

Trailblazing Political Engagement of Women in Zamboanga del Norte, Philippines

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Abstract

Women's political engagement has a very wide meaning. It is not only related to right to vote, but simultaneously relates to involvement in political decision making process, activism, consciousness, and run for public offices and political parties. This study looked into the women's political engagement in Zamboanga del Norte and trailblazing their potential to lead and politically engaged with. Descriptive survey method of research was used with questionnaire involving 1179 respondents. The study revealed that elected women were greatly engaged in executive, legislative, and judicial functions in the barangay. However, their engagement significantly differed between and among the three mandated functions. Trailblazing political engagement of women in the province is imperative to raise their engagement level to very great extent. It is necessary to take steps towards the ideological transformation of the political system, the party system, and, particularly, civil society, so that women themselves change their conduct and their expectations.

Keywords: trailblazing, political engagement, executive, legislative, judicial

1. Introduction

Women's development is an integral part of the focus of the Philippine government. The gender and development (GAD) model is an approach that focuses on social, economic, cultural, and political engagement of women towards recognizing women's forces to involve in, gain from, and control resources and activities for development. It recognizes the various roles, responsibilities, expectations, interest needs, and contribution of women in society and integrates women's concerns in the development process. Trailblazing political engagement of women is seen as a crucial factor that provides women to participate in planning, budgeting, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programs, activities, projects and services for development.

Albright (2015) asserted that every country deserves to have the best possible leader and women have to be given a chance to compete. It is pointed out that if women are never allowed to compete in the electoral process then the countries are really robbing themselves of a great deal of talent. It is believed that equitable participation of women in politics and government is essential to building and sustaining democracy. The National Democratic Institute (2016) averred that creative and wide-ranging programs, in both challenging environments where democracy is just beginning to flourish and in more established democracies, engage women in legislatures, political parties and civil society as leaders, activists and informed citizens, advocate on matters of policy, run for political office, be elected, govern effectively, and participate meaningfully in every facet of civic and political life.

However, from the local to the global level, women's leadership and political participation are underrepresented whether in elected office, the civil service, the private sector or academia (UN Women, 2015). Women face several obstacles to participating in political life (UN Development Fund for Women, 2008) despite their proven abilities as leaders and agents of change, and their right to participate equally in democratic governance.

The UN Women (2015) divulged further that the percentage of women has nearly doubled in the last 20 years in the global arena. This translates 22 percent globally in parliament today. In Zamboanga del Norte in the Philippines at present, women are occupying political seats in the barangay, municipal, city, and provincial levels. It is imperative, therefore, to determine women's political engagement in the province and trailblazing their potential to lead and politically engaged with. The study specifically looked into the profile of politically engaged women in the province in terms of age, educational qualification, political position occupied, and years of experience as elected official, determine the extent of engagement in the three mandated functions along executive, legislative, and judiciary, and find out significant differences in their political engagement as to their profile and their mandated functions. In so doing, it is expected that finding of the study enforces and emphasizes the needs and roles of women's engagement in building political culture of excellence.

2. Methods and Materials

This study employed the survey method of descriptive research with the aid of the questionnaire checklist. Data were collected through the questionnaire of the study which composed of two (2) parts, namely: the profile of the respondents in terms of age, educational qualification, political position occupied, and years of experience as elected official and the women's political engagement scale which was adopted from the study of Mabalot et al. (2012) with translation of the statements into "bisaya" to give all the respondents better understanding in responding the questionnaire. To draw out the responses of the respondents, a five (5) point Likert scale format was employed with qualitative descriptions as follows:

Scale	Range of Values	Description	Interpretation
5	4.21 – 5.00	Very Great Extent	Women are given full engagement/leadership in all activities and functions undertaken in their assigned post.
4	3.41 – 4.20	Great Extent	Women are given almost full engagement/leadership in all activities and functions undertaken in their assigned post.
3	2.61 – 3.40	Moderate Extent	Women are given average engagement/leadership in all activities and functions undertaken in their assigned post.
2	1.81 – 2.60	Little Extent	Women are given limited engagement/leadership in all activities and functions undertaken in their assigned post.
1	1.00 – 1.80	Very Little Extent	Women are given very limited engagement and/or leadership in all activities and functions undertaken in their assigned post.

