

Factors Affecting Youth Voting Preferences in the Philippine Senatorial Election: A Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The Philippine elections had been characterized by the presence of a weak party system, a low information environment for voters, a history of dynastic rule, and the preponderance of media celebrities in elected political offices. These features amounted to the observation that candidate winnability in the country is discussed often as a “personality versus platform” issue, highlighting the importance of candidates’ personal background. This study examines certain variables associated with the voting preferences of young educated voters for the 2019 Senatorial Elections. Using a quantitative approach, this inquiry specifically sought to analyze the extent to which party identification, issue orientation, candidate orientation, and pre-election surveys affect voters’ preferences for candidates. Survey data were obtained from the 210 purposively sampled youth-voters, and were analyzed using structural equation modelling. On the whole, the results of the study indicate the positive association between the respondents’ party identification on voting preferences, as well as the positive association between pre-election surveys and the respondents’ voting preferences. Both issue orientation and candidate orientation do not appear as significant independent variables. The outcome of the study has departed from the prevailing Philippine electoral trend where candidate personality-centered factors have been pivotal for explaining Filipino voting preferences.

Keywords: voting preferences, party identification, issue orientation, candidate orientation, pre-election surveys, voting behavior

ABSTRAK

Pemilu Filipina dicirikan oleh adanya sistem kepartaian yang lemah, lingkungan informasi yang rendah bagi para pemilih, sejarah pemerintahan dinasti, dan banyaknya selebriti media di kantor-kantor politik terpilih. Fitur-fitur ini sama dengan pengamatan bahwa kelayakan kandidat di negara tersebut sering dibahas sebagai masalah “kepribadian versus platform”, yang menyoroti pentingnya latar belakang pribadi kandidat. Penelitian ini mengkaji variabel-variabel tertentu yang terkait dengan preferensi memilih pemilih muda berpendidikan untuk Pemilihan Senator 2019. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif, penyelidikan ini secara khusus berusaha menganalisis sejauh mana identifikasi partai, orientasi isu, orientasi kandidat, dan survei pra-pemilihan memengaruhi preferensi pemilih terhadap kandidat. Data survei diperoleh dari 210 pemilih muda yang disampel secara sengaja, dan dianalisis menggunakan pemodelan persamaan struktural. Secara keseluruhan, hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya hubungan positif antara identifikasi partai responden terhadap preferensi pemungutan suara, serta hubungan positif antara survei pra-pemilu dengan preferensi pemungutan suara responden. Baik orientasi isu maupun orientasi kandidat tidak muncul sebagai variabel independen yang signifikan. Hasil studi telah berangkat dari tren pemilihan Filipina yang berlaku di mana faktor-faktor yang berpusat pada kepribadian kandidat menjadi sangat penting untuk menjelaskan preferensi pemungutan suara Filipina.

Kata kunci: preferensi pemungutan suara, identifikasi partai, orientasi isu, orientasi kandidat, survei pra-pemilihan, perilaku memilih

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding electoral outcomes hinges on the evaluation of what makes voters vote as they do. Socio-demographic background of voters, such as sex and ethnicity, are being considered to have influenced voter's selection of candidates ([Kittilson, 2016](#); [Banerjee and Pande, 2008](#); [Cutler, 2002](#)). One persuasive and enduring conceptualization is that many voters think that candidates or party leaders who share a voter's characteristics are more likely to act in that person's interest when in office ([Cutler, 2002](#)). Yet this form of reasoning has been argued to be insufficient in explaining voters' choices during elections.

Certain scholars claimed that a voter's sense of attachment to a political party ([Aiba, 2002](#); [Klein and Baum, 2001](#); [Ranney, 1999](#); [Campbell et al., 1954](#)), important political issues or voter's policy preferences ([Ranney, 1999](#); [Walgrave et al., 2017](#)), and voter's evaluation of the personal qualities or backgrounds of the candidates, above and beyond the latter's issue positions or party ties ([Popkin, 1994](#); [Lawrence, 1978](#); [Pitkin, 1967](#)) have high salience on voting preferences. Other scholars also identified the influence of pre-election polls to voting preferences, and noted the bandwagon or underdog effect of these polls towards the voters ([Dahlgaard et al., 2017](#); [Michniewicz and Vandello, 2013](#); [Donsbach, 2001](#)).

