



## How does the Epistemic Ethics of Voting relate to Civic Obligation in the Democratic Philippines?<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Electoral exercise is part of the Philippine democratic system that she has inherited from her American colonizers. Both have the same system of voluntary voting in which the participation of their citizens in the democratic process is not a requirement. All the government can do in the name of participation is encourage citizens to vote. Intuitively, this could be a useless political activity when treating the democratic process as a decision-making method. Its implication means that voluntary voting does not let her people directly address the ills in Philippine politics, such as political dynasties and traditional politicians, because they can choose to vote or not to vote. There are two seemingly valid reasons why it must be that way. On the one hand, the glaring reason is that it gives the public the freedom to exercise their right to how they vote politically, ethically, and epistemically. On the other hand, state coercion is put into question when it forces people to join in the exercise of suffrage against their will. The author proposes a third option: to inculcate a sense of accountability for the people and the elected when political affairs do not sit well. I will argue that through this, the perception of electoral activity becomes clear, inviting everyone to get involved through collective cohesion and epistemic responsibilities. This perception will strengthen the legitimacy and representation of the government and advance

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democracy to its greatest height. It will use Jason Brennan's *epistocracy* to advance an argument that voting is voluntary based on the degree of one's justified knowledge in participating in political decision-making and Charles Taylor's *entre nous* to have a sense of collectivity and moral accountability.

**Keywords:** Democratic participation, selective participation, good and bad policies, voting well, abstention, moral cohesion

## Introduction

Democratic participation is a term that encompasses many other essential things that take place in any democratic country. It refers to the "processes by which citizens influence or control those who make major decisions affecting them."<sup>2</sup> In the Philippines, Filipino youth are eager to join in the process they see as making their future brighter. Democracy, in this sense, means a method of decision-making, and therefore, Filipino citizens should take part in shaping their destiny as one nation under one flag. In broad strokes, participation means the "acts intended to influence the behavior of those who have such decisional power."<sup>3</sup> The citizens are about to influence the decision-makers, who are the government officials. Sidney Verba makes it clear that citizens' acts must be intentional, so wherein government officials can respond to their needs regarding policymaking.<sup>4</sup> This interaction between them ensures that these officials cannot make policies according to their beliefs and values. Hence, they must create policies for the common good.

One of the expressions of democratic participation is political participation through voting in elections. There will be only two expected consequences when people participate and vote: either they put the lives of the people or the government in a better or worse situation. But how about those who do not vote? What would be their

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<sup>2</sup> Sidney Verba, "Democratic Participation," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 373, no. 1 (1967): 54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626737300103>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>4</sup> Sidney Verba, "Democratic Participation," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 373, no. 1 (1967): 55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626737300103>.

contribution to the political scene? Would it be worth considering if their votes do not make a worse politician win? Or would it also be not worth considering if their votes do not make a good politician win in the race? Regarding those who do not participate in voting, Brennan clarifies and argues that voting itself carries no moral acceptability. But that is not the case concerning how we vote.<sup>5</sup> He speaks not only about the manner of voting but also about why we vote. Let it be clear that the discussion of voting takes place in a political context, for there are other avenues where voting happens, such as voting for who would be the winner of *The Voice* or the *Miss Philippines* contests.<sup>6</sup> However, speaking of voting in a political context, the voter's vote not only affects themselves. A domino effect affects other citizens if the voter makes a good choice. If we follow this line of thinking, voters must consider others, that is, voters and non-voters, in their decision-making.

Given that a vote does not affect the well-being of other Filipinos, the voter acknowledges that they think of their own welfare when they vote.<sup>7</sup> The only way to avoid this thinking is to understand that individual vote takes place in the context of collectivity, for there are Filipinos in a collective sense and not in an individual sense who decide who would govern us. Because of these, we ask, "How does political participation, particularly voting, gear towards improving democracy?" "If the concept of voting well is imposed, will this only result in selective participation?" "How do we justifiably achieve the common good?"