There were 1179 respondents involved in the study out of 1229 elected women from the 691 barangays of Zamboanga del Norte with 25 municipalities and two cities. Frequency count, percent, weighted mean, Mann-Whitney U Test, Kruskal-Wallis H Test, Friedman Q Test, Wilcoxon Sign Ranks Test with Bonferroni-Adjusted significant level were used to facilitate the tabulation, analysis, and interpretation of data in the study.

3. Results

3.1 Profile of the Respondents

Figure 1 reveals that bulk of the elected women (62%) belonged to the age range 41 – 60 years old. This means that the age of elected women in the barangays of Zamboanga del Norte is within the requirement of the Local Government Code of 1991 which states that candidates for the position of chairman or members of the "Sanguniang Barangay" must be at least 18 years of age on the election day (R.A.7160, Title II, Chapter 1, Section 39). This implies that age requirement is strictly observed in the province. However, about 45 percent of the elected women reached elementary level with only 6 percent completed college. This means that all elected women are able to read and write. This implies that all women in the barangay posts also conform to the requirement of no literacy as provided by the Local Government Code of the Philippines.

Further, the figure shows that about 85 percent of the elected women occupied the barangay councilor position in which 46 percent had less than 5 years experience as elected official. This could mean that bigger quantity of women is serving as member of the policy making body of the barangay as first timer or second timer in the service. This implies that elected women engage in and yet less expose to executive, legislative, and judiciary functions in the barangay.

3.2 Extent of Engagement of Women in the Executive Functions

Table 1 shows that elected women were very greatly engaged in along enforcement of all laws and ordinances in the barangay and negotiating, entering into and sign contracts for and on behalf of the barangay upon authorization of the Sanguniang Barangay/Bayan. This means that women are given full engagement/leadership in all activities and functions undertaken along this line. This implies that even larger frequency of women is first timer or second termer in their post but they are provided with the opportunity to function as policy makers. However, women indicated that they were given great chance of participating in the other eight executive functions. This means that women have still the possibility of trailblazing engagement in the executive functions. Moreover, engagement of women in the executive activities was only described as great. This means that women have greatly represented in the Sanguniang Barangay and could still have developed their engagement in the executive branch of the barangay to a very great extent by putting into effect the barangay laws and their implementation.

3.3 Extent of Engagement of Women in the Legislative Functions

Table 2 divulges that women were given great engagement in all of the activities in their station relative to legislative functions. This means that women are greatly engaged in the formulation of ordinances and resolutions that enable their barangay constituents to achieve a better life and establish barangay development leading to the attainment of the barangay's mission and vision. However, the great engagement of women in the legislative activities of the barangay discloses that women greatly represented in the council but could still have the opportunity to trailblazing new ways of nurturing political culture of excellence.

3.4 Extent of Engagement of Women in the Judicial Functions

Table 3 shows that the ten judicial activities/functions were greatly observed in the barangays of Zamboanga del Norte including the two cities of Dipolog and Dapitan. This means that women are given almost full engagement/leadership in all judicial activities and functions undertaken in their assigned post. This implies that women are greatly engaged in ensuring that all laws passed are constitutional and do not go in any way against the Constitution. However, engagement of women in the judicial functions could still be elevated to a very great extent by trailblazing possible strategies towards establishing political culture of excellent.

3.5 Test of Difference in the Political Engagement of Women in the Three Mandated Functions as to Age

Significant variations occurred in the executive and legislative engagement of women when categorized into age (Table 4). This means that different age groups of women vary in their engagement in the executive and legislative functions. This could imply that older elected women perform better than the young ones along executive and legislative activities. However, the table reveals that no variation was observed in the engagement of elected women along judicial functions. This means that elected women are similarly involved in judicial activities regardless of age groups.