Those contentions are in part fueled by the fact that across many countries that practice democratic elections, the contexts and relevant factors in play vary widely. In the Philippines for instance, elections are characterized by the preponderance of media personalities or celebrities and members of political clans in elected political offices where most lack the merit and only enjoyed the undue advantages of wealth, exposure, and name recall, among others. This observation is underpinned by previous studies which revealed that candidate winnability in the country is discussed often as a "personality versus platform" issue, and that during elections, voters would resort to candidate-centered factors rather than issue-based ones ([David and Legara, 2015](#)).

Some studies also claimed that Filipino voters do not consider political party affiliation a useful basis for selecting the candidate they will support, as the country is characterized to have a weak party system ([David and Legara, 2015](#); [Ufen, 2008](#); Social Weather Station, 2007; [Pertierra, 1988](#); [Ando, 1969](#)). Many studies also focused on the voters' opinion of candidates' qualities or backgrounds in explaining the voting preferences of the Filipinos ([Murcia and Bolo, 2016](#); [David and Legara, 2015](#); [Gallardo, 2015](#)).

This research is grounded on certain considerations. First, according to the Philippine Commission on Elections (COMELEC), the voters for the 2019 elections was dominated by young people, since one-third of the voting population come from the young demographic ([Patinio, 2018](#)). It is therefore relevant to look into the voting preferences of the young voters. Second, although numerous studies were conducted in the past explaining Filipino voting preferences, and literatures reviewed found that candidate-centered factors are determinants for voting preferences in the Philippines, this study is based on a different context. The Philippine electoral environment at present is characterized by the presence of issues that are crucial and critical; opposition and pro-administration parties have apparent stance; and pre-election polls are mainstreamed in media outlets. Therefrom, it is equally important to examine the potential influence of the aforementioned to the voting preference of voters.

Thus, this study examined certain variables in determining young and educated voters' preference in the 2019 Philippine senatorial elections. These include party identification, issue orientation, candidate orientation, and pre-election surveys. Specifically, this paper sought to answer this question: to what extent are party identification, candidate orientation, issue orientation, and pre-election surveys associated with voting preferences of the respondents?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

Attitudinal analysis of voting by (Fishbein and Coombs;1974) examines the major factors relevant to an individual's decision to vote and to his choice of candidate. It argues that social characteristics are inadequate in determining political preferences mainly voting. Apart from the sense of civic obligation to vote are other essential factors which include party identification, concern with issues, personal attachment to candidates, opinion over the candidate's personality, conformity to group standards, and the sense of efficacy. Thus, this theory assumes that in a political arena, a person should like or dislike a given candidate because (a) he believes the candidate has certain personal characteristics (Popkin, 1994), is affiliated with certain reference groups (Aiba, 2002; Klein and Baum, 2001), or is for or against various issues (Ranney, 1999; Popkin, 1994); and (b) evaluated these characteristics, groups and issues positively or negatively (Fishbein and Coombs, 1974).

VOTING PREFERENCE

Voting preference is one dimension of voting behavior which refers to what makes people prefer one party or candidate over other parties and candidates (Roskin et al., 1997). Accordingly, the basic factors that affect voters' decision are the voters' biological nature and needs, their psychological makeups, their membership in social groups, and the communications they receive (Ranney, 1999). (Cutler; 2002) explained that many voters tend to think that candidates and party leaders who share a voter's characteristics are more likely to act in that person's interest when in office.

