

# Political Awareness and Engagement in Relation to Voting Behavior among College Students

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding how political awareness and engagement shape the voting behavior of young citizens is essential for a thriving democracy. This study explored how political awareness and engagement influence the voting behavior of young citizens, focusing on 110 purposively selected NSTP 2 college students aged 18 to 25 from a private, non-sectarian institution in Ozamiz City, Philippines, all with prior voting experience. Using a researcher-made questionnaire covering Political Awareness, Political Engagement, and Voting Behavior on a 5-point Likert Scale, data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient, and multiple regression. Results showed high to very high political awareness, moderate engagement, and high positive voting behavior, with significant positive correlations between both awareness and engagement with voting behavior, and both variables together significantly predicting voting behavior. The study concludes that strengthening political awareness and providing genuine engagement opportunities are essential for fostering informed, responsible voting, recommending that educational institutions sustain civic education and platforms for balanced political discourse to enhance democratic participation.

**Keywords:** citizen participation, political literacy, youth development, electoral behavior, university students

## INTRODUCTION

Democratic countries rely on the active participation of citizens, with voting serving as a cornerstone of representative governance (Héroux-Legault, 2023; James & Garnett, 2023). Through voting, citizens select leaders expected to uphold democratic values and prioritize the greater good (Sterling, 2021; Wallace, 2024). The success of a nation depends on the informed and engaged decision-making of its people (Rojas, 2020; Wallace, 2024). Low political participation among the youth poses risks to democracy, potentially resulting in underrepresentation and inadequate policies addressing education, employment, and social justice (Medina et al., 2025; Zhang, 2022).

Political consciousness, engagement, and voting form the foundation of democracy, linking citizens with government decision-making (Wallace, 2024). The youth, as future voters, play a key role in shaping social progress (Rojas, 2020). Politically aware and participative youth are better positioned to influence policies aligned with their aspirations, making their voting behavior an important subject for analysis.

In the Philippines, despite rising political awareness among youth, actual participation and voter turnout remain lower than that of older populations, even with their heavy social media presence (Cohan & Chaaraoui, 2024; Medina et al., 2025; Zhang, 2022). Social media promotes widespread discussion but often fosters surface-level engagement and exposes youth to misinformation (Alodat et al., 2023; Cohan & Chaaraoui, 2024; Muringa & Adjin-Tetty, 2024). The 2022 elections saw high youth turnout, yet much of it was driven by viral online content rather than sustained political engagement (Ladia & Panao, 2023). This highlights the need to study factors affecting youth political awareness, engagement, and voting behavior.

Inadequate political education remains a significant challenge to fostering active and informed voters (Héroux-Legault, 2023). Many schools and universities lack comprehensive civic education, leaving students with limited understanding of political processes and responsibilities (Jensen & McGinnis, 2023; Ward, 2023).

Youth with little political education are less likely to vote or participate in debates (Al-Ansari, Al-Fahim, & Zang, 2025; Lee & Tan, 2021; Younas & Imran, 2025). In the Philippines, insufficient civic instruction contributes to disengagement and ignorance of voting procedures (Dela Cruz, 2022).

Digital media offers both opportunities and risks for political participation. While social media facilitates large-scale discussion, it also spreads disinformation and sensationalized messages (Cohan & Chaaraoui, 2024; Muringa & Adjin-Tettey, 2024). Limited civic education compounds this issue (Ward, 2023). Engagement through youth organizations and community groups can foster participation, yet not all young people have access to such channels, weakening their voter behavior (Lundberg & Abdelzadeh, 2025; Zainurin et al., 2024).

University environments provide valuable contexts for shaping political awareness and behavior. Exposure to diverse perspectives through coursework, participation in student organizations, and institutional support for information access can strengthen engagement and informed voting (Muringa & Adjin-Tettey, 2024; Lundberg & Abdelzadeh, 2025). Voting behavior is also influenced by perceptions of costs and benefits, peer influence, and media consumption (Budiman & Irwandi, 2020; Hill, 2020). Examining these factors within academic institutions offers insights into the drivers of active citizenship.

