

Political Arrangement in the Municipality of Bongabon Nueva Ecija in the Philippines: Issues and Impacts

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Abstract

This study determined the issues and impacts of the existing relationship between the Executive and the Legislative branches of the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Bongabon, Nueva Ecija. Using the mixed and descriptive methods of research, a set of questionnaire was administered to two groups of respondents. The study also used the structural –functional analysis as its theoretical and analytical framework. The study revealed that participants strongly agreed on the issue that the executive branch is exercising the dominant power over the legislative branch through its veto power. Further a slightly “agree” response is shown by the respondents on the issues of the separation of powers as a control mechanism; that the political arrangement is affected by political rivalry and the perception of the dominance of executive branch. The participants also believe that the separation of power is evident on the relationship of the two branches. The paper provides insights to future researches on the subject of Executive-Legislative conflicts. Toward this end, the use of technology may be integrated and applied to improved executive and legislative arrangement.

Keywords: Legislative, Executive, Issue, Conflict, Separation of power, Local Government

1. Introduction

The legislature and executive branches of local government are important political institutions in countries whose government is under the presidential system. They play a critical role in promoting a genuine local development (Gabriel & Gutierrez, 2017). The Constitution of the Philippines provides for the separation of powers between the two branches of government in order to establish check and balance (Gabriel, 2016). For quite a time, the Executive branch and the legislature exercise enormous power in their municipalities. The executive department implements municipal laws while the legislature makes, amends and repeals laws other the oversight power which allow the legislature to determine to a certain extent how the municipal laws they made are implemented on the ground. The oversight powers include the power to review the executive budget and to appropriate (Lawteacher.net, July 2018). According to Villaluz (2004) legislative oversight is a process where the Sanggunian (legislative body) evaluates if the ordinances it enacted are being implemented and, if so, how they are implemented by the executive branch. The objective of this function is to ensure that policies as guidelines are carried out in accordance with legislative intent and that public funds are spent as appropriated and not wasted.

On the other hand, Mezey (1979) argues that the veto is the “most powerful tool of the Executive because of its definitive ability to block the legislative process.” He added that “A weaker constraint which may be imposed upon the executive branch is the power to override the executive veto, given that the policy emanates from the legislature.” Abellera’s (2012) study lends support to the argument that legislatures are pillars of democratic good governance”. Nevertheless, he claims that the Local Government Code of 1991 accorded vast legislative powers to the Executive rendering the Legislative lesser prominence and effort to take its appropriate place in the political system. Consequently, the principle of co-equality is undermined and one overdoes the power of another. “The legislature’s procedural arrangements and institutional infrastructure were preventing the potential to oversee an increasingly powerful executive.”

The local legislative body is also confronted by the issue of professionalization and qualification of legislators (Valdehuesa, 2005). He posits that “Members of the Sangguniang Bayan should possess the essential skills for passing regulations, appropriating funds and deliberating public policy.” In order to contribute to good governance, he notes that legislators must not only have adequate knowledge of local conditions; rather, “they should be capable of formulating and analyzing laws, making quality decisions that would lead to the greater good.” Unfortunately, the present scenario of Philippine politics discourages the most qualified members of the society to vie for electoral posts. This is because the qualification for running as legislator is also of minimum standard with no minimum educational level required. He further contends that “Politicians in the Philippines are elected not on the basis of qualifications but on their family name or dynasty, deep-pocketed or wealthy, well-known or celebrity, influential or connectivity but not education, capability, record or character” He said that, sadly, many elected legislators lack the knowledge of parliamentary procedures which is the governing principle, the very basis in passing legislation. This lack of preparation makes the executive intervention in legislative procedures overwhelming, constituting to “rubber-stamp approvals and to the extent of relegating legislative procedures.”