This paper will be divided into the following sections. First, it will discuss political participation as part of the scope of democratic participation. This participation contains other activities that relate directly to politics and governance. One of the activities is voting in the elections. Second, it will deal with improving democracy by considering two arguments: the commonsense view and the saving democracy argument. Although these arguments are valid, they are still questionable. Third, it will analyze the concept of voting as a right in the context of some existing laws in the Philippines, emphasizing

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<sup>5</sup> Jason Brennan, *The ethics of voting* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>6</sup> These are entertainment programs that showcase local talents in the Philippines. Filipino viewers and general audience are invited to participate in the decision making by voting via texting and online.

<sup>7</sup> Jason Brennan, *The ethics of voting* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 2.

that this right is favorable within the purview of selective participation. Fourth, it will analyze fortuitous voting as a risk that puts Filipinos in disadvantaged situations. There is a need to focus on the content of justification that addresses the common good. And lastly, it will introduce the epistemic justification in “us” as a social force for the electors to exercise their right of suffrage. It will conclude that a justificatory reason for voting, coupled with a sense of collective accountability, will be a better alternative in figuring out what is best for our country.

### Political Participation

Democratic participation is a broad concept that covers all forms of engagement that would support democracy in general, such as “voting, letter-writing, picketing, or political activities.”<sup>8</sup> The scope of political activities, as one of the forms of engagement under democratic participation, is to influence the government directly. Other activities aside from voting under the name of political participation<sup>9</sup> include “attending a demonstration or protest, signing a petition, contacting community leaders, or elected officials.”<sup>10</sup> All these activities are standard modes of participation, but the most controversial one is voting in the election, especially in times of changing the leaders in the country.

The participation of the people, whether democratic or political, refers to the “acts intended to influence the behavior of those who have such decisional power.”<sup>11</sup> The ones in decisional power are the government officials, either elected or appointed, while those who are about to influence the former are the citizens. There are many citizens, but only a few are part of the skeletal force in the government or are

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<sup>8</sup> Jason Brennan, *The ethics of voting* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Sidney Verba, “Democratic Participation,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 373, no. 1 (1967): 56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626737300103>.

<sup>10</sup>Anthony Lawrence A. Borja, et al., “Challenges to Democratization from the Perspective of Political Inaction: Insights into Political Disempowerment and Citizenship in the Philippines,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* (Online First 2024): 3. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034241239060>.

<sup>11</sup> Sidney Verba, “Democratic Participation,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 373, no. 1 (1967): 55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626737300103>.

employees maintaining essential government operations. Nevertheless, through manifest participation, which is the direct form of participation, interaction and communication exist between them.<sup>12</sup> Sidney Verba makes it clear that the agent's act is intentional; that is, government officials must be responsive to the needs of their constituents in terms of policymaking and not based on their beliefs and values.<sup>13</sup>

The Philippines has inherited many things from its former colonizer – the United States of America. One of these, which is of primary importance, is the system of voting, in which political participation in the election is not a requirement. In this system, not all Filipinos vote during an election. According to Comelec Chairperson George Garcia, 82.20 percent or 57,350,968 out of 69,673,653 registered voters participated in the May 12 midterm elections.<sup>14</sup> It means that 17.70 percent did not vote. In this situation, there are two forms of political participation: those who are voting and those who do not but join other political means, such as joining protests or attending rallies. Those Filipino voters participating in the polls believe that elected officials can change the country's political landscape. And those non-electoral Filipinos who are not participating in the poll think it is costly to vote at the precinct. Hence, they view voting as a decision-making process and a wasted opportunity. This view gives the impression that they do not care about advancing democracy. Overall, electoral participation becomes selective by only those who actively and directly address the ills in Philippine politics, such as political dynasties and traditional politicians.

An article published in the Philippines highlights the political participation of Filipino youth. The research has been focusing on the

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<sup>12</sup> In the typology of political participation, political participation is distinguished into two forms, which are the latent and the manifest, based on impact. In the latent participation, the impact of individual participation is gradual. This contrasts with manifest participation, in which the impact is immediate since individual participation is active. For instance, it is voting. See Joakim Ekman and Erik Amna, "Political Participation and Civic Engagement: Towards a New Typology," *Human Affairs* 22 (2012): 284. DOI: 10.2478/s13374-012-0024-1.

<sup>13</sup> Sidney Verba, "Democratic Participation," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 373, no. 1 (1967): 55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626737300103>.

