




Violeda Umali

The Politics of Population Policy-making in the Philippines: Insights from the Population and Reproductive Health Legislative Proposals

The Research Puzzle	Research Questions	Main Findings	Conclusions
<p>Despite a big, and still growing, population, the Philippines has failed to come up with a stable and coherent population policy. The seeming haphazardness of the country's population policy is attributed mainly to the Catholic Church, but no in-depth study seems to have been undertaken about why and how the Church manages to prevail in the population debate. Such investigation gains further significance given that 'pro-choice' advocates have a strong presence in the country, and that studies have shown that religion does not play a significant role in people's family planning decisions.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who are the stakeholders in the population/RH legislative proposals and what are their specific positions and views on the proposals? 2. What advocacy and/or lobbying strategies have the stakeholders adopted to push their legislative agenda? 3. How do the different stakeholders compare in terms of the different factors that could potentially affect the outcome of the legislative initiatives? 4. What factors account for the seeming dominance of the Catholic Church and the morality discourse in population policy-making in the Philippines? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an existing legal framework for population policy (Republic Act 6365) but it hardly figures in the current population policy debates. • A total of 79 stakeholders actively participated in the deliberations on the population/RH bills: 57 in favor (pro-choice), 17 against (pro-life), and five undecided. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The latest bill filed in the House of Representatives had about 110 co-authors. • Use of arguments as advocacy strategy focused on asserting the mandate of representation, increasing the value of linguistic products, and reframing or attention shifting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As holders of the status quo position, the pro-life stakeholders are not "sitting it out" and instead are actively 'on the offensive' in pushing for their legislative agenda. • Pro-choice stakeholders exhibited more attempts at reframing and attention shifting. However, they failed to change the terms of the debate. • Pro-choice and pro-life stakeholders used basically the same types of advocacy tactics. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both rely considerably on networking with policy gatekeepers and in conducting public awareness campaigns. 	<p>The Catholic Church owes its strong position in the population debate to several factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It holds the status quo position; • It exercises great symbolic power in national-level Philippine politics; • It has strong access to important veto points within the legislative process; • The bureaucracy for population programs is very weak; • There are differences in opinion within the pro-choice group; and • Population/RH services is not an articulated need among the public. <p>A deeper understanding of these dynamics – particularly with regard to the Church's symbolic power – can be gleaned by analyzing local-level 'successes' in population legislation.</p>
<p>Research Focus</p> <p>The study examines the interplay of actors and institutions involved in the deliberations/debates on the legislative proposals on population and/or reproductive health (RH) filed in the 13th and 14th Philippine Congresses. The main research problem that the study addresses is: <i>What factors account for the form and direction that population legislation had taken in the Philippines?</i></p>	<p>Theory and Methodology</p> <p>The analysis is anchored on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice in general and his critique of the political field in particular, and on the propositions of Frank Baumgartner and his colleagues about policy advocacy and policy change. Key informant interviews and content analysis were the primary methods of data gathering.</p>		<p>The Researcher</p>  <p>Violeda Umali obtained her B.A. Communication Research and M.A. Demography degrees from the University of the Philippines. She also has a Master of Mass Communication degree from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.</p> <p>Contact: violeda.umali@univie.ac.at</p>