Predictors of Voting Intentions among First-Time Voters in a Rural Municipality in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the factors that influence the voting intentions of first-time voters in a rural municipality in the northern Philippines. This study employed a quantitative research design guided by Singh et al.'s (1995) Voting Behavior Model, with 148 first-time voters (N = 148) completing a researcher-developed survey questionnaire. Descriptive results showed that respondents held more favorable attitudes toward individual candidates than toward political parties and perceived both their social circles and mass and digital media as influential in shaping their voting considerations. Regression analysis indicated that the overall model was significant (F 4,143) = 17.84, p < .001). However, only attitude toward individual candidates (β = .634, p < .001) and mass media subjective norms (β = .241, p < .01) significantly predicted voting intentions. Attitudes toward political parties and interpersonal norms were not significant predictors. These findings suggest that first-time voters rely primarily on candidate-specific qualities and media portrayals rather than party affiliations or interpersonal influences. These results offer concrete implications for designing youth-focused civic education initiatives and electoral communication strategies.

1. Introduction

In a democratic country like the Philippines, electoral processes are vital because they allow citizens to participate in governance and policy-making that influence their daily lives. Such electoral processes are created and structured in order, i.e., the local and national elections, which encourage the Filipino citizenry's democratic participation. One aspect of the local elections include the barangay and *Sangguniang Kabataan* (SK) elections which are held separately from national elections. In the Philippine societal structure, the barangay is regarded as the most basic unit of local government unit while the SK is the country's youth governance mechanism created and institutionalized through Republic Act No. 7160, also known as the Local Government Code (LGC) (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2007). Through the enactment of Republic Act No. 9164, the barangay and SK elections involve choosing a barangay captain and several barangay councilors, while the SK elections enable the youth to elect their SK chair and his respective councilors.

The aim of the SK elections is for Filipino youths to choose their SK leaders who are tasked to "engage the youth in the community and teach them accountability, honesty and creativity" (UNICEF, 2007). For this reason, only those aged 15 to 17 years old in a barangay who could register in barangays have the right to vote and be voted into the SK. As a result, the SK elections then has been viewed as an avenue for young Filipinos to participate in the barangay's electoral process and local governance. Consequently, to better understand the complexities of the electoral participation of young voters, exploring the factors that predict voting behavior may be noteworthy.

Previous literatures have investigated the voting behaviors of first-time voters, along with the factors that shape them. Firstly, studies have found that educational tools can shape the political choices of first time voters

(Børhaug, 2008; Jackson & Tan, 2012). Similarly, the study of Abiera et al. (2022) examined and found that the preferences of first-time voters' were often influenced by their interpersonal relationships, such as peers and family. They also found that educational institutions and political parties also impact the preferences of first-time voters.

Meanwhile, several studies have also found that the political decisions and engagements of young voters are shaped by mass and social media and peer interactions (Newman et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2005). David (2013) also found that the rise of information and communication technologies, especially social networks, have contributed to the evolution of the political engagement of young voters. Likewise, Carvalho et al. (2023) also explored the factors, i.e., information and perceptions, which shape young voters' voting behaviors and electoral engagement

Furthermore, in examining the behaviors of voters, Singh et al. (1995) developed the Voting Behavior Model, which has been derived from the Theory of Reasoned Action by Ajzen and Fishbein (1975). Singh et al. (1995) claim that the voting behaviors of individuals were shaped by their attitudes, their social groups' norms, and their behavioral intentions. On the one hand, voting attitudes are influenced by the attitudes towards the candidates themselves and their respective political parties. On the other hand, the voters' subjective norms are impacted by their interpersonal and mass media norms (Singh et al., 1995).

Understanding the dynamics of these factors pose significant implications for political campaigns and policymakers. By understanding how these factors impact voting behaviors, one can comprehend patterns in voters' behaviors. This can aid in improving political and governmental strategies in order to increase voter turnout and civic engagement of the citizenry. Unfortunately, research on the subject

matter, i.e., the voting behavior of young and first-time voters, especially in the Philippines, remain underexplored. For instance, literature reviews have revealed significant research gaps in the examination of how mass and digital media, along with interpersonal relationships, shape the voting behavior of first-time voters in the Philippines. Likewise, there is a scarcity of studies that utilize the Voting Behavior Model in understanding how attitude and norms shape the electoral decisions of voters included in this demographic. Lastly, studies appear to examine only the voters located in urban regions both in the country and abroad. Unfortunately, there are very few studies examining the factors influence the first-time voters in the Philippine context, especially in rural areas, such as the chosen locale of this study.

