

VOTING BEHAVIOR OF THE BALIWAG ELECTORATE DURING THE MIDTERM ELECTION

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Abstract

Elections are a fundamental mechanism of democratic governance in the Philippines, enabling citizens to select leaders and political parties they believe can improve their quality of life. Voting serves as both a direct and indirect means of directing political outcomes and an investment in the country's future. This study examined the voting behavior of the Baliwag electorate during the 2019 midterm elections, focusing on voters' perceptions of election practices, their level of trust in candidates, and the criteria they use in choosing whom to vote for. It also sought to identify specific reforms necessary to strengthen the Philippine electoral system. Using a descriptive research design, the study employed mean and standard deviation to analyze respondents' voting behavior. The findings revealed a troubling normalization of vote-buying, with many respondents perceiving it as an acceptable electoral practice despite its manipulative and unethical nature. This perception indicated that vote-buying has become deeply ingrained in local electoral culture. In terms of electoral reform, respondents consistently emphasized the need for the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) to strictly enforce existing election laws and regulations. The study's results suggested that the acceptance of vote-buying undermined democratic accountability, enabling candidates to win electoral contests based on wealth and entrenched political family ties rather than competence and merit. Consequently, the study underscored the urgent need for comprehensive voter education programs, particularly at the grassroots level, to promote awareness of the value of one's vote and its direct impact on individual and societal well-being.

Keywords: level of trust in candidates, midterm election, opinion on electoral reforms, view on election practice

Introduction

Elections are important in a democracy like in the Philippines. Through elections, Filipino citizens like Baliwag electorates choose candidates and parties that they believe would help improve their lives, community, and nation as a whole (Velmonte, 2020). Voting, as a way of participating in elections, is an indirect way of directing (Bernstein, 1989) and investing in (Popkin, 1991) the future of the country. It is the single aggregate act that can define the fate of a fledgling country like the Philippines.

Electing public officers is the most exciting event in the Philippines. It is when friends turn into enemies and relatives become insignificant. Voters are diehard for the candidates they supported. According to Harden (2010), in his Washington Post article, "Elections in the Philippines are personality-driven, a kind of national soap

opera in which distinctions between infamy and celebrity tend to blur over time.” The Manila Times, in its publication, “Getting to know Filipino Voters” on July 17, 2015, said that in each election, a candidate brings to the table a unique set of characteristics and propositions. Journalists, voter advocates, writers, and interest groups frequently opine that Filipinos should think about platforms rather than personality when considering the people running for office. However, according to Batara et al. (2022) young voters still put candidate character above experience, positions, and education when considering their votes for senators. It is simplistic to say that people vote on personality. So, the question is: does popularity become the formula for winning the elections in the Philippines? It is becoming clear that the voting behavior of the citizenry can be explained based on their own perception and behavior (Javines, 2024).

According to Cudal (2022) and Şener et al. (2022), voting as a political behavior can be influenced by several factors like the individuals’ personal characteristics, their social environment, and their exposure to the mass media and other campaign materials. Individual value orientations, attitudes, and personal and group networks—particularly during the election period—have considerable impact on voter turnout and decisions. Those who possess predisposing intentions and characteristics are more likely to show up on the day of the election with much conviction about their vote (Berelson et al., 1968). The personal networks of voters also significantly influence their voting behavior because people form and maintain social relations with others who have the same socio-economic, ethnic, and educational background, as well as political preference. The family, in particular, is a major factor in influencing an individual’s vote (Berelson et al., 1968). Also, the “face value” of the parties and candidates can also influence voters. Perceptions of the candidate’s various characteristics serve as bases for voting by the people.

The May 2019 midterm election was already held. Elections in the Philippines were never safe from any issue or problem. Some of these problems include vote buying, violence, the influence of political dynasties, inefficiency of PCOS machines, and black propaganda (Oliveros, 2013). There exists an alarming situation of the electoral situation at the micro-level; voters choose candidates for very different reasons, including campaign methods and characteristics of candidates. Likewise, there exists a high level of uneducated voters whose bases for voting are highly different from those who are educated (Santiago, 2012). Thus, there is an increased concern on looking at the basis of how voters exercise their suffrage, the basis of how they vote, and especially the reasons for the voting choices (Falcão et al., 2023; Kulachai et al., 2023).