3.6 Test of Difference in the Political Engagement of Women in the Three Mandated Functions as to Educational Qualification

Table 5 shows that political engagement of women along executive and judicial functions differed significantly when analyzed as to educational qualification. This means that women with higher educational attainment perform better than their counterpart in the executive and judicial activities in the barangay. However, no variation was seen in the engagement of women along the legislative functions in the barangay. This means that all elected women were equally involved in all legislative activities in the barangay regardless of education level that they obtained.

3.7 Test of Difference in the Political Engagement of Women in the Three Mandated Functions as to Political Position Occupied

Table 6 reveals that no disparity was observed in the engagement of women in the three mandated functions, namely: executive, legislative, and judicial functions. This means that women holding chairmanship position or as barangay councilor were equally engaged in all activities/functions in the barangay could it be executive, legislative or judicial functions. This implies that all elected women are aware of their functions as barangay servant in their locality. Finding is supported by Chapter III Section 48 of the Local Government Code of 1991 which provides that local legislative power shall be exercised by the sangguniang barangay for the barangay.

3.8 Test of Difference in the Political Engagement of Women in the Three Mandated Functions as to Years of Experience as Elected Official

Table 7 shows that a significant disparity was found in the engagement among elected women along the three mandated functions in the barangay. This is an indication that experience matters most in the participation of elected officials in the business of the barangay. This implies that officials with longer length of service as barangay officials involve differently in all activities of the barangay compared to those who are novice in the service. Finding is corroborated by the old cliché that experience is the best teacher which helps develop higher level of confidence in the service.

3.9 Test of Difference in the Political Engagement of Women in the Three Mandated Functions

Table 8 presents the Friedman's test which shows that there was statistically significant difference in the mean ranks of the three mandated functions among the elected women. A post hoc analysis was performed to examine where the difference actually occurred using Wilcoxon Sign-Rank test of the three mandated functions of the elected women. Bonferroni-adjusted significance level was calculated manually as follows: 0.05 level of significance divided by 3 (three mandated functions) which yielded $p < 0.017$. The table reveals that a significant difference occurred between executive and legislative, executive and judicial, and legislative and judicial functions. In general, a distinction between the engagement of women in the three mandated functions was established. This means that women were engaged in the executive, legislative, and judicial activities at different extents. This implies that it is not sufficient to conclude that the extent of political involvement of women in the three mandated functions was the same (great extent) as shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3. In support, computed means showed differences (executive = 4.06, legislative = 3.85, and judicial = 3.74) and significant.

4. Discussion

Women's political engagement has a very wide meaning. It is not only related to right to vote, but simultaneously relates to participation in decision making process, political activism, political consciousness, and the like. Women in the country participate in voting, run for public offices and political parties at lower levels similar to the men. Unarguably, political voting is the strongest area of women's political involvement. Significantly, the Philippine government has instituted reservations for seats in local governments at the barangay level to combat gender inequality in politics.

In similar vein, Republic Act 7160 or known as the Local Government Code of 1991 guarantees not only the men but also the women the right to be elected, freedom of speech, freedom to assemble and form associations, and vote. The Philippine government through its Gender and Development (GAD) paradigm also removes gender inequalities by banning discrimination based on sex and class, prohibiting human trafficking and forced labor, and reserving elected positions for women. Moreover, the government directed local governments to promote equality by class and gender including equal pay and free legal aid, humane working conditions and maternity relief, rights to work and education, and raising the standard of living. However, women's political engagement in the barangay level of the country particularly in Zamboanga del Norte including the two cities of Dipolog and Dapitan has remained low and underrepresented political leaders and elected officials.

Though the current investigation revealed that women in the barangays of Zamboanga del Norte, Dipolog and Dapitan Cities engaged greatly along executive, legislative, and judicial activities/functions in the barangay, trailblazing political engagement of women in the province is still imperative to raise their engagement to very great extent. The National Democratic Institute (2016) recognizes that women should be equal partners in the process of democratic development. The institute pointed out further that women's contributions are crucial to building a strong and vibrant society because they are highly committed to promoting national and local policies that address the socio-economic and political challenges facing most women, children and disadvantaged groups. Likewise, women should be committed to peace building, as they often disproportionately suffer the consequences of armed conflict. Further, reconstruction and reconciliation efforts should take root more quickly and should be more sustainable when women are involved (Politics and Media, 2015). By helping women become engaging members of a democracy, one should look to mitigate conflicts or stop conflicts before they begin. Women should strongly link to positive developments in education, infrastructure and health standards at the local level (USAID, 2016). The National Democratic Institute (2016) supported that where rates of gender development and empowerment are higher, human rates of development and standards of living are also higher.

