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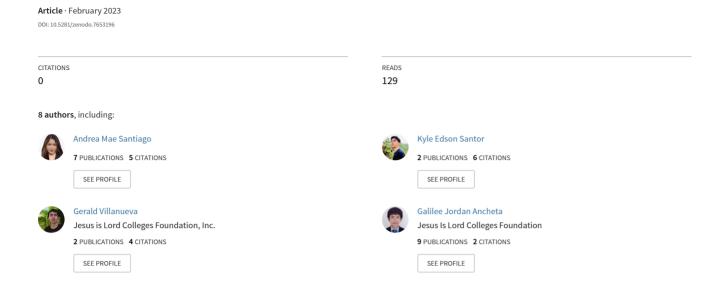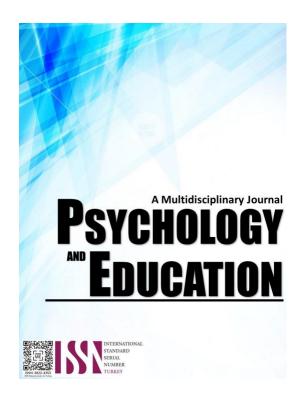
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HALALAN PILIPINAS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY ELECTION POLL WATCHERS

Halalan Pilipinas: The Lived Experiences and Challenges Faced by Election Poll Watchers

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Abstract

One of the main highlights from last year's event was the 2022 Philippine National and Local Elections. The Philippine elections involve a lot of people interaction from poll workers and other deputized agencies. Further, this study explores the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of poll watchers during the 2022 Philippine election. Employing the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the findings of this study were: (1) Filipino workers value a good-paying job and preferred meaningful work. (2) Amidst the experiences and challenges, the poll watchers remain determined and motivated to take part in the seasonal election. (3) Poll watchers must be physically, emotionally, and mentally prepared to participate in this crucial work. Mainly, poll-watching is a self-reliant job.

Keywords: *Philippines, challenges, lived experiences, poll watchers, election*

Introduction

One of the main highlights from last year's event was the 2022 Philippine National and Local Elections. The Philippine elections involve a lot of people interaction from poll workers and other deputized agencies. According to Education Secretary Leonor Briones, 756,083 poll workers from different institutions participated in the recent election (Balita Online, 2022). Hence, studies have supported that poll workers played a significant part in obtaining a successful election administration as they provide a crucial public administrative service (Burden & Milyo, 2015; Clark & James, 2021; Lefterov, Ignatieva, Prykhodko, Timchenko, Formaniuk, & Holina, 2021).

Poll watchers play a critical role in politics, given the significant role of elections. Poll watchers are considered street-level bureaucrats− front-line government workers who interact directly with the public and implement policies that are a crucial part of the functioning of government (Nathan & White, 2019). This gives poll watchers serious and demanding responsibility that challenges and burdens them. As Burden, David, Mayer, and Moynihan (2012) stated in their study, all work has a specific set of demands, and all public officials experience some level of administrative burden in their work. Accordingly, they defined *administrative burden* as an individual's policy implementation experience as onerous, which signifies that burdens are distinct from rules. Primarily, aspects of administrative burden are explored in different streams of research. However, there is not a broad discussion across prior work about

conceptualizing administrative burdens (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015).

Recently, efforts to conceptualize administrative burdens occurred, which identifies the categories of costs of access in public services (learning cost), demanding application processes that require extensive documentation and paperwork (compliance costs), and the increase in stress arising from program processes (psychological cost) (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015; Herd & Moynihan, 2019; Barnes, 2021). According to Barnes and Henly (2018), this conceptualized administrative burden can undermine the effectiveness of the policy and negatively shape perceptions of the government.

Moreover, concerns about electoral malpractice and integrity are still raised in many democracies in recent years, and many of these occur in polling places (Clark & James, 2021). Also, issues regarding significant levels of violence on polling day and even the aftermath of voting add to the cruciality of the job of poll watchers. At the same time, less research has studied the welfare of poll watchers towards these election challenges. This interests the researchers of this study to investigate and examine the watcher's lived experiences and challenges during election day.

