

Election Voting Preference Analysis: A Case Study on Qualified Voters of Masiu, Lanao del Sur

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Abstract. This study examines the voting preferences of qualified voters in Masiu, Lanao del Sur, in preparation for the upcoming local elections. It aims to identify the most valued candidate attributes and analyze how demographic factors, particularly educational attainment, influence these preferences. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study engaged 500 registered voters through a structured survey and focused interviews. Respondents ranked five core candidates' qualifications: educational attainment, leadership experience, integrity and character, public service record, and advocacies. Descriptive statistics revealed that educational attainment became the most preferred attribute, followed by integrity and leadership experience. Chi-square tests used in inferential analysis showed statistically significant associations between educational attainment and voters' preferences for education versus experience-based leadership. This finding implies that more educated respondents adhered to competence-oriented selection criteria. Meanwhile, honesty and transparency were upheld in equal measure at all levels of education, emphasizing the culturally central position of moral leadership. Thematic analysis further reinforced these quantitative results, with participants frequently linking education and ethics to effective governance, and emphasizing tangible priorities such as scholarships, healthcare access, infrastructure, and livelihood. Despite advocacy ranking lowest overall, voters stressed that platforms must be backed by credibility and track record. These findings indicate a gradual shift in local political culture from personality-based and patronage-driven voting to issue- and performance-based evaluation. This transition reflects growing democratic maturity and civic awareness in underserved communities, with implications for leadership development and electoral strategy in similar contexts. The study contributes to a significant understanding of electoral behavior in Mindanao and supports broader regional trends in voter sophistication.

Keywords: Candidate qualifications; Democratic participation; Local elections; Mixed-methods; Voter preferences.

1.0 Introduction

Elections are pivotal in shaping democratic societies, serving as mechanisms through which citizens express their preferences and influence governance. In the Philippines, electoral behavior has traditionally been influenced by entrenched socio-political structures, including familial ties, patronage systems, and charismatic leadership. However, recent studies indicate a gradual shift towards more issue-based voting, particularly among younger and more educated demographics. Social media has emerged as a significant factor in this transformation. Research by Cadayday et al. (2024) highlights that Generation Z voters in the Philippines increasingly utilize platforms like Instagram and TikTok to engage with political content, valuing authenticity and transparency in

candidates' online presence. Similarly, Umali and Brion (2024) found that social media plays a crucial role in shaping the political attitudes of senior high school students, particularly in countering misinformation. Likewise, religious affiliations continue to influence voting behavior significantly. Ravanilla (2024) examined the "vote as one" doctrine of the Iglesia ni Cristo (INC) and found that sectarian endorsements can lead to substantial shifts in vote shares, underscoring the power of religious institutions in Philippine elections. Furthermore, Economic concerns remain at the forefront of voter priorities. A 2025 Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey revealed that Filipino voters prioritize candidates who focus on job creation, food security, and healthcare. These findings suggest a growing demand for leaders who address tangible socio-economic issues.

Local election stakes are particularly high in municipalities like Masiu, Lanao del Sur, a municipal town in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). With development challenges from poverty and poor infrastructure to unwarranted peace and order, the voters are electing not only a representative, but an individual who can personally influence the quality of their daily lives. As noted in recent field reports, residents in BARMM areas consistently express a desire for leadership that is competent, grounded in community values, and capable of addressing urgent socio-economic concerns (Yusof & Bagolong, 2023). Although traditional forms of political loyalty remain strong, recent national trends point to a slow but growing shift in how some Filipino voters, particularly younger ones, evaluate candidates. Studies have documented the rise of issue-based voting among first-time voters and those with access to social media and civic education (Teehankee, 2012; Cabo, 2018). Not that personality politics have disappeared, but voters increasingly rely on platforms, credentials, and identification.