Moreover, the researchers advanced that the implementation of Gender and Development (GAD) paradigm is not enough to ensure substantive gains in women's political engagement. It is necessary therefore to take steps towards the ideological transformation of the political system, the party system, and, particularly, civil society, so that women themselves change their conduct and their expectations. This supports Astin's "Theory of Involvement" as cited by Hunts (2003) which states that women learn more the more they are involved in both the social and political aspects of everyday experience. The theory states further that women who are involved devote significant energy to politics, spend time on community activities, participate actively in community organizations and programs, and interact often with the people. On the other hand, uninvolved women neglect their duties, spend little time on community activities, abstain from extracurricular activities, and rarely initiate contact with people in the community. Importantly, the most persuasive types of engagement are political engagement, engagement with the people, and engagement with organizations. This theory is consistent with women-centered political approaches in that they play an integral role in determining their own degree of engagement in various political activities.

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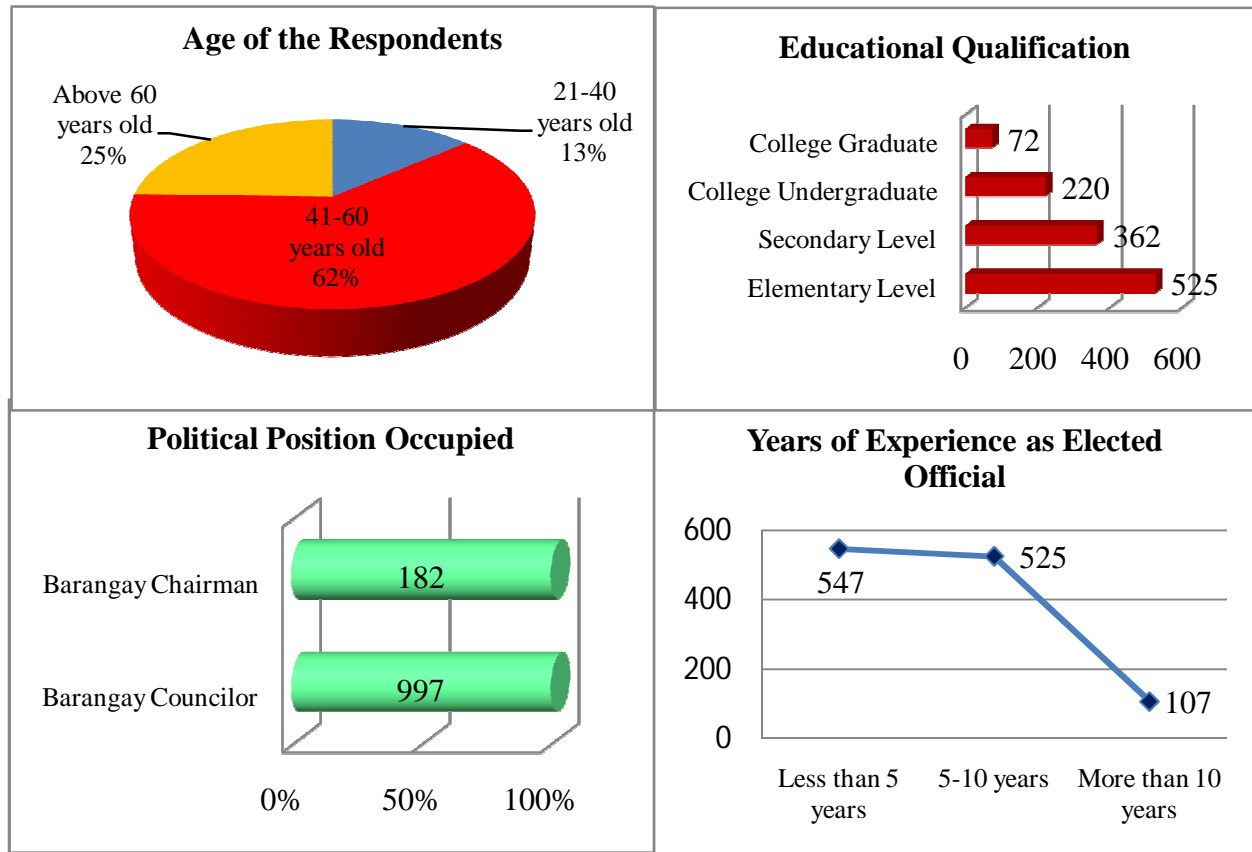


