

Factors Influencing Political Opinions and Voting Behavior Among University Students



STAT 22632 – Survey Methods & Sampling
Techniques

Department of Statistics & Computer Science
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Introduction

Political opinions and voting behaviors are crucial areas of study for understanding the dynamics of modern democracies. University students represent a significant demographic in this context, as they are young, educated, and often at the forefront of societal change. In Sri Lanka, the Western Province is home to several major government universities, including the University of Colombo, the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, the University of Kelaniya, and the University of Moratuwa. Additionally, it boasts a growing number of private universities, such as SLIIT, NSBM, and CINEC, which attract students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

This survey aims to explore the factors influencing the political opinions and voting behaviors of university students across both government and private institutions in the Western Province. The study recognizes the unique position of university students in shaping Sri Lanka's political future, given their exposure to contrasting political ideologies and their potential to drive civic engagement.

Our research focuses on individual characteristics such as income, political ideology, gender, emotional intelligence, and healthcare experiences, alongside socio-cultural influences like ethnicity, religion, media exposure, and peer networks. These factors are examined to understand how they shape political opinions, party preferences, and voting behaviors. The study also delves into the role of candidate characteristics, policy positions, campaign strategies, and the current economic climate in shaping students' perceptions of political leaders and parties.

This research is particularly significant in the Sri Lankan context, where political opinions often intersect with ethnic identities, cultural values, and socio-economic disparities. By analyzing the interplay of these factors, this survey seeks to provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and political stakeholders. The findings aim to uncover regional trends, patterns in political behavior, and the underlying factors that influence how university students engage with politics and make voting decisions.

Through this comprehensive study, we aspire to contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving political landscape among Sri Lanka's educated youth.

Objectives of the Survey

The primary objectives of the survey are:

- To identify the demographic characteristics that influence students' political opinions.
- To examine the role of family and peer influences on political behavior.
- To evaluate the impact of media consumption on political opinions.
- To assess the importance of cultural and community representation in political decision-making.
- To analyze the students' level of political engagement and trust in political systems.

Methodology

Target Population

The survey targeted university students from both government and private universities in Sri Lanka's Western Province. Government institutions included the University of Colombo, the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, the University of Kelaniya, and the University of Moratuwa. Additionally, popular private universities such as SLIIT, NSBM, and CINEC were also included. This diverse selection ensures representation across various academic disciplines, socio-economic backgrounds, and institutional types, offering a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing political opinions and voting behaviors.

Sampling Method

A convenience sampling method was used to select participants for this survey. This approach allowed us to gather responses from university students who were easily accessible and willing to participate. The sample included students from major government universities in the Western Province—University of Colombo, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, University of Kelaniya, and University of Moratuwa—as well as popular private universities like SLIIT, NSBM, and CINEC. While convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings, it provided a practical way to collect data within the constraints of time and resources.

Data Collection Process

Data was collected over a period of two months using both online, administered through Google Forms and distributed via university student forums and emails. The online survey was anonymous to encourage honest responses. All participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would be kept confidential.

Pilot Survey

A pilot survey was conducted with 12 students at the University of Kelaniya. This was to test the survey's clarity and effectiveness. The pilot results helped refine questions and ensure that they were easy to understand. Based on feedback, several modifications were made, particularly around question wording and response options

Main Survey

Calculation

1. Calculating margin of Error(MoE)

$$\text{MoE} = Z \times \sqrt{\frac{P(1-P)}{n}}$$

n – sample size

Z = 1.96 for 95% confidence

P : Sample proportion (number of students who ever changed support candidate base on shift in economic condition)

$$P = \frac{210}{315} = \mathbf{0.6667}$$

$$\text{MoE} = Z \times \sqrt{\frac{P(1-P)}{n}}$$

$$= \mathbf{1.96} \times \sqrt{\frac{0.6667(1-0.6667)}{315}}$$

$$\approx \mathbf{0.0521}$$

Questionnaire

Link of the Google form: <https://forms.gle/8xEk431ofUVYziUk6>

Factors Influencing Political Opinions and Voting Behavior Among University Students

Dear Participant,

We are a group of second-year students from the Department of Statistics and Computer Science at the University of Kelaniya. As part of our study, we are exploring the factors influencing political opinions and voting behavior among university students.

Your input is valuable in helping us understand the trends, influences, and perspectives shaping these behaviors. Participation is voluntary, and all responses will remain anonymous and confidential, used solely for research purposes.

Thank you for contributing to this important study!

Gender? *

- Male
- Female
- Other: _____

How do you identify your ethnicity? (Select all that apply) *

- Sinhalese
- Tamil
- Muslim
- Other: _____

What is your religion or belief system? (Please select the one that best describes * your affiliation)

- Buddhism
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Christianity
- Other: _____

What is your current academic major? (Please select the one that best describes * your field of study)

- Arts and Humanities
- Medicine/Bio Sciences
- Engineering/Physical Science
- Social Sciences
- Management/Business
- Other: _____

Please specify the name of your university or institution *

Your answer

Individual Characteristics

1. What is your family's estimated monthly income? *

- Less than LKR 25,000
- LKR 25,001 - LKR 75,000
- LKR 75,001 - LKR 150,000
- LKR 150,001 - LKR 250,000
- More than LKR 250,000

2. How would you describe your political beliefs? *

- Progressive: I support changes aimed at improving society, particularly in areas such as social justice, equality, and the environment.
- Traditional: I prefer to maintain established customs, focusing on stability and order.
- Moderate: I hold a balance of views, supporting some changes while valuing tradition.
- Apolitical: I am not interested in politics or do not have a specific belief system.
- Other: _____

Socio-Cultural Influences

3. How often do you consider a candidate's standpoint on cultural or minority representation when evaluating their qualifications (e.g., ethnicity, religion, or community-specific concerns) ? *

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

4. Have you ever attended a political event or rally organized by a group that represents your community or cultural background? *

- Yes
- No

5. How important is it to you that a political candidate understands and addresses issues specific to your cultural or community background? *

- Very Important
- Somewhat important
- Not important

Social Consultation and Peer Influence

1. When deciding which candidate to support, whose opinions do you consider? *
(Select all that apply)

- Parents
- Friends
- Professors/Academic mentors
- Online communities or influencers
- My own opinion
- None

2. In your most recent political decision (e.g., voting, supporting a campaign), did * you discuss your decision with family or friends beforehand?

- Yes
- No

3. How strongly do political discussions with friends or family influence your views on political matters? *

- Very strongly
- Strongly
- Neutral
- Weakly
- Very weakly

Political Factors

1. When evaluating political candidates, have you ever considered policies related * to financial aid, scholarships, or taxation?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

2. How often do you focus on policies addressing economic inequality or * employment opportunities when reviewing election agendas?

- Always
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never

3. How often do discussions about financial matters (e.g., tuition fees, inflation, * cost of living) come up in political conversations with your friends or family?

- Always
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never

4. Which policy area do you consider most important when evaluating political * candidates?

- Healthcare
- Education
- Employment and Economic Growth
- Social Justice (e.g., equality, human rights)
- National Security and Law & Order
- Other: _____

5. Have you ever changed your support for a candidate based on shifts in economic conditions (e.g., inflation, cost of living)? *

- Yes
- No

6. How often do you follow news or engage in discussions about economic policies (e.g., budgets, taxes, employment rates) *

- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never

Political Trust and Engagement

1. When evaluating political candidates, which qualities do you prioritize? *

- Honesty
- Strong leadership and decision-making ability
- Education level
- Representation of your community or identity
- Experience in governance and policy-making

2. When learning about political candidates, what sources do you rely on the most? *

- News outlets (TV, newspapers, etc.)
- Social media platforms
- Discussions with friends and family
- Political debates or campaign speeches
- Other: _____

3. How influential do you think these sources are in forming political opinions generally? *

- Very strongly
- Strongly
- Neutral
- Weakly
- Very weakly

4. How trustworthy do you think these sources are when forming political opinions? *

- Very strongly
- Strongly
- Neutral
- Weakly
- Very weakly

Any additional thoughts or suggestions on factors influencing political opinions and voting behavior among university students? Share below .

Your answer

Back

Submit

Clear form

Analysis and Interpretation

➤ Demographic Insights

- ✓ Gender
- ✓ Ethnicity
- ✓ Religion
- ✓ Academic Major
- ✓ University or Institution

➤ Individual Characteristics

- ✓ Family's Estimated Monthly Income
- ✓ Political Beliefs

➤ Socio – Cultural Influences

- ✓ Evaluating candidates based on cultural or minority representation
- ✓ Attendance at community – specific political events
- ✓ Importance of candidates addressing cultural or community issues

➤ Social Consultation and Peer Influences

- ✓ Sources of political opinions
- ✓ Discussions of political decisions with family or friends
- ✓ Influence of Discussions on political views

➤ Political Factors

- ✓ Consideration of financial aid, scholarships, or taxation policies.
- ✓ Focus on economic inequality or employment policies.
- ✓ Frequency of financial discussions in political conversations.
- ✓ Most important policy area (e.g., healthcare, education, social justice).
- ✓ Changing support based on economic conditions.
- ✓ Engagement with economic policy news or discussions.

