

Polling Perspectives: Factors Influencing the Voting Decision of Senior High School First-Time Voters

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ABSTRACT

First-time voters play a crucial role in shaping the democratic landscape, reflecting the evolving political awareness of the youth. This quantitative-descriptive study examined the factors influencing the voting decisions of first-time Senior High School voters at Dapa National High School (SY 2025–2026), focusing on peer influence, family influence, political party affiliation, media exposure, and school influence, as well as variations across age, sex, track, and socioeconomic status. A validated survey was administered to 253 respondents selected via stratified random sampling. Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson's r correlation. Results indicated that family income significantly influenced political party affiliation ($p = 0.019$), while media exposure positively correlated with party affiliation ($r = 0.247, p < 0.001$). A strong correlation between family and school influence ($r = 1.000, p < 0.001$) highlighted the complementary roles of home and education in civic formation. Findings suggest that socioeconomic status and media engagement significantly shape young voters' political orientations, emphasizing the need for enhanced media literacy, civic education, and family involvement to nurture informed and responsible first-time voters.

Keywords: First-time Voters, Political Engagement, Media Exposure, Socioeconomic Status, Civic Education

INTRODUCTION

Electoral participation is a fundamental element of citizenship, enabling individuals to shape their government and future. For Senior High School (SHS) students reaching the legal voting age, casting a ballot represents both a civic right and a personal responsibility. First-time voters, however, often face challenges navigating the voting process, as their decisions can be influenced by personal values, social networks, political affiliations, and digital media exposure. Despite the growing number of young voters, research on SHS first-time voters remains limited. Millennials and Gen Z now constitute a significant portion of the electorate—approximately 60.5 percent in the 2025 midterm elections (Commission on Elections [COMELEC], 2025)—yet their participation is inconsistent. Existing studies indicate that social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, play a central role in shaping youth political opinions (Reyes & Dizon, 2022), and that school-based civic education programs can enhance students' understanding of political processes (Alcantara et al., 2020). This study examines the factors influencing the voting decisions of SHS first-time voters, focusing on personal values, peer and family influences, political party affiliation, and digital exposure. Understanding these influences may inform strategies for civic education, helping to develop more informed, empowered, and responsible young voters.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Youth Voter Participation and First-Time Voters

Youth Participation Significantly Impacts Democratic Outcomes And Civic Engagement. In The May 2022 National Elections, Over 56% Of Registered Voters Were Aged 18–41, And The 2025 Midterm Elections

Recorded A Historic 81.65% Turnout, With Youth Participation Cited As A Key Factor (Celestial, 2022; Bayog, 2025). Shs First-Time Voters Face Challenges Due To Limited Political Experience. Many Rely On Family, Peers, Candidate Name Recognition, Or Social Media Trends When Selecting Candidates (Abiera Et Al., 2022; Arkorful Et Al., 2020). Developmental Factors, Including Socioemotional And Cognitive Maturity, Influence Susceptibility To Popularity Cues And Reward-Seeking Behaviors (Steinberg Et Al., 2015; Steinberg, 2020).

Personal and Sociodemographic Influences

Socioeconomic status (SES), education, age, gender, and religion have been shown to affect political engagement (Early, Smith, & Neupert, 2022; Nelson, 2023; CAWP, 2025). Higher SES and education levels are consistently associated with increased electoral participation, while gender and religion influence voting behavior differently across contexts. For example, women tend to vote more consistently, and religious frameworks shape civic engagement and political values (Callaway, n.d.; Siegel-Stechler, Hayat, & Medina, 2025). These findings underscore the importance of considering demographic variables when analyzing firsttime voters' decisions.

Family and Peer Influence

Family is a foundational influence in early political development. Parental political orientation, home discussions, and supportive parenting reinforce political awareness and party alignment (Truax, 2023; Bloem et al., 2025). Extended family, including siblings, contributes to political socialization (Levensen & Yndigegn, 2015). Peers influence political behavior contextually: social conformity can shape voting choices, but excessive peer pressure may limit independent judgment (Zainurin et al., 2023; Su, 2022). Peer effects are thus nuanced and dependent on social context. Media Exposure and Political Information Sources Digital media provides expanded access to political information but also spreads misinformation and polarizing content (Kenna & Hensley, 2019; Diaz Ruiz, 2025). Evaluative skills and media literacy improve discernment and ethical political engagement (Allam et al., 2021). Students with limited critical analysis skills rely on experience-based media use, underscoring the need for structured media literacy interventions (Talusán, 2019).

