

Justice in the Philippine political and socio-economic environments

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ABSTRACT

This research sought to find out the key informants' "positive" or "negative" perceptions about justice in the Philippine political and socio-economic environments. This study utilizes the descriptive-qualitative inquiry. Results show more negative perceptions than the positive outlook. Conclusively, the government needs more efforts to strengthen its current political and socio-economic programs vital towards the nation's progress.

Keywords: key informants, perceptions about justice, Philippine political and socio-economic environments

I. INTRODUCTION

The famous political philosopher Voltaire during the Enlightenment Period about 17th to 18th century C.E. mentioned, "It is dangerous to be good when the government is wrong (Quotations Page, 1994-2015). It is very hard to run counter against the government when critics believe that the government is anomalous or else the government is, in fact, anomalous. This is where people may negatively interpret the actions of the government, thinking of their lives and the spirit of democracy (if one practices it) and the laws if it is properly implemented to all citizens of a state. This is vital in the interpretation of justice.

In a state where the government exercises its mandate coming from the people regardless of political orientation and ideology justice should be compensated in such a way that political, social, and economic equality is observed.

In the Philippines, political and socio-economic inequalities exist despite the government's preventive and corrective measures to alleviate problems like corruption, unemployment, inflation or stagflation, the scarcity or shortage of food, criminalities and illegal drug problems, political dynasties and any kind of problems to mention a few are some of the causes of the wide disparity between the rich and the poor.

This research sought to find out the key informants'

"positive" or "negative" perceptions about justice in the Philippine political and socio-economic environments. As a result, the Philippine government needs more efforts to strengthen its current political and socio-economic programs vital towards the nation's progress.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Akin with the focus of the research vis-à-vis key informants' "positive" or "negative" perceptions about justice in the Philippine political and socio-economic environments, the research relied on John Rawls' principles in his "A Theory of Justice" (Ebenstein & Ebenstein, 2000):



Figure 1. Rawls' Two Principles of Justice on the Philippine Socio-Economic Environment.

First Principle. Each person is entitled to have equal rights to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.

Second Principle. Social and economic inequalities are

to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle; and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

The first principle is also known as the Principle of Equal Basic Liberties and the second, Fair Equality of Opportunity and Difference Principle. Being a pre-requisite to the second, the two principles are in chronological order of importance. Elaborately, Rawls' principles of justice are in lexical or serial order, meaning that the first principle is more important than the second. More importantly, that equal basic liberties cannot be sacrificed for the greater social or economic benefits. Rawls values rights such as freedom of speech and expression, and political participation rights, above economic opportunities (Ebenstein & Ebenstein, 2000).

The first principle stipulates equality of rights for all citizens in a state. If the former principle has been satisfied, the second principle focuses on the equality of the socio-economic opportunities of the citizens of a state being beneficial to the greatest of the least advantaged in society. Specifically, the first part of the second principle stresses on fair equality of opportunity among citizens and the second part of the second principle is the difference principle or *maximin* (maximizing the minimum) (Ebenstein & Ebenstein, 2000).

Central to the theory is a belief in the rationality of human nature and dynamics. In a well-ordered society, men's natural sentiments will prove to be both unified and stable and they will not permit morally arbitrary advantages to influence their social arrangements. Rawls's theory offers a rational accommodation of freedom and equality (Chapman, 1975).

Stumpf and Fiese (2005) mentions Plato's interpretation of justice in his Republic which both authors mention, "A fourth virtue, justice is attained for justice means giving to each its own due. Justice, then, is the general virtue, which reflects a person's attainment of well-being and inner harmony, which in turn, is achieved only when every part of the soul is fulfilling its proper function."

Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, J., and Meyer, (1990) mentions that, "Individuals should be treated the same, unless they differ in ways that are relevant to the situation in which they are involved."

Cicero (2000) put emphasis on the rule of law. As cited in the book of Ebenstein and Ebenstein, he said that although "we cannot agree to equalize men's wealth, and equality

of innate ability is impossible, the legal rights at least of those who are citizens of the same commonwealth ought to be equal."

St. Aquinas has contention of justice as distributive, which concerns the way in which collective goods and responsibilities are (fairly apportioned among people who stand in a social community (In NE V. 927). Yet with respect to distributive justice, what a person receives is not a matter of equal quantity but "due proportion" (ST II-II 61.2) (Floyd, Shawn, 2006).

In line with John Rawls' socio-economic principle, Jonathan Wolff's prioritarian perspective stresses out that the government's role is to focus more on those who are "underprivileged" and/or "poor" in the society. The goal of social justice is not so much to achieve an equal distribution of material goods, but to create a society in which each individual can think of themselves as valued as equal (McKinnon, 2008).

In the 1987 Philippine Constitution, the rights of its citizens are safeguarded and protected against encroachment. The following are some of its (Constitution) provisions, to wit: Article II, Declaration of Principles and State Policies; Article III, Bill of Rights; and Article XIII, Social Justice and Human Rights.

