



Campaign Practices of Political Candidates in the Barangay Elections

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the campaign practices of political candidates in the Barangay Election to strengthen electoral integrity. Using a descriptive research design, data were gathered from 355 registered voters across eight villages, with demographic profiles considered regarding age, sex, civil status, and highest educational attainment. Most respondents (60.28%) were below 45 years old, reflecting a segment of the electorate highly exposed to traditional and digital campaign strategies. Findings revealed that premature campaigning was widespread, with the wearing of campaign apparel such as T-shirts bearing candidates' names and images emerging as the most dominant practice across all demographics. Campaign strategies were heavily characterized by distribution of material goods -- including T-shirts, bags, food, and drinks -- alongside excessive media exposure of candidates. Vote buying and selling also persisted in varied forms, ranging from direct cash inducements to logistical support such as transportation of voters. Demographic differences shaped how these practices were experienced: younger and single voters reported greater exposure to direct inducements and covert tactics, while older and married voters emphasized logistical support. The researcher conclude that barangay elections remain deeply rooted in visibility -- driven and clientelistic campaign practices, with candidates tailoring strategies to specific voter profiles. To address these persistent challenges, the study recommends stricter COMELEC monitoring and sanctions against premature campaigning, regulation of media exposure and oversized paraphernalia, intensified enforcement against vote buying, and targeted voter education.

Keywords: Campaign Practices, Barangay Elections, Premature Campaign, Campaign Strategies, Clientelistic Campaign Practices

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INTRODUCTION

Republic Act 9006, or the Fair Elections Act, provides the legal framework designed to ensure that elections in the Philippines are conducted in a free, orderly, honest, peaceful, and credible manner (Senate Electoral Tribunal, 2023). The law outlines specific obligations for political aspirants, including restrictions on campaign conduct, posting of propaganda materials, and ethical interactions with voters. Its amendment through Senate Resolution 2079 further clarified provisions on the posting, utilization, and distribution of campaign materials, reflecting the evolving landscape of electoral engagement and the need for adaptive governance mechanisms (An Act Amending Republic Act 9006). Additionally, other legislation, such as Republic Act No. 6646 and Batas Pambansa Blg. 881 (Electoral Reforms Law of 1987), established rules on common poster areas, sizes of election paraphernalia, and the airing of political advertisements across television, radio, and print media, highlighting the multifaceted regulatory efforts aimed at curbing unfair electoral practices.

Despite these legal frameworks, the persistent prevalence of premature campaigning, vote buying, and other transactional strategies indicates a gap between policy and practice. In the 2023 Synchronized Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections (SKE), the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) launched the “Kontra Bigay” Anti-Vote Buying Campaign, emphasizing a holistic approach to tackling vote-buying, which is widely regarded as a major obstacle to democratic consolidation in the country. According to reports in The Philippine Star (2023), complaint centers were established to document instances of vote buying and selling, reinforcing the commission’s intensified effort to ensure electoral integrity (Jaymalin, 2023). Nevertheless, media coverage and official records indicate that violations remain widespread, underscoring challenges in enforcement and citizen reporting mechanisms.

For instance, the Philippine Daily Inquirer (2022) documented that over 1,000 vote-buying cases were still under investigation by COMELEC, while other illegal acts included the improper disposal of election paraphernalia in public spaces, as reported in Amadeo, Cavite, and the distribution of campaign giveaways such as shirts, mugs, and ballers—actions explicitly prohibited under COMELEC guidelines issued on September 4, 2023 (Pazzibugan, 2023). On the day of the 2023 Barangay and SK elections, reports from COMELEC Negros Occidental indicated multiple allegations of vote buying, though many were verbal and lacked formal complaints (Panay News, 2023). Similar patterns emerged during the 2022 Presidential and Local Elections, when the Philippine National Police in Bacolod received numerous reports of vote buying a day before the polls, yet none of the witnesses were willing to testify (The Daily Guardian, 2022). These recurring challenges point to the limitations of current regulatory mechanisms and the need for empirical assessment of their deterrent effect.

The persistence of illegal electoral practices raises critical questions about the effectiveness of existing election laws and COMELEC resolutions in deterring misconduct among political candidates. Despite the formal structures designed to safeguard democratic processes, local elections—particularly at the barangay level—remain vulnerable to transactional politics, clientelism, and personality-driven mobilization. These micro-level contests are often overlooked in political behavior research, which tends to focus on national and municipal elections, leaving a knowledge gap regarding the dynamics of grassroots political practices.