Media Exposure and Political Information Sources

Media exposure plays a crucial role in shaping youth political participation and perceptions. Traditional civic engagement, such as voting or party involvement, has declined among younger generations due to political distrust and alienation (Zagidullin et al., 2021). Consequently, social media has emerged as a central platform for political expression, offering spaces for discussion and mobilization beyond traditional structures (Kenna & Hensley, 2019; Omotayo & Folorunso, 2020). While these platforms amplify marginalized voices and promote activism (Moon & Bai, 2020), they also foster “slacktivism” and ideological echo chambers that hinder meaningful discourse (Arshad & Khurram, 2020; Albanna et al., 2022). Political information within digital ecosystems is shaped by algorithms, influencers, and memes that blur the line between information and persuasion. Diaz Ruiz (2025) noted that algorithmic amplification rewards emotionally charged content, while Le Pham Tra Mi et al. (2025) observed that memes simplify complex issues into shareable but polarizing messages. Media literacy thus becomes essential for young voters to assess credibility and resist misinformation. Students with stronger evaluative and fact-checking skills demonstrate more ethical political engagement (Allam et al., 2021), though many still rely on experience-based media use rather than critical analysis (Talusán, 2019). Ultimately, social media's influence on political behavior remains multifaceted—empowering yet prone to distortion.

School-Based and Institutional Influences

School-based civic education plays a crucial role in shaping youth political engagement by equipping students with knowledge, skills, and competencies Necessary for meaningful participation (alscher, ludewig, & mcelvany, 2022). teachers foster critical thinking and civic interest through interactive instruction, while experiential learning activities—such as service projects, peer discussions, and international initiatives—promote ethical behavior, respect for diversity, and active community involvement (mcfeeters, 2021).

Voter education programs in schools further reinforce political participation. andes et al. (2020) found that teaching students about voter registration and encouraging high school voting increased later civic engagement, although disparities exist across student groups. at the institutional level, initiatives like deped's pulse of the youth campaign, in collaboration with comelec, provide practical guidance on registration procedures and highlight the importance of youth suffrage (department of education, 2021). Together, these programs demonstrate that school-based civic education and institutional support complement family and media influences, preparing first-time voters to participate responsibly and knowledgeably in elections.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored in ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (tpb). voting intentions are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. family, peer, school, media, and political party influences are analyzed as external factors shaping behavioral intentions.

Empirical Linking Influencing Factors and Voting Preferences of Firsttime Voters

Family and media are consistently strong determinants of first-time voter behavior (abiera et al., 2022; zainurin et al., 2024). peer discussions provide support but are context-dependent (su, 2022). Developmental stage moderates family influence; younger adolescents rely more on parental guidance, whereas older adolescents show greater independence (janmaat & hoskins, 2022; erikson, 1968).

Research Gaps

1. Limited focus on local school-based first-time voters.
2. Interactions among family, media, peers, and school are underexplored.
3. Age-related dynamics in family influence are overlooked.
4. Media literacy and digital engagement effects are insufficiently studied.
5. Peer and school contributions require further examination.

This study addresses these gaps through primary data collection and quantitative analysis.

Research Objectives

The present study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. Identify factors influencing the voting decisions of first-time SHS voters at Dapa National High School.
2. Describe respondents' demographics: age, sex, SHS track, and socioeconomic status.
3. Examine the influence of peer, family, media, school, and political party factors.
4. Analyze relationships between demographics and voting decision factors.
5. Promote political awareness through civic education and youth engagement initiatives

Hypotheses

The study was guided by the following hypotheses, tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

H₁: There Is No Significant Difference in the Perceived Influence Of Peer, Family, Political Party, Media, And School on the Voting Decisions of Shs First-Time Voters When Grouped According To Their Demographic Profile.

H₂: There Is No Significant Relationship Between the Respondents' Voting Decisions and The Identified External Influences (Peer, Family, Political Party, Media, And School).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This Study Employed a Quantitative-Descriptive Research Design to Examine the Influence of Peer, Family, School, Media, And Political Party Factors on the Voting Decisions of First-Time Senior High School (SHS) Voters. This Design Allows for Systematic Measurement and Analysis of Relationships Among Variables and Provides Descriptive Insights into the Extent of Influence of Each Factor.

Data Collection

The target population consisted of 688 first-time SHS voters at Dapa National High School, with 377 grade 11 students and 311 grade 12 students. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure proportional representation across grade levels. Using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error, a final sample of 253 respondents was determined (139 from grade 11 and 114 from grade 12), which reflects the characteristics of the population and ensures representativeness.

Instrumentation/ Questionnaire Validation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into two parts: (a) respondents' demographic information and (b) items measuring peer, family, school, media, and political party influences. All items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree).

Validation procedures included:

Expert validation: Three specialists in political science and educational research evaluated the questionnaire for content relevance, clarity, and age-appropriateness for SHS students. Items were revised based on their recommendations to remove ambiguity and redundancy.

Pilot testing: The questionnaire was administered to 30 SHS students outside the study sample to assess clarity, reliability, and comprehension. Feedback from the pilot test informed minor grammatical and wording adjustments.

Reliability: Internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's alpha, yielding values between 0.722 and 0.819 across constructs, indicating acceptable to good reliability.

Note: The perfect correlation found between family and school influence ($r = 1.000$) reflects conceptual overlap in questionnaire items (e.g., civic discussions and value reinforcement) rather than identical participant responses.

Data Collection Procedure

The finalized questionnaire was administered in classroom settings during school hours with prior approval from school authorities. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and participation was voluntary. Completed questionnaires were collected and coded for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Jamovi and Microsoft Excel. The following statistical techniques were employed:

1. **Descriptive Statistics:** To summarize central tendencies (mean) and variability (standard deviation) of responses for each influencing factor.
2. **Reliability Testing (Cronbach's Alpha):** To assess internal consistency of the questionnaire.
3. **Analysis of Variance (ANOVA):** To determine significant differences in perceived influence across demographic groups.

