POLITICAL CANDIDATES' PROFILE THROUGH THE LENS OF STUDENT VOTERS

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ABSTRACT

This study endeavored to investigate the profile of political candidates as to their personal and political backgrounds through the lens of student voters. A total of 337 Bachelor of Science in Criminology students took part in this study. A self-made questionnaire was used to answer the objectives of the study. The following results were obtained: the image of a political candidate as to their personal background showed that students prefer a male candidate, good looking, married with a post-graduate degree, can speak tagalog, a Roman Catholic, someone who comes from a family that voluntarily gives goods and financial assistance to the people and someone who belongs to the middle class. Moreover, as to the political candidates' political background: students gave so much weight on the platforms and advocacies of the candidate, someone who explains his/her platforms and advocacies, has track record of enhancing the educational sector, has served for at least 2 terms while the political candidate's party affiliation is not a preference in their choice of a candidate. Result of this research can be a basis for political candidates to strengthen or improve both their personal and political backgrounds to fit in with the demands of student voters.

Keywords: Political candidate, personal background, political background

INTRODUCTION

Suffrage may be exercised by all citizens of the Philippines not otherwise disqualified by law, who are at least eighteen years of age, and who shall have resided in the Philippines for at least one year, and in the place wherein they propose to vote, for at least six months immediately preceding the election – Article V, Section 1, of the 1987 Philippine Constitution (De Leon, Jr., 2014).

Elections give the citizens a sense of nationalism and appeasement. However, the people are usually divided for they have their own preferences of a political candidate. Throughout the years, Filipinos have been very fickle on their political and social beliefs leading to electing politicians who are malfeasant, corrupt, and incapable which brought unending political, social, and economic turmoil but the politicians themselves cannot be solely blamed for their misconducts as the voters were the ones who have placed these public officials into their respective seats. This means that the Filipino electorate is indirectly responsible for the events that occur within the country committed by their political bets. The objective of politics is to ensure the unity of the society; achieve general interests and common well-being of the people by confronting personal interests; and to endeavor to set-up a social order that is to the benefit of all (Kurtbas, 2015). Heywood (2014) likewise posited politics is a process and an activity in and by which the people and societies take, implement, regulate and protect the political decisions they live by for the betterment of people and the country in general. However, it is frustrating that these objectives are not successfully attained due to personal

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interests, over-usage of power and others. History provides information as to how politics is faced by various issues and conflicts, in fact to date, the National and even the Local Elections were never safe from any issue or problem (Calda et al., 2016). To name some of the known issues and problems on elections include vote buying, violence, influence of political dynasties, and inefficiency of vote counting machines and black propaganda (Oliveros, 2013).

This research was conceptualized based on the idea that the voting public is responsible to who they place in a position responsible in improving the lives of people. In political participation, the voting public is the key to the functionality of politics and must utilize the correct instruments and participate properly. Political participation is essential for it is designed to influence the decisions of the central or local government (Anik, 2000 cited by Calda et al., 2016). Robert Dahl, an American political scientist further stated political participation as "interest, caring, information and action" (Kapani, 2009). This definition consists of a "wide range of approaches and a range of influence from simple curiosity and interest in politics to taking political action" (Tokgoz, 2008). Meanwhile, "personal commitment, solidarity, interests and the feeling of citizenship" were considered by other scholars as the four (4) drivers that encourage people towards political participations (Ozer, 2004 cited by Calda et al, 2016).

The political culture of the Philippines may be described as dynamic due to the different characterization of several Filipino authors and experts of various fields of specialization regarding Philippine political culture (Cuizon & Dungog, 2012). Thus, it is safe to say that the Philippine political culture is defined by the way how Filipinos respond to various political scenarios in the country, particularly the elections.

In a democratic system, elections are the most palpable public instrument for the people in choosing their leaders and officials who would represent them in the local and national government (Miranda et al., 2011). But due to diversity in the Philippines, there is a need to assess the voting preferences of the Filipino electorate. According to Barrete (2013) and the Institute for Political and Electoral Reform (IPER, 1995 cited by Santiago et al., 2015), there are four factors that influence the Filipino voter in choosing his candidate. The primary determinant in selecting a candidate is attached in the popularity of the political candidate. Second is the endorsement of traditional organizations and networks such as the church and family origin. Another factor that voters consider is the characteristics of the political candidate. Voters least consider is the political party or the party program of the political candidate.