Framing this study within United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) emphasizes the importance of ethical governance, transparency, and institutional accountability. SDG 16 calls for the promotion of just, peaceful, and inclusive societies and the development of effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels. Barangay officials and candidates, as frontline actors in local governance, embody these principles in their day-to-day political conduct. By examining grassroots campaign practices, the study contributes to understanding how local electoral behaviors either support or undermine the integrity of democratic institutions, directly aligning with the global agenda of strengthening governance and rule of law.

This study is informed by the researcher’s experience as a former punong barangay in a highly urbanized city in Central Philippines, providing both professional insight and contextual understanding of local electoral processes. It seeks to empirically examine whether existing and amended election laws, together with updated COMELEC resolutions and guidelines, effectively deter premature campaigning, vote buying, and other unethical campaign practices. By systematically documenting these behaviors and voters’ perceptions of them, the study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations that can enhance compliance, strengthen enforcement, and promote ethical political behavior at the grassroots level. In doing so, it not only supports local democratic resilience but also contributes to the broader objectives of SDG 16, fostering accountable leadership, citizen participation, and transparent governance across communities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study examined the campaign practices of political candidates in the Barangay Elections in a highly-urbanized city in Central Philippines during the calendar year 2023. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions: 1) the profile of respondents according to age, sex, highest educational attainment, and civil status; 2) the level of campaign practices of political



candidates according to premature campaign, campaign strategies, and vote buying/vote selling; and 3) if there is a significant difference in the level of campaign practices of political candidates when grouped and compared according to the aforementioned variables.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Good governance and ethical political behavior remain essential to sustaining democratic institutions and public trust at the grassroots level. Coronel (2022) observed that modern political campaigns often exploit legal loopholes through premature visibility strategies, challenging election integrity and complicating the enforcement of campaign regulations. Similarly, Teehankee and Calimbahin (2016) found that weak oversight mechanisms normalize early campaigning, eroding the fairness of local elections. The Commission on Elections (2022) further acknowledged that despite regulatory reforms, premature campaigning and vote buying persist, highlighting the limited deterrent effect of current policies.

From a governance perspective, transparency, accountability, and participation are critical determinants of public confidence (Brillantes & Fernandez, 2018). De Guzman (2019) stressed that ethical leadership enhances bureaucratic efficiency and citizen engagement, while Atienza (2021) argued that grassroots governance often suffers from patronage and the weak institutionalization of values-based leadership. Cariño (2020) and Bautista (2023) likewise underscored that genuine public service must rest on moral integrity, compassion, and adherence to the principle that “public office is a public trust,” particularly among barangay officials who directly shape community welfare.

Scholars have also highlighted the role of civic engagement and voter education in strengthening political maturity. David (2021) noted that civil society-led electoral literacy initiatives help reduce disinformation and transactional politics, while Cruz and Guerrero (2022) emphasized the importance of academic–LGU partnerships in fostering ethical awareness and participatory governance. These findings align with the Commission on Elections’ (2023) advocacy for citizen-driven accountability to ensure credible, transparent, and inclusive electoral processes.

Despite these insights, there remains a significant research gap in empirically documenting how premature campaigning, material inducements, and personality-based mobilization continue to shape barangay elections—a level of governance often overlooked in political behavior studies. Existing literature focuses mainly on national and municipal contests, leaving the micro-level dynamics of barangay politics underexplored. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the extent and nature of campaign practices among local candidates and how these reflect persistent patterns of clientelism and transactional politics in a supposedly nonpartisan electoral setting.

Building on the conceptual lens of Practice Theory, campaign behaviors can be seen as structured social practices performed by candidates, campaign staff, and volunteers, encompassing routines, habitual strategies, and interactions that reproduce the political landscape (Apps, Beckman, & Bennet, 2019). By observing these practices, researchers can identify the tacit norms, improvisations, and adaptive strategies employed to influence voters, particularly in local settings where informal networks dominate. Complementing this, Symbolic Interactionism allows an interpretive examination of how voters decode messages, symbols, and gestures embedded in campaigns, thereby shaping the perceived legitimacy and effectiveness of candidate strategies (Carter & Fuller, 2015; Blumer, 1969). Integrating these perspectives provides a robust analytical framework to capture both observable patterns and their underlying meanings in barangay electoral contexts.