➤ Political Trust and Engagement

- ✓ Prioritized qualities in political candidates
- ✓ Main sources of information about candidates
- ✓ Influence of sources on political opinions.
- ✓ Trustworthiness of sources in shaping opinions.
- ✓ Impact of campaigns and promises on voting decisions

Gender

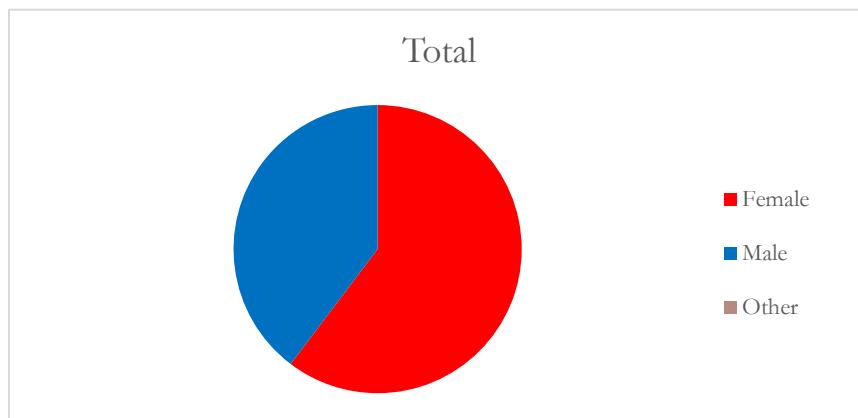


Figure 1: Gender of Respondents

- Among 315 respondents 60.3% are female and 39.7% are males and no respondents identified as 'Other'.
- Number of female respondents : 190
- Number of male respondents : 125
- The sample has a majority of female individuals.

The survey data suggests that female students were more represented in this study, possibly reflecting higher participation rates among female students or a demographic pattern in the student population.

Ethnicity

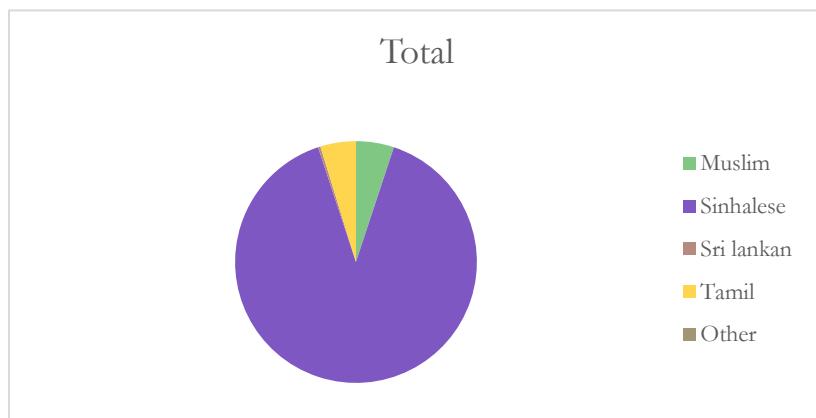


Figure 2: Ethnicity of respondents

Among the 315 respondents:

- 89.8% identify as Sinhalese (283 individuals).
- 5.1% identify as Muslim (16 individuals).
- 4.8% identify as Tamil (15 individuals).
- 0.3% identify as Sri Lankan (1 individual).
- No responses were recorded under the category "Other."

The survey respondents are predominantly Sinhalese, with smaller representations of Muslims and Tamils. This distribution may reflect the ethnic composition of the university population or the region where the university is located.

Religion

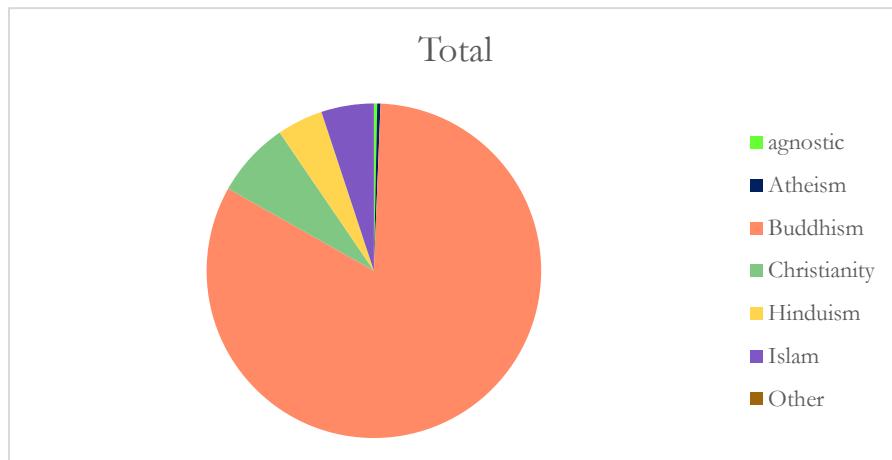


Figure 3: Religion of respondents

Among the 315 respondents:

- 82.5% follow Buddhism (260 individuals).
- 7.3% follow Christianity (23 individuals).
- 5.1% follow Islam (16 individuals).
- 4.4% follow Hinduism (14 individuals).
- 0.3% identify as Agnostic (1 individual).
- 0.3% identify as Atheist (1 individual).
- No responses were recorded under the category "Other."

The majority of respondents identify as Buddhists, which is consistent with the predominant religious affiliation in Sri Lanka. Minority belief systems, including Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, are also represented, reflecting a degree of religious diversity among the surveyed students.

Academic major

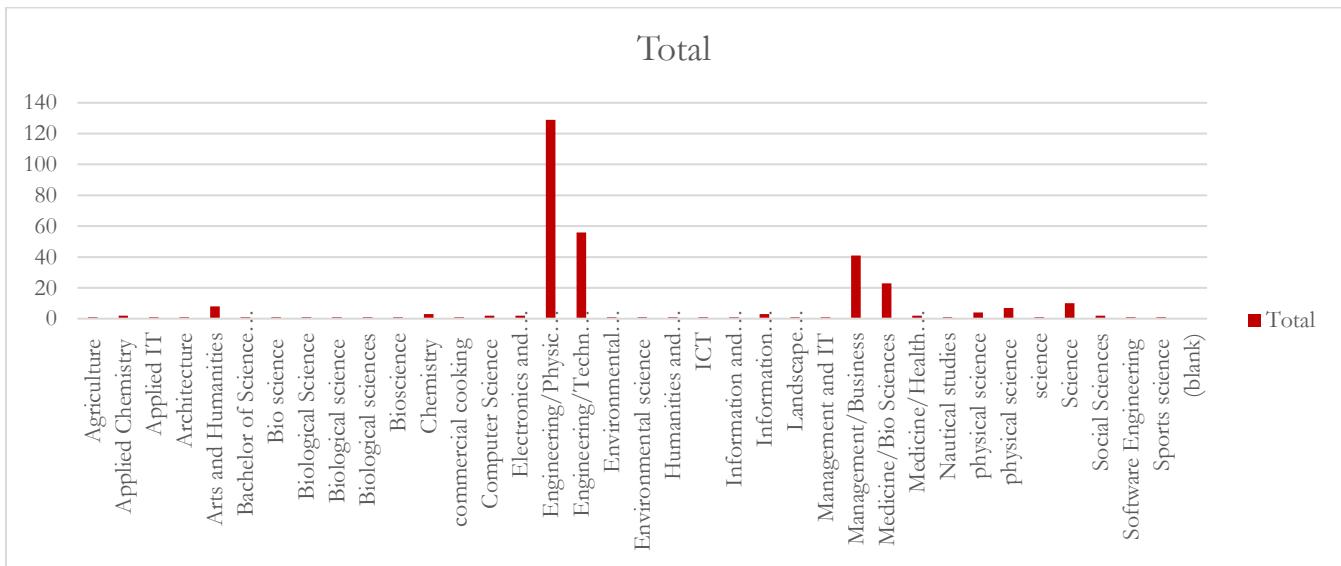


Figure 4: Academic major of respondents

Among the 315 respondents:

- 69.5% are enrolled in Engineering/Physical Science fields (219 individuals).
- 13.0% are in Management/Business fields (41 individuals).
- 7.3% are in Medicine/Bio Sciences fields (23 individuals).
- 9.2% fall into the "Other" category (29 individuals).
- 0.6% are enrolled in Arts and Humanities fields (1 individual).
- 0.6% are in Social Sciences fields (2 individuals)

The majority of respondents are pursuing majors in Engineering/Physical Science, followed by Management/Business. Fields such as Medicine/Bio Sciences and Social Sciences are less represented, while a small portion of students fall into "Other" disciplines, reflecting a diverse range of academic majors among respondents