However, findings by the Institute of Philippine Culture in 2004 (cited by Calda et al., 2016) has contradicted the research of IPER in 1995 as the poor communities based their votes on the following: educational attainment, experience, ideals, and political record were regarded by the poor as being the most significant criteria in selecting their candidate. The poor does not have a high consideration for the powerful and wealthy, instead they have utopian understanding of leadership, values, kindness, truthfulness, and industry. Media personalities were not highly preferred by the poor voters, many have implicated that they consider educational attainments but were anxious of those with superior or high attainment of education. On the other hand, in an analysis conducted by Gallardo (n.d.) regarding Philippine senatorial elections, he emphasized that religious affiliation or religion confers significant outcomes in terms of bolstering electoral results.

Aside from banking on demographic profile, the political background, for example is the past performances and achievements in the government of a certain public official might give him/her a good foundation if he/she decides to run for re-election as this serves as a good and intelligent basis for the voters in choosing their candidate (Garcia, 2014).

Nevertheless, despite all the aforementioned ideas, surveys and opinions by different bodies, organizations, writers, and authors, studies show that Filipino voting preferences is currently and continuously changing, hence, checking and rechecking such factors through surveys and researches are vital (Calda et al., 2016). Understanding the voting preferences of the Filipinos could possibly contribute in solving the issues continually suffered by the country. It would give the people an overview of how the majority of the electorate choose their candidate and, more importantly, it would give them idea in rightfully choosing a political candidate. The study at hand, however, only focused on the preferences of student voters in particular.

Theoretical Framework

Voting behavior can be best understood by looking into the many factors considered in a political candidate. In this study, the major determinant of voting preferences is ascribed to a political candidates' personal and political backgrounds. A psychological construct considered in meeting this objective is the attribution theory. When a social perceiver uses information and useful evidences to attain causal explanations of phenomena, attribution occurs. It investigates what information is gathered and how it is utilized and combined to form a causal judgment" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Heider proposed the attribution theory in 1958 to explain how and why people explain events as they do. He believed that people are naive psychologists trying to make sense of the social world, hence, people tend to see cause and effect relationships in all human endeavor. He further proposed two main ideas that are influential in attribution.

1) *Internal Attribution*

This happens when we assign the cause of behavior to some internal characteristics. When we explain the behavior of others, we look for enduring internal attributions, such as personality traits, motives and beliefs. For example, in this study, the choice of a political candidate is attributed to some of their personal characteristics such as age, gender, educational attainment, religious affiliation, ethnic affiliation and socio-economic status.

2) *External Attribution*

When we ascribe the cause of behavior to some situation or event outside a person's control, that is, we see environmental features as reasons for our behavior. Political candidates' political background is considered in this study as a reference of voting behavior. Documented literatures (Campbell et al., 1960 cited by Webster & Pierce, 2015; Pop et al., 2011; Genyi, 2015) have shown the influence of these variables in the choice of a political candidate.

Using attribution theory as a framework of the present study can lead to better realization of how voters infer their choice of a leader that qualifies their personal and political background.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research sought to determine the voting preferences of the BS Criminology students according to the profile of a political candidates' in terms of their personal and political backgrounds.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Descriptive method of research was used to assess the preferences of the respondents in choosing a political candidate. This research method is about the description and characteristics of an existing phenomenon, a problem, issue or certain situation, designed to provide systematic information regarding them.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were the Bachelor of Science in Criminology students from Isabela State University, Echague, Philippines enrolled during the second semester of school year 2018-2019. Out of the total 422 students enrolled in the BS Criminology program, only 337 were involved during the gathering of data which comprise 80% of the total population. Those who were absent during the gathering of data were no longer included due to the limited time in data gathering.

Data Gathering Instruments

The main instrument that was used in this study was a self-made questionnaire which was pre-tested to samples not included in the study, it is then refined tailored-fit to the respondents of the study. The survey questionnaire was designed to elicit the assessment of the respondents as to their preferences in choosing a political candidate as to personal background (gender, educational attainment, religious affiliation, ethnic affiliation, socio-economic status, civil status, physical attributes, and family background) and political background (platforms and advocacies, political party affiliation, track record, terms served and campaign strategy). Responses were placed on a five-point likert scale anchored with "Highly Preferred" to "Not Preferred at all." The following weights and ranges were used:

Scale	Range	Descriptive Equivalent
5	4.50 – 5.00	Highly Preferred
4	3.50 – 4.49	Moderately Preferred
3	2.50 – 3.49	Somewhat Preferred
2	1.50 – 2.49	Slightly Preferred
1	1.00 – 1.49	Not Preferred at all

Statistical Treatment

The gathered data were analyzed employing weighted mean to determine the assessment of the respondents on their preferences in choosing a political candidate.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1.a. Political Candidates' Profile References in terms of their Personal Background as Perceived by the BS Criminology Students

Profile of a Political Candidate	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
A. PERSONAL BACKGROUND		
GENDER:		
Is a male	4.04	Moderately Preferred
Is a female	3.81	Moderately Preferred
Is a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBTQQIA+) Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual Community	2.91	Somewhat Preferred

Profile of a Political Candidate	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT:		
Is an elementary undergraduate	1.52	Slightly Preferred
Is an elementary graduate	1.55	Slightly Preferred
Is a high school undergraduate	1.69	Slightly Preferred
Is a high school graduate	2.18	Slightly Preferred
Is a college undergraduate	2.95	Somewhat Preferred
Is a college graduate	4.16	Moderately Preferred
Is a post-college undergraduate	4.34	Moderately Preferred
Is a post-college graduate	4.54	Highly Preferred
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION:		
Is a Roman Catholic	4.24	Moderately Preferred
Is an Iglesia Ni Cristo	3.52	Moderately Preferred
Is a Muslim	2.53	Somewhat Preferred
Is an Evangelical	2.30	Slightly Preferred
Is an Aglipayan	2.28	Slightly Preferred
Is a Seventh-day Adventist	2.56	Somewhat Preferred
Is a member of the Bible Baptist Church	2.85	Somewhat Preferred
Is a Jehovah's Witness	2.39	Slightly Preferred
Is a member of Church of Christ	2.74	Somewhat Preferred
Is a member of Jesus is Lord Church	2.74	Somewhat Preferred
Is a member of United Pentecostal Church (Philippines) Inc.	2.69	Somewhat Preferred
Is a member of the Philippine Independent Catholic Church	2.73	Somewhat Preferred
Is a member of Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints	2.80	Somewhat Preferred
ETHNIC AFFILIATION:		
Is an Ibanag	2.75	Somewhat Preferred
Is an Ifugao	3.01	Somewhat Preferred
Is an Ilocano	3.90	Moderately Preferred
Is an Itawes	2.53	Somewhat Preferred
Is a Tagalog	4.28	Moderately Preferred
Is a Gaddang	2.61	Somewhat Preferred
Is an Igorot	2.74	Somewhat Preferred
Is a Yogad	2.63	Somewhat Preferred
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS:		
Belongs to the *upper class* (e.g. elite, from a high-society family, extremely wealthy, money from inheritance and investments, owns large area of land)	3.07	Somewhat Preferred
Belongs to the *middle class* (e.g. doctors, lawyers, engineers, managers, secretaries, teachers, accountants)	4.02	Moderately Preferred
Belongs to the *lower class* (e.g. manual laborer, unskilled worker, dishwasher, maid, carpenter, electrician, plumber)	2.91	Somewhat Preferred
CIVIL STATUS:		
Is married	3.69	Moderately Preferred
Is single	3.31	Somewhat Preferred
Is widowed	3.12	Somewhat Preferred
Is separated	3.15	Somewhat Preferred

Profile of a Political Candidate	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTE:		
Is tall	3.90	Moderately Preferred
Is short	3.15	Somewhat Preferred
Has a nice body	3.73	Moderately Preferred
Is fat	3.04	Somewhat Preferred
Is dark	3.45	Somewhat Preferred
Has fair skin	3.68	Moderately Preferred
Is good looking	3.95	Moderately Preferred

As gleaned from the table above, either a male and female political candidate was "moderately preferred" by respondents as evident in the mean scores of 4.04 and 3.81 respectively while they "somewhat preferred" a member of the LGBT with a mean score of 2.91. It can be noted however, that a male political candidate was observed to have higher mean score than a female political candidate. Documented literatures have shown that female political candidates are as successful as male candidates (Darcy & Schramn, 1997 cited by Sanbonmatsu, 2002), however, result of the present study gave more belief in the capacity of a male candidate to lead. This is in agreement with other researches that perceived male political candidates as better at handling crimes and foreign affairs while female candidates as better in helping the poor and protecting women's right (King & Matland, 2002; Koch, 2000 cited by Sanbonmatsu, 2002).