<sup>14</sup> Ferdinand Patinio, "May 12 polls voter turnout at 'historic' 82.20%," *Philippine News Agency*, May 16, 2025, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1250259>.

perception of the youth in political affairs. The youth are considered a large chunk of the populace, and the research findings show that they enthusiastically participate in political matters. In the study conducted by Wilhelmina Cabo, for instance, she claimed that the youth are not disconnected, uninterested, and apathetic about the politics in the country. She has conducted a democracy project in which the respondents participated in election monitoring exercises.<sup>15</sup> According to her, the youth have learned or been educated about the political process through monitoring. The project means that education serves as a primary indicator of participation.<sup>16</sup> And it only indicates that the advancement of democracy in the country looks brighter with their enthusiasm in the political arena.<sup>17</sup>

### Commonsense View and Saving Democracy Arguments

It is supposed that political participation through voting would serve as an avenue to correct political flaws and form a better political landscape. It is either by putting the right people in office whom the voters prefer or removing the wrong politicians whom they have lost their confidence in.<sup>18</sup> If voting remains a non-requirement for each citizen, it gives the public the freedom to exercise their right to how they vote politically, ethically, and epistemically. It would be advantageous if Filipinos were mature enough to vote with the end in mind for the country's good. This advantage will address Brian James Lu's observation that "... Filipinos still lack the maturity to vote, often electing candidates with questionable character and accomplishments to office."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Wilhelmina L. Cabo, "Youth and political participation in the Philippines: Voices and themes from a democracy project," *Journal of Politics and Governance* 8, no. 1 (2018): 268.

<sup>16</sup> Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, & Henry E. Brady, *Voice and equality. Civic voluntarism in American politics*, (Harvard University Press, 1995), 327.

<sup>17</sup> It is of utmost importance for every elector to know the intention of political candidates whether they are for or against advancing democracy. See Arnel A. Morte, "The Role of Collective Recognition on Political Power," *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Politics and Culture Special Issue 2 (2025): 239.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>19</sup> Brian James Lu, "The urgent need for electoral reforms in PH," *Philippine News Agency*, July 26, 2024, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/opinion/pieces/913-the-urgent-need-for-electoral-reforms-in-ph>.

The comment of Lu speaks to the lack of knowledge among Filipino voters to understand the purpose of voting and to learn the qualifications and worthiness of political candidates. Hence, voters should be intellectually informed to make the right choice. However, retaining the non-requirement to vote is also crucial in democracy. Or else, it might create a problem of state coercion when it forces people to join in the exercise of suffrage to live up to the expectation of having a good democracy. When election day is near, an idea resonates among hopeful individuals on social media and clerics in the pulpit that everyone should participate and exercise their right to vote. Even the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) would make an advanced announcement as to when the registration begins, especially for those who have reached the age of eighteen years old (18), since it is a requirement according to the 1987 Constitution. These all encourage people to participate in local and national elections. There are two kinds of encouragement amidst the practice of voluntary voting.

The first kind of encouragement is that voting is a civic duty. By just being a member of a country, and with all the rights and privileges given, it is a duty on their part to participate in the activity. In other words, it is a kind of duty that is associated with the notion of citizenship.<sup>20</sup> In this case, being a citizen or Filipino in this country motivates them to participate politically. This position is the commonsense view, which is also called the “folk theory of voting.”<sup>21</sup> One must vote, and to abstain from voting is not recommended except for extenuating circumstances. In this case, it is morally acceptable to be in good faith when voting despite the worst candidates vying for government positions.<sup>22</sup>

Another kind of encouragement is based on the idea that voting preserves a stable democracy. It is a belief that a stable government promotes the individual and common good of all. Hence, voting preserves the stability of democracy, while not voting would destabilize it. This understanding is called the “saving democracy argument.” There is a dual perspective on the part of the voter in participating politically with this argument – it would benefit one’s

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<sup>20</sup> Filomeno V. Aguilar, “Betting on democracy: Electoral ritual in the Philippine presidential campaign,” *Philippine Studies* 53, no. 1 (2005): 107.

<sup>21</sup> Jason Brennan, *The ethics of voting* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

interest and the common good.<sup>23</sup> However, this argument's problem in trying to save democracy is the paradox of voting, wherein a single vote does not guarantee a desired change in the election outcome.<sup>24</sup> And this calls for a specific collective action or common interests will never be achieved. Participating speaks for itself in the decision-making method.

