



Nurturing Informed Student Voters: Enhancing Active Citizenship through General Education

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HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ **BSU students perceive a candidate's leadership qualities and acts of service to the public as more important factors in their decision-making than the candidate's gender.**
- ✓ **The top three presidential candidates favored by BSU students during the 2022 Philippine National Elections were Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., Maria Leonor G. Robredo, and Panfilo M. Lacson.**
- ✓ **The BSU students' choice of presidential candidate was strongly influenced by factors such as the candidate's family and educational background, leadership qualities, governance platforms, recognized experience and track record, as well as their campaign messages and behaviors.**
- ✓ **BSU students' voting behavior is shaped by a combination of influences from their family, friends, church, and social media.**



INTRODUCTION

The 1987 Philippine Constitution enshrines the vital role of the youth in nation building, a role evident in their right of suffrage. Their vote is significant since they make up a large portion of the population; their choice of presidential candidate holds great importance since the platforms and policies this leader implements will affect both present and future generation of Filipino youth.

In 2018, Dolipas conducted a study on the voting considerations of BSU students when selecting candidates for elective positions in the government. Four years after, she sought to determine if those findings were still valid by focusing on how the students' socio-educational environment influence their political behavior. According to Careemdeen, Awang, and Ahmad (2021) this environment includes the family, school, community, social network, and virtual access; all of these impact students' education by shaping their knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

However, the study revealed that the school had no influence on the students' political behavior. Instead, they relied on family, peers, church, and social media for information about candidates. Addressing this issue is essential to ensure that education remains relevant in shaping students' political decisions.



METHODOLOGY

The study used a multi-research design combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative approach (using frequency) gathered data on the number of students who responded to the study, including their sex and presidential choice. In contrast the qualitative approach analyzed students' responses through thematic grouping.

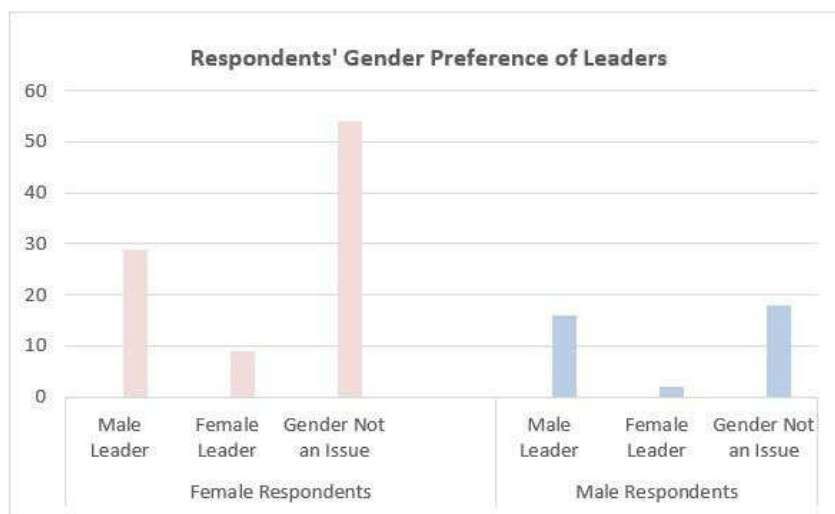
Non-probability convenience sampling was applied based on students' accessibility and willingness to participate; hence, the results may not reflect the broader BSU student population. The respondents included 133 BSU students enrolled in The Contemporary World during the second semester of 2021-2022 and the first semester of 2022-2023. Students answered questions about their preferred candidate's gender and their voting choices.



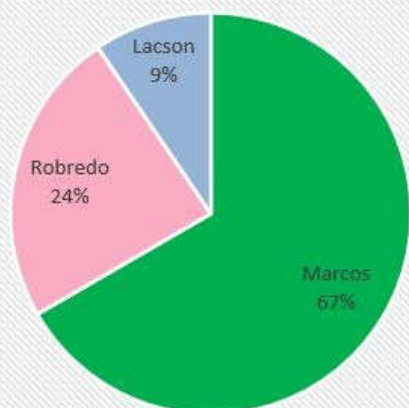
FINDINGS

Prioritizing Leadership Traits and Public Service over Gender in Candidate Selection

The students did not consider gender when selecting a leader emphasizing that "a man, woman, and even part of the LGBTQ community can lead the country." They stressed that leadership traits and qualifications should take precedence over gender. Their vision of a leader is clear: someone with intellect; determination, patriotism, trustworthiness, no history of illegal activities, and commitment to serve the country. Moreover, they value traits such as being a good listener, compassionate, eloquent, wise, impartial, just, and considerate as essential qualities in a leader.



Preferred Candidate During the 2022 Presidential Elections



These choices were based on various factors including the candidates' demonstration of leadership qualities and traits, pronouncement of sound platforms of governance, recognized experience or track record, campaign message and attitude, and family and educational background. Some of the direct quotations associated with the identified factors include:

Factors Influencing Students' Presidential Preferences

Among the 10 presidential candidates during the May 2022 Philippine national elections, the students' top three choices included Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Maria Leonor Robredo, and Panfilo Lacson.