This research will mainly explore three various ways. First, the study will examine the poll watchers' lived experiences, challenges, and also their coping mechanisms on the day of the election. Second, this research will address how poll watchers keep their will to take the job despite the negative perceptions of the government and the election process.

Finally, this research will contribute to a better understanding of poll watchers in Cognitive Psychology, Social Psychology, and Filipino Psychology. The study's findings are the basis of the interpretation and analysis of data collected through interviews with individuals who experienced life being a poll watcher during the latest Philippine election.

Research Questions

This study aims to explore the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of poll watchers in the Philippines. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of a poll watcher?
2. What are the challenges faced by a poll watcher?
3. What are the coping mechanisms of a poll watcher?

Methodology

In this qualitative study, Heideggerian Phenomenology was employed examine the lived experiences of poll watchers and the challenges in their work. Heideggerian Phenomenology also called interpretative phenomenology and commonly labeled as hermeneutic phenomenology is primarily concerned with ontological questions about how certain lived experiences influence an individual's being (Bordogna, 2021). Heideggerian Phenomenology approach undertakes interviews and analysis focusing on existential themes to identify essential structures of the phenomenon. The researchers will compare written descriptions of the phenomenon of interest, wherein, in this study is the "life experiences" of poll watchers, to identify the essential structure of the phenomenon, which is the "lived experiences" of poll watchers (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018). Therefore, using Heideggerian Phenomenology the researchers can explore and deeply analyze the lived experiences and challenges faced by the poll watchers.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were ten (10) election poll watchers who participate in the latest election.

Instrument of the Study

In this research, a semi-structured interview guide enabled participants to freely speak their minds, feelings, and beliefs regarding the specific question and topic. Hence, a panel of professionals in the field reviewed and approved the interview guide to ensure its reliability and authenticity.

The researchers interviewed the participants face-to-face to collect the research's data. The researchers discussed the interview's content, research objective, and process on the day of the interview. With the participant's consent, the interview was documented and recorded their responses on smartphone devices.

Data Collection Process

Primarily, the data collecting process began with broadening the knowledge of the field of the study through the use of online resources. Through online searches using Google, Google Scholar, Research Gate, and other web-based resources such as qualitative journals, articles, and other academic studies, these unveil the poll watchers' experiences, challenges, and coping strategies on the day of the election.

Furthermore, this research has taken an effective procedure to come up with reliable data. The researchers customized an interview that has been checked and underwent content validation to verify its reliability. The semi-structured interview consists of 20 questions that tackle the three main themes of the study; (1) the poll watcher's lived experiences, (2) the poll watcher's challenges, and (3) the poll watcher's coping mechanisms.

Beforehand, on the interview day, the researchers discussed the interview's content, research objective, and process to give the participants enough knowledge about the study. With the participants' consent, they were subjected to answer the interview and recorded their responses for transcription only. Answering the interview may take more or less than 5 minutes. After the participants answered the interview, the researchers organized and analyzed all the gathered data.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers in this study sought their research professor's permission for the study's data collection along with its research design and instruments' validation to ensure that the ethical standards were strictly observed and that the approval was secured. Hence, the participants have been identified and qualified to be involved based on the criteria layout

and were asked to express their voluntary support through informed consent. The informed consent contained discussion in compliance with the protocol standard for data gathering.

Moreover, the confidentiality of this study is protected under the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (R.A 10173). Thus, this assured the participants that the data gathered and the responses collected in this research would be kept confidential and used for academic and research purposes only.

Data Analysis Procedure

In this study, the researchers used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to adequately describe, interpret, and understand the research participants' innermost reflection about their lived experience situations. IPA is a kind of approach considered "participant-oriented," allowing the participants to express themselves free from distortion. The essential goal of this technique is to examine the research participants' life experiences and to describe the research findings through their lived experiences (Alase, 2017).

Moreover, this phenomenological study is also anchored on the Modified Van Kaam technique by Moustakas to successfully obtain the research's objective, which is to examine the lived experiences of poll watchers and the challenges in their work. The Modified Van Kaam technique allows the researchers to extract insights and meaning from the participants' experiences through face-to-face and tape-recorded interviews. Thus, this approach is claimed to be the most effective and common for gathering relevant data in phenomenological research and significant in identifying existential themes (Yeh & Chang, 2014).