This study then addressed these gaps by analyzing the predictors of voting intention among first-time voters in a selected rural municipality during the 2023 SK Elections. In general, this study aimed to investigate the factors that shape the voting intentions of first-time voters within the selected municipality using Singh et al.'s (1995) Voting Behavior Model. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1) examine the attitudes of first-time voters towards candidates and parties, along with their respective interpersonal and mass media norms;

2) determine the level of voting intentions among first-time voters in the chosen municipality; and,

3) identify which factors among their attitudes towards candidates, attitudes towards parties, interpersonal norms, and mass media norms were predictors of their voting intentions.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative research design, with a survey as its methods. According to Leavy (2022), quantitative research prioritizes breadth, statistical descriptions, and generalizability, focusing on objectivity, control, and precise measurement through structured and standardized methods. The researcher formally requested data from the Election Officer of the Commission on Election in the locale to acquire information regarding first-time voters. Subsequently, the researchers administered the surveys using a house-to-house method to gather data from the target population.

The researchers employed various statistical methods to analyze the voting attitudes, norms, and intentions of the participants. Initially, a descriptive statistic was utilized to summarize the gathered data. Subsequently, regression analysis was conducted to measure which among the voting attitudes towards candidate and party, and interpersonal and mass media subjective norms were predictors of intentions of first-time voters.

2.2 Participants and Sampling

The researchers employed purposive sampling, a non-probability method, to select participants based on specific characteristics aligned with the study's objectives (Crossman, 2020). The study population was defined under the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Reform Act of 2015 or RA 10742, which states that only youth aged 15 to 17 years old who are officially registered as SK voters are eligible to participate in SK elections. Since the study focused on first-time voters who registered for the 2023 SK elections, purposive sampling was the most suitable method for identifying individuals who met these legally prescribed characteristics.

The selection criteria for respondents in this study are twofold: 1) they are first-time voters, and 2) they have registered for the 2023 Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) elections. The sample size was determined using the Raosoft sample size calculator, considering a population size of 240, which reflects the number of registered first-time voters in a chosen municipality, as reported by its Commission on Elections. With a 5% margin of error, this calculation yielded a recommended sample size of approximately 148 respondents.

Table 1 details the frequency and percentage distribution across various demographic profiles. Among the respondents, the age distribution showcases a varied representation. Notably, individuals aged 20 years old constitute the largest percentage, comprising 27.70% of the sample, totaling 41

respondents. Conversely, the smallest percentage is observed among those aged 18, constituting 12.16% of the sample, with 18 respondents.

Regarding sex distribution, males represent the majority of respondents, comprising 54.05% of the sample, with a total of 80 respondents. Females, on the other hand, account for 43.92% of the sample, totaling 68 respondents.

The analysis of respondents' educational levels reveals distinctive patterns. The largest percentage is attributed to second-year college students, constituting 23.65% of the sample, with 35 respondents. In contrast, the smallest percentage is shared between grade nine and fourth-year college students, each representing 1.35% of the sample, with 2 respondents each.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents according to Age, Sex, and Year Level of First-Time Voter, 2024

Demographic Profile of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
15	21	14. 9
16	18	12.16
17	37	25.0
18	13	8. 78
19	18	12. 16
20	41	27.70
Sex		
Male	80	54.05
Female	68	43.92
Educational Level		
Grade 9	2	1.35
Grade 10	33	22.30
Grade 11	27	18. 24
Grade 12	24	16.21
First-year college	14	9.46
Second-year college	35	23.65
Third-year college	11	7.43
Fourth-year college	2	1.35
TOTAL	148	100.0

Note. Percentage may not equal to 100% due to rounding errors.

2.3 Research Instrument

The survey questionnaire served as the primary tool for data collection and was designed to measure the components of Singh et al's (1995) Voting Behavior Model within the context of first-time Filipino voters. The structure and phrasing of several items were patterned after the instrument used in the study of Lagasca-Hiloma et al. (2021). That earlier instrument provided a model for constructing behavior-related statements that are clear, age-appropriate, and easily understood by Filipino respondents. Drawing from this framework ensured that the present questionnaire maintained clarity and accessibility while remaining theoretically grounded.