This study used quantitative research techniques. The quantitative instrument is the survey questionnaire, which focused not only on the demographic characteristics of the Baliuag electorate but also on the more abstract aspects (psychographic) of voters’ attitudes, opinions, and interests in order to understand the behavior of this electorate regarding elections. The responses were then quantified using factor analysis and other statistical measures.

As a whole, this present study tackled the areas of electoral perception, such as election campaign materials and strategies, perception of common election (mal)

practices, and attitudes and perception of election fraud. Other areas of voting behavior are level of interest in the political campaign, level of trust in the candidates, attitude toward choosing a candidate, and their proposal on electoral reforms.

It is in this context that a study about the voting behavior of the Baliuag electorate was conducted in order to comprehend the contemporary voter's characteristics and political and social environment that influenced their elective acts. The result of the study would be useful in understanding the provincial profile of the Bulacan electorate. Thus, the Bulakenyos and the Filipino people in general would stand to benefit from the findings of this study.

Statement of the Problem

The main purpose of this study is to describe voting behavior, views, and opinions of the Baliwag electorate in various election processes and election practices in the 2019 Midterm Election. It also aims to identify specific reforms needed in the electoral system.

Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the Baliwag electorate in terms of:
 - 1.1. age;
 - 1.2. gender;
 - 1.3. civil status;
 - 1.4. occupation;
 - 1.5. monthly income;
 - 1.6. educational attainment; and
 - 1.7. religion?
2. What is the view of voters on the Philippine election practices?
3. What is the level of voters' interest in the political campaign for the candidates?
4. What is the level of trust of voters in their candidates in the:
 - 4.1. national election, and
 - 4.2. local election?
5. How do voters choose their candidate in terms of:
 - 5.1. characteristics of candidates; and
 - 5.2. factors that influence to vote?
6. What are the common views/opinions of the respondents for electoral reforms in the Philippines?

Objectives of the Study

This research principally aimed to contribute to the understanding of the Baliuag electorates—what determines their votes and the influences that come into play during electoral exercises in the midterm election. It also aimed to identify

specific reforms needed in the electoral system. In particular, this research aims to:

1. Describe the voting behavior of the Baliwag electorates in the 2019 midterm election.
2. Evaluate the existing electoral system to identify specific reforms needed in the electoral process.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

There are three frames of variables in this study. The first frame presents the quantitative variables, which include the socio-demographic profile and the psychographic dimensions of the respondents. The second frame presents the Baliwag electorate, who are the participants in this study and are aged 18 years and above, as mandated by law. The third frame presents the participants' common perceptions of electoral reform in the Philippine election. The arrow connecting the first frame (socio-demographic and psychographic profiles) and the second frame (Baliwag electorate) is hypothesized to result in an outcome related to electoral reform in the Philippines (third frame). The conceptual model that guided this study is reflected in Figure 1.

