



Voters Turnout of Village Residents in Cebu City, Philippines

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Abstract

As a fundamental human right, the right to vote is associated with democracy and citizens' sovereignty. This study investigated the factors affecting voter turnout of village residents in Cebu City, Philippines. It utilized a descriptive survey research design to randomly choose 279 respondents who were registered voters during the village election. The survey questionnaire elicited the demographic profile, respondents' electoral participation in the last village election, and their reasons for not voting. Findings revealed that the large group of the study respondents were young adults, married, and have higher electoral participation than the other age groups. In addition, on average, their income fell below the poverty threshold. Prevailing factors influencing the respondents' vote-casting decision included political, socioeconomic, institutional, media, and cultural factors. The political aspect manifested a highly dominant influence on voters' turnout due to perceived unresolved political problems and intertwined mechanisms within the electoral processes. On the one hand, significant reasons for not casting votes included personal, political, candidates' qualification/competency, electoral system/process, and health. The study concludes that voters' turnout in the study area depended on the overall decisions of the electorates, either to cast a vote or not to cast a vote, amidst perennial influences of essential factors in electoral participation.

Keywords: *Voters' Turnout; Vote Casting; Electorates; Election Participation; Village Residents*

Introduction

Every time there is an election, whether, at the local or national levels, a fundamental question arises: How many registered voters will flock to their respective precincts to exercise their right to suffrage? This question suggests knowing the rate of voters who appeared in the polls or termed the "voters' turnout". Knowing the voters' turnout is crucial for an entire nation or a territory, or within a

political jurisdiction. Moreover, the information can be vital to those conducting surveys and research or those running as election candidates (Molina et al., 2021). A good voter turnout translates to a fertile democracy where majority of the members of the society consciously exercise their rights as electorates. In contrast, a low voter turnout could reflect that citizens do not care about choosing and electing their political leaders.

While it is difficult to keep track of those who keep changing their residences every time there is an election – particularly the "flying voters" – the Commission on Election has a sound system of knowing the exact number of voters per precinct. The agency tasked to check the list of voters is the Board of Election Inspectors, and the list of voters is assigned to them weeks before the actual day of voting. Recently, voters must submit themselves to biometrics data encoding to ensure that their identities are secure, and no duplication of voter registration occurs. In addition, the Election Day Computerized Voters List (EDCVL) is posted outside the precinct for easier reference of the voter's name during election day.

However, despite the government's technological progress, many voters still need to go to the polling precincts (Shahzad & Crowcroft, 2019). For instance, even if voting becomes more accessible and faster with the advent of the precinct count optical scanner (PCOS) machines, many are still hesitant to participate in the electoral exercise. One reason is that most precincts, usually public-school classrooms, are crowded and need proper ventilation. Also, many voters need help finding their names in the list posted outside the voting centers. Still, others are pessimistic about whoever is in office; the elected official will be the same as the others before them: corrupt who thinks only of his/her good and not of the constituents. Moreover, other electorates still need to be convinced of the integrity of election results due to vote buying happening during elections (Abocejo, 2015).

Voters' turnout varies dramatically across countries because of the disparities of factors that affect voters' turnout per country. Some identified factors are socioeconomic, cultural, political, and institutional (Konzelmann et al., 2012; Fieldhouse & Cutts, 2012). In the Philippines, specifically in Cebu City, the chairman of the Board of Canvassers officially declared the voters' turnout rate of the entire Cebu City during the last 2013 local election at 81.36 percent. However, the village under study has a much lower voter turnout rate of just 42.30 percent, according to the voters' turnout statistics issued by the Commission of Election during the last village-level election. This low turnout prompted the researchers to choose the Sambag I village as the study locale to examine the influencing factors of the downtrend voters' turnout.

Issues concerning voter turnout is explored more academically throughout the Philippines. Unfortunately, there is a need for more resources concerning voter turnout in the Philippines, so the researchers strived to capture vital information to fully understand and evaluate the factors driving voter turnout. This research shed light on Philippine politics by investigating the political phenomenon of voter turnout and the factors influencing voters' electoral exercise participation.