While these studies provide valuable understandings in national and urban voting behaviors, there is a notable gap in localized research focusing on rural and conflict-affected regions like the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Understanding the unique electoral dynamics in areas such as Masiu and Lanao del Sur is crucial to analyzing Philippine voting behavior comprehensively. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the voting preferences of qualified voters in Masiu ahead of the local elections. By identifying the most valued candidate attributes and exploring how demographic profiles, particularly educational attainment, influence these preferences, this research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on electoral behavior in the Philippines. The research uses a mix of survey data and qualitative feedback through thematic interviews to present grounded data on local electoral behavior. This mixed methodology attempts to identify what people select and why. Most importantly, this paper helps better understand how voters in conflict-affected and underserved regions engage with elections. It also sheds light on whether the larger national trend of issue-based voting is developing from the bottom up, something of long-term consequence to governance and democratic consolidation in BARMM and similar regions.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods design that combined qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Masiu Lanao del Sur constituency's voting platform choices. The design allowed for data triangulation, enhancing the validity and richness of the findings by incorporating numerical trends and contextual data (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

2.2 Research Locale

This study was conducted in the Masiu municipality, Lanao del Sur province, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Philippines. Masiu is among the area's oldest and most culturally important towns, rooted in deep Maranao traditions and Islamic governance systems. The zone includes various barangays, which are primarily rural and have tight family societies with deep kinship and tribal identifications. Although it is of historical significance, Masiu continues to experience various development challenges, such as limited access to quality education, healthcare, infrastructure, and stable livelihood opportunities, as noted in the 2024 assessment report by the Municipal Social Welfare Office. To ensure the relevance and depth of data gathered, the study employed a purposive sampling strategy, selecting participants who are exceptionally knowledgeable about the social and developmental conditions of the area. This approach allowed for the deliberate inclusion of individuals who could offer meaningful perceptions aligned with the research objectives. As Ahmad and Wilkins (2024) emphasized, purposive sampling is adequate in qualitative studies, particularly when seeking a detailed understanding from information-rich cases. Their framework supports a systematic application of this technique, enhancing the credibility and contextual relevance of qualitative findings.

2.3 Research Participants

Five hundred respondents from various barangays in Masiu were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation across gender, age, civil status, and educational background. This approach was deemed appropriate given the study's intent to gather perceptions from voters most likely to participate in the local and national elections. Participants ranged from ages 18 to 60 and above, with varying educational attainments and occupations, including students, professionals, farmers, and homemakers. For the qualitative component, 10 key informant interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format. Informants were selected based on their engagement in local governance, community involvement, or consistent voting participation. This qualitative cohort added depth to the interpretation of the quantitative results.

2.4 Research Instrument

For the quantitative phase, a structured questionnaire was used, consisting of two sections: (1) demographic profile and (2) ranked preference questions regarding candidate qualifications and platforms. Respondents were asked to rank candidate attributes such as educational background, leadership experience, platform, appearance, and personal relationship on a 1-to-5 scale, with 1 being the highest priority. For the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview guide was designed to elicit voter perceptions on the importance of education, leadership experience, core values, public service programs, and preferred platforms. Open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate on their choices, enabling thematic analysis.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The data for this study were collected over four weeks, from March to April 2025, using a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. A structured questionnaire was administered to a purposively selected sample of registered voters in various barangays across Masiu. The questionnaire was designed to capture demographic details, electoral behavior, and platform preferences using closed and open-ended items. Trained field researchers, fluent in Maranao and familiar with local customs, conducted face-to-face interviews to ensure clarity of questions and encourage honest responses. In addition to the survey, semi-structured thematic interviews were conducted with a smaller subset of participants to understand better their values, preferences, and motivations behind voting decisions. These interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic coding. The mixed methods design ensured data triangulation and enabled the researchers to validate quantitative findings with rich qualitative narratives, shedding light on the comprehensive view of voter attitudes in the local context.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity, were observed throughout the process. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The purpose of the study was clearly explained, and anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were allowed to withdraw at any point without consequence. This study followed the ethical standards the Philippine Social Science Council (PSSC) set for social research in community settings.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

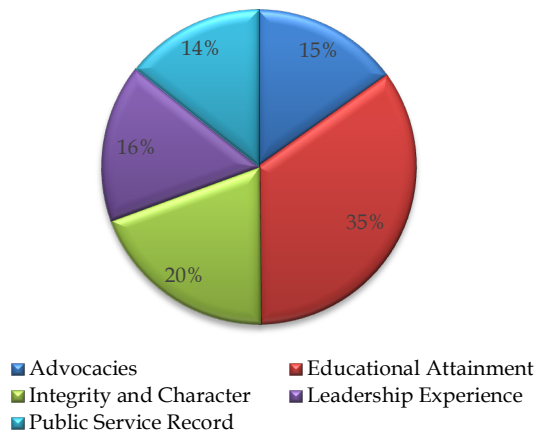
The study engaged 500 respondents from Masiu, Lanao del Sur, revealing a gender distribution of 59% female and 41% male. A significant portion (33%) was aged 32 and above, suggesting a mature and possibly more politically experienced sample. The high rate of registered voters (96%) further reinforces the political relevance of the findings. Occupationally, the sample included students (20%), homemakers, farmers, fishermen, and vendors, elucidating diverse socioeconomic insights in electoral preferences. These demographic characteristics may influence voting behavior, especially since previous studies suggest that older and more educated voters exhibit greater discernment in candidate selection (Chingkoe et al,2016).

