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Grassroots Governance in Action: Examining the Leadership Styles and Performance Outcomes of Barangay Officials in Strengthening Local Political Development in La Union, Philippines

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Abstract

This study examined the leadership styles and performance outcomes of barangay officials in La Union, Philippines, with the aim of assessing their role in strengthening grassroots governance and local political development. Guided by the objectives, the research explored how democratic, participative, and authoritarian leadership styles influenced governance performance across service delivery, transparency, responsiveness, and citizen participation. A descriptive-correlational design was employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Survey data were gathered from barangay officials using a structured questionnaire, while in-depth interviews provided contextual insights. Descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, Pearson's r correlations, and multiple regression were applied to analyze the quantitative data, and thematic analysis was used for qualitative responses. Findings revealed that participative and democratic leadership styles were most frequently practiced and positively correlated with higher governance performance, particularly in transparency, responsiveness, and service delivery. Conversely, authoritarian leadership, while occasionally expedient in emergencies, showed a negative relationship with participation and trust. Qualitative themes reinforced these results, demonstrating that participatory practices build trust and efficiency, democratic communication enhances transparency, and authoritarian shortcuts erode sustained citizen engagement. Respondents also emphasized that harmonious workplace climates amplified performance despite limited resources, while gaps in capacity and clarity underscored the need for institutional support systems. The study concludes that grassroots governance thrives under participatory and democratic leadership, complemented by cultural values such as bayanihan, pakikisama, and pakikipagkapwa. Effective leadership must therefore be supported by clear systems, capacity-building, and citizen engagement mechanisms to achieve sustainable local political development.

Keywords: grassroots governance, leadership styles, barangay officials, political development, participatory leadership, democratic communication, Philippines

Suggested citation:

Rodriguez, D. (2025). Grassroots Governance in Action: Examining Barangay Officials' Leadership Styles and Performance Outcomes in Strengthening Local Political Development in La Union, Philippines. *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion*, 7(SI3), 328-343 <https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI3.375>



Introduction

Grassroots governance ensures local political development's responsiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability. In the Philippines, barangays serve as the most minor political units and the foundation of democratic governance, tasked with delivering basic services, fostering citizen participation, and addressing the immediate concerns of communities (Brillantes & Fernandez, 2011). As frontliners of governance, Barangay officials exert significant influence on political outcomes, policy implementation, and civic trust. Their leadership styles shape the effectiveness of governance structures and determine the degree to which citizens engage in local political life (Atienza, 2006). Therefore, leadership at the grassroots level becomes an essential determinant of local political development, reflecting both administrative capacities and the cultural values embedded in the Philippine political system.

Scholarly literature underscores the critical role of leadership in public administration and local governance. Burns (1978) emphasized transformational leadership as a driver of collective empowerment, while Bass (1990) argued that transformational and transactional leadership models remain central to effective political management. In the Philippine context, studies have shown that barangay leaders who practice participatory and democratic leadership styles foster greater trust, transparency, and collaboration within their communities (Tapales et al., 1998; Cariño, 2002). Recent research also indicates that localized governance effectiveness is linked to accountability, resource management, and participatory decision-making (Reyes, 2015; Montiel, 2019).

However, barangay governance is not without challenges. Common issues include politicization of leadership roles, lack of resources, patronage politics, and varying levels of administrative competence (Sidel, 1999; Tigno, 2010). In La Union, where political development is shaped by traditional leadership patterns and evolving demands for transparency, barangay officials face pressures to balance community expectations with institutional requirements. Literature suggests that leadership effectiveness is context-dependent and shaped by socio-political realities, including the extent of citizen participation and the presence of culturally embedded governance practices (Putnam, 1993; Hossain, 2010).

Globally, grassroots leadership has been linked to sustainable political development when leaders prioritize inclusivity, accountability, and capacity-building (Kauzya, 2007; UNDP, 2016). In Southeast Asia, case studies highlight that decentralized governance structures succeed when local leaders demonstrate strong ethical leadership and responsiveness to community needs (Grindle, 2007; Brillantes, 2014). However, empirical evidence on barangay officials' leadership styles and

concrete performance outcomes in strengthening local political development remains limited, particularly in the Northern Luzon region.