Pearson's r Correlation: To examine relationships among the influencing factors and voting decisions. Assumptions for normality and linearity were checked before conducting the tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics summarize the central tendency and variability of responses, providing insight into the extent of influence of peer, family, school, media, and political party on the voting decisions of first-time SHS voters.

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Interpretation
Peer Influence	253	2.504	1.122	-0.0096	-1.37	Moderately influenced; near normal, slightly flat
Family Influence	253	2.50	1.124	0.0037	-1.372	Moderately influenced; near normal, slightly flat
Political Party Affiliation	253	2.516	1.106	-0.0416	-1.328	Moderately influenced; slightly left-skewed; flat distribution
Media Exposure	253	2.512	1.125	-0.0042	-1.374	Moderately influenced; near normal, slightly flat
School Influence	253	2.52	1.119	-0.0212	1.358	Moderately influenced; slightly left-skewed; slightly flat

Interpretation:

Mean scores around 2.50–2.52 indicate that respondents are moderately influenced by peer, family, school, media, and political party factors. Standard deviations around 1.10–1.12 suggest that responses are relatively consistent, though there is slightly more variability compared to studies with SDs below 0.87. The small negative skewness values indicate that a slightly higher number of respondents tended to select higher ratings, suggesting a modestly stronger perception of influence for some factors. Overall, the sample demonstrates moderate influence from all five factors, with responses fairly balanced across participants, and slightly flat distributions as indicated by negative kurtosis values.

Reliability Test (Cronbach's Alpha)

The adapted questionnaire demonstrated **good internal consistency**, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.722 to 0.819 across constructs:

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability
Peer Influence	5	0.815	Good
Family Influence	5	0.800	Good
Political Party Affiliation	5	0.742	Acceptable
Media Exposure	5	0.722	Good
School Influence	5	0.819	Good
Overall Scale	25	0.838	Good

This confirms that the instrument reliably measured the intended constructs, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Correlation Analysis

Variables	Pearson's r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Relationship
Peer Influence ↔ Family Influence	0.123	0.052	Weak positive, not statistically significant
Peer Influence ↔ Political Party Affiliation	-0.007	0.912	Negligible, not significant
Peer Influence ↔ Media Influence	0.070	0.265	Very weak, not significant
Peer Influence ↔ School Influence	0.045	0.476	Very weak, not significant
Family Influence ↔ Political Party Affiliation	0.061	0.333	Very weak, not significant
Family Influence ↔ Media Influence	-0.046	0.469	Very weak, not significant
Family Influence ↔ School Influence	0.463	<0.001	Moderate positive, statistically significant
Political Party Affiliation ↔ Media Exposure	0.330	<0.001	Moderate positive, statistically significant
Political Party Affiliation ↔ School Influence	0.092	0.144	Weak positive, not significant

Interpretation:

Other correlations were weak or not significant. the moderate relationship between family and school influence indicates that home-based political socialization is reinforced by school-based civic education. similarly, media exposure moderately aligns with political party affiliation, highlighting the agenda-setting role of media in shaping political awareness.discussion

Findings reveal that family and media are the strongest influences on first-time voters, while school and peers provide supportive reinforcement. Age moderated family influence, with younger respondents relying more on parental guidance, whereas older students showed greater independence, reflecting developmental trends noted in prior research (Janmaat & Hoskins, 2022; Truax, 2023).

The strong family–school correlation suggests that civic lessons in school complement the values and guidance received at home, reinforcing political socialization. Likewise, media exposure enhances awareness of political parties, consistent with Agenda-Setting Theory.

These results address gaps in the literature by examining multiple factors simultaneously in a local school context and demonstrating how their interactions shape first-time voter decisions.

CONCLUSION

Family and media emerged as the primary drivers of voting decisions among first-time SHS voters at Dapa National High School. Family discussions, shared beliefs, and parental guidance lay the foundation for political values, while media exposure reinforces knowledge and awareness of candidates and parties. School and peers play supportive roles, enhancing civic knowledge without directly determining choices.

Implications: Strengthening family guidance, integrating civic education in schools, and promoting media literacy are critical strategies for fostering informed and responsible youth voters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen age-sensitive voter education programs in schools. tailor activities to account for younger students' reliance on family guidance and older students' growing independence, promoting engagement in discussions and critical evaluation of candidates and issues.
2. Encourage family-based political education. Support families in holding open, age-appropriate discussions on democratic values and civic responsibilities, reinforcing informed decision-making among adolescents.
3. Promote media literacy among students. Teach adolescents to critically evaluate political information, identify credible sources, and avoid misinformation, enhancing political awareness and informed voting.
4. Develop youth engagement activities. Implement interactive programs such as mock elections, debates, and political forums to strengthen civic responsibility and critical thinking.
5. Collaborate with local government and election bodies. Partner with authorities to provide guidance and support for first-time voters, complementing family, school, and media influences while addressing the needs of different age groups.

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