The final questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part included ten statements measuring respondents' attitudes toward individual candidates and political parties. The second part contained fourteen statements assessing interpersonal subjective norms (e.g., peer and family influence) and mass media subjective norms (e.g., exposure to televised or online political content). The last section measured the voting intentions of first-time voter-participants. All items were rated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

To ensure reliability and clarity, the instrument underwent a pilot test with 20 first-time voters from a nearby *barangay*. Feedback from the pilot test resulted in revisions such as simplifying ambiguous wording, removing overlapping statements, and improving the flow of items. Reliability analysis from the pilot test informed the final refinement of each subscale.

Internal consistency coefficients computed after the pilot and full administration showed acceptable to high reliability. For attitudes toward candidates and political parties, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.871 and 0.712, respectively. Interpersonal and mass media subjective norms yielded alpha values of 0.835 and 0.780, while the voting intention scale produced an alpha of 0.841. These values indicate strong internal consistency across the instrument.

To establish content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by a licensed psychometrician and a communication and media research expert, who assessed the alignment of items with the theoretical constructs, evaluated cultural appropriateness, and recommended adjustments to improve clarity and measurement precision.

3. Results

This section presents insights into the voting attitudes, norms, and intentions of first-time voters of a select municipality in the Philippines during the 2023 Sangguniang Kabataan Elections.

Table 2 illustrates that the mean score for Attitude Towards Candidate is the highest at 3.80 (SD = 0.70). This suggests that, on average, first-time voters tend to hold a positive attitude toward candidates. This mean score also suggests a favorable perception among this demographic regarding the candidates running for office. Meanwhile, Attitude Towards Political Party records the lower mean score of 3.11 (SD = 0.74). This suggests that first-time voters have a less favorable attitude toward political parties compared to individual candidates.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on Attitudes

Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Attitude Towards Candidate	3.8094	0.70801	148
Attitude Towards Political Party	3.1149	0.74766	148

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the respondents' attitudes toward political candidates. Respondents' preferences for specific candidate-attributes are evident through the high levels of agreement or strong agreement observed in the mean values. For instance, respondents express agreement with statements such as "*I prefer to vote for a candidate who is committed to equal employment opportunity*" (M= 4.30) and "*I prefer to vote for a candidate who represents the interest of all citizens*" (M= 4.20), which are statements 3 and 9, respectively.

Similarly, attributes related to personal qualities and communication skills also garner significant agreement from respondents. Statements such as "*I prefer to vote for a candidate who has great communication skills*" (M= 4.50) and "*I prefer to vote for a candidate who has problem-solving skills*" (M= 4.26), which are statements 12 and 14, respectively, emphasize the value placed on candidates'

abilities to effectively communicate and address complex issues.

Conversely, statements where respondents express neutrality or disagreement provide additional insights into their attitudes. For example, statement 7 "*It makes no difference to my life who wins the election*" (M = 2.16) reflects a neutral stance on the impact of election outcomes. This suggests a lack of a strong conviction or perceived significance regarding how election results directly affect them. This neutrality might stem from various factors, including a sense of detachment from the political process, disillusionment with political outcomes, or a belief that individual actions have limited influence on broader political dynamics.

Similarly, disagreement with the statement "*I prefer to vote for a candidate without credentials but charming personality*" (M = 1.76) (Statement 5) highlights the prioritization of substance over style in candidate selection.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Statements on Attitude Towards Candidate

Attitude Toward Candidate	Mean	Interpretation
1. I prefer to vote for political who are responsive to the needs of young voters	4.20	Agree
2. I will vote for a candidate who has a degree and an excellent educational background	4.03	Agree
3. I will vote for a candidate who is committed to equal employment opportunity	4.30	Strongly Agree
4. I will vote for a candidate who gives importance to education	4.43	Strongly Agree
5. I prefer to vote for a candidate without credentials but charming personality	1.76	Disagree
6. I prefer to vote for a candidate who is honest and has a strong moral principle	4.13	Agree
7. It makes no difference to my life who wins the election	2.16	Neutral/Uncertain
8. I believe online media influenced my attitudes towards voting	3.20	Neutral/Uncertain
9. I prefer to vote for a candidate who represents the interest of all citizens	4.20	Agree
10. I prefer to vote for a candidate who listens to the voices of minorities	4.30	Strongly Agree
11. I prefer to vote for a candidate who has leadership skills	4.40	Strongly Agree