Figure 1: Profile of the Respondents

Table 1: Extent of Engagement of Women in the Executive Functions

Executive Functions	Average Weighted Value	Description
1. Enforcement of all laws and ordinances.	4.30	Very Great Extent
2. Negotiating, entering into and sign contracts for and on behalf of the barangay upon authorization of the Sangguniang Barangay/Bayan.	4.22	Very Great Extent
3. Maintaining public order in the barangay and in pursuance thereof, assist the sanggunian members in the performance in their duties and functions.	4.18	Great Extent
4. Organizing and leading of an emergency group whenever the same may be necessary for the maintenance of peace and order or on occasions of emergency or calamity in the barangay.	4.06	Great Extent
5. Enforcement of laws and regulations relating to pollution control and protection of the environment.	3.95	Great Extent
6. Exercising general supervision over the activities of the Sangguniang Kabataan.	4.00	Great Extent
7. Ensuring the delivery of basic services as mandated under Section 17 of the Local Government Code.	3.89	Great Extent
8. Conduct of an Annual Palarong Pambarangay which shall feature traditional sports in coordination with the DepEd.	3.93	Great Extent
9. Promote the general welfare of the barangay.	4.12	Great Extent
10. Organization of regular lectures, programs, or forum on community problems and convene assemblies to encourage citizen participation in the government.	3.98	Great Extent
Mean	4.06	Great Extent

Table 2: Extent of Engagement of Women in the Legislative Functions

Legislative Functions	Average Weighted Value	Description
1. Enactment of ordinances as may be necessary to discharge the responsibilities conferred upon it by law or ordinance and to promote the general welfare of the inhabitants therein.	4.14	Great Extent
2. Enactment of annual and supplemental budgets in accordance with the provisions of the local code.	4.12	Great Extent
3. Provision for the construction and maintenance of barangay's facilities and other public works project.	3.84	Great Extent
4. Giving of assistance in the establishment, organization and promotion of cooperative enterprises that will improve the economic condition and well being of the residents.	3.80	Great Extent
5. Regulating the use of barangay facilities constructed with government funds within the jurisdiction of the barangay and charge reasonable fees for the use thereof.	3.72	Great Extent
6. Provision for the organization of community brigades, barangay tanod, or community service units as may be necessary.	3.76	Great Extent
7. Adoption of measures to prevent and control the proliferation of squatters and mendicants in the barangay.	3.63	Great Extent
8. Provision for the proper development and welfare of children in the barangay by promoting and supporting activities for the protection and total development of children, particularly those below seven years of age.	3.73	Great Extent
9. Adoption of measures towards the prevention and eradication of drug abuse, child abuse, and juvenile delinquency.	3.72	Great Extent
10. Provision for the establishment of non-formal education center in the barangay whenever feasible in coordination with the DepEd.	3.99	Great Extent
Mean	3.85	Great Extent

