

Presidential Candidates as Viewed by First Time Voters and Its Impact in Choosing a Candidate

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how first-time voters at the University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines perceived the 2016 presidential candidates and how these perceptions influenced their candidate preferences. Specifically, it analyzed respondents' demographic profiles (age and gender), perceptions of candidates' popularity and political literacy, candidate ranking, and the extent to which these factors shaped voting decisions. A descriptive-survey research design was employed, with data gathered from 103 first-time voters using purposive sampling. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis were used to interpret the data. Findings revealed that most respondents were aged 18–19, indicating early-stage electoral participation, with a nearly balanced gender distribution. Among the candidates, Rodrigo Duterte was consistently perceived as both the most popular and politically literate, and he likewise ranked highest in voter preference. Results further showed that political literacy had a stronger influence on candidate evaluation than popularity in specific cases, although emotional appeal and media visibility remained significant factors in shaping perceptions. Regression analysis indicated that voter preferences were not uniformly determined by a single factor but were instead influenced by an interaction of cognitive and affective dimensions. The study concludes that first-time voters' electoral decisions are shaped by both informational and emotional influences, highlighting the need to strengthen civic education and media literacy programs to promote more informed democratic participation.

Keywords: First-time voters; political literacy; candidate perception; popularity; electoral behavior

INTRODUCTION

As the Philippines prepares for forthcoming national elections, it is of high value to look back and assess how first-time voters perceive presidential candidates is increasingly important. Under the country's democratic system, leadership roles are decided by popular vote via the Commission on Elections, granting every citizen aged 18 and above the right to vote. First-time voters, therefore, represent a pivotal segment of the electorate—bringing diverse cultural backgrounds, educational experiences, community values, and varying exposure to media and digital platforms. These factors shape how they evaluate candidates. Recent empirical research demonstrates that social media usage significantly influences youth political attitudes and behaviour in the Philippines (Boulianne, 2020; Vitak et al., 2011). Moreover, younger voters—often in late adolescence or early adulthood—exhibit heightened emotional reactivity and are still forming political identities (Dayrit et al., 2022).

Given these emerging patterns among young voters, such dynamics may affect how first-time voters interpret candidate messaging and ultimately make electoral choices, which in turn influences the quality of governance when those elected assume office. While individuals may choose candidates aligned with their interests or identities (Curato, 2017), many young voters base their decisions more on popularity or celebrity than policy competence. Therefore, this study investigates how presidential candidates in the Philippines are viewed by first-time voters and whether these perceptions significantly affect their voting preferences.

To better understand these observed voting behaviors, this study is anchored on three key theories that explain voter perception and decision-making: The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), Social Identity Theory (SIT), and Rational Choice Theory (RCT). According to UGT (Katz et al., 1973), individuals actively use media to fulfill specific needs such as information, entertainment, and social interaction. In the context of politics, young voters often rely on digital and social media platforms to obtain political knowledge, evaluate candidates, and express opinions. Recent findings affirm that social media consumption enhances democratic literacy among first-time voters, directly shaping their political perceptions and voting intentions (Boulianne, 2020).

Expanding on these theoretical perspectives, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) further suggests that individuals categorize themselves into social groups that influence their political leanings. For first-time voters, identification with youth movements, political parties, or social causes (e.g., gender equality, environmental sustainability) can influence candidate preference (Curato, 2017).

Lastly, Rational Choice Theory (Downs, 1957) posits that voters make calculated decisions by weighing the costs and benefits of supporting a candidate. However, research indicates that emotional and social factors often override rational assessment, particularly among younger voters whose decision-making is still developing (Dayrit et al., 2022).

Taken together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing how perceptions, emotions, and social influences shape first-time voters' choices of presidential candidates.

Guided by these theoretical foundations, the above theories will guide this research inquiry in its aims to determine the following: 1) the profile of the respondents in terms of age and gender; 2) the presidential candidates viewed by first-time voters in terms of popularity and political literacy; 3) how the presidential candidates are ranked by the respondents based on their preference of candidate; and 4) the impact in choosing a candidate for presidency among first-time voters.