But while socio-demographic factors and socio-economic characteristics are significant in the explanation of vote choice (Roskin et al., 1997), these are not enough in the understanding of how and why people preferred one party or candidate over the other (Aiba, 2002). (Ranney; 1999) explained that voters' socio-demographic status cannot simply determine their preferences. He found out that most voters choose candidates on the basis of their feeling or sense of attachment to a particular party from which a candidate belongs, orientations on specific issues of

public policy, and their evaluation on the personal characteristics of the candidates. Thus, the first step in understanding how and why people vote as they do is to understand how they feel about the parties, issues, and the candidates.

PARTY IDENTIFICATION

In modern democracies, voters are found aligned or identified with a political party. Electorates identify themselves to a party and these partisan loyalties is seen to influence their voting choice ([Ranney, 1999](#)). This identification amounted from the voters' assumption that a particular party could serve their political, economic, and social interests ([Green, 2002](#)). Thus, in this case, voting choice is determined by the voters' feeling towards the political party of the candidate ([Sarlamanov and Jovanoski, 2014](#)). Certain scholars agreed that those who strongly preferred a party were more stable and predictable than voters who moderately identified a party or were independent in voting patterns ([Lachat, 2006](#); [Yu, 2004](#); [Miller, 1991](#)).

Some studies emphasized the significance of party identification towards the voters' preferences. ([Liu, 2007](#)) found out its importance to vote choice in Taiwan presidential elections which he observed has increased overtime and remained constant between the 1996 and 2004 elections. He also noted that while political communication in election campaigns in Taiwan may have changed with its increasing emphasis on highlighting party candidates, the political psychology of voting pattern has not changed too much since partisanship still dominates Taiwanese voting behavior in presidential elections ([Liu, 2007](#)). Garzia and ([Viotti, 2013](#)) also found out that party identifications appear still central in Italians' voting choice since 1990, and these identifications are shaped by two variables, which exert both a direct and indirect effect on vote: (1) party-voter proximity on issues; (2) and party leader evaluations especially in a highly personalized political context like the Second Italian Republic.

This study hypothesizes that:

H1: Party identification is associated with the respondents' voting preferences.

ISSUE ORIENTATION

While some scholars would claim that citizens rarely, or not at all, vote on the basis of their issue opinions ([Lenz, 2012](#); [Campbell et. al, 1954](#)), others would argue that the awareness, concern, perception, and opinion on political issues can exert influence on voting preferences ([Aardal, 2005](#); [Ranney, 1999](#)), especially when one's party identification is weak or absent ([Yu, 2004](#)).

([Walgrave et. al., 2017](#)) summarized into three ways how voters' issue orientations can affect their electoral choices. First is the perception on the parties' or candidates' issue positions. That is, voters care about how close candidates' or parties' positions are to their own, and whether candidates and parties stay on the same side of an issue as they are. Second is the idea of competence. It holds that people vote for the party or candidate that they consider to be most competent to tackle, or solve, an issue. Third, is the idea is that people tend to vote for parties that they consider to be especially committed to tackle the policy issues they themselves care about. It holds that issue voting is not only a matter of agreeing with parties positionally and of considering parties as competent (or not) to deal with specific policy issues, but that it is also a matter of appreciating the priority parties give to specific issues ([Walgrave et. al, 2017](#)).

Studies from several scholars also underpin the above mentioned. ([Aardal, 2005](#)) assumes that voters cast their ballots on the basis of valence issues. These are issues on which both voters and parties agree on the same overall policy goals. He found that when a party or a candidate is regarded to be the 'owner' of the issue - that is, considered as best able to handle an issue, people tend to vote for it. The study of ([Markel, 2010](#)), for example, noted the popularity of LGBT candidates and political parties ought to represent them among the LGBT community, given the latter's

constant attempt to gain political representation. ([Baker and Greene, 2015](#)), moreover, discussed the idea of positional issue voting which occurs when a voter chooses the candidate whose publicly announced platform best approximates the voter's own policy preferences. Some work also combined positional and competence considerations as drivers of the vote choice ([Bélanger and Meguid, 2008](#); [Green and Hobolt, 2008](#)).