Regional and global trends reinforce these micro-level observations. Youth and single voters, for example, show heightened engagement with digital and entertainment-focused campaign strategies. In Indonesia, political campaigns increasingly rely on esports, social media, and pop-culture content to mobilize younger demographics (Associated Press, 2024). In the Philippines, over 80% of Gen Z voters are active on social media platforms daily, amplifying their exposure to digital campaigns (RSIS, 2023). Strömbäck, Shehata, and Andersson (2024) similarly note that online mobilization intensifies youth engagement as elections approach, reflecting campaigns’ adaptation to generational communication preferences. These patterns suggest that demographic characteristics intersect with campaign exposure, influencing both perceptions and behaviors.

Clientelistic practices remain a persistent challenge. Despite regulatory reforms, vote-buying, material inducements, and premature campaigning continue to occur in barangay elections (The Daily Guardian, 2022; Pazzibugan, 2023; Panay News, 2023). COMELEC initiatives, such as complaint centers and anti-vote-buying campaigns, highlight institutional attempts to curb illegal practices (Jaymalin, 2023). Yet, pending cases and anecdotal reports illustrate the limits of enforcement, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions, robust monitoring mechanisms, and civic participation strategies to strengthen compliance and electoral integrity.

Framed within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), these insights highlight the global relevance of local electoral practices. SDG 16 emphasizes building effective, accountable, and transparent institutions, fostering inclusive participation, and combating corruption. By situating barangay-level campaign practices within



this normative framework, the study not only illuminates micro-level electoral dynamics but also demonstrates how grassroots governance contributes to broader goals of sustainable, ethical, and participatory democratic institutions.

METHODOLOGY

This section presents the research methodology used, the subjects and respondents of the study, the research instrument used, the reliability of the instrument, the procedure for data gathering, and the statistical tools and data analysis procedures.

Research Design

The study utilized a Descriptive Research Design to assess the level of campaign practices of political candidates during the Barangay Elections in a highly-urbanized city in Central Philippines. As defined by Dulock (1993), the descriptive design provides an accurate and systematic portrayal of a phenomenon without manipulating variables. It is appropriate for the study as it enables the identification of existing conditions, relationships, beliefs, and emerging trends relevant to local electoral practices.

The study employed a Descriptive Research Design to explore the relationship between the Senior High School (SHS) Voucher Program and students' learning motivation in private secondary schools for the academic year 2024–2025. This approach was appropriate for investigating the current status of the phenomenon without manipulating variables and enabled a systematic analysis of how the voucher program influenced students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as their self-efficacy (Calmorin, 2011).

Data were gathered through survey questionnaires, which captured demographic profiles (age, sex, income, and year level) and motivation levels. The design also allowed for identifying significant differences in motivation across demographic groups and understanding students' perceptions of the program's effectiveness. Ultimately, the findings offered practical insights to inform policies and strategies aimed at improving the SHS Voucher Program's impact on learner motivation and retention.

Study Respondents

From a total voter population of 4,630 across 37 puroks, the study involved 355 registered voters from eight (8) puroks located near the barangay's people's hall. The sample included both male and female residents, single and married individuals, and voters with varying levels of educational attainment. The study employed stratified random sampling, a method that divides the population into smaller groups or strata based on shared characteristics such as income and education (Hayes, 2023). The statistician determined the number of respondents per purok proportionate to its voter population: Purok A (39), Purok B (27), Purok C (16), Purok D (41), Purok E (33), Purok F (72), Purok G (64), and Purok H (63) -- comprising the total sample of 355 respondents.

Instrument

A researcher-made survey questionnaire was used to assess the level of campaign practices of political candidates in the Barangay Elections. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: Part I gathered respondents' demographic profiles, such as age, sex, educational attainment, and civil status, while Part II measured the level of campaign practices across three areas -- premature campaigning, campaign strategies, and vote buying/vote selling -- with ten (10) items per area, for a total of thirty (30) items. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 (Always) to 1 (Rarely). The instrument underwent validity and reliability testing prior to data collection.

Data Gathering Procedure

The study followed a structured data gathering procedure to examine the level of campaign practices of political candidates in the Barangay Elections. Following the validation and reliability testing of the instrument, formal letters of permission were sent to the purok chairpersons where the pilot and actual surveys were conducted. Upon approval, the researchers met with the respondents to explain the purpose of the study, the contents of the questionnaire, and the procedures for accomplishing it. In compliance with ethical research standards, respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. The researchers personally administered and retrieved the accomplished questionnaires to ensure completeness and accuracy. Collected data were then categorized, tabulated, and prepared for statistical analysis.



Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

Objective No. 1 used the descriptive-analytical scheme to determine the level of campaign practices of political candidates in the Barangay Elections according to age, sex, highest educational attainment, and civil status.

Objective No. 2 used the descriptive analytical scheme and mean to determine the level of campaign practices of political candidates in the Barangay Elections according to the following domains: premature campaign, campaign strategies, and vote buying/vote selling.

