

It was on the 5th of April 2019 when president Rodrigo Duterte signed Republic Act No. 11259 into law dividing Palawan into three (3) provinces: Palawan del Norte, Palawan Oriental, and Palawan del Sur. The signed law states that the municipalities of the captivating islands of El Nido, Coron, Busuanga, Culion, and Linapacan will be included as part of the province of Palawan del Norte, having Taytay as its capital. Agutaya, Cuyo, Cagayancillo, San Vicente, Araceli, Dumarán, and Magsaysay with Roxas as its capital will be included in the province of Palawan Oriental; Aborlan, Quezon, Narra, Rizal, Sofronio Espanola, Bataraza, Kalayaan (Spratlys), and Balabac with Brooke's Point as its capital will be included in the province of Palawan del Sur.

Through a plebiscite to be held on the second Monday of May 2020 requiring only the approval of the majority of the voters in affected areas, it is not a question that newly created provinces will soon arise. In the eyes of many, this can be a positive act that will make new changes for the Palaweños and their local government unit in the name of a far *better government* and the furtherance of progression with regards to economics and administration. However, it can also be taken into account the various oppositions raised by the Palaweños including the possibility of gerrymandering and the claim on the right to participate in the plebiscite by the residents of Puerto Princesa. In this paper, the author will discuss the major issues in the creation of the three provinces particularly focusing on the (1) enactment of R.A. No. 1125 such as: (a) rights of the residents of Puerto Princesa in participating in the plebiscite and (b) political issues in the enactment of the law; and (2) the effect of division into three provinces in regard to economic stability, administration and politics.

I. Enactment of R.A. No. 1125

It is not new in the ears of the Palaweños to hear the issue of the Division of Palawan into three (3) provisions. Many already heard the different pros and cons of this issue and whether or not the division will certainly achieve its goal of providing a better governance among the people of Palawan and for their future. With these opinions and thoughts regarding the matter of rights and benefits among the Palaweños, the author observed two of the major issues that are commonly argued about regarding the division of Palawan, which are: (a) claims on the rights of the residents of Puerto Princesa in participating in the plebiscite, and (b) political issues regarding the enactment of the law.

A. On the Rights of the Residents of Puerto Princesa

Before going into the reasons of opposition, the author took notice of the petition filed by the residents of Puerto Princesa to be included in the plebiscite. Their demand centers on the people's right to vote and have a say in the division of the province. It is not a question of the mind that the residents of Puerto Princesa are more active in this issue than those within the municipalities. However, we live in a country ruled by law and not of men. One cannot instantly demand his rights without it being expressly or impliedly stated by law. Section 54 of Republic Act No. 11259 purposely disqualifies the residents of Puerto Princesa City from voting in the coming plebiscite in May 2020. It states that:

“Residents of the City of Puerto Princesa. - The residents of the City of Puerto Princesa, as a highly urbanized city, shall not be qualified to vote in the plebiscite and for candidates for provincial elective positions.

The district representatives who were duly elected and qualified in the election immediately preceding the May 2022 national and local elections of the present First Legislative District, Second Legislative District, and Third Legislative District shall continue to represent their respective districts until the representatives for the newly created legislative districts for the three (3) provinces and the highly urbanized City of Puerto Princesa shall have been elected and qualified.”

The residents of Puerto Princesa claim that being part of the Province, they are directly affected by the division. The above stated provision contravenes the Constitution and the people's right. Looking further into this claim, it is indeed true that every person has the right to be included and take part in the alteration of the province's structure of government. However, to further support my opposition against the claims of the residents of Puerto Princesa, we should look at what the provisions of the Local Government Code of 1991 say about this issue. According to Section 452 (c):