In this context, voter demographics such as age and gender play a crucial role in understanding political engagement, perception, and decision-making during elections. In the Philippines, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC, 2023) reported that nearly 52% of registered voters in the 2022 national elections were aged 18–30, classifying them as young or first-time voters. This growing segment represents a powerful political force that can influence electoral outcomes.

Supporting this demographic trend, youth voters often exhibit strong curiosity toward political issues but lack sustained political literacy, making their engagement situational and emotion-driven (Boulianne, 2020). Gender also intersects with political participation patterns. Dayrit, Albao, and Cleofas (2022) found that Filipino female youth tend to engage more in online political discourse compared to males, reflecting broader social trends in digital communication and civic expression.

Beyond the local context, in a global perspective, studies emphasize that young voters' political involvement is not only determined by age but also by their digital exposure and emotional maturity—factors that affect how they perceive leadership and political competence (Pew Research Center, 2021). Consequently, understanding these demographic profiles provides the basis for analyzing how perceptions differ among voter groups.

One key factor influencing these perceptions is popularity, which remains a significant driver of voter perception in personality-driven democracies like the Philippines. Cruz and Tusalem (2023) found that Filipino voters often associate charisma, familiarity, and mass appeal with leadership competence. This is consistent with the “personality politics” culture that dominates national elections. Albarece, Montano, and Dela Cruz (2023) also observed that social media exposure amplifies candidates' popularity, especially when messages resonate emotionally with youth audiences.

However, popularity does not necessarily translate to political literacy or informed decision-making. Research indicates that young voters' heavy reliance on social media for political information exposes them to misinformation and biased narratives, which can distort perceptions of candidates' true qualifications (Tufekci, 2017). Similarly, studies highlight that although digital engagement enhances awareness, it often fosters "performative politics," where attention is based on viral content rather than policy comprehension (Boulianne, 2020).

In contrast, exposure to credible online sources and civic education can enhance political literacy among first-time voters, allowing them to differentiate between a candidate's popularity and actual competence (Boulianne, 2020). Thus, this interplay between emotional appeal and rational understanding defines how young Filipinos view presidential candidates.

As a result, candidate ranking reflects the culmination of voters' perceptions, values, and exposure to political information. First-time voters often prioritize candidates who project authenticity and alignment with their personal beliefs (Curato, 2017).

Moreover, political branding also strongly influences preference formation. Digital platforms personalize political content to reinforce favorable impressions of preferred candidates, subtly shaping ranking and preference without voters' full awareness (Tufekci, 2017). Meanwhile, Albarece et al. (2023) emphasized that voters' exposure to emotionally resonant campaign narratives can override critical evaluation, leading to popularity-based ranking rather than evidence-based selection.

Therefore, this suggests that voters' ranking preferences are the outcome of an interaction between media exposure, emotional identification, and limited political experience—factors especially pronounced among first-time voters. Ultimately, the final voting decision of first-time voters is a function of their perceptions, literacy, and exposure to political narratives. According to Rational Choice Theory (Downs, 1957), individuals vote to maximize personal benefit, yet research shows that first-time voters' decisions are often guided by emotional rather than rational factors (Dayrit et al., 2022).

In the Philippine setting, Cruz and Tusalem (2023) observed that candidate choice is frequently influenced by media framing, emotional appeal, and family preferences. Furthermore, Dayrit et al. (2022) noted that peer networks and online communities significantly influence political opinions and final voting behavior.

From a psychological lens, Libed and Borres (2018) described young voters as being in a stage of emotional development where social belonging and identity formation strongly shape decision-making. These findings suggest that while first-time voters exercise political rights actively, their candidate choices often stem from affective rather than cognitive evaluations—a trend with implications for the quality of democratic participation.

In light of these preceding discussions, however, despite the growing body of literature on youth political behavior, limited studies have comprehensively examined how first-time voters in the Philippine context integrate perceptions of candidate popularity, political literacy, and media exposure in forming candidate rankings and final voting decisions. Moreover, the interaction between emotional and rational decision-making, particularly in the digital age, remains underexplored. Existing studies often focus on isolated variables such as social media influence, demographic characteristics, or political attitudes, without providing a holistic analysis of how these factors collectively shape electoral choices.