Stalemate and political rivalry are issues existing between executive and legislative departments. According to Bernas (2006) development planning is a matter reserved for governments to undertake. He stated that the Executive Branch is mandated to conceptualize the nation’s Economic Plan, but it requires the approval of Congress for eventual enactment. He opines that the best economic plans would end futile if the two houses of Congress which are mandated by our Constitution to preside over economic matters, do not extend their much needed cooperation and support to the administration's priority bills. His paper expounds on the perennial rivalry between the two branches of government, and also proposes some recommendations in preventing the recurrence of such an unproductive stalemate. In another view, Cruz (2014) states that in a democracy with a presidential form of government — which we have in the Philippines — the three branches are supposed to serve as checks and balances to each other. He reckons that the Legislative branch — the Senate and House of Representatives — exercises oversight over the executive branch and all its agencies. For instance, the Congress can demand executive officials to appear in front of its committee members to answer questions broadcasted live by radio and television. On the other hand, the Executive has the right to investigate and file charges against lawmakers it believes are guilty of corruption.

Finally, Gita (2015) wrote in an article what Former Chief Justice Renato Puno said about the concept of federalism and its relevance to the separation of powers among the three branches of government. According to the justice, the present system of our government model gives too much emphasis on the independence of the three branches of government, instead of interdependence on certain areas of governance. He further said that this outdated, if not erroneous, allocation of powers has earned the country a lot of democratic deficits. And this has resulted in the continuing categorization of the Philippines as a failing democracy. So he said that there is a need to strike a more appropriate balance of power among the three branches of government.

In the Province of Nueva Ecija, a good number of municipalities have been experiencing serious conflict between their Sangguniang Bayan (legal term for local legislature) and their Executive Office (Aliaga, Gabaldon, Llanera, Pantabangan, Caranglan, Zaragoza and Cabiao). The serious ones pertain to annual budget not being approved causing the LGU to spend on re-enacted budget. In Bongabon, Nueva Ecija, there has also been some issues that reflect on the separation of powers between the Sangguniang Bayan and the Executive. However, there are some pressing issues between the two branches both in the national and local levels. There has been a lot of comments expressed by critics, such as, the legislature dominates the executive or vice-versa, and that the conflict serves as form of check and balance in government. Still, others point at it as contributing to the issue over major public policy, thus, making government unable to deliver the kind of service their citizens deserve (Bartleby.com).

1.1 Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on the concept that the legislature and executive are two very important political institutions in presidential democratic regimes and they have a very critical task to play in promoting good governance. The achievement of this task however is dependent on whether the relationship that exists between these institutions is constructive or conflicting.