In addition, ([Kriesi and Sciarni, 2004](#)) noted that not all issues have a consistent impact on voters' decision. In their study, they found out that only issues that are highly familiar and polarizing, and which address problems of the highest priority, have a strong impact on voting choices among Swiss electorates. In like manner, issue positions of parties and candidates on key policy issues, such as education, health, and employment, have been the most important basis for voting by electorates in Ghana ([Adams and Agomor, 2015](#)).

This study hypothesizes that:

H2: Issue orientation is associated with the respondents' voting preferences.

CANDIDATE ORIENTATION

Candidate orientation is the structuring of political events in terms of a personal attraction to one of the major personalities involved ([Campbell, 1954](#)). Citizens do evaluate candidates in terms of their ability to act as according to their positions, above and beyond their issue positions or party ties ([Lawrence, 1978](#)). It excludes evaluations based on issue positions or party affiliation but focus on remarks like "I like him", "the candidate's smile", or any judgments that indicate likeness and preference. Thus, when one votes for a candidate because of a conviction that he or she is intelligent and forward-looking, then candidate orientation is the prime factor ([Ranney, 1999](#)).

([Popkin, 1994](#)) noted that in making political decisions, voters rely on informational shortcuts and heuristics. Candidate traits are considered to be useful heuristics as they are relatively easy to

assess compared to intricate policy positions ([Kinder and Abelson, 1981](#)), and have been an inexpensive way to gain information about the candidates and simplify vote decisions ([Hardy, 2014; Popkin 1994](#)). Candidate traits “offer an appealing shortcut for citizens to evaluate candidates on their performances without having to invest considerable time and energy into following public affairs or uncovering candidate issues” ([Funk, 1996 as cited in Hardy, 2014, p.4](#)).

([Kinder and Abelson, 1981](#)) suggest the influence of nonverbal factor in voters’ assessment of candidates’ qualities. In their study, electorates evaluate candidates’ competence, honesty, warmth and strength on the basis of physical appearance, and found that these evaluations affect voting preferences. ([Rosenberg et al., 1986](#)) also used photographic image of the candidates and voters were asked to evaluate them in terms of likableness, integrity, competence, and leadership ability. They found that image evaluations create a general evaluation in terms of the credibility and competence of candidate for public office, and these influence votes when voters have limited basis of judgment ([Rosenberget al., 1986](#)).

([Miller and Shanks, 1996](#)) also posited that voters already have knowledge structures and organized cognitions about candidates in their political role which would serve as their basis on casting votes. Voters actually concentrate on instrumental concerns about the manner in which a candidate would conduct governmental affairs, and candidate appearance is possibly the most important (or at least frequently employed) of the low information heuristics that can guide citizens’ voting decisions ([Lau and Redlawsk, 2001](#)).

Moreover, quality differences among candidates can arise from many reasons, including charisma, experience, incumbency, advertising, and other non-policy dimensions ([Aragones and Palfrey, 2004](#)), including honesty, morality, compassion, competence, and leadership ability of the candidates ([Miller and Shanks, 1996](#)). These qualities are sought to influence the voting choice of the

electorates.

([Lee, 2001](#)) noted that a candidate's incumbency has a significant causal effect of raising the probability of subsequent electoral success. This success of the incumbent can be attributed to voters' valuation of politician's experience. Also, the role of name recall can be attributed to voters' preference on incumbent officials (Byrne & Pueschel, 1974). The findings of ([Hazarika, 2015](#)) for example, revealed that candidates' political experience has strongly influence Indian electorates. He noted that candidates who have previously held political positions are likely to be well known in the constituency from their history of solving problems in office ([Hazarika, 2015](#)).

There is evidence that leaders' level of education has a positive effect on governance outcomes, thereby educational background has been largely looked into by voters. The study of ([Hossain et al., 2017](#)), for example, found out that candidates' qualifications, especially their educational attainment, had the highest effect on voting decisions among constituents in the local areas of Bangladesh.