Table 3. Extent of Engagement of Women in the Judicial Functions

Judicial Functions	Average Weighted Value	Description
1. Receiving all complaints filed by individuals against other persons that are subject to amicable settlement.	4.16	Great Extent
2. Summon respondents with notice to the complainants for them to appear before him for mediation.	3.93	Great Extent
3. Resolving the venue of settlement and referring any legal question to the Secretary of Justice or his duly representative.	3.76	Great Extent
4. Organizing the "Lupon ng Barangay".	3.73	Great Extent
5. Rendering an arbitration award when agreed upon by the conflicting parties before the "Lupon ng Barangay".	3.61	Great Extent
6. Administering oaths in connection with any matter relating to all proceedings in the implementation of the "Katarungang Pambarangay".	3.67	Great Extent
7. Setting the date, time and place, and preside over the regular monthly meetings of the lupon.	3.65	Great Extent
8. Preparing the agenda for each meeting.	3.61	Great Extent
9. Ensuring that the lupon exercises administrative supervision over the various groups and perform such powers, duties and functions as may prescribed by law or ordinance.	3.65	Great Extent
10. Where the mediation or arbitration is made, she shall attest to the certification signed or issued by the lupon secretary.	3.61	Great Extent
Mean	3.74	Great Extent

Table 4. Test of Difference in the Political Engagement of Women in the Three Mandated Functions as to Age

Functions	Age	N	Mean Rank	H-value	p-value	Decision
Executive	21-40 years old	160	638.61	10.774*	0.005	Ho rejected
	41-60 years old	729	564.70			
	Above 60 years old	290	626.78			
Legislative	21-40 years old	160	666.18	13.738*	0.001	Ho rejected
	41-60 years old	729	564.05			
	Above 60 years old	290	613.21			
Judiciary	21-40 years old	160	568.00	1.834 ^{ns}	0.4000	Ho accepted
	41-60 years old	729	586.61			
	Above 60 years old	290	610.67			

* = significant

ns = not significant

Table 5. Test of Difference in the Political Engagement of Women in the Three Mandated Functions as to Educational Qualification

Functions	Educational Qualification	N	Mean Rank	H-value	p-value	Decision
Executive	Elementary Level	525	578.56	10.831*	0.013	Ho rejected
	Secondary Level	362	573.05			
	College Undergraduate	220	606.39			
	College Graduate	72	708.54			
Legislative	Elementary Level	525	600.63	2.321 ^{ns}	0.509	Ho accepted
	Secondary Level	362	588.43			
	College Undergraduate	220	584.42			
	College Graduate	72	537.42			
Judiciary	Elementary Level	525	541.66	22.113*	0.000	Ho rejected
	Secondary Level	362	634.87			
	College Undergraduate	220	603.35			
	College Graduate	72	676.08			

* = significant

ns = not significant

Table 6. Test of Difference in the Political Engagement of Women in the Three Mandated Functions as to Political Position Occupied

Functions	Political Position	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U-value	p-value
Executive	Barangay Councilor	997	588.95	587180.00	89677.000 ^{ns}	0.803
	Barangay Chairman	182	595.77	108430.00		
Legislative	Barangay Councilor	997	573.95	572230.50	74727.500 ^{ns}	0.000
	Barangay Chairman	182	677.91	123379.50		
Judiciary	Barangay Councilor	997	574.00	572281.00	12651.500 ^{ns}	0.000
	Barangay Chairman	182	677.63	123329.00		

* = significant

ns = not significant

Table 7: Test of Difference in the Political Engagement of Women in the Three Mandated Functions as to Years of Experience as Elected Official

Functions	Age	N	Mean Rank	H-value	p-value	Decision
Executive	Less than 5 years	547	578.78	8.344*	0.015	Ho rejected
	5-10 years	525	583.36			
	More than 10 years	107	679.96			
Legislative	Less than 5 years	547	574.64	9.978*	0.007	Ho rejected
	5-10 years	525	586.23			
	More than 10 years	107	687.05			
Judiciary	Less than 5 years	547	584.25	9.296*	0.010	Ho rejected
	5-10 years	525	576.76			
	More than 10 years	107	684.36			

* = significant ns = not significant

Table 8: Test of Difference in the Political Engagement of Women in the Three Mandated Functions

Friedman's Test				Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test				
Functions	Mean Rank	Q-value	p-value		Legislative - Executive	Judiciary - Executive	Judiciary - Legislative	
Executive	2.45	440.999*	0.000	Z	-18.459	-21.561	-9.943	
Legislative	1.88			p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Judiciary	1.66							

* = significant ns = not significant