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Policy implementation in crisis: Lessons from the Philippines

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Abstract

Like many countries, the Philippines faced severe economic, social, and political challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020 President Duterte issued an executive order announcing a national state of emergency that introduced a highly restrictive system for community quarantine and lockdown. While these measures led international observers to rank the Philippines' pandemic response among the world's most stringent, it is unclear whether subsequent health outcomes were sufficient to justify the severity. In this article, we evaluate discrepancies between COVID-19 policy goals and outcomes in the Philippines via a compelling but under-utilized method of democratic deliberation, the 'mini-public'. The mini-public that we held brought together a random sample of citizens who heard testimony from local public health experts and political leaders, and then used this information in conjunction with their own experiences to identify policy shortcomings and develop recommendations for policymakers. The most substantial challenges to the government's pandemic response were reported to be inadequate enforcement and under-resourcing of government officials tasked with policy implementation. These challenges created a disconnect between policy objectives and their performance in practice. We

conclude by summarizing the mini-public participants' recommendations.

KEYWORDS
COVID-19, deliberative mini-public, pandemic policy, Philippines, policy implementation

1 | INTRODUCTION

Policies related to non-pharmaceutical public health interventions have played an important role in limiting the spread and impact of COVID-19 in countries across the world (Gozzi et al., 2021). However, the costs of these policies, especially those that are coercive and interfere with individual freedoms, have led to significant pushback. Because coercive state actions demand public justification to be legitimate (Dahlquist & Kugelberg, 2021), it is important to provide the public with an opportunity to deliberate their value. Moreover, as the threat of future pandemics remains, it is critical to evaluate discrepancies (real or perceived) between public health policy goals and outcomes. Doing so should not only improve our knowledge of policy effectiveness but also bolster public confidence in authorities when extreme measures are required.

In this article, we draw on discussions from a deliberative mini-public event that we held in the Philippines to assess the Philippine government's Community Quarantine (CQ) policies. Mini-publics are small, randomly selected groups of people who are tasked with deliberating important matters of law or public policy (Smith & Setälä, 2018). This mini-public brought together public health experts and practitioners, political leaders, and a representative sample of the broader population to discuss community experiences at the local level, and to learn about, debate, and ultimately reach a consensus on recommendations for improvement. These public deliberations provide an important window into how CQ policies functioned on the ground, and offer insight into how and why policy measures in the Philippines did not necessarily generate public health outcomes commensurate with their stringency, and relative to other countries.

Like in most countries, COVID-19 caused severe challenges in the Philippines, including disruptions to education delivery (Tria, 2020), increased panic behaviours (Nicomedes & Avila, 2020), and threats to livelihoods (Magcale-Macandog, 2021). After early efforts to downplay the severity of the threat, President Duterte issued an executive order announcing a national state of emergency in March 2020 and the government introduced subsequent CQ policies based on recommendations from the Interagency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) (Vallejo & Ong, 2020).[1] The Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) represented the most stringent quarantine level, which in effect required total lockdown: it severely limited travel and transportation, imposed community curfews, cancelled mass gatherings, closed non-essential businesses and imposed other work restrictions, delayed loan and debt repayments, banned pandemic profiteering, imposed heavy financial penalties for noncompliance, and provided the national government with leeway to carry out additional measures as needed.[2]

[1]For more details on the different community quarantine measures in the Philippines, see Talabis et al. (2021, pp. 3-4).
[2]The Philippine government's Community Quarantine policies are detailed in Republic Act No. 11469, also known as 'The Bayanihan to Heal as One Act.'

Although Local Government Units (LGUs) in the Philippines retained some flexibility in making quarantine declarations, the policy was designed to be severe. Some scholars have characterized it as an instance of 'securitization', a perspective which reflects the militarized, police-centric 'war' against the virus, where instances of excessive force against some segments of the population accompanied broader efforts to curtail viral transmission (Billing, 2020). This approach was also severe relative to other countries: according to Oxford University's COVID-19 Government Response Tracker, the Philippine government's pandemic response ranked ninth out of a total of 186 countries surveyed on their 'Stringency Index', a composite index of policies related to travel bans, school and business closures, restrictions on gatherings and other internal movements, and stay-at-home requirements (COVID-19 Tracker). Among the eleven Southeast Asian nations, only Myanmar's approach to COVID-19 was classified as more restrictive.