3.2 Voter Preferences for Candidate Qualifications

The pie chart demonstrates that Educational Attainment was the most highly valued candidate trait among the voters in Masiu, earning 35% of the total Rank 1 votes. This demonstrates the increasing valuation of academic credentials as a stand-in for governance ability and policy understanding. Integrity and Character (19.2%) and Leadership Experience (16.4%) likewise enjoyed wide acceptance, reflecting that not only does technical competence matter, but moral suitability and experience in leadership also matter. Public Service Record (14.4%)

and Advocacies (15.2%), on the other hand, had fewer top choices, hinting that generalized promises or previous positions are no longer enough to influence voter choices. This distribution substantiates research by James Amante et al. (2024) that Filipino voters, especially in politically active communities, are gradually becoming more intentional and criteria-based in assessing candidates.

Figure 1. *Distribution of Voter Prioritization*



Respondents scored five leadership qualities on a 1-to-5 scale, with one being the most important and five the least. The descriptive statistics capture how voters in Masiu scored five important qualities they look for when selecting political candidates. Respondents were requested to score each quality from 1 (most preferred) to 5 (least preferred). Therefore, in this analysis, a lower mean score indicates higher preference, while a higher mean score reflects lower priority. This allows us to identify which candidate qualifications the electorate values most on average. The table below presents the mean rankings and standard deviations for each attribute.

Table 1. *Descriptive Analysis of Voter Preferences*

| Candidate Attribute | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|-------------------------|------|--------------------|
| Educational Attainment | 2.73 | 1.56 |
| Leadership Experience | 2.82 | 1.25 |
| Integrity and Character | 2.97 | 1.33 |
| Public Service Record | 3.05 | 1.31 |
| Advocacies | 3.41 | 1.47 |

The descriptive distribution reveals clear trends in the attributes that Masiu voters prioritize when selecting candidates for the upcoming elections. Among the five evaluated criteria, educational attainment emerged as the top-ranked attribute ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.56$), indicating that voters associate formal education with a candidate’s preparedness for governance. This aligns with James Amante et al. (2024), who found that voters in the Philippines increasingly consider a candidate’s academic background a marker of competence, particularly in administrative and developmental planning. Closely following in preference was integrity and character ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.25$), reflecting the electorate’s enduring regard for moral leadership traits such as honesty, transparency, and a clean public record. This finding is supported by recent surveys indicating that moral character continues to shape voter choices across the Philippines. For instance, a 2024 nationwide survey by The Nerve reported that 73% of voters consider honesty the most important quality in a senator, underscoring a national preference for ethical governance over party loyalty or personal charisma (Gavilan, 2024). Similarly, the Abiera et al. study (2022) found that most voters prioritize transparency and accountability when assessing candidates, especially in local contexts.

In the context of Masiu, a community shaped by close kinship ties and Islamic cultural values, moral credibility likely carries social weight beyond its administrative implications, reflecting local expectations of leadership as a form of moral stewardship (Teehankee, 2012). Leadership experience ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.33$) and public service record ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.31$) were ranked next, indicating a moderate emphasis on prior governance exposure. These findings echo studies by Diokno-Sicat et al. (2020), which suggest that voters view experiential knowledge as advantageous but not decisive. Interestingly, advocacies were rated lowest ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.47$), suggesting that broad or vague campaign promises may no longer be sufficient to gain voter trust in this locality. This preference pattern signals a shift from personality-driven politics to a more qualifications- and character-centered

electorate, an evolution consistent with national trends toward issue-based voting (Thompson, 2016).

Analysis of rankings reveals that voters with higher education levels, particularly those with college and postgraduate degrees, consistently assign greater importance to competence-based attributes, such as educational attainment and leadership experience.

