

FEDERALISM: AN ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT FOR THE PHILIPPINES

Jecy F. Duron

INTRODUCTION

The government of any country in the world should be able to deal with various and peculiar problems of different groups¹ under varying agenda. In dealing with these problems, the government recognizes that strategies which depend on culture, resources and capabilities must be applied. It is also expected to tackle the parochial problems of tribal groups and in the process persuade or prevail upon them to form themselves into unified groups that ultimately constitute one nation or state. The government is thereby enabled to pursue its objectives and attain its goals more effectively and efficaciously as envisioned by thoughtful individuals.

Political philosophers like John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and Jean Jacques Rousseau espoused the idea that a formal understanding must exist between the governed, i.e, the people, on the one hand, and the governor, the government, on the other. This vision has been institutionalized as a theoretical construct more precisely known as the Social Contract Theory, which proposes that any change in the policy and process of governing must have the approval and acquiescence of the governed.²

In an attempt to determine the suitability/adaptability of a federal system as an alternative to the unitary system of government in the Philippines, we undertook an empirical study. It was, moreover, the intention of the study to gauge the possible impact of adopting a federal system of government upon the political, economic and social life of the Filipino people, vis-a-vis awareness, suitability, adaptability, local autonomy, national unity, national security, political culture and the process of the conversion of the present form of system.

PERCEPTION OF THE RESPONDENTS ON THE ISSUES SURROUNDING FEDERALISM

As an initial step of our study, six groups of respondents were asked what they thought about federalization of the Philippines in terms of political, economic and social issues.

Political issues. Table 1 shows the summary of the respondents' perceptions on the political issues.

TABLE 1

Summary of Values Showing the Perception of the Respondents on Political Issues

Item	Senators	Representatives	Governors	Mayors	Professors	Students
1. Federal Government is suitable to the conditions of the Philippines	3.06 Undecided	3.481 Agree	3.231 Undecided	3.366 Undecided	3.556 Agree	3.257 Undecided
2. Federal form of government is adaptable in the Philippines	3.08 Undecided	3.501 Agree	3.231 Undecided	3.290 Undecided	3.670 Agree	3.288 Undecided
3. Federalization scheme is reflective of the desires and aspirations of the Filipino people	3.210 Undecided	3.698 Agree	3.259 Undecided	3.750 Undecided	3.876 Agree	3.380 Undecided
4. As to substance, a federal form of government creates political unity	3.190 Undecided	3.701 Agree	3.333 Undecided	3.490 Undecided	3.777 Undecided	3.286 Undecided
5. Political culture of the Filipinos is suitable for a federal system of government	3.201 Undecided	3.668 Agree	3.540 Agree	3.190 Undecided	3.854 Agree	3.502 Agree
6. Philippine national security will be enhanced if federalization is adopted	2.390 Disagree	3.409 Undecided	3.201 Undecided	3.210 Undecided	3.540 Agree	3.400 Undecided
7. Federalization will create disintegration of the whole Republic	3.011 Undecided	3.209 Undecided	3.187 Undecided	3.111 Undecided	2.354 Disagree	2.330 Disagree
8. There is a need for an amendment to our Constitution changing the unitary to a federal form	3.601 Agree	3.601 Agree	3.654 Agree	3.590 Agree	3.999 Agree	3.540 Agree
9. Federalization scheme creates greater autonomy to other local units of government	3.598 Agree	3.601 Agree	3.875 Agree	3.609 Agree	4.010 Agree	3.652 Agree
10. The unitary system of government has failed to implement greater decentralization and autonomy	3.019 Undecided	3.666 Agree	3.543 Agree	3.333 Undecided	3.786 Agree	3.121 Undecided

Tabular values show that there is a general trend of bipolarity among the respondents as regards political issues, with the politicians on one side and the academicians on the other. When queried as to the suitability of the federal form of government in the Philippines, senators, governors and mayors gave no comment (means³ from 3.06 for senators to 3.366 for mayors). The representatives, however, agreed with the professors in saying that this form of government would be suitable in the Philippine setting. Students, similarly declined to give an opinion. The most positive response was elicited from the professors (mean = 3.556) while the most negative came from the senators (mean = 3.06).