Beyond awareness and discussion, active participation such as volunteering or joining civic groups builds political efficacy and networks that mobilize engagement (Boulianne, 2022; Zainurin et al., 2024). These practices help college students move from passive information consumption to active political contribution, fostering a generation of engaged citizens (Al-Khaza'leh & Lahiani, 2021). Educated, habitual voting legitimizes government and ensures representation of youth concerns (James & Garnett, 2023; Wallace, 2024). Low turnout risks exclusion, while informed voting strengthens democracy (Héroux-Legault, 2023; Sumatra, 2025; Ladia & Pano, 2023).

This study examines the factors influencing youth voting behavior in a university context, focusing on students who have participated in elections. It addresses gaps in existing research by analyzing how political education, social media influence, and other factors interact to shape voting decisions, particularly in provincial settings. The findings aim to inform initiatives that promote political understanding, voter participation, and civic responsibility among the youth at both local and national levels.

## Objectives of the Study

This research examined the different factors influencing the youth's voting behavior, political awareness, and engagement. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following objectives:

1. Determine the respondents' level of political awareness in terms of knowledge of political issues, understanding of governance, and awareness of social media trends.
2. Determine the respondents' level of political engagement in terms of participation in political discussions, social media engagement, and active membership in organizations.
3. Determine the respondents' level of voting behavior in terms of voting frequency, informed voting decisions, and vote influence factors.
4. Explore the significant relationship between the levels of the respondents' political awareness and voting behavior.
5. Explore the significant relationship between the extent of the respondent's political engagement and voting behavior.
6. Identify the predictors among voting behavior in college students.

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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study used a descriptive-correlational research design, a quantitative method that systematically describes variables and examines their relationships (Johnson & Christensen, 2024). Data were collected to measure participants' behaviors and attitudes, followed by statistical analysis. This approach was ideal for identifying patterns and connections between political awareness, engagement, and voting behavior among the youth.

### Locale of the Study

The research was conducted at a private, non-sectarian educational institution in Ozamiz City, Philippines, known for promoting progressive education and strong community linkages. The school offers programs like the NSTP, which fosters civic consciousness, leadership, and service. Its diverse student population, representing various socio-economic backgrounds and political exposures, made it an ideal setting for the study.

### Respondents of the Study

The unit of analysis was individual college students aged 18–25 who had voted in national or local elections. A total of 110 second-semester NSTP 2 students were selected through purposive sampling. This group was ideal due to NSTP's emphasis on civic consciousness and leadership, ensuring participants had relevant experience with political awareness, engagement, and voting behavior.

### Data Gathering Instruments

A researcher-made survey questionnaire was used, validated by experts in political science, education, and research methodology for clarity, relevance, and alignment with study objectives. Pilot testing yielded a Cronbach alpha of .898. The questionnaire had three sections, each using a 5-point Likert Scale to measure political awareness, political engagement, and voting behavior.

### Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher secured permission from the university administration, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and the NSTP Director to conduct the study. After approval, validated questionnaires were distributed to selected respondents. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, and ethical standards were observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

### Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

Experts reviewed the survey for content validity. A pilot test with 25 respondents produced a Cronbach's alpha of .898, indicating high reliability of the instrument.

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation, to summarize and present voting behavior patterns. Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied to examine the relationships between political awareness, political engagement, and voting behavior. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the most significant predictors of voting behavior.

### Ethical Considerations

Approval was obtained from the university's Research Ethics Board. Informed consent detailed the study's purpose, scope, and methodology. Participants could withdraw at any time without consequences. Data were anonymized, used only for educational purposes, and secured in compliance with Republic Act No. 10173, the Data Privacy Act of 2012

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Level of Respondents' Political Awareness

Table 1 reveal that the surveyed college students (n=110) demonstrated a high overall level of political awareness, with an overall mean of 4.0903 and a standard deviation of 0.61676. Across the three measured dimensions, Understanding of Governance ranked highest (M=4.1927, SD=0.65801), followed by Knowledge of Political Issues (M=4.0964, SD=0.62705), and Awareness of Social Media Trends (M=3.9818, SD=0.74811). All scores fell within the 3.41–4.20 range for “High” on the 5-point Likert scale, indicating that students generally felt well-informed about political matters and governmental structures, with particularly strong comprehension of how their political system operates.