Additionally, there is a lack of updated empirical evidence (2023–2026) that captures the evolving role of digital platforms and algorithm-driven content in influencing first-time voters' preferences. Thus, this study aims to address these gaps by offering an integrated and context-specific analysis of the factors that influence how first-time voters perceive presidential candidates and how these perceptions ultimately affect their voting decisions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a **descriptive research design** to assess how first-time voters perceive presidential candidates and how such perceptions influence their voting preferences. The descriptive approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for the systematic presentation and interpretation of data gathered from respondents to describe trends, attitudes, and perceptions within a defined population.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at the **University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines (USTP)**, Cagayan de Oro City. The participants were alumni of the university, who during the 2016 election were of legal voting age and who were identified as **first-time voters**. Respondents were drawn from the following academic units: the **College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)**, **College of Engineering and Architecture (CEA)**, **College of Industrial and Information Technology (CIIT)**, and the **College of Policy Studies, Education, and Management (CPSEM)**.

Sampling Procedure

A **purposive sampling technique** was utilized to select respondents who met the inclusion criteria of being (a) 18 years old and above during the Philippine scheduled election in 2016, and (b) registered first-time voters. This sampling approach ensured that participants possessed the necessary characteristics relevant to the study's objectives.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal permission was secured from the **Student Affairs and Welfare Office (SAWO)** of USTP. Upon approval, the researchers distributed a structured survey questionnaire to the identified participants. The purpose of the study was clearly explained, and respondents were assured of the **confidentiality and voluntary nature** of their participation.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Data gathered were organized, tabulated, and analyzed using **descriptive statistics**, including **frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation**, to interpret respondents' demographic profiles and perception levels. These statistical tools were employed to determine how first-time voters view presidential candidates in terms of **popularity and political literacy**, as well as to analyze the general trends in candidate preference and perceived impact on voting decisions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of first-time voters based on age. The results indicate that the majority of respondents, **59.85%**, belong to the **18–19 years old** age group.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents' Age

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage
18 - 19	82	59.85
20 - 21	41	29.93

22 - 23	14	10.22
	137	100.00

Results show that the majority of first-time voters belong to the 18–19 age group (59.85%), indicating that most respondents were in the early stage of voting eligibility. This reflects demographic patterns in youth voter participation reported by the Philippine Statistics Authority (2023), which highlights that young adults comprise a large portion of first-time voters. Younger voters are often characterized by idealism and curiosity toward political participation (Boulianne, 2020). This demographic tendency suggests increasing civic engagement among youth as they transition into electoral participation.

Table 2 presents the percentage distribution of respondents by gender. The results reveal that **male respondents constitute the majority at 53.28%**, while **female respondents account for 46.72%**.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents' Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	73	53.28
Female	64	46.72
TOTAL	137	100.00

The distribution indicates that male respondents comprise 53.28%, slightly higher than females at 46.72%. This near gender parity reflects balanced participation in electoral engagement, consistent with Commission on Elections (2023) voter participation reports. Gender diversity in political engagement contributes to more inclusive political discourse and decision-making (Krook & Norris, 2014), implying that both genders actively participate in shaping political perceptions.

Table 3 presents the distribution of respondents' perceptions of the 2016 presidential candidates in terms of **popularity**. Results show that all candidates were generally perceived as popular among first-time voters. Among them, **Rodrigo Duterte and Grace Poe** emerged as the most popular, with a combined percentage within the “popular” to “most popular” range reaching **98.54%**. **Mar Roxas** followed with a popularity rating of **95.63%**, while **Jejomar Binay** obtained **91.54%**. The **least popular** candidate, according to respondents, was **Miriam Defensor-Santiago**, with **65.70%**.

The corresponding mean scores further support these findings, ranking **Duterte** as the most popular (1st), followed by **Poe** (2nd), **Roxas** (3rd), **Binay** (4th), and **Santiago** (5th). These results suggest that while all candidates maintained significant public recognition, Duterte and Poe achieved the strongest resonance among first-time voters.