A similar pattern of response took shape when the respondents were asked as to the adoptability of a federal form of government in the Philippine setting. The professors indicated preference with the highest rating of 3.670 whereas the senators had the least mean of 3.08. On their part, the representatives opined that a federal government would be adoptable in the Philippines (mean = 3.501).

In sum, the respondents believed that many of the country's political problems will be solved under a federal form of government. For in a federal set-up, such main concerns as organizational coordination, leadership, regulation and accountability are readily on hand to attain and promote political stability and development. Advocates of federalism contend that it produces many political benefits including responsiveness to a diversity of needs, reduced risks of adverse power, greater innovation, enhanced local autonomy and assurance of national security through military strength. Inasmuch as federalism engenders the dispersal of power as its framework, the solution of local problems will thereby be given greater attention. Based upon the perceptions of the participants in the exercise, there are enough forces that encourage the adoption of the federal form of government. Evidently, many Filipinos are eager to join those who desire to change the present unitary form of government. In accordance, with the attention given to the present clamor for decentralization for both the Muslims and the Cordillera inhabitants, federalization appears to be the proper response to articulate expressions for the attainment of political integration *and* political development.

The respondents were likewise asked whether the federal form of government would be reflective of the desires and aspirations of the Filipinos. Results showed that both the professors and representatives agreed on the premise cited, with the professors having the larger mean of 3.876. The rest of the respondents gave no comment on the issue.

The senators disagreed with the view that federalization would enhance national security (mean = 2.390) in sharp contrast to the professors who stated that such a move would enhance national security (mean = 3.540). Again, the other groups of respondents gave no definite comment.

People from the academe disagreed that federalization would bring about the disintegration of the Republic. The professors showed a mean rating of 2.354 while the students had a mean rating of 2.330. On the other hand, the politicians either gave no comment or remained undecided on the issue.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, all groups of respondents believed that it would be necessary to amend the Constitution should there be a change from the present unitary government. Similarly, all agreed that federalization would cause greater degree of decentralization for the various local units of government in the country. In fact, representatives, governors and professors believed that the present governmental set-up has failed to implement existing laws that prescribe greater decentralization and corresponding autonomy to various local units of government.

Economic issues. Table 2 shows the values pertaining to the perceptions of the respondents on the various economic issues surrounding federalism.

TABLE 2

**Summary of Values Showing the Perceptions of the Respondents
on the Economic Issues Surrounding Federalism**

Item	Senators	Representatives	Governors	Mayors	Professors	Students
1. Philippine economy will be better if federalization is adopted	3.210 Undecided	3.250 Undecided	3.406 Undecided	3.392 Undecided	3.536 Agree	3.220 Undecided
2. The huge external debt problem of Philippines will be solved if the federal system of government will be implemented	3.209 Undecided	3.198 Undecided	3.203 Undecided	3.265 Undecided	3.668 Agree	3.182 Undecided
3. Unemployment and rising inflation have never been checked by the present system of government	3.507 Agree	3.609 Agree	3.587 Agree	3.555 Agree	3.549 Agree	3.666 Agree
4. The Comprehensive Agrarian and Land Reform Program of the present government will not succeed	3.198 Undecided	3.121 Undecided	3.098 Undecided	3.210 Undecided	3.554 Agree	4.898 Agree
5. Three years ago, the earnings of many Filipinos were not enough to meet their basic needs	3.543 Agree	3.555 Agree	3.609 Agree	3.598 Agree	3.709 Agree	3.765 Agree
6. The Philippines should stop borrowing from foreign financial institutions	3.019 Undecided	3.208 Undecided	3.222 Undecided	3.129 Undecided	3.889 Agree	4.656 Strongly Agree
7. Businessmen will benefit more if the federal system is adopted	3.098 Undecided	3.186 Undecided	3.196 Undecided	3.209 Undecided	3.541 Undecided	3.133 Undecided
8. Poverty in the countryside will be checked if the federal system of government is adopted	3.129 Undecided	3.122 Undecided	3.401 Undecided	3.387 Undecided	4.010 Agree	3.498 Agree
9. The economic recovery program of the government is succeeding	3.509 Agree	3.511 Agree	3.508 Agree	3.500 Agree	2.376 Disagree	2.098 Disagree
10. The prevalence of graft and corruption in the government discourages businessmen and foreign investors	3.098 Undecided	3.145 Undecided	3.209 Undecided	3.555 Agree	4.550 Strongly Agree	4.861 Strongly Agree
11. Federalization scheme guarantees equitable distribution of resources in the nation	2.309 Disagree	2.401 Disagree	2.398 Disagree	3.019 Undecided	3.120 Undecided	3.000 Undecided
12. To have better distribution of development efforts in the countryside, the proposed federal system of government should have 75-25 proportion of government control regardless of the nature of the taxes	3.010 Undecided	3.098 Undecided	3.000 Undecided	3.665 Agree	3.509 Agree	4.000 Agree