Data from the Philippines suggest that LGUs that effectively implemented CQ measures were better able to curtail pandemic harms than LGUs that did not (Talabis et al., 2021). However, a review of pandemic performance relative to other countries suggests that the severity of the response was disproportionate to the public health outcomes that followed. For example, while the Philippines ranked second in Southeast Asia on the Stringency Index, it had the sixth highest number of per capita COVID-19 infections, the second highest per capita death total, and the second lowest per capita level of vaccine uptake.[3]

In our study, mini-public deliberations enabled participants to reach consensus on CQ policy failures and recommendations for improvement. Inadequate and unequal execution of top-down policy mandates proved to be a major challenge. Because enacting quarantines and lockdowns fell to under-resourced LGU officials and private enterprises, often coupled with inadequate national support or oversight, there was substantial local variation in implementation and enforcement. Relatedly, the lack of resources provided to LGUs exacerbated enforcement challenges and reduced public compliance, particularly with respect to enforcing requisite quarantines for travellers or those exposed to COVID-19. Individuals and families faced resource challenges as well. Participants pointed out that lacking basic supplies such as medicine and food made it much more difficult to comply with mobility restrictions and curfews, or to pay fines for policy violations. Finally, a heavy reliance on financial penalties, coupled with the decline in economic activity and insufficient resource provision, meant that fines were often levied against people who had little capacity to pay. This situation led to local improvisation and substantial variation in the stringency of implementation and enforcement. The result increased confusion and frustration among the population, decreased compliance, and undermined policy goals.

The identification of policy problems and disconnects corresponded closely with participants' proposed solutions. Notably, participants did not condemn the overall stringency of the government's approach; they did, however, recommend greater consistency in how it was implemented and enforced. In part, this was a question of resources, and indeed, consensus quickly emerged on the need for the government to better support its policy mandates with the resources necessary to carry them out. These challenges were not only a result of resource deficiencies, but also of policy design. The government created a system that imposed harsh penalties for violations but lacked the flexibility to tailor these penalties to local conditions, particularly in the context of high resource scarcities. While participants appreciated the need for vigilance to protect the population and keep the virus at bay, they also expressed their preference for a system that would enable officials to match policy demands to local needs while still operating within the letter

[3]For data on COVID-19 cases and deaths, see the COVID-19 Dashboard link through Dong et al. (2020). For data on COVID-19 vaccines, see Mathieu et al. (2021).

and spirit of the law. Taken together, these deliberations provide an important window into how the CQ policy operated on the ground in the Philippines and offer crucial insight into how the government might improve its approach in preparation for the next pandemic or similar public health threats.

This article proceeds in four parts: First, we review how deliberative mini-public events can serve as a useful tool in policy research. We highlight some of their strengths in helping scholars and policymakers to understand and advance better policies. We also emphasize their potential to aid in 'bottom-up' policy design through deliberation. Second, we describe our research design and provide details about how we used the mini-public event in practice. Third, we share how the participants experienced the pandemic and the CQ policies that followed, before identifying key problems with those policies and participants' recommendations for improvement. We conclude with a discussion of prospects for improved research related to mini-publics and for achieving better policy outcomes.

2 | DELIBERATIVE MINI-PUBLICS AND POLICY

Mini-public events bring together a representative sample of the broader population to learn about and deliberate on a specific topic or policy issue. These types of events often go by different names—citizens' assemblies or juries, deliberative polls, etc.—and can vary in terms of core features such as goals and design. Goals might include informing citizens about a particular issue, better aligning policies with public preferences, or problem solving through collaboration, among others. Event design may consider participant recruitment strategies, participant numbers, venue, procedural questions around format and engagement, as well as event outputs (Curato, Farrell, et al., 2021, Chapter 2; Fung, 2003). Deliberation is a central feature—participants should expect to digest evidence and opinions, ultimately striving to interact with experts and their peers so they can exercise informed judgement (Knoboch and Gastil, 2021). Generally, a mini-public event involves several key steps that include a planning phase, recruitment, a briefing with directions and purpose, learning from experts, deliberation, decision making, and recommendations (Breckon et al., 2019; Escobar & Elstub, 2017; Farrell et al., 2019; Fung, 2003; MosaicLab, 2020).

