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Demystifying Politics: A Case Study on Students' Perception of Politics as a Foundation for Political Engagement

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Abstract

Our lives are shaped by politics and yet, many specifically the students find it complex or even untrustworthy. This study explores how students perceive politics and how these perceptions influence their willingness to engage in political activities. Through interviews, insights from students across different academic backgrounds are gathered and collected. The results show that while many students see politics as a tool for governance and social change, others associate it with corruption and conflict, leading to disengagement. However, students with a more positive understanding of politics are more inclined to vote and participate in discussions. This study emphasizes the importance of political education in fostering critical thinking and civic responsibility. By breaking down misconceptions and making politics more accessible, it can encourage young people to take an active role in shaping their communities and the world around them.

Keywords: Political engagement, students' perception, civic responsibility, political education, youth participation

Introduction

Greek origins of the term "politics," is derived from "politikos," which means matters of the "polis" (city-state). In ancient Greece, "politikos" related to the role of citizens in governance, law-making, and public administration, which laid the foundation for modern political thought and the study of political systems (Cohen, S. M. 2000) [3].

The Greek philosopher Aristotle stated that man is by nature a political animal (Stumpf, 1999) [16] and highlighted that the essence of human existence is politics. Human beings are inherently social, and the central of human life is politics. According to Aristotle, participation in political communities is essential to human nature and the realization of a meaningful life, emphasizing the role of governance and societal engagement in shaping human existence. Indeed, politics, a term often fraught with complexity and controversy, permeates nearly every aspect of societal functioning. It exists everywhere. It is evident in our daily lives. It has been and always will be a part of human existence. Scholars such as Bennett and Levine (2017) [2] argue that traditional definitions of politics focused on formal governmental structures and electoral processes are increasingly inadequate in capturing the full scope of political engagement today.

What happens when the youth who are considered as the future political leaders decline to participate in any political activities? Putnam (2000) [15] stated that the declining civic engagement in the United States, attributing part of this trend to a lack of social capital among younger generations. He argues that young people are less involved in traditional civic organizations, including political parties, due to factors such as increased screen time, individualism, and social isolation. Norris, P. (2003) [13] explores generational differences in political participation, observing that younger people are more skeptical of party politics and less likely to vote than older generations. Henn, M., & Foard, N. examines the reasons why young people in Britain are often disengaged from politics, citing factors like a lack of trust in politicians and the feeling that their voices do not matter. It finds that many youths see politics as corrupt or unrepresentative, which discourages them from participating

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in formal political activities.

Young people often view politics with skepticism, associating it with corruption and inefficiency. However, it also shows that students who participate in civic organizations and school-led political activities demonstrate higher political engagement and a more positive perception of politics (Tuazon, R. (2015) ^[17]. Students with a higher sense of political efficacy have more constructive perceptions of politics and are more likely to participate in political discussions and activities (Garcia, H. F. (2019) ^[9].

Roxas, a municipality in Oriental Mindoro, offers a compelling and meaningful backdrop for this study. Nestled within a province known for its rich cultural heritage and evolving political landscape, Roxas stands out as a community where tradition and modernity intersect. Despite its relatively small size, the municipality is a hub of social and political activity, where local governance, education, and civic engagement play integral roles in shaping the perspectives of its people.

At the heart of this study is the youth—the students whose views and political awareness reflect not only their immediate surroundings but also broader societal trends. As young individuals growing up in an era of rapid information exchange, they are exposed to a wide range of political ideologies, governance styles, and civic responsibilities.

This study, therefore, is more than just an exploration of political opinions; it is a reflection of the evolving consciousness of the youth in Roxas. It seeks to understand how they view their duties and responsibilities as future leaders and decision-makers, and how their perspectives contribute to the larger political narrative of the region and, potentially, the country. By giving these young voices a platform, this research aims to highlight their thoughts, aspirations, and the factors influencing their political awareness, ultimately recognizing their role as active participants in the democratic process.

This study aimed to explore how students in Roxas, Oriental Mindoro, perceive politics and how this understanding influences their political participation. The following are the research questions that led to this study:

1. What is politics? This question aims to understand the student's basic definition and personal view of politics
2. What is political engagement? This question aims to gather the students' opinions on the importance and impact of being politically active.
3. How does political education influence political engagement? This question explores the students' views on the importance of political education in fostering active political participation

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design utilizing semi-structured interviews to provide an in-depth understanding of the students' definitions and perceptions of politics and political engagement. The qualitative approach is particularly suited for exploring complex social phenomena, such as political views, as it allows researchers to capture the nuances of individual experiences and perspectives. Selected college students from Roxas, oriental Mindoro, ages 18-24 were chosen through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives. Participants were selected based on their active involvement in school organizations and community activities, which indicated a higher likelihood of engagement with political issues.