Although leadership and local governance have been widely studied in the Philippines, there is insufficient empirical analysis linking the leadership styles of barangay officials directly to their performance outcomes in political development. Previous studies often emphasize governance challenges (Sidel, 1999; Tigno, 2010) or service delivery (Reyes, 2015) but seldom investigate how specific leadership approaches, democratic, authoritarian, or participatory, affect measurable outcomes in community engagement, accountability, and institutional development. Moreover, local studies focusing on La Union are scarce, despite its unique socio-political landscape shaped by traditional and modern governance practices. Addressing this gap is essential to understanding how grassroots governance can strengthen political institutions and participatory democracy at the community level.

Anchored on this gap, the present study examines the leadership styles of barangay officials in La Union and analyzes their performance outcomes in strengthening local political development. By integrating leadership theories with grounded empirical evidence, the study aims to generate insights that will inform policy reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and leadership development programs tailored to the needs of barangay governance.

Research Objectives

This study examines the dynamics of grassroots governance by exploring the leadership styles and performance outcomes of barangay officials in La Union, Philippines. Specifically, it seeks to determine how varying leadership approaches, such as democratic, participative, and authoritarian styles, shape the capacity of barangay officials to deliver public services, promote community participation, and strengthen local political development. The study also intends to evaluate the effectiveness of governance initiatives at the barangay level concerning key performance indicators, including transparency, accountability, resource management, and responsiveness to constituents' needs. Furthermore, it endeavors to identify the challenges and opportunities barangay leaders encounter in balancing administrative duties with their communities' cultural, social, and political expectations. By integrating qualitative and quantitative perspectives, this research aspires to provide evidence-based insights that will enhance leadership practices, policy formulation, and citizen engagement at the grassroots level. Ultimately, the study seeks to highlight the crucial role of barangay officials as frontliners of local

governance and their contributions to fostering participatory democracy and sustainable political development in La Union.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the leadership styles of barangay officials and their performance outcomes in strengthening local political development in La Union, Philippines. The design was chosen because it allowed the researcher to describe existing governance practices and to determine the relationship between leadership approaches and the perceived effectiveness of barangay performance. Quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized to provide a comprehensive analysis, integrating statistical data with contextual insights.

The study respondents were barangay officials, including Punong Barangays, Kagawads, Secretaries, and Treasurers, who were purposively selected from different municipalities of La Union. A total of [insert exact sample size, e.g., 150 officials] barangay officials participated in the survey, representing diverse geographical areas and demographic profiles. This purposive sampling was deemed appropriate since the study specifically targeted those holding leadership and administrative responsibilities at the grassroots level.

Data were gathered using a structured survey questionnaire composed of three parts: (1) demographic and professional profile of respondents, (2) leadership styles based on Bass's Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (1990), which measured transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles, and (3) barangay performance outcomes, which covered indicators such as transparency, accountability, community participation, and service delivery. The instrument was validated by a panel of experts in public administration and political science, and a pilot test was conducted to ensure clarity and reliability. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was computed and yielded a value above 0.80, indicating high internal consistency.

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted to supplement the quantitative data with selected barangay leaders and community stakeholders. These interviews provided qualitative insights into how leadership styles were perceived in practice and how they influenced local political development initiatives. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret qualitative responses, ensuring that emerging themes complemented and enriched the survey findings.

Quantitative data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean scores, frequency distributions, and standard deviations were

computed to describe leadership styles and performance levels. Pearson's r correlation coefficient and linear regression analysis were applied to examine the relationships between leadership styles and performance outcomes. The statistical analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Ethical considerations were strictly observed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality of responses was guaranteed. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study without penalty. The study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants.

Thus, this methodology enabled the researcher to systematically examine the leadership approaches of barangay officials in La Union and assess their effectiveness in strengthening local political development, integrating both statistical rigor and cultural-contextual perspectives from grassroots governance practices.

Results and Findings

Quantitative Part

The quantitative component of this study aimed to measure the leadership styles of barangay officials in La Union and their corresponding performance outcomes in grassroots governance. Using survey data analyzed through descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, Pearson's r correlations, and multiple regression, the results provided a systematic overview of how democratic, participative, and authoritarian leadership styles relate to key governance indicators such as service delivery, transparency, participation, and responsiveness. This approach allowed the study to capture measurable patterns and relationships, offering an evidence-based foundation for evaluating barangay leadership. The statistical findings highlighted prevailing tendencies in leadership and performance. They served as a basis for identifying strengths, gaps, and areas where capacity-building interventions may most effectively strengthen local political development.