The findings suggest that both formal education and contemporary information sources contribute to building students’ political knowledge. The high score in Understanding of Governance points to the role of academic instruction and civic learning experiences in shaping this knowledge (Al-Ansari, Al-Fahim, & Zang, 2025; Younas & Imran, 2025). The strong Awareness of Social Media Trends underscores the influence of digital platforms as major sources of political information for youth (Alodat et al., 2023; Cohan & Chaaraoui, 2024; Muringa & Adjin-Tettey, 2024). While Knowledge of Political Issues is also high, the slightly higher Governance Understanding score suggests a robust grounding in civics, complemented by the rapid information flow from social media. These findings are consistent with research highlighting the role of educational institutions and digital media as agents of political socialization (Khan, 2021).

The high political awareness among these students has important implications for their democratic participation. A solid foundation in political knowledge and governance understanding equips young citizens to engage more meaningfully with political issues and candidates, fostering informed decision-making during elections (Héroux-Legault, 2023; James & Garnett, 2023). This awareness is not only an asset for individual civic engagement but also a resource that strengthens democratic processes overall, as further sections on political engagement and voting behavior will demonstrate (Sumatra, 2025).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on the level of Political Awareness (n=110)

Constructs	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Knowledge of Political Issues	4.0964	0.62705	High
Understanding of Governance	4.1927	0.65801	Very High
Awareness of Social Media Trends	3.9818	0.74811	High
Overall Political Awareness	4.0903	0.61676	High

*Note: Perceived level on Scale: 4.21 – 5.00 (Very High); 3.41 – 4.20 (High); 2.61 – 3.40 (Moderate); 1.81 – 2.60 (Low); 1.00 – 1.80 (Very Low).*

### Level of Respondents' Political Engagement

Table 2 shows that the surveyed college students demonstrated a moderate overall level of political engagement, with an overall mean of 3.26607 and a standard deviation of 0.77048. Participation in Political Discussions was high (M=3.5309, SD=0.74609), while Social Media Engagement (M=3.2164, SD=0.89119) and Active Membership in Organizations (M=3.0509, SD=1.07633) were at a moderate level. This pattern suggests that while students are willing to discuss political topics, they are less likely to engage in political activities on social media or participate actively in organizations (Medina et al., 2025; Zhang, 2022). From the perspective of Political Socialization Theory, peer interactions may foster verbal engagement (Zainurin et al., 2024), whereas online platforms and organizational opportunities influence other forms of participation (Khan, 2021; Boulianne, 2022). The Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) also applies, indicating that participation levels

depend on resources, recruitment, and engagement opportunities (Lundberg & Abdelzadeh, 2025), which may be limited for some students (Al-Khaza'leh & Lahiani, 2021; Ward, 2023).

The moderate levels in social media and organizational activity highlight possible constraints such as limited time, online skills, recruitment channels, or psychological readiness for deeper political involvement. While the high discussion level reflects a positive openness to exchanging political ideas, the moderate engagement in structured or collective activities suggests that many students may not be fully utilizing available avenues for participation. This gap points to the need for initiatives that provide clearer pathways, greater resources, and more opportunities to channel political interest into active and impactful civic participation (Medina et al., 2025; Zhang, 2022).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on the level of Political Engagement (n=110)

Constructs	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Participation in Political Discussions	3.5309	0.74609	High
Social Media Engagement	3.2164	0.89119	Moderate
Active Membership in Organizations	3.0509	1.07633	Moderate
Overall Political Engagement	3.26607	0.77048	Moderate

*Note: Perceived level on Scale: 4.21 – 5.00 (Very High); 3.41 – 4.20 (High); 2.61 – 3.40 (Moderate); 1.81 – 2.60 (Low); 1.00 – 1.80 (Very Low).*