University or Institution

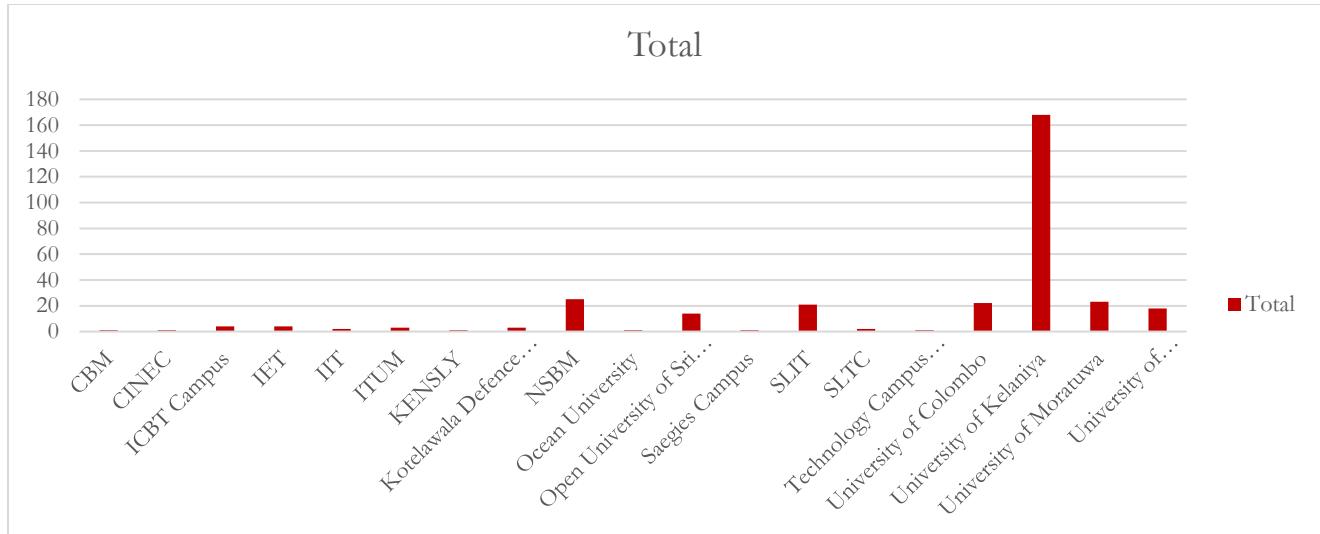


Figure 5: University or Institution

- The majority of respondents (53.3%) are from the University of Kelaniya (168 individuals).
- Other universities and institutions with significant representation include:
 - NSBM: 25 respondents (7.9%).
 - University of Moratuwa: 23 respondents (7.3%).
 - University of Colombo: 22 respondents (7.0%).
 - SLIT: 21 respondents (6.7%).
 - University of Sri Jayewardenepura: 18 respondents (5.7%).
 - Open University of Sri Lanka: 14 respondents (4.4%).
- Institutions with fewer respondents include:
 - Kotelawala Defence University (3), ICBT Campus (4), IET (4), ITUM (3), SLTC (2), IIT (2), and others with 1 respondent each (CINEC, CBM, Saegies Campus, Ocean University, Technology Campus Gampaha, KENSLY).

The sample is mainly from the University of Kelaniya, with additional input from NSBM, University of Moratuwa, University of Colombo, and other institutions, ensuring diverse representation across different regions and campuses

Family's Estimated Monthly Income

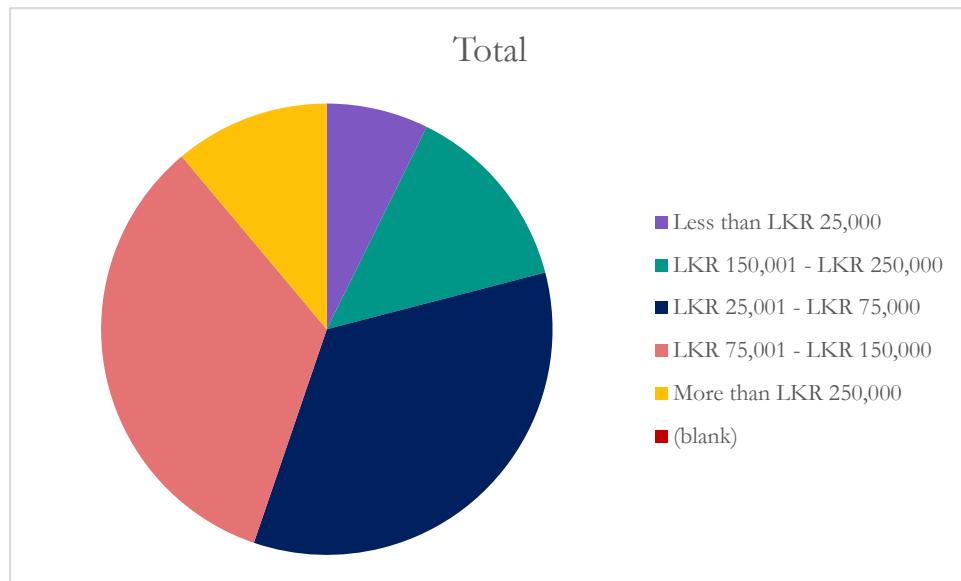


Figure 6: Family's Estimated Monthly Income

Among the 315 respondents:

- 34.3% (108 individuals) come from families with a monthly income of LKR 25,001 - LKR 75,000.
- 33.7% (106 individuals) are from families with an income range of LKR 75,001 - LKR 150,000.
- 13.7% (43 individuals) report an income of LKR 150,001 - LKR 250,000.
- 11.1% (35 individuals) come from families with a monthly income greater than LKR 250,000.
- 7.3% (23 individuals) are from families with less than LKR 25,000 in monthly income.

The majority of respondents come from middle-income families, particularly in the LKR 25,001 - LKR 75,000 and LKR 75,001 - LKR 150,000 brackets. Fewer respondents come from lower- and high-income families. This distribution reflects a broad economic diversity among university students.

Political beliefs

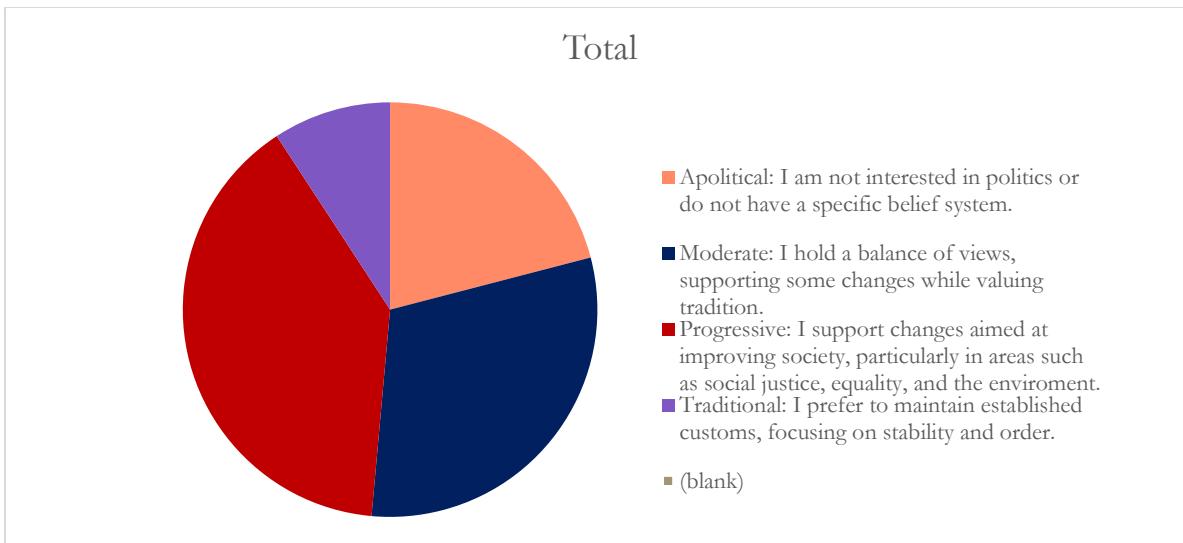


Figure 7: Political beliefs of respondents

Among the 315 respondents:

- 39.4% (124 individuals) describe themselves as **Progressive**, supporting societal changes, particularly in areas such as social justice, equality, and the environment.
- 30.5% (96 individuals) identify as **Moderate**, holding a balance of views that support some changes while valuing tradition.
- 21.0% (66 individuals) are **Apolitical**, meaning they are not interested in politics or do not have a specific belief system.
- 9.1% (29 individuals) identify as **Traditional**, preferring to maintain established customs with a focus on stability and order.