Interviews were scheduled at convenient times and locations of the participants. Individual interviews were conducted to explore their political awareness. These allowed for open-ended discussions that provided deeper insights into personal experiences and beliefs.

The data collected from research participants was analyzed using thematic coding analysis in this study. This process began with the transcription of interviews and focus group discussions, ensuring that participants' responses were accurately documented.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose and procedures, and benefits. They were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences, and written informed consent is obtained from all participants before data collection begins. The participants were assured of confidentiality and the anonymity of the data. Participants were informed that they can refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any point without any negative repercussions.

Results and Discussion

What is politics?

Decision-making

For Participants 1 and 4 (P1 and P4) politics is all about decision-making, specifically, the choice of who gets to lead. P1 simply explained: "People choose and decide who will lead and guide in terms of politics. Ang nanalo, dapat tough sa pagdedecide, yan ang pulitika." Moreover Participant 4 added "politics play an important role in society, kase without it, magulo! Ang mga pulitiko, once elected, nag-iiba na! Politics? Magulo yan." Participant 6 added, "Sa May 2025 pa lng naman ako boboto pero olitics, to me, is the process of making and implementing decisions na nakakapekto sa lahat. It's not just about government; it also involves the relationships and rules that exist between people and institutions."

To them, politics isn't just about those in power; it is about the people deciding who should be given the responsibility to govern. This reflects the idea that leadership isn't just taken - it's given by the people through voting and participation. Their perspective highlights the power of choice in shaping the future, whether in a small community or an entire nation. This understanding also brings up important questions. How do people make these decisions? Are they informed, or are they influenced by outside factors? Exploring this viewpoint helps reveal how individuals see their role in governance and whether they feel empowered in the political process.

Governance

It is the cooperative effort of the government and the non-government bodies in public administration (UNDP, WB, IMF). Participant 2 however perceived politics in the concept of "bad governance" equating it with corruption. "Politics is corruption of those who governed. Kapag nakaupo na sa puwesto, kurakot na! May kilala ka ba na hinde corrupt?" However, participant 7 stated "Ang pulitika ay ang proseso na may kaugnayan sa pamamahala ng isang bansa, komunidad, o organisasyon. Kabilang dito ang mega paraan kung paano nahahalal ang mga pinuno, how laws are

made, and how issues concerning the society are resolved. Sa madaling salita, ang pulitika ay tungkol sa pamumuno, at pagtugon sa pangangailangan ng mga mamamayan wag lang saanag corrupt”.

This perspective reflects broader distrust in the public servants and political institutions, potentially leading to political apathy and disengagement. This may have been shaped by personal experiences, stories from her community, or the way politics is portrayed in the media. In places where political scandals, bribery, and abuse of power are common, it's not surprising that people start to equate politics with bad governance rather than progress.

Power and Authority

For Participant 3 (P3), politics is about power and authority, the ability to lead and manage, make decisions, and shape society. Politics isn't just about laws and policies; it is about who holds control and how they use it. “Power kase once they occupy a seat sa gobyerno, kala nila kaya na nila lahat. Authority kase since sila ay may posisyon, so influential sila.”. Participant 8 (P8) pointed out that politics is about power, leadership, and the resolution of societal issues through collective decision-making.

This perspective likely stems from witnessing how leaders, whether in government or the community, influence and shape people's lives through the choices they make and the actions they take.

Understanding politics as a system of power and authority presents both advantages and challenges. At one point, it highlights the pivotal role of leadership and structured governance in maintaining peace and order, implementing policies, and driving societal progress. Moreover, authority, when effectively practiced, ensures stability, and the enforcement of laws that protect peoples' rights and welfare. This perspective underscores the necessity of having designated leaders who make critical decisions on behalf of the people.

However, questions about fairness and accountability are to be put in consideration. Power can be unequally distributed, leading to concerns about who is influential, how decisions are made, and whether leadership genuinely reflects the welfare of the public. Furthermore, excessive authority without checks and balances can result in authoritarianism, where power serves the interests of a few rather than the greater good. This perspective provide valuable insights into how young people interpret power dynamics and their expectations for fair, inclusive governance.