12. I prefer to vote for a candidate who has great communication skills	4.50	Strongly Agree
13. I will vote for a candidate who has a vision for the future	4.40	Strongly Agree
14. I prefer to vote for a candidate who has problem-solving skills	4.26	Strongly Agree

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Statements on Attitude Towards Political Party

Attitude Towards Party	Mean	Interpretation
1. I trust political candidates to make decisions that benefit the public	3.33	Neutral/Uncertain
2. I prefer to vote for a candidate who has political dynasty history	2.23	Disagree
4. I prefer to vote for a candidate who has an elite political background	2.73	Neutral/Uncertain
5. I will vote for a candidate who is rich and powerful life status	2.40	Disagree

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics on Subjective Norms

Constructs	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Interpersonal Subjective Norms	3.35	0.74417	148
Mass Media Subjective Norms	3.06	0.79147	148

Table 4 presents the mean levels and interpretations of attitudes toward political parties. Descriptive statistics indicate that survey items are categorized under "disagree" and "neutral/uncertain," following the Likert Scale questionnaire interpretation procedures outlined by Nyutu et al. (2020). Regarding attitudes toward political parties among selected first-time voters, it is apparent that a preference exists for parties making beneficial decisions for the public, as evidenced by the highest mean score of 3.33. Conversely, the lowest mean level of 2.23 pertains to candidates with a political dynasty history.

Table 5 shows the mean scores which provide a quantitative measure of the average level of agreement or endorsement of these subjective norms among the respondents. Firstly, the construct of Interpersonal Subjective Norms presents a relatively high mean score of 3.35, which indicates a notable level of agreement among respondents regarding the influence of interpersonal interactions on their attitudes and behaviors.

Conversely, the construct of Mass Media Subjective Norms yields a slightly lower mean score of 3.06. Despite this, the value still indicates a considerable level of agreement among respondents regarding the influence of mass media on their attitudes and behaviors.

Table 6 presents a comprehensive analysis of respondents' attitudes and behaviors related to interpersonal norms in the context of political engagement. Across various statements, respondents generally express agreement with actively engaging in political discourse and seeking information before forming opinions. For instance, respondents agree with statements such as feeling confident in discerning between true and untrue information online (M = 3.43) and

actively fact-checking political information before forming opinions (M = 4.13).

The respondents also exhibit a notable willingness to engage in discussions about politics with their peers or family members, as indicated by a mean score of 3.73. This inclination towards interpersonal dialogue demonstrates the significance of social interaction in the formation and exchange of political beliefs and perspectives. Moreover, the respondents demonstrate a collaborative approach to information-seeking by involving their families in the decision-making process related to the election process and candidates, as reflected by a mean score of 3.43. Actively participating in political discussions within their social circles serve as a platform for sharing insights, debating ideas, and fostering mutual understanding, which ultimately enriches their political beliefs and preferences.

However, some statements elicit neutral or uncertain responses from respondents. For instance, respondents express neutrality or uncertainty regarding the impact of *miting de avances* on their voting preferences (M = 3.26) and the effectiveness of house-to-house campaigning strategies (M = 3.26). These responses suggest a degree of ambiguity or

lack of consensus among respondents regarding the influence of certain political activities on their decision-making processes.

Table 7 presents the mean scores of the participants' mass media subjective norms. Firstly, results show that the respondents generally agree that television plays a significant role in shaping their political opinions, as evidenced by the relatively high mean score of 3.63 for the statement "*Television has played a significant role in shaping my political opinions.*" This indicates a recognition among respondents of the influential role of television in informing and influencing their political perspectives.