Study Objectives

This study investigated the factors affecting voter turnout in Cebu City, Philippines, village residents. It investigated the factors affecting voter turnout of village residents during the last 2013 village-level election, the latest available data at the time of the study. The researchers also examined the dominant factors affecting voters' turnout and the reasons for not casting a vote during the election.

Literature Review

In a democratic government, every citizen receives an equal chance and opportunity to participate in the political process (Elstub & Escobar, 2019). Political participation of individuals from all classes,

specifically in election processes, manifests for a democratically oriented form of government (Findlow, 2019; Molina et al., (2021). Every citizen is entitled to partake in the affairs of the government and the entire political process (Cinco & Abocejo, 2020). Democracy becomes healthy when the government grants equal political participation to all individuals in the government processes (Kraft & Furlong, 2019).

When political influence is concentrated in the hands of the few privileged groups in society (Berry et al., 2019), the democratic government becomes unhealthy and tainted by the unequal treatment and disproportionate granting of access to political opportunities in society (Evangelio & Abocejo, 2015). The kind of democratic government that provides greater electoral participation in the few privileged class (Spencer & Ross, 2019) compared to the vast marginalized groups in society is the root cause of political disappointment of the various underprivileged groups (Inabangan et al., 2019; Alvarez et al., 2017) with the democratic process, which essentially decreases their level of electoral participation (Hillen & Steiner, 2020; Arshad & Khurram, 2020).

The essence of democracy lies in the active involvement and participation of the citizenry in the political process (Kiess, 2022), such as participating in the election (voting), referendum, plebiscite, initiative, and recall, among others (Cinco & Abocejo, 2020). On the other hand, the alarming increase in unequal voters' turnout and political inequality has propelled obliteration to the imbued democratic principles (Singh, 2021) by exasperating the level of underrepresentation and dissatisfaction of the downgraded classes in society (Alvarez et al., 2017). This destruction of the essence of democracy and democratic principles disenfranchised the underprivileged groups in society (Almazan et al., 2018; Abocejo, 2014) and further decreased their level of electoral participation when they feel ineffective in influencing the political decision-making process (Craig et al., 2020). As a result, the marginalized groups refrain from voting and participating in the national and local elections (Schwander et al., 2020) as they believe they need more capacity and supremacy to substantially influence the political process, thereby decreasing the voters' turnout rates.

Scholarly studies (Nyanado, 2019; Mangi, 2019; Gushchina, 2020; Biswas, 2022; Konzelmann et al., 2012; Fieldhouse & Cutts, 2012) indicate that the dominant factors affecting voter turnout are political, socioeconomic factors, cultural factors, and institutional factors, hereditary factors, and media factors. The authors affirmed that the declining level of voter turnout in the local and national elections results from electoral stratification, where there is an alarming decline in voter turnout, especially among the marginalized segments of society. This deteriorating trend of voter turnout rate in national or local elections is predominantly found among the least privileged segments of society (Schäfer et al., 2020; Biswas, 2022; Inabangan et al., 2019; Alvarez et al., 2017).

Voters' turnout shows the aggregate number of registered electorates who cast their votes in the election (Lang & Witts, 2019) within a locality over the total number of registered voters as monitored and confirmed by the Commission of Election. Studying voters' turnout bears significance on the political subject matter in political science. Varied interests during elections are predominantly deep-rooted in many concerns about the factors affecting voters' turnout (Biswas et al., 2022) and the implications of voters' turnout for the legitimacy of a democratic government (Cinco & Abocejo, 2020).