### Level of Respondents' Voting Behavior

Table 3 shows a high overall level of voting behavior among the surveyed college students ( $M = 3.80363$ ,  $SD = 0.58593$ ), with high scores for Voting Frequency ( $M = 4.1309$ ,  $SD = 0.72968$ ) and Informed Voting Decisions ( $M = 4.1927$ ,  $SD = 0.73942$ ), but only a moderate score for Vote Influence Factors ( $M = 3.0873$ ,  $SD = 0.94102$ ). This indicates that students not only participate regularly in elections but also prioritize making informed choices, often engaging in candidate research, issue evaluation, and platform analysis before voting (Héroux-Legault, 2023; Sumatra, 2025). Such behavior reflects Rational Choice Theory, where voters aim to maximize perceived benefits through informed decision-making (Brennan, 2024; Budiman & Irwandi, 2020). Meanwhile, the moderate rating for external influence factors—such as social media, peer opinions, and political advertising—suggests that while these are present, students rely more heavily on personal research and values (Hill, 2020; Zainurin et al., 2024).

The high voting frequency and strong commitment to informed decision-making underscore the significant role college students play in strengthening democratic processes. Their active and deliberate participation suggests that civic education and access to reliable political information are effectively fostering thoughtful and responsible voters (James & Garnett, 2023; Wallace, 2024). The limited impact of external influences further points to a degree of critical thinking and independent judgment in their voting process. Maintaining and expanding initiatives that provide credible information and encourage analytical evaluation of influence factors will be crucial for sustaining and enhancing this positive voting behavior (Ladia & Panoa, 2023; Medina et al., 2025; Zhang, 2022).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics on the level of Voting Behavior (n=110)

Constructs	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Voting Frequency	4.1309	0.72968	High
Informed Voting Decisions	4.1927	0.73942	Very High



Vote Influence Factors	3.0873	0.94102	Moderate
Overall Voting Behavior	3.80363	0.58593	High

*Note: Perceived level on Scale: 4.21 – 5.00 (Very High); 3.41 – 4.20 (High); 2.61 – 3.40 (Moderate); 1.81 – 2.60 (Low); 1.00 – 1.80 (Very Low).*

### Significant Relationship Between Political Awareness and Voting Behavior

Table 4 shows a statistically significant positive correlation between political awareness and voting behavior ( $r = 0.629$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating that higher political awareness is associated with higher voting behavior scores. This moderately strong relationship suggests that as students become more informed about political matters, their likelihood of engaging in voting increases. These results align with prior studies showing that individuals with greater political knowledge and understanding of governmental processes are more likely to participate in civic activities, including voting (Héroux-Legault, 2023). The finding reinforces the idea that political awareness is a key predictor of voting behavior.

This relationship is supported by Political Socialization Theory, which posits that political knowledge gained from sources such as education and media equips individuals with the cognitive tools for meaningful participation (Al-Ansari, Al-Fahim, & Zang, 2025; Khan, 2021). From a Rational Choice Theory perspective, greater political awareness enables voters to better evaluate the benefits and outcomes of their choices, lowering the perceived costs of uninformed decisions and making participation more appealing (Brennan, 2024; Sumatra, 2025). The implication is clear: enhancing civic education, improving access to reliable political information, and fostering critical thinking are practical strategies to strengthen youth voting participation.

Table 4. Correlation Between Political Awareness and Voting Behavior (n=110)

Variables Correlated	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation
Political Awareness ↔ Voting Behavior	0.629	0.000	Moderately strong positive relationship

*Note: Correlation is statistically significant at  $p < .001$  (2-tailed). Note: Correlation is statistically significant at  $p < .001$  (2-tailed). Interpretation of Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r):  $\pm 0.00 - \pm 0.10$  (Negligible);  $\pm 0.11 - \pm 0.30$  (Weak);  $\pm 0.31 - \pm 0.50$  (Moderate);  $\pm 0.51 - \pm 0.70$  (Strong);  $\pm 0.71 - \pm 1.00$  (Very Strong).*

### Significant Relationship Between Political Engagement and Voting Behavior

Table 5 shows a statistically significant positive correlation between political engagement and voting behavior ( $r = 0.632$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating that higher levels of engagement are linked to more positive voting behaviors. This moderately strong relationship suggests that students who are more involved in political activities tend to participate in elections more actively. These results align with prior research showing that political discussions (Zainurin et al., 2024), engagement with political content on social media (Khan, 2021), and participation in youth or community organizations (Lundberg & Abdelzadeh, 2025) are associated with increased political participation, including voting.