Objective No. 3 used the comparative-analytical scheme and Mann-Whitney U test to determine if there is a significant difference in the level of campaign practices of political candidates in the Barangay Elections when grouped and compared according to demographic variables.

Ethical Consideration

The study on level of campaign practices of political candidates in the Barangay Elections was conducted in full compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173), ensuring the confidentiality, protection, and rights of all participants. Informed consent was obtained from participants, clearly outlining their right to voluntarily participate, withdraw at any time without consequences. Confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process. Access to raw data was restricted to the authorized research team, and results were reported in a manner that protected the anonymity of all respondents. Ethical concerns were addressed promptly to safeguard participant welfare and ensure research integrity. This adherence to ethical and legal protocols supported the credibility and trustworthiness of the study and helped maintain high standards of professional conduct in educational research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents, analyzes, and interprets the data that were gathered consistent with its predetermined objectives.

Table 1

Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Younger (below 45 years old)	214	60.28
	Older (45 years old and above)	141	39.72
	Total	355	100
Sex	Male	148	41.69
	Female	207	58.31
	Total	355	100
Highest Educational Attainment	Lower (elementary and high school)	192	54.08
	Higher (college)	163	45.92
	Total	355	100
Civil Status	Single	203	57.18
	Married	152	42.82
	Total	355	100



Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of the 300 SHS-VP beneficiaries enrolled in private senior high schools. Most respondents were aged 18 and above (61%) and female (71.67%). A majority came from families earning below ₱33,000 monthly (61.67%), were in Grade 11 (51%), and had fewer than three siblings (62.33%). These figures offer a snapshot of the socioeconomic background of the student respondents.

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 355 respondents in terms of age, sex, educational attainment, and civil status. The majority, 214 respondents (60.28%), were below 45 years old, while 141 (39.72%) were aged 45 and above. This distribution reflects a voter segment commonly described in Philippine electoral studies as more digitally connected and adaptable to campaign trends (Coronel, 2022; Ong & Cabanes, 2018). The predominance of younger voters suggests that digital and social media-based campaigns -- particularly through platforms like Facebook and TikTok -- may have exerted stronger influence in the area, complementing traditional methods such as house-to-house visits and community events. However, older voters remain vital to electoral stability as they tend to maintain consistent participation regardless of digital exposure (Boulianne, 2020).

In terms of sex, female respondents comprised 58.31% (207), while males accounted for 41.69% (148). The higher proportion of women aligns with findings that female voters in the Philippines often play active roles in community mobilization and local political participation (Tapales, 2019; David et al., 2021). Women's involvement in family and civic networks makes them strategic targets for personality-driven and grassroots campaigns (medina, 2020). Their active engagement in both online and offline political discussions amplify campaign messages, indicating that relational and interpersonal strategies may have been particularly effective in the study area.

Regarding educational attainment, 54.08% of respondents had lower educational backgrounds, while 45.92% were college graduates. This mix implies that campaign strategies resonated across different voter segments: those with higher education may respond more to issue-based messaging, while less-educated voters may be influenced by personality-centered and community-oriented approaches (Teehankee & Calimbahin, 2016). Prior studies also suggest that vote buying tends to be more prevalent among socioeconomically vulnerable groups (Hicken et al., 2018), indicating that transactional politics may persist to some extent in the study area.

In terms of civil status, 57.18% were single, and 42.82% were married. Single voters are typically more influenced by their peer networks, online mobilization, and youth-oriented events, while married voters are often targeted through household-based vote buying or family-level mobilization (David et al., 2020). Overall, the respondent profile underscores the need for hybrid campaign approaches -- combining digital outreach with traditional face-to-face strategies -- to effectively engage diverse voter groups. It also highlights persistent challenges such as premature campaigning and vote buying, underscoring the importance of policy interventions and civic education to promote ethical and transparent electoral practices.