The majority of respondents lean towards **Progressive** beliefs, suggesting a strong support for social change and progress. A significant portion also identifies as **Moderate**, reflecting a balanced approach to political views. **Apolitical** and **Traditional** respondents make up smaller portions, indicating that most students have some political affiliation or stance, with relatively fewer being disengaged from political matters or preferring traditional values.

Evaluating candidates based on cultural or minority representation

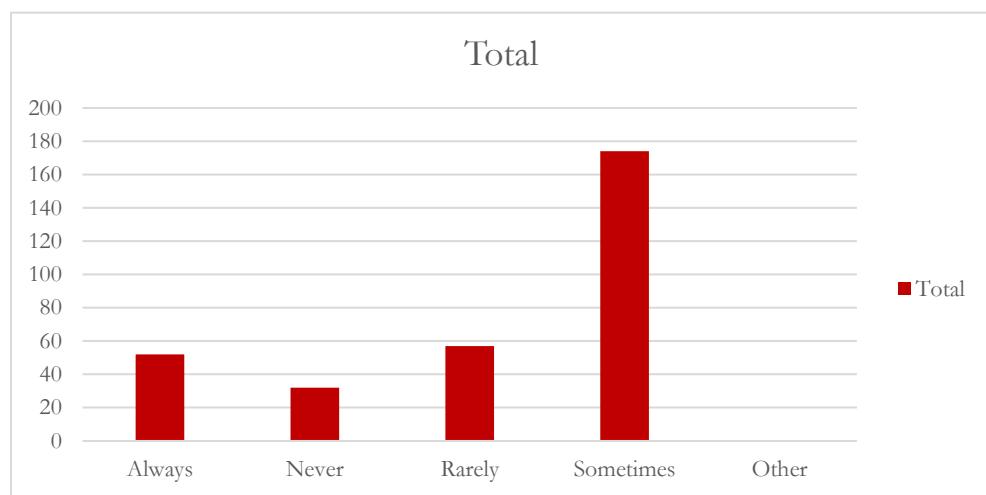


Figure 8: Evaluating candidates based on cultural or minority representation

Among the 315 respondents:

- 55.2% (174 individuals) consider a candidate's standpoint on cultural or minority representation sometimes when evaluating their qualifications.
- 18.1% (57 individuals) rarely take cultural or minority representation into account.
- 16.5% (52 individuals) always consider cultural or minority representation.
- 10.2% (32 individuals) never consider these factors.

A majority of respondents evaluate a candidate's standpoint on cultural or minority representation **sometimes**, suggesting that while it is not always a decisive factor, it plays a role in their overall assessment. A significant portion **rarely** or **never** considers it, indicating that for some, other factors may weigh more heavily when evaluating candidates. Only a smaller percentage always prioritize cultural and minority concerns, reflecting a varied approach to how such issues are factored into decision-making.

Attendance at community – specific political events

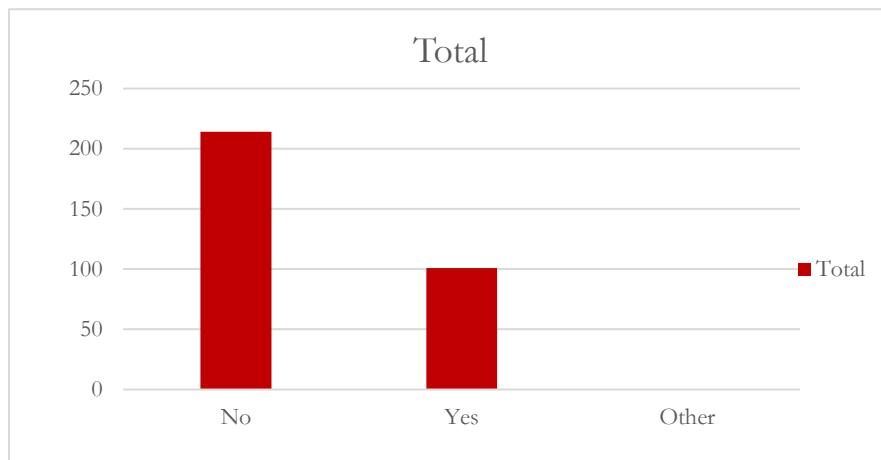


Figure 9: Attendance at community – specific political events

Among the 315 respondents:

- 67.9% (214 individuals) have never attended a political event or rally organized by a group representing their community or cultural background.
- 32.1% (101 individuals) have attended such an event or rally.

The majority of respondents have not attended a political event or rally focused on their community or cultural background, suggesting limited engagement in such political activities. However, a notable portion of respondents (32.1%) have participated in these events, indicating some level of involvement in politically charged gatherings related to their cultural or community identity.

Importance of candidates addressing cultural or community issues

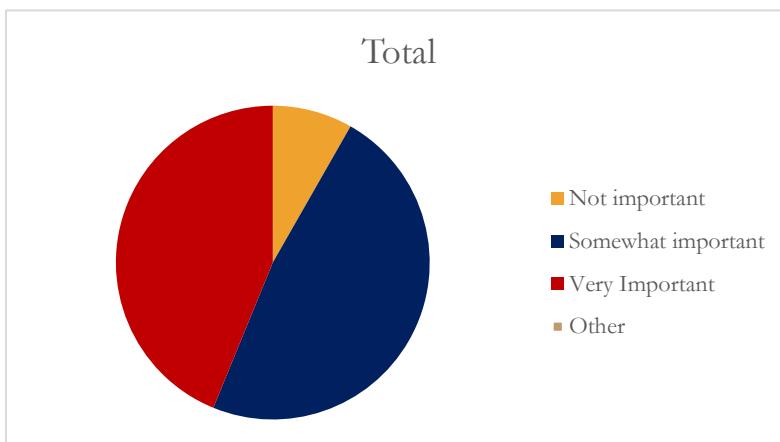


Figure 10 : Importance of candidates addressing cultural or community issues

Among the 315 respondents:

- 8.3% (26 individuals) believe it is not important.
- 47.9% (151 individuals) consider it somewhat important.
- 43.8% (138 individuals) see it as very important.

The majority of respondents regard a candidate's understanding and attention to cultural or community-specific issues as either **somewhat important** or **very important**, highlighting the significance of these concerns in their political evaluations. Only a small portion considers it **not important**, indicating that cultural or community representation is valued by most

Sources of political opinions

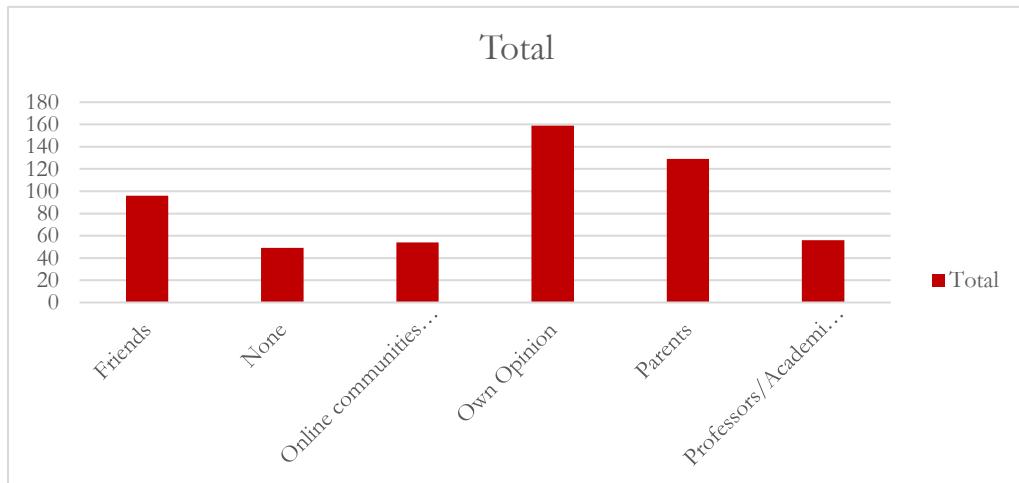


Figure 11: Influential Opinions in Candidate Selection

Respondents indicated multiple influences when deciding which candidate to support:

- 29.3% (159 responses) rely on their own opinion.
- 23.8% (129 responses) are influenced by their parents.
- 17.7% (96 responses) consider the opinions of friends.
- 10.3% (56 responses) take guidance from professors or academic mentors.
- 9.9% (54 responses) are influenced by online communities or influencers.
- 9.0% (49 responses) stated they consider none of these opinions

The most significant influence on candidate selection comes from respondents' **own opinions**, followed by their **parents** and **friends**. Online communities and academic mentors also play a notable role, while a small portion remains uninfluenced by external opinions.