However, there is a degree of neutrality or uncertainty regarding certain aspects of mass media engagement. For instance, respondents express neutrality towards watching campaign advertisements on television (M = 2.63) and a preference for television news programs in shaping political opinions and voting decisions (M = 3.23). These responses suggest a mixed sentiment regarding the influence of specific forms of mass media, with some respondents remaining undecided or uncertain about their impact on political attitudes and behaviors.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Statements on Interpersonal Subjective Norms

Interpersonal Norms	Mean	Interpretation
1. I feel confident in discerning between true and untrue information online	3.43	Agree
2. I actively fact-checked political information before forming opinions	4.13	Agree
3. I participate in discussions about politics with my peers or family members	3.73	Agree
4. I actively seek information about the election process and candidates with my family to make a decision	3.43	Agree
5. I attend *meeting de avance* campaigns in choosing which candidate to vote for	3.26	Neutral/Uncertain
6. Political rallies have an impact on my voting preferences	2.80	Neutral/Uncertain
7. I consider house-to-house an effective strategy in campaigning	3.26	Neutral/Uncertain

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Statements on Mass Media Subjective Norms

Mass Media	Mean	Interpretation
1. Television has played a significant role in shaping my political opinions	3.63	Agree
2. I prefer watching campaign advertisements on television	2.63	Neutral/Uncertain
3. I trust the flyers information about the candidates	2.16	Disagree
4. I watch and reflect on election debates to widen my political perspective	4.06	Agree
5. I prefer to watch a television news program in shaping my political opinions and voting decisions	3.23	Neutral/Uncertain
6. I prefer to read the newspaper or news websites in shaping my political opinions and voting decisions	3.20	Neutral/Uncertain

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics Voting Intentions

Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Voting Intentions	3.7809	0.81077	148

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics for Voting Intentions

Voting Intention	Mean	Interpretation
1. I intended to vote for the SK Election after I register	3.70	Agree
2. During the campaign, my intent to vote did not change.	3.50	Agree
3. During the election day, my intent to vote did not change.	3.66	Agree
4. I intended to vote and participate in future elections.	4.0	Agree
5. I intended to consider the policies and promises of the candidates in my voting decision.	3.76	Agree
6. I intended to look over the specific platforms of the political candidates.	3.86	Agree
7. I intended to vote to exercise my right and to choose a reliable leader.	4.50	Strongly Agree

Notably, the strongest agreement is observed with the statement expressing the intent to vote to exercise one's right and select a reliable leader, with a mean score of 4.50, indicating their commitment to civic duty and responsible leadership selection among respondents.

Furthermore, there is a degree of disagreement regarding the trustworthiness of information presented in flyers about political candidates, as indicated by the relatively low mean score of 2.16 for the statement "*I trust the flyers information about the candidates.*"

Table 8 shows the mean voting intention score of 3.7809. This suggests a consistent level of agreement across respondents regarding their intent to vote in the SK Election and future elections.

Specifically, as shown in Table 9, the respondent's express agreement with statements indicating their intention to vote after registering, with a mean score of 3.70, and a commitment to maintain their voting intent during the campaign (M = 3.50) and on election day (M = 3.66). Moreover, respondents affirm their intention to participate in future elections (M = 4.0) and

consider candidates' policies and promises in their voting decisions (M = 3.76), as well as review specific platforms presented by political candidates (M = 3.86).

As shown in Table 10, a linear regression analysis was performed in order to determine whether the attitudes towards party, attitudes towards candidate, mass media subjective norms, and interpersonal subjective norms were significant predictors of the voting intention of first-time voters. The analysis showed that the model is significant, F (4, 143 = 17.84, p < 0.0).

Additionally, attitudes towards candidate (t = 6.421,) and, mass media subjective norms (t = 2.785, p < 0.01) are significant predictors, showing that for every one-unit increase in attitude towards candidate and mass media subjective norms, voting intention is increased by 0.634 and 0.241, respectively. It must be noted that 33% of the variation in voting intention was explained by the variation in attitude towards candidate and mass media subjective norms. Additionally, attitude towards party and interpersonal subjective norms were not significant predictors of voting intention.

Table 10. Linear Regression Model of Voting Intention and the Predictor Variables

Variables	B	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.486	4.237	0.000
Attitude Towards Party	-0.113	-1.366	0.174
Attitude Towards Candidate**	0.634	6.421	0.000
Mass Media Subjective Norms**	0.241	2.785	0.006
Interpersonal Subjective Norms	-0.151	-1.580	0.116

Note.*significant at alpha = .05, **significant at 0.001

4. Discussion

Analysis of attitudes toward candidates and parties reveals a positive sentiment toward individual candidates, while attitudes toward political parties are less favorable. Notably, regression analysis highlights the significant influence of attitudes toward candidates and mass media subjective norms on voting intentions.