Descriptive analysis in the level of campaign practices of political candidates in the Barangay Elections in the areas of Premature Campaign, Campaign Strategies, and Vote Buying/Vote Selling

Table 2

Level of Campaign Practices of Political Candidates in the Barangay Elections in Premature Campaign

Items	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a registered voter, I have witnessed/experienced/encountered...</i>		
1. direct or indirect solicitation of votes, pledges, or support for or against a candidate.	4.08	High Level
2. political candidates alongside five of his or her campaign staff wearing a T-shirt bearing the candidate's name and photo before the campaign period.	4.41	High Level
3. airing of advertisements over television or radio programs from July 8, 2023, to October 18, 2023, or prior to the start of the campaign period.	3.90	



4. placement or streaming of advertisements of political candidates on social media from July 8, 2023, to October 18, 2023, or before the campaign period.	3.88	High Level
5. formation of organizations, associations, clubs, committees, or other groups of persons to solicit votes and/or undertake any campaign for or against a candidate.	4.20	High Level
6. Posting of campaign materials on public streets before October 19, 2023, or the start of the campaign period.	4.20	High Level
7. political candidates promoting their advocacies through various platforms before October 19, 2023, or the start of the campaign period.	4.22	High Level
8. publishing or distributing campaign literature or materials designed to support or oppose the election of any candidate.	3.95	High Level
9. holding of political causes, conferences, meetings, rallies, parades, or other similar assemblies, soliciting votes, and/or undertaking any campaign or propaganda for or against a candidate.	4.05	High Level
10. political candidates making speeches, announcements, or commentaries, or holding interviews for or against the election of any candidate for public office.	3.92	High Level
Overall Mean	4.08	High Level

Table 2 presents the level of campaign practices of political candidates in the Barangay Elections, with an overall mean score of 4.08, interpreted as a high level of campaign practices. This indicates that activities associated with early campaigning were widely observed in the study area.

Among the indicators, the placement or streaming of political advertisements on social media prior to the official campaign period (July 8-October 18, 2023) obtained the lowest mean of 3.88 while wearing T-shirts bearing a candidate's name and photo before the campaign period recorded the highest mean of 4.41, both interpreted as high-level practices. The findings suggest that branded apparel and early visibility tactics have become common strategies for candidates to build recognition before the official campaign period.

These practices blur the line between personal visibility and political solicitation, complicating enforcement of campaign regulations. As Coronel (2022) noted, modern political marketing thrives on visibility and message saturation, with even minor public appearances shaping voter attitudes over time. This aligns with the observations of the Commission on Elections (2022) and Teehankee and Calimbahin (2016) that premature campaigning often exploits legal loopholes allowing early exposure without clear sanctions.

From a governance standpoint, the findings underscore the need for stricter COMELEC monitoring and clearer enforcement guidelines at the community level, including documentation mechanisms for pre-campaign activities. Moreover, civic education



initiatives should inform voters that such informal or “innocent” acts of visibility are part of a strategic premature campaign designed to influence voter perceptions well before the official campaign period begins.

Table 3

Level of Campaign Practices of Political Candidates in the Barangay Elections in Campaign Strategies

Items	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a registered voter, I have witnessed/experienced/encountered...</i>		
1. individual posters in common poster areas exceeding 2x3 feet.	4.01	High Level
2. billboards, posters, and tarpaulins exceeding 2x3 feet.	3.74	High Level
3. election campaign or propaganda materials that violate gender sensitivity principles, or are obscene, or otherwise constitute Republic Act No. 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women.	3.86	High Level
4. posters or tarpaulins that do not bear the words “Political advertisement paid for/by _____” or “Printed free of charge,” as may be applicable.	3.80	High Level
5. posters or tarpaulins bearing the image of candidates, whether individually, by group, or of the whole slate, which exceed 2x3 feet.	3.95	High Level
6. name-calling or mudslinging to discredit a political candidate during media interviews.	3.80	High Level
7. too frequent and unnecessary guesting or interviewing of an incumbent official seeking re-election or a political candidate in a TV or radio program.	4.07	High Level
8. posters with single letters of names of political candidates, having a maximum size of 2x3 feet, assembled to form a size exceeding 2x3 feet, or other similar means of grouping such posters that tend to circumvent the size limitation.	3.96	High Level
9. giving of T-shirts, ballers, bags, sun visors, hats or caps, umbrellas, handkerchiefs, ballpens, fans, food, drinks, and transportation by candidates or their supporters during and after the campaign.	4.03	High Level
10. political candidates alongside five of his or her campaign staff wearing only a T-shirt bearing the candidate’s name and photo, only during the campaign period.	3.94	High Level
Overall Mean	3.92	High Level



Table 3 shows the level of campaign practices of political candidates in the barangay elections in terms of campaign strategies, with an overall mean score of 3.92, interpreted as a high level of campaign practices. Among the indicators, the use of billboards, posters, and tarpaulins exceeding 2x3 feet received the lowest mean of 3.74, while the distribution of campaign materials and in-kind benefits such as T-shirts, fans, umbrellas, food, drinks, and transportation obtained the highest mean of 4.03, both indicating a high level of practice. These results suggest that material inducements remain central to campaign strategies even at the barangay level. Candidates continue to rely on tangible giveaways to generate goodwill, strengthen voter connection, and enhance name recall -- blurring the boundary between legitimate campaigning and indirect vote buying.

