



Civic Engagement Experiences Among Talisay Youth: Basis for a Participation Program

Faye Bernadette L. Guevarra¹ and Arnold Abad C. Tenorio²

¹San Guillermo Academy, Talisay, Batangas, Philippines

²Laguna State Polytechnic University - San Pablo City, Laguna, Philippines

Abstract— This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of Talisay youth in civic engagement using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. In-depth interviews were conducted, and participants' narratives were analyzed through thematic analysis and hermeneutic interpretation to examine experiences in electoral and non-electoral participation, cognitive engagement, and relational engagement. Findings revealed that civic engagement among Talisay youth is shaped by personal beliefs, social relationships, community experiences, and digital exposure. While some individuals demonstrated active, informed participation through research, factchecking, volunteerism, and advocacy, others viewed civic involvement as an obligation or expressed skepticism toward the political system. The study highlighted diverse levels of awareness and social engagement, with family, friends, and community leaders emerging as significant influences. Overall, youth civic engagement is dynamic and socially influenced, shaped by both empowering and limiting experiences. The study recommends creating meaningful, youth-centered opportunities that encourage critical awareness, social responsibility, and sustained civic participation.

Keywords— Civic Engagement, Electoral Participation, Non-Electoral Participation, Cognitive Engagement, Relational Engagement, Youth, Talisay.

I. INTRODUCTION

Several societies today are experiencing a collapse of democratic values, widening socioeconomic gaps, and declining trust in public institutions, making youth civic engagement an emerging global concern. Civic engagement, according to Springer (2024), is active participation in public and community life — including volunteering, joining community programs, advocating for causes, and engaging in political activities to address social concerns and enhance society.

Civic engagement, a multifaceted concept, has four components: Electoral Participation, Non-Electoral Participation, Cognitive Engagement, and Relational Engagement. Electoral engagement involves participation in the formal democratic process, including voter registration, voting, and campaign activities (Sairambay, 2020; Fiveable, 2025). Non-electoral participation, by contrast, encompasses civic and political actions outside the electoral process — such as community organizing, protests, petitions, volunteer work, and digital activism — aimed at influencing public opinion and social change (Coviello, 2025). Cognitive engagement involves interest in public affairs, political knowledge, critical thinking, and a willingness to process information about societal issues (Sairambay, 2020). Relational engagement emphasizes the social component of civic life by highlighting

interpersonal relationships, social networks, trust, and group interactions that foster cooperation, shared accountability, and sustained community involvement (Soucie et al., 2025).

According to the United Nations, youth are individuals aged 15–24, numbering approximately 1.2 billion globally, and constitute a significant demographic group that plays a critical role in the functioning and sustainability of democratic systems (UN World Population Prospects, 2022). According to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2024), youth involvement in political and civic decision-making is especially significant given the global decline in democracy and the rise of authoritarianism.

Despite ongoing efforts, studies show that many young people still face barriers to meaningful civic engagement — weak ties to local institutions, limited access to safe civic spaces, and low trust in formal political systems (CIRCLE, 2025). In the Philippine context, the Youth in Nation-Building Act (RA 8044) and the SK Reform Act (RA 10742) affirm the important roles of Filipino youth as active partners in national development, not merely recipients of government programs. Recent analyses note that while these structures offer valuable opportunities for leadership and civic learning, their effectiveness varies across communities (Cleofas, 2025).

Understanding youth civic involvement in municipalities is critical to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Quality Education (SDG 4), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16). This study therefore seeks to explore the dynamics of civic engagement among youth in Talisay, the barriers they face, and ways to strengthen their participation — providing an evidence-based perspective for enhancing youth engagement at the local level.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to explore and understand youth civic engagement from participants' perspectives. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on interpreting lived experiences and the meanings individuals ascribe to them (Creswell, 2012). This approach enabled the collection of narratives about youth's lived experiences, including barriers to civic engagement and ways of sustaining civic involvement within the community.

A. Research Instruments

The primary instrument was a semi-structured interview guide featuring open-ended, follow-up, and probing questions on youth civic engagement, barriers to involvement, and strategies to enhance engagement. Interviews lasted 20 to 45 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and were transcribed verbatim. An observation guide was also used to document nonverbal cues and contextual details. Related documents, including social media posts, photographs, and online civic content, were reviewed to enrich the data. The interview guide was validated by the research panel and by external validators, including head teachers and MAEd graduates.

B. Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select twenty (20) youth participants from Talisay, aged 15 to 30, consistent with RA 8044. The participants included 10 males and 10 females from diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, including in-school youth, out-of-school youth, senior high school students, college students, and



college graduates. Creswell (2013) suggested that phenomenological studies commonly involve 5–25 participants, while Guest et al. (2006) noted that data saturation frequently occurs within the first 12 interviews.

C. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, focusing on electoral participation, non-electoral participation, cognitive engagement, relational engagement, existing barriers, and methods for sustaining civic engagement. Triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and social media content increased the trustworthiness of the findings. Member checking was also used to strengthen credibility by allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of interpretations.