Table 2. Relationship between Voter's Profile and Voter's Candidate Attribute Preferences

| Candidate Attribute | X ² | df | P-value |
|-------------------------|----------------|----|---------|
| Educational Attainment | 11.36 | 4 | 0.023* |
| Leadership Experience | 13.01 | 4 | 0.011* |
| Integrity and Character | 2.72 | 4 | 0.605 |
| Public Service Record | 4.38 | 4 | 0.357 |
| Advocacies | 0.21 | 4 | 0.056 |

*p<0.05 indicates significance

Table 2 revealed significant associations between voters' educational profile and their ranking of two candidate attributes: educational background ($\chi^2 = 11.36$, $p = 0.023$) and leadership experience ($\chi^2 = 13.01$, $p = 0.011$). These findings suggest that more educated respondents prioritize competence-related attributes, consistent with broader theories of democratic development and civic sophistication (Reyes, 2020). Voters with college and postgraduate degrees were significantly more likely to rank educational attainment and prior leadership roles higher than their counterparts with lower education levels. This pattern of behavior is consistent with the national survey's observation that Filipino voters with higher levels of education tend to adopt a more policy and performance-focused approach when evaluating candidates. Rather than being influenced by personality traits or populist rhetoric, these voters emphasize candidates' qualifications and demonstrated ability to navigate governance structures effectively. Supporting this, recent surveys such as Hufana's (2024) study reveal that many voters prioritize competence and proven results over personal appeal. Similarly, Rappler's Gavilan (2024) findings show that most respondents consider candidates' track records and clear policy stances as critical factors in their decision-making. Research involving young voters also points to a trend where issue-based considerations increasingly outweigh personality-driven choices, especially among those with formal education (Batara et al., 2021). Furthermore, studies demonstrate a notable connection between educational attainment and informed voting patterns, highlighting how education encourages voters to scrutinize candidates more critically (Javines, 2024). Complementing these insights, research from the University of the Philippines' Mendoza (2025) highlights retrospective voting as an important mechanism through which educated voters hold incumbents accountable based on their performance. Together, these recent studies reinforce the idea that Filipino voters with formal education value credentials and the candidates' capacity to understand governance frameworks and effectively deliver results.

In contrast, attributes such as integrity and character ($p = 0.605$), public service record ($p = 0.357$), and advocacies ($p = 0.056$) did not show statistically significant associations with educational attainment. These findings show that ethical and moral values are always significant at every level of education, supporting earlier research by Hufana (2024), which highlighted the deeply ingrained nature of "moral politics" in the electoral conduct of Filipinos. The absence of variation implies that honesty, transparency, and public service orientation are all important qualities regardless of a voter's educational attainment. In the same vein, although advocacies were regularly cited in interviews, their absence of statistical significance might suggest that voters see platforms as secondary to a candidate's qualifications and personal integrity. Overall, the inferential analysis corroborates the position that voter preferences are stratified by education on technical issues, but united on fundamental values, emphasizing diversity and cohesion within the electorate.

Thematic interviews reinforce this trend. Respondents consistently linked education to competent leadership. One participant stated, "A candidate must at least have a proper educational background to govern a community... Masiu did not improve at all because previous leaders lacked administrative knowledge.". This opinion resonates with that of Diokno-Sicat et al. (2020), who established that educational background among government officials positively correlates with better policy outcomes and program implementation. Although integrity and character ranked lower in the quantitative ranking, qualitative feedback heavily emphasized honesty, transparency, and moral responsibility. Many voters noted that corruption and abuse of power often stem from weak ethical standards in leadership. One respondent remarked, "Without honesty and transparency, corruption can thrive." These responses reflect deeply held communal and religious values in Masiu, where leadership is often judged by skill and

adherence to moral and cultural expectations (Abiera et al., 2022). Laput et al. (2024) also found that honesty remains the top priority among Filipino voters, with 73% citing it as the most critical trait in senators.

Leadership experience, though ranked third, was discussed in subtle ways during interviews. Many voters preferred tribal or community leaders over elected officials, citing a more authentic connection to grassroots realities. As one noted, *"They have first-hand experience of people's struggles."* Others valued former government employees, recognizing their ability to navigate bureaucratic systems. These findings suggest that voters distinguish between mere title-holders and those with substantive, experience-based leadership, echoing Teehankee's (2012) call for more grounded and responsive political leadership. Interestingly, despite being rated lowest in the rankings ($M = 3.41$), platforms and advocacies were still meaningfully discussed in interviews, especially when tied to tangible service programs. Respondents frequently cited education, health care, and infrastructure as essential services. One participant stated, *"We want more schools like a college school in order for us to have more options for a better future."* Another emphasized access to local healthcare facilities. While broad political slogans may no longer carry weight, programmatic specificity still resonates. This indicates voters may discount vague campaign promises but value well-defined, actionable platforms.