The benefits of deliberation can be far-reaching in both well-established and fragile democracies. These types of events can aid in 'generating workable agreements, creating habits of democratic dialogue, and promoting collective reflection' in challenging political environments (Curato & Steiner, 2018, p. 493). Avenues for participatory governance and consensus-based decision making can also improve democratic practices and may serve as a bulwark against authoritarian encroachment (Landemore, 2020). Mini-publics specifically can foster feelings of inclusion, community responsibility, and civic engagement among those who participate (Jacquet, 2019). Through reasoned debate, they can correct distortions in perceptions about public preferences or flawed understandings of policy issues (Niemeyer, 2011). The events also have the potential to bridge the gap between citizens and experts as they provide a window into public experiences and opinions (Breckon et al., 2019). In the Philippine context, mini-publics have offered citizens in disadvantaged communities the opportunity to exercise deliberative agency and have their voices heard around issues like media representation of the government's heavy-handed war on drugs (Curato, 2021), as well as political campaigns rife with disinformation (Curato, Ong, & Ross, 2021). The social science research methods used in the design and running of these kinds of mini-publics can help to overcome or circumvent some of the deficiencies in other research methods, and to achieve reasoned, informed, collective recommendations (Escobar, 2011; Escobar & Elstub, 2017).

The deliberative process at the heart of mini-publics, centred around reasoned debate and public justification, can lead to better policy outcomes. To evaluate 'good' policy that can be seen as a 'success' we should ask whether '(a) it demonstrably creates widely valued social outcomes; through (b) design, decision-making, and delivery processes that enhance both its problem-solving capacity and its political legitimacy; and (c) sustains this performance for a considerable period of time, even in the face of changing circumstances' (Compton & 't Hart, 2019, p. 5). Good policies are not only about implementation and outcomes but also about their legitimacy and longevity (Luetjens et al., 2019). Engagement with the public can have a positive effect on most of these dimensions related to good policy, especially innovation based on local-level experiences and perceptions of legitimacy (Sinclair, 2002). We can improve policymaking efforts through active observation of community experiences and their involvement in the policy process (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2016).

Mini-public events allow for direct input and a 'bottom-up' approach that can incorporate community consultation, deliberation, and efforts to reach broader policy consensus. These events provide opportunities for participatory governance and stronger collaboration between politicians, practitioners, and the public. Mini-publics not only strengthen democratic practices; they also offer the potential for policies that can better consider the local conditions, experiences, and needs of those most affected by the problems at hand. Participating in deliberative mini-public events also provides an educational experience where community members can ask questions and bridge any divides or information asymmetries between the public, experts, practitioners, and other stakeholders. The events offer opportunities for policy refinement and become sites for soliciting and securing policy buy-in from the community. Some segments of the population have less influence over issue prioritization and policy decisions than others (Flavin & Franko, 2017), and some groups might experience negative effects related to policy outcomes disproportionately. Mini-publics can serve as one way to help rectify these asymmetries. Indeed, scholarship approaching the global pandemic through a normative political theory lens has stressed the need to develop responsive, public-minded policies that can at least recognize the potential for different 'strains of commitment' (Rawls, 1999, p. 153) among different sectors of the population (Bonotti & Zech, 2021).

3 | RESEARCH DESIGN: DATA AND METHODS

This research draws on data from a deliberative mini-public event held on 6 and 7 August 2021 in the Libagon municipality in the Southern Leyte province of the Philippines (see Figure 1).[4] The authors partnered with a Philippine research team that was actively working on COVID-19 economic recovery programming in the region to design and carry out the event. Participant recruitment included two randomisation steps: (1) randomly selecting four villages from the list of 45 communities where the team had ongoing work and (2) randomly selecting names from the village roster to extend invitations to potential participants. To better ensure a representative

[4]This research received approval from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project ID 28199). The two-day event took place following a relaxation of modified ECQ measures. The more permissive General Community Quarantine (GCQ) measures allowed for the activities necessary to organise and hold the mini-public event, including the use of hotel and conference facilities. The Philippine research team coordinated with local authorities and health officials to ensure compliance with all COVID-19 restrictions during recruitment, transport, and event activities.

FIGURE 1 Partial map of the Philippines identifying Southern Leyte, the province where the mini-public event took place (OpenStreetMap, 2022).

sample of what constitutes the 'public', the team assessed several characteristics of participants who accepted during each set of invitations until reaching the desired number of 15 adult participants. Through stratified sampling, the team sought to achieve parity between men and women participant numbers, as well as representation across age groups and different local employment sectors. The team achieved a final sample closely resembling characteristics of the broader adult

population—a key feature in designing a mini-public with the aim of providing findings that are indicative of general attitudes, interests, and experiences (Smith & Setälä, 2018).[5]

Exclusion criteria included only failure to pass pre-event COVID-19 screening by a medical professional, which did not occur among the recruited participants. Each participant received a 1500 Philippine peso (~US$30) honorarium for the two-day mini-public. It is normal practice to offer a small honorarium or incentive to mini-public participants (Chwalisz and Česnulaitytė, 2020, p. 83). The amount was calculated (in consultation with our Philippine research partner) to compensate participants for their time and offset potential forgone income caused by a brief interruption to their livelihoods, as well as to cover any unforeseen expenses and inconvenience associated with participation. The level of compensation was determined with the aim of also avoiding inducement, attempting to address any biases in who would agree to participate in the mini-public given random selection during the recruitment process. We also provided participants with food, accommodation, and transport to the event site.

