Current Context and Historical Bases for Federalism Bin the Philippines

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Abstract:
This study shed light to the feasibility and the necessity for the Philippines to shift from a unitary to federal form of government taking into account its historical background and the current contexts of the country. It employs the descriptive-survey method whereby data and information needed for the same is collected through library research and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Information and data gathered were treated and analyzed using frequencies and percentages. Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) were also used to substantiate the paper. The study discloses that history and current context in the Philippines can be addressed optimally through a federal form of government.

Keywords: Federalism, context, Historical, Philippines.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Whatever forms and structures of government a country has, be it central or federal, parliamentary or presidential, communist or democratic, these are moored on the experiences and history of particular peoples and nations. This is the basic postulate to which this paper is anchored. The measure of an effective system of government is the extent to which it satisfies its people in their basic needs anchored on the principle of human dignity (Ramirez, 2005). Since 1946 Philippines has had a form of government of which the powers are all vested in the central government under the presidential system, quite long, yet unable to remedy the longstanding social, economic, and political problems and issues confronting the country. Political leaders who have a sense of “common good” and desire for an equitable society are now pushing for change, hence, Philippines is now on the verge of shifting from a unitarian to a federal form of government that will consequently bring some changes in its social, political and economic culture. Federalism is a kind of government where powers and responsibilities are assigned or shared between the federal (national) government and the state (regional and local) governments. Each level has some genuine autonomy from each other and each level is primarily accountable to their respective electorates or constituencies (Abueva, 2005). This system of government has three key pillars: autonomy, subsidiarity, and solidarity. Federalism adheres to the principle of popular sovereignty which implies that “Sovereignty resides in the people and all government authority emanates from them” (Article II. Section1. The 1987 Constitution) Constitutional partnership in democratic governance exists in which the people in each State exercise self-rule by its substantial powers, authority, functions as well as resources or funding which are deemed necessary. The power is shared between the central government and the local states (So, 2016) It is the aim of this paper to trace the evolution of the Philippine governance that may lead us to reflect on our socio-political history and current issues and come to understand of Senator Pimentel’s and President Duterte’s advocacy on Federalism. It will also enlighten us on how the new Federal System will address the current issues of various contexts relative to the country’s governance.

2.0. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on the premise that the structure and organization of a sovereign nation is moored by its history and current experiences. A nation’s history serves as its institutional memory that is deeply rooted in the psyche of the citizens. Such institutional memories cumulatively dictate the form of governance which, in the past, had produced desirable national outcomes. On the other hand, the current experiences or context, serve as new inputs to the national memory that either serve to strengthen or modify national governance structures. Emerging problems such as the prevalence of poverty incidence in some parts of the country, criminality and other such social issues require that nations re-examine their historical roots and their relevance in addressing the issues. Going back to the Philippine’s Pre-colonial Era, the Balangay/Barangay was the unit of government which was composed of 30-100 families (Agoncillo, 1990). Each barangay was headed by a chieftain or Datu with kinsmen and slaves as the other constituents. Each barangay as claimed by the historian Onofre Corpus was colonization by the Spaniards somehow changed the system and
further changes were brought by the Japanese and Americans. After 333 years of colonization by the aforesaid nationalities, the Philippines had experienced short-lived revolutionary governments, the unitary presidential democratic government was finally established in 1946. After 72 decades of governance under the said unitary system of government, Philippines failed to forge ahead and even lagged far behind its Asian neighbors like Singapore, China, and other countries. Serious political, social, and economic problems which have been so long suffered by Filipinos are neither solved with the existing system. With these and along with many other reasons, President Rodrigo R. Duterte, Senator Aquilino Pimentel and other advocates are now pressing on a “radical change” (Jimenez, 2016) in our governance – Federalism. Ramirez (2005), as cited above, asserted that the measure of an effective system of government is the extent to which it satisfies its people in their basic needs anchored on the principle of human dignity. Contrary to this claim however, the present chaotic set up in the country is a clear manifestation of discontentment and dissatisfaction of its constituents, hence the call for a change - Federalism. To better conceptualize the above milieu, shown below is the paradigm of this paper.

