

Influential Factors Affecting Candidate Choice Among First-Time College Voters

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Abstract. First-time voters represent a significant yet often overlooked segment of the Philippine electorate, whose active involvement significantly contributes to the country's democratic process. Despite their growing numbers, limited research has examined the factors that influence the decision-making of these young citizens in choosing which candidates to support. This study aims to identify and analyze the key factors that affect the candidate preferences and decision-making of first-time voters within the Philippine context. Using a descriptive research design, data were gathered from first-time voters at the University of La Salette College, Incorporated, to examine how demographic and social variables influence voting behavior. The research findings reveal that the most significant factors influencing voter perception are personal characteristics, such as a candidate's underlying values and principles, and educational attainment, which shape the view of their capability and competence to address complex issues. Furthermore, age is a key influencer, with younger voters favoring candidates closer to their generation for relatability and responsiveness to youth concerns. Political affiliation also proves influential based on the party's core values, and a candidate's economic background affects perception of their ability to tackle poverty and inequality. Conversely, gender was found not to be a decisive factor in voter preference. Overall, the findings underscore that first-time voters consider both personal and contextual factors when selecting candidates. The study highlights the importance of enhancing political awareness and voter education among young Filipinos to foster critical and informed participation in democratic processes and promote a more engaged and discerning electorate.

Keywords: Candidate selection; Decision-making; First-time voters; Youth population; Voter engagement

1.0 Introduction

Democracy thrives on participation, and the engagement of first-time voters is especially critical as it lays the foundation for their future political involvement. Their candidate selection is a complex decision-making process influenced by a variety of personal beliefs, social environments, and political contexts. Comprehending these drivers of voter preference is essential for crafting effective political strategies and sound policies.

Philippine national elections occur every six years, while Senate and local elections are held every three years. The May 2022 elections underscored the significant role of the youth vote, with the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) reporting that 52% of registered voters were young adults, including over four million new voters in the 18-24 age bracket (Philippine News Agency, 2020; AIEPRO, 2022). This demographic's participation is a key indicator of a nation's democratic health and has the potential to influence its future direction profoundly.

However, the Philippine electoral landscape is notably complex. It is characterized by a weak party system, widespread dynastic rule, a prevalence of celebrity politicians, and a low-information environment for voters (Batarra et al., 2021). Furthermore, the process is often marred by controversies such as vote buying and the dissemination of fake news. This challenging context makes the initial voting experience particularly daunting for first-time voters, many of whom lack a clear basis for selecting candidates in national and local races.

Studies across the Philippines have explored aspects of voter behavior. For instance, Sumatra (2025) noted in Davao City that candidate attributes—such as age and educational attainment—significantly shape the perceptions and preferences of Gen Z voters, reinforcing the relevance of these determinants in the national electoral context. While these national studies provide a crucial background, a localized understanding of voter decision-making in specific academic environments remains underexplored.

Recognizing this gap and the evolving nature of youth political engagement, this study investigates explicitly the candidate selection criteria among first-time voters at the University of La Salette College, Inc. (ULS). We focus on the influence of key demographic characteristics (sex, age, educational attainment, political affiliation, and financial status) alongside the personal characteristics of the political candidate on their choices. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on democratic representation by providing valuable, localized insights for policymakers and political parties seeking to engage effectively with this crucial student demographic.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The descriptive research design method is employed in this study to quantitatively analyze and describe the factors influencing the choice of candidates by first-time voters. This design is chosen for its suitability in providing a detailed snapshot of the current state of affairs within the demographic of first-time registered voters at the University of La Salette, Inc. College. This research design applies to this study, as the researchers aim to identify the factors influencing the choices of first-time voters and how these factors affect their decision-making.

2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique

The study included a sample of 337 participants, all of whom were bona fide students at the University of La Salette, Inc. College. Essential criteria for inclusion were being a registered voter in any municipality in Isabela and having cast a vote for the first time in either a local or national election. The researcher used Slovin's Formula to determine the appropriate sample size, selecting a sample size of at least 306 participants from a population of 1,306 first-time voters to represent the population with a 5% margin of error. The random sampling method was used to develop the sample for the research under discussion. With this method, each element in the population has an equal chance of being selected to represent the entire population.