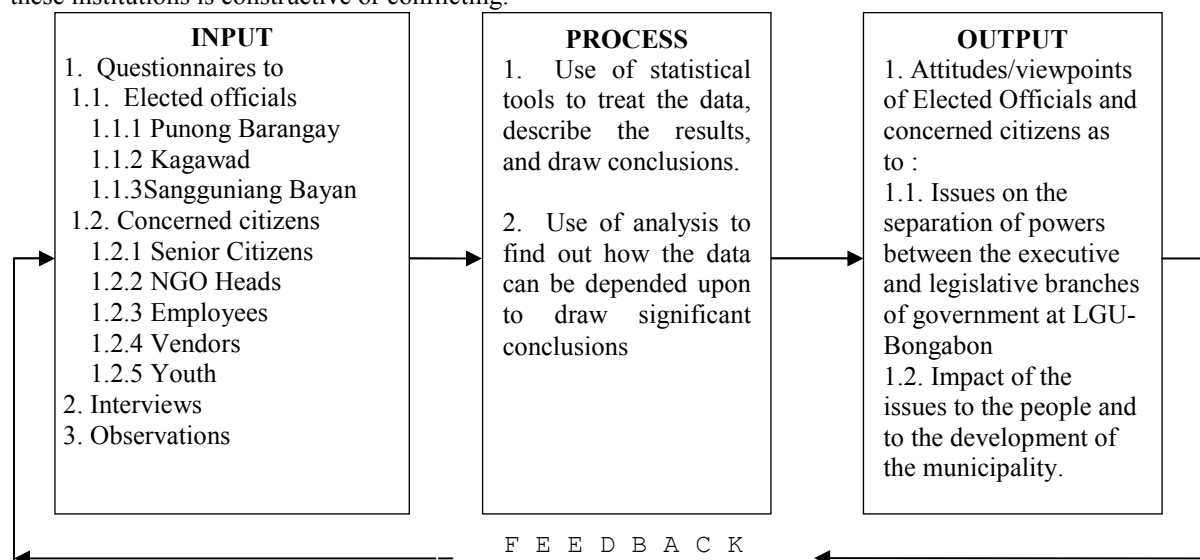


Fig.1 Research Paradigm

Cases of some LGUs revealed that the relationship between the executive and legislature has been characterized more by dysfunctional conflicts which often deadlocks the policy making and implementation

process, ultimately inhibiting good governance.

Thus, this paradigm illustrates how the study proceeded. The input box contains the problems identified; the process box contains the methods to be used in processing the data; and the output are the attitudes or views of the elected officials and concerned citizens on issues of separation of powers between the executive and legislative, and its impact to the people and the development of the municipality. After the output is the feedback, and will return again in the input for the continuity of the process.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study intended to present the existing relationship between the executive and the legislative branches of the local government unit of Bongabon, Nueva Ecija.

Specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the issues arising from the executive and legislative arrangement under a presidential system of government?
2. What are the impacts of the issues on executive and legislative arrangement under a presidential system of government?
3. What recommendations may be submitted?

1.3 Hypotheses

This research was anchored on the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference in responses between the elected officials and the concerned citizens on the issues of separation of powers confronting the Executive and Legislative Branches of LGU-Bongabon
2. There is no significant difference in responses between the elected officials and the concerned citizens on the impact of issues confronting the Executive and Legislative Branches of LGU- Bongabon.

2. Methodology

This study made use of the descriptive survey method of research as it ascertained the prevailing conditions relative to the issue of separation of powers between the executive and legislative bodies in the LGU.

2.1 The Respondents

The researcher gathered data using a set of questionnaire from two groups of respondents: The first group numbering 60 consisted of elected officials, namely Punong Barangay, Kagawad, and Sangguniang Bayan members. The other group consisted of Senior Citizens, NGO heads, employees, vendors and youth sector. The respondents readily accomplished the questionnaires and expressed willingness to offer additional viewpoints if needed.

Table 1. The Respondents

I. Elected Officials	Number
Punong Barangay	20
Kagawad	34
Sangguniang Bayan Members	6
Total	60
II. Concerned Sectors	
Senior Citizens	15
NGO Heads	5
Vendors	10
Employees	10
Youth	20
Total	60

2.2 Instrumentation

The questionnaire was the main source of data gathering. Two sets were prepared, one of the elected officials and the other, for the concerned sectors. The questionnaires were of the check list type intended to offer convenience for the respondents. They were given numerical options to choose from as every statement has to be answered by simply checking the option that best describes the respondent's opinion. To establish the validity of the questionnaires, they were subjected to pre-test. Ten elected officials who were not included in the final group were requested to accomplish the questionnaire. In addition, ten concerned citizens who were not either included as final respondents were asked to answer the second set of questionnaire. Their responses were analyzed and compared. The results were compared and analyzed. It was found out that the questionnaires can

be relied upon to draw conclusions for the study.

2.3 Data Treatment

The data gathered were collated and subjected to statistical tests to find out the average response of the respondents on the items in the questionnaire. The mean was used as a measure of averages. The calculations were made part of the appendices. The Student-test was used to test the hypothesis advanced earlier in this study. The results enabled the researcher to draw significant conclusions for the study.