Discussions of political decisions with family or friends

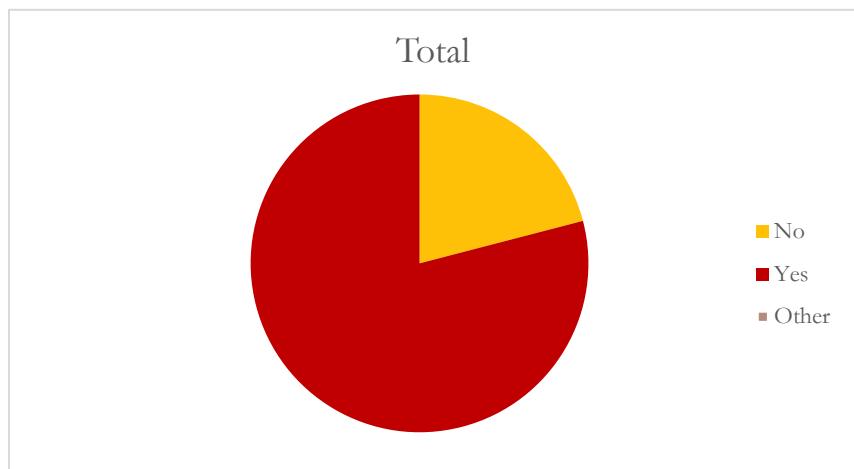


Figure 12: Pre-Decision Discussions on Political Choices

Among the 315 respondents:

- 79.0% (249 individuals) discussed their political decisions with family or friends beforehand.
- 21.0% (66 individuals) did not engage in such discussions.

The majority of respondents consulted family or friends before making their most recent political decision, indicating the significant influence of close social circles in shaping political choices.

Influence of discussion on Political Views

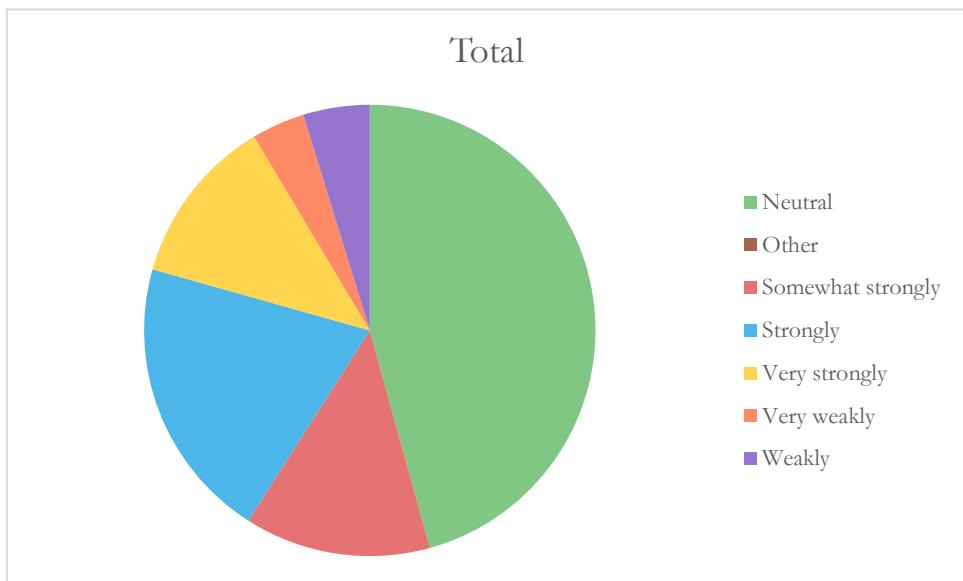


Figure 13:
Influence of
Discussion on
Political Views

Among the 315 respondents:

- The largest group (45.7%) remains neutral about the influence of political discussions with family or friends (144 individuals).
- 20.3% of respondents feel these discussions influence them strongly or very strongly (64 and 38 individuals, respectively).
- A smaller portion, 13.7%, reported weak or very weak influence (15 and 12 individuals, respectively).
- 13.3% feel they are somewhat strongly influenced (42 individuals)

Most respondents either remain neutral or are moderately influenced by political discussions with family or friends, indicating a varied but generally balanced effect of such interactions on their political views.

consideration of financial aid, scholarships, or taxation policies.

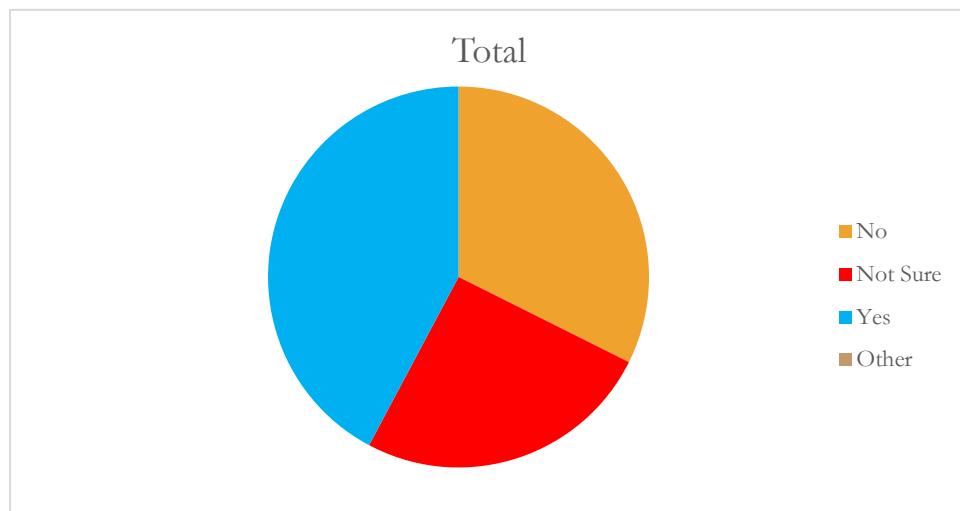


Figure 14: Consideration of financial aid, scholarships, or taxation policies.

Among the 315 respondents:

- 42.2% (133 individuals) have considered policies related to financial aid, scholarships, or taxation when evaluating political candidates.
- 25.4% (80 individuals) are **unsure** whether they have considered these policies.
- 32.3% (102 individuals) have **not** considered these policies.

A significant portion of respondents (42.2%) takes financial policies into account when evaluating political candidates, though a notable number remain unsure or uninterested in this aspect, reflecting varying levels of attention to these issues in political decision-making.

Focus on Economic Inequality or employment policies

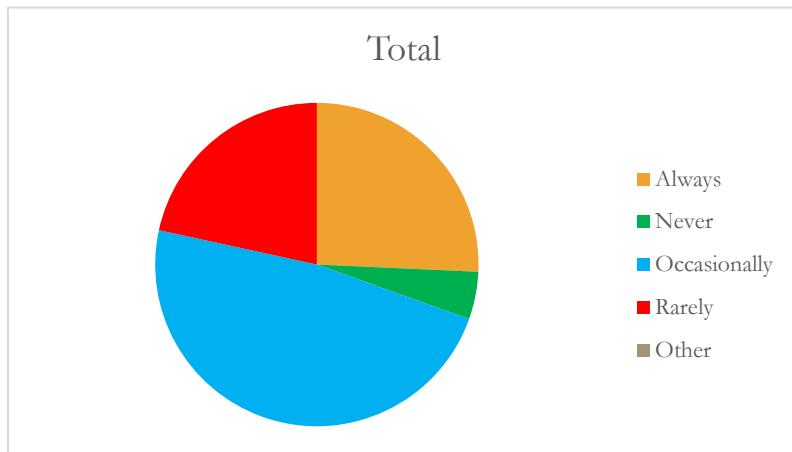


Figure 15: Focus on Economic Inequality or Employment policies

Among the 315 respondents:

- 25.7% (81 individuals) **always** focus on policies addressing economic inequality or employment opportunities when reviewing election agendas.
- 21.3% (68 individuals) **rarely** focus on these policies.
- 47.9% (151 individuals) focus on them **occasionally**.
- 4.8% (15 individuals) **never** focus on these policies.

A large portion of respondents (73.3%) focus on policies related to economic inequality and employment opportunities at least occasionally, indicating that these issues are important to a significant number of voters when evaluating election agendas. However, a smaller segment (4.8%) never considers these factors, reflecting diverse priorities among the respondents.