Rolando Suarez (2005) mentioned three essential parts of a written constitution. One of which is the Constitution of Liberty, which "contains the fundamental civil and political rights of the citizens as well as the limitations of the powers of the government to see to it that the said rights are guaranteed by the Constitution to every citizen but also prescribes the limitations whenever such rights are violated.

This is the Bill of Rights which per Dannug and Campanilla (2004) is a statement of individual liberties, freedoms, and rights which residents and sojourners in the Philippines, Filipino or foreigner, enjoy against exertion of government power.

On the other hand, Hector S. De Leon (1999) in his book mentioned that Social Justice is not a mere catchy slogan to express concern for the plight of the poor and the downtrodden. It requires the adoption by the State (Government) of measures that guarantee the right of all people to equality of opportunity in all fields of human endeavor and to equitable sharing of the fruits of social and economic development with special emphasis to such measures that ameliorate the standard of living of the unprivileged groups. The end of social justice measures or programs should be to assure that "those who are less favored in life must be more favored in law." This holds true under the two principles that has been espoused by John Rawls.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a qualitative description of the key informants' "positive" or "negative" perceptions about justice in the Philippine political and socio-economic environments.

The researcher employed a non-probability purposive theoretical sampling where each informant was at least 18 years old, aware, and conversant of about justice in the Philippine political and socio-economic environments. Informants as much as possible possessed good reputation and integrity in society along gender, civil status, income or economic status and educational background. In addition, the informants' credibility concerning the requirements as an informant of this research was determined through a background investigation that was conducted prior to the actual interview.

The place of study was concentrated in Cebu City where the research informants were affiliated, reside or work.

Interview Guide. The research instrument comprised two primary questions namely: Justice in the (a) Philippine Political Environment and (b) Philippine Socio-Economic Environment.

Expert professors evaluated the content of all the guide questions which are at the same time translated to the language that is comprehensible to the key informants.

Interviews. The semistructured interviews were done to key informants using the guide questions. As such, follow up questions were allowed to further clarify the answers provided by the key informants. Observations and responses were noted and tape recorded to arrive at reflections and field-notes towards the output of data analysis.

Until saturated, the data were analyzed per positive and negative perceivers, then tabulated, to arrive at the results using the qualitative scale which indicates: (1) Positive Perceptions (affirmative" responses from the Cebuano perceivers about justice in the Philippine political and socio-economic environments); and (2) Negative Perceptions by Key Informants means that these are "not so affirmative" responses from the Cebuano perceivers about justice in the Philippine political and socio-economic environments.

The key informants of this study are guaranteed: (1) privacy of common information that may be detrimental to them; (2) accuracy and confirmability of the data free from undue influence towards data rigor. The study is REC exempt since the context of the study is of public interest.

Table 1
Key Informants' Demographic Profile

KEY INFORMANTS	QUALITATIVE DEMOGRAPHICS				
	AGE	GENDER	CIVIL STATUS	ESTIMATED INCOME (K)	EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
A	34	Female	Married	undisclosed	MA Psychology (18 units)
B	24	Female	Married	undisclosed	First Year LLB
C	75	Male	Married	undisclosed	AB, BSE, LLB, MA, Ed.D
D	52	Female	Married	not fixed	undisclosed
E	44	Female	Married	not fixed	undisclosed
F	27	Male	Single	not fixed	High School
G	38	Female	Married	est. 168	BEED, MA (9 units)
H	35	Male	Single	est. 144	BSED, MAEd (CAR)
I	40	Male	Married	est. 252	MA, Ed.D units
J	45	Female	Married	est. 200	Ed.D
K	28	Female	Married	est. 144	BSE
L	28	Male	Single	est. 240	DM units
M	52	Male	Married	est. 420	CPA, LLB, MPA
N	49	Male	Married	est. 375	MNSA
O	22	Male	Single	est.120-132	MPA units
P	55	Male	Married	not fixed	College Grad
Q	37	Female	Married	not fixed	College Grad
R	43	Female	Married	not fixed	College Grad
S	30	Male	Single	unestimated	Graduate
T	38	Male	Married	unestimated	Studies
U	38	Male	Married	unestimated	College Grad
V	20	Male	Single	none	Education Grad
W	32	Female	Married	est. 312	AB Pol. Sci. (Student)
X	71	Male	Married	est. 312	MedTech, MPA,DPA
Y	54	Male	Married	undisclosed	College Grad
Z	40	Female	Single	undisclosed	Pre-Med and Law Grad
AA	31	Female	Married	undisclosed	AB, LLB
BB	31	Male	Single	est. 180	LLB (First Year)
CC	40	Male	Married	est. 168	DM Graduate
DD	47	Male	Married	est. 180	BS Math
EE	52	Male	Married	undisclosed	College Grad
				undisclosed	College Grad