This finding supports Munoz (2018), who observed that the distribution of non-monetary goods during campaigns remains an effective clientelistic tool for signaling generosity and cultivating loyalty, particularly where party systems are weak. Similarly, Van Ham and Lindberg (2015) noted that such practices persist in various democracies because they influence undecided voters and reinforce existing patronage networks.

The persistence of these traditional strategies in Philippine barangay elections reflects a broader global pattern: in grassroots political contexts, face-to-face and material-based campaigning continues to coexist with, and sometimes outweigh, digital campaign methods. The high mean ratings for material inducements in this study indicate that despite technological modernization, clientelistic and personalized campaign practices remain deeply embedded in local electoral culture.

Table 4

Level of Campaign Practices of Political Candidates in the Barangay Elections in Vote Buying/Vote Selling

Items	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a registered voter, I have witnessed/experienced/encountered...</i>		
1. being offered/receiving assistance (financial or otherwise) during the campaign period.	3.65	High Level
2. distribution of coins, money bills, cash cards, pay envelopes, tokens, or anything of value, together with sample ballots or other campaign materials.	3.47	Moderate Level
3. being offered or promised something valuable in exchange for my vote.	3.59	High Level
4. a long queue of people or registered voters to receive money, discounts, insurance, health cards, grocery items, etc.	3.63	High Level
5. house-to-house campaign that involves distributing money, discount cards, grocery items, and other valuable items to voters.	3.57	High Level
6. conduct of bingo games, talent shows, or other similar activities that involve the distribution of prizes by political candidates or their supporters, or any person, wherein the names of candidates or the photos of candidates were mentioned and shown, respectively.	3.61	High Level



7. gathering or transporting two or more registered voters to an area before and during election day, purposely for the distribution of money, or anything valuable, and/or sample ballots or filled-out ballots.	3.65	High Level
8. possession of a voter or political candidate's supporter of blank original ballots on election day	3.57	High Level
9. Provision of transportation to registered voters to polling centers on election day.	3.62	High Level
10. provision of meals to registered voters on election day.	3.55	High Level
Overall Mean	3.59	High Level

Table 4 presents the campaign practices of political candidates in the barangay elections concerning vote buying and vote selling, with an overall mean of 3.59, interpreted as a high level of campaign practices. This indicates that activities involving material or financial inducements remain prevalent during local elections.

Among the indicators, the provision of meals to registered voters on election day obtained the lowest mean of 3.55, while the gathering or transporting of voters for the distribution of money, valuables, or sample ballots recorded the highest mean of 3.65, both interpreted as high-level practices. The findings suggest that logistical and financial assistance remain dominant strategies for influencing voter behavior, reflecting the persistence of resource-based political engagement in barangay contests.

These practices highlight the continuing influence of patronage politics, where tangible benefits outweigh issue-based appeals, despite the prohibition of vote buying under Section 26(a) of the Omnibus Election Code (Batas Pambansa Blg. 881). As noted by Hicken et al. (2018) and Muñoz (2018), vote buying persists where material needs are pressing and accountability mechanisms are weak. Similarly, Van Ham and Lindberg (2015) emphasize that such exchanges function as tools of voter mobilization and loyalty-building.

From a governance standpoint, the findings underscore the need for stronger enforcement and civic education to address the cultural acceptance of vote buying and selling. Enhanced monitoring mechanisms and voter awareness programs could help shift electoral participation from transactional to programmatic engagement at the community level.

Comparative Analysis in the level of campaign practices of political candidates in the Barangay Elections in the areas of Premature Campaign, Campaign Strategies, and Vote Buying/Vote Selling when grouped and compared according to age, sex, highest educational attainment , and civil status

Table 5

Differences in the level Campaign Practices of Political Candidates in the Barangay Elections in Premature Campaign when grouped and compared according to variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Age	Younger	214	183.60	13889.000	0.204	0.05	Not Significant
	Older	141	169.50				
Sex	Male	148	178.46	15250.000	0.943		Not Significant
	Female	207	177.67				



Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	192	178.93	15468.500	0.852	Not Significant
	Higher	163	176.90			
Civil Status	Single	203	193.93	12193.500	0.001	Significant
	Married	152	156.72			

Table 5 presents the differences in the level of campaign practices of political candidates regarding premature campaigning when respondents are grouped according to age, sex, educational attainment, and civil status. The results indicate no significant differences across age ($p = 0.204$), sex ($p = 0.943$), and educational attainment ($p = 0.852$), suggesting that these demographic variables do not substantially influence respondents' perceptions of early campaign activities. This observation is consistent with previous studies that highlight how the pervasiveness of premature campaigning in community and digital spaces can render certain demographic factors less decisive in shaping awareness or perception (Tanggol, 2021; Rocamora, 2018).