Other intellectuals argue that low voter turnout decreases the legitimacy of democracy (Grillo, 2019; Syed, 2019). If the voting public does not discharge its right and obligation to vote as conferred in the Philippine Constitution, it indicates apathetic concern toward the democratic system. Some political analysts (Leininger & Meijers, 2021; Kostelka & Blais, 2021; Tavares & Raudla, 2018) argue that low voter turnout denotes a fragmented democratic system. Low voter turnout creates prejudice in favor of the privileged and influential people (Helmke, 2022), which more probably cast votes and subsequently be elected to public office and be represented of their interests (Katz & Mair, 2018). The study of voters'

turnout also manifests an interest in the overall health of democracy and the legitimacy of the democratic system (Teglbjærg et al., 2022)

Many studies noted that voter turnout has viable influences on democratic legitimacy (Umbers, 2019; Schraff & Schimmelfennig, 2020; Teglbjærg et al., 2022; Brouwer & Staal, 2020). The greater the number of the electorates' electoral participation in a political process, the higher the democratic legitimacy of the political process (Mokhonchuk & Romaniuk, 2019). The legitimacy of the elected candidates in a local or national election becomes jeopardized when only a few people cast their votes.

In like manner, the government officials' legitimacy in ensuring compliance with its people via enforcement of government regulations can vanish if there is minimal legitimacy input (Levi, 2019). Political institutions and political decision-making processes obtain legitimacy only if there is an equal distribution among the various sectors of the society (Strebel et al., 2019, Pañares & Abocejo, 2019) where the privileged and the excluded masses, the essentially-needed resources and opportunities in influencing political decision-making processes (Young, 2020; Adonis & Tyndall, 2013).

In addition, low and unequal electoral participation can also serve as a gauge of citizens' disgruntlement with the political process (Fowler, 2013). His research asserts that citizens' level of electoral participation has something to do with their perceptions, whether satisfied or dissatisfied with the entire political process. The electorates are more inclined to participate in the local or national elections if they perceive that they have a higher chance of influencing the outcome of the political decision-making process (Dermont & Stadelmann-Steffen, 2018).

Theoretical Background and Conceptual Framework

This study anchored its legal basis on Article 5 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution. Suffrage is a right granted by the supreme law of the land, allowing a citizen to join in the political process of the State, thereby practicing the principles of democracy and republicanism. While not practicing it is not a violation of the law, it creates irresponsibility on the part of the citizens. Article 21 of the human rights declaration posits that all of us have the right to participate in our government, all of us have equal political participation and social justice, and the people's authority shall be the cornerstone of government power. This authority shall be practiced in elections with integrity, sanctity, and utmost impartiality from all individuals across social classes.

This study is also anchored on the Democratic Theory advocated by Dahl (as cited in Sodaro, 2004), which emphasizes that the foundation of a democratic community is the electorates, particularly the voters who must be aware and conscious of what they are doing when casting votes in an election process. With a small quantity of political comprehension on the part of the electorate, voting may be worthwhile, and the very notion of sovereignty of the people becomes manageable. Essentially, democracy presumes that voters are rational (Sodaro, 2004). The democratic theory emphasizes that anyone participates in the election, directly or indirectly. It sets the principles and guidelines on how democracy should work on a fundamental level and how they function in practice, along with sundry explications of how democracies develop or persist.

As can be gleaned from Figure 1, two identified independent variables, the level of dominance and the reasons for not casting votes, influence the village voters' turnout. The indicators measured to assess the level of dominance influencing voters' turnout include socioeconomic, cultural, political, institutional, and hereditary factors. Meanwhile, the reasons for not casting votes include political, personal, health, electoral system and processes, and the qualifications of the running candidates. These indicators were quantitatively measured and descriptively discussed how they brought about voter turnout among the village residents during the election period.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Research Methodology

Research Design and Study Respondents

This study employed a survey research design to a randomly chosen 279 respondents comprised of 108 male and 171 female electorates. All respondents were registered village voters. The survey research design is the appropriate for use since the since the study involved getting information from village residents who agreed to to be surveyed under anonymity.