D. Ethical Considerations

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before the study. Participants were informed of the study's goals, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Pseudonyms were used to protect identities. Participants under 18 years of age obtained parental or guardian consent in accordance with ethical standards for research involving minors (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study sought to understand the lived experiences of Talisay youth in civic life and to explore existing and potential barriers to their civic engagement. Specifically, it addressed four research questions regarding: (1) the lived experiences of participants in electoral participation, non-electoral participation, cognitive engagement, and relational engagement; (2) existing barriers to youth civic participation; (3) how youth sustain and strengthen their engagement; and (4) what evidence-based participation programs can be proposed.

A. Electoral Participation

Four major themes emerged from Talisay youth narratives on electoral participation: Engaged and Knowledgeable Voters, Influenced and Relational Voting, Confusion and Skepticism, and Limited or Passive Electoral Engagement. These findings indicate that youth electoral behavior is shaped by knowledge, personal values, social influences, and emotional engagement. Consistent with Zhang (2022), situational attention to politics does not necessarily translate into action, while structural and informational barriers — including unequal access to political information and educational resources — limit turnout and create disengagement among some youth groups (CIRCLE, 2025).

B. Non-Electoral Participation

Non-electoral participation among youth is socially embedded and encompasses community involvement, advocacy, digital participation, and interpersonal influence. Youth primarily expressed engagement through active community involvement and digital participation, which they viewed as accessible and visible avenues for civic contribution. Consistent with Velasco et al. (2023) and Child & Youth Services Review (2020), these forms of participation offer flexible and immediate avenues for civic involvement. Peer influence emerged as a critical



motivator — peers serve as co-participants and sources of information, reinforcing civic engagement as a collective and relational experience (Terriquez et al., 2020).

C. Cognitive Engagement

Three major themes emerged within cognitive engagement: Civic Awareness, Active and Reflective Cognitive Engagement, and Cognitive Disengagement and Passive Cognition. Most participants reported awareness of current affairs and social issues primarily through social media, school discussions, and personal conversations — consistent with the Asian Institute of Research (2023) finding that youth today are value-conscious and globally aware. Results indicate that cognitive engagement is not binary but varies in degree, from passive awareness to active and reflective civic involvement.

D. Relational Engagement

Relational engagement underscores the importance of social relationships and interpersonal interactions in youth civic participation. Friends, family, and community leaders significantly shaped both the desire to participate and the meaning youth ascribe to their participation. Themes ranged from socially motivated participation and community connection to non-civic interaction and conditional engagement. Boat et al. (2021) noted that peer social capital is indirectly linked to the collective capacity to create change, reinforcing the centrality of relational networks in sustaining civic involvement.

E. Barriers to Civic Engagement

Barriers to youth civic participation are multidimensional — structural, environmental, informational, cognitive, personal, psychological, familial, political, and institutional — and intersect to shape the depth and quality of involvement. Competing responsibilities, financial constraints, limited access to information, time constraints, political skepticism, and gaps in civic knowledge collectively hinder sustained engagement. These barriers are not standalone; they reinforce one another and reflect both systemic and individual causes, consistent with existing literature on youth disengagement (CIRCLE, 2025; OECD, 2024).

F. Sustaining Civic Engagement

Youth in Talisay have adopted adaptive strategies to sustain their civic involvement, including self-initiated learning (research, fact-checking), active engagement in community and leadership roles through the Sangguniang Kabataan, and selective participation in personally meaningful activities. These findings suggest that when enabling conditions exist, youth demonstrate both the potential and the willingness to participate. Existing literature supports the view that sustained participation is best achieved when individual motivation is backed by relational networks and enabling structures (OECD, 2024; Wray-Lake & Abrams, 2020).

G. Proposed Participation Program

Based on the findings, the Portfolio of Participation Program for the Youth of Talisay was developed, comprising ten responsive program components that address identified barriers and leverage enabling factors from youth's lived experiences.