The mini-public event was held in a small conference facility at a local hotel. During the first day of the event, participants shared some background information and opinions on a range of issues and described their experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants also spoke as a group with several political authorities from local communities about ECQ measures and the practicalities of their implementation. The conversations focused on describing the various public health challenges and policies with an emphasis on how they had affected participant livelihoods. The participants listened to details about how *barangay* (village) authorities had attempted to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic. The participants were later divided into three smaller groups and instructed to identify the issues they deemed the most important, along with points that needed clarification, and to formulate lists of questions they would ask experts and policymakers the following day.

During the second day, the event facilitator brought up various ECQ policy issues and discussed some of the arguments and justifications for each one. The event engaged with ECQ policy measures already enacted and the research team did not formulate explicit alternative policy options or adjustments for the participants. Purely bottom-up formulations of the issues and subsequent policy recommendations can be problematic (Boswell, 2021), so the research team anticipated many of the key issues raised by participants during the first day (e.g. masking requirements, quarantine practices and facilities, jobs and livelihoods, curfews, and church restrictions) and enlisted the support of appropriate experts. Participants heard expert briefings from sector representatives chosen for their knowledge about the various ECQ policy issues and who were able to respond to questions pertinent to their sectors. The experts included barangay captains; an Infection Prevention and Control Officer from a local hospital; a health practitioner from the Rural Health Unit; a pastor from a church; the President of the Southern Leyte Business Club; and a community garden initiative representative. Experts gave presentations and fielded questions from the mini-public participants guided throughout by our Philippine research team leader who served as a facilitator. He guided participants through deliberation about the different ECQ policy issues. Participants were meant to arrive at a consensus on ways to address some of the issues when possible and they worked collectively alongside the facilitator to produce a policy document related to consensus positions. The authors were not able to attend the event due to ongoing travel restrictions, but they worked closely with the facilitator prior to and during the

[5]The team did not have to make purposeful adjustments to the sample, though several initial selections were passed over due to potential participants having recently suffered from illness, moved from the area, or died and their name not having been removed from the village roster.

event. The Philippine research team video-recorded the mini-public event. The presentations and discussion took place in Cebuano and English, and the video included subtitles that our research team translated into English for subsequent analysis.

4 | THE MINI-PUBLIC EVENT

4.1 | Enhanced community quarantine' policy discussion

The mini-public began with the facilitator explaining what participants could expect over the two-day event. The facilitator introduced the President of a regional Association of Barangay Captains, who discussed ECQ policy measures in greater detail to prepare the participants for later deliberation.[6] When President Duterte ordered a lockdown through Executive Order in early 2020, only 'essential' travel was permitted and movement throughout Southern Leyte required a pass. The government established border control points between many of the municipalities and towns with CQ mobility restrictions between quarantined areas. Enhanced Community Quarantine protocols handed down from the central government required strict home quarantine and only allowed limited movement to access essential goods and services. Other protocols required residents to observe capacity limits in locations permitted to stay open and to practice personal protective behaviours like wearing masks and face shields. The government suspended public transportation and placed restrictions on businesses and limitations on individual social and economic activities. There was an increased presence of uniformed personnel to enforce CQ protocols as well, but it was LGUs that were ultimately tasked with the adoption, implementation, and enforcement of ECQ measures (Talabis et al., 2021). Individual non-compliance with ECQ measures could result in fines or imprisonment.