However, the treatment of voting as voluntary or non-compulsory escapes the commonsense view and the saving democracy argument in the Philippines. It escapes the view that voting is a civic duty since the circumstances are not alright. It also escapes the argument that voting preserves the stability of democratic government since it serves no one's good and the common good. For Francis Joseph Dee, there are two ways to abstain from voting since voting is not mandatory: the unit abstention and the item abstention.<sup>25</sup> In the first abstention, the voter simply does not show up at the poll or does not mail the ballot, in the case of absentee voters. And in the second abstention, the voter shows up at the poll. They submit an accomplished ballot but refrain from shading, not of their own choice, any candidate for a particular position. The abstention, the author argues here, can be either of the two.

### **Voting as a Right and the Philippine Laws**

Right, in general, is defined as an entitlement for any person to be allowed to do something that interests them.<sup>26</sup> This entitlement includes the exercise of voting as a right that every Filipino of the Republic possesses under their citizenship. It also considers this right a privilege bestowed upon them to partake in the democratic process. Hence, the 1987 Constitution enshrines such rights unless an amendment takes place in the future.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>24</sup> Eduardo T. Gonzalez, "People Power in the Philippines: Between Democratic Passions and the Rule of Law," *Asian Studies Journal* 39, nos. 1-2 (2003):152.

<sup>25</sup> Francis Joseph Dee, "Is it Ok to Abstain?," *UP Sa Halalan*, December 30, 2021, [https://halalan.up.edu.ph/is-it-okay-to-abstain/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://halalan.up.edu.ph/is-it-okay-to-abstain/?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>26</sup> Francis Evangelista and Napoleon Mabaquiao, *Ethics: Theories and applications* (Anvil, 2020), 21.

<sup>27</sup> *1987 Constitution of the Philippines*, accessed September 30, 2024, <https://www.set.gov.ph/resources/philippine-constitutions/1987->

However, the right to vote is correlative to the concept of duty. To exercise one's right to vote means to expect others not to hinder in the execution of such right. The difference between right and duty is in the punishment that it entails. There is no imposition of punishment when one is not exercising the right to vote. In the Philippines, when one fails to exercise the right to vote in two straight elections, the consequence is that the COMELEC will remove one's name from the list of registered voters. All one must do to be listed again is to re-register at their office. And this non-exercise to vote goes without sanction.<sup>28</sup> But this is not the case when one fails to exercise one's duty, since there is imposition of punishment. For instance, there is an obligation on the part of the parents when they do not fulfill their duty to educate their children. In other words, it does not always follow that one must exercise the right to vote. Only when a particular right involves duty, as in the case of civic duty in the folk theory of voting, does one have to fulfill it. If we put this under a moral perspective, it does not follow that choosing to vote would mean it is morally right.<sup>29</sup>

In applying the concept of right to the exercise of voting, the elector has the right to vote at a minimum. It implies that no one can stop that person from exercising their political right. Likewise, there is also no obligation imposed on them to vote. This non-obligation leads us to find why the elector needs to vote for it to become morally right. It only means that when one is not justified in voting, one is not obliged to vote. Now, the question is, what is the reason for the act of voting?

Brennan is concerned with how we ought to vote. He acknowledges that each elector has equal voting power. However, once the election comes, each contribution will not be of equal quality.<sup>30</sup> He cites some reasons regarding how voters behave. Regarding knowledge, some are well-informed, while others are not, and they are ignorant. Regarding policy preferences, some use social

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[constitution/#:~:text= Suffrage%20may%20be%20exercised%20by,months%20immediately%20preceding%20the%20election.](#)

<sup>28</sup> Francis Joseph Dee, "Is it Ok to Abstain?" *UP Halalan*, December 30, 2021.

[https://halalan.up.edu.ph/is-it-okay-to-abstain/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://halalan.up.edu.ph/is-it-okay-to-abstain/?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>29</sup> According to Brennan, Martin Luther King Jr. describes right as a moral furniture wherein it "allows you to stand up and look others in the eyes as equals." It means that each one of us, human beings, has the same dignity. See Jason Brennan, *The ethics of voting* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

scientific evidence, appeal to emotion, and the degree of rationality as the basis for selection. In terms of relation to morality, some would vote based on sound moral values, others for morally despicable reasons, and others depending on their moral attitudes.<sup>31</sup> However, when it comes to how one should vote, every voter should remember that they need to vote well and not just to vote.<sup>32</sup> The need to vote well will point to the content of the justification.

