

Bloc Voting and Youth Electoral Behavior: A Study on the Role of Religion in University Student Decision-Making

Samuel B. Damayon, Mikaela Nicole B. Montañez, Sandra Isahvel C. Gallera, Gwynette Gyle M. Asuncion, Jesalyn D. Nadia, Leanne Jaye C. Derije,

Social Sciences and Philosophy Department, Saint Mary's University, Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The intersection of religion and electoral behavior in the Philippines continues to raise concerns about voter autonomy, particularly among youth voters. This research examined how collective voting practices influence the political independence of university students affiliated with various religious groups. Using a descriptive-comparative research design, a structured questionnaire was administered to 360 registered student voters from different academic departments and religious affiliations within a diverse university community. The study assessed students' alignment with legal provisions on suffrage, their behaviors toward coordinated voting behaviors, and the degree of perceived influence exerted by religious and social groups. Quantitative data were analyzed using t-tests and ANOVA to explore variations in perception based on academic background, sex, and religious affiliation. Findings revealed that participants strongly support constitutional provisions on suffrage and reject electoral misconduct. Participants generally disagreed with the practice of bloc voting but were perceived as moderately influential, with respondents acknowledging its effect on electoral outcomes and the social pressure it creates. No significant differences were found in perceptions based on academic program or sex; however, religious affiliation showed a notable impact on perceived influence. The findings revealed a clear tension between upholding community unity and exercising personal choice. In response, the study proposed an educational initiative that encourages reflective decision-making and enhances awareness of electoral rights. The research offers valuable insight into how institutional, cultural, and spiritual contexts shape student voters' behavior, contributing to broader discussions on promoting informed and autonomous participation in democratic processes.

Keywords: suffrage, voter autonomy, young voters' practices, political independence, social pressure, awareness of electoral rights

INTRODUCTION

As members of the youth, an impressionable demographic vulnerable to pressure, exacerbated by being exposed to different communities, there are many factors surrounding and affecting their individual autonomy in terms of suffrage. The youth, raised and growing alongside the principles of their respective age groups, peers, academic community, and religious affiliations, may end up defining the truth of their own votes in a different manner from their own, authentic beliefs. This compromises the quality and ingenuity of their votes, causing a chain reaction of consequences leading to larger-scale impacts when the misguided vote of one is added to the snowballing votes of similar caliber to many.

Religious beliefs significantly shape an individual's behavior and decision-making processes. A person with an active and deeply rooted faith, grounded not only in belief in a higher power but also in a thorough understanding of religious teachings, often views faith as central to their identity and daily actions [1]. Research indicates that individuals who adhere to religious doctrines frequently use these beliefs as a moral compass, helping them distinguish between right and wrong. As a result, religious values become embedded in their ethical judgments and everyday conduct. Scriptures and religious teachings typically emphasize virtues and moral principles that further guide one's reasoning and behavior [2].

Religion also plays a notable role in shaping political preferences. Various studies suggest that individuals tend to support political parties and candidates whose platforms align with their moral and religious convictions, leading to diverse political leanings across religious groups [3]. Furthermore, a political leader and founder of the Self Improvement Model for Political Leadership Excellence (SIMPLE), emphasizes that religion serves as a powerful influence in linking personal values with public policy [4]. This connection often shapes voters' political views and expectations of leaders, influencing their decisions both consciously and subconsciously.

The relationship between religion and politics is strongly ingrained in Filipino culture. The Catholic Church, for example, has always exercised significant political power, frequently favoring specific candidates or policies that correspond with its moral precepts. This group may instill a sense of obligation in voters to align their choices with their religious views, undermining the concept of independent decision-making [5]. The strong link between religion and political identification can lead to a situation in which voters feel obligated to adhere to the choices of their religious communities, thereby limiting their individual agency in the democratic process.

One research study suggests that religious engagement and identification have a big impact on young Filipinos' political participation. Their study showed that Catholic youths who actively participate in religious activities and are informed about their faith are more likely to take political action [6]. The finding implies that while religiosity can increase political participation, it may also lead to pressures that affect voting behavior.

Moreover, Soriano et al. [7] found that higher degrees of religious commitment correlate with increased political participation among college students. This relationship highlights religious organizations' ability to organize members for political activity, ultimately influencing electoral outcomes.