Experts spoke to mini-public participants about how the Southern Leyte region experienced severe economic disruptions as a result of these restrictive measures. Local governments put a freeze on some of the existing public projects and redirected funds to provide economic support to those struggling during the lockdowns. Much of the support focused on helping farmers. Local leaders implemented a range of initiatives aimed at mitigating the economic effects of COVID-19 policies. For example, the provincial Governor enacted an executive order diverting 20% of government funding to aid the private sector. Fisherfolk producing tilapia and other fish products were given aid—such as boats and fingerlings—to help them recover their livelihoods. Farmers were given free agricultural inputs such as fertilizer and seeds. In Sogod, the Mayor focused on food security, organizing communal gardens to prevent a food shortage. They also created the Bagsakan Center, a direct-to-market vegetable depot where farmers and fisherfolk could sell their products in one place. A local politician involved in the effort explained to the mini-public participants:

> Now, our farmers from neighbouring municipalities like you, our farmers from Libagon, if you have farm products, say squash, if you have 5 tons and want to sell in Sogod, all you have to do is call the management of the Bagsakan Center so that you will be accommodated. Our policy is to first accommodate our farmers in Sogod and when our supply is not enough, then we will receive products from other places.

[6]They also discussed the subsequent Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ) measures that were less strict, as well as the (Modified) General Community Quarantine protocols that were less strict still.

The distribution of direct aid to families accompanied efforts to improve market access. Leaders provided relief in the form of rice and canned goods to households at the barangay level. One village captain explained and justified his own policies related to distribution. He conducted a census prior to taking action and found 353 families living in 120 households in his village. He stressed the importance of fairness in his decision to distribute food aid to all the residents, despite differences in income, as everyone was affected by the pandemic and households with more resources contribute higher taxes. He reasoned: 'Do the rich eat? Yes, they do'. He believed this policy would pre-empt accusations of favouritism and limit harassment during aid distribution. The local leader stressed the importance of public-minded policies and the importance of ensuring that the rules did not apply to only some and not others. A relative of his 'double-dipped' into economic relief as a social pension recipient and was reported by a neighbour. He did not intervene because, he said, 'If the leader strictly implements the policy, the people will follow. That is my policy as a leader. I don't allow nepotism'. Most respected his efforts to justify the aid policy to all residents even if they disagreed with the reasons.

Generally, the event participants expressed some initial confusion about many of the policy mandates that made up the ECQ measures. Participants asked a range of questions that largely related to policies around government financial assistance. They also asked questions about different quarantine measures, restrictions on travel, and gatherings for religious services and cockfighting before they shared their own experiences and deliberated about policy options.

4.2 | Participant experiences

The participants had the opportunity to describe their experiences with, and opinions about, various CQ measures. Five of the fifteen participants shared negative experiences related to undergoing a required fourteen-day quarantine when contact tracers identified them as close contacts to positive COVID-19 cases. The facilities did not receive adequate cleaning and they worried about exposure to other diseases during their residency. Most participants also raised concerns about the testing procedures and the motivations driving the reporting of results. They brought up issues related to testing inconsistencies, allegations of discrimination returning from China, and extreme anxieties waiting for delayed results. More troubling, most participants expressed doubts about the veracity of test results, suggesting that the Rural Health Unit would ask them if they were members of PhilHealth Insurance before providing the results of swab tests—implying the public believes those with up-to-date insurance payments are most likely to be positive while those without would receive a negative result. Even if their concerns were unfounded, the perceptions of potential unethical behaviour and the prevalence of distrust of health workers could create serious problems in managing a pandemic.

Participants understood the importance of preventative measures like requiring masks and face shields, but they reported imperfect compliance among the broader population for a range of reasons. The availability was limited early on, and they saw extreme price gouging, making compliance a significant financial burden. Their own experiences with the protective measures led many to comment on discomfort, suspicions that rules around face shields might be more than what was necessary, and other impracticalities. One participant explained: 'I wear eyeglasses underneath my face shield. It fogs my glasses when I breath through the mask and face shield. It is very uncomfortable, and I don't like wearing both'. Another participant agreed about the discomfort and provided a little levity for the group, lamenting that 'My nose is flat and the mask keeps on falling down and I need to put it back on every time'. One woman added: 'I don't like

wearing a facemask because it blurs our vision and it's hot'. She also called attention to one of the new social challenges related to masks, observing that '[w]e can't see other people's faces and it stops us from recognizing our friends and family members when we are out in the public'.

Participants discussed lockdowns, curfews, and restrictions placed on specific activities as well. They described individual and collective experiences, with some commenting on their support for restrictive measures beyond curtailing the spread of the virus: 'We liked the implementation of the curfew. We experienced peace and quiet in our localities. Our husbands came home early. You were picked up in a patrol car if you were caught loitering. The minors who were out playing computer games were stopped'. However, there was widespread noncompliance with some restrictions, especially related to evading the police and organizing cockfights and parties. One participant commented: 'What they did was not safe. They cannot maintain social distancing, so there was a high chance of the virus spreading. There were also people from other places who would come and join them'. They explained that people gathered to gamble, and to play cards and sports like basketball and volleyball in the hinterlands where authorities were less likely to reach them.