The study of ([Horiuchi et al., 2016](#)) however, revealed the discrepancy between voters' preferences and the actual attributes of politicians in Japan. Their results revealed that despite the fact that there are many elderly, celebrity, dynastic, and male politicians in Japan, voters do not appear to prefer older politicians or celebrities, and are indifferent with regard to dynastic family ties and gender. Furthermore, they found that these preferences are consistent regardless of whether voters consider the different electoral system contexts of the mixed-member bicameral parliament ([Horiuchi et al., 2016](#)).

Further, the increasing influence of mass media has changed the opportunities for candidates to communicate with voters. This trajectory of change has been in the direction of focusing the public's attention on candidate profiles and personalities, above and beyond their policy platforms ([Lau & Redlawsk, 2006](#) as cited in [McAllister, 2016](#)). It also enabled candidates to rely

less on their party affiliation for support and more on their personal appeals and images conveyed through the electronic media ([McAllister, 2016](#)). Also, ([Biswas et al., 2014](#)) found that news and other relevant contents in social media about certain candidates posed a significant influence to the voters in assessing the personal qualities of the candidates.

This study hypothesizes that:

H3: Candidate orientation is associated with the respondents' voting preferences.

PRE-ELECTION SURVEYS AND VOTING

Pre-election polls typically survey a random sample of eligible or likely voters, and then generate population-level estimates by taking a weighted average of responses, where the weights are designed to correct for known differences between sample and population ([Voss et. al, 1995](#) as cited in [Mehr et al., 2016](#)). ([Blais et al., 2002](#)) noted that polls have an impact on expectations about the outcome of the election, and is potentially important for understanding how voters decide which candidates and parties to vote for in elections. Given that people tend to favor and conform to strong groups, one of the best metrics for deciding which political groups are gaining in strength are election polls ([Dahlgaard et al., 2017](#)).

The work of ([Blais et al., 2002](#)) argues for the influence of pre-election surveys to the voting preferences of the voters. They used the concepts “strategic vote” and the “contagion effect” to explain the association of voter’s voting decisions and election polls. Strategic voting refers to the voters’ preference for a party or candidate that shows a positive standing in the election race (through pre-election poll), even if it is not personally motivated by the intention to affect the election outcome. Contagion effect takes a similar action with the latter; however, it assumes that voters evaluate leading candidates in pre-election polls and have positive outlook on them over those lagging behind on the assumption that these candidates perform better than other candidates

simply because people rated the candidate better than others ([Blais et al., 2002](#)).

Another factor is the “underdog effect” of pre-election polls on voting. This refers to the tendency for voters to be attracted to the trailing candidates in the pre-election polls ([Michniewicz and Vandello, 2013](#)). ([Dahlgaard et al, 2017](#)) described this as “sympathy votes” from the electorate to parties or candidates that are set to decline in a poll. Similarly, recent studies have explored the importance of how polls influence vote choice with causal designs and in new contexts. These studies all confirm “bandwagon effects” in the Netherlands, France, Austria, Germany, and Denmark ([Dahlgaard et al., 2017](#); [Stolwijk et al. 2016](#); [Van der Meer et al. 2016](#); [Morton et al. 2015](#); [Meffert et al. 2011](#)).

The fourth hypothesis of this study is thus stated:

H4: Pre-election surveys is positively associated with the respondents’ voting preferences.

RESEARCH MODEL

Figure 1 below shows the hypothesized relationships of the variables under study. The respondents’ party identification, issue orientation and candidate orientation, as well as pre-election surveys are posed as independent variables in determining their voting preferences in the 2019 Philippine senatorial elections (dependent variable).