Theoretically, this relationship is supported by the Civic Voluntarism Model, which identifies engagement—both psychological involvement and activity participation—as a key driver of political participation, and by Political Socialization Theory, which posits that active involvement strengthens political norms and behaviors. Engaged individuals often perceive greater stakes in political outcomes, influencing their rational decision to vote. The implication is that universities and communities can boost youth voting participation by fostering opportunities for active engagement in political discussions, civic-oriented social media use, and organizational involvement, thereby cultivating a stronger culture of democratic participation among young people.

Table 5. Correlation Between Political Engagement and Voting Behavior (n=110)

Variables Correlated	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation
Political Engagement ↔ Voting Behavior	0.632	0.000	Moderately strong positive relationship

*Note: Correlation is statistically significant at  $p < .001$  (2-tailed). Interpretation of Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r):  $\pm 0.00 - \pm 0.10$  (Negligible);  $\pm 0.11 - \pm 0.30$  (Weak);  $\pm 0.31 - \pm 0.50$  (Moderate);  $\pm 0.51 - \pm 0.70$  (Strong);  $\pm 0.71 - \pm 1.00$  (Very Strong).*

### Predictors of Voting Behavior

Table 6 shows that political awareness and political engagement together significantly predict students' voting behavior ( $F(2,107) = 57.571$ ,  $p < .001$ ), explaining 51.8% of the variation ( $R^2 = .518$ ). Both predictors were individually significant ( $p < .001$ ), with Political Engagement ( $\beta = .414$ ) slightly stronger than Political Awareness ( $\beta = .408$ ). This supports research showing that political knowledge and participation are critical to youth civic engagement (Medina et al., 2025; Zhang, 2022). Increases in either awareness or engagement were linked to more positive voting behavior.

The findings align with Political Socialization Theory, which holds that knowledge and active participation foster civic-minded citizens (Khan, 2021; Zainurin et al., 2024), and with Rational Choice Theory, which suggests that informed and engaged individuals see voting as a rational, beneficial act (Brennan, 2024; Hall, 2024). Practically, these results highlight the need for strategies that combine civic education with real opportunities for engagement, as focusing on one without the other may be less effective. Schools, communities, and policymakers should develop programs that simultaneously enhance political awareness and encourage active participation to build a more informed and engaged youth electorate.

Table 6. Regression Analysis Predicting Voting Behavior Based on Political Awareness and Political Engagement (n=110)

Variables	Coef SE	Coef	T-Value	P-value
Constant	0.155	0.595	3.832	< .001
Political Awareness	0.075	0.388	5.145	< .001
Political Engagement	0.06	0.315	5.22	< .001

*Note:  $R^2 = .518$  (51.8%). Overall Model Significance:  $F(2, 107) = 57.571$ ,  $p < .001$ . Regression Equation:  $Voting\ Behavior = 0.595 + (0.388 \times Political\ Awareness) + (0.315 \times Political\ Engagement)$*

### CONCLUSION

Study revealed that college students in the study possess a high level of political awareness, a moderate level of political engagement, and a high level of voting behavior, characterized by frequent and informed voting. Political awareness and engagement were both found to have strong, statistically significant positive relationships with voting behavior, indicating that students who are more informed and more actively involved in political activities tend to exhibit more favorable voting practices. Furthermore, both factors independently and significantly predicted voting behavior, underscoring their unique contributions to fostering active civic participation. These results highlight the importance of enhancing both political knowledge and opportunities for meaningful engagement to cultivate an informed and participatory youth electorate.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that educational institutions expand civic education to strengthen students' political awareness and critical thinking, while student organizations and schools provide diverse platforms for meaningful participation. Students should seek credible information beyond social media to make informed electoral choices. Institutions and civic organizations must enhance political literacy and ensure access to unbiased information, while collaborative efforts with local government can create opportunities for consistent youth political involvement. A coordinated approach among all stakeholders is vital, and future research should explore non-voter engagement, social media's influence, varied organizational involvement, and long-term trends.

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