Again the tabular values revealed greater mean ratings among the academicians than among the politicians on the economic issues, signifying more positive perception of the idea of federalization among the professors and students than among the politicians. In particular, all the politicians responded that they remained undecided on the issue of whether or not federalization will bring about a better Philippine economy (means ranging from 3.210 to 3.406). On their part, the professors said that this economic phenomenon would occur under a federal form of government (mean = 3.536).

Would federalization bring relief from the problem of huge external debt that the government is facing? On this issue, only one group of respondents, the professors, stated that federalization would relieve the Philippines from the onus of its foreign debts (mean=3.668). The rest of the respondents, including the students who were expected to concur with the professors, declined to give any comment on the issue.

Rather surprising is all six groups of respondents agreed that the present system of government failed to check the soaring inflation and unemployment that up to now confront the Filipinos. Data, however, failed to show the reasons for this failure, i.e., is it attributable to the political system or is it due to weak political leadership?

The respondents' economic perceptions showed that the shift to a federal system of government is an alternative strategy for the attainment of economic growth. According to them, the federal system provides a solution to the problem of how the citizens can address their local and national needs. They perceived that a smaller political unit would be in a better position to help launch an economic take off. To them, if a unitary government could be converted into a federation, economic development would be achieved.

The probability of success of the present government's Comprehensive Agrarian Land Reform Program was also presented for rating. Results show that all the politicians were unable to present any prospects for the success of this government program. The academicians agreed that this program did not succeed. The students were almost certain that it would fail (mean = 3.898) and thus concurred with the view of the professors (mean=3.554).

All six groups of respondents agreed that the present earnings of the Filipinos are not sufficient to meet their basic needs. This is more strongly felt by the students and teachers (means of 3.765 and 3.709, respectively.)

Again, all the politicians declined to comment on whether or not the country should stop borrowings from foreign sources. The students strongly contended that the government should stop its propensity for borrowing from foreign financial institutions (mean = 4.656). The teachers and professors agreed that this practice should be stopped but only to a lesser extent (mean = 3.889).

If adapted in the Philippines, federalization can check the prevalence of poverty in the countryside, according to the professors (mean = 4.010) and the students (mean = 3.498). On the same issue, however, all the politicians either declined to comment or were undecided on the issue. It is quite fascinating to note that all the politicians seem to agree that the government's economic recovery program is succeeding; their mean being highest compared with those of the representatives and senators. At any rate, the representatives' view was sharply negated by both the students and professors.

Social issues. Finally, Table 3 shows a summary of the respondents' perceptions on the social issues involved in a federalization move in the Philippines.

In a federal form of government, social consciousness must be recognized [by Filipinos] as crucial to their own good. This was concurred in by the responses of both governors and mayors, with resultant means of 3.503 and 3.503. The rest of the respondents, however, did not show any reaction to the statement. It may be noted that those who agreed with the statement were mainly local politicians.

All six groups of respondents stated that irrelevant traditional values of the people hinder the adoption of the federal system of government in the Philippines. In fact, all of them agreed that lack of discipline among the Filipinos is a serious social problem on the road towards federalization. This sentiment was strongly felt by the professors (mean = 3.601) and the students (3.601).