Residents sometimes took steps on their own to dissuade those in breach of ECQ measures, especially people from outside the community coming to 'celebrate fiesta'. One participant recounted:

> We have a swimming resort in our area and people still flocked to that place to celebrate. There was one time, a group of young adults was on their way to celebrate a party at the resort. We stopped them and told them that it is not allowed and that it is better for them to just go home. The police were not always able to do something. We had to stop them. We asked them where they were from and they told us that they are from the city. We told them that it is against the law to congregate and celebrate parties at the resort. No one was guarding the place, so we took the matters into our own hands.

However, enforcing restrictions on mobility among those in their own communities sometimes proved more challenging. When the eldest of the mini-public participants described how she would visit friends and family twice a month even during the strictest lockdowns, the event facilitator asked how she was not apprehended or questioned. She explained: 'Well, I just did it. I would hire a motorcycle to take me somewhere. Most of the time, the policemen and village watchers who would guard the border control points were my friends. They would just ask me where I'm going and they would allow me to pass through'. Her social ties to the community facilitated noncompliance with ECQ measures and allowed her to avoid government repercussions.

Restrictions on religious services and church attendance featured prominently during discussion at the mini-public event as well. All chapels and churches closed their doors during the ECQ, though they were allowed to open at 30% capacity under the less-strict Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine measures. One participant described attending services at 3am with only a handful of other attendees to avoid people. A barangay leader who spoke to participants as an expert lamented the difficulty of balancing the spiritual needs of the community against public health and safety, offering his own reflections on religious practices:

> Based on my experience reading all kinds of books, especially the Bible, it says, 'it is okay if you cannot attend your church services, for God is everywhere'. Wherever you are, you can worship Him. It says in the scripture if there are two or three who

> gather together in my name, my presence is there. We know of monks who have secluded themselves in the mountains to pray to the Lord. He can do that while alone. He can pray while inside caves.

A pastor from the Jesus is Alive church also spoke to the mini-public participants as an expert to discuss the issue of religion. He stressed the importance to 'not only focus on our physical needs but on our spiritual needs [too]'. On the matter of right to worship and the government's mandate to implement these restrictions to protect its citizens, he observed: 'For Filipinos, religion is a big part of our lives so we would always find ways to worship the Lord in many ways. We are now live streaming our church services so our members can watch our sermons in their homes. Some religious leaders are serving their members by visiting their homes. But we always take every chance we get to gather'. The restrictions had eased from the early church closures and the pastor emphasized not only the importance of prayer for many Filipinos in helping to keep their family safe and protected during the pandemic, but also how religious institutions and their leaders have suffered financially. The pastor ended on a somewhat contentious note given the central role of experts in the mini-public event: 'If we have true faith in the Lord our God, then he will help us. That is why I have always prayed to the Lord for His help. I prayed that he help me and the people. We cannot trust the experts. Look at what is going on, it has already been two years since the pandemic hit us and they have not done anything to stop it. But, if the Lord wills it, all of these will stop'. His comments reflected some of the general frustrations and fears the community felt.

The deliberation ultimately turned to how the pandemic and CQ measures affected livelihoods. Following small group discussions, one participant succinctly summarised a key trade-off all participants faced: 'The ECQ protocols were effective in stopping the spread of the virus, however our livelihood was affected. The advantage of not having strict protocols is that we are free to move around to earn a living'. The President of the Southern Leyte Business Club Association acted as an expert for the mini-public and described the strict restrictions, a severe decline in revenue across many industries, and challenges in supporting workers most affected by the pandemic. All the participants and their families experienced these challenges firsthand. Many were out of work and depended on government aid or direct support from their employers. Some participants living in rural communities who lost their jobs were forced to go back to farming. Some tried to put a positive spin on their situation, suggesting: 'One good thing that I have seen with [ECQ] restrictions is that the city is not the only place where one can earn a living. We can work on our lands and produce our own food by planting crops and vegetables'. The LGU distributed seeds and fertilizers, and loaned out the use of a tractor, though often limited its support to groups with established communal gardens. Some complained that measures aimed at supporting farming efforts were stifled by resource and supply limitations and one participant commented: 'Providing seedlings was good, but the process was not. They gave a very limited number of seeds to us. They gave us two packets of string bean seeds. The [Department of Agriculture] gave the seeds to the barangay and the barangay officials distributed the seeds to us. And they gave us two packets of seeds! What will we do with two packets of seeds?'