According to Castro [8], religious organizations play an important role in voter mobilization, particularly through methods like bloc voting among religions such as Iglesia Ni Cristo (INC). For example, during elections, INC members frequently vote as a bloc for candidates supported by their church leadership, raising concerns about individual autonomy in voting decisions, as communal demands may outweigh personal preferences. He emphasizes this dynamic, pointing out that religious organizations can considerably swing electoral outcomes through organized voting behaviors, ultimately influencing the Philippines' broader political environment.

Thus, the interplay of religious influences and political participation in the Philippines highlights the intricacies of voter behavior. While these religious affiliations might promote communal engagement and solidarity, they can limit personal autonomy in making voting decisions.

Bloc voting, for instance, a widespread and generational practice among Iglesia ni Cristo faithful, remains a strong factor in defining the votes of its church members, most especially the youth. While religious engagement and identification can increase political participation among youth, this could also lead to pressure affecting their electoral behavior [7]. With strict implementations of church practices within and outside the institution, young voters are pressured to abide by these directions to maintain a level of identity with their community. Especially persons who are actively and deeply rooted in their faith, grounded not only in belief in a higher power but also in a thorough understanding of religious teachings, often view faith as central to their identity and daily actions [1]. They may also instill a sense of obligation in voters to align their choices with their religious views, undermining the concept of independent decision-making [5]. However, it is important to consider the effects of this, especially in a country where religion holds significant sway over political behavior.

Bloc voting refers to the practice wherein a group of individuals who share common beliefs and ideologies cast their votes collectively to influence political outcomes. This strategy holds considerable significance within electoral politics and demonstrates the power of group solidarity in shaping the voting landscape [9]. The collective nature of bloc voting also enhances the effectiveness of other coordinated actions. It strengthens a group's political leverage, often positioning them as a reliable voter base for political leaders [10].

Several factors contribute to the emergence of bloc voting. These include shared beliefs, cultural identity, and common ideologies. Such alignment typically stems from religious affiliations, traditional practices, and a unified worldview, fostering a collective sense of purpose and preservation of identity. Within these voting blocs, a strong sense of camaraderie and mutual support develops, compelling members to vote in unison to achieve

shared objectives. Additionally, some blocs are driven by unified policy interests or common socio-political goals. Historical connections also reinforce bloc voting, as communities with collective experiences, such as past injustices or victories, tend to unite politically to address lingering grievances [9]. In terms of political responsiveness, research by Gottlieb and Larreguy [11] suggests that politicians prioritize delivering services to groups known for casting their votes cohesively.

In the Philippine context, the most prominent religious group practicing bloc voting is the Iglesia ni Cristo (INC). Bloc voting in INC is not merely a political act but a theological and organizational command. According to Alcantara [6], the church's doctrine is based on passages such as John 17:21-23 and 1 Corinthians 1:10, which emphasize unity among believers. This sacred unity extends beyond religious practices to include uniformity in decision-making, including participation in elections. The church interprets Acts 15 of the Jerusalem Council as a directive that only the General Authority, or the Executive Minister, holds the authority to guide members in judgment, including political choices. Disobedience or dissent within this framework is considered a violation of the church doctrine and may result in expulsion. As Harper notes, within this system, the interest of the collective takes precedence over personal views, as division is viewed as a threat to spiritual and organizational unity [12].

Tolentino [13] elaborates on how INC's theology positions bloc voting as a collective act of faith rather than mere compliance. As part of their spiritual obligation, Members are encouraged to trust the church administration's guidance on electoral matters, viewing it as part of their spiritual obligation. This perspective complicates discussions about coercion and free will within the context of voting.

While current research suggests the relationship between religious affiliation and political practice among the youth, this study aimed to fill the gaps in terms of the more intricate details along the varied experiences of youth voters, especially those with strong alignments to their faith. This study then sought to address these gaps by offering a more comprehensive understanding of how religious beliefs shape electoral practices in the Philippine context.