Quantitative responses to program priorities reflect this: 31.2% of respondents preferred educational scholarships, followed by health and social services (29.6%), infrastructure projects, and disaster response. This mirrors national survey trends, such as those from SWS (2025), where health, education, and jobs consistently top the list of voter concerns. Moreover, economic development emerged as the most pressing issue (41.8%), followed by peace and safety (34.8%). These concerns were echoed in qualitative accounts linking poverty, unemployment, and insecurity. One voter put it, *"More jobs, less crimes,"* highlighting the felt linkage between work opportunities and social order. This supports Sen's (2014) idea of development as freedom, wherein economic empowerment is necessary not just for material betterment but also for individual empowerment and democratic engagement. Thus, the intersection of quantitative rankings and qualitative stories reveals a maturing electorate that prizes technical preparedness, moral rectitude, and pragmatic outcomes. Masiu voters are shifting away from personality politics and towards issue-based, competence-driven standards for leadership. This is in tandem with trends elsewhere in Southeast Asia as democratization advances through electoral demands of performance and accountability (Felker, 2009; Thompson, 2016). For the candidates, winning an election is not necessarily about kinship or rhetoric but about verifiable integrity, education, and a focus on public service.

Summing up, this study significantly enriches the discourse on electoral behavior in developing democracies by providing empirical evidence from Masiu, Lanao del Sur, a rural and conflict-affected area within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). By focusing on voter preferences in this underrepresented locale, the research offers a localized perspective that complements and deepens existing national electoral studies. Prioritizing educational attainment, integrity, and leadership experience as key candidate attributes departs from traditional personality-driven or kinship-based voting patterns. This shift suggests the emergence of a more reflective and competence-oriented electorate, even within socio-culturally conservative and resource-limited environments. Such findings align with recent studies indicating a broader trend among Filipino voters, particularly the youth, towards valuing candidate competence and integrity over mere popularity or familial ties.

By employing a mixed-methods approach, this study captures the statistical and narrative dimensions of voter preferences, providing a deep understanding of the motivations behind electoral choices. The integration of qualitative data deepens the analysis of how voters relate technical qualifications to real-world governance outcomes, particularly in underserved municipalities. Hence, this research validates national trends and reveals how democratic ideals are gradually internalized in peripheral areas. It defines electoral policy and candidate strategy while contributing to the theoretical refinement of voter behavior models in fragile democratic settings. As such, the study serves as a relevant and timely resource for political scientists, development practitioners, and governance reform advocates seeking to understand and support democratic deepening at the local level.

4.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined the voting preferences of registered voters of Masiu, Lanao del Sur, prior to the elections for their voting preferences, specifically how demographic factors, such as educational level, affect the value placed on candidate qualities. Quantitative rankings and thematic interviews revealed an emerging local electorate with a growing favor for education, integrity, and experience as more important than classic indicators such as charisma or campaign slogans. Educational background was rated highest, implying electors equate

intellectual credentials with leadership ability and preparedness to rule. Honesty and moral character came next, validating the recurrent position of moral expectations in Filipino electoral politics. While advocacies were most often debated in interviews, their lower mean ranking and failure to correlate significantly with profiles of voters confirm an increasing cynicism regarding imprecise campaign slogans in the dearth of evidence-based competence.

Statistical analysis verified that the level of education plays a significant role in influencing voters' preferences, especially concerning competence-oriented qualities. However, moral virtues like honesty and transparency were consistently valued across educational levels, demonstrating common cultural standards despite demographic variation. Thematic interviews further validated these patterns, revealing that voters prioritize leadership that is not only ethically grounded but also solution-focused, especially in areas such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic development. The data points to a grassroots-level evolution toward issue-based, values-driven voting, consistent with broader trends in democratic deepening across Southeast Asia. For future leaders in Masiu, these findings underscore the necessity of embodying moral integrity and technical capacity to resonate with an increasingly reflective and engaged electorate.

5.0 Contribution of Authors

Author 1: supervising, data analysis.
Author 2: data analysis, data gathering.

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7.0 Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests or potential conflicts of interest regarding this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

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