2.3 Research Instrument

To explore the perspectives of first-time voters at the University of La Salette, Inc. College, this study employed a survey questionnaire as its primary research instrument. Surveys provide a systematic and efficient means of gathering data from a large number of respondents while ensuring anonymity, which is an essential factor when addressing the sensitive nature of political preferences. The use of closed-ended questions facilitated the generation of quantifiable data. It complemented the Quantitative Descriptive Research Design, enabling the systematic collection, categorization, and coding of responses for meaningful analysis.

The survey questions were adapted from previous studies to make sure that all important aspects were covered. Items about the age and sex of candidates were based on Narido et al. (2022), educational attainment from Young (2011), political attainment from Pedersen et al. (2019), financial status from Bhothisawang (2018), political affiliation from Kurtbas (2015), and personal characteristics from Nai et al. (2021). These adaptations ensured that the instrument was grounded in scholarly research, allowing the researchers to identify recurring themes, patterns, and preferences in the decision-making of first-time voters.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, it underwent expert validation by the statistician of the University Research Department, who assessed the clarity, relevance, and consistency of each item. A pilot test

was then administered to 20 respondents with similar characteristics to the main participants. The responses were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.966, indicating an excellent level of internal consistency and reliability of the instrument.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

This research study used a Quantitative Survey in the form of questionnaires to gather the data needed to determine the factors that highly influenced the Salettinian's (students in the University of La Salette) first-time voters' voting preferences. Upon the validation of the research questionnaires, the researcher created a 'Google Form' Survey Link comprising the questions that needed to be answered. Furthermore, a letter of request was prepared for the National Service Training Program, the Head Instructor, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the OIC Dean of each department, seeking their consent to conduct a survey.

After the letter of request was granted, the Survey Link was given to every National Service Training Program instructor and subsequently forwarded to the group chats of their respective classes. The researcher also added a note to the questionnaire instructions specifying that only first-time voters should respond to the survey. The purpose and objective of the study were also stated in the message, along with the survey link. Furthermore, the researcher assured the respondents that the provided data would be used solely for research purposes; therefore, all information is kept confidential.

The results of the retrieved questionnaire copies were tabulated. The researcher then statistically interpreted, analyzed, and treated the data results.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

This research study employed descriptive analysis to present the data on first-time voters at the University of La Salette, Inc. College. Descriptive analysis is a statistical method used to summarize and describe a given dataset, which can be either a representation of the entire population or a sample of a population. According to Cooksey (2020), descriptive statistics offer a systematic approach to condense large amounts of data into interpretable summaries, facilitating the identification of patterns and trends. In this study, the method summarized key dataset features, providing a demographic profile of respondents and highlighting variables such as age, sex, and economic status. It transformed complex data into interpretable results through measures of central tendency, variability, and frequency distributions. To enhance clarity, tables and figures were utilized, while correlation coefficients were applied when appropriate to explore relationships between variables.

A statistical tool was also used to ensure accurate and efficient interpretation of responses. Grand means were computed for each set of questions, with the final mean values evaluated using the following scale: 1.00–1.79 (very uninfluential), 1.80–2.59 (uninfluential), 2.60–3.39 (undecided), 3.40–4.19 (influential), and 4.20–5.00 (very influential). This process enabled the researchers to obtain precise results regarding the factors influencing candidate choice among first-time Salettinian voters.