The status of the need to vote well is in harmony with how the Philippine documents support voluntary voting. In the *1987 Constitution*, section one of Article V states that “[s]uffrage may be exercised by all citizens of the Philippines not otherwise disqualified by law, who are at least eighteen years of age ....”<sup>33</sup> And in the Republic Act No. 8189, also known as *The Voter’s Registration Act of 1996*, section nine states that voting registration is not compulsory with the modal term “may” in “...may register as a voter.”<sup>34</sup> From these two documents, the value of freedom among individual Filipino citizens is secured and respected. Thus, their right not to vote and to vote are protected and safeguarded.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> Jason Brennan, *The ethics of voting* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 10-11. For Brennan, to achieve the art of voting, voters must develop the skill of voting well since it requires practice and training.

<sup>33</sup> “1987 Constitution of the Philippines,” archived September 30, 2024, <https://www.set.gov.ph/resources/philippine-constitutions/1987-constitution/#:~:text=Suffrage%20may%20be%20exercised%20by,months%20immediately%20preceding%20the%20election.>

<sup>34</sup> “The Voter’s Registration Act of 1996,” archived September 30, 2024, at <https://www.set.gov.ph/resources/election-law/republic-act-no-8189/>.

<sup>35</sup> Before the exercise of voluntary voting, the Philippines practiced compulsory voting. Section four of the *Omnibus Code of the Philippines* obliges every citizen, from eighteen years of age or over, to register and vote. Moreover, according to Article XXII, Section 261, (z) 1, it is an election offense if one fails to cast one’s vote. The penalty for this is imprisonment of not less than one year and not more than six years with a fine of one hundred pesos as written in section two hundred sixty-four of the same Code. However, it allows citizens to abstain from voting in the same Code only when vote-buying or vote-selling exists. That is the only condition for abstention. Otherwise, abstention other than those reasons would be considered an election offense under section two hundred sixty-one, paragraph A. See “Omnibus Code of the Philippines,” archived December 15, 2024, <https://comelec.gov.ph/?r=References/RelatedLaws/OmnibusElectionCode.>

## The Fortuitous Voting

Most Filipinos understand that they must fulfill their civic obligation to vote. Part of the reality is that most of them vote because it has a low cost. The government usually declares a holiday for greater electoral participation. With this, it gives less reason for Filipinos not to go to the precinct and vote. However, that is not the case for overseas Filipinos, for there is low electoral participation due to the high cost of going to the consulate just to vote. Usually, there is one consulate per country abroad. Hence, some would prefer to join the different political and social organizations and activities in their nearby locality instead.<sup>36</sup>

The other part of the reality is that Filipinos generally feel obligated to vote. With this perspective, I will argue that Filipinos must also develop a sense of responsibility not to vote incorrectly. It is a common understanding that voting is “the principal way that citizens can influence the quality of government.”<sup>37</sup> It is the critical duty of every Filipino to discern who they think would govern them. If an individual voter does not vote well, they should abstain. One should abstain from voting if one lacks “the motive, knowledge, rationality, or ability to vote well.”<sup>38</sup>

To put it in another way, one should have a justifiable belief in voting for the common good and not just have the belief in voting for the common good. Likewise, it is not enough to believe that one must vote; one must have a good reason to do it. The analysis of right and duty regarding voting leads one to abstain from voting if one’s political action is unjustified. Voting becomes justifiable when one has all the reasons for voting. Without one, one becomes blameworthy of the election’s results, ignorant or misinformed about relevant facts, or irrational in that it promotes the common good. Then, one must not proceed to vote, lest they pollute democracy.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Anthony Lawrence A. Borja, et al., “Challenges to Democratization from the Perspective of Political Inaction: Insights into Political Disempowerment and Citizenship in the Philippines,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* (Online First 2024): 4. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034241239060>.

