

Efforts for 100% Response Rate: Local Government Survey in the Philippines as a Case

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Abstract

We conducted an interview survey on randomly selected 300 local governments in the Philippines. Fortunately, we collected data from all the respondents with 100% response rates. It seems that we attained these high responses due to repeating pretesting, choosing an appropriate survey mode (interview), and creating trust with a local counterpart.

1 Introduction

This paper reports on how to attain high response rate in random sampling surveys. We focus on a local government survey in the Philippines as a case.

Our research project aims at comparing local governments in the Philippines to those in Thailand and Indonesia. The population was all the basic local governments (cities and municipalities) with a random sample of 300 governments. We interviewed mayors and planning/development officers (the top of administrative officers) at each government.

So far, local governments have never been investigated at the national level in the Philippines (for Philippine local governance, see McCoy 1994 and Sidel 1999). Therefore, to grasp the whole picture, we were required to reduce nonresponse.

In general, we can use statistical inferences and tests only when the sample is randomly selected from the population and enough many respondents cooperate for the survey. Improving survey response is a must to guarantee data quality (Stoop et al. eds. 2010).

However, declining response rates have widely been observed in local government surveys. In Japan, Tsujinaka conducted a mail survey on all the 1,827 local governments with a 64.5% response rate (Tsujinaka and Ito eds. 2010). In Thailand, Nagai conducted a mail survey on all the local governments to collect data from 32.8% Thesabans (municipalities) and 35.6% Tambons (villages) (Funatsu ed. 2008).

2 Methods

We conducted a survey “2011 Local Government Survey in the Philippines” as follows.

Survey Name. 2011 Local Government Survey in the Philippines: Local Capability and Decentralization. Shortly, 2011 Local Government Survey in the Philippines.

Principal Investigator. Fumio Nagai (Osaka City University). The survey was implemented by Social Weather Stations (SWS) in the Philippines.

Mode. We interviewed a mayor and a planning/development officer at each local government. We used a questionnaire for mayors and that for officers. Only nominated persons can answer to the questionnaires. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face. In very few cases, they were interviewed via telephone and self-completion, given limited schedules of respondents.

In the survey, 50 SWS members interviewed (11 were local interviewers out of 50). In addition, three research project members interviewed three mayors. SWS faxed three endorsement letters when making appointments: one from the National President of the League of Cities of the Philippines, one signed by the SWS Vice-President, and one signed by an SWS director.

Questionnaires were written both in English and Tagalog. Still, all respondents used English.

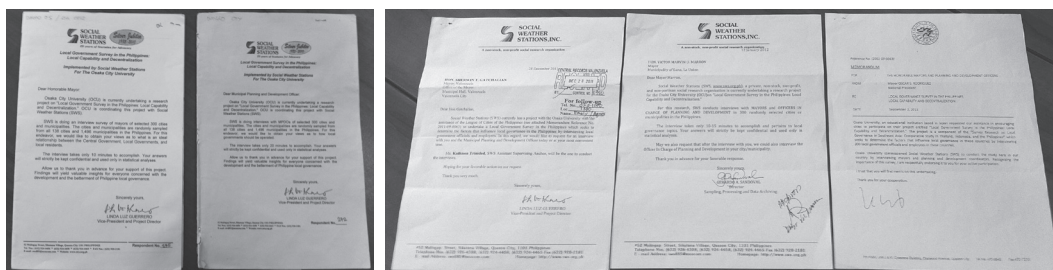


Figure 1. Questionnaires (left for mayors, right for officers), Endorsement Letters

Period. Mayors were asked from October 12, 2011 to November 27, 2012. Officers were from October 12, 2011 to April 19, 2012.

Population. 1,515 local governments in 16 regions in 78 provinces as of February 2, 2011. Out of all the 1,591 governments in 17 regions in 79 provinces, we excluded 76 governments in 2 provinces in Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) due to their political instability (Magindanao province belongs to both ARMM and the other). The population consists of 135 cities and 1,380 municipalities; 771 governments in Luzon, 336 in Visayas, and 408 in Mindanao.