Research Instrument

The survey questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part elicited the demographic profile (age, gender, civil status, income, and educational attainment). It also asked whether the respondents voted in the last village election. If the respondents voted, they were asked to proceed to the rear portion of the questionnaire to rate the factors within an indicated range. However, if the respondents failed to cast a vote, they were humbly asked to state their reasons for not voting, then answer the back page of the questionnaire. The second part elicited the factors that influenced the village voters' turnout. The respondents were asked to rate the level of identified factors that led them to cast votes during the last election. The head of each household answered the survey questionnaires, and voluntary participation was ensured with the respondent's duly signed written informed consent.

Research Locale

The village under study is a highly urbanized residential area in Cebu City, Philippines with a large voting population. It has 9,380 registered voters as of the 2013 village-level election, 3,967 of which are the total number of registered voters that turnout during that election, accounting for about 42 percent of voters' turnout during the village election.

Data Gathering Procedure

Following standard protocols, the researchers sent a letter request to the village chief, locally called "the captain," for permission to conduct the study in the area. Upon approval by the village captain, the researchers carried out the study, orienting the respondents and explaining the purpose of the study, assured them all responses would be dealt with utmost confidentiality and would be used only for the purpose of the research. They were also told that if along the progress of the interview, they want to stop and be out of the interview process, they are free to do so. The respondents were randomly chosen from

the official list of registered voters during the last 2013 village election, issued by the Commission on Election and as provided by the village secretary.

Data Analysis

Data from the survey questionnaires were electronically processed and summarized to generate graphs, charts, and summary tables for analysis and interpretations according to the identified study variables. The responses were classified and categorized according to political reasons, personal reasons, health reasons, electoral systems/processes, and candidates' qualifications/competencies. In addition, the responses on factors affecting voters' turnout were processed to derive the weighted mean per factor.

Results and Discussions

Table 1 shows that the average age of the respondents is 37.55 years, with a standard deviation of 11.62 years. Indicatively, the respondents' ages are more spread than the mean. By civil status, most of the village respondents are married and have had higher electoral participation than other age groups. As to economic status, the mean monthly income of respondents was PhP9,233, which is about PhP110,794 annually.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents by gender, educational attainment, civil status, income, and age

Variable	Indicator	Frequency
Gender	Male	108
	Female	171
Educational Attainment	Elementary level	30
	Elementary graduate	18
	High school level	90
	High school graduate	31
	College level	44
	College graduate	28
Civil Status	Master graduate	6
	Single	125
	Married	137
	Widow/Widower	7
	Separated	8
Variable	Income Source	Value (Philippine peso)
Income	<i>Income from employment</i>	
	Mean monthly income	PhP9,232.86
	Mean annual income	PhP110,794.29
	<i>Income from business</i>	
	Mean monthly income	PhP5,010.54
	Mean annual income	PhP5,010.54
	<i>Income from real property</i>	
	Mean monthly income	PhP135.71
	Mean annual income	PhP1,628.57
Age (year)	Arithmetic mean age	37.55
	Standard deviation (SD)	11.62

Employment is the respondents' highest income source (Table 1), with the large group falling below the poverty threshold. However, they manifest low monthly income and annual income from

employment. For those engaged in small-scale business, the mean monthly income of Php5,011 and Php60,126 also fall below the poverty threshold, reflecting even lower monthly income than those employed. Regarding respondents owning real property, their monthly income was only Php136 which annually totaled about Php1,630.

The grand mean income of the entire respondents is Php14,388 which reached the total annual mean income of Php172,656. These incomes are in the mainstream levels considering the overall economic status of the country, specifically Cebu City. All respondents generally exhibited low income and fell below the country's poverty threshold. By educational attainment, 30 respondents reached the elementary level, 18 were elementary graduates, 90 attained high school level, 31 graduated from high school, 44 reached college level, 28 were college degree graduates, and six obtained masters' degrees. The largest group was the high school-level attendees.