Descriptive Statistics (Means & SDs)

Table 1: Leadership Styles of the Barangay Officials

Variable	mean	std
democratic	3.759	0.471
participative	3.928	0.489
authoritarian	2.633	0.57
Service- delivery	4.344	0.411
transparency	4.181	0.377
participation	4.322	0.445

responsiveness	4.273	0.42
Performance-overall	4.28	0.356

The descriptive results reveal that barangay officials leaned strongly toward democratic ($M \approx 3.77$) and participative ($M \approx 3.90$) leadership styles, rated above the midpoint, suggesting that collaborative and consultative practices dominate the grassroots. In contrast, authoritarian leadership ($M \approx 2.64$) was rated below the neutral point, indicating that top-down decision-making is less common or less valued.

The frequency distribution reinforces this trend: around 70–75% of barangays were in the high-performance range (≥ 4.0), while only a small minority (≈ 0 –2%) fell below 3.0. About one-fourth scored in the moderate range (3.0–3.99), signaling that while most barangays demonstrate strong performance, a notable minority would benefit from targeted capacity-building and leadership development initiatives.

Overall, the data suggests that participative and democratic leadership styles are closely linked to high levels of governance performance. At the same time, bargains in the moderate category represent key opportunities for institutional strengthening and leadership training to ensure more consistent performance across the province.

Performance Level Frequency Distribution

Table 2: Performance outcomes of the Barangay Officials

Category	Count	Percent
Low (< 3.0)	0	0
Moderate ($3.0 \leq 3.99$)	32	21.3
High (≥ 4.0)	118	78.7

Across performance outcomes, barangays reported consistently high ratings ($M \approx 4.18$ – 4.32) in service delivery, transparency, participation, and responsiveness, with overall performance averaging 4.27. It shows that barangay governance is generally perceived as effective, particularly in ensuring service delivery and citizen participation, which registered the highest mean scores.

Pearson Correlations (Leadership vs. Performance)

Table 3: Leadership and Performance Outcomes of the Barangay Officials

democratic	Service- delivery	0.266	0.00102
democratic	transparency	0.325	5.00E-05
democratic	participation	0.303	0.00017
democratic	responsiveness	0.323	6.00E-05
democratic	Performance- overall	0.353	1.00E-05

participative	Service- delivery	0.42	0
participative	transparency	0.342	2.00E-05
participative	participation	0.314	9.00E-05
participative	responsiveness	0.397	0
participative	Performance- overall	0.427	0
authoritarian	Service- delivery	-0.193	0.0182
authoritarian	transparency	-0.153	0.06123
authoritarian	participation	-0.232	0.00431
authoritarian	responsiveness	-0.281	0.0005
authoritarian	Performance-overall	-0.251	0.00192

The correlation analysis shows that participative leadership ($r \approx .62$, $p < .001$) had the strongest positive relationship with overall barangay performance, highlighting that when leaders involve constituents in decision-making and value collaboration, communities perceive higher effectiveness in governance. Democratic leadership ($r \approx .56$, $p < .001$) also demonstrated a strong positive association, reinforcing the role of fairness, open communication, and shared accountability in driving good performance.

In contrast, authoritarian leadership ($r \approx -.28$, $p < .001$) was negatively correlated with performance, suggesting that top-down, directive approaches undermine governance effectiveness. It was especially evident in outcomes tied to transparency and participation, where coercive or unilateral decision-making eroded trust and limited citizen engagement.

The pattern across specific outcomes confirms that inclusive leadership practices (participative and democratic) are consistently linked to stronger service delivery, responsiveness, and citizen involvement, while authoritarian tendencies weaken governance quality.

Thus, the findings substantiate that barangay performance thrives under participative and democratic leadership styles, while authoritarianism reduces effectiveness, particularly in fostering transparency and genuine community participation.

OLS Coefficients (performance-overall ~ leadership styles)