Actions of the Government

For Participant 5 (P5), “Politics? Ito ung pano gumalaw ang taong gobyerno para magsilbi sa masa. Pulitika ang nagpapagalaw sa gobyerno. Minsan magulo, minsan maayos.” For P5 politics isn't just an abstract idea; it is something seen in action, shaping and influencing communities and daily life. Moreover, participant 8 mentioned “politics refers on how the government act to support ung mga kababayan natin, that applies to all, typically within a government or society. It involves pag gawa at agsasatupad ng batas at selection of leaders.

It reflects an understanding that politics plays a direct role in society, whether through public services, laws, or leadership decisions. At the same time, this view also raises important questions. How well does the government serve its people? Are leaders making fair and effective decisions? Exploring

this perspective alongside others helps build a fuller picture of how people experience and understand governance in their own lives.

What is political engagement?

Participants 1 and 5 (P1 and P5). Political engagement isn't just important, it is the foundation of a healthy democracy. When people choose their leaders, they shape the future of their communities and country. Without participation, democracy weakens, and decisions end up in the hands of a few rather than the many. Participant 1 put it simply: “Everyone of legal age must vote.” Moreover Participant 5 believed that for a government to truly represent its people, citizens had to take part in the process. “kahit nakakatakot, dapat at kailangang bumoto. Dapat may pakialam.”

Their view raises important questions. Are people making informed choices? Do they feel their votes truly matter? Exploring this perspective helps not just why political engagement is valued, but also the barriers that may prevent people from fully participating in the democratic process.

Participants 2 and 6 (P2 and P6). Emphasized that the youth (just like them) must be actively involved in politics. “I actually encouraged my cousin of same age to register and vote, and she did”, She explained. “As much as I can, lahat po ng mga kaedad ko, I encouraged them to vote. Being politically engaged po, di dapat natatapos sa pagboto lng. Matuto din tayong mag monitor kung tam aba o mali ang mga ginagawa ng ibinoto natin.” She believed that young people shouldn't just watch politics from the sidelines, they should be part of it. Being involved wasn't just important; it was a responsibility. This simple yet powerful action showed how engagement starts on a personal level. P2 was already making a difference by inspiring just one person to take part in the democratic process. Additionally, participant 6 defined political engagement as “eto yung paglahok ng isang individual sa mga activities or processes na related to politics. Pwedeng sa pagboto, attending political events, pagsali sa mga protests or simply expressing opinions on social issues para makaimpluwensya na din sa iba.”

It highlights a crucial reality: many young people feel disconnected from politics, thinking their voices don't matter. But Participant 2's experience proves otherwise—change starts with awareness, conversation, and action. Understanding this viewpoint helps reveal what drives young people to engage in politics and what challenges might hold others back. Moreover participant 6 emphasized that the goal of political engagement is to influence or have an impact on political decisions.

Participant 3 (P3). Political engagement allows citizens to influence the decisions of elected officials. Participant 3 acknowledged the significant role of the younger generation in shaping the future, stating, “I don't know how to further explain, but I know that the progress of one society relies as well on the actions of the younger generations today. *Dapat lahat ng botante, bumoto.* Magkaron tayo ng concern hinde lng sa ating sarili, pati sa kapwa natin Filipino. Wag itolerate ang mali.” This statement reflects that everyone has a responsibility to become actively engaged in politics, as the choices made today impact the development of society in the long run.

This reinforces the idea that political engagement extends beyond voting—it also includes civic participation, advocacy, and dialogue with leaders to push for meaningful change. Analyzing P3's perspective offers insight into how

individuals understand their role in governance and the importance of active participation in shaping policies and decisions that affect their communities.

Participants 4 and 8 (P4 and P8). Believed that political engagement is a fundamental way for individuals to exercise their rights and have a voice in their community. To P4, being involved in politics isn't just about voting, it's about actively participating in discussions, decision-making, and advocating for what is best for society. "Bawal ang tahimik, dapat may pakialam. Minsan, nakakatakot magsalita, kaya siguro ang mga Kabataan nawawalan na ng ganang makialam sa pulitika. Minsan nga, mas gusto ko pang manood ng K drama." P8 added that "Political engagement dapat lahat tayo ay engaged, makilahok.. Hinde yung puro reklamo lang. Isang paraan to pra mapakinggan tayong mga Filipino."

Participant 7 (P7). Ang political engagement ay tumutukoy sa mga aksyon ng mga mamamayan upang maging bahagi ng mga proseso ng pamahalaan at politika. Maaaring kabilang dito ang pagboto, being a member of an organisasyon. Siguro pwede ding isama yung pakikipag-usap sa mga lider ng komunidad. Ito ay nagpapakita ng pakialam at pananagutan ng isang tao sa mga isyung panlipunan. Yung may pakiaalam or awareness.