When queried as to the possibility of giving free education from primary through college in a federal system, all the politicians replied that they could not give an unequivocal answer. Nevertheless, the academicians agree that this should be done by the federal government in case this system would be adopted in the Philippines.

The tabulation of the social perceptions of the respondents revealed that the change of the structure of government in the Philippines to a federal system is appropriate to the present social scenario in the country. There seems to be a clamor from various groups, especially the Muslim Filipinos and the Cordillera peoples, for broader decentralization in the management of governmental affairs in their respective areas in order for them to achieve social development.

Meanwhile, the senators stated that senior citizens should be afforded free transportation (mean = 3.502) in the event that federalization takes place. This view was concurred in by the students (mean = 3.500). The other respondents gave no specific comment.

A number of federal states as well as in some totalitarian governments, compulsory population control is being enforced. This was the case, for instance, during the term of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister of India, when men were forced to undergo "defertilization" in an effort to control the alarming rate of population growth in that country. When queried as to the possibility of applying population control in the Philippines under a federal form of government, each group of respondents remained undecided or had no comment.

TABLE 3

Summary of Values Showing the Perception on the Issues Surrounding the Federal System of Government

Item	Senators	Representatives	Governors	Mayors	Professors	Students
1. Social consciousness among the Filipinos is a desideratum for a federal system of government	3.375 Undecided	3.415 Undecided	3.503 Agree	3.503 Agree	3.371 Undecided	3.220 Undecided
2. Irrelevant traditional values of the people will hinder the adaption of the federal system of government	3.512 Agree	3.501 Agree	3.551 Agree	3.511 Agree	3.560 Agree	3.601 Agree
3. Unemployment insurance for the members of the labor force can be established in a federal system of government	3.201 Undecided	3.411 Undecided	3.409 Undecided	3.451 Agree	3.391 Undecided	3.120 Undecided
4. Lack of discipline among the Filipinos is a serious social problem towards federalization	3.550 Agree	3.512 Agree	3.509 Agree	3.500 Agree	3.601 Agree	3.601 Agree
5. Complete free education from primary through college should be a policy of the federal government	3.101 Undecided	3.009 Undecided	3.210 Undecided	3.511 Agree	4.019 Agree	4.555 Strongly Agree
6. Coupons for free transportation for senior citizens (above 70 years old) should be provided by the federal states	3.502 Agree	3.401 Undecided	3.401 Undecided	3.210 Undecided	3.209 Undecided	3.500 Agree
7. Rapid population growth should be controlled by the federal states	3.100 Undecided	3.125 Undecided	3.018 Undecided	3.072 Undecided	3.000 Undecided	3.000 Undecided
8. It is a power of the federal states to stop exportation of logs and other forest resources and minimize deforestation and denudation of our mountains	4.000 Agree	4.000 Agree	4.000 Agree	4.000 Agree	4.500 Strongly Agree	4.600 Strongly Agree
9. Honesty in public service is deteriorating	2.301 Disagree	2.287 Disagree	2.401 Disagree	2.209 Disagree	2.888 Undecided	3.601 Agree
10. The policies and programs of the national government for the people's welfare are not adequate	2.308 Disagree	2.222 Disagree	3.018 Undecided	3.102 Undecided	3.887 Agree	3.990 Agree
11. Rural development is given less emphasis in a unitary government	3.010 Undecided	3.201 Undecided	3.222 Undecided	3.245 Undecided	3.721 Agree	3.654 Agree
12. Nutrition and day-care services are emphasized more by federal units	3.220 Undecided	3.341 Undecided	3.298 Undecided	3.265 Undecided	3.260 Agree	3.598 Agree

As regards despoiling forest resources, the politicians agreed that a federal government had the right to control the exportation of logs and forest resources and thereby prevent forest denudation (mean = 4.000). This was strongly concurred in by the academicians, a mean of 4.500 for professors and 4.600 for the students. These figures show that there is an intensifying concern for environmental protection from all sectors of society.