2.6 Ethical Consideration

In conducting this research study, a commitment to ethical considerations is paramount to ensure the well-being, privacy, and rights of the participants. A foundational ethical principle lies in securing informed consent from each participant. Transparent communication of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits precedes the participant's decision to participate. Through the process, individuals had the opportunity to pose questions and make an informed choice about their involvement. Participants are assured that they can withdraw from the study at any point without facing any negative consequences. This emphasis on voluntary participation underscores the commitment to respecting individuals' autonomy and choices. The protection of participants' privacy is a fundamental ethical consideration. Personally identifiable information was only collected when necessary for the research, and stringent encryption and secure storage methods were employed to safeguard this information. Respecting the privacy of participants, their identities were protected through the use of coding systems during data analysis and reporting, ensuring complete anonymity. Furthermore, strict measures are in place to maintain the confidentiality of all collected data, restricting access solely to authorized members of the research team.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents by sex, civil status, and year level. The results reveal that the majority of the respondents are female (64%), while males account for 35% and a small portion identify as gay (1%). Most of the respondents are single (99%), which reflects their status as college students, and almost all are in their first year (96%), with very few in higher year levels. This distribution is consistent with previous studies on first-time Filipino voters, which also found that most participants in similar research are young, single, and primarily in the early years of their college education (Abasolo et al., 2023).

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents		
	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	119	35%
Female	216	64%
Gay	2	1%
Civil Status		
Single	335	99%
Married	2	1%
Year-Level		
1 st year	323	96%
2 nd year	4	1%
3 rd year	3	1%
4 th year	7	1%

3.2 Weighted Mean and Interpretation of the Factors Affecting Candidate Choice

Table 2 demonstrates that the 337 Salettinian first-time voters who participated in the study believed that the age of a political candidate was an 'influential' factor in deciding whom to vote for, with an average score of 3.89. With a mean of 3.71, the participants also considered age to be an influential factor, as younger political candidates bring a fresh perspective and innovative ideas to address societal issues. In terms of older political candidates being more experienced and better equipped to handle the challenges faced by our society, a mean of 3.73 was accumulated, corresponding to influential. Furthermore, with a mean of 3.68, the participants also believed that the candidate's age is a crucial factor in determining their ability to connect with and represent the interests of the younger generation. Moreover, a total of 3.49 means were accumulated, indicating that supporting a political candidate who is closer to their age group was influential upon their decision-making. With a 3.74 total weighted mean in terms of the 'Age of the candidate', the database indicates that the Salettinian first-time voters consider the age of the political candidate as an influential factor in their voting preferences.

Table 2. Weighted Mean and Interpretation of the 'Age of the Candidate' Factor Affecting Candidate Choice		
Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
1. The age of a political candidate is an important consideration for me when deciding whom to vote for.	3.89	Influential
2. I believe that younger political candidates bring a fresh perspective and innovative ideas to address societal issues.	3.71	Influential
3. Older political candidates are more experienced and better equipped to handle the challenges faced by our society.	3.73	Influential
4. A candidate's age is a crucial factor in determining their ability to connect with and represent the interests of the younger generation.	3.68	Influential
5. I am more inclined to support a political candidate who is closer to my age group.	3.49	Influential
General Assessment	3.47	Influential

Legend: 4.20 - 5.00 Very Influential

3.40 - 4.19 Influential

2.60 - 3.39 Undecided

1.80 - 2.59 Uninfluential

1.00 - 1.79 Very Uninfluential

Despite ongoing efforts to bridge gender disparities, studies show that women continue to be underrepresented in political spheres (Baltrunaite et al., 2024). Table 3 presents that the first-time voters from the University of La Salette Inc. College were undecided about whether the sex of a political candidate is an important factor in deciding whom they would vote for, with a mean of 2.96. With a mean of 3.18, the participants were also undecided about whether the candidate's sex can significantly influence their ability to address the public's concerns. Thus, the participants are undecided about supporting a political candidate of the same sex as themselves. In terms of the candidates' sex determining their credibility and competence, a mean of 3.06 was accumulated, corresponding to undecided. Furthermore, with a mean of 3.19, the participants were undecided about whether political candidates of a certain sex are better equipped to understand and address specific societal issues. In contrast, recent studies suggest that leadership characterized by gender diversity can stimulate economic growth by fostering increased efficiency, while diminishing corruption and vulnerability to political opportunism (Baskaran et al., 2023).