3.0. METHODOLOGY
This paper employed the descriptive type of research where historical facts of the Philippine governance, current issues and problems in different contexts under the present unitary Presidential system, as well as the nature of the proposed Federal system were gathered through library research and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The FGD was composed of members who were knowledgeable on the issue being studied, two of which are LLB graduates. Same group also determined how the past forms of Philippines shed light to the proposed Federal system. Literatures on the topics considered in this paper were also gathered to support the FGD’s proceedings.

4.0. DISCUSSION
A. Historical Bases
As mentioned earlier in this paper, the forms and structure of a nation’s governance is moored by its experiences and history. Some of the historical milestone of the Philippines are discussed hereunder to shed light on the feasibility of Federalism in the Philippines.

A.1 Pre-colonial Federalism in the Barangay/Balangay System
It might be a small scale and amateur one, but Federalism was already practiced in the Philippines during Pre-colonial Era as evidenced by the Barangay/Balangay system of governance. The barangay/balangay was the unit of government consisting of 30-100 families. Each barangay was independent or autonomous and was ruled by a chieftain National or Central government was not evident. It was a prime duty of the chieftain to run or govern his subjects in order to foster their welfare and interest. Vested with wide powers, he act as the supreme commander during war and exercised as executive legislator and the judge. However, when he wants a law enacted, he consults the community ELDERS of what he had in mind. With the chieftain being the judge as said earlier, these elders also act as the jury in deciding disputes (Agoncillo, 1990). The foregoing clearly manifests the practice of Federalism in the country and it is worth noting that, primitive as it was, each Balangay was claimed to be relatively self-sufficient and autonomous. Moreover, the economy that prevailed in the Balangay was unmediated economics characterized by a natural exchange of goods and services or barter (Ramirez, 2005). Self-sufficiency and Autonomy of the different states/regions are two of the major goals of the proponents of Federalism. Once we are under the federal system, each component state shall collect its own taxes and remits only a small part (20% as proposed) to the national or central government. Moreover, given the freedom to determine its own over-all directions under the principle of autonomy, each state will then strive to accelerate its economic development to attain self-sufficiency. The economy may not necessarily be unmediated but with a more directed and focused production in each region, mediation in the economy is minimized. Finally, if ancient Filipinos were able to establish self-sufficiency in their own primitive Federal-Balangay system, the same could be possibly achieved in the proposed federal system.

A.2 Diversity of Local Cultures and Geographic Setting
Philippines as an archipelago is composed 7,107 islands and this can be accounted for the diversity of the Philippine cultures. The country comprises 110 ethno-linguistic groups distributed in its three major Islands as shown below:
It can be noted that Philippine ethnicity is dominated by the Mindanao Ethnic groups which comprises more than half (61%) nationwide. Most if not all of these ethnic groups or “lumads” were displaced to the remote hinterlands by the new settlers due to urbanization and industrialization. Despite the protection of their rights under “Indigenous Peoples Right Act” or IPRA (RA 8371), they still have been subjected to discrimination and relegation from political processes as well as economic benefits (https://www.iipeace.org>Philippines). These people are dependent on timberlands and rivers for their daily existence and livelihood and these resources are now threatened or utilized in mining and large scale farming of private companies depriving them of their source of living (Pedrosa, 2017). The shift to federalism will divide the country into ethnic, political as well as religious groups. With such, the aforesaid problems will then be catered and the numerous ethno-linguistic groups in the country will be given the freedom and be encouraged to preserve their respective culture, religion, beliefs, language, and other practices. Hence, their respective identities are recognized, problems are addressed at their own local units (states/regions) as well as at the national level thru their respective representatives in the federal or central government.

A.3 Addressing an Age-old Problem that can be Traced Back to Historical Injustices

The Muslim-Christian conflicts in Mindanao could be historically traced back during the colonization when the Spanish first arrived in the mid-1500s. Spaniards and Christianized Indios (Filipinos) isolated the Muslims in Mindanao and prevented them from trading with the neighboring countries which had been their source of living and prosperity in the past. Injustices worsened in the American regime during which the colonizer introduced new customary laws on land ownership which deprived many Muslims of their ancestral rights (https://www.iiipeace.org>P hilippines). Moreover mining and large scale farming of private companies, and other large industry-related ventures further displaced our Muslim brothers depriving them of their source of living particularly in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. For decades these Muslims in Mindanao including the insurgent groups have been clamoring for some kind of autonomy rule. One of the major pillars of Federalism is autonomy and this will give them the freedom to run their own territories according to their own laws and develop their own resources relevant to their needs or priorities geared toward self-sufficiency.