This emphasizes the pivotal role of candidate qualities and media portrayal in shaping voting decisions. However, attitudes toward political parties and interpersonal norms show no significant prediction on voting intentions.

These results collectively suggest that in the rural municipality where the study was conducted, voters' evaluations tend to center on individual-level characteristics rather than party-level affiliations

4.1 Attitude towards candidate and Attitude towards party of First-Time Voters during the 2023 Sangguniang Kabataan Elections

Findings reveal that there is a preference among first-time voters for assessing candidates rather than evaluating political parties. In one comprehensive literature review, it was discovered that voters' preferences are significantly influenced by both party identification and candidate characteristics. The study argued that party identification serves as a cornerstone for voters, offering them a sense of identity and affiliation with a broader political community (Kulachai et al., 2023). This affiliation simplifies the decision-making process by providing voters with a heuristic or mental shortcut for appraising candidates and their stances. Similarly, they found that voters frequently weigh various personal attributes,

qualifications, and characteristics of candidates when making electoral choices (Kulachai et al., 2023). These factors play pivotal roles in shaping voters' perceptions, attitudes, and preferences, consequently impacting their decisions to support specific candidates. However, in the rural context of this study, political parties often have a weaker local presence, and local elections tend to center on individual personalities rather than party platforms. This helps explain why first-time voters evaluated the candidates' attributes more strongly than party affiliation.

Data shown in Table 3 emphasize the importance placed on candidates' commitment to social justice and inclusivity. This coincides with the results of the study of Kulachai et al. (2023) that one crucial characteristic that garners considerable attention from voters is the candidate's experience and qualifications. Voters tend to scrutinize candidates based on their educational background, professional expertise, and track record, among other pertinent qualifications. They also mentioned that one factor considered is the policy positions of candidates.

In addition, the results suggest that the respondents value qualifications, credentials, and tangible accomplishments more than mere charisma or likability. It reflects a desire for candidates who demonstrate competence, integrity, and a track record of accomplishments rather than relying solely on charm or personality traits. This also aligns with the results of the study of Sariat et al. (2022) which found that there is a significant relationship between communication skills and the performance of a politician. They found that uncivil communication will reduce the political trust and performance of the politician. Likewise, Sheafer and Tzionit (2006) and Silvester et al. (2020) found that a candidate's political skill impacts their performance during election campaigns. This also aligns with various studies which found that effective

communication skills and strong leadership abilities are pivotal factors contributing to the electoral success of candidates (Sheafer, 2008; Conway III et al., 2012; Nam & Lee, 2021; Baron et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the systematic review conducted by Falcão et al. (2023) sheds light on an intriguing aspect of voter behavior, i.e., there is the tendency for individuals to perceive themselves as similar to the candidates of the political parties they support. This finding resonates with the current study, which suggests that first-time voters, who are the participants in our investigation, place significant importance on the notion of making beneficial decisions for the public. This alignment between voter perceptions and candidate characteristics underscores the emphasis placed by voters on candidates' commitment to public welfare and decision-making processes that prioritize societal well-being.

Lastly, this study's results with respect to voting attitude also suggest a trend among voters, i.e., that they are veering away from supporting political dynasties. This observation is particularly noteworthy given the political milieu in the Philippines, which is known for having its own political dynasties. The reluctance or disfavor toward political dynasties among first-time voters signals a potential shift in voter preferences and attitudes, which indicate a desire for more diverse and representative political leadership.

4.2 Interpersonal and Mass Media Subjective Norms of First-Time Voters during the 2023 Sangguniang Kabataan Elections

Results of this study suggest that individuals within the respondents' social circles, such as friends, family, or peers, exert a significant influence on the perceptions and decision-making processes of first-time voters. This supports the study of Lahtinen et al. (2019), which highlight the intimate connection

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between an individual's level of political engagement and their social integration. According to their study, an individual's political voice serves as a potent tool for influencing societies. Consequently, the political preferences and beliefs held by one's friends and family members exert a significant influence on an individual's own political stance and beliefs.

Data shown in Table 5 also reveal that media sources, including television, newspapers, and social media platforms, play a significant role in shaping respondents' perceptions and beliefs. This aligns with the results of the study of Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2019) that mass media and social media have a combined effect when it comes to influencing voting and political preferences. Additionally, in rural areas, information channels are fewer and political advertising is less diverse. As a result, traditional and digital media become central sources of information on SK candidates.