Table 3. *Weighted Mean and Interpretation of the 'Sex of the Candidate' Factor Affecting Candidate Choice*

Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
1. The sex of a political candidate is an important factor for me when deciding whom to vote for.	2.96	Undecided
2. I believe that a candidate's sex can significantly influence their ability to address the concerns of the public.	3.18	Undecided
3. The sex of a political candidate is a crucial factor in determining their credibility and competence.	3.07	Undecided
4. I am more inclined to support a political candidate of the same sex as mine.	3.06	Undecided
5. I believe that political candidates of a certain sex are better equipped to understand and address specific societal issues.	3.19	Undecided
General Assessment	3.09	Undecided

Legend: 4.20 – 5.00 Very Influential
3.40 – 4.19 Influential
2.60 – 3.39 Undecided
1.80 – 2.59 Uninfluential
1.00 – 1.79 Very Uninfluential

Overall, with a 3.09 total weighted mean in terms of the 'Sex of the candidate', the database indicates that the Salettinian first-time voters were undecided about whether to consider the sex of the political candidate as a reference to their voting preferences.

Table 4. *Weighted Mean and Interpretation of the 'Educational Attainment of the Candidate' Factor Affecting Candidate Choice*

Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
1. I tend to support political candidates who have attained a high level of education: college graduate, master's graduate, or doctorate graduate.	3.89	Influential
2. Political candidates who have attained a high level of education are better equipped to understand and solve societal issues.	3.88	Influential
3. The educational attainment of a political candidate is a crucial factor in determining.	3.90	Influential
General Assessment	3.89	Influential

Legend: 4.20 – 5.00 Very Influential
3.40 – 4.19 Influential
2.60 – 3.39 Undecided
1.80 – 2.59 Uninfluential
1.00 – 1.79 Very Uninfluential

Table 4 presents that first-time voters from the University of La Salette Inc. College support political candidates who have attained a high level of education, with a mean of 3.89, corresponding to 'influential'. A study by Arceneaux & Wielen (2023) finds evidence that candidates with higher levels of education receive more votes than those with lower levels of education, even after accounting for standard indicators of candidate quality and campaign spending. The participants also believe that political candidates who have attained a high level of education are better equipped to understand and solve societal issues, with a mean of 3.88, which corresponds to 'influential'. Similarly, a comprehensive literature review by Kulachai et al. (2023) discussed how voters tend to

prefer candidates with higher educational qualifications, as voters often associate educational attainment with better problem-solving skills and leadership qualities. Thus, politicians should possess a good level of education, as education provides numerous leadership qualities. Leaders who lack knowledge are unable to cope with change, which impedes a country's progress (Abiera et al., 2022). Therefore, with an accumulated mean of 3.90 corresponding to 'influential', the educational attainment of a political candidate is a crucial factor in determining their credibility and competence. Supporting this, a recent survey of Hufana 2024 reveals that many voters prioritize competence and proven results over personal appeal.

With a 3.89 total weighted mean in terms of the 'Educational Attainment of the candidate', the database indicates that the Salettinian's first-time voters find the educational background of the political candidate as an 'influential factor' in their voting preferences. This aligns with the study by Amante et al. (2024), who found that voters in the Philippines are increasingly considering a candidate's academic background as a marker of competence, particularly in administrative and developmental planning. Complementing these insights, studies demonstrate a notable connection between educational attainment and informed voting patterns, highlighting how education encourages voters to scrutinize candidates more critically (Javines, 2024).