A significant difference, however, was found for civil status ($p = 0.001$), with single voters reporting a higher mean rank (MR = 193.93) than married voters (MR = 156.72). This implies that marital status influences sensitivity to premature campaigning, with single respondents appearing more observant or critical of early campaign activities. This may be due to their stronger engagement in social networks and digital media, which increases exposure to campaign materials and events (RSIS, 2023; Strömbäck, Shehata, & Andersson, 2024). Married voters, on the other hand, may perceive such practices with more tolerance, shaped by familial priorities, stability, and competing daily responsibilities (David, Teehankee, & Tadem, 2021).

These findings resonate with research on voter responsiveness to clientelistic and non-programmatic campaign practices. Hicken and Nathan (2020) and Pabico (2020) emphasized that socio-demographic characteristics influence how citizens interpret political behavior, including tolerance of early campaigning or vote-buying. Integrating Practice Theory (Apps, Beckman, & Bennet, 2019), these results suggest that premature campaigning represents a patterned social practice, and single voters' heightened sensitivity may reflect their more active participation in the social and digital networks where these practices circulate. Symbolic Interactionism (Carter & Fuller, 2015) further elucidates how single voters attach meaning to campaign activities, interpreting them as symbolic markers of candidate behavior and political integrity.

Overall, the data underscore the need for targeted voter education initiatives that account for civil status. Programs could encourage single voters to act as community monitors of campaign compliance, while also raising awareness among married voters about the long-term consequences of tolerating premature campaigning. Such interventions would reinforce COMELEC's (2019) regulations, promote responsible political engagement, and strengthen the overall integrity of electoral processes in the Philippines.

Table 6

Differences in the level Campaign Practices of Political Candidates in the Barangay Elections in Campaign Strategies when grouped and compared according to variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Age	Younger	214	194.16	11629.500	0.000	0.05	Significant
	Older	141	153.48				
Sex	Male	148	181.76	14761.500	0.557		Not Significant
	Female	207	175.31				
Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	192	180.46	15175.000	0.621		Not Significant
	Higher	163	175.10				
Civil Status	Single	203	170.39	14271.500	0.224		Not Significant
	Married	152	183.70				



Table 6 presents the differences in the level of campaign practices of political candidates in terms of campaign strategies when respondents are grouped according to selected demographic variables. Results indicate no significant differences across sex ($p = 0.557$), highest educational attainment ($p = 0.621$), and civil status ($p = 0.224$), suggesting that these factors do not substantially influence respondents' perceptions of candidates' campaign strategies. This finding is consistent with studies showing that exposure to modern campaign strategies, especially digital outreach, may operate independently of formal education, gender, or marital status due to the pervasive nature of online platforms and community-based political interactions (Hicken, Aspinall, & Weiss, 2019; Sidel, 2021).

In contrast, a significant difference emerged for age ($p = 0.000$), with younger voters (MR = 194.16) reporting higher mean ranks than older voters (MR = 153.48). This implies that younger constituents are more exposed to or targeted by campaign strategies, reflecting their heightened engagement in digital and social media spaces where political messaging is increasingly concentrated. These results align with Norris and Gromping (2019), who noted that contemporary electoral campaigns rely heavily on digital platforms that disproportionately reach younger audiences. Likewise, Magno (2016) and Enli (2017) highlighted the role of online campaigning and mediated authenticity in establishing stronger connections with younger voters, while older voters remain more dependent on traditional media channels such as television, radio, and print.

The generational divide observed in these results can also be understood through Practice Theory, which emphasizes the patterned behaviors, routines, and social interactions embedded within political campaigns (Apps, Beckman, & Bennet, 2019). Younger voters' higher exposure may be facilitated by their dense online social networks, where campaign content spreads rapidly and peer influence amplifies engagement. In addition, Symbolic Interactionism (Carter & Fuller, 2015) provides insight into how these voters interpret and respond to political messages, where symbolic cues, media presentation, and interactive digital experiences shape their perception of candidates' strategies.

Overall, the findings underscore a generational and technological dimension to campaign exposure, highlighting the necessity for COMELEC to strengthen oversight of digital campaigning, ensure fairness, and promote equitable access to political information. Furthermore, these insights call for voter education programs tailored to younger audiences, emphasizing critical media literacy and ethical political participation, which are essential for safeguarding democratic accountability and participatory equity in increasingly digitized election contexts.