Results and Discussion

The following themes were identified from the gathered results from the in-depth interviews. These themes include (1) The Ground, (2) The Encounter, (3) The Burden, and (4) The Withstand. The findings of this study are grouped into themes derived from the participants' responses.

The Ground

As poll watchers became the key to understanding how elections are delivered on the ground, it also has been found in this research several roots of motivations for poll watchers choosing to pursue this line of work on election day. It has been found that the most commonly stated reason for becoming a poll watcher was because 'the payment was good, 'to help my community,' and because it became their 'family motive.'

The payment was good

Most respondents claimed their initiative to be a poll watcher because the payment for its service was seldom high. Hence, Participant 4 expresses her motivation to work as a poll watcher because of the incentive she will receive.

"Gusto ko lang, at saka sayang din ang kikitain 'kong pera."

Likewise, Participant 2 mentioned that:

"Sa totoo lang kung tutuusin, dahil sa pera. Malaki kasi bigayan, may sahod kasi yon tapos makikita mo kung pa'no nangyayari sa election pero primary is pera talaga kasi may sahod ka don."

Thus, based on the participant's responses, they support the significance of material incentives on the volunteering motivations of poll watchers. A former study also argues that incentive systems, such as material incentives, are vital in bridging the gap between individuals and organizations. A sort of material gain provides material incentives either through payment or career advancement. But, in most cases, there is unlikely to be any career advancement involved. Instead, it is conceivable that poll workers work on election day to earn extra money (Clark & James, 2021).

Based on a study, Filipino workers are described as someone who value good pay, which is significantly correlated to the country's economic situation. Money is the primary extrinsic motivator for Filipino workers as they use their salaries to provide for themselves and their families. (Ilagan, Hechanova, Co, & Pleyto, 2014). Therefore, being a temporary employee, like a poll watcher, helps the majority of workers to make ends meet.

Help my community

According to studies, poll workers presumably appear as 'stipended volunteers. Stipended volunteers are workers that receive a little amount of financial compensation which is below fair market value to help others with whom they rarely have any connection. With this concept, Participant 6 shared her motivation

that aims to help her fellow Filipino to have a clean election.

"Para mababtayan ko ren yung malinis na halalan, at para din sa mga ano naten, kababayan."

Participant 9 also shares the initiative of poll workers which were intertwined motivations driven by civic responsibility, and public service.

"Kasi gusto ko ring makatulong. Matulungan lang sila, mga pari at PPCRV."

McAuliffe (2009) conducted a survey indicating that in the scale of motivations, the first three incentives are serving the community, supporting democracy process, and rendering a civic service. This confirms that poll watchers are not self-interested but instead much more encouraged by the intrinsic rewards of doing civic duty. Thus, in light of the way of public service, it is good to say that Filipino poll workers are likely motivated by their feeling of being public servants supporting the ideals of democracy and sharing a sense of civic responsibility (Amegnran, 2017; Clark & James, 2021). Furthermore, a number of studies have supported that intrinsic factors remain more significant rather than extrinsic ones in the Philippines. Thus, for Filipino workers, intangible rewards such as self-satisfaction, autonomy, and recognition weigh more than tangible rewards (Ilagan, Hechanova, Co, & Pleyto, 2014).

Family motive

The interviewers also found in the interviewing that some poll watchers are encouraged and expected by their family relatives to work as poll workers on the day of the election. Participant 10 revealed that her relative has personally assigned her as a poll watcher to support their desired candidate.

"I was assigned by my relative who was supporting a candidate."

This pertains to the family's motive to help their bet of candidates to be assured that their votes are secured and will take part in their election standing.

Similarly, Participant 8 claimed that she was encouraged by her mother which influenced her to volunteer as a poll watcher.

"Mga magulang ko... nung una kasi si mama yung nagpo-poll watcher. So, nagtanong siya sa akin kung pwede daw ba akong magvolunteer. Wala naman

akong problema, goods ako. Masaya rin kasing mag-volunteer ng taga-rito kasi nakakatulong ako."