Table 5. *Weighted Mean and Interpretation of the 'Political Attainment of the Candidate' Factor Affecting Candidate Choice*

Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
1. I am inclined to associate closely with any political candidate.	3.56	Influential
2. When presented with thorough background details, I tend to shift my stance on an issue.	3.63	Influential
3. A candidate's recent track record in the government is a decisive factor in earning my vote.	3.86	Influential
General Assessment	3.68	Influential

Legend: 4.20 – 5.00 Very Influential
3.40 – 4.19 Influential
2.60 – 3.39 Undecided
1.80 – 2.59 Uninfluential
1.00 – 1.79 Very Uninfluential

Table 5 revealed that the first-time voters of the University of La Salette Inc. College believed that associating closely with any political candidate was an influential factor in decision-making, with a mean of 3.56. While being presented with thorough details, the first-time voters, with a mean of 3.63, believed that it is an influential factor in shifting their stance on an election. Thus, the participants believed that a candidate's recent track record in the government is an influential factor in earning their vote. Similar to the findings in Rappler's Gavilan (2024) study, most respondents consider candidates' track records and clear policy stances as critical factors in their decision-making. With a 3.68 total weighted mean in terms of the 'Political Attainment of the candidate', the database indicates that the Salettinian's first-time voters consider the political achievement of the candidate as an 'influential' reference to their voting preferences. Supporting this, Macalawi et al. (2025) emphasized that voters stressed the importance of platforms being backed by credibility and a track record.

Table 6. *Weighted Mean and Interpretation of the 'Financial Status of the Candidate' Factor Affecting Candidate Choice*

Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
1. The financial status of a political candidate is an important factor for me when deciding whom to vote for.	3.45	Influential
2. I believe that a candidate's financial background can significantly influence their understanding of economic issues and policies.	3.57	Influential
3. The economic success or struggles of a political candidate personally affect their credibility.	3.61	Influential
4. A candidate's financial stability is a crucial factor in determining their ability to address issues related to poverty and economic inequality.	3.51	Influential
5. I am more likely to support a political candidate with a similar financial background to mine.	3.30	Undecided
General Assessment	3.48	Influential

Legend: 4.20 – 5.00 Very Influential
3.40 – 4.19 Influential
2.60 – 3.39 Undecided
1.80 – 2.59 Uninfluential
1.00 – 1.79 Very Uninfluential

The table shows that, among the 337 first-time voters at the University of La Salette, the financial status of a political candidate is a significant factor influencing their decision on whom to vote for. Kulachai et al. (2023) discussed how economic conditions affect voter preferences with a weighted mean of 3.45. With a weighted

mean of 3.57, the candidate's financial background can significantly influence their understanding of economic issues and policies. Furthermore, the respondents also believed that the economic success or struggles of a political candidate personally affect their credibility in general, which is an influential factor in their decision-making, with a weighted mean of 3.61. A result of 3.61 corresponds to 'influential'; the respondents also show that a candidate's financial stability is a crucial factor in determining their ability to address issues related to poverty and economic inequality. In the last statement, the respondents were 'undecided' with a weighted mean of 3.30 on whether they were likely to support a political candidate with a similar financial background to them. Voters experiencing economic hardships may be more likely to support wealthy candidates whom they perceive as capable of improving the economy and providing financial stability. They may seek candidates who offer promises of economic relief or change (Bartels 2008).

As a result, the table concludes that financial status is a factor that can alter the candidate preference of first-time voters at the University of La Salette. With a 3.48 total weighted mean in terms of the 'Financial Status of the Candidate', the database indicates that Salettinian first-time voters consider the financial well-being of the political candidate as a significant factor in their voting preferences. Supporting this, Vivyan et al. (2020) similarly argue that citizens in Austria, Germany, and Britain evaluate politicians with working-class roots more positively based on class affinity.

Table 7. Weighted Mean and Interpretation of the 'Political Affiliation of the Candidate' Factor Affecting Candidate Choice

Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
1. The political affiliation of a candidate is an important consideration for me when deciding whom to vote for.	3.72	Influential
2. A candidate's political party plays a significant role in shaping their policy positions.	3.79	Influential
3. The values and principles of a candidate's political party are crucial factors in my decision to support them.	3.76	Influential
4. I am more inclined to vote for a candidate based on their political party rather than their individual qualities.	3.38	Undecided
5. A candidate's ability to work across party lines is an important characteristic for me.	3.67	Influential
General Assessment	3.66	Influential