Meanwhile, the data presented in Table 5 reveal the participants' prevailing tendency towards proactive engagement with information consumption and critical thinking, particularly in the realm of political matters. This proactive approach suggests that the participants are not passive recipients of political information but actively seek to verify and discern the accuracy and validity of the information they encounter. When presented with information about a specific political candidate, it is likely that participants are inclined to take steps to verify the truth of this information before forming opinions or making decisions, including engaging in political discussion with their peers.

This inclination towards interpersonal dialogue demonstrates the significance of social interaction in the formation and exchange of political beliefs and perspectives. This aligns with the study of Shah et al. (2005) who found that engaging in social interactions with peers regarding political matters significantly influences the civic engagement of young citizens.

This indicates that respondents are less inclined to rely on printed materials, such as flyers, as sources of information about political candidates, potentially due to concerns about bias or misinformation. This is an interesting result as it contrasts the study of Trumm (2021) where it was found that a candidate who utilize offline campaign tools such as flyers and posters contribute to higher vote shares as long as the offline campaign is combined with online tools as well.

Lastly, data presented in Table 7 implies a conscientious approach to the respondents' voting decisions, as indicated by their intention to consider the policies, promises, and specific platforms of political candidates. This demonstrates a desire for informed decision-making and a recognition of the significance of candidates' platforms and agendas in shaping their voting preferences. It also reveals that the participants are likely to be pragmatic voters. Laughland-Booÿ (2018) identifies principled young voters as individuals who adopt a compensatory stance, carefully weighing various issues and being willing to make trade-offs in pursuit of what they perceive as the greatest overall benefit. These voters take into account a multitude of factors before deciding on their preferred candidate, prioritizing those who promise the most favorable outcomes, whether for the broader society or for themselves.

4.3 Predictors of Voting Intention

Results of the regression analysis indicate that attitudes towards the candidate and mass media norms are indeed influential factors in predicting voting intention among first-time voters in the district, whereas attitudes towards the party and interpersonal norms do not significantly impact voting intention. The findings imply that when it comes to first-time voters, their attitudes

towards specific candidates and their perceptions of mass media are key factors influencing their voting intentions. This shows that the personal qualities, characteristics, and platforms of individual candidates hold considerable sway over the voting decisions of new voters. This aligns with the results of the study of Abiera et al. (2022) which investigated the voting preferences of first-time Filipino voters. They found that first-time voters take into account the candidate's clean track record, leadership experience, educational background and political platforms. In addition, in a survey published by Balita (2022), the top three factors which voters took into account during the 2022 national elections in the Philippines include the candidate's political experience track record, stand on issues and platform, and educational background.

Moreover, the way in which mass media portrays political information and candidates significantly influences first-time voters' intentions at the polls. This highlights the influential role that media plays in shaping political attitudes and behaviors, particularly among individuals who are new to the voting process. This is remarkable as past studies have been unclear as to the impact of social media in the voting preferences of individuals. On the one hand, Rita et al. (2023) claimed that it is impossible to state that social media impacts voting decisions. Similarly, Jun (2022) found that political information in social media do not prompt the wired youth to be more likely to vote, but instead, distracts them from performing voters' duty. On the other hand, Messing and Westwood (2014), Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2019), Bukari et al. (2021), and Cañares et al. (2022) found that mass media and social media indeed have the power to impact voting intentions and behaviors of voters.

Conversely, the study reveals that attitudes towards political parties and interpersonal norms—such as social influences from friends, family, or community—are not significant predictors of voting intentions of first-time voters. The lack of significance regarding attitudes towards political parties was expected, given the relatively diminished role of political parties within the Philippine context. As noted by Mabulay (2021), political parties in the Philippines are often transient entities, and voters tend to prioritize candidates based on personal qualities or track records of addressing specific concerns. This trend persists despite the absence of strong reliance on party affiliation or pre-election polls to guarantee a candidate's suitability or effectiveness.

The lack of significant prediction regarding the influence of interpersonal norms, such as those stemming from close familial ties, presents an intriguing aspect of the study's findings. This observation is particularly compelling given the central role that family relationships play in shaping Filipino identity and cultural values (Alampay & Jocson, 2011). Filipino society is known for its strong emphasis on familial bonds, with family ties often serving as the foundation of social support networks and individual identity formation (Alampay & Jocson, 2011). Despite this cultural backdrop, the study suggests that interpersonal norms within family units may not exert a significant impact on the voting intentions of first-time voters.