Frequency of Financial Discussions in Political conversations

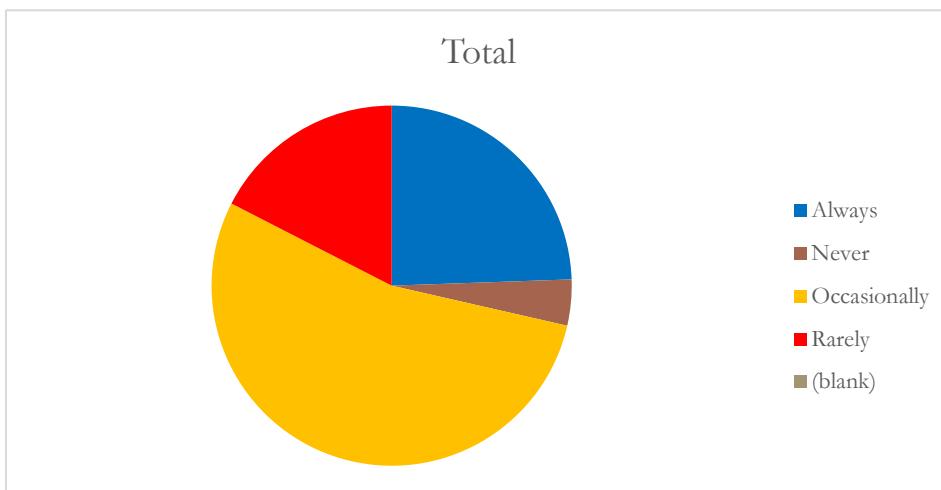


Figure 16: Frequency of Financial discussions in political conversations

Among the 315 respondents:

- 24.5% (77 individuals) always discuss financial matters like tuition fees, inflation, and the cost of living in political conversations with family or friends.
- 5.4% (17 individuals) never bring up financial matters in these discussions.
- 53.9% (170 individuals) occasionally discuss financial topics related to politics.
- 17.5% (55 individuals) rarely engage in such discussions.

The majority of respondents (77.4%) occasionally or always consider financial matters in political discussions, reflecting the significance of economic concerns, such as tuition fees and inflation, in shaping political views within their social circles.

Most Important Policy Area

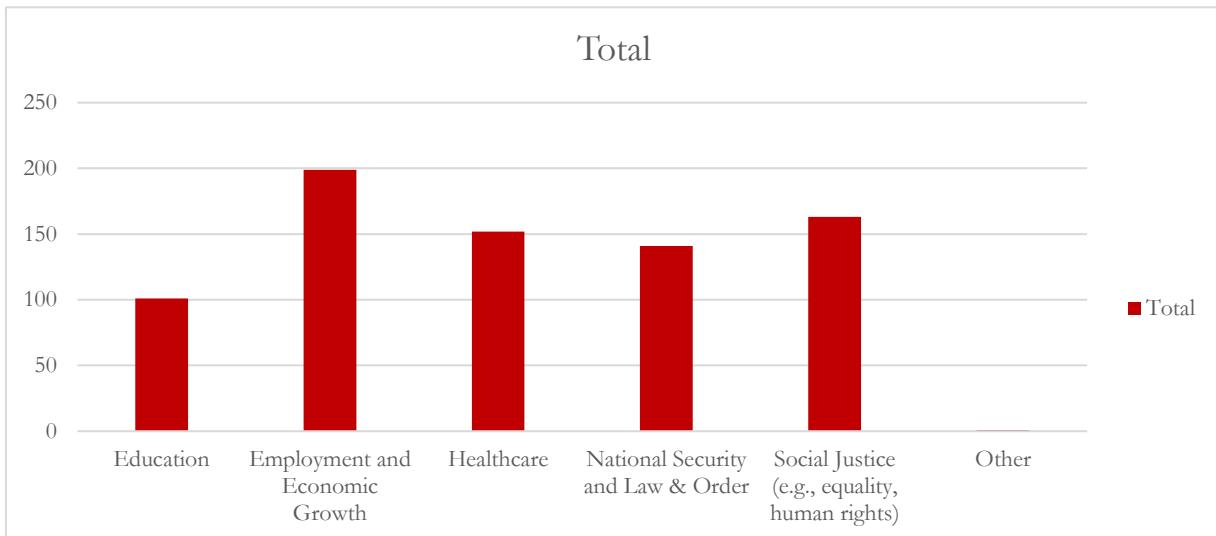


Figure 17: Most Important Policy Area for Evaluating Political Candidates

Among the 315 respondents, the most frequently cited important policy areas when evaluating political candidates are:

- **Employment and Economic Growth:** 199 respondents (26.29%)
- **Healthcare:** 152 respondents (20.08%)
- **Social Justice:** 163 respondents (21.53%)
- **National Security and Law & Order:** 141 respondents (18.63%)
- **Education:** 101 respondents (13.34%)

One respondent mentioned another policy area.

The respondents place the highest importance on **Employment and Economic Growth**, followed by **Healthcare** and **Social Justice**. **Education** is the least emphasized area among the candidates. This suggests that students prioritize economic well-being, access to healthcare, and social equality when evaluating political candidates.

Changing support based on economic conditions

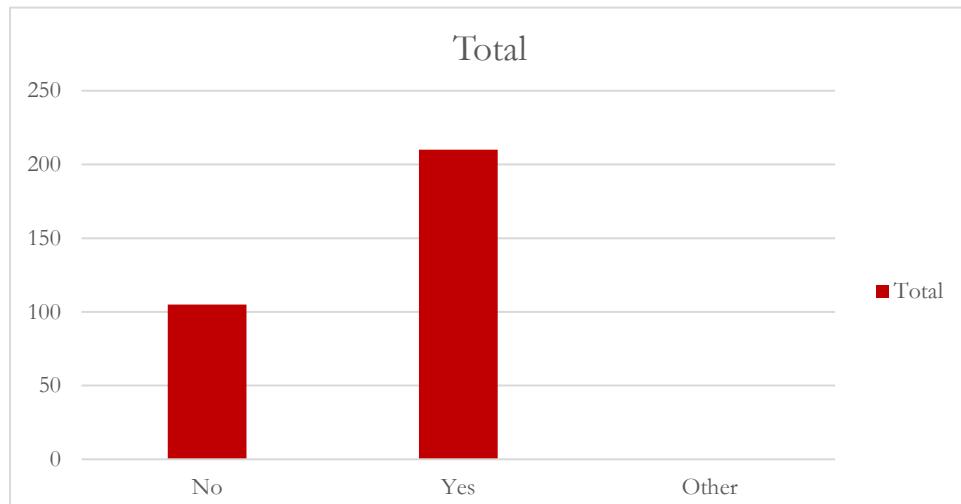


Figure 18: How economic conditions influence candidate support

Among the 315 respondents:

- 66.7% (210 individuals) have changed their support for a candidate based on shifts in economic conditions.
- 33.3% (105 individuals) have not changed their support due to economic factors.

The majority of respondents indicate that economic conditions, such as inflation or cost of living, have influenced their political support. This suggests that economic factors are a significant concern for many students when evaluating political candidates.

Engagement with Economic Policy news or discussions

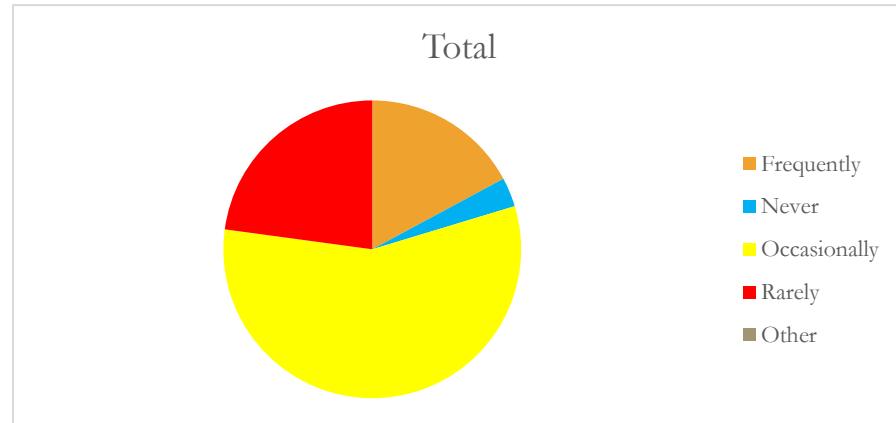


Figure 19: Engagement with Economic Policy news or discussions

Among the 315 respondents:

- 17.1% (54 individuals) follow news or engage in discussions about economic policies frequently.
- 5.0% (10 individuals) never engage in discussions or follow news about economic policies.
- 56.8% (179 individuals) engage occasionally with news or discussions about economic policies.
- 22.9% (72 individuals) follow or engage in such discussions rarely.

A majority of respondents (56.8%) engage occasionally with economic policies through news or discussions, while 17.1% follow such topics frequently. A significant proportion of respondents (22.9%) engage rarely, and a small group (5.0%) do not engage with economic policies at all. This suggests that while economic issues are of some interest to a broad group, frequent engagement is less common.