Legend: 4.20 – 5.00 Very Influential
3.40 – 4.19 Influential
2.60 – 3.39 Undecided
1.80 – 2.59 Uninfluential
1.00 – 1.79 Very Uninfluential

The table revealed how the respondents answered questions about the different factors that affect their candidate preference, specifically in relation to their political affiliation. Party identification is a significant factor influencing voting decisions, as it refers to an individual's psychological attachment to a political party (Kulachai et al., 2023). The database indicates that the political affiliation of a candidate is a significant consideration when deciding whom to vote for, with a weighted mean of 3.72, as it is a highly influential factor for the respondents. With a mean of 3.79, the data indicate that respondents find it influential to consider the candidate's political party as a significant factor in shaping the candidate's policy positions. Strong party identifiers are more likely to be politically active, participating in activities such as volunteering, donating, and engaging in discussions (Abramowitz, 2010). With a weighted mean of 3.76, the data shows that the values and principles of a candidate's political party are influential factors in their decision to support the candidate. Individuals with strong party identification are more likely to interpret political information in a way that is consistent with their party's perspective (Bartels, 2002). Furthermore, on the statement of whether the respondents are more inclined to vote for a candidate based on their political party rather than their individual qualities, the respondents were 'undecided' with a weighted mean of 3.38. In the last statement, the respondents indicated that a candidate's ability to work across party lines is an important characteristic, with a weighted mean of 3.67.

This table shows that when faced with a candidate who has factors related to their political affiliation, they prefer them significantly. Out of the five statements, they chose 4 of them, indicating that the candidate's political affiliation can influence their preferences. With a 3.66 total weighted mean in terms of the 'Political Affiliation of the Candidate', the database indicates that the Salettinian's first-time voters consider the partisan identification of the political candidate as an influential factor in their voting preferences. As Green (2002) argues, it simplifies the decision-making process by providing a heuristic or mental shortcut for evaluating

candidates and their positions.

The table shows that the respondents indicated that the personal characteristics of a candidate, such as integrity and charisma, are influential factors in their decision-making process when choosing whom to vote for, with a weighted mean of 3.91. In contrast, despite the findings of a 2024 nationwide survey by The Nerve that 73% of voters consider honesty the most important quality in a senator, it still underscores a national preference for ethical governance over party loyalty or personal charisma (Gavilan, 2024). With a weighted mean of 4.04, a candidate's traits, like honesty and reliability, play a significant role in their ability to connect with the public. On the other hand, the charisma and communication skills of a political candidate are influential factors in making the candidate an effective representative, resulting in a weighted mean of 3.95. Upon believing that a candidate's values and principles greatly influence the respondent's decision to support the candidate, they scored a weighted mean of 3.98, which reveals that such characteristics are influential factors in decision-making. Lastly, with a weighted mean of 4.04, the respondents indicated that they are likely to vote for a candidate who demonstrates authenticity and transparency in their actions, which aligns with the study by Abiera et al. (2022), who found that most voters prioritize transparency and accountability when assessing candidates.

Table 8. *Weighted Mean and Interpretation of the 'Personal Characteristics of the Candidate' Factor Affecting Candidate Choice*

Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
1. The personal characteristics of a political candidate, such as integrity and charisma, are important factors for me when deciding whom to vote for.	3.91	Influential
2. I believe that a candidate's traits, like honesty and relatability, play a significant role in their ability to connect with the public.	4.04	Influential
3. The charisma and communication skills of a political candidate are crucial in making them an effective representative.	3.95	Influential
4. A candidate's values and principles greatly influence my decision to support them.	3.98	Influential
5. I am more likely to vote for a candidate who demonstrates authenticity and transparency in their actions.	4.04	Influential
General Assessment	3.98	Influential

Legend: 4.20 – 5.00 Very Influential
3.40 – 4.19 Influential
2.60 – 3.39 Undecided
1.80 – 2.59 Uninfluential
1.00 – 1.79 Very Uninfluential

Overall, the table indicates that personal characteristics play a significant role in helping first-time voters select their preferred candidate. According to Arkorful et.al (2020), voters' choice preferences are connected to the candidate's expertise, image, quality, trust, and attractiveness, which supported the study of Timoteo Jr. (2021) as he observed that Generation Z and Millennial voters in the Philippines prefer candidates who are not corrupt, wise, and have a solid moral character. With a 3.98 total weighted mean in terms of the 'Personal Characteristics of the Candidate', the database indicates that the Saletinian's first-time voters consider the personal qualities of the political candidate as an influential factor in their voting preferences.