Table 3: Distribution of the Respondents' Perception of the 2016 Presidential Candidates in terms of Popularity

	Poe		Roxas		Duterte		Binay		Santiago	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Most Popular 4.50 – 5.00	10	7.30	2	1.46	31	22.63	0	0.00	2	1.46
More Popular 3.50 – 4.49	94	68.61	65	47.45	86	62.77	56	40.88	45	32.85
Popular 2.50 – 3.49	31	22.63	64	46.72	18	13.14	69	50.36	43	31.39
Least Popular 1.50 – 2.49	2	1.46	6	4.38	1	0.73	12	8.76	29	21.17

Not Popular1.00 – 1.49	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.73	0	0.00	18	13.14
	137	100.00	137	100.00	137	100.00	137	100.00	137	100.00

Indicators	2016 Presidential Candidates				
	Grace Poe	Mar Roxas	Rodrigo Duterte	Jejomar Binay	Miriam Defensor-Santiago
1. Most liked and admired by people.	3.74	2.99	4.54	2.95	2.63
2. Most supported by people (ex. Poll survey results).	4.01	3.15	4.56	2.79	2.65
3. Most talked about due to controversies.	3.55	3.90	4.04	3.91	2.50
4. Most followed by people in news and social media.	3.57	3.31	4.53	3.07	2.80
5. Who has the most number of political issues?	3.31	3.98	3.53	4.35	2.44
6. Most pleasing personality.	4.40	2.96	3.30	2.77	3.35
7. Most exposed in media (Television and Social Media).	4.11	3.75	4.18	3.43	2.89
8. Most dominant candidate in your family's political discussion.	3.99	3.47	3.89	3.24	3.00
9. Most dominant candidate in your colleagues' political discussion.	3.82	3.72	4.19	3.28	3.28
OVERALL MEAN	3.83	3.47	4.08	3.31	2.84
VERBAL DESCRIPTION	More Popular	Popular	More Popular	Popular	Popular
RANK	2	3	1	4	5

Findings show that all 2016 presidential candidates were generally perceived as popular, though to varying degrees. Rodrigo Duterte and Grace Poe received the highest popularity ratings. This pattern aligns with studies showing that candidate visibility and media exposure strongly influence perceived popularity (Boulianne, 2020; Tufekci, 2017). Populist appeal and strong media framing significantly shape youth voter preferences (Mudde, 2007). The results suggest that emotional resonance and media presence play a key role in political perception formation.

Table 4 presents the distribution of respondents' perceptions of the 2016 presidential candidates in terms of political literacy. Results indicate that all candidates were generally perceived as politically literate by first-time voters. Among them, *Duterte* emerged as the most politically literate, with a combined percentage of 97.81% within the "literate" to "most literate" range. *Poe* and *Santiago* followed closely, both receiving a literacy rating of 92.70%, while *Roxas* obtained 89.78%. The candidate perceived as least politically literate was *Binay*, with 81.02%.

The corresponding mean scores reinforce these results, ranking Duterte first, followed by Santiago (2nd), Poe (3rd), Roxas (4th), and Binay (5th). These findings suggest that first-time voters tend to associate political literacy with leadership decisiveness and communication effectiveness, reflecting how perceived competence shapes their candidate evaluations.

Table 4: Distribution of the Respondents' Perception of the 2016 Presidential Candidates in terms of Political Literacy

Range / Candidates	Poe		Roxas		Duterte		Binay		Santiago	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Most Literate 4.50 – 5.00	5	3.65	5	3.65	72	52.55	7	5.11	18	13.14
More Literate 3.50 – 4.49	87	63.50	77	56.20	47	34.31	79	57.66	85	62.04
Literate 2.50 – 3.49	35	25.55	41	29.93	15	10.95	25	18.25	24	17.52
Least Literate 1.50 – 2.49	8	5.84	13	9.49	2.00	1.46	20	14.60	8	5.84
Not Literate 1.00 – 1.49	2	1.46	1	0.73	1.00	0.73	6	4.38	2	1.46
	137.00	100.00	137.00	100.00	137.00	100.00	137.00	100.00	137.00	100.00