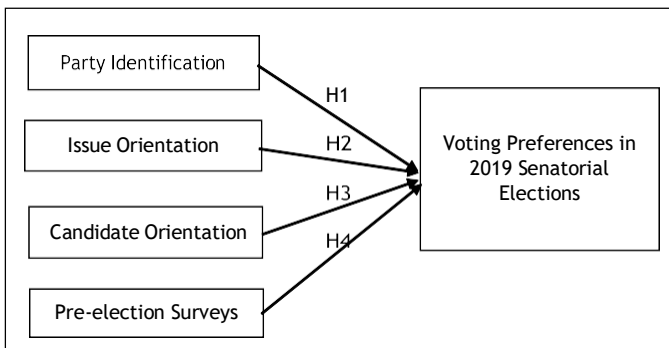


FIGURE 1. RESEARCH MODEL SHOWING HYPOTHESIZED RELATIONSHIPS

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a quantitative approach in examining the variables associated with the voting preferences of youth-voters in the 2019 Senatorial Election. The research population is the youth voters of Iligan City, Philippines. A total of 210 respondents ($N=210$) were selected using purposive sampling, due to time and financial constraints. Survey research method was utilized for gathering of data from the respondents. The respondents were asked to state their level of agreement with the indicators of the constructs on a five-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed quantitatively through structural equation modeling, path analysis and confirmatory factor analysis statistical tools.

Before the actual gathering of data, the survey questionnaire was subjected to a pilot-testing. This was necessary to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs which is determined by the coefficient of Cronbach’s alpha. According to (Nunally, 1978), the minimum Cronbach’s alpha values should be greater than 0.70 to indicate reliability of the instrument. Presented below in Table 1 is the result of the reliability analysis for the pilot-test which was administered to selected thirty (30) respondents.

TABLE 1. PILOT-TEST RELIABILITY ANALYSIS OF CONSTRUCTS (N=30)

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach’s alpha α	Reliability Type
Party Identification	4	.864	High
Issue Orientation	4	.956	High
Candidate Orientation	4	.914	High
Pre-election Surveys	4	.797	High
Voting Preference	7	.785	High

The result shows that the constructs are reliable and valid given that the Cronbach’s alpha values exceed the minimum. After the questionnaire was finalized, actual gathering of data was conducted.

RESULT

This part presents the results of analysis of the data collected from the study sample. Quantitative analysis was done through a licensed version of IBM SPSS (version 20) and IBM SPSS AMOS (version 25).

TABLE 2. MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION FOR ITEMS IN THE MODEL (N=210)

Constructs	Item	Mean	SD
Party Identification	PI1	3.1524	1.18427
	PI2	2.8571	1.16100
	PI3	2.6762	1.03522
	PI4	2.4952	1.03641
Issue Orientation	IO1	4.4667	.67868
	IO2	4.3810	.67606
	IO3	4.4524	.67073
	IO4	4.7571	3.55720
Candidate Orientation	CO1	4.2048	.85894
	CO2	3.6571	1.02904
	CO3	4.2333	.82301
	CO4	4.1762	.96464
Pre-Election Surveys	PES1	3.6190	1.07944
	PES2	3.5238	1.04075
	PES3	3.3000	.96865
	PES4	2.6667	.87678
Voting Preferences	VP1	3.2381	1.14936
	VP2	3.0524	.89235
	VP3	3.4095	.98501
	VP4	4.3286	.75877
	VP5	2.2954	.99206
	VP6	2.8619	.89388
	VP7	2.5381	.87549

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Indicated in Table 2 above are the mean and standard deviation (SD) of the items or indicators for the constructs in the research model. Mean values for party identification (PI), pre-election surveys (PES), and voting preferences (VP), except for VP4, as well as item CO2 for candidate orientation (CO), were above two, which suggests that there is a general disagreement on the indicators. The mean values for issue orientation (IO) and candidate orientation (except for CO2) were higher than four, indicating a general positive response on the indicators.

However, this does not mean that other indicator statements did not receive positive responses since it only shows the multileveled nature of response coming from the respondents. The standard deviation for the construct items ranges from .6703 to 3.5572.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY ANALYSIS

The findings in Table 3 below show the results of the reliability analysis applying Cronbach’s alpha, which signifies the internal consistency of indicator items that measure the same construct. (Nunnally, 1978) considers a minimum Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.70 to indicate reliability and validity of constructs. As reported below, the alpha values of the constructs range from .720 to .953, which means that all constructs have shown high reliability level.