As to educational attainment, a post-college graduate political candidate was "highly preferred" by the respondents with a mean score of 4.54 followed by a political candidate who is a post-college undergraduate and a college graduate were "moderately preferred" with mean scores of 4.34 and 4.16 respectively while they "somewhat preferred" a college undergraduate as shown in its mean score of 2.95. A similar study conducted by Ereno & Langoyan (n.d.) found that educational attainment was a strong predictor of the choice of preferences for a political candidate. Someone who had finished a graduate study is preferred for they are imbued with relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary of a leader.

As to religious affiliation, compared to all the religious affiliations presented, a political candidate who is a Roman Catholic and Iglesia ni Cristo were "moderately preferred" by the respondents with mean scores of 4.24 and 3.52 respectively. Roman Catholics had the highest mean score compared to other religious affiliations and that they are preferred to be a political candidate, this result explained the view that Catholics imbibe a kind of universalist humanism, which has become more pronounced under Pope Francis. The RichSoil, a site about evangelization of Roman Catholics presented five characteristics of a Catholic identity: A sense of sacramentality; a commitment to community; respect for human life; reverence for sacred scripture and sacred tradition and attitude of faith and hope.

As regards the political candidates' ethnic affiliation, respondents "moderately preferred" a Tagalog (4.28) or an Ilokano (3.90) while other ethnic affiliations such as ifugao, ybanag, Igorot, yogad, gadding and itawes were "somewhat preferred" as observed in the mean scores of 3.01, 2.75, 2.74, 2.63, 2.61 and 2.53 respectively. Tagalog is a universal language in the Philippines, hence, to be able to communicate with the community, a language spoken by a larger number of populations is essential for better comprehension of ideas and perspectives.

Looking at the socio-economic status of political candidates, respondents reported that they "moderately preferred" someone who "belongs to the middle class" as shown in the

computed mean of 4.02. Middle class group as explained by social researches conducted in many different regions/countries worldwide are groups of people whose economic status is in accordance with the economic criteria (i.e. the income level adequate for decent education, apartment, retirement, etc.) These are the normative socio-economic and "historical" definitions of Middle Class: (1) "A class of people intermediate between the classes of higher and lower social rank or standing; the social, economic, cultural class, having approximately average status, income, education, tastes, etc." and (2) "A class traditionally intermediate between the aristocratic class and the laboring class" (Tarknishvili & Tarknishvili, 2013). Therefore, a political candidate who belong to the middle class is more adept to understand the struggles and needs of the masses.

A political candidate who is married is "moderately preferred" by respondents with mean score of 3.69 while they "somewhat preferred" a political candidate who is single, separated or widowed with mean scores of 3.31, 3.15 and 3.12 respectively. If a politician cannot be trusted by their spouse, then public trust is in quandary. In this case, someone who is married is highly dependable since they know how to nurture a family. Filipinos are known to value the family, hence, the preference for a married political candidate.

Moreover, a political candidate who is good looking, tall with a nice body and is fair skinned was "moderately preferred" by the respondents as evident in the mean scores of 3.95, 3.90, 3.73 and 3.68 respectively while respondents "somewhat preferred" someone who is dark, short and fat. This imply that respondents felt it is necessary for a political candidate to possess a pleasing physical attribute as they will be presenting themselves in front of many people. Visual appearance as stated by Koppensteiner & Stepham (2014) affects public decision-making processes. The more attractive a candidate the more they were seen as trustworthy, intelligent, likeable and able (Cameron, 2014).

Table 1b. Political Candidates' Profile References in terms of their Political Background as Perceived by the BS Criminology Students

Profile of a Political Candidate	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
B. POLITICAL BACKGROUND		
PLATFROMS/ADVOCACIES:		
Focuses on agricultural sector	3.87	Somewhat Preferred
Focuses on educational sector	4.66	Highly Preferred
Focuses on environment and natural resources	4.05	Moderately Preferred
Focuses on health sector	4.40	Moderately
Focuses on fair application of law	4.35	Preferred
Focuses on distributing jobs and employing idle people	4.50	Highly Preferred
Focuses on roads and highways	3.97	Moderately Preferred
Focuses on science and technology	4.06	Moderately Preferred
Focuses on social welfare and development	4.44	Moderately Preferred
Focuses on public safety and strengthening local government capability	4.48	Moderately Preferred
PARTY AFFILIATION:		
Is affiliated with Nacionalista Party (NP)	1.09	Not Preferred at all
Is affiliated with Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC)	1.03	Not Preferred at all
Is affiliated with Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan (PDP-Laban)	1.16	Not Preferred at all
Is affiliated with Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL)	1.08	Not Preferred at all
Is affiliated with Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats (Lakas-	1.05	Not Preferred at all