3.3 The Total Weighted Mean and Interpretation of All Factors

Table 9. *The Total Weighted Mean and Interpretation of All Factors*

Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
Personal Characteristics of the Candidate	3.98	Influential
Educational Attainment of the Candidate	3.89	Influential
Age of the Candidate	3.74	Influential
Political Attainment of the Candidate	3.68	Influential
Political Affiliation of the Candidate	3.60	Influential
Financial Status of the Candidate	3.48	Influential
Sex of the Candidate	3.09	Undecided

Legend: 4.20 – 5.00 Very Influential
3.40 – 4.19 Influential
2.60 – 3.39 Undecided
1.80 – 2.59 Uninfluential
1.00 – 1.79 Very Uninfluential

The overall findings suggest that all factors, including personal characteristics, educational and political attainment, political affiliations, financial status, and age of the candidate, except sex diversity, were found to be influential in establishing voting preferences among first-time voters at the University of La Salette, Inc. College. Sex accumulated the lowest mean among the other data, which corresponds to 'undecided'. However, although

the overall analysis of first-time voters suggests that the gender gap in preference is less robust, some still believe that this is a vital factor in establishing their political preference. Similar to research on age category, research on gender representation remains highly politicized.

This study is limited to the perspectives of first-time voters from the University of La Salette, Inc. College. As such, the findings may not be fully representative of the broader population of first-time voters outside the institution. The results should therefore be interpreted with caution, as they reflect only the experiences and viewpoints of the participants within this specific academic setting.

4.0 Conclusion

First-time voters weigh various factors when deliberating on the selection of a political candidate. Based on the findings, candidate qualities and competence, as well as personal characteristics — particularly a candidate's underlying values and principles — emerged as the most influential factors. These traits are critical as they demonstrate the candidate's credibility, transparency, and ability to connect effectively with the public. Educational attainment is similarly influential, as it determines a candidate's perceived capability and competence to solve complex societal issues.

Age is a significant consideration: voters exhibit a dual preference for candidates who are closer to their own age group, while simultaneously valuing the experience and capability necessary to address societal issues effectively. Younger voters tend to relate more to candidates closer to their own age, perceiving them as more aware of the societal issues and aspirations of young people.

Meanwhile, external and economic factors such as political affiliation prove influential, depending on the party list's core values and the candidate's perceived ability to collaborate across political divides. Furthermore, the candidate's financial background is a significant factor that influences voter perceptions, highlighting their understanding of economic matters; a candidate's perceived financial well-being determines their credibility in addressing issues such as poverty and inequality. Conversely, gender was found not to be a decisive factor for first-time voters.

These findings indicate that first-time voters prioritize character, demonstrated competence, and economic understanding in their initial political choices. Consequently, future research is strongly advised to employ a longitudinal methodology to track how these preferences shift as individuals transition into experienced voters. The core investigation should determine if the initial high value placed on personal traits evolves into a stronger focus on concrete policy platforms, governance performance, and political track record in subsequent elections. Observing the same cohort over time will yield critical insights into how sustained political exposure and lived experience refine the maturity and complexity of their candidate selection criteria.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Author Franco: conceptualization, data gathering, data analysis, proposal writing, editing, proofreading, and correspondence

Author Tayag: conceptualization, data analysis, data gathering, proofreading, paperwork, and correspondence

Author Clemente: data analysis, data gathering, and editing

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9.0 References

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