TABLE 3. RELIABILITY ANALYSIS OF CONSTRUCTS (N=210)

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach’s alpha α	Reliability Type
Party Identification	4	.865	High
Issue Orientation	4	.953	High
Candidate Orientation	4	.913	High
Pre-election Surveys	4	.815	High
Voting Preference	7	.720	High

The covariance estimates between pairs of variables in the model determines the discriminant validity of the variables (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The square root of the average variance extracted should be greater than the covariance between a pair of variables to indicate that a variable is different from other variables (Barclay and Smith, 1997). For example, the covariance between PES and CO is 1.761, which is less than the square root of average variance extracted for PES (10.126) and CO (7.169). In other words, PES is different from CO, hence, there is a discriminant validity between both variables. As shown in Table 4, all variables of the model passed this test.

TABLE 4. COVARIANCES OF VARIABLES

Variable	PES	CO	IO	PI	VP
PES	10.126				
CO	1.761	7.169			
IO	1.418	1.904	18.025		
PI	4.794	1.699	.966	13.872	
VP	4.659	.708	1.125	4.745	16.133

STRUCTURAL MODEL TEST

Table 5 below summarizes the model fit test. The structural model fit was tested by calculating model fit estimates by means of AMOS and reporting the following fit indices: incremental fit index [IFI ([Bollen, 1989](#))]; comparative fit index [CFI ([Bentler, 1990](#))]; goodness-of-fit-index [GFI ([Arbuckle, 2016](#))]; and the root mean square residual [RMR ([Arbuckle, 2016](#))]. Results show that the model values have exceed the recommended values, which means that the research model passed all fit indices.

TABLE 5. MODEL FIT RESULTS

Index	Recommended value	Model Value
Incremental fit index (IFI)	≥ 0.900	1.000
Comparative fit index (CFI)	≥ 0.900	1.000
Goodness-of-fit index (GFI)	≥ 0.950	1.000
Root mean square residual (RMR)	≤ 0.04	.000

HYPOTHESIS TESTING: THE INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT VARIABLES

In assessing the relationship between hypothetical constructs, path coefficients or regression weights should exceed .100 to account for a certain impact within the structural model ([Urbach & Ahlemann, 2010](#)). Furthermore, path coefficients or regression weights, either positive (in the expected direction) or negative, should be significant at least at the 0.05 level ([Urbach and Ahlemann, 2010](#); [Henseler et al., 2009](#)). The coefficient of determination (R^2) values of approximately 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 are considered as substantial, moderate and weak, respectively,

in terms of the level of explanatory power (Chin, 1998). Table 6 below presents this analysis.

TABLE 6. REGRESSION WEIGHTS AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Relationship	Standard Regression Weight	Hypothesis Supported?	Significance (p)
PI → VP	.210	Yes	<0.001
IO → VP	.030	No	ns
CO → VP	-.034	No	ns
PES → VP	.291	Yes	<0.001
R ² (VP)	.93		

Legend: ns = not significant

Findings shown above reveal that the independent variables party identification (PI) and pre-election surveys (PES) had impact on voting preference (VP), with regression weight values of .210 and .291, respectively. These are significant at less than 0.001. These findings supported the hypotheses that party identification and pre-election surveys are positively associated with voting preference.

The regression weight value for issue orientation (IO) did not exceed .100, which means that it is less associated with VP. Candidate orientation (CO) is revealed to be the least associated with VP given that it had negative regression weight value. This does not mean however that IO and CO do not impact the dependent variable, but suggests that PI and PES had more impact compared to the two aforementioned variables.

TABLE 7. SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES TESTING RESULTS

HYPOTHESIS	RESULT
H ₁ Party identification is positively associated with the respondents' voting preferences	Accepted
H ₂ Issue orientation is positively associated with the respondent's voting preferences.	Rejected
H ₃ Candidate orientation is positively associated with the respondent's voting preferences.	Rejected
H ₄ Pre-election survey is positively associated with the respondent's voting preferences.	Accepted

The result on the R^2 value of VP, which is .93, suggests that the independent variables account for about 93% of the variance in VP. In other words, the independent variables in the model can substantially explain 93% of the VP, and the remaining 7% can be explained by other variables.

