. It can therefore be said that the opportunities to have their views heard by others provide Filipino adolescents with the social conditions to express their political agency.

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APPENDIX A

Guide questions for the Focused Group Discussions

1. Sa palagay ninyo, anu-ano ang mahahalagang problema ng ating lipunan?
2. Ano kaya ang mga problemang nararanasan ng mga kabataan
3. Saan ninyo nakukuha ang impormasyon tungkol dito?
4. Bilang kabataan ano naman ang pwede nyong gawin para mabago yung mga problemang ito?
5. Ano kaya ang mga mahahalagang bagay na matututunan mo sa inyong pakikilahok para mabago ang ating lipunan?
6. Anu-ano kaya ang mga maaaring tumulong sa inyong pakikilahok?
7. Anu-ano kaya ang mga maaaring humadlang sa inyong pakikilahok?

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