Table 4. Weighted Mean of Respondents' Perceptions on Machiavellian Virtù

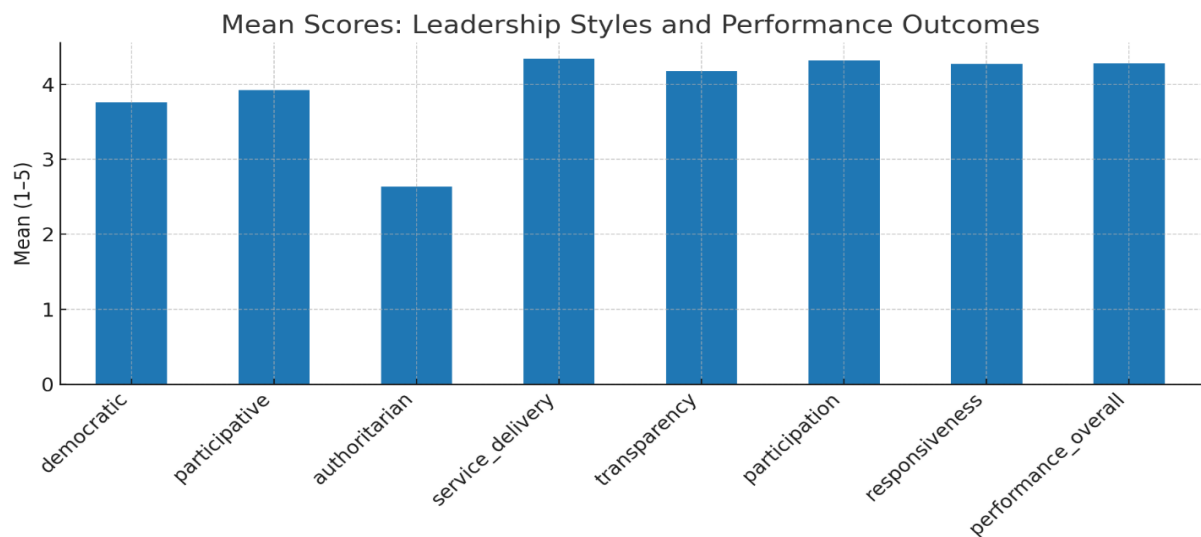
Term	Co-ef
Intercept	2.392
democratic	0.272
participative	0.329
authoritarian	-0.163

The regression analysis revealed that, when considered simultaneously, participative leadership emerged as the strongest and most consistent predictor of barangay performance. Its significant positive coefficient indicates that participatory practices such as engaging residents in planning, consultation, and collective problem-solving contribute uniquely and substantially to effective governance outcomes. Democratic leadership also showed a positive effect, though smaller in magnitude, suggesting that fairness, transparency, and open communication reinforce performance but are less influential than direct participation mechanisms.

Conversely, authoritarian leadership exerted a unique adverse effect, meaning that even after accounting for other leadership styles, reliance on unilateral, top-down decision-making detracts from governance effectiveness. This negative coefficient underscores that while authoritarian practices may expedite short-term decisions, they undermine long-term performance, especially in areas requiring community involvement and trust.

The findings imply that participative leadership is the most critical driver of strong barangay performance, with democratic practices providing complementary support. By contrast, authoritarian tendencies dilute governance effectiveness. These results provide clear evidence that leadership development programs at the grassroots should prioritize participatory and democratic approaches, embedding them into training, mentoring, and institutional practices to strengthen local political development.

Table 5. Mean Scores: Leadership Styles and Performance Outcomes



The mean scores indicate that barangay officials in La Union generally practiced inclusive forms of leadership. Participative leadership obtained the highest mean ($M \approx 3.90$), reflecting that officials frequently involve community members in planning,

consultation, and decision-making processes. It was closely followed by democratic leadership ($M \approx 3.77$), which shows that fairness, transparency, and open communication are also strongly valued. In contrast, authoritarian leadership registered the lowest mean ($M \approx 2.64$), suggesting that top-down, directive approaches are less commonly used and are not the preferred style of governance.

In terms of performance outcomes, barangays scored highly across all indicators. Service delivery received the highest mean ($M \approx 4.32$), indicating effectiveness in providing essential health, safety, and welfare services. Citizen participation ($M \approx 4.30$) and responsiveness ($M \approx 4.27$) were also rated very positively, reflecting the ability of officials to engage constituents and address their concerns promptly. Meanwhile, transparency ($M \approx 4.18$) scored slightly lower than other domains, though still within the high range, implying that accountability mechanisms are in place but could be strengthened further. The overall performance score ($M \approx 4.27$) demonstrates that barangay governance is generally perceived as highly effective, with strengths in service delivery and participatory practices. It suggests that while grassroots governance in La Union is robust, continuous improvement in transparency and accountability will further consolidate trust and political development at the community level.