The study generally aimed to examine how different religious denominations perceived and influenced the practice of bloc voting, and to explore the implications of these perceptions for the electoral freedom of their adherents. Specifically, the study was designed to investigate the position of Marian participants with regard to their freedom to vote. It sought to determine the level of agreement of these participants concerning beliefs about the practice of bloc voting. It examined the extent to which the bloc voting system influenced the voting preferences of the participants. Moreover, it assessed whether there were significant differences in the participants' positions on bloc voting, their level of agreement on the practice, and the degree of influence it exerted, when they were grouped according to school, sex, and religious affiliation. Lastly, based on the salient findings, the study aimed to create a voter education material that contributes to the protection of democratic rights within religiously diverse academic communities.

To guide this investigation, the study was structured around key research questions. The first research question focused on the position of Marian participants with regard to their freedom to vote, aiming to assess their awareness and support of their constitutional right to suffrage. The second was to explore their level of agreement with beliefs surrounding the practice of bloc voting, seeking to determine whether students ideologically align or disagree with the concept of voting as a unified religious group. The third was to examine the extent to which bloc voting influences their voting behavior, in order to measure the degree of social or religious pressure that affects students' electoral choices. The fourth was to investigate whether there are significant differences in these responses when grouped according to academic program, sex, and religious affiliation, to determine whether demographic factors shape perceptions and experiences. Lastly, the study addressed what form of voter education material can be proposed to reinforce electoral freedom and adherence to constitutional provisions, with the goal of supporting students in making independent and informed voting decisions.

Aligned with these research questions, the objectives of the study were to evaluate the participants' understanding and support of constitutional voting rights, to assess their beliefs and perceived pressures regarding bloc voting, and to identify any statistically significant variations across demographic profiles. Ultimately, the study sought to provide empirical data that would inform the creation of targeted voter education

initiatives, designed to empower young voters to exercise independent, informed, and conscientious participation in the democratic process.

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study utilized a descriptive-comparative methodology to evaluate the influence of bloc voting on students' electoral freedom. The descriptive aspect identified patterns in perceptions and behaviors, while the comparative approach analyzed differences across demographic groups. The research was conducted at Saint Mary's University, a Catholic institution with a religiously diverse student population. A total of 360 registered student voters, affiliated with various religious denominations including Igesia Ni Cristo, Catholicism, Protestantism, and others, participated in the survey. Participants were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure balanced representation.

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire composed of items measuring respondents' agreement with constitutional voting rights, attitudes toward bloc voting, and their perceived levels of influence. The questionnaire was grounded in legal texts such as the 1987 Philippine Constitution [14] and the Philippine Omnibus Election Code [15], and guided by Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes observational learning, self-efficacy, and reciprocal determinism. The tool underwent expert validation and achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.735, indicating acceptable reliability.

Data collection was carried out both online through Google Forms and in printed surveys between March and April 2025, personally disseminated by the researchers to the target respondents. These methods were the more practical means of approach to reach the participants and get accurate responses. Ethical protocols were strictly followed, including informed consent which the participants agreed too via clicking "I Agree" on the Google Forms for the online respondents, and signing on the IFCs for the respondents using the printed surveys, confidentiality which is maintained by the practice of non-disclosure of any part of the research directly concerning the respondents, and voluntary participation. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies, Mean, and Standard deviation. The t-tests and one-way ANOVA were used to identify significant differences in responses based on school, sex, and religious affiliation. Ethical protocols were strictly followed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Positions of students about Freedom to Vote

TABLE 1 Level of Agreement of Stuentns on Constitutional Provisions Regarding Freedom to Vote

Indicators	Mean	SD	QD
1. Voters should be 18 years old and above on the day of the election.	3.45	.74	Agree
2. Voters must be living in the Philippines for at least one year.	3.23	.72	Agree
3. Only Filipino citizens are eligible to vote in the Philippine elections.	3.43	.79	Agree
4. Voters should be able to vote without any literacy requirement.	2.95	.90	Agree
5. Voters do not need to have finished any level of education to be able to vote.	3.28	.80	Agree
6. No property requirement is needed for citizens to be able to vote.	3.42	.74	Agree
7. Votes in the ballot should be protected as they are sacred and inviolable.	3.70	.63	Strongly Agree

8. Voters living abroad/OFWs should be allowed to vote.	3.35	.73	Agree
9. Disabled and illiterate voters should be allowed to vote.	3.43	.77	Agree
10. The disabled and illiterate should be assisted while voting.	3.53	.71	Strongly Agree
11. There is enough information about voting rights and how to vote.	3.02	.96	Agree
12. Education about voting rights is essential for citizens to participate in elections effectively.	3.73	.56	Strongly Agree
13. The government must ensure fair voting practices for all citizens.	3.74	.59	Strongly Agree
Overall Mean	3.41	.47	Agree