Prioritized qualities in political candidates

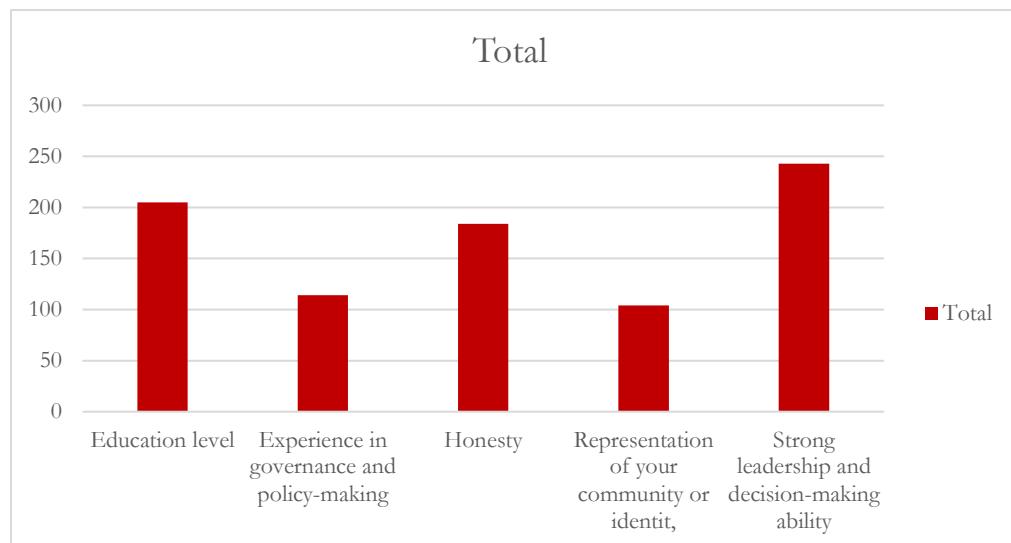


Figure 20: Prioritized qualities in political candidate

Respondents identified several qualities they prioritize when evaluating political candidates:

- 28.6% (243 responses) prioritize strong leadership and decision-making ability.
- 24.1% (205 responses) prioritize the education level of the candidate.
- 21.6% (184 responses) value honesty in a candidate.
- 13.4% (114 responses) emphasize the candidate's experience in governance and policy-making.
- 12.3% (104 responses) prioritize representation of their community or identity.

When evaluating political candidates, respondents prioritized **strong leadership and decision-making ability**, with **28.6%** of respondents selecting this quality. **Education level** (24.1%) and **honesty** (21.6%) also ranked highly, indicating that academic credentials and personal integrity are important to many. Less importance was placed on **experience in governance and policy-making** (13.4%) and **representation of community or identity** (12.3%).

Main source of information about candidates

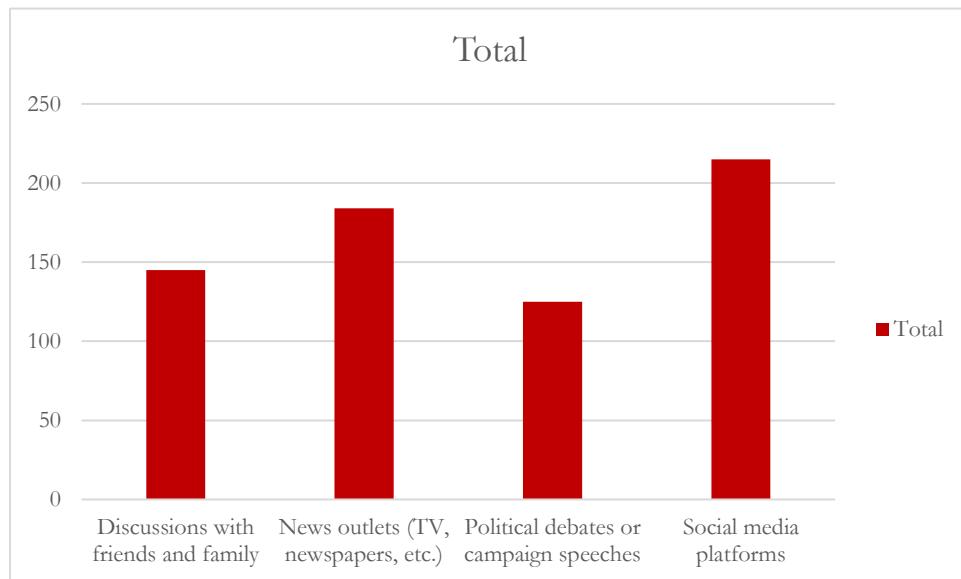


Figure 21: Sources of Information Used When Learning About Political Candidates

Respondents rely on a variety of sources when learning about political candidates:

- **32.2%** (215 responses) rely on **social media platforms** as their primary source of information.
- **27.5%** (184 responses) turn to **news outlets (TV, newspapers, etc.)** for updates and insights.
- **21.7%** (145 responses) prioritize **discussions with friends and family** to gain perspectives on candidates.
- **18.7%** (125 responses) depend on **political debates or campaign speeches** for information on candidates' policies and performance.

These findings indicate that social media and personal conversations play significant roles in shaping respondents' political knowledge, with traditional news outlets and political events still being important sources.

Influence of sources on political opinions

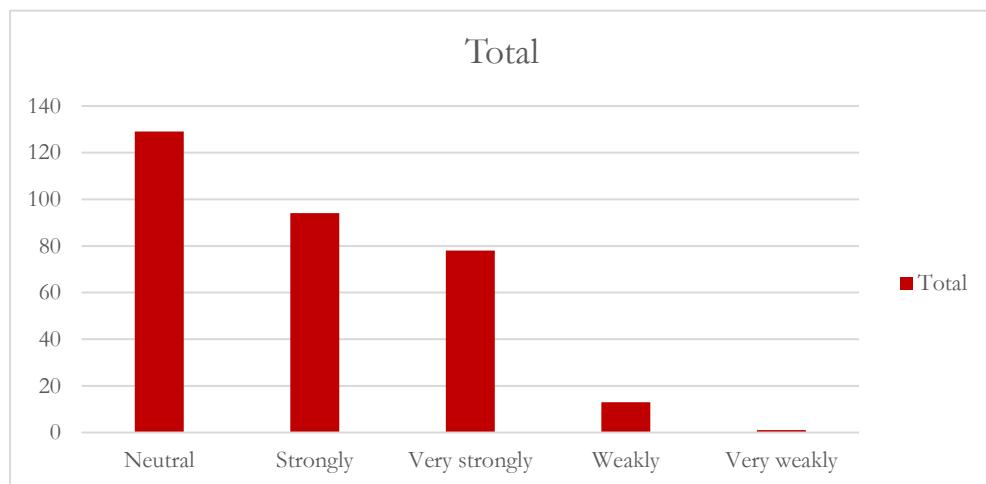


Figure 22: Influence of Sources in Forming Political Opinions

In terms of the perceived influence of sources on political opinions, respondents indicated varying levels of influence:

- 41.6% (131 responses) believe these sources strongly influence political opinions.
- 24.8% (78 responses) feel these sources influence opinions very strongly.
- 15.2% (48 responses) view the influence as neutral.
- 4.1% (13 responses) consider the influence to be weak.
- 0.3% (1 response) stated that these sources have very weak influence.

This suggests that a significant proportion of respondents believe sources like news outlets, social media, and discussions with friends or family play an important role in shaping their political perspectives.

Trustworthiness of the sources in shaping opinions

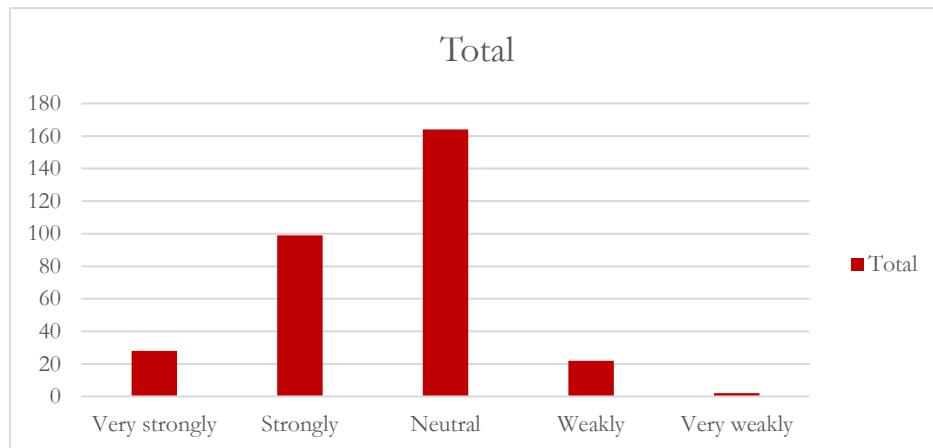


Figure 23: How trustworthy do you find these sources in shaping political opinions?

When evaluating the trustworthiness of sources in forming political opinions, respondents displayed the following tendencies:

- 31.4% (99 responses) rated these sources as "Strongly" trustworthy.
- 8.9% (28 responses) considered them to be "Very strongly" trustworthy.
- 52.0% (164 responses) felt neutral about the trustworthiness of these sources.
- 7.0% (22 responses) indicated that they found the sources to be "Weakly" trustworthy.
- Only 0.6% (2 responses) viewed these sources as "Very weakly" trustworthy.

This suggests that while a significant portion of respondents remain neutral or perceive moderate trust in these sources, a smaller percentage strongly trusts them.