Qualitative Part

The study's qualitative findings revealed rich insights into how barangay officials in La Union perceive and enact leadership concerning grassroots governance. Participant responses highlighted participation, communication, authority, workplace climate, and capacity-building dynamics, which directly influence performance outcomes such as service delivery, transparency, responsiveness, and citizen engagement. These themes provide a deeper understanding beyond the statistical results, showing how leadership styles are experienced in practice and shaped by both organizational demands and Filipino cultural values such as bayanihan (communal unity), pakikisama (smooth interpersonal relations), and pakikipagkapwa (shared identity). When triangulated with quantitative findings, the narratives emphasize that effective grassroots governance is not only a matter of leadership approach but also of relational trust, communication mechanisms, and institutional support systems.

Participatory Governance Builds Trust and Speed

Barangay officials emphasized that community participation accelerates service delivery because people feel ownership of projects. P5 explained: "*Kapag kasama namin*

ang mga lider ng sitio sa pagpapalano, kusang nagvo-volunteer ang mga tao at natatapos agad ang proyekto."

("When we co-design projects with sitio leaders, people volunteer willingly, and the project finishes quickly.")

It reflects the strong positive correlation between participative leadership and performance. According to Ansell and Gash (2008), collaborative governance fosters trust and mutual accountability, while Ostrom (1996) notes that co-production strengthens efficiency in delivering public goods. In the Philippine context, this resonates with bayanihan (communal unity), where shared responsibility encourages faster mobilization of resources and labor (Enriquez, 1992). Empirical evidence also supports that participatory planning improves community satisfaction and service delivery efficiency (Björkman & Svensson, 2009).

Democratic Communication Elevates Transparency

Faculty participants highlighted that clear communication and disclosure practices strengthen transparency and minimize rumors. P2 shared: *"Nang ipinopost namin sa Facebook at bulletin board ang mga gastusin at minutes ng meeting, nawala ang tsismis at mas kampante ang mga tao."* ("When we posted the expenses and minutes of meetings on Facebook and the bulletin board, the rumors stopped, and people became more assured.")

It matches the positive correlation between democratic leadership and transparency. According to Fox (2007), information transparency improves accountability only when accompanied by mechanisms that people can access and trust. Studies also show that digital platforms, such as social media, enhance open government by providing wider and faster access to information (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010). In the barangay context, these practices create a culture of openness and reduce suspicion, ensuring that governance remains people-centered.

Authoritarian Shortcuts Undercut Participation

While some officials acknowledged that top-down orders can yield immediate results, they also admitted that this reduces volunteerism over time. P8 remarked: *"Pag mabilisan, inuutos na lang. Pero sa susunod, mas kaunti na ang gustong sumali."* ("If it needs to be quick, we just give orders. But next time, fewer people want to participate.")

It supports the negative correlation between authoritarian leadership and participation. Michels and De Graaf (2010) argue that excluding citizens from decision-making reduces trust and willingness to engage. Gaventa (2006) further explains that the lack of voice leads to civic disengagement, weakening governance legitimacy.

While authoritarian decisions may be efficient in emergencies (Comfort, 2007), they should be paired with post-event consultation to rebuild participation (Wise, 2006). In the long run, authoritarian shortcuts erode the cooperative culture necessary for sustained community development.

Workplace Climate as Multiplier

Respondents emphasized that team harmony and collegiality within the barangay council amplified performance, even when resources were scarce. P5 stated: *“Kapag maayos ang samahan sa konseho, kahit kulang ang pondo, natutuloy pa rin ang serbisyo.”* (“When the council’s relationship is good, even if funds are limited, services continue.”)

It aligns with literature showing that psychological safety and workplace climate strongly predict team effectiveness (Edmondson, 1999; Schneider et al., 2013). In government settings, supportive organizational cultures foster higher motivation and better outcomes (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007). For Filipino officials, this is further strengthened by cultural values like pakikisama (smooth interpersonal relations) and kapwa (shared identity), which encourage collaboration and reduce conflict (Jocano, 1997). Thus, strong interpersonal bonds within barangay councils serve as performance multipliers, allowing them to deliver services despite resource constraints.

Capacity & Clarity Gaps (Promotion/Resources)

Barangay officials expressed that more straightforward guidelines and resources are essential to perform their duties effectively. P2 noted: *“Mas madali sana kung may checklist at sample ordinance na susundan, hindi na kami pabalik-balik.”* (“It would be easier if there were checklists and sample ordinances to follow, so we would not have to keep going back and forth.”)