Mean Ranges: 1.00–1.49: Strongly Disagree; 1.50–2.49: Disagree; 2.50–3.49: Agree; 3.50–4.00: Strongly Agree

TABLE 2 Level of Agreement of Participants on Prohibitions Stated in the Omnibus Election Code

Indicators	Mean	SD	QD
1. Vote-buying and vote-selling should not be allowed.	3.73	.67	Strongly Agree
2. Conspiracy to bribe voters should be punishable under the Omnibus Election Code.	3.69	.62	Strongly Agree
3. The promising of any office or employment or expenditure to influence a voter to vote for or against a candidate should be unlawful.	3.65	.61	Strongly Agree
4. Forcing employees to vote for a certain person or party list should be strictly prohibited.	3.70	.67	Strongly Agree
5. No leader or official of any religious group should pressure, threaten, or force their members to support or vote for any candidate.	3.64	.74	Strongly Agree
6. Threats, intimidation, and cheating to influence voters should not be allowed.	3.65	.73	Strongly Agree
Overall Mean	3.68	.52	Strongly Agree

Mean Ranges: 1.00–1.49: Strongly Disagree; 1.50–2.49: Disagree; 2.50–3.49: Agree; 3.50–4.00: Strongly Agree

The results in Table 1 revealed that students exhibit a strong and consistent agreement with the Philippine constitutional provisions on suffrage, as well as the prohibitions outlined in the Omnibus Election Code. Across various statements related to voter qualifications and rights, the participants rated highly on key indicators such as the sanctity of the ballot (mean = 3.70), the necessity of voter education (mean = 3.73), and the importance of providing assistance to voters with disabilities (mean = 3.53). The overall mean score for constitutional provisions was 3.41, which falls under the “Agree” category, indicating broad support for the inclusive and democratic principles enshrined in the Philippine 1987 Constitution.

In the same way, Table 2 shows that respondents strongly supported the prohibitions under the Philippine Omnibus Election Code. All statements relating to electoral misconduct, such as vote-buying, bribery, coercion by religious leaders, and intimidation, gathered “Strongly Agree” ratings. The highest mean score (3.74) was

recorded for the belief that the government must ensure fair voting practices for all, while statements such as “No leader or official of any religious group should pressure, threaten, or force their members to vote for any candidate” also received high levels of agreement (mean = 3.64). The overall mean for this section was 3.68, demonstrating not only awareness of illegal practices but a clear moral position against them.

These findings imply that students understand both their voting rights and the legal protections in place to protect them. Their responses indicate that the student body is not only well-informed but also ethically committed to democratic values. The high level of agreement with legal prohibitions such as coercion and vote-buying suggests that students are concerned about issues that could jeopardize the legitimacy of elections. This demonstrates their opposition to electoral manipulation, whether through material incentives or religious-political influence. Despite this solid foundation, students reported only moderate agreement when asked if there is “enough information about voting rights and how to vote,” implying that while values are present, voter education structures may be lacking or inconsistent.

The findings are consistent with those of De Guia [16], who emphasized the role of suffrage in promoting participatory governance. The students' strong position on both voting rights and prohibitions echoes De Guia's assertion that suffrage must be based not only on entitlement but also on ethical considerations.

Furthermore, the findings add to the discussion presented by Tolentino [13], who emphasized the Philippines' obligation under international treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to maintain universal and equal suffrage. This study demonstrates that students understand and embrace those rights, even within a religiously affiliated institution. Unlike previous research, this study reveals an important finding: while students support legal and ethical electoral principles, they still perceive gaps in voter education, indicating a disconnect between belief and preparedness. This adds a new dimension to the literature by demonstrating that even well-informed students may feel inadequately equipped to fully exercise their rights, highlighting the need for institutional reinforcement of voter education through accessible and ongoing programs.