Table 7 shows the summary of hypotheses testing for the associations between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The hypotheses that issue orientation (IO) and candidate orientation (CO) are positively associated with voting preference are rejected because the standard regression weights did not reach the required value, which is .100. On the other hand, the hypotheses that party identification (PI) and pre-election surveys (PES) are positively associated with voting preference are accepted because the regression weight values exceed the required value of .100, and both have very high significance levels, which are at <0.001 . Thus, the study shows that party identification and pre-election surveys are determinant factors for the youth-voters' voting preference in the 2019 senatorial election.

DISCUSSION

This research analyzed the extent to which party identification, issue orientation, candidate orientation, and preelection surveys are associated with the youth-voters' voting preference in the 2019 Philippine senatorial election. Results of the study supported the hypotheses that party identification and preelection surveys are positively associated with the voting preferences of the respondents, while issue orientation and candidate orientation appear to have insignificant impact on voting preference.

In relation to the theories applied in the study, this finding supports only one of the assumptions of Fishbein and Combs (1975) that an individual's decision to vote for a candidate can be based on the latter's affiliation to a political party. This also supports the contentions of other scholars who claimed that party identification is a pivotal factor in an individual's voting choice ([Garzia and Viotti, 2013](#); [Liu, 2007](#); [Lachat, 2006](#); [Yu, 2004](#); [Aiba,](#)

[2002](#); [Ranney, 1999](#); [Miller, 1991](#); [Meier, 1975](#); [Campbell et.al, 1954](#)).

Pre-election survey also has significant influence to the voting preference of the voters in the 2019 senatorial election. This supports the work of ([Blais et.al, 2002](#)) which argues that pre-election surveys are influential to the voting preferences of voters. The findings also show that candidates who have positive standing in pre-election surveys are more preferable compared to those who do not perform well. This corroborates the contentions of other scholars about the contagion or bandwagon effect of pre-election surveys ([Donsbach, 2001](#); [Marsh, 1985](#); [Simon, 1954](#)).

Meanwhile, the finding that candidate orientation is least associated with voting preferences refutes the claims of previous studies which reject candidates' party affiliation and rather explain candidate-centered factors as pivotal determinant in explaining the voting preferences of the Filipinos ([Murcia and Bolo, 2016](#); [Calda, 2016](#); [David and Legara, 2015](#); [Gallardo, 2015](#); [Centeno, 2010](#); [Ufen, 2008](#)).

Looking into the Philippine electoral environment at present, it can be construed that the preference is based on the candidate's affiliation with pro-administration or opposition parties. Moreover, pre-election surveys are influential to the youth-voters' preference. This is apparently associated to the fact that results of preelection surveys are regularly available to the public especially that they have been mainstreamed in all media outlets, especially in social media, and have been regularly conducted and published within the campaign period. Thus, they could potentially create a bandwagon effect towards the voters. On the whole, the outcome of the study has departed from the prevailing electoral trend, as can be found in the existing literature, where Filipino voting preference is explained by candidate personality-centered factors.

CONCLUSION

In the context of this study's findings, the candidate's political alignment to a political party or parties that is/are supportive of an administration which is gaining popular support from the majority is favored by youth voters. The candidates' secure positive standing in pre-election surveys is likewise preferred. Needless to say, a candidate's stand or position on key issues of the country as well as their personal background are also important because the electorate is also composed of non-youth voters.

While it is important to look into the candidate's party affiliation and status in pre-election surveys in voting, these factors do not guarantee a candidate's winnability in an election, nor do these ensure competence and ability in the performance of duties and functions. On the part of the voters, it is equally important to apply an issue-based choice and evaluate candidate's qualities and background during elections.

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