Sample. A random, probabilistic sample of 300 local governments in 16 regions in 71 provinces. It consists of 93 cities and 203 municipalities; 170 governments in Luzon, 67 in Visayas, and 63 in Mindanao.

No substitution was allowed.

Sampling. A systematic random sampling was used. All the 1,515 governments were numbered from the north to the south. Then, 300 governments were selected at even intervals, based on their population sizes. The interval was 236,500 residents. To simplify sampling, we did not use information of land sizes and income levels of governments.

Respondents and Response Rates. 300 respondents and 100% response rates for both mayors and officers.

Before the survey, we conducted field pretesting at 20 governments (LGUs: Local government units). Comparisons are shown in Table and Figure below.

Table 1. Comparisons of Whole country, Sample, and Pretests

	In Whole country	(%)	In Sample	(%)	At Pretests	(%)
Local governments	1,515 LGUs		300 LGUs		20 LGUs	
Population	84,275,983		42,342,634		4,912,963	
Mean population	55,628		141,142		245,648	
Province	78		71		4	
City/Municipality						
City	135 LGUs	(8.9%)	93 LGUs	(31.0%)	6 LGUs	(30.0%)
population	33,352,397	(39.6%)	28,923,112	(68.3%)	4,451,084	(90.6%)
Municipality	1,380 LGUs	(91.1%)	207 LGUs	(69.0%)	14 LGUs	(70.0%)
population	50,923,586	(60.4%)	13,419,522	(31.7%)	461,879	(9.4%)
Island groups						
Luzon	771 LGUs	(50.9%)	170 LGUs	(56.7%)	10 LGUs	(50.0%)
population	49,747,961	(59.0%)	28,561,958	(67.5%)	4,660,258	(94.9%)
Visayas	408 LGUs	(26.9%)	67 LGUs	(22.3%)	10 LGUs	(50.0%)
population	17,154,355	(20.4%)	6,228,052	(14.7%)	252,705	(5.1%)
Mindanao	336 LGUs	(22.2%)	63 LGUs	(21.0%)	0 LGUs	(0.0%)
population	17,373,667	(20.6%)	7,552,624	(17.8%)	0	(0.0%)

The sample contains one fifth governments of the whole country. Yet it covers more than half the residents of the nation. Cities are overrepresented in the sample because of their large population sizes. The sample mostly maintains proportions of governments and residents by island groups.

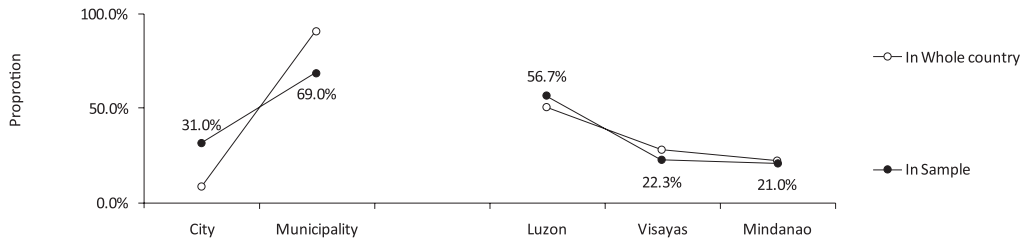


Figure 2. Comparisons of Whole country and Sample

3 Results

Most data are collected in 200 days (see Figure below). Out of 300 governments, 297 mayors answered by then, while all the officers were interviewed. In a year, the rest three mayors agreed to be interviewed.

By the graph, both respondents were accelerated to answer around 80 days, and then decelerated around 120 days. This might be because Christmas had ended then. Finally, we collected all the questionnaires.

As a result, we obtained complete information of the sample with 100% response rates. The data provide us with accurate understanding of how mayors and officers experience, behave, and think. For example, it was revealed for the first time that more mayors prioritize efficiency rather than residents' participation (Nishimura et al. 2012).