Level of Agreement of the Participants on the Beliefs about the Practice of Bloc Voting

TABLE 3 Level of Influence of Bloc Voting System to the Voting Preferences of Marians

Indicators	Mean	SD	QD
1. The Church knows better when it comes to political issues.	2.13	.92	Disagree
2. Bloc voting is a fair and democratic practice.	2.08	.85	Disagree
3. The political system will improve when the Church and state work together.	2.30	.94	Disagree
4. God should be able to help us discern our political decisions through our Church Leaders.	2.16	.93	Disagree
5. Bloc voting can help keep unity within a church.	2.26	.90	Disagree
6. Bloc voting leads to a more informed voting decisions among community members.	2.24	.92	Disagree
7. Bloc voting creates pressure to conform to group preferences rather than individual choices.	3.04	.61	Agree
Overall Mean	2.35	.61	Disagree

Mean Ranges: 1.00–1.49: Strongly Disagree; 1.50–2.49: Disagree; 2.50–3.49: Agree; 3.50–4.00: Strongly Agree

The participants generally disagreed with beliefs supporting bloc voting. They rejected the ideas that the church knows better on political matters, that bloc voting leads to informed decisions, or that it preserves democratic fairness. The item with the highest agreement, however, acknowledged that bloc voting creates pressure to conform. This contrast suggests that while students ideologically reject bloc voting, they recognize its continued influence in real-life situations due to communal and religious expectations.

This suggests an important distinction between belief and behavior. Students are intellectually aware that bloc voting undermines democratic autonomy, yet they remain socially and culturally immersed in networks where conformity is frequently promoted or expected. The impression of bloc voting as a source of pressure rather than guidance demonstrates how it operates less as a group decision-making process and more as a subtle control mechanism. This acknowledgement of pressure, rather than agreement with its principles, indicates the internal battle that students face between faith-based loyalty and individual conscience.

Previous research, such as that of Martinez and Ubaldo [18], frequently focused on external coercion in bloc voting but did not address how students perceive this as internalized social pressure rather than overt orders. This study adds to our knowledge of how youth, particularly those in religious academic environments, navigate bloc voting not by blind obedience, but through a tug-of-war between group identification and individual political will. This is an important difference that emphasizes the complexities of religious-political impact in modern youth situations, which earlier research has frequently oversimplified.

Level of Influence of Bloc Voting System to the Voting Preferences of Marians

TABLE 4 Level of Influence of Bloc Voting Practices

Indicators	Mean	SD	QD
The individual relies on his/her own judgment rather than group consensus when making voting decisions.	2.92	.79	Influential
The individual makes his/her own voting decision based on personal beliefs rather than church directives.	2.98	.80	Influential
Bloc voting limits the ability of an individual to vote according to his/her personal beliefs.	3.00	.86	Influential
Bloc voting contradicts the essence of one's voting freedom.	3.16	.92	Influential
Bloc voting affects the outcome of elections.	3.30	.80	Influential
The individual feels pressured to vote in line with a bloc rather than according to their personal preferences.	3.02	.92	Influential
There are social expectations from fellow church members regarding how individuals should vote.	2.91	.91	Influential
The individual will likely vote for a candidate or party that their church recommends.	2.84	.90	Influential
The individual will perceive his/her vote as a religious duty rather than a civic responsibility.	2.77	.94	Influential
Bloc voting makes the individual feel pressured to align his/her vote with the group rather than voting for their preferred candidate.	2.86	1.0	Influential
Bloc voting encouraged members to prioritize group loyalty over individual candidate evaluation.	2.92	.91	Influential

Individuals feel that his/her right to vote has been compromised by the practice of bloc voting.	2.90	.94	Influential
Overall Mean	2.87	.74	Influential

Mean Ranges: 1.00–1.49: Not Influential; 1.50–2.49: Slightly Influential; 2.50–3.49: Influential 3.50–4.00: Very Influential

While the majority of students disagreed with bloc voting ideologically, they rated it as moderately influential in practice. All statements under this section received mean scores that fall within the “Influential” category, with an overall mean of 2.87. The item with the highest score was “Bloc voting affects the outcome of elections” (mean = 3.30), indicating that students perceive bloc voting as a significant force in shaping electoral results. This was followed closely by items stating that bloc voting creates pressure to conform to church or group preferences (mean = 3.20) and that it leads to internal conflict when personal and group choices do not align. Students also acknowledged that bloc voting could influence them to vote based on fear of social consequences, such as judgment or exclusion from religious peers or communities.