A politically aware and engaged population leads to more democratic and inclusive decision-making. However, it also brings attention to challenges, such as political apathy and misinformation, which can hinder meaningful participation. Understanding this perspective helps explore the factors that encourage or discourage civic engagement and how individuals perceive their role in shaping their society.

How does political education influence political engagement?

Participants 1 and 3. They emphasized the importance of political education, stating, "*Dapat tinuturo sa school para mas ma-educate kami kasi minsan, through social media lang kami nagiging aware kung ano nga ba ang politics so pano kami magiging involved kung di kami familiar?*" However, P3 believe that learning about politics from an early age has an advantage and disadvantages. "Ang advantage po, bata pa lang may pakialam na sa paligid while the disadvantage is maaga kaming namumulat sa maling sistema haha."

Their statement suggests that without proper education on political systems, governance, and civic duties, young people may struggle to understand their role in shaping society. Schools serve as a foundation for developing critical thinking, awareness of rights and responsibilities, and an understanding of how government functions. By integrating political education into the curriculum, students can gain the knowledge needed to make informed decisions, participate in discussions, and engage in democratic processes such as voting and advocacy.

This perspective raises important considerations about the accessibility and quality of political education. Are young people receiving adequate knowledge about political systems? How does early exposure to political education affect their engagement later in life? Examining their view provides insight into the role of education in strengthening political awareness and participation among the youth.

Participants 2, 4 and 5. "It can also help us to be actively involved if we are knowledgeable enough kung anon ga ba yang politics, political engagement etc," stated by

Participant 2. "Dapat nga elementary pa lng, tinuturo na yaan, pra mabawasan ang mga corrupt". Exclaimed by Participant 5. "It is of great help so we will have broader grasp on what and how to be engaged in politics. Sana sa mga susunod na generation ng mga Filipino, bata pa lng mamulat na sila sa tunay na mundo ng pulitika." participant 4 added.

They agreed that studying politics will provide a deeper understanding of political systems. Their statements is a clear reflection that learning about political processes can increase political engagement and understand how government works, making them more informed and confident in participating.

Participant 6. "By studying politics, students ay matututo about government systems, rights, and responsibilities. Ang knowledge or mga natutunan can increase their participation in political activities like voting and advocacy, which ultimately benefits the community or country."

She emphasized that political education is very important in school. It provides the knowledge necessary to become informed and responsible citizens. This clearly demonstrates that prior political knowledge can enhance political participation.

Participant 7. "Mahalaga ang pag-aaral ng pulitika sa paaralan. Sa pamamagitan nito, mauunawaan ng students kung ano kanilang mga karapatan at responsibilidad bilang responsible citizens. Natututo rin sila kung paano gumagana ang gobyerno at paano sila maaaring magbigay ng kontribusyon sa lipunan. Pero minsan, naisip ko, parang di tama na pag aralan kse masyadong exposed kaming mga Kabataan sa katiwalian ng pamahalaan. Negative na kase ang impression ko sa gobyerno".

Participant 8. Political education significantly influences political engagement by increasing individuals' political awareness. "Malaki ang influence ng pagkakaroon ng knowledge sa pulitika sa pagkakaroon ng active na political participation. Paanong magiging active kung walang alam. Pero dapat kmi mismong mga students must know how to filter kung ano yung information na dapat naming paniwalaan".

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into how selected students from Roxas, Oriental Mindoro define and perceive politics, and how these perceptions serve as foundations for their political engagement. The findings reveal that while many students recognize the importance of politics in governance and societal well-being, their views are often shaped by skepticism and disillusionment, particularly due to the prevalence of corruption and inefficiency in the political system. Politics, for some, is seen as a distant, complex, and sometimes corrupt institution, which discourages active participation.

However, this study also highlights that there is a significant opportunity to reshape these perceptions through proper education and engagement initiatives. Students who were exposed to civic education and active discussions about the importance of political participation were more likely to express interest in participating in political processes, even if they had previously viewed politics negatively.

The study was limited to the selected students of Roxas Oriental Mindoro, therefore, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how students perceive politics and how these perceptions influence their engagement, it is

recommended that similar studies be conducted in different locations, various academic institutions, and among students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Expanding the scope of research will help identify common trends, differences, and factors that shape political engagement among students, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and effective political education programs.

Schools, on the other hand, should create more opportunities for students to engage in open discussions about politics, helping them better understand its role in their lives. Encouraging debates, interactive lessons, and real-world activities can make political concepts more relatable and meaningful. Collaborating with local leaders and youth organizations can also give students hands-on experiences, inspiring them to take an active role in their communities.

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