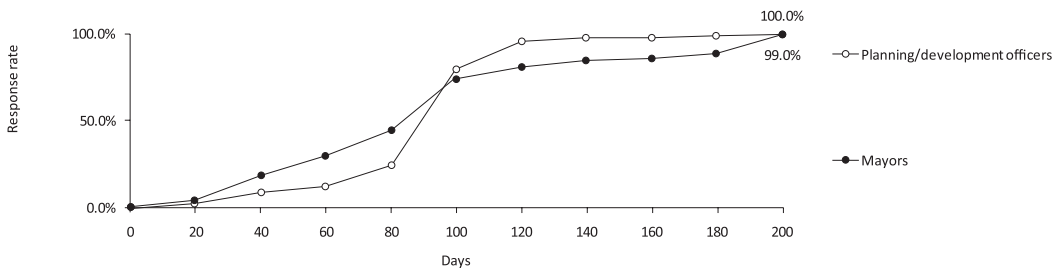


Figure 3. Cumulative Response Rates

4 Hints on High Response Rates

Truly we made every effort to collect as many questionnaires as possible. Still, 100% was beyond our expectation. How did we attain such high responses? The following points may provide some hints.

Diversity in Research Team. We organized our research team with a sociologist (Kobayashi), a Philippines expert (Nishimura), and experts in public administration (Kikuchi and Matammu). This diversity enabled us to complement each other.

Repeated Field Pretests. Field pretests always pay (Fowler 1995, 2008). We conducted detailed and repeated pretesting. Before the survey, we went to the Philippines twice to see mayors and officers at 20 local governments. The first trip was held in January 2010 in six days in Manila and around. In the second trip in August and September 2010, we spent six days in Palawan and Aklan (see Table below).

In developing countries, we tend to observe huge inequalities between urban and rural areas. Thus, to keep areal diversity, we went to six cities and 14 municipalities; eight governments in Luzon, 10 in Panai island, and two in Palawan island; minimum population 11,688 (Linapacan) to maximum 2,679,450 (Quezon). In addition, we interviewed a governor and an officer at Aklan province. Also we saw five barangay captains at Kalibo, New Washington, Malay, and Puerto Princesa for questionnaire development.

After each hearing, we discussed how to improve and revise questions. As a result, questionnaires were shortened and clarified. It took 20.3 minutes for mayors and 22.1 minutes for officers on the average. Respondents were provided a copy of the questionnaire during the interview to use it as a guide.

Table 2. 20 Local Governments at Pretests

Local governments	City/Municipality	Province	Population	Income class	Sample
Malolos	City	Bulacan	223,069	3	Sample
Paombong	Municipality	Bulacan	53,510	3	
San Ildefonso	Municipality	Bulacan	93,438	1	
Makati	City	NCR	510,383	1	Sample
Pasay	City	NCR	403,064	1	Sample
Marikina	City	NCR	424,610	1	Sample
Quezon	City	NCR	2,679,450	Special	Sample
Morong	Municipality	Rizal	50,538	2	
Linapacan	Municipality	Palawan	11,688	5	
Puerto Princesa	City	Palawan	210,508	1	Sample
Altavas	Municipality	Aklan	23,692	4	
Balete	Municipality	Aklan	26,360	4	
Buruanga	Municipality	Aklan	15,767	5	Sample
Ibajay	Municipality	Aklan	42,742	3	
Lezo	Municipality	Aklan	13,077	5	
Malay	Municipality	Aklan	32,110	1	Sample
Malinao	Municipality	Aklan	23,921	4	
Nabas	Municipality	Aklan	28,345	4	
Numancia	Municipality	Aklan	27,570	4	
Tangalan	Municipality	Aklan	19,121	5	

Appropriate Survey Mode. Choosing the appropriate method is fatal in data collection (Groves et al. eds. 2009). We adopted an interview survey instead of a mail survey. Mails are not reliable in the Philippines,

so we had no choice other than an interview survey. This decision resulted in no missing information (no unit nor item nonresponse).

