Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

Introduction

Voting is a fundamental process in a democratic system. It is a chance for the citizens of a country to have a say in the people who represent them or an issue that impacts them. Informed voting and participating in elections is one of the responsibilities of the citizens, the voting process is fairly straightforward. First, an eligible citizen registers to vote, studies the candidates and issues, looks up their polling location, then casts their ballot during the election. In the age of information and technology, the role of the internet in shaping political participation and informed citizenry cannot be overstated. The prevalence of online resources and the ease of access to information have the potential to transform the way citizens engage with the democratic process. Commission on Election chair George Erwin Garcia highlights the importance of voter education in preparation for the upcoming Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections (BSKE), during a press conference in Laoag City on Thursday (June 15, 2023). Garcia along with other commissioners are in Ilocos Norte province for a consultative meeting with field personnel [1]. The act of voting has an opportunity cost. It takes time and effort that could be used for other valuable things, such as working for pay, volunteering at a soup kitchen, or playing video games. Further, identifying issues, gathering political information, thinking or deliberating about that information, and so on, also take time and effort which could be spent doing other valuable things [2]. Among politicos, education is not usually considered a top-tier issue in presidential election. The issue tends to get overshadowed by other issues where the president is the obvious leader and decisionmaker-defense, security, climate change, health care, social security, and economic affairs. Education, in constant, has been seen as a state and local issue. But times have changed, especially when it comes to Democratic primaries [3]. You have the power to make key decisions about the quality of life you want for yourself, your family and your community. Voting is your chance to advocate for the issues you care about, like affordable housing, economic justice, environmental protection, and quality education [4].“ So the question in this election is not who is going to lead us, but what are our standard for being led?” Andrews asked in a recent visit to The Dave Ramsey show.” Speaking the truth should be the least we require of our elected leaders,” he added.” It won’t solve all our problems, but it is a beginning.” [5]. In the country’s plurality or “first-past-the-post” system, the candidate whit the highest number of votes wins, while others are left with nothing in this “winner takes all” set up. But with multiple candidates vying for a single post, “vote splitting” is inevitable. Thus, a broadly unpopular candidate who nonetheless has solid voter support can emerge victorious based on the rule of minority [6]. The importance of voter education in producing a mature and informed electorate cannot be overstated. Educating the voters is just a critical to the effective functioning of a democratic system as the electoral process itself. Providing vital information to voters allows the electorate to make sound and enlightened choices. Voter education is a necessity that cannot be ignored. Neglecting voter education can undermine the integrity and credibility of any electoral process and pose a serious challenge to democratic institutions. Indeed, voter education allows citizens to have a healthy respect for the democratic process regardless of the outcome [7]. In any election, the goal of the candidate is to win. Because of this, they often do not adequately reach out and engage voters. Those who do not show up to the polls in years prior are brushed off as “unlikely voters” and are no longer pursued in attempts to secure their vote. This process begins a cycle of exclusion and ultimately alienates certain groups from participating. However, reaching out to disaffected voters is often all it takes to encourage them to vote, especially for voters who are new to the process. As advocates, it’s up to us to ensure we are actively working to promote voter participation, and are doing so by providing our communities with the tools they need to navigate the system [8]. Almost every democratic theorist or democratic political actor sees an informed electorate as essential to good democratic practice. Citizens need to know who or what they are choosing and why – hence urgent calls for expansive and publicly funded education, and rights to free speech, assembly, press, and movement [9]. The 2020 presidential election is fast approaching, and the next few months will be critical for voter registration, education, and mobilization. Campaigns and grassroots organizers are revamping their outreach strategies to make the most of this final stretch, and it’s also an important time for K-12 schools to acknowledge and embrace their role in preparing young people for electoral participation [10]. Educating the voters is just as critical to the effective functioning of a democratic system as the electoral process itself. Providing vital information to voters allows the electorate to make sound and enlightened choices. Voter education is a necessity that cannot be ignored. Neglecting voter education can undermine the integrity and credibility of any electoral process and pose a serious challenge to democratic institutions [11]. On March 11, 1947, the Party amendment gave equal opportunity for both sides to equally learn their voting rights to citizens of the United States and Filipino citizens while at the same time cultivating the natural resources of country and manage public utilities. Since then, nothing changed in the Constitution until martial law was declared on September 23, 1972 [12]. The Filipinos’ once proud democratic innovations are decaying. First Street protest in the metropolis are rendered ineffectual, if not harmful. If Thailand has become notorious as the home of coups, then the Philippines is now viewed as an “EDSA state”. Second, elections have become an apparatus for extracting political power from the voters. Previously ousted leaders or their family members, like Imelda Marcos and her son, as well as Estrada and Arroyo, hold significant government position. The number of incidences of vote-buying and electoral violence increased, raising doubts about the efficacy of elections to keep dominant political groups and clans in check. Whereas the oligarchs, the few who hold much of the nation’s wealth and power, are guilty of these electoral crimes, their mass market, composed of the poor and “uneducated” is demeaned as “bobotante”(ignorant voters) by the elite establishment [13]. Voter education acts as a conceptual bridge linking the positions of voters with those of the candidates. It can improve voters’ “ability to identify candidates who share their policy views” [14] .