Table 7

Differences in the level Campaign Practices of Political Candidates in the Barangay Elections in Vote Buying/ Vote Selling when grouped and compared according to variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Age	Younger	214	188.68	12800.500	0.015	0.05	Significant
	Older	141	161.78				
Sex	Male	148	178.86	15190.000	0.893		Not Significant
	Female	207	177.38				
Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	192	185.67	14175.000	0.125		Not Significant
	Higher	163	168.96				
Civil Status	Single	203	187.97	13404.500	0.034		Significant
	Married	152	164.69				

Table 7 presents the differences in the level of campaign practices of political candidates, specifically in vote buying and vote selling, when respondents are grouped according to age, sex, educational attainment, and civil status. Results indicate no significant differences across sex ($p = 0.893$) and highest educational attainment ($p = 0.125$), suggesting that these demographic variables do not meaningfully shape respondents' perceptions or experiences of vote-buying practices. This aligns with prior



research indicating that exposure to clientelistic practices and vote-buying behaviors can transcend formal educational or gendered divides, particularly in contexts where political mobilization relies heavily on localized networks and social norms (Hicken, Aspinall, & Weiss, 2019; Sidel, 2021).

In contrast, significant differences emerged for age ($p = 0.015$) and civil status ($p = 0.034$). Younger voters (MR = 188.68) and single respondents (MR = 187.97) reported higher mean ranks than older (MR = 161.78) and married voters (MR = 164.69), implying that these groups are more exposed to or observant of vote-buying activities. These findings resonate with global and regional evidence highlighting youth as a primary focus of contemporary campaign strategies. In Indonesia, for example, candidates have strategically engaged younger audiences through pop culture, esports, and digital media content (Associated Press, 2024). Similarly, in the Philippine context, over 80% of Gen Z voters engage with social media daily, making them especially susceptible to online political messaging and targeted mobilization (RSIS, 2023). Strömbäck, Shehata, and Andersson (2024) further underscore that political engagement among younger cohorts intensifies as elections approach, reflecting campaigns' reliance on digital outreach, interactive platforms, and entertainment-driven strategies to capture attention.

The generational and social differences observed in this study can also be interpreted through the lens of Practice Theory, which conceptualizes campaign behaviors as socially embedded practices involving networks of actors, routines, and interactions (Apps, Beckman, & Bennet, 2019). Younger and single voters are likely embedded in more dynamic social networks—both online and offline—which facilitate rapid dissemination of campaign information, including exposure to vote-buying activities. Complementarily, Symbolic Interactionism (Carter & Fuller, 2015) highlights how the meanings and interpretations of campaign practices are socially constructed, suggesting that youth may perceive vote-buying differently due to peer influence, digital discourse, and media-mediated representations of political engagement.

Overall, these results reveal a generational and social dimension to perceptions of electoral misconduct, with younger and single voters being more attuned to campaign dynamics in both digital and community spaces. The findings underscore the need for targeted voter education campaigns, strengthened monitoring of digital campaign practices, and community-based reporting mechanisms to mitigate the risks associated with early exposure to clientelistic tactics. By addressing these vulnerabilities, policymakers and electoral commissions can uphold electoral integrity, foster informed participation, and strengthen trust in democratic processes amid increasingly sophisticated and technology-driven political campaigns.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the campaign practices of political candidates in the 2023 Barangay Elections, focusing on premature campaigning, campaign strategies, and vote buying/selling as perceived by 355 respondents. Results showed a high prevalence of early visibility efforts and material inducements, with age and civil status significantly influencing perceptions—young and single voters were more aware and critical of premature and transactional campaigning—while sex and educational attainment had no significant effect.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Traditional and clientelistic practices persisted alongside modern digital strategies, prompting recommendations for strengthened COMELEC monitoring, civic education, and voter-awareness programs targeting youth and families to foster ethical elections. To align with UN SDG 16, the study further proposed enhanced voter education on legal and ethical responsibilities, improved monitoring and complaint mechanisms, ethical training for candidates, and participatory community engagement. Lastly, it urged periodic policy reviews to address evolving digital campaign dynamics, thereby promoting transparency, accountability, and integrity in local electoral processes and strengthening democratic institutions.

Conflict of Interest



This article was authored by a member of the journal's editorial/review team. An independent editor handled the manuscript, an external reviewers evaluated it to ensure transparency and avoid conflict of interest.

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