4.3 | Points of consensus and participant recommendations

Throughout the mini-public discussions, the invited experts and participants alike highlighted how the CQ measures resulting from top-down policy formulation presented challenges during

their local-level implementation. The mini-public participants created a recommendation document (see Appendix 1) that identified under-resourced officials and inadequate enforcement as two of the key challenges that those tasked with policy implementation faced. Participants expressed a willingness to comply with ECQ measures contingent on adequate resources: 'It is okay to continue the implementation of the strict protocols of ECQ if the government will ensure that our needs are well provided for. If not, then that would be hard for us'. This was especially true for economic assistance and livelihoods, as well other policies like quarantine. For example, the participants seemed to reach a collective accord about contingent compliance with quarantine measures for those re-entering the region if officials could guarantee improved conditions at the facilities. A health practitioner from the Rural Health Unit spoke to the participants and lamented: 'Our quarantine facilities are indeed infested with mosquitoes and rats. We only have two people who are maintaining these facilities and we have 12 units, so they cannot do everything for you including the control of rat infestations'. The participants saw a clear need for the conditions to improve, recommending protocols to maintain cleanliness and that '[authorities] should provide enough budget for the renovation of the bathrooms'.

Discussion amongst the mini-public participants turned to a prominent local case where a man was arrested for breaking the quarantine rules. He had arrived in the region without providing the required advance notice and his transport to the quarantine facility was not there, so he took a taxi. The man did not like the facilities and then roamed the area hoping to find an alternative site. Unable to do so, he went to his home. The case highlighted the substandard facilities due to a lack of resources, along with the inadequacies of protocols and imperfect enforcement mechanisms. A local hospital official who spoke to the mini-public participants stressed the importance of personal agency in the absence of effective governance:

> Do not roam around because you are endangering the lives of others. What if you turned out to be positive? Who do you think you are putting at risk? It is your family, your neighbours, your community. Now, we have to lockdown the whole community because of you. So, you need to be responsible. Do not follow the protocols because it is the law. Follow the protocols because you want to protect the safety of your family and the safety of your community. It is your responsibility.

While no one condoned the returning man's actions, they could sympathize with his case, and participants emphasized the need for improved services in their recommendations. Government transport for arriving 'locally stranded individuals' did exist to ensure greater safety and to minimize risk of quarantine evasion upon return. However, clear system failures and intentional evasion were not uncommon. Community buy-in to quarantine policies requires adequate facilities and higher standards of implementation and enforcement.

Participants expressed clear support for implementing localized lockdowns when faced with a rise in COVID-19 cases, but food and other basic needs like medicines and infant milk had to be made available. They largely insisted that food and financial aid should also be provided to those affected, highlighting the difficulties governments faced in securing conditional compliance from the public without sufficient resources at their disposal. At least one participant seemed to recognize resource constraints and commented: '[F]ood is enough. I don't think there is enough funding for cash aids. Where will the government get their funding to support all of us with cash?' Given these challenges, policies might need to entail more nuanced protocols rather than blanket prohibitions and inadequate resource provision. More pragmatic policies did follow when the public health risks began to subside with increased vaccination rates. However, the

small restaurants, mini-grocery stores, and street vendors might have been allowed to reopen sooner, as long as safety protocols were observed.

The issue of enforcement came up frequently. Despite some of the participants' own violations, the group advocated for consistent and strict implementation of ECQ measures and related policies.[7] While mandates around curfew violations came through executive order from the national government, local actors assumed much of the responsibility in the enforcement of these and other measures. In penalizing those who violated the mandates, local enforcement saw the heft of the financial burden shifting back to the local political actors and communities themselves who would often have to help individual violators unable to pay the fines. So, violators might be issued a fine using a municipal ordinance for 500 pesos rather than the 10,000-peso national penalty. Barangay captains had to organize much of the local enforcement and often relied on volunteers too. Curfew restrictions were especially difficult to enforce, even more so for minors. One village leader explained:

> No law will penalize minors for violation of curfew. We can only take the child back to their parents. The problem is they would again find a way to escape and if they get caught, the guards can lose their temper causing them to sometimes hit the child physically. They would sometimes threaten them to scare the child. They would then bring them to the police station and [the communities] would end up taking them back. I would explain to parents that they should be responsible for disciplining their children and that we are allowed to penalize parents if their child keep violating the rules.