These data suggest that bloc voting continues to influence youth decision-making through subtle and internalized communal pressure. This has a significant influence on election integrity since the right to vote is not fully exercised when people are afraid of being disapproved of or losing their sense of community. It suggests a more complicated type of influence, one that acts silently and relationally rather than through explicit demands.

Earlier studies, such as Alcantara et al. [6], stressed that religion enhances voter involvement, but this study expands on the analysis by demonstrating that such engagement may still be degraded in quality. Voting “under pressure” does not constitute free participation. What distinguishes this study is its demonstration that youth voters are aware of the emotional mechanisms employed to sustain bloc voting, and that this awareness does not always translate into resistance. This idea closes a critical gap by demonstrating how bloc voting power is maintained not just by tradition, but also by subtle social reinforcement that may survive even in democratic situations.

Comparison of the position of Student participants to bloc voting, as well as their level of agreement on the practice of bloc voting, and level of influence when grouped according to different profile variables

TABLE 5 Comparison of The Position of Marian Participants to Bloc Voting When Grouped According to Sex

Areas	Sex	Mean	t	P-Value	Decision
Constitutional Provision on Suffrage	Female	3.45	2.183	.030*	Reject the Null Hypothesis
	Male	3.34			
Prohibitions	Female	3.69	.812	.418	Accept the Null Hypothesis
	Male	2.65			
Agreement with Bloc Voting Beliefs	Female	2.30	-1.217	.224	Accept the Null Hypothesis
	Male	2.40			
Influence of Bloc Voting	Female	2.88	.546	.573	Accept the Null Hypothesis
	Male	2.84			

(Significant if P-value is less than 0.05)

Mean Ranges: 1.00–1.49: Strongly Disagree; 1.50–2.49: Disagree; 2.50–3.49: Agree; 3.50–4.00: Strongly Agree

The comparative analysis examined differences in students' positions on suffrage, bloc voting beliefs, and the perceived influence of bloc voting across three demographic variables: academic school, sex, and religious affiliation. The results showed no statistically significant differences across academic programs or schools, suggesting that the students' academic disciplines had no meaningful effect on their positions or experiences regarding electoral autonomy and bloc voting. Likewise, sex did not produce significant differences in agreement with bloc voting beliefs or its perceived influence. However, female students showed significantly higher agreement with the constitutional provisions of suffrage, indicating a stronger alignment with democratic values among female respondents.

TABLE 6 Comparison of The Position of Marian Participants on Bloc Voting When Grouped According to Religious Affiliation

Areas	Religious Affiliation	Mean	F	P-Value	Decision
Constitutional Provision on Suffrage	INC	3.42	.942	.420	Accept Null Hypothesis
	Catholic	3.42			
	Protestant	3.32			
	Others	3.44			
	Total	3.40			
Prohibitions	INC	3.65	1.38	.247	Accept Null Hypothesis
	Catholic	3.73			
	Protestant	3.60			
	Others	3.76			
	Total:	3.67			
Agreement with Bloc Voting Beliefs	INC	2.50	5.54	.001	Reject Null Hypothesis
	Catholic	2.21			
	Protestant	2.24			
	Others	2.31			
	Total:	2.34			
Influence of Bloc Voting	INC	2.87	.902	.440	Accept Null Hypothesis
	Catholic	2.88			
	Protestant	2.76			
	Others	3.01			
	Total:	2.86			

(Significant if P-value is less than 0.05)

Mean Ranges: 1.00–1.49: Strongly Disagree; 1.50–2.49: Disagree; 2.50–3.49: Agree; 3.50–4.00: Strongly Agree

The most notable and statistically significant difference was observed in terms of religious affiliation. Specifically, respondents from Iglesia ni Cristo (INC) displayed a significantly higher level of agreement with beliefs supporting bloc voting compared to other religious denominations. While all groups shared moderate levels of perceived influence, INC respondents were more likely to agree with the idea that bloc voting is a legitimate practice and that religious groups should guide members in their political choices. In contrast, Catholics, Protestants, and other students tended to disagree with such beliefs and emphasized individual discernment and conscience in the voting process.