All the politicians disagreed that honesty in public service is deteriorating (means from 2.209 to 2.301). The students, however, agreed with the statement that there is a decline in moral fiber among government workers (3.601). The professors were not certain on this point.

When the respondents were asked whether or not the policies and program of the National Government for the welfare of the people are adequate, dissenting opinions were again observed. The politicians either disagreed (mean of 2.308 for senators and 2.222 for representatives) or gave no comment (mayors with mean of 3.102). On their part, the academicians agreed that such programs were inadequate (professors with mean of 3.888).

Lastly, the professors and students believed that rural development is given less emphasis in a unitary government (mean of 3.721 for professors and 3.654 for students). The politicians had no comment on the issue.

PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL AND ACADEMIC LEADERS ON FEDERALISM CONCERNING ITS ADOPTION IN THE PHILIPPINES

With regard to the suitability/adaptability of a federal system of government in the Philippines, the respondents believed that present conditions and the requirements for the adoption of such a system are all present. Federalism is, therefore, definitely attainable.

The survey indicated that 50.53 percent were in favor of federalism for the Philippines. Only 26.19 percent disagreed or did not favor a federal form of government for the country. The perceptions in the samples indicated a big margin of agreement in favor of change.

Therefore, majority of the respondents are agreeable to the adoption of a federal system of government, compared to the number of those who disagree. The responses to majority of the samples can be shown as tangible evidence of how tentative the Filipino people as a whole can mobilize the means or the potentials for success in metamorphosing the present governmental system in various political, economic and social conditions of the country, into a federal system of government.

The views of majority of the respondents show that the governmental system has not improved in political terms, exemplified by the scarce participation of people in decision-making relative to economic and social issues. There is a gross disparity between envisioned development and actual ongoing development efforts of the government. For instance, with respect to Mindanao, one of the crucial issues of its development is that its share in the public fund allocation is rather miniscule.

In economic terms, imbalance in existing budgetary resources contrasts sharply with budgetary performance in a federal government. In the latter, extreme care is observed in the allocation of scarce resources to the various units of the government. It is likely that the problem of disparities in the developmental program of the present system of government can be minimized, if not totally eradicated, in a decentralized system. It can be demonstrated that the processes of both political and administrative decentralization can best be consummated in a federal system of government. To be sure, socially, the concept of federalization will require remedial measures to solve or vitiate such problems as insurgency and secession; otherwise, these exacerbations will remain to threaten the fragile social relations between and among groups who support cohesion with the national government and those who advocate secession from such government.

TABLE 4

Frequency Distribution as to the Suitability of a Federal Form of Government for the Philippines

Group/Level	5		4		3		2		1		No. of Respondents
	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		
	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	
Senators			7	53.8			4	30.8	2	15.4	13
Representatives	6	5.9	30	29.7	29	28.7	15	14.9	21	20.8	101
Governors	6	8.8	21	30.9	32	47.1	6	8.8	3	4.4	68
Mayors	26	14.1	81	44.0	25	13.6	33	17.8	19	10.3	184
Professors	7	7.1	45	45.9	29	29.6	15	15.3	2	2.0	88
Students	29	14.9	75	38.5	34	17.4	37	19.0	20	10.3	195
Total	74	11.23	253	39.3	149	22.6	110	16.7	67	10.2	659

Table 4 shows computations on the suitability of a federal form of government for the Philippines. Generally, majority of the respondents support the idea of federalization. The Table shows that 11.23 percent strongly agree and 39.30 percent agree, or a total of 50.53 percent. The negative responses on the suitability of federalism consisted of 16.7 percent disagree and 10.2 percent strongly disagree, for a total of 26.9 percent.

The overall result of the respondents' perceptions indicates popular support for federalization. Thus, there is no reason for Filipinos to be apprehensive that they will feel uncomfortable in a federal set-up, just as there is no reason for alarm on the part of the Muslim Filipinos, and the Cordillera peoples in their desire for secession. After all, the recommended system of federal government is itself an embodiment of the aspirations of the minority people in southern and northern Philippines.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE MECHANISM IN THE CONVERSION FROM A UNITARY FORM OF GOVERNMENT TO A FEDERAL SYSTEM

There has been an increasing interest in the Philippines lately on the issue of federalization. Vice-President Salvador H. Laurel, in one of his speeches, emphasized that it is not enough that Filipinos have changed our leadership and returned to a constitutional system but we should also reconsider our system of governance in its entirety. Our basic problem is to prevent the centralization of governmental authority, and to enable the provinces and other local governments to have an equitable sharing of the resources expected to achieve a more balanced development nationwide.

