



Perceptions on Politics and Political Participation of Benguet State University Students

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Abstract

The view of the youth about politics is a primary determinant of their political participation in school and their respective communities. This study determined the BSU political science students' perceptions of politics and examined their political participation. It used mixed methods, namely interview strategy through classroom recitation and descriptive survey with 143 students. Findings revealed that students regarded politics as a democratic form of government that is supposed to act in accordance with peoples' interests, as involving the election of famous and influential personalities, and as the primary means of solving social issues despite students associating it with negativity due to political corruption. The majority of the students were not interested in politics, and they had a negative image of politics based on how the media portrayed it. BSU students mainly engage in community politics by voting in elections and attending public meetings dealing with political or social issues. They primarily participate in school politics by attending student meetings and taking active roles in these meetings. In order to reduce political apathy among BSU students, the following actions are recommended: course facilitators of subjects that are related to politics should objectively process students' comprehension of politics, and include research (of university issues or issues that concern the locality) as a subject requirement to foster civic and political awareness; BSU Office of Student Services (OSS) should encourage all college based student organizations to hold activities that nurture civic and political engagement, and embolden active student participation in these activities, and BSU student Commission on Election (COMELEC) and BSU OSS continue partnership to promote students' political engagement.

KEYWORDS

political perceptions
political participation
student political engagement

Introduction

The Greek philosopher Aristotle remarked that "man is by nature a political animal" (Stumpf, 1999) and emphasized that the essence of human existence is politics. Figuratively, politics affects man's life from womb to tomb.

Certainly, politics is evident in everyday human affairs, but the youth seem to be politically apathetic. This seeming apathy was noted by Velasco (2005) when she underlined the result of the 1996 Social Weather Station (SWS) survey where it was highlighted that "60% of young people are 'not interested in politics' (para. 1,

page 86).” Likewise, Hays (1998) also described today’s college generation as uninterested and unknowledgeable about politics (para.5, page 42), which may be brought about by the belief that government is irrelevant to their daily lives (para.2, page 43.) Similarly, Maboloc (2015) explained that the youth cannot be blamed for refusing to engage in politics because it is understood that they are supposed to be in the library, burying themselves in books.

However, Sebastian (2014) asserted that the Filipino youth is not as disengaged as people claim them to be. She underlined that the youth are most active in electoral participation, including registering to vote, voting in local elections, and voting in national elections. Her study revealed that the youth’s disappointment in national and local politics is why they randomly participate in other political activities.

Moreover, Velasco (2005) underlined that youth participation in Philippine politics is event-driven. She emphasized that “the youth are not afraid to mobilize in extreme situations yet in ‘normal times’ only organized youth groups engage in advocacies and political debates.”

The youth are powerful catalysts of societal and political changes because of their talents, skills, and knowledge, all of which bring forth positive transformations. The Filipino youth’s meaningful political participation has been evident in the course of Philippine history. For instance, Jose Rizal, Andres Bonifacio, and Emilio Jacinto were in their early twenties when they stood against the abusive Spanish colonizers. In the contemporary Philippines, the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Youth-Philippines qualified as an official member of the UN task force on COVID-19. Ayala (2020) reported that SDSN Youth has “significantly impacted more than 17,000 youth leaders across the Philippines through capacity-building sessions, youth summits, and project support.”

The essence of the Filipino youths’ existence is also enshrined in the 1987 Philippine Constitution. Article II (Declaration of Principles and State Policies) Section 13 acknowledges the imperative role of the nation’s youth in nation-building; thus, the Philippine government ensures that its youth will achieve a good education. Education will enable the efficient involvement

of the youth both in civic and public affairs.

Aristotle espoused that the most important duty of the state is to give its citizens civic education for these citizens to participate in the state’s political affairs. Branson (1998) defined civic education as education in self-government (meaning active participation in politics). This civic education is a significant component of democratic societies—citizens having informed knowledge of their country’s political system resulting in active participation in the country’s political processes. The schools where students spend most of their day are crucial institutions where they can enhance their political knowledge and political engagement.

Civic education is embedded in the curriculum of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) such as Benguet State University (BSU). BSU’s curriculum includes general education subjects like Philippine History, Politics, Governance, Philippine Constitution, and the New Constitution, where students are familiarized with the concepts of Philippine politics. The researcher taught these courses, and she noticed that the student’s viewpoint on politics is almost always negative. In addition, when these students were asked to share news articles about national or local politics, still students shared those that are off-putting (like issues on drugs, corruption, political killings, and the like). On the other hand, every semester, some students would pen on the researcher’s evaluation sheets their gratitude for making them politically aware and for making them realize the significance of politics in their lives. One pertinent student wrote, “*she opens our political eye*”. This gave the impression that they were able to comprehend and value politics only after the subject had been a part of their academic life for a semester.

Furthermore, the researcher also discovered through classroom discussions that some students of legal age were not yet registered as voters. Also, they had not participated in the 2016 national elections and even in the election of student officers in the university student government.

Educational institutions acting as government partners in molding students who will later become active and responsible citizens of the state is only possible if the schools provide



opportunities where students are able to understand the principles of democratic governance fully and at the same time apply such principles in their classroom or organization activities or their respective communities.

Hence, this study intended to explore how students enrolled in Political Science subjects describe and understand politics. This understanding is essential for teachers handling subjects on civic education subjects. The study's output will provide them information on what concepts about politics need to be corrected or reinforced and taught to the students. The students' perception of politics determines their participation in the country's democratic processes at present and, more importantly, in the future. Moreover, since the youth are regarded as the catalysts of change, their views on politics are an essential consideration for them to bring forth change in the country's political system. The voice of the young generation is significant for redefining Philippine democracy.

Moreover, there is also a need to look into how BSU facilitates political participation among its learners. It is interesting to examine the various political activities in the university where students can engage themselves and develop or hone their sense of political awareness.

The study aimed to present BSU students' perceptions of politics and examine their political participation. Specifically, the study aimed to: identify BSU students' definition of and understanding of politics; determine the attentiveness of BSU students in politics; to explore how BSU students understand politics based on how the media portrays it; and to determine the forms of political activities engaged into by BSU students.

Methodology

The study employed qualitative and quantitative methods of research in drawing responses from the students. The qualitative method was used to draw answers on the students' perceptions of politics; the appeal of politics to them; and their viewpoints on the image of politics as presented by the mass media. The interview was in the form

of classroom recitation and classroom discussions prior to the lecture-discussion of the topic Power and Politics. The students in each class were divided into five groups, each group consists three to four members. They were given 20 minutes to discuss answers to the following questions as a group: 1) What is politics?; 2) Do you think students are generally interested in politics?; and 3) What do you think is the image of politics portrayed by media? The students were then instructed to draft a concept map or a graphic organizer that showcased their answers to the three