On the other hand, interview surveys must urge us to adjust schedules with respondents. Interviewers reported that they had difficulty making appointments with respondents, particularly with mayors. They could not schedule an interview in one visit. It was even harder to contact secretaries than to interview mayors. Some appointments had to be rescheduled according to respondents' convenience. Most meetings were held at offices, but some had to be done at hotels, restaurants, and respondents' homes due to their requests. One interview started even after midnight (1:30 AM).

To avoid inefficiency, we sent three letters by fax in advance. It would have been helpful to obtain a signed letter from the National President of the League of Municipalities as well. Female interviewers were supposed to be better (49 were females out of 50 interviewers). We found that the best time to set an appointment was Mondays since most city or municipal officials are present.

Cooperation with Local Counterpart. We arranged the survey with our Philippine counterpart Social Weather Stations. We asked them to implement the survey. This was the first random survey on local governments in the country. Therefore, this survey was a challenge to them as well as to us.

To exchange opinions and information, we visited them five times before the survey (September 2008, August 2009, January 2010, March and August 2011) and four times during it (January, March, June, and October 2012).

They have many experiences in conducting surveys in the Philippines, especially political surveys. They also employ many trained interviewers. As a result, respondents often agreed to be interviewed once they know that interviewers represented the company, due to their good reputation. When interviewers visited offices, they always wore their company's shirts with IDs, calling cards, and company's brochures.

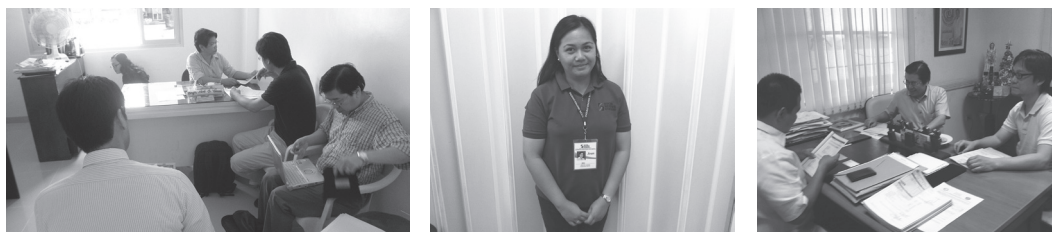


Figure 4. Pretest at Lezo, Interviewer, Interview at Cabuyao

Additional Interviews. The local counterpart was declined to conduct interviews by three mayors due to time conflicts. So, we visited them to collect data.

Incentives. To boost responses, we introduced an incentive structure. The baseline rewards 3 million

pesos were guaranteed. If Social Weather Stations collected answers from more than 240 respondents (80%) of both mayors and officers, we were supposed to add 2,500 pesos for each government (maximum 150,000 pesos, see Figure below). The local counterpart told us that this helped their motivations increase, although they might have done their best even without such incentives.

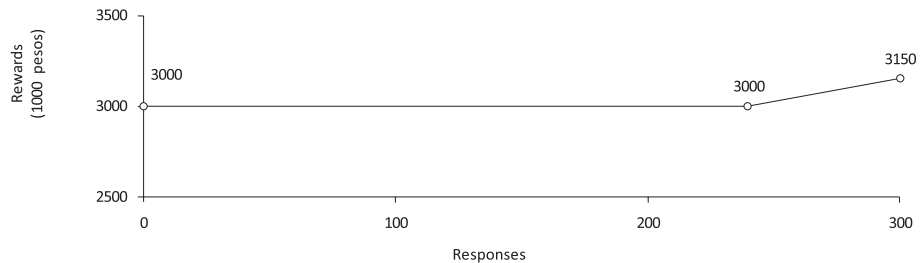


Figure 5. Rewards by Responses

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