Impact of Campaigns and Promises on Voting Decisions

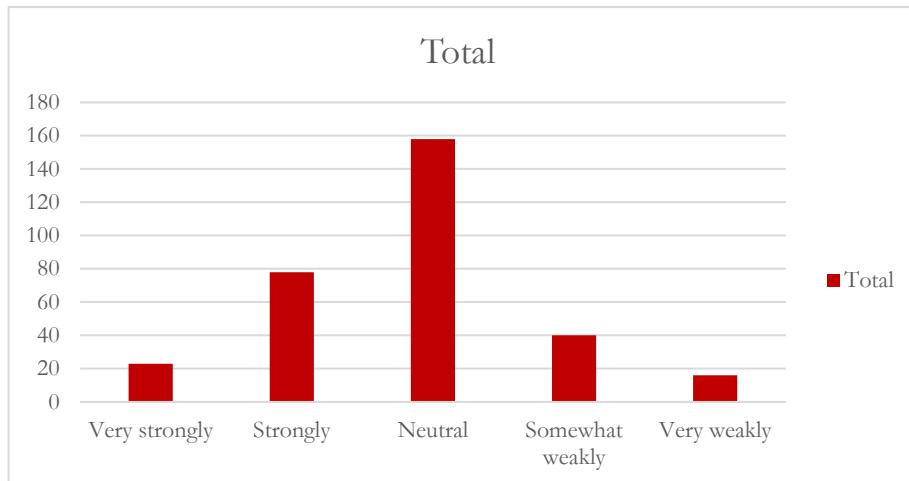


Figure 24: Influence of Political Campaigns and Election Promises on Voting Decisions

When evaluating the influence of political campaigns and election promises on voting decisions, respondents showed the following tendencies:

- 7.3% (23 responses) indicated that these factors influenced their voting decisions "Very strongly."
- 24.8% (78 responses) felt that political campaigns and election promises influenced them "Strongly."
- 50.2% (158 responses) were neutral, suggesting they were not significantly influenced by these factors.
- 12.7% (40 responses) reported that these factors influenced their decisions "Somewhat weakly."
- 5.1% (16 responses) stated that political campaigns and election promises influenced them "Very weakly."

This suggests that while a notable proportion of respondents are neutral or only somewhat influenced by political campaigns and promises, there is a smaller but significant group who feel strongly or very strongly impacted by these factors in their voting decisions.

Discussion

The findings of the survey provide valuable insights into the political opinions and voting behavior of university students. However, it is important to interpret these results considering the convenience sampling method employed, which could influence the representativeness of certain demographic and socio-cultural characteristics.

1. Individual Characteristics

The gender distribution of respondents, with 60.3% female and 39.7% male, may reflect a skewed participation pattern due to the sampling method. Convenience sampling, reliant on accessibility and willingness to participate, often results in overrepresentation of individuals more readily available or inclined to respond. Female students might have demonstrated higher willingness to participate or greater engagement in such surveys, potentially introducing bias into the analysis of gender-related political behaviors.

Similarly, the academic major distribution is dominated by Engineering/Physical Science students (69.5%), while Arts and Social Sciences constitute less than 1% of respondents. This imbalance may be attributed to the sampling strategy, which likely targeted more students from technically inclined programs due to their availability or their predominance in the selected universities. Consequently, the survey findings might underrepresent perspectives from disciplines more closely aligned with socio-political issues, potentially biasing conclusions about political engagement and ideological diversity.

The prevalence of Progressive (39.4%) and Moderate (30.5%) political beliefs among respondents suggests a forward-thinking outlook, but this trend could also be influenced by the sampling method. Students with progressive ideologies may have been more willing to participate in a survey examining political opinions, while more politically disengaged or traditional-minded students may have opted out, resulting in an overrepresentation of progressive views.

2. Socio-Cultural Influences

The survey's ethnic and religious composition mirrors national demographics to an extent, with 89.8% Sinhalese and 82.5% Buddhists. However, these figures may also reflect the convenience sampling approach, as the majority of students at the surveyed universities are likely to belong to these groups. The underrepresentation of minority

ethnicities and religions (e.g., Muslims, Tamils, Christians, Hindus) could skew interpretations of socio-cultural influences, limiting the ability to generalize findings to all university students across Sri Lanka.

Cultural and community-specific political engagement provides further evidence of sampling influence. While 67.9% of respondents reported never attending a community-specific political event, the relatively low participation may be partly explained by the sampling approach, which might not have adequately captured students deeply engaged in cultural activism or minority representation issues. Additionally, the finding that 43.8% of respondents consider community representation very important could overestimate the importance of this factor if participants from minority or highly engaged groups were underrepresented.

Finally, reliance on convenience sampling may introduce socio-economic biases. Students from middle-income families constitute the majority, as reflected by 68% of respondents reporting monthly family incomes between LKR 25,001 and LKR 150,000. This may exclude perspectives from students in higher or lower economic brackets, potentially limiting the survey's ability to capture the full spectrum of socio-economic influences on political opinions.

3. Political Factors

Economic considerations emerge as the dominant factor influencing students' political behavior. A significant 42.2% of respondents prioritize financial aid, scholarships, or taxation policies when evaluating candidates. Similarly, 66.7% reported changing political support based on economic conditions, highlighting the direct impact of inflation, cost of living, and job availability on their voting decisions.

The importance of economic issues is further emphasized by the ranking of policy priorities:

Employment and Economic Growth (26.29%) is the top priority, followed by Social Justice (21.53%) and Healthcare (20.08%).

In contrast, Education (13.34%) is a lesser concern, implying that students may feel the existing education system meets their expectations or that immediate economic challenges outweigh concerns about educational reform.

These observations suggest that university students view politics through a pragmatic lens, prioritizing policies with tangible, short-term benefits over ideological or long-term objectives.

4. Social Consultation and Peer Influence

Social networks significantly influence political opinions, with 79.0% of respondents discussing their decisions with family or friends. However, a nuanced observation emerges here: while discussions are common, their impact is perceived as neutral by 45.7% of respondents. This suggests that students value these exchanges as opportunities to gather information or validate their choices rather than as a determinant of their decisions.

Interestingly, 29.3% of respondents rely solely on their own opinions when selecting candidates, indicating a growing trend of individualism and critical thinking among the student population. This independent decision-making might also reflect their exposure to diverse perspectives, both online and offline.

5. Political Trust and Engagement

Social media emerges as the most significant source of political information (32.2% rely on it), followed by traditional news outlets (27.5%). While 31.4% of respondents rate these sources as "strongly trustworthy," the majority (52.0%) remain neutral about their trustworthiness. This neutrality implies a degree of skepticism toward political messaging, reflecting students' critical engagement with information sources.

Despite this, active engagement with political discourse remains moderate. For example: 56.8% of respondents occasionally engage with economic policy discussions, while only 17.1% frequently engage.

Campaigns and election promises are viewed as only moderately influential, with 50.2% of respondents feeling neutral about their impact.

This measured approach to political participation suggests that while students are aware of political developments, they may lack the time, resources, or trust needed for deeper involvement.

Conclusion

This survey on "Factors Influencing Political Opinions and Voting Behavior Among University Students in the Western Province of Sri Lanka" provides important insights into how students think about politics and make voting decisions. Since the survey used convenience sampling, there are some limitations in the results, which may have led to biases in the data, particularly regarding gender, academic backgrounds, socio-cultural groups, and economic factors.

The survey shows that economic issues, such as employment opportunities and financial policies, are key factors influencing students' political behavior. Many students prioritize practical matters over long-term political ideas. Social networks, including family and friends, also play a role in shaping students' political choices, though their influence is often seen as neutral.

Students mainly get political information from social media and traditional news, but their political engagement remains moderate. Many are aware of political issues but feel skeptical about the trustworthiness of the information they receive.

In summary, this survey highlights how economic, social, and cultural factors shape university students' political opinions and voting behavior in Sri Lanka. The findings show a generation of students who are thoughtful, informed, and cautiously engaged in politics.

References

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Individual Contribution

Student No	Task Completed
PS / 2021 / 007	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Making the questioner• Data Collection• Communication and Collaboration• Presentation
PS / 2021 / 005	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication and Collaboration• Interpretation• Making the questioner
PS / 2021 / 033	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data Collection• Making the questioner• Creating descriptive statistics
PS / 2021 / 091	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data Entry and Data Analysis• Data Collection• Interpretation
PS / 2021 / 117	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication and Collaboration• Data Entry and Data Analysis• Interpretation
PS / 2021 / 128	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data Collection• Making the questioner• Conclusion of the Report
PS / 2021 / 140	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Making the questioner• Finding Solutions for challenges• Data Collection
PS / 2021 / 145	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data Collection• Creating Methodology• Making the questioner
PS / 2021 / 164	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Making the questioner• Interpretation and Reporting• Creating Methodology
PS / 2021 / 176	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction of the Report• Identifying Challenges• Data Collection
PS / 2021 / 240	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interpretation and Reporting• Data Collection• Creating descriptive statistics