Table 1. Portfolio of Participation Program for the Youth of Talis

Program Component	Objectives	Key Activities	Implementation Process	Monitoring and Evaluation	Expected Outcomes
Youth Empowerment & Confidence Building	Enhance self-efficacy in civic engagement	Leadership training, public speaking workshops, sports league (Basketball and Volleyball)	Conduct capacity-building sessions in coordination with schools and LGU	Pre/post self-efficacy surveys; participation tracking	Increased confidence and willingness to participate
Peer Support & Engagement Circles	Promote group-based participation	Buddy system, peer-led civic activities	Organize youth groups and assign peer facilitators	Attendance and peer engagement monitoring	Increased participation through peer support
Civic Education and Awareness Campaign	Improve civic knowledge and critical thinking	Open and online forums, issue-based discussions, voters' education	Partner with schools and civic organizations for regular sessions (per quarter or semester)	Knowledge assessment tests; feedback forms	More informed and critically engaged youth
Inclusive Participation Support Program	Reduce economic barriers	Transportation support, free participation access, provide foods or water for participating	Allocate LGU/SK funds; look for sponsorships	Participation rate comparison (before/after support)	Increased accessibility to civic activities
Flexible Engagement Program	Accommodate diverse schedules	Weekend events, hybrid participation (use of digital platforms)	Develop modular and flexible activity schedules	Participation consistency tracking	Sustained engagement despite time limitations
Digital Information and Outreach Program	Improve awareness of opportunities	Social media campaigns, info hubs, use of mobile public address system	Create centralized youth information platform	Reach analytics, engagement metrics	Increased awareness and information access
Family Engagement Program	Encourage family support	Parent orientations, family-inclusive events	Conduct community-family dialogues	Parent feedback surveys	Increased family support for participation
Institutional Dialogue & Strengthening	Improve institutional trust	Youth-government forums, transparency sessions	Facilitate regular dialogue with LGU	Trust perception surveys	Improved trust in institutions
Transparency and Accountability Initiatives	Build civic trust	Open forums, participatory governance, use of digital media, continuous posting on Transparency Board	Implement feedback and reporting systems	Trust and satisfaction surveys	Increased trust in governance



The Youth Empowerment and Confidence Building component aims to build self-efficacy, leadership, and confidence. Results showed that civic participation was associated with fulfillment and empowerment, but also with hesitancy among those with low civic knowledge (UNICEF, 2021; World Bank, 2023; UNESCO, 2022).

The Peer Support and Engagement Circles component is grounded in research showing the critical role peers play in civic involvement — friends' encouragement and collective participation significantly increase willingness to engage (Wong et al., 2022). The Civic Education and Awareness Campaign addresses varying levels of cognitive engagement, including skepticism and exposure to disinformation, and calls for media literacy and political awareness initiatives (Quimba et al., 2025; Cleofas, 2025).

The Inclusive Participation Support Program addresses logistical and economic barriers by promoting accessible, equitable participation opportunities, particularly for marginalized youth (World Bank, 2023). The Flexible Engagement Program accommodates diverse schedules through hybrid and modular participation models (UNESCO, 2022). The Digital Information and Outreach Program promotes responsible online engagement and digital citizenship in response to the primacy of social media in youth civic life (Pew Research Center, 2023; OECD, 2021).

The Family Engagement Program draws on research on family influence over civic attitudes and behaviors (Pellicer, 2020). The Institutional Dialogue and Strengthening component and Transparency and Accountability Initiatives address political distrust and institutional skepticism by fostering meaningful dialogue and accountability mechanisms between youth and local government (Ramos et al., 2025; Grassi et al., 2023). A Monitoring and Evaluation methodology was also designed to assess program efficacy on an ongoing basis.

Figure 1 presents the Framework for the Participation Program for the Youth of Talisay, illustrating the interrelationships among program inputs (LGU support, schools, digital platforms, community partnerships), activities (civic education campaigns, peer mobilization, leadership training, digital engagement, family involvement), outputs (youth participants engaged, campaigns implemented, online engagement metrics), and expected outcomes — from short-term increases in civic awareness and confidence to intermediate strengthening of leadership and social support to the long-term impact of active, informed, and empowered youth.

Figure 2 presents the Civic Engagement Experiences of the Talisay Youth Framework, illustrating the four interrelated dimensions of engagement — electoral, non-electoral, cognitive, and relational — as well as the conditions that enable or constrain participation and the essence of lived experience, which is socially influenced, emotionally meaningful, digitally mediated, and context-dependent.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study finds that youth civic engagement in Talisay is multifaceted and dynamic. Youth are diverse in their electoral participation — some are active, informed voters, while others are cynical, confused, or disengaged. Non-electoral involvement is more accessible but often inconsistent and opportunistic. Cognitive engagement ranges from critical, information-seeking behavior to confusion fueled by disinformation and a gap between awareness

and action. Family, friends, and community networks are key relational influences, underscoring that civic participation is socially constructed.

The study concludes that youth civic engagement is hindered by interconnected cognitive, structural, psychological, personal, informational, environmental, familial, institutional, and political barriers. Political skepticism and apathy, civic education deficits, and the spread of disinformation fuel frustration and disengagement. Non-participation is therefore less a matter of apathy and more a reflection of systemic limits and a perceived sense of futility.

Despite these challenges, Talisay youth have demonstrated adaptive capacity — engaging in self-directed learning, assuming leadership roles in the SK, and choosing personally meaningful activities. The proposed Portfolio of Participation Program directly addresses these barriers and supports the development of active, informed, and empowered youth.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed: (1) Youth may take more intentional roles in civic engagement by participating in local issues and community discussions; (2) the LGU, through the SK and other youth-led organizations, may make civic engagement efforts more inclusive and responsive; (3) schools may improve civic education through community immersion, collaborative projects, and leadership training; (4) families may reinforce civic values through household discussions and by modeling responsible citizenship; and (5) future researchers may extend the study to other localities and larger samples, focusing on measuring the effects of civic engagement programs.

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