Statements/Indicators	2016 Presidential Candidates				
	Grace Poe	Mar Roxas	Rodrigo Duterte	Jejomar Binay	Miriam Defensor- Santiago
1. Appropriate educational background for public service	4.12	3.24	4.20	3.45	4.17
2. Has the basic understanding with how the government works	3.78	3.58	4.31	3.34	4.06
3. Awareness of the issues facing the society	3.91	3.66	4.38	3.61	3.87
4. Critical thinking ability to be able to evaluate different point of views	3.97	3.54	4.30	3.34	3.81
5. Political experience and involvement (ex. Govt service, projects involvement, etc.)	3.29	3.78	4.29	3.80	3.91
6. Recognitions/awards received during his/her service in Government	3.42	3.58	4.36	3.26	3.67
7. Length in Government service.	2.97	3.68	4.29	3.69	3.80
8. Effective decision-maker regarding in Government service.	3.72	3.48	4.43	3.34	3.94

9. Has a knowledge in Government System.	3.72	3.69	4.35	3.59	4.13
10. Has a capacity in coping well the crisis facing during his/her tenure ship.	3.73	3.54	4.39	3.53	3.88
11. Which is most appealing platform of the running candidates.	4.00	3.57	4.46	3.29	3.57
12. Most number of implemented projects and fulfillments.	3.25	3.51	4.39	3.72	3.40
OVERALL MEAN	3.66	3.57	4.35	3.50	3.85
VERBAL DESCRIPTION	More literate	More literate	More Literate	More literate	More literate
RANK	3	4	1	5	2

First-time voters perceived all candidates as politically literate, with Duterte receiving the highest rating. These findings indicate that voters often equate political literacy with perceived leadership strength rather than formal policy knowledge. Research shows that political competence is frequently inferred from communication style and perceived authenticity (Galston, 2001; Dalton, 2016). Youth voters particularly evaluate leadership through relatability and media exposure rather than technical credentials (Boulianne, 2020).

Table 5 presents the ranking of the 2016 presidential candidates as perceived by the respondents. **Duterte** received the highest ranking with a score of **1.75**, followed by **Poe** at **2.47**. **Santiago** was ranked third, **Roxas** fourth, while **Binay** received the lowest ranking from the respondents.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents' Ranking of 2016 Presidential Candidates

2016 Presidential Candidates	Overall Mean Rank	Final Ranking
Grace Poe	2.47	2 nd
Mar Roxas	3.75	4 th
Rodrigo Duterte	1.75	1 st
Jejomar Binay	3.82	5 th
Miriam Defensor-Santiago	3.19	3 rd

Respondents ranked Duterte as their top choice, followed by Poe, Santiago, Roxas, and Binay. This reflects heuristic-based decision-making, where voters rely on mental shortcuts such as personality and media visibility (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Studies confirm that candidate image and perceived decisiveness strongly influence electoral preference (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004). Emotional and cognitive shortcuts are especially prevalent among first-time voters (Jennings & Niemi, 2015).

Table 6 shows that respondents' preferences for the 2016 presidential candidates have limited but notable effects on how they rank first-time voters based on **popularity** and **political literacy**. Only two candidates show significant relationships.

For **Grace Poe**, preference for her candidacy significantly predicts respondents' emphasis on political literacy ($t = -2.27$, $p = .025$), indicating that her supporters value informed and knowledgeable first-time voters. Her supporters, however, do not differ in how they rate popularity ($p = .568$). For **Mar Roxas**, preference significantly predicts lower importance placed on popularity ($t = -2.24$, $p = .027$), suggesting that his supporters favor

substance over popularity when evaluating new voters. No significant effect was found for political literacy ($p = .293$).

Preferences for **Rodrigo Duterte**, **Jejomar Binay**, and **Miriam Defensor-Santiago** do not significantly influence respondents' rankings on either criterion, indicating no clear pattern among their supporters. Overall, only supporters of Poe and Roxas show value-based expectations of first-time voters, particularly emphasizing **political literacy** (Poe supporters) and **devaluing popularity** (Roxas supporters).