Table 2
Key Informants Responses

Perceptions About Justice In the Philippines		CEBUANO POSITIVE/NEGATIVE PERCEIVERS
Political Environment	<p>The following are the positive responses from the informants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the government has served all under existing laws though it could not please all citizens; • legal services in the government are for free; • there is the existing peace and order and traffic enforcement; • the government's attempt to solve problems of • inequality and human rights violations; • the government's observance of the Constitution; • the government has protected the rights of the employers and the employees in balancing interest; and • the stability of the current political system. 	<p>The following negative perceptions are cited from the informants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the insufficient legal assistance for the poor from the government and the poor could not hire competent lawyers to protect them; • the right of the poor is bought during elections; • police demolition without prior notice; • government officials participation in illegal activities; • the partial decision of the judge when bearing a case; • the poor are unprotected compared to rich perpetrators of a crime who could easily be freed including high ranking officials; • problem on corruption; • lack of enabling laws that should safeguard the rights of the farmers; • fear from military aggression; • CARP not properly implemented; • violation of some of the rights of the workers to just compensation, association and the union organization; • illegal retrenchment of workers without prior notice; • Christians and non-Christians believed that there are bills processed in Congress that would undermine the dignity of the human person like the use of artificial method of birth control; • political conflict of relatives against relatives; • extra judicial killings; • religious discrimination especially experienced by the Moslems; • justice is bought by those in power; • liberty can only be attained if one has the access to resources, money and influences; • killing of media personalities; and • there are laws to protect the people but their implementation is the government's failure.
Socio-Economic Environment	<p>The positive informants believed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it is man who conditions his own economic status in the society; • the government has programs and policies for the poor like the NFA rice for the poor, TESDA training, DepEd program and the development of manpower; and • one can avail of government programs when one has knowledge about the operations of the government. 	<p>The following negative perceptions are revealed from the informants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the government has not catered to the needs of the poor majority; • the government has been very corrupt and getting officials are getting richer and inequality between rich and poor widened; • worsening condition of the poor; • the poor access to government services like health and education; • imperialism, feudalism and capitalism brought about by large investors in the Philippines; • only those near the government can access its programs especially in the barangay level; • less benefits for factory workers; • government programs for the poor has not reached the poor constituents; • government's high dependence to imperialist domination and its policies of privatization, deregulation and liberalization which causes market price increases; • the government has not reached the grass roots because of the wrong priorities and allocation of governmental budget; • government publicity; • politicians are using the poor for their interest and benefit; • problem on the set-up and the slow process of programs in the government; • the programs of the government are not for long-term solutions and has not solved the problem of poverty; • the poor remains poor because programs are not aggressively prioritized and implemented; and • the government is not sensitive to the needs of the poor.
Socio-Economic Environment	<p>The informants with positive perceptions gave the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the government provides opportunities for all; • there is fairness or equality in the government's hiring process as well as opportunities in private institutions; • government hiring is open to all; • there is equality between men and women; • private companies based their hiring on technical qualification; • one has to know the government's hiring process and its opportunity is open to all to get a job; and • recognizes the government's effort in giving equal opportunities for all and the fairness in the private institutions. 	<p>The similarities among the negative perceptions of the informants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the insufficient qualifications of some of the employees in the government; • it is difficult to get a job in both private and public institutions of "palakasay" or to whom you know basis; • some private companies hire only applicants "with pleasing personality" and the school background; • those who are near the government are those who are given work opportunity; • private and public institutions are handled by political dynasties; • government hiring is the discretionary power of persons in authority; • there should be modification in the government scheme for hiring; • those that are hired are products of expensive schools; and • inequalities on gender and age when applying for positions in the private and public institutions.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The key informants' perceptions about justice in the Philippine political and socio-economic environments were categorized into positive and negative perceivers, consequently processed and analyzed to arrive at results.

The array above indicates the political and socio-economic issues raised by the informants. Generally, perceivers believed to have been confronted with political concerns related to legal assistance, illegal retrenchment, peace and order including extra-judicial killings, farmers rights, problems on corruption, military aggression and political dynasties. For socio-economic conditions, informants raised issues related to poverty, poor access to government's programs due to corruption, labor matters/hiring issues on employment to include *palakasan* (roughly translated as influence and whom you know) and discrimination.

V. CONCLUSION

Key informants perceived justice in the Philippine political and socio-economic environments more negative than positive. This varies per the benefit each one gets from the government. Since there are more negative perceptions, this indicates that the government needs more efforts to strengthen its current political and socio-economic programs that is vital towards the nation's progress.

There is a need to meet all conditions to attain progress in line with the government's current political and socio-economic programs. The following are recommended: (1) people's civic education that is necessary to promote awareness through information dissemination in all forms, means and ways; (2) Government platforms and/or programs that require stakeholders' consultations through dialogues, forums

and other avenues towards participatory governance from the smallest unit barangay, all people's organizations and non-government organizations to the largest scope of the national government; (3) government's rational and actual decisions that should be anchored on its priority agenda in compliance with the rule of law; (4) government needs to intensify discipline in all forms by implementing laws that will mitigate the political and socio-economic problems in the society; and (5) other mechanisms and/or initiatives that is in aid of governance.

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