2. Data Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis

This study presents, interprets and analyzes the data gathered from the questionnaires. The data are contained in the succeeding tables for clarity of analysis;

2.1 Perceived issues relating to executive –legislative arrangement

Table 2. Issues on executive-legislative arrangement

Issue	Elected Officials		Concerned Citizens	
	Mean	Verbal Description	Mean	Verbal Description
1. The executive –legislative arrangement when observe consumes more time to pass upon an ordinance.	2.93	Slightly Agree	3.0	Slightly Agree
2. The separation of power is a controlling mechanism in an executive –legislative arrangement.	3.80	Agree	3.23	Slightly agree
3. The separation of power is affected by political rivalry.		Slightly agree	2.83	Slightly agree
4. The power to review executive budget is the dominant means of the Sangguniang Bayan in the executive-legislative arrangement.	4.01	Agree	3.7	Agree
4. The power to veto is a dominant power of the executive branch in the executive-legislative arrangement.	4.83	Strongly Agree	4.63	Strongly Agree
General Mean	3.48	Agree	3.73	Agree

Legend: 4.31–5.00 Strongly Agree; 3.41–4.30 Agree; 2.61–3.40 Slightly Agree; 1.81–2.60 Disagree; 1.00–1.80 Strongly Disagree

The researcher gathered data using a set of questionnaire from two groups of respondents: The first group numbering 60 consisted of elected officials, namely Punong Barangay, Kagawad, and Sangguniang Bayan members. The other group consisted of Senior Citizens, NGO heads, employees, vendors and youth sector. The respondents readily accomplished the questionnaires and expressed willingness to offer additional viewpoints if needed

2.1.1 The Separation of Powers is evident on the executive-legislative arrangement

The data on Table 2 shows that both the elected officials and senior citizens agree on the idea that “The separation of power is evident in the passage of resolutions and ordinances taking a longer time to be acted upon.” It generated mean scores of 2.93 from the elected officials and 3.03 from the concerned citizens, both interpreted to mean “slightly agree.” This implies that the participants are not fully convinced that so much time is wasted in reviewing ordinances and resolutions and that there may be deliberate attempt to delay their passage. The municipality of Bongabon observes the principle of check and balances. As such the two departments are performing functions that are distinct and separate from each other. This political arrangement provides both departments to exercise certain degree of power which will ensure observance of check and balance (Gabriel, 2017b). The study of Villaluz (2004) offers a differing opinion when he wrote that Legislative oversight is an evaluation process where the Sanggunian (legislative body) determines if the ordinances it enacted are implemented and, if so, how they are implemented by the executive branch. The purpose of this function is to ensure that policies are carried out in accordance with legislative intent and that public funds are not wasted. Thus, a Sanggunian with the real motive of ensuring public welfare will not delay its work of passing resolutions necessary for the development of the municipality. The principle of check and balance is a political doctrine built in the structure and operation of republican system. The use of this doctrine is necessary to the development and proper consideration of the proposed ordinance at hand. The local legislature in observance of parliamentary arrangement must necessarily dig deeper into the interests behind an ordinance. When it does what it should do, it is only performing its usual duties mandated by the Local Government Code of 1991 and should not be given negative implications.

2.1.2 The separation of power is a controlling mechanism in the executive –legislative arrangement

On the issue of separation of power as a control mechanism that promotes check and balance between the two branches,” the obtained mean scores of 3.80 from the elected officials implies agreement while the 3.23 from the concerned citizens verbally described as “slight agreement. It may be good to state that the elected officials

expressed the view that check and balance is a principle that should permeate the two branches so that both works independently but looks at each other's performance and offer corrective measures. On the other hand, the group of concerned citizens is not fully in agreement that indeed the separation of power is a controlling mechanism. Tamayao (2014) opines that while each of the branches exercises its respective power, it should look at it not as a controlling mechanism but should do so in collaboration with the other because in the end both belong to one unified government with a common purpose