The 1987 constitution has given due course to demands for autonomy in Mindanao, and in the Cordillera region even as it maintains a unitary, centralized government for the whole country. However, with the result of the plebiscite in Mindanao wherein majority of the voters rejected the idea of autonomy, it is reasonable to effect a constitutional amendment adopting a federal form of government for the Philippines.

In this regard it is suggested that the existing twelve political regions be utilized to establish state governments, with the National Capital Region as the seat of the federal government. Or the legislators themselves start to consider how to reorganize the existing regions or parts of regions on the basis of geography, economic viability, ethnic and linguistic commonalities.

In case we Filipinos signify our preference for establishing a federal form of government, our present Constitution would have to be overhauled. This Constitution was designed to establish the government of the Republic of the Philippines in order to continue the system of government which has been in force in the Philippines since July 4, 1946.

If our present political leaders would recommend the amendment of the 1987 Constitution in order to adopt a federal system of government, a number of policy questions would have to be resolved. Under the prevailing Constitution, there are two ways by which it could be modified, amended or repealed: (1) the Congress of the Philippines may be convened as a constituent assembly with the approval of the people to draft the amendments to the Constitution for the ratification of the people. (2) A constitutional convention or a constitutional commission may be convened to draft the necessary amendment to the Constitution so as to convert the system of government from a unitary to a federal form, subject to the approval of the people.

Another important policy decision which needs to be considered is that amending the Constitution in order to convert the form of government to a federal system would be a matter of delineating what functions should be the responsibility of the federal government and what functions should be settled between the federal and the state governments.

Some countries have settled this question through the principle of residual powers. In applying this principle, some countries adopt the rule that all functions not assigned to the state government will be considered as functions to be exercised by the federal government. In some countries where some functions are not assigned to either, such functions are rendered to be the responsibility of the state government.

Another policy issue that must be resolved in the amendment of the Constitution is the establishment of state governments and defining their respective territorial jurisdictions. At present, the Philippines is divided into twelve regional areas plus one national capital region and two autonomous regions, i.e., Mindanao and Cordilleras. These regional areas are composed of certain provinces and cities located in such provinces. Whether the state government will use each of the present regional areas as constituting one state with its own government in the federal system, this interesting question should also be resolved.

Since under the federal system of government, each state shall have a complete government structure of its own, the structure of the government of each state must necessarily be defined in the Constitution. Following the practice in other countries, each state government will have its executive, legislative and judicial branches. In addition, it will be necessary for each state to have its own Constitution, with the federal Constitution supervening in countrywide matters.

The above stated policy questions are by no means exclusive or the only policy questions that must be threshed out in amending the present constitution for the purpose of converting the unitary system of the Philippine government into a federal system. Many other questions remain to be considered but those mentioned above are believed to be given priority as the most significant and basic ones.

NOTES

¹Marshall McLuhan, "Federalism and French Canadians," *New York Times Book Review*, November 17, 1968.

²Carlton Clyper Rodee, Totton James Anderson and Carl Quimby Christol, *Introduction to Political Science* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 4.

³Mean is obtained simply by adding the values of cases and dividing the sum by the number of cases. It is the most common measure of central tendency for variables measured at the internal level. Below is the assigned weights and ratings as well as the qualitative interpretations of data obtained in the survey.

OPTIONS	NUMERICAL RATING
SA Strongly Agree	5
A Agree	4
UD Undecided	3
SD Strongly Disagree	2
D Disagree	1
Assigned Weight	Qualitative Interpretation
4.5-5.0	Strongly Agree
3.5-4.4	Agree
2.5-3.4	Undecided
1.5-2.4	Strongly Disagree
1.4-Below	Disagree