Table 6 :Regression Analysis of the Impact of Respondents' Preference of Presidential Candidates on their Ranking of First Time Voters

2016 Presidential Candidates	Voter's Preference of 2016 Presidential Candidates					
	Popularity			Political Literacy		
	T-value	P-value	Conclusion	T-value	P-value	Conclusion
Grace Poe	0.57	0.568	Not Significant	-2.27	0.025*	Significant
Mar Roxas	-2.24	0.027*	Significant	1.06	0.293	Not Significant
Rodrigo Duterte	0.20	0.842	Not Significant	-0.80	0.424	Not Significant
Jejomar Binay	-0.03	0.973	Not Significant	-1.47	0.144	Not Significant
Miriam Defensor-Santiago	-1.08	0.283	Not Significant	-1.74	0.083	Not Significant

*significant at $p < 0.05$

Regression results indicate that for Grace Poe, political literacy had a stronger effect on her rank than popularity ($p = 0.025$), while for Mar Roxas, popularity was the more significant predictor ($p = 0.027$). Results show that only supporters of Grace Poe and Mar Roxas exhibit significant patterns in evaluating first-time voters, particularly regarding political literacy and popularity. This suggests that voter preferences influence evaluative standards of political competence.

Studies show that politically informed voters tend to prioritize civic knowledge and informed participation (Aldrich et al., 2018; Galston, 2001). Meanwhile, voters favoring administrative or technocratic leadership tend to prioritize competence over charisma (Esaiasson & Holmberg, 1996; Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2013).

For populist-oriented candidates, no significant pattern was observed, which aligns with research showing that populist support is often driven by emotional, identity-based, and anti-establishment motivations rather than structured evaluation criteria (Mudde, 2007; Teehankee, 2016).

Overall, the findings reflect that voter expectations are shaped by political orientation, media influence, and cognitive framing processes (Dalton, 2016; Bandura, 1986).

CONCLUSION

This study examined how first-time voters from the University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines perceive presidential candidates in terms of popularity and political literacy, and how these perceptions influence candidate preference and ranking. Anchored in the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein

& Ajzen, 1975) and Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957), the findings reinforce the argument that voters' beliefs, attitudes, and interpretive frameworks significantly shape electoral behavior, particularly among individuals in their initial stage of voting participation.

The results indicate that the majority of respondents belong to the 18–19 age group, highlighting early adulthood as a critical phase for the formation of political identity, civic awareness, and evaluative judgment in electoral decision-making. The near-balanced gender distribution further suggests that first-time voter perspectives are not disproportionately shaped by a single demographic group, thereby reinforcing the representativeness of youth political engagement in the study context.

In terms of candidate perception, all presidential candidates were generally viewed as both popular and politically literate, although notable variations emerged in the intensity of these perceptions. Rodrigo Duterte consistently ranked highest in both popularity and perceived political literacy, followed by Grace Poe, Miriam Defensor-Santiago, Mar Roxas, and Jejomar Binay. This pattern suggests that first-time voters tend to associate leadership competence with visibility, decisiveness, and media prominence, reflecting the strong influence of mediated political communication in shaping cognitive evaluations.

The ranking of candidates further revealed that Rodrigo Duterte was the most preferred candidate among respondents, followed by Grace Poe and other contenders. This ordering indicates that candidate preference among first-time voters is largely influenced by heuristic evaluation processes, where emotional resonance, perceived strength of leadership, and familiarity play significant roles in shaping political choice.

Moreover, the regression findings suggest that political literacy has a more substantial influence on candidate evaluation than popularity for certain voter groups, particularly among supporters of candidates perceived as more policy-oriented. However, for other candidates, preferences were not significantly associated with either popularity or political literacy, indicating that electoral judgments are not uniformly structured but are instead shaped by varying combinations of cognitive, emotional, and contextual influences.

Overall, the study concludes that first-time voters' electoral behavior is shaped by an interaction of demographic characteristics, mediated political exposure, perceived popularity, and political literacy. While emotional appeal and media visibility remain influential, the findings suggest a gradual orientation toward competence-based evaluation among segments of young voters. This underscores the importance of strengthening political literacy and critical media awareness programs in higher education institutions to support the development of informed, reflective, and responsible democratic participation.

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