2.1.3 The separation of power is a controlling mechanism in the executive –legislative arrangement

However, on issue number three (3) which specifies “The separation of power is affected by political rivalry” obtained a weighted mean scores of 3.08 verbally described as slightly agree and 2.83 for concerned citizens. This finding implies that the respondents are not convinced that political rivalry undermines the principle of the separation of powers by the two branches. While the members of both branches belong to different political parties, there has been no strong circumstance that may be cited to attest to this issue. While indeed, political rivalry exists, the SB members do not use it to block the passage of important resolutions. It appears that while they are separated by political parties, the present core of SB members in LGU-Bongabon and the mayor do not show considerable differences in the performance of their respective functions. An interview with a group of SB members disclosed that based on their perception, the political arrangement in the municipality is more on interdependence rather than complete independence. This has to be done according to the mandate of the LGC of 1991. The system of local governance is conceived to prevent excesses. The checking mechanism of the two branches aims to realize the highest possible legislative and executive performances. Considering the political arrangement and the observance of transparency and accountability in the execution of functions of the two departments, the legislative and executive level shall improve. In the study of Gabriel and Ong (2018), it is shown that transparency and accountability principles as observed is linked to improved governance and performance (Gabriel&Ong, 2018).

2.1.3 The power of the Sanggunian to review executive budget requires scrutiny

On issue number four (4) which states that “The Sangguniang Bayan is a dominant force in LGU-Bongabon because of its power to review the Executive Budget”, mean scores of 4.01 and 3.7, respectively, were obtained. That both groups of respondents expressed agreement on this issue implies that the Sangguniang Bayan is really doing its job of subjecting the Executive Budget to a close scrutiny. The budget reflects the mayor's ability to project the income and expenditures of the municipality. The SBs feel that the budget is crucial to the municipality's yearly performance' hence, the need to make it accurate.

Finally, issue number five (5), “The Executive Branch is a dominant force in LGU-Bongabon because of its veto power and the leadership of the mayor,” garnered mean score of 4.83 from the elected officials and 4.63 from the concerned citizens. These scores are interpreted to mean strong agreement on the issue. They both contend that the mayor has strong leadership qualities that enable him to get things done despite opposition from the Sanggunian Members. While he can exercise veto power, the mayor, in an interview, contends that he seldom uses it as he respects the wisdom of the Sangguniang Bayan members in their lawmaking function.

On the whole, the issue that obtained the highest mean is issue number 5, to wit: the Executive branch is the dominant force in LGU Bongabon because of its veto power. This suggests that both the elective officials and concerned citizens regard in high esteem the leadership ability of the chief executive or mayor in the governance of the municipality. In contrast, the lowest mean is that pertaining to issue number 1, to wit: the separation of power is evident in the passage of resolutions and ordinances taking time to be acted upon.

The Student t-test was applied to find out whether the mean scores of the two groups significantly differ. The calculated t-value is 0.533 which is lower than the critical value of $t = 1.860$ at.05 level of significance, 8 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the null hypotheses of no significant difference is accepted

2.2 Perceived issues relating to executive –legislative arrangement

2.2.1 The arrangement leads to the inability of the executive department to implement vital program

With regard to the impact of the issues, Table 2 shows that Impact Number 1 which states, “The Executive remains unable to implement vital programs because of the lack of resolutions required by funding agencies,” obtains mean scores amounting to 3.72 for both groups of respondents. The mean implies agreement with the issue. The interview conducted with Sangguniang Bayan members revealed that there are times they cannot prepare a needed resolution because some funding agencies provide loans with high interest rates. Moreover, the project is not a priority.

2.2.2 The arrangement creates unresolved conflict between the two departments

With regards to Impact number two (2) which states, “ There are problems in the LGU that remain unresolved because of conflicting ideas/goals between the two branches,” the mean scores obtained are 4.25 for elected officials and 4.48 for concerned citizens. The mean suggests that they strongly agree on the said impact resulting from issues on the separation of powers. Conflicting opinions or ideas of both parties result on problems that remained unresolved.

The number 3 Impact which states, “This is a difficult situation as it affects development of the town,” has mean score of 5.00 for elected officials and 4.48 for concerned citizens. Both strongly agree that conflict may affect the development of the town being stifled, the higher the conflict, the lesser the chance of development to foster in the municipality.