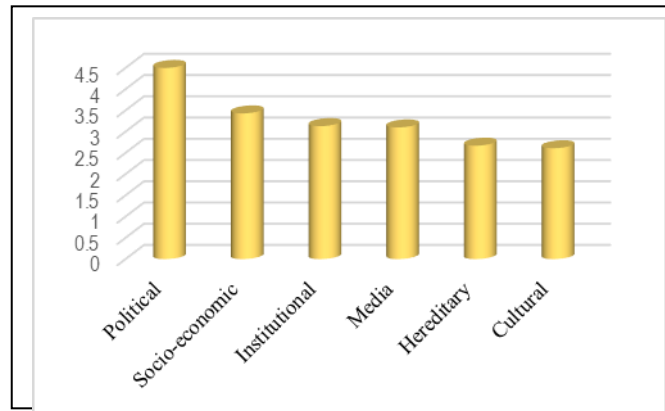
The political factor posted the highest weighted mean of 4.50, indicating that it is a highly dominant factor influencing the voters' turnout during the election (Table 2 and Figure 2). Presumably, most respondents strongly agree that political factors influenced their vote-casting decisions. Usually, political principles dictate and dominate the subsequent political decisions, events, and electoral processes. The pervasive political problems prompted the village residents to exercise their civic duty to cast a vote (Shah, 2019; Pirro & Portos, 2021) as the only perceived mechanism to address existing unresolved political problems in their village. The small SD value suggests a minor spread of responses about the mean.

Table 2. Level of the dominance of factors affecting voters' turnout

Factor	Weighted Mean	SD	Factor Description
Political	4.50	1.00	Highly dominant
Socioeconomic	3.43	1.20	Dominant
Institutional	3.13	1.07	Moderately dominant
Media	3.10	1.18	Moderately dominant
Hereditary	2.67	1.04	Moderately dominant
Cultural	2.61	1.01	Moderately dominant
Grand Mean	3.24		Moderately dominant
	Overall SD	1.24	

<i>Ranges for the Weighted Mean</i>	<i>Factor Description</i>
1.00 – 1.80	Not a dominant
1.81 – 2.60	Slightly dominant
2.61 – 3.40	Moderately dominant
3.41 – 4.20	Dominant
4.21 – 5.00	Highly dominant

The socioeconomic factor emerged with a weighted mean of 3.43 (Table 2 and Figure 2), indicating its dominant influence on voters' turnout. Somehow, it created a demarcation line among the village electorate. Wealthier people favor casting votes more than poor ones (Arlen Rossi, 2018). The socioeconomic factor appeared to influence vote casting. The small SD of 1.2 reflects a close conformity of responses from the resulting mean to suggest that the respondents were on common grounds as to their opinion based on socioeconomic considerations.



The institutional factor came in next with a weighted mean of 3.13, manifesting a moderately dominant influence on the voters' turnout. Indeed, electoral procedures that govern local elections encourage village residents to cast their votes. When village resident views the election process as somewhat disorganized, complex, and messy, they will avoid such an event (Vannucci, 2021), affecting voters' turnout.

Similarly, the media, hereditary and cultural factors have only manifested moderate dominance in influencing the village residents' decision to cast votes. Media advocacy encourages active involvement and participation during the election (Rahman & Bunaiya, 2022). It considerably shapes the landscape of politics and elections (Reyes, 2019). Suppose the media promotes election as vital in changing the country, as manifested by some TV and radio stations. In that case, electoral participation will increase and augment voters' turnout.

The hereditary factor reflects the respondents' family orientation and upbringing toward politics, shaping their voting decision. It influences the vote-casting decisions because some respondents have their own culture of voting. Operationally, if a clan is involved in an election or suffrage, they tend to participate (Wong et al., 2020). Likewise, the respondents' cultural background may shape their electoral participation. In many instances, village residents do not care about politics. For them, it is just a waste of time and money. Some respondents agree and have one common saying no matter what, politics and elections are always corrupt and dirty.

The grand weighted mean of 3.24 suggests dominance for all the six identified factors whose influence on voters' turnout was dominant. The overall SD of 1.24 indicates that the respondents did not vary in their answers and rating based on the grand mean.