Tablan (2021) stated that supporting one's family is the major reason many people work, not just Filipinos. If money is the number one extrinsic motivator, this is because Filipinos use their salaries to provide for the maintenance and education of their children and extended family. Therefore, some Filipino families encourage their family members to apply to work with them to gain the same incentives and use them for the family.

The Encounter

In this study, the poll watchers encounter different scenarios of experiences on the day of the election. Poll watchers expressed their experiences into three subthemes: It's so tiring, Frustration is real, and It's just a normal day.

It's so tiring

The long and difficult day clocked in at 15 hours, leaving the poll watchers feeling achy, exhausted, yet proud (Molineaux, 2022). Participant 7 expressed how draining it was for the poll watchers to comply with the public administrative service.

"Grabe sobrang nakakapagod dahil magdamag kang nakatayo at kumakausap ng mga tao."

Moreover, according to a study, administrative burdens have increased unambiguously over time, specific policies provide greater citizen convenience but create more work for officials, and implementation rests with local officials who have many tasks to perform beyond election duties (Burden, David, Mayer, & Moynihan, 2012).

Frustration is real

Poll watchers faced a great deal of frustration during the election due to the long lines and slow-moving processes that were in place (Luna, 2022).

Participants 4 and 3 both shared their feeling of frustration due to long hours of work during the election.

"Mahirap sya kasi halos buong araw kami nandoon at nagbabantay."

"nakakapagod sya dahil buong araw ka nasa pwesto mo at nagbabantay."

Lack of work activity may lead workers to feel frustrated.

It's just a normal day!

For others like Participant 5, it's just like a normal day for them because they have done all the necessary preparation for the upcoming election and prepared for what will happen during the election.

"Maayos naman dahil naging handa naman ako bago ang araw ng election."

Participant 5 shows that being prepared and ready on your duty will make your work way more efficient and easier.

The Burden

Poll watching is consequential in terms of the burden that it bears. Poll watchers provide front-line service, which is crucial to the nature and quality of government services that citizens receive. Therefore, poll workers take significant responsibility, giving an undeniable burden to do their job well.

Interviewers have noticed three subthemes that occur throughout the interview. First, Grind hard− poll watchers work long hours to obtain their significant role. Second, Buzzfeed− this is about gossip roaming around the area, affecting the poll watchers, specifically in their emotional and psychological aspects. Third, cranky villagers. Short-tempered voters had become one of the significant challenges in dealing with poll watching.

Grind hard

Poll watchers devote their time and effort to accomplish their assigned tasks, resulting in them taking long hours of duty on election day. Respondent 8 claimed that:

"Dahil ang pagbibilang boto ay nakakapagod, dahil minsan pa ay inaabot na ng umaga na siyang talagang nakaka-mental drain dahil maghapon akong gising."

Most of the respondents also answered with the same sentiment as Respondent 3,

"Nakakapagod siya dahil... buong araw ka nasa pwesto mo at nagbabantay."

Altogether the pace of activities, pressure from voters, and the length of the workday definitely put a strain on poll watchers (Amegnran, 2017).

Buzzfeed

Poll watchers often face a variety of challenges such as gossiping. It is unavoidable in the job of poll-watching to hear workplace gossip. Gossip that may pertain to the candidate they are supporting also leads them to get into trouble. Respondent 8 commented that one of the challenging aspects of being a poll watcher is the negative gossip you may hear from other parties

"Nakakapagod din sya dahil may oras na naririnig mo yung nasa kabilang presinto na kuha ng ibang kandidato na nagpaparinig sayo ganon. May ibang poll watcher na nagpaparinig sa'yo na naaapektuhan ako sa emosyonal pero hindi naman gaano."

Workplace gossip is defined as informal, negative, and evaluative discussions among organization members aimed at an organization member. Former studies have employed different perspectives to explain the impact of negative workplace gossip. Some studies have confirmed the detrimental effect of gossip on targets' attitudes and behaviors, such as reducing their organization-based self-esteem, increasing emotional exhaustion, promoting negative mood, raising organizational cynicism, and causing a decline in engagement (Cheng, Dong, Zhang, Shaalan, Guo, & Peng, 2020).