One participant offered support for the sentiment: 'These children are very young, and it is the responsibility of the parents to discipline them. If they don't listen, then put them in prison for them to learn'. However, the village leader explained, 'We are not allowed to do that. That is against the law'.

Enforcing rules that required individuals to wear masks and face shields came up frequently as well. Failure to comply could be met with penalties of increasing severity (e.g. 500 pesos for the first offense, 1000 for the second, and 2500 for the third), but the highest penalty in practice stood at 1000 pesos at the barangay level. Police did not always monitor and enforce compliance, with much of the burden falling on businesses. One participant lamented:

> Business establishments are enforcing the use of face masks at their entrance; however, the people take them off once they are inside the buildings. The establishments should put more guards inside who ensure that face masks are worn properly while inside their building. The public areas must have more enforcers to ensure that face masks and shields are always worn properly.

Participants made it clear that noncompliance with mask and face shield rules was not always intentional. They expressed indignation that some business owners took advantage of personal protective equipment (PPE) supply issues and raised prices given the significant demand. One participant insisted: 'The businessmen should not overprice face shields and face masks. The

[7]An exception seemed to be related to religious practices—participants thought churches should be exempt from the implementation of lockdowns. They should be allowed to open and operate at limited capacity with minimum health protocols.

DTI should monitor its pricing,' suggesting that if businesses take advantage of the situation with price gouging, there should be consequences and the Department of Trade and Industry should monitor and control PPE prices. The participants wanted to see state action under such circumstances.

In summary, participant recommendations and feedback about pandemic ECQ measures included several key takeaways based on their local-level experiences. First, under-resourced officials could not always depend on seamless local implementation of policies. Second, enforcement presented its own set of challenges. This led to a significant disconnect between many of the policy objectives and how their implementation worked out in practice. Compliance with different ECQ measures and related policies is contingent on government actors, local authorities, businesses, and fellow citizens meeting expectations regarding the upkeep of facilities, the provision of aid, and the development of effective enforcement capacities.

5 | CONCLUSION

Beyond the human costs, COVID-19 has affected everyone's economic, social, and political lives (Bonotti & Zech, 2021). In the Philippines context, mini-public participants highlighted not only the pandemic's devastating public health outcomes but also the severe economic hardships experienced by households and broader communities. The mini-public event that we held focused on describing and interrogating ECQ measures and related pandemic policies, allowing participants to deliberate and provide insight into local experiences. They were able to weigh in on particular themes and express their opinions on important issues like how accepting limitations on freedom of movement and their right to earn a living might balance against efforts to achieve better outcomes related to public health and safety.

Mini-public findings can provide an important avenue into the public experience prior to and following policy decision-making. Engaging with a representative sample of the population using a mini-public allowed us to highlight where information deficiencies related to policies existed and how those policies actually affected people on the ground. This article complements research on the Philippines describing top-down 'brute force' policy implementation (Thompson, 2022) by illustrating how local-level political actors also possessed a significant degree of autonomy in enforcing measures and adapting restrictions to local conditions. Policy decisions related to the pandemic in the Philippines need to find a balance between the epidemiological and economic contexts (Vallejo Jr. and Ong, 2020), and these bottom-up accounts can provide additional information to make policy assessments.

A key take-away from this article is that mini-public events can help to improve democratic practices more broadly. Deliberation during a mini-public often required participants to adopt reflective practices—imagining others' experiences, perspectives, and feelings (Muradova, 2021). In the aftermath of an extreme event like a global pandemic, many of the processes integral to mini-publics can foster greater community resilience in the face of other extreme events (Albright & Crow, 2021).

Future research might continue to advance and refine how mini-publics are used as a research tool. Much of the existing work on mini-publics still sees this methodological approach as a means to an end, focusing on achieving consensus related to a particular issue. Subsequent studies might focus on particular behaviours and practices during the events, opening up new avenues to utilize mini-publics as a complementary tool in research that asks questions about deliberative practices. Scholars might examine whether the deliberative process can help to create better informed and more public-minded citizens. Or scholars might examine whether participation alters specific atti-

tudes, beliefs, preferences, and behaviours. For example, we suspect that involvement in these kinds of deliberative events can provide participants with a greater awareness about and skills in arguing for policy positions based on public-minded perspectives given the appropriate guidance. Future research can assess those conjectures empirically while still helping participants to overcome extreme issue polarization, settle disagreements, and arrive at consensus-based policy recommendations.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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