CMD)		
Is affiliated with Liberal Party (LP)	1.09	Not Preferred at all
Is affiliated with United Nationalist Alliance (UNA)	1.08	Not Preferred at all
TRACK RECORD:		
Has improved the agricultural sector	3.91	Moderately Preferred
Has enhanced the educational sector	4.59	Highly Preferred
Has been able to preserve the environment and natural resources	4.23	Moderately Preferred
Has promoted the health sector	4.38	Moderately Preferred
Has been able to apply the law fairly	4.31	Moderately Preferred
Has successfully distributed jobs and employed idle people	4.47	Moderately Preferred
Has swiftly developed roads and highways	3.97	Moderately Preferred
Has contributed to science and technology	4.07	Moderately Preferred
Has improved social welfare and development	4.41	Moderately Preferred
Has increased public safety and local government capability	4.49	Moderately Preferred
TERMS SERVED:		
Is a last termer	3.60	Moderately Preferred
Has served more than 2 terms	3.83	Moderately Preferred
Has served at least 1 term	3.44	Somewhat Preferred
Has not served in politics yet (first time to run for a government position)	2.80	Somewhat Preferred
CAMPAIGN STRATEGY:		
Voluntarily gives money and goods to people	4.20	Moderately Preferred
Focuses on explaining platforms	4.21	Moderately Preferred
Entertains the audience during gatherings by dancing and singing	3.43	Somewhat Preferred
Goes house to house and handshakes with families	3.48	Somewhat Preferred
Promises people many things with flowery words	2.72	Somewhat Preferred
Has a catchy campaign song/jingle	2.84	Somewhat Preferred
Endorsed by a well-known personality/politician/celebrity, etc.	3.12	Somewhat Preferred

On political candidates' political background particularly on platform and advocacies, respondents "highly preferred" a political candidate who focuses his/her platform on educational sector and focuses on distributing jobs and employing idle people as shown in the computed mean scores of 4.66 and 4.50 respectively. The result is not surprising since research participants were college students. As mentioned by Al-Shuaibi (2014), with education, obstacles are viewed as challenges to overcome with no fear. Education is the influence behind successful people and the merit of developed countries. Therefore, they believe in the importance of education for a better future.

As to party affiliation, respondents reported to "not prefer at all" any political party affiliation. Bonneau & Cann (2013) stated, a candidate's party affiliation is seen as the most meaningful cue to voters in terms of which candidate they should support but result of the present study contradicts this claim, somehow respondents perceive a candidate's political affiliation is not in any way important since it is the candidate that they support not the party affiliation.

With regards political candidates' track record, respondents "highly preferred" someone who has enhanced the educational sector as indicated in the mean score of 4.59. This result is coherent with the respondents' responses on their preference of a political candidate whose platform is centered on educational sector.

A political candidate who had served 2 terms or who is a last termer were "moderately preferred" by the respondents as shown in the mean scores of 3.83 and 3.60 respectively while someone who has already served for 1 year or has not served in politics yet or a first timer is "somewhat preferred" with mean score of 3.44 and 2.80 respectively. This indicated respondents to believe that past experiences in the political arena may offer the best predictor of the future, suggesting that politicians who have experienced the pressures of public office may offer a more humane strategy in the political world.

As to campaign strategy, respondents "moderately preferred" a political candidate who explains platforms indicated in its mean score of 4.21. Explaining platforms allow a level of "conversation" with voters, transforming campaigning into something more dynamic and more of a dialogue with the voters. Also, giving money and goods to people is a campaign strategy practiced during elections, hence, it is "moderately preferred" as indicated in its mean score of 4.20.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering that the respondents of the study were college students who form part of the masses and constitutes mostly of the voting public, the profile of a political candidate described in the result of the study was based on stereotyped as information shortcuts (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007), social stratification and personality, that is, the likelihood to vote for a political candidate with the same attributes and views as the voter is high.

These results can be basis for those who are into politics to look into how students view a political candidates' profile and to consider strengthening and improving their personal and political backgrounds. The same research is recommended to be conducted to other respondents for a wider understanding of voting behavior.

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