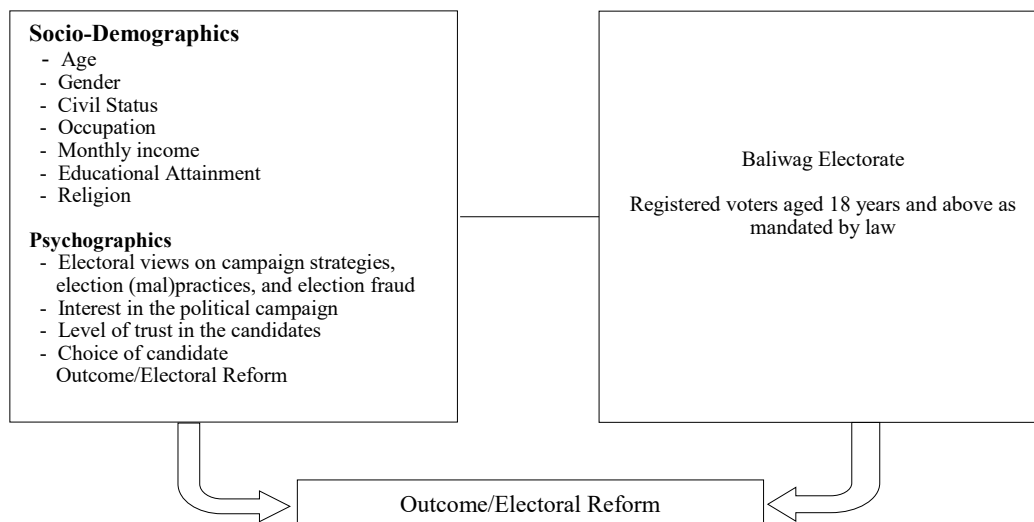


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Conceptual Framework of the Study

Methods

This study attempted to describe and explain the electoral perceptions and behaviors of the Baliwag electorate across various aspects of Philippine electoral processes and practices. Using quantitative methodologies, the study focused not only on the demographic characteristics of the electorate but also on more abstract aspects (psychographics), such as voters' attitudes, opinions, and interests, in order to better understand their electoral behavior. The responses were quantified using factor analysis and other statistical measures. Furthermore, the respondents were asked to identify specific electoral reforms needed to improve the Philippine electoral system.

Population and Sample of the Study

The population of this study consisted of the electorate of the Municipality of Baliuag, Bulacan. The municipality of Baliuag is politically subdivided into twenty-seven (27) barangays. Of these 27 barangays, the study utilized the top five (5) barangays in terms of registered voters, namely: Sta. Barbara, Sabang, Poblacion, Makinabang, and Concepcion.

This study used Slovin's formula to determine the required sample size and employed a stratified sampling technique to obtain a more accurate representation by subdividing the population into smaller, homogeneous groups. Thereafter, the respondents were distributed as follows:

Name of Barangay	Total Registered Voters	Sample Questionnaire	Sample Retrieved Questionnaire
1. Sta. Barbara	7, 992	381	246
2. Sabang	7,509	380	287
3. Poblacion	7,096	379	248
4. Makinabang	6,780	387	118
5. Concepcion	6,703	377	256
Total	36, 080	1895	1,155

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Respondents

Age	F	%
18-32	442	38.3
33-47	563	48.7
48-59	129	11.2
60 & above	21	1.8
Gender	F	%
Male	310	27.0
Female	845	74.0
Civil Status	F	%
Single	292	29.9
Married	774	69.6
Separated	55	4.8
Widow/er	34	2.9

Table 1
Continuation

Occupation	F	%
Employee	340	29.5
Self-employed	218	18.9
Skilled worker (seasonal job)	53	4.6
Pensioner	13	1.1
Not working	336	29.1
Others	193	16.7
Highest Educational Attainment	F	%
No schooling	11	1.0
Elementary level	56	4.8
Elementary graduate	134	11.6
High school level	155	13.4
High school graduate	265	22.9
College level	300	26.0
College graduate	179	15.5
M.A. units	3	.3
M.A. graduate	4	.3
Doctoral graduate	2	.2
Others	46	4.0
Religion	F	%
Roman Catholic	1018	88.4
Iglesias in Cristo	46	4.0
Jehovah's witnesses	8	.7
Others	79	6.8
Monthly income	F	%
0-9,999	537	46.8
10,001-24,999	447	38.6
25,000-39,999	103	8.9
40,000-54,999	38	3.3
55,000-69,999	8	.7
70,000 & above	13	1.12