Leadership Qualities/Traits

"qualities, character and achievements [are] what matters when choosing someone to lead the country"

"has great leadership and management skills"

"compassionate towards citizens, a good listener, eloquent speaker, wise, just, unbiased, considerate, patriotic"

"I want my candidate to have fear in the Lord"

"he is compassionate... he has good heart for the people" (Marcos Voter)
"because of his integrity" (Marcos Voter)

"I have seen how sincere she serves the country" (Robredo Voter)

"she has good reputation" (Robredo Voter)

"she has no record of corruption which can guarantee she will do a good job if she wins the election" (Robredo Voter)

Track Record

"I did some research on his performances as senator and they are all good"

effective tenure as vice president, her office's highest COA rating for three consecutive years, and her commendable COVID-19 response

"he came from PNP which means he has a lot of experiences in ruling and discipline. He was also a senator for 3 terms and so he knows how different sectors of the government run"

Family and Educational Background

"she has good educational background having studied economics and law"

"has great educational background being able to graduate in 1996 with Master's Degree in Government Management"

Message and Attitude during the Campaign Period**Marcos Voters**

"his campaign's message was focused on uniting the country"

"was focused on his campaign not on his fellow candidates"

"he's been criticized and cancelled for his late father's actions; he's very genuine and doesn't insult his co-candidates"

"he never talked back against the people or opponents who [were] against him or destroying him. Instead, he kept still, smiling, humble and silent and he never intended to make fun or criticize them"

"I admire him most for not making fun of or maligning his fellow presidential candidates; he remained calm and focused solely on his campaign"

"people are throwing bad words against him and his family but he chose to be kind"

"I hate people who talked badly about others"

"I was turned off by the only woman candidate because of her lame campaign ideas like doing some construction under the rain, the self-centered behavior of her supporters, her unprofessional behavior and words given that she's a lawyer and her opposition against the former president during her vice president regime."

These findings support Sebastian's (2014) claim that youth are not as disengaged as commonly believed. They actively participate in the electoral process by exercising their right to vote in a meaningful way; they carefully chose candidates based on specific criteria rather than being influenced by the goods and entertainment offered by candidates. The factors considered by the youth indicate that they are not politically indifferent and have not fallen victim to the "bobotante" virus as evidenced by Dolipas' 2018 study.

Key Drivers of Voting Behavior among Students

The proverb "it takes a village to raise a child" is clearly reflected in the voting behavior of students. The students' voting behavior is the result of the interplay of influences from their family, friends, church, and social media. Family members instill perspectives that influence students on whom to vote; friends, on the other hand, may either reinforce or challenge that choice. The church is also capable of swaying students' opinions on candidates. Finally, social media proves to be a powerful social institution that provides students a wide array of information about candidates.

Family/Relative

"my family...because they say that Bongbong is a kind and great president"

"my household told me to vote for BBM because they believe he can also make a difference just like his father"

"influence of family; they are always saying that this candidate is the one who can make our country better"

"with the support of my father since he is also a PBBM supporter. Some of my questions about the Marcoses were all answered by him"

Friends

"I had deep discussion with ... friends about her and believe she is fit to be a president" "my ... friends because they say that Bongbong Marcos is a kind and great president"

Church/Religion

"as a member of INC we have what we call unity in voting. What our leader said is what we will vote"

"because of my religion Iglesia ni Cristo. I follow my religion wholeheartedly and was not forced, I did it because we have unity"

Social Media

"based on what I've read and found out from social media which is basically correct and I validated these things from further searching on history and watching documentaries of the people who experienced the running of the late President Marcos"

"social media promotions also helped a lot especially when they featured his response to calamities and when he paid respect to the SAF 44 members"

"I watched the story of FM and his family; I really felt sad because they are so pitiful and underestimated by those corrupted people of the Philippines; I know he will follow his father's legacy"

"social media... I did research on her background credentials and achievements"

Notice that the university does not significantly influence the students' voting behavior; instead, they primarily gather information from social media rather than from their lessons or subject teachers. This is contrary to the known belief that educational institutions significantly influence students' voting behavior by according them with the knowledge, skills and motivation to become active and informed voters.



CALL TO ACTION

- ✓ Social Science course facilitators incorporate civic education into their subjects as appropriate. They educate students about the country's electoral process, the importance of voting, and the impact of their votes on both local and national governance.
- ✓ Social Science course facilitators continue to inspire students to exercise their right to vote through engaging lecture-discussions, and to instill the understanding that leadership is defined by qualities and track record, not by gender.
- ✓ Social Science course facilitators create an environment for open discussions in classrooms, providing a safe space for students to debate political issues. This approach encourages students to express their political views and listen to others, fostering a culture of respectful dialogue.
- ✓ Social Science course facilitators invite guest speakers, such as student leaders, local politicians, and experts, to provide valuable insights and inspire students to actively participate in the country's democratic process.
- ✓ Social Science course facilitators support school organizations since these serve as platforms for students to engage in political activities and discussions.



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ABOUT THE MATERIAL

Informing Policy and Practice is published quarterly by the Institute of Social Research and Development and R & E Publications Office of Benguet State University. It synthesizes findings from research and development activities, or presents results of quick survey and opinion poll on social, economic, and policy issues and concerns affecting the Cordillera region. It also distills the key messages and provides recommendations for the information and consideration of relevant stakeholders and policymakers.

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