<sup>37</sup> Jason Brennan, *The ethics of voting* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>38</sup> Jason Brennan, *The ethics of voting*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

However, there are two kinds of wrong voting. The first kind is voting for a harmful policy or for a candidate about to implement a harmful policy, which is called harmful voting. It is considered unexcused and unjustified at all costs.<sup>40</sup> This kind of voting is detrimental to the welfare of the country. The second kind is voting for a beneficial policy or for a candidate who is about to implement a beneficial policy, which is called fortuitous voting. However, the downside of this voting is that there is a lack of sufficient justification for the policy or the candidate to be good. Here, voters make the right choice but with the wrong reason or without a reason.

The fortuitous voting is precisely what is happening among the Filipinos. They have made the right choice in voting individually or collectively because candidates appear appealing through their political agenda. The latter are investing all the resources to show their good intention for the country. However, every voter must consider themselves and the future when voting. They need to consider others as well because it affects them, too. Hence, they owe to others "to be adequately rational, unbiased, just, and informed about their political belief."<sup>41</sup> Filipino electors must be responsible if they opt to be one. With this, they must develop political virtue. There is no problem with voting since they vote the right way, but only because they are not justified in believing their vote will be for the common good. Knowing that one is voting fortuitously, they have the duty not to vote. The reason for this is that "it imposes unacceptable risk."<sup>42</sup> As much as possible, voters must know whether their vote will expose the governed to risk. In the case of fortuitous voting, the governed are harmed indirectly, unlike in harmful voting. This obligation not to vote fortuitously goes the same with any collective activities that seek to put the Filipinos in a disadvantaged situation. In this case, it does not require individual voters to participate in the election.

The question of justification comes to the fore. There is a need to discuss the content of their voting, or how to make their reasons right, or create reasons to vote. This justification puts a premium on political skills instead of moral virtue.<sup>43</sup> Hence, the country needs politicians

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 84. Brennan talks about social-scientific knowledge when it comes to measuring moral virtues of the politicians.

with political skills, such as the ability to make moral decisions that focus on the common good and not on personal gain. It is a good suggestion that voters must do research regarding their candidate and their preferred policies. A candidate must protect democracy to promote the common good and secure social justice.<sup>44</sup> The act of voting well includes the voter in collective activity, for they are in solidarity with others with the same justification.

Political participation is an act that aims “at those empowered to make decisions.”<sup>45</sup> However, this kind of participation is not limited to the elected, since voting is part of the definition of democracy as a method of decision-making. It considers the relations between individuals and authorities in other institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and families. In other words, each Filipino has a say in those decisions that affect us as a nation. Hence, in abstaining from voting, it would be normal to think that candidates are at the losing end but deserve our votes. But that is not the case since voters must collectively consider themselves part of the common good.

### **Epistemic Justification in “US”**

A solid justification is a requirement for voting well, lest one should abstain from voting. Voting well paves the way for voters to develop personal accountability that makes them morally praiseworthy or blameworthy. In the overall picture of the electoral activity, only a portion of the population would vote well; hence, political participation is selective. From this datum, the other portion of the population votes wrongly or harms the governed.

The individual voter who participates selectively in the electoral activity participates in a collective beneficial activity. It becomes an ethical collectivity based on sharing the same justification. How can we increase their tribe in voting well? It must employ education “to improve citizens’ knowledge of relevant philosophical and social-scientific issues.”<sup>46</sup> In that way, it makes them better voters. The move

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<sup>44</sup> Jason Brennan, *The ethics of voting* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 87.

<sup>45</sup> Sidney Verba, "Democratic Participation," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 373, no. 1 (1967): 56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626737300103>.

<sup>46</sup> Jason Brennan, *The ethics of voting* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 110.

to educate others is like Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, wherein the enlightened are responsible for bringing others to light. Hence, everyone must support the call of many civic society organizations and church leaders for voter education and participation reforms. According to Lu, "[c]omprehensive voter education campaigns can empower citizens to make informed choices and participate more actively in the democratic process." The role of education, in terms of its political and moral dimensions, is a crucial and integral component in political participation. Verba, in his *Participation in America*, considers education, in general, an essential factor that contributes to the welfare of democracy.