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. A total of 1,155 participants were selected for this research study, consisting of residents of Baliwag, Bulacan. Out of the respondents, 48.7% were between the ages of 33 to 47 ($n = 563$). Only 1.8% were senior citizens ($n = 21$). At least 74% were female ($n = 845$). About 70% were married ($n = 774$) and 30% were single ($n = 292$). A combined 48.4% were either employed or self-employed ($n = 558$), while the 4.6% were skilled workers, which means they hold seasonal jobs ($n = 53$), 1.1% were pensioners ($n = 13$), and 29.1% were not working ($n = 336$). In terms of schooling, 53.7% had not graduated college (621), 26% had some college ($n = 300$), while the remaining 20.3% were college graduates or had some advanced graduate school studies ($n = 234$). As for religious affiliation, 88.4% identified as Roman Catholic. Meanwhile, 46.8% received an income below 10,000 for those who were employed. Some 38.6% earned less than 25,000 while the remaining 14% ($n = 162$) earned higher than 25,000.

Table 2
Voters' Views on Philippine Election Practices

Views on Election Practices	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Vote buying	3.15	1.50	Nothing wrong with it
2. Bribing local Comeliter personnel	2.49	1.21	Should not be tolerated
3. Voting in another person's name "Flying voters"	2.28	1.02	Should not be tolerated
4. Cheating during the counting of votes or transmission of votes	2.36	1.18	Should not be tolerated
5. Use of coercion and terrorism during the voting process	2.27	1.00	Should not be tolerated
6. Election-related or politically- motivated killing	2.38	1.13	Should not be tolerated
7. Election-related violence	2.39	1.13	Should not be tolerated
8. Threatening the voters	2.25	0.98	Should not be tolerated
9. Disfranchisement of voters	2.29	1.06	Should not be tolerated
10. Giving gift or dole out money	2.79	1.38	Nothing wrong with it

As illustrated in Table 2, the respondents' views on Philippine election practices are presented. The results show that respondents perceived nothing wrong with vote-buying ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.50$). This indicates that vote-buying, despite being manipulative and unethical, has become an acceptable practice for many Filipino voters. It appears to be so deeply ingrained in Philippine electoral culture that it is often regarded as acceptable. Another improper practice that respondents likewise perceived as acceptable is the giving of gifts or dole-outs to the citizenry as a means of winning votes ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.38$). Similar to vote-buying, voters indicated that this practice is also considered acceptable.

2. What is the level of voters' interest in the political campaign for the candidates?

Table 3

Level of Voters' Interest in the Political Campaign Strategies for Candidates

Political Campaign Strategies	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. TV Interview	3.80	1.12	Extremely interested
2. TV Ads	3.59	1.13	Extremely interested
3. Mitting de Advance	3.49	1.11	Extremely interested
4. Campaign Slogan	3.31	1.08	Extremely interested
5. House to House Campaign	3.87	1.09	Extremely interested
6. Endorsement by a Celebrity	3.13	1.25	Very Interested
7. Endorsement by Incumbent Politician	3.19	1.14	Very Interested
8. Posters and Flyers	3.12	1.09	Very Interested
9. Radio Ads	3.17	1.14	Very Interested
10. Engaging in Public Debate	3.60	1.24	Extremely interested

As shown in Table 3, the level of voters' interest in the political campaign strategies of candidates is presented. The house-to-house campaign posted the highest mean score of 3.87 (SD = 1.09), which was interpreted as extremely interested. Voters perceived this as the most interesting campaign strategy because it allows them to meet the candidates face to face. This was followed by television interviews, with a mean of 3.80 (SD = 1.12), also interpreted as extremely interested. In the Philippines, candidates are often interviewed on television to present their platforms, which voters likewise find highly engaging. Other campaign strategies, such as meeting the *de avance*, campaign slogans, and participation in public debates, were also described as extremely interesting by the respondents.

3. What is the level of trust of voters in their candidates in the:
 - 3.1. national election, and
 - 3.2. local election?