Table 3. Impact of the Separation of Powers Between the Executive and the Legislature

Impact	Elected Officials		Concerned Citizens	
	Mean	Verbal Description	Mean	Verbal Description
1. The executive department fails to implement vital programs because of the lack of legislative back up for the purpose.	3.72	Agree	3.72	Agree
2. Problems in the LGU remain unresolved because of conflicting points of view between the two branches.	4.25	Strongly Agree	4.48	Strongly Agree
3. The existing political arrangement affects the development of the town.	5.0	Strongly Agree	4.92	Strongly Agree
4. The tension between the two branches creates political stalemate resulting in non passage of annual budget.	4.83	Strongly Agree	5.00	Strongly Agree
5. The political arrangement undermines the integrity of the respective offices.	4.27	Strongly Agree	4.30	Strongly Agree
6. The situation of conflict between the two departments will remain in the future.	4.58	Strongly Agree	4.62	Strongly Agree
General Mean	4.48	Strongly Agree	4.55	Strongly Agree

Legend: 4.31–5.00 Strongly Agree; 3.41–4.30 Agree; 2.61–3.40 Slightly Agree; 1.81 – 2.60 Disagree; 1.00 – 1.80 Strongly Disagree

2.3 On Development Impact

The number 3 Impact which states, “This is a difficult situation as it affects development of the town,” has mean score of 5.00 for elected officials and 4.48 for concerned citizens. Both strongly agree that the conflict may affect the development of the town being stifled, the higher the conflict the lesser the chance of development to foster in the municipality.

2.4 On creation of Tension

With regard to impact number four (4) which states, “This conflict creates tension among concerned citizens particularly when the annual budget is involved,” garnered a mean score of 4.83 for the elected officials and 5.00 for the concerned citizens. This is because the Mayor and his team can only perform with sufficient budget. So when such budget is pending, the mayor could not undertake his planned projects and expenditures.

2.5 On the Impact to Public Service

Finally, with regard to Impact number five (5), “This situation is going to be a vicious cycle which succeeding politicians will follow,” the obtained mean scores are 4.48 for elected officials and 4.62 for concerned citizens. Both groups of respondents strongly agree on this impact. The respondents’ belief may be on the basis that from generation to generation, conflicting ideas on the separation of powers will not be resolved.

2. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

From the above findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

- The null hypothesis of no significant difference in responses between the elected officials and concerned citizens with regard to issues on separation of power between the executive and legislative branches is accepted. The calculated student t-value is 0.533 which is lower than the critical value of $t = 1.860$ at .05 level of significance, 8 degrees of freedom.
- The null hypothesis of no significant difference in responses between the elected officials and concerned citizens with regard to the impact of the issues on separation of power between the executive and legislative branches is accepted. The Student t-test conducted resulted to 0.313 which is below the critical value of $t = 1.860$ at .05 level of significance, 8 degrees of freedom.
- Based on the results, it can be realized that the separation of power of the executive and legislative is only a way to stabilize the power of the government in a democratic and presidential form. It is for the purpose of transparency and accountability and for the effective functioning of both branches according to the Local Government Code.

The following recommendations are proposed to achieve the objectives of this study:

- a) While proposed resolutions are submitted for deliberation by the Sangguniang members, it is incumbent on the one member who sponsors such resolution to make follow ups and lobby for the approval of his resolution.
- b) The separation of power between the two branches should be understood in the light of the need to prevent abuse of each other's power; such power however should not undermine the unity and harmony that should permeate the SB as a body.
- c) Both the Executive and the Legislative bodies should reserve politics during election time; they should perform their duties in a spirit of genuine concern for the people who put them in power.
- d) The SB members having been vested the power to review and approve the Executive Budget should realize the significant role they play in the fiscal management of the municipality's funds. Hence, they should approve a budget that is fair, realistic and just.
- e) The study is expected to provide a springboard for future researches on the subject of Executive-Legislative conflicts aimed at unifying the branches to work for the common good of the people. Toward this end, such researches should be added to the already existing data that may be accessed thru e-Governance, the Information and Communications Technology system, so that others could make use of such information.

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