This significant variation suggests that religious tradition influences not just young voters' conduct but also their political perspective. In the context of INC students, their strong support for bloc voting ideas is consistent with the church's well-documented practice of centralized and mandatory voting. This represents a theological stance that views bloc voting as a religious responsibility rather than a personal political choice. As a result, members may internalize this practice as both spiritually and communally required, molding their perspective on political engagement. Students from more individualistic religious traditions, such as Catholicism, Protestantism, and others, seem to emphasize conscience, personal thought, and democratic freedom, all of which are more in line with liberal democratic norms.

These findings are consistent with Tolentino's research, which identified the INC's practice of bloc voting as a form of spiritual obedience related to church unity [13]. Similarly, Harper described bloc voting in the INC as a political representation of religious solidarity [12]. However, what this study adds to previous research is the perspective of students themselves, who confirm by their own responses that such doctrinal influence is still active and assimilated in their society. The moderate yet noticeable influence of bloc voting demonstrates the need for continued voter educational reform and the creation of safe spaces where students can freely express and exercise their political autonomy.

Moreover, the study's findings also have implications for university administrators and policymakers. Educational institutions should integrate targeted voter education modules into the curriculum, particularly in faith-based universities, to address the unique pressures students may face. For policymakers, the results call for stricter implementation of the Omnibus Election Code's provisions against coercion by religious groups and the promotion of awareness campaigns that emphasize independent, conscience-driven voting.

By strengthening critical thinking, self-efficacy, and awareness of electoral rights, institutions can cultivate a generation of voters who participate not out of obligation or fear, but out of informed beliefs.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

University students, based on the findings of the study, are very much aware of their right to suffrage. They espouse the idea that everybody must be given the chance to freely exercise their right to suffrage. They believe that it is the duty of the government to protect this right, especially for the disadvantaged. This is further strengthened by the general position of the students against any possibility of thwarting every individual's right to suffrage, like vote buying, bribery, and while bloc voting is not prohibited by law, it is not favored by university students.

This study found that while students strongly support democratic principles and reject unethical electoral practices, many still experience social and religious pressures that influence their voting behavior. The findings revealed that bloc voting, particularly among members of Iglesia ni Cristo, remains a moderately influential force, despite students' general disagreement with the practice. Importantly, religious affiliation, not sex or academic background, emerged as the key factor shaping perceptions and experiences of electoral autonomy.

It was also found out that university students do not have differences in terms of their school or course programs, but primarily differ in their position in terms of agreement with the provisions of the Philippine constitution when grouped according to their sex. Furthermore, the study found out that when it comes to block voting, the Iglesia Ni Cristo students strongly adhere to this practice while other students belonging to other religions despise it.

The key takeaway is that even in a university setting where voter education is emphasized, the influence of religious authority continues to challenge the full exercise of individual political freedom. Students are aware of their rights but may find it difficult to assert them in the face of institutional religious expectations.

The implications for practice are significant. For education, it highlights the need to go beyond legal literacy and focus on building students' self-efficacy and critical thinking to resist social pressures. For university administration, this calls for the integration of rights-based and values-oriented civic education programs. For policymakers, the findings support targeted voter education initiatives and enforcement of election laws.

In summary, promoting electoral freedom in a faith-influenced society requires not only legal protections but also educational strategies that empower individuals to act independently and responsibly within their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that academic institutions incorporate more structured civic reflection spaces into their academic and extracurricular programs, as many students support the constitutional right to free suffrage but are still exposed to traditional bloc voting practices in their communities. These forums can be scholarly symposia, interdisciplinary voter education seminars, or student-led, moderated conversations where students can freely address the conflict between political autonomy, culture, and faith. This will strengthen their moral judgment and critical thinking, particularly in situations when cultural or religious traditions can contradict democratic values.

Local government unit policymakers may support legislation that protects voters from indirect coercion or psychological pressure in any form, especially from institutions or organizational voting endorsements. And religious leaders and organizations may reconsider how to maintain a balance between religious unity and individual political freedom, especially those who actively support bloc voting. Although many faiths place a strong emphasis on obedience and unity, leaders should be aware of how their younger members' viewpoints are changing. During elections, religious advice can continue to have an impact while respecting each member's autonomy to make their own decisions. Faith and democratic integrity would be strengthened if conscience-driven participation were encouraged instead of bloc orders being enforced.

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