Table 4*Level of Trust of Voters for the National and Local Candidates*

Level of Trust for	Mean	SD	Interpretation
National Candidates			
Senators	3.11	0.84	Moderate
Party List	2.90	0.86	Moderate
Local Candidates			
Congressmen	3.11	0.84	Moderate
Governor	3.21	0.82	Moderate
Vice-Governor	3.15	0.81	Moderate
Provincial Board Members	3.04	0.84	Moderate
Mayor	3.27	0.82	High
Vice-Mayor	3.21	0.83	Moderate
Councilors	3.08	0.84	Moderate

As illustrated in Table 4, the level of voters' trust in national and local candidates is presented. As shown in the table, the level of trust in national candidates—particularly senators—was higher ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.84$) than that in party-list representatives ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.86$). However, both were interpreted as moderate. This may be attributed to the fact that senatorial candidates are generally more well-known than party-list representatives. For local candidates, the level of trust in those running for the mayoralty position obtained the highest mean score of 3.27 ($SD = 0.82$), which was interpreted as high.

4. How do voters choose their candidate in terms of:
 - 4.1 characteristics of candidates; and
 - 4.2 Factors that influence to vote?

Table 5
Factors Influencing Voters' Choice of a Candidate

Characteristics of Candidates	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. He/she has a good track record in a previously held public office	4.53	0.87	Extremely important
2. He/she leads an example of eradicating graft and corruption within his area of Influence.	4.34	0.91	Extremely important
3. His/her public image is based on a solid character of trustworthiness	4.22	0.99	Extremely important
4. He/she has qualifications and abilities to carry out his/her responsibilities Successfully	4.42	0.89	Extremely important
5. He/she has been proven promoting an alternative program of government that promotes the general welfare of the people.	4.48	0.85	Extremely important
Endorsement			
1. Endorsement of family/relatives	3.54	1.21	Important
2. Endorsement of the church	3.41	1.24	Important
3. Endorsement of a group or organization	3.37	1.11	Important
4. Endorsement of a community leader	3.44	1.12	Important
5. Endorsement of a well-known personality	3.28	1.23	Important

As shown in Table 5, the factors influencing voters' choice of a candidate are presented. The results indicated that both the characteristics of the candidate and the endorsers influence voters' decisions. Under the characteristics of a candidate, the item "He/she has a good track record in a previously held public office" obtained the highest mean score of 3.53 (SD = 0.87), which was interpreted as extremely important. This suggests that voters prefer candidates who possess a good and proven track record in public service.

5. What are the common views/opinions of the respondents for electoral reforms in the Philippines?

Table 6

Common Views/Opinions of Respondents on Philippine Electoral Reform

Views/Opinions	Frequency	Ranking
1. The Comelec must strictly implement existing laws and regulations governing Philippine elections.	1067	1
2. A loser must accept the results of the election conducted, as a sportsman does.	1062	2
3. Vote for those who will honestly serve the people.	1062	3
4. Give the voters enough knowledge of election laws and regulations.	1038	4
5. Be vigilant, especially in guarding the sanctity of the ballot. The people must work together and must contribute to the effort at improving the conduct of elections.	1028	5
6. Vote wisely. Do not vote for corrupt candidates.	1021	6
7. Apprehend those who violate the election laws.	1008	7
8. Make improvements in the conduct of voter registration and the manner of casting votes.	1002	8
9. Launch comprehensive information and educational campaign aimed at enlightening the electorate on the merits and demerits of certain election practices.	983	9
10. Prevent warlords' domination of the electoral process.	957	10
11. People should not accept money or anything offered by candidates.	942	11
12. Accessibility of polling stations and increase the number of PECOS machines.	929	12
13. Prohibits categorically and/or bans definitely political dynasties as a self-executing policy to guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service.	877	13
14. Excessive spending during campaigns must be heavily penalized.	852	14
15. It is the people, the electorate that must first show signs of reforming their attitudes and behavior in elections.	832	15
16. Reform the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) to ensure it remains faithful to its original purpose of providing a necessary venue for the youth to participate in governance.	832	16
17. Review and amend the Omnibus Election Law particularly in reference to the campaign fund, premature campaigning, vote-buying, and “dagdag-bawas” scheme.	821	17
18. Dismantle private armed groups.	773	18
19. Amend the educational qualifications for President, V-President, Senators, and Congressman/woman to at least a college graduate.	741	19
20. Reshuffle Comelec officials down to the barangays and precincts.	631	20