The study's findings are consistent with research conducted by Abiera et al. (2022), which emphasizes the influence of interpersonal relationships, such as the family, on Filipino's political attitudes. While participants in their study acknowledged the significance of family in shaping their political views, the absence of a direct link between interpersonal norms and voting intentions in the present study suggests that other factors may be at play. These could include the influence of broader societal trends, political discourse, or personal experiences that shape individuals' perceptions of political issues and candidates.

Beyond the empirical findings, this study contributes theoretically by extending Singh

et al's (1995) Voting Behavior Model to a rural Philippine electoral context, which is a setting where voting behavior has traditionally been understudied. The results demonstrate how the model operates in an environment characterized by weak party institutionalization, community-based relational dynamics, and uneven access to political information. The strong predictive power of attitudes toward individual candidates supports the view that rural electoral cultures in the Philippines tend to be candidate-centered rather than party-centered. This emphasizes a behavioral pattern that diverges from more institutionalized party systems.

Lastly, the significant role of mass media subjective norms shows that, even with limited digital infrastructure in rural areas, media exposure remains a salient influence on the political decision-making of young voters. This interaction between candidate-level evaluation and media-mediated information expands the application of the Voting Behavior Model as it illustrates how its components function in a localized and rural democratic setting.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study offers insightful revelations into the voting attitudes and intentions of first-time voters of a selected municipality in the Philippines during the 2023 Sangguniang Kabataan Elections. Key findings from the survey demonstrate the significant impact of attitudes toward candidates and mass media subjective norms on voting intentions. This highlights the pivotal role of candidate qualities and media portrayal in shaping electoral decisions. Conversely, attitudes toward political parties and interpersonal norms exhibit no significant prediction on voting intentions. This indicates a complex landscape of factors driving first-time voters' political choices.

These findings carry substantial implications for electoral strategies and civic engagement initiatives targeting first-time voters. Campaigns should prioritize highlighting candidates' qualities and policy platforms to resonate with this demographic, which leverages mass media channels effectively to shape positive narratives. Educational programs should empower voters with knowledge and critical thinking skills, while fostering open dialogue within family and peer networks can enrich political understanding. Long-term engagement strategies are essential for building lasting relationships with first-time voters, ultimately strengthening democratic governance by fostering a vibrant and inclusive electorate.

In the specific context of SK elections, the results emphasize the need for local governments and electoral bodies to design youth-targeted voter education programs that emphasize how to meaningfully evaluate individual candidate competence, integrity, and platforms. Since first-time voters place greater weight on candidate-centered qualities rather than party affiliation, SK campaigns may be strengthened by requiring candidates to clearly communicate their plans, community-oriented projects, and leadership capabilities. In addition, the prominence of mass media subjective norms also underscores the importance of incorporating media and digital literacy training into community-based youth programs. Equipping young voters with the ability to critically assess online content, identify misinformation, and evaluate political messaging can support more informed voting decisions and help safeguard youth voters from manipulative or misleading media practices.

Collectively, these implications point toward the need for voter education and reforms in SK governance that both develop the evaluative skills of young people and promote political participation. Doing so ensures that their early electoral experiences contribute to a more informed, responsible, and engaged electorate over time.

6. Limitations

While this study offers valuable insights into the voting attitudes and intentions of first-time voters in a selected municipality in the Philippines, during the 2023 Sangguniang Kabataan Elections, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the study's findings are based on a specific geographic location and election context. This limits the generalizability of the results to other regions or electoral processes. Additionally, the use of self-reported data through survey responses introduces the possibility of response bias, where participants may provide socially desirable answers or misrepresent their true attitudes. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of the study prevents the establishment of causal relationships between variables, which limit the depth of understanding regarding the dynamics of voter behavior. The reliance on quantitative methods may overlook the nuanced and context-dependent nature of political attitudes and decision-making processes among first-time voters. Finally, while efforts were made to ensure the representativeness of the sample, the potential for sampling bias cannot be entirely ruled out, particularly in capturing the diverse perspectives and experiences of all first-time voters in the area.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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