Cranky Villagers

Poll watchers take a significant responsibility to deliver quality elections to voters as the assigned front-liners as they interact with the voters at polling places. Hence, voters demand exceptional work quality on their part. However, unpredictable inconveniences may arise along their job which may affect their efficiency. This includes unpredictable voter cases, massive workloads, staff shortages, and inadequate voting materials and equipment (Amegnran, 2017). Consequently, these inconveniences led voters to display negative attitudes and behaviors. Participant 8 claimed that

"Hindi maiiawasan yung mga malimit na pag-aaway o init ng ulo",

Participant 8 also mentioned,

"Yung iba [naman] is hindi naming makita yung mga pangalan nila kasi nahihintuan sa commission of election o di kaya lumipat sila ng tirahan nila. Akala nila dito pa rin sila sa place na ito, pero hindi. Yung

iba nagsisimula na sa pagawa ng mga away dahil hindi mahanap-hanap ang kanilang mga pangalan."

Participant 4 also admitted that dealing with ill-tempered voters has affected her emotionally.

"Yung mga maiinit na ulo na botante ang nagpapahirap sa akin sa emosyonal."

Based on a recent study by Mulvaney (2021), poll watchers reported being threatened and harassed by individuals on election day, which had an impact on the voting process. In some cases, poll watchers felt disrespected and disregarded by the individuals who were disrupting the voting process.

The Withstand

In this research, the interviewers have found adaptive coping mechanisms to manage the burden of their job. Researchers have found four strategies they rely on to cope: Stand firm, Mind my own business, Positivity is a choice, and We distract ourselves to ease our boredom.

Stand firm

Poll watching is not an easy job. Poll watchers experience a range of emotions when working during elections. As Participant 1 pointed out,

"Kailangan matatag ka dyan kase kung ikaw hindi ka matatag iiyak ka nalang dyan sa sobrang hirap ng pag po-poll watcher."

Hence, psychological resilience and physical readiness are important to manage the stress of the day and complete their duties with a sense of accomplishment.

Participant 1 also added that,

"Pagka poll watcher ka sa pisikal kailangan matulog ka ng maaga bago yung tinakdang araw at oras ng botohan. Kailangan iready mo yung sarili mo na hindi ka maggg papadaig o magpapatalo sa mga maririnig mo laban sa kandidato na binabantayan mo."

Mind my own business

In some interviews, participants commented that they keep themselves from the negatives carried by their work, rather stay focused on their duties, and remain emotionally resilient. Participant 10 simply stated,

"I shouldn't be entertaining negative thoughts."

Moreover, Participant 4 told that it is part of the job therefore there is nothing much to consider.

"Hindi ko na lang pinapansin kasi ganon talaga pag botohan nasanay na rin ako, ilang beses na rin kasi ako naging poll watcher."

I entertain myself.

Feelings of boredom occur regularly at work. It has been shown that bare work, monotony, repetition, and underutilization of skills may induce work-related boredom (van Hooff & van Hooft, 2014). From a psychological perspective, boredom is an unpleasant and demotivated effect characterized by a lack of motivation or enthusiasm (Noury, Ahuja, Parker, Sturdy, & Tyler, 2020). Hence, according to research, distractive behavior is one of the types of coping with work-related boredom. Distractive behavior is a behavior of employees at work that divert attention from work

Participant 2 expressed, *"Nag iisip ako ng mga bagay na mapaglilibangan habang nandon ako kasi boring talaga na nagbabantay ka lang, siguro inoobserve ko lang pano gumawa yung mga tao don, pano sila magsulat mga ganon."* Therefore, diverting their interest from time to time helps them to endure their feeling of boredom at work.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were derived: (1) Filipino workers value a good-paying job and preferred meaningful work. (2) Amidst the experiences and challenges, the poll watchers remain determined and motivated to take part in the seasonal election. (3) Poll watchers must be physically, emotionally, and mentally prepared to participate in this crucial work. Mainly, poll-watching is a self-reliant job.

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