As illustrated in Table 6 is the common views/opinions of respondents on Philippine electoral reform. As can be gleaned from the table, the top three common views according to ranking are 1) The Comelec must strictly implement existing laws and regulations governing Philippine elections; 2) A loser must accept the results of the election conducted, as a sportsman does; and 3) Vote for those who will honestly serve the people. As for the first view, many people often blame the Comelec for any election anomaly since they are the ones responsible for the election. Voters expect that they will implement election rules and regulations without any partiality.

Second, Filipinos prefer that candidates concede when results show they are losing. However, in Philippine elections, there have been instances of the election results being contested due to electoral fraud. Next is to vote for those who will honestly serve the people. Filipinos truly want servant leaders. Those who will be in power, but will not use that power to oppress but to serve. This is the reason a good track record is extremely important for voters. They want honest leaders.

Summary of Findings

Based on the data gathered, the following are the findings of the study:

1. Profile of the Respondents

- a. The Baliwag voters were mostly between the ages of 33 and 47, female, married, Roman Catholic, and had not graduated from college.
- b. The great majority of the respondents earned a monthly income below 10,000 for those who had jobs. Some earned less than 25,000, while others earned more than 25,000.

2. Baliwag Voters' Views on Philippine Election

- a. The respondents perceived that there was nothing wrong with vote-buying.
- b. Gift-giving or dole-outs to the citizenry as a means of winning their votes was another practice that respondents considered acceptable.
- c. Other election practices—such as cheating during the counting or transmission of votes, the use of coercion, politically motivated killings, election-related violence, threatening voters, and disfranchisement—were all regarded by the respondents as unacceptable.

3. Baliwag Voters' Level of Interest on the Political Campaign Strategies for the Candidates.

- a. House-to-house campaign strategies posted the highest mean of 3.87 (SD = 1.09), interpreted as extremely interested.
- b. This was followed by a TV interview with a mean of 3.80 (SD = 1.12), which is likewise interpreted as extremely interested.

- c. Three other political strategies—such as endorsement by a celebrity, radio ads, and endorsement by an incumbent politician—were the least preferred among the strategies mentioned.

4. Baliwag Voters' Level of Trust for the National and Local Candidates.

- a. For the national candidates, the level of trust—particularly for the senators—was higher than that for the party-list representatives. However, both were interpreted as moderate. This could be because senatorial candidates were more well-known than party-list representatives.
- b. For the local candidates, the level of trust for the mayoralty post was high. It was the only political position that received a descriptive interpretation of high. This may indicate that the candidate running for the position was popular, well-liked, and trusted by the majority of the respondents.
- c. All other All other local candidates—congressmen, governor, vice-governor, provincial board members, mayor, vice-mayor, and municipal councilors—were all interpreted as moderate. Among the local candidates, the provincial board members received the lowest mean, which was also interpreted as moderate.

5. Factors Influencing Voters' Choice of a Candidate.

- a. On characteristics of a candidate, “He/she has a good track record in a previously held public office,” posted the highest mean of 3.53 (SD = .87), interpreted as extremely important.
- b. Other characteristics of a candidate which says “His/her public image is based on a solid character of trustworthiness” was likewise got a little higher mean of 4.22 (SD = .99), interpreted as extremely important.
- c. On the influence of endorsement, the endorsement of family and relatives posted the highest mean of 3.54 (SD = 1.21), interpreted as important.
- d. Likewise, endorsement of a community member with a little higher mean of 3.44 (SD = 1.12) is interpreted as important.
- e. Endorsement of the church was likewise posted a higher mean and interpreted as important. Certain religious organizations, like the Iglesia ni Cristo, have been known to exercise block voting, which means that church members vote for the candidate that is endorsed by the church leader. Thus, politicians curry the favor of religious organizations and churches for a higher chance of winning the election.
- f. Endorsement of a well-known personality got the least mean and interpreted as important. While this may be apparent in Philippine elections, it registered the least mean, meaning it has the least influence compared to when a candidate is endorsed by a family member, a community leader, and a church leader.