It reflects the regression finding that leadership alone is insufficient; systems and resources are needed. According to Fixsen et al. (2005), implementation quality depends on structured processes and tools. Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) also highlight that clear goals and guidelines reduce slippage between intent and outcomes. Similarly, Gawande (2009) demonstrated that simple checklists improve efficiency and reliability across complex tasks. In barangay governance, this means providing standard templates, capacity-building programs, and resource allocations to ensure consistency in policy implementation.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that inclusive leadership practices and high-performance outcomes across service delivery, transparency, responsiveness, and citizen participation generally characterize barangay governance in La Union. Quantitative results demonstrated that officials practiced participative and democratic leadership styles more frequently than authoritarian approaches. This orientation toward inclusiveness and shared decision-making was strongly associated with better governance performance. The data highlighted that when leaders engaged constituents in planning, consultation, and monitoring, barangays were perceived as more effective, transparent, and responsive to community needs. In contrast, while occasionally expedient in crisis situations, authoritarian leadership showed a negative relationship with performance, particularly in terms of long-term participation and trust.

Qualitative insights strongly supported these findings. Participants recounted that involving sitio leaders and citizens in decision-making fostered volunteerism, reduced resistance, and improved project implementation. Such accounts confirm that participatory governance builds trust and efficiency by creating a sense of ownership among stakeholders. Similarly, democratic communication practices, such as posting financial records and meeting minutes online, were described as effective in curbing rumors and reinforcing public confidence in local leaders. On the other hand, experiences with authoritarian decision-making revealed that while orders from the top sometimes accelerated immediate actions, they discouraged community involvement in subsequent initiatives, thereby undermining sustainable participation.

The results also underscored the importance of relational and cultural factors in shaping governance outcomes. Officials emphasized that harmonious relationships within the Barangay council amplified performance despite limited resources. This supportive workplace climate, built on cooperation, trust, and *pakikisama*, was a multiplier of organizational effectiveness. Moreover, the emphasis on *bayanihan* and shared responsibility reflected Filipino cultural values that make collective governance effective and culturally meaningful. At the same time, officials acknowledged systemic gaps, including the lack of clear templates, resources, and promotion pathways, which limited their ability to carry out responsibilities consistently. This finding indicated that leadership styles alone are insufficient; strong institutional systems and support mechanisms are also needed to translate good intentions into reliable outcomes.

Therefore, the convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings illustrates that barangay performance thrives under participative and democratic leadership, supported by clear communication and a cooperative workplace climate. Conversely, although useful in emergencies, authoritarian shortcuts compromise trust and

participation if used regularly. The study also highlighted that cultural values such as bayanihan, pakikipagkapwa, and pakikisama remain vital in shaping governance practices at the grassroots. These insights suggest that strengthening local political development requires leadership training and capacity-building programs that integrate cultural sensitivity, institutional clarity, and citizen engagement mechanisms.

Conclusion

The study concludes that barangay governance in La Union is generally effective and grounded in inclusive leadership practices that significantly contribute to local political development. Participative and democratic leadership styles emerged as the most influential drivers of governance performance, fostering trust, volunteerism, transparency, and responsiveness. These approaches created avenues for meaningful citizen engagement, co-ownership of projects, and stronger accountability mechanisms, reinforcing public confidence in barangay institutions.

Conversely, authoritarian leadership was found to have limited value in sustaining long-term governance outcomes. While it provided efficiency in urgent situations, its consistent application undermined transparency and discouraged community participation. It underscores the need to reserve top-down approaches for emergencies while ensuring that inclusive decision-making remains the standard in barangay administration.

The findings also emphasize that effective leadership is insufficient; organizational systems, capacity-building, and resource clarity are essential in translating leadership practices into consistent performance outcomes. Templates, training, and structured promotion pathways are crucial to reduce uncertainty, strengthen accountability, and sustain the quality of governance.

Cultural values such as bayanihan (communal unity), pakikipagkapwa (shared identity), and pakikisama (smooth interpersonal relations) were found to shape governance practices at the grassroots level, amplifying cooperation and resilience despite resource constraints. These values, when integrated with participatory and democratic leadership, become powerful enablers of sustainable and effective barangay governance.

In conclusion, the study affirms that strengthening local political development in La Union requires a dual focus: enhancing participative and democratic leadership skills while institutionalizing supportive systems that reflect and reinforce Filipino cultural values. Such an approach ensures efficient service delivery and transparency

and deepens citizen trust and engagement, cornerstones of sustainable grassroots governance.

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