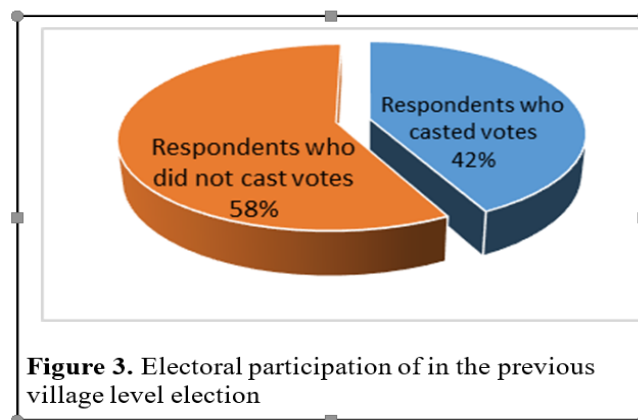


Figure 3 shows the respondents' electoral participation during the last 2013 village election. Of the 279 respondents, 118 (42 percent) voted in the last village election. In comparison, 161 respondents (58 percent) did not cast their votes reflecting a higher number of the electorate who did not vote than those who voted. The five significant reasons affirmed by the respondents for not casting votes include political, personal, and health reasons, electoral systems/processes, and candidates' qualification/competency (Table 3).

Table 3. Reasons for not casting a vote

Reason for not casting vote	Frequency	Percent
Personal	60	37
Political	49	31
Candidates' qualification/Competency	22	14
Electoral system/process	18	11
Health	11	7
Total	161	100

As shown in Table 3, more than one-third (37 percent) of the respondents failed to cast a vote primarily due to personal reasons considered as the major contributing factor which hindered their election participation. First, the respondents disclosed personal reasons that they gave priority rather than casting a vote on election day. They confirmed that voting and exercising their civic duty was less important than engaging in their usual business activities. Some prefer to attend to household work instead of going to the election precinct. The following confirmed reason is political, garnering 31 percent (49 respondents). The respondents affirmed that pervasive political phenomena like electoral fraud and vote buying, among others, in their village destroyed the integrity of the election results. They viewed this political exercise as simply dirty and out of control. Indeed, many irregularities construed the simple electoral exercises in the Philippines (Abocejo, 2015).

The cited reason was on candidates' qualifications or competency, accounting for 14 percent (22 respondents). They said many candidates needed to be qualified and competent to be elected. In addition, they need the proper training, leadership experience, and skills to handle elected posts. The electoral system or process came in fourth at 11 percent (18 respondents), where the respondents noted inadequate electoral procedures during the election campaign period. The least was health reasons at seven percent (11 respondents), where many electorates were already elderly, and they could not just go to the voting precinct to cast their votes. Still, others were in severe health conditions during election time.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The electoral participation and the voters' turnout lie on the veracity of the identified factors in shaping the electorate's judgment to partake in the electoral process. Indeed, voters' turnout practically shapes the landscape of democratic legitimacy when higher electoral participation is achieved when legitimate political factors hasten voter turnout. Arguably, the voters' turnout largely depends on the overall decisions of the electorates either to cast a vote or not to cast a vote in the election amidst perennial influences of compelling factors along the electoral processes. The participation, or otherwise, of the individual electorate manifests the will to decide and exercise one's voting rights during an election.

The findings of this present study refute the Democratic Theory on the ground that voting is essential and must be acquainted with understanding politics. Personal reasons are the primary reason why some electorates failed to cast votes during the last village election. The principle of the voting

action renders visible the democratic theory rather than personal concerns when an individual prioritizes more than exercising his civic duty, engaging in a profitable business, doing lucrative work, attending to essential family affairs, and other personal priorities. On the one hand, the study findings confirmed the arguments of the Rational Choice Theory, where voters are rational and conscious concerning their needs and want. They select those candidates who are likely to deliver those needs when elected to office.

Further studies may be carried out involving other factors not included in this research, which may also affect the voters' turnout of a community. For example, other studies may be pursued if voter turnout has possible effects on democratic legitimacy and if the declining voter turnout rates in a specific society raise a concern about electoral stratification.

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