6. Common Views/Opinions of Respondents on Philippine Electoral Reform

Top Three Common Views According to Ranking are:

- a. “The Comelec must strictly implement existing laws and regulations governing Philippine elections.” This means many people often blame the Comelec for any election anomaly since they are the ones responsible for the election. Voters expect that they will implement election rules and regulations without any partiality.
- b. “A loser must accept the results of the election conducted, as a sportsman does.” This means Filipinos prefer that candidates concede when results show they are losing. However, in Philippine elections, there have been instances of the election results being contested due to electoral fraud.
- c. “Vote for those who will honestly serve the people.” It goes to say that Filipinos truly want servant leaders. Those who will be in power, but will not use that power to oppress but to serve. This is the reason a good track record is extremely important for voters. They want honest leaders.

Bottom Three Common Views are:

- a. “Dismantle private armed groups” means that Filipinos do not support violence in elections. This is reflected in Table 2, where respondents indicated that such groups should not be tolerated. However, this was ranked low because the presence of armed groups is dominant only in certain areas, such as Mindanao and Davao.
- b. “Amend the educational qualifications for President, Vice President, senators, and members of Congress to at least a college graduate.” Respondents perceived this as a low concern, indicating that academic qualifications were not seen as essential for those running for Congress and higher positions. This may be because Filipino voters believe that education alone does not determine a person’s ability to serve.
- c. “Reshuffle Comelec officials down to the barangay and precinct levels.” This received the lowest rank, as respondents felt that there were more pressing concerns during elections than the reshuffling of Comelec officials at the grassroots level.

Conclusions

In view of the major and significant findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- a. The Baliwag electorate perceived that there was nothing wrong with vote-buying. This indicates that, despite being manipulative and unethical, vote-buying has become an acceptable practice among Filipino voters. It has become so ingrained in Philippine electoral culture that it is now regarded as acceptable.

- b. Cheating during the counting or transmission of votes, coercion, politically motivated killings, threatening voters, and disfranchisement were all regarded by voters as unacceptable. It should be noted that practices involving violence and blatant cheating were considered unacceptable, while those that directly benefit voters, such as dole-outs and vote-buying, were viewed as acceptable.
- c. House-to-house campaigning was found to be the most engaging strategy, as it allowed voters to meet candidates face-to-face. .
- d. Television interviews were also perceived as highly interesting, as candidates in the Philippines often use this platform to present their platforms. Other strategies, such as advance meetings, campaign slogans, and public debates, received lower interest ratings.
- e. Baliwag voters preferred candidates with a good and proven track record. Politicians with prior experience in local elections were more likely to be elected than those who immediately sought national positions without first serving locally. This suggests that success in local elections increases a candidate's chances of winning national office.
- f. Baliwag voters also remained clannish in their preferences, often supporting candidates endorsed by family members or relatives. Similarly, endorsements from barangay captains and other local officials influenced voters' choices.

Recommendations

In view of the significant findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- a. COMELEC should issue a policy providing guidelines and mechanisms for election surveys, propaganda, and candidates' campaign rallies to increase voters' and citizens' awareness.
- b. Debates are recommended prior to the election proper, as they help educate voters on the capabilities of future officials.
- c. Partisanship and vote-buying should be given due attention, as these are problems experienced by most voters.
- d. Since the election does not end on election day, COMELEC should closely monitor the counting and processing of election results, including in the respective local government units, to ensure the highest degree of transparency and accountability.
- e. Future studies should be conducted on the effect of voters' participation on the effectiveness of the electoral process in national and local elections.

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