Speaking of collective beneficial accountability, there needs to be a sense of "we" or "us." However, there is no "we" or "us" in the Philippine laws regarding voting. Only individual Filipinos acting of their own volition must register and eventually vote on election day. But when two people engage in a brief or casual conversation with each other in the grocery store, or at the terminal while waiting for the bus, or one engages in social media regarding the credentials of political candidates and whether their political goals are for the common good, that serves as an entrance into the "we-space." That becomes an occasion for Filipinos to share the same epistemic content and resolve in choosing the right candidate for office; a sense of awareness and connection exists among them. That is the emergent social layer called the shared space. This shared space is the "between us" that captures the *entre nous* of Charles Taylor. His philosophy of sociality implies that when two or more people are involved in linguistic exchange or conversation, shared space exists not "for me" or "for you" but "for us."<sup>47</sup> At the same time, this shared space is irreducible into "for me" or "for you." Hence, *entre nous* can develop among Filipino electors the sense of collective accountability established between and among them.

Furthermore, in *entre nous*, there is an acknowledgment between two or more individuals regarding the co-presence existing between them. The moment an individual recognizes the other and the

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<sup>47</sup> Arto Laitinen, "Entre Nous: Charles Taylor's Social Ontology," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 29, no. 5, (2021): 723, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2021.1992478>.

other recognizes the one who recognized them, mutual acknowledgment arises as co-present to each other.<sup>48</sup> It is a structural feature.<sup>49</sup> In this structure, the feature is a meshing of first- and second-person pronouns, and eventually, they share something between them in the “public space.” The possibility of being in-between spaces may not necessarily mean that there exists a “joint commitment.”<sup>50</sup> To have a strong sense of collectivity, a commitment is needed wherein those who share something in the public space must share with everyone. If that is the case, this commitment is not one-sided since there is already a combination of the “I” and “You” that paves the way “for the creation of a group with character.”<sup>51</sup> That collective character would be the Filipino voters who are committed to the ideals of democracy with a sense of accountability.

Through this sense of collective character, Filipino voters can overcome the paradox of voting, that is, the dubious idea that a single vote can make a desired change in the election outcome. Collective Filipino voters will prevail over any problems in forming a collective social identity because they are in the proper position that it is a collective effort to achieve democratic ideals, such as better policy and the common good.

The consequence of *entre nous* is eliminating the idea that the epistemic ethics of voting, or selective participation, in particular, is for the elite alone. By saying “elite alone,” it means that there is an understanding that members of the group identify themselves as one group with the assumption that they share the same goal.<sup>52</sup> This group includes the learned and the proselytized with a common epistemic state of democratic ideals. As Margaret Gilbert would describe the

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<sup>48</sup> Margaret Gilbert, “Mutual recognition, common knowledge, and joint attention,” *Hommage à Wlodek: Philosophical papers dedicated to Wlodek Rabinowicz* (Web Resource only 2007): 13.

<sup>49</sup> Arto Laitinen, “Entre Nous: Charles Taylor’s Social Ontology,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 29, no. 5, (2021): 727, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2021.1992478>.

<sup>50</sup> Margaret Gilbert, “Mutual recognition, common knowledge, and joint attention,” *Hommage à Wlodek: Philosophical papers dedicated to Wlodek Rabinowicz* (Web Resource only 2007): 13.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> The epistemic content of the goal on which group members believed to be advancing democracy is collectively accepted. See Arnel A. Morte, “The Collective Goals of Nation-Building: How Citizens Must Respond,” *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy. Special Issue* (2022): 264-265.

group of Filipinos involved in the shared goal of “the plural subject of X-ing,”<sup>53</sup> wherein all are one in mind and heart in advancing democracy. Hence, the epistemic justification occurs in the context of “us.”

## Conclusion

Verba comments that “participation is not necessarily successful participation.”<sup>54</sup> It means that achieving a sufficient degree of knowledge about democratic participation, particularly in political participation, is an essential step towards realizing the democratic ideals in the country. The degree of expertise is desirable when electors act in a collective spirit by voting well. Voting well can advance democracy with the end in mind of fulfilling the common good. But when electors do not vote well, they pollute democracy, only by voting well with a sense of collectivity that we expect moral and political accountability.

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<sup>53</sup> Margaret Gilbert, “Mutual recognition, common knowledge, and joint attention,” *Hommage à Wlodek: Philosophical papers dedicated to Wlodek Rabinowicz* (Web Resource only 2007): 12.

<sup>54</sup> Sidney Verba, “Democratic Participation,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 373, no. 1 (1967): 56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626737300103>.

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