A. Contextual Bases

Philippines has been stalked by problems and issues at various contexts which remains unresolved by the present unitary form of government. Few major issues are hereby discussed below:

B.1 Inequitable Distribution of Wealth and Imbalance Economic Development

Philippines is one of the Asia-Pacific countries where wealth distribution inequality is prevalent. The rich are getting richer while the poor are getting otherwise. This is what Senator Pementel called the “wealth gap”. In 2016 Philippine economy posted a strong GDP growth of 6.6%, following steady growth in previous years but this is not felt by majority of the Filipino citizens especially the poor that comprises more than 25% of our population. Pimentel added that contributing to such problem is the fact that the country is a unitary state of which over 60% of its GDP is generated in Metro Manila and adjoining areas of the national capital. He further stressed that the poorest and least developed areas in the country is in the far south of the capital which is Mindanao. Figure 1 and Table 2 will further give us light to this wealth gap mentioned above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISLAND</th>
<th>NO. OF ETHNO-LINGUISTIC GROUP</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luzon</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visayas</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindanao</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be noted from the above graph that some regions located in Luzon particularly NCR, Region III and IV – A (blue) occupy a greater share in the national budget compared to other regions in Visayas and Mindanao with the National Capital Region

Figure 1. Histogram of the 2017 Budget Allocation by Region in Billion

http://ijesc.org/
(NCR) making a very huge lead over the others. Looking at the summary of the budget allocation by island, one can now clearly see how inequitably distributed our national budget is.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUMMARY</th>
<th>ALLOCATION</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCR</td>
<td>536.60B</td>
<td>26.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luzon (7 regions)</td>
<td>718.02B</td>
<td>35.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visayas (3 regions)</td>
<td>328.75B</td>
<td>16.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindanao (6 regions)</td>
<td>416.29B</td>
<td>20.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>1999.66T</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. 2017 Budget Dimension by Island

From the table it can be gleaned that Metro Manila and Luzon regions receive a grand share of more than half (26.83% + 35.91% = 62.74%) of the national budget while the two main Islands of Visayas and Mindanao receive the remaining meager share (16.44 + 37.26% = 47.76%). Consequently, economic development in the less privileged part of the country lagged behind. As seen in the graph below, NCR, Region IV-A (Calabarzon) and Region III dominate in the share to domestic product; 67%, 16%, and 9%, respectively. On the contrary, The rest of the regions’ share to gross domestic product range only form 1% - 7%. It is worth noting that ARMM and region XIII have contributed only 1% GDP share. The foregoing data simply prove how huge the economic imbalance is in the Philippines.

Figure 2. Pie Graph of the 2017 Budget Allocation

B.2 Unemployment Problem

Due to the rising social and economic inequity in the country, Philippines has had experienced distinct longstanding problems in different contexts including unemployment and insurgency. The graph below presents the unemployment rate of the Philippines for the last ten years. Although the trend is decreasing, the extent of decrease is not really that remarkable. Under federalism, all the states/

Figure 3. Unemployment Rate for the last 10 years. (Source: PSA)
regions are independent/autonomous in terms of local legislations, economics, budget and other aspects not mentioned. Each state will then be free to determine their overall directions. Hence, each state would then strive to accelerate its economic development to create more job opportunities for its constituents. On the other hand, one may pose this question “Are there no other options aside from Federalism?” Let us then consider and compare other options or alternatives by relating them to the parameters discussed above using the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARAMETER</th>
<th>POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES</th>
<th>Current System</th>
<th>Federalism</th>
<th>Strengthen the Existing Local Government Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical/Geographical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Previous/current experience of same/similar governance</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Addressing diversity of Local Cultures and Geographic Setting are addressed</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Addressing problems that can be traced back to historical injustices</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Equitable Distribution of Wealth</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Addressing current problems/issues</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: + Feasible/applicable/evident
- Not feasible/ not applicable/not evident

5.0. CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing analysis, it can be concluded that history and current context in the Philippines can be addressed optimally through a federal form of government.

6.0. REFERENCES