A system of election was first practiced in the Philippine during the Spanish and American colonial period. But the process was only limited to male voters and was more of a ceremonial rather than a genuine democratic mechanism. Sectoral struggle and political participation were only realize in 1937:when Act 4112, granting women the right of suffrage, was implemented; and when the peasant movements gained meaningful participation in political parties and in actually filling of government positions [15].The Republic of the Philippines is in the process of modernizing its over registration, voting and tabulation procedures through the application of new electoral technology. This requires development of enabling legislation for both the modernization process and the implementation if new administrative structures and practices. It also requires development and implementation of a major new voter education effort explaining the new processes. IFES involvement in the Philippines began in 1995 with a Technical Assessment Project to evaluate the existing electoral system and to recommend fundamental changes in the registration and tabulation procedures[16].In early January 1997, the IFES Election Modernization and Voter Education interim report was delivered to COMELEC Commissioners and Executive Director for review and consideration. They ware then briefed on its content, rationale, recommendations, and external resource, the report was intended to help COMELEC understand the realities of current citizen concerns and needs so that it might develop a more targeted approach to future voter education and information programs [17].There are over 65.7million individuals who will decide the next six years of the country’s leadership. With this, many youth voters will be casting their ballots create spaces for them to learn more about elections and what this entails: from the use of vote counting machines to the value of citizen participation, from the issues that matter to voters to the new age of digital citizenship. Ahead of the May 2022 elections, Democracy watch Philippines in once again partnering with the commission on Elections (COMELEC) to launch Vote Right 2022, a non-partisan voter education program to be organized with different Colleges and Universities across the country. Democracy Watch and COMELEC have been official partners for voter education since 2015 [18]. In recent years, social workers have again organized to strengthen democracy by working to increase participation. Since 2016, the National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign (also known as Voting Is Social Work) has engaged in voter education and mobilization [19].

In this democratic society, the centerpiece of representative governance lies in the ability of citizens to make informed and purposeful choices during elections. The fundamental element of this process is acquiring accurate and comprehensive information about the political candidates. However, in the course of time it has become more challenging to navigate credible sources of information about candidates. The purpose of this research is to inform and engage voters as it is necessary for voters and civic education to ensure that all men and women understand their rights, their political system, and how and where to vote. They must know their responsibilities and understand their rights, they must be knowledgeable what the standard of that specific position. This is to ensure that they are to participate meaningfully. Enhancing Civic Literacy, Voter education is a fundamental element of informed and active citizenship. An assessment of the impact of Voter Education Websites can reveal their potential in enhancing civic literacy. Digital Engagement, Given the increasing reliance on digital platforms for information, it is crucial to understand how Voter Education Websites can effectively engage citizens in the digital realm. Empowering Informed Voting at the heart of democratic participation is the concept of informed voting. Voters must have access to reliable, non-partisan information about candidates to make decisions aligned with their values, beliefs, and aspirations. This research aims to empower voters by providing them with candidate information that facilitates well-informed choices at the ballot box. Testing Voter Knowledge beyond providing information, this research includes the element of knowledge assessment. By assessing voter knowledge, this research seeks to measure the effectiveness of our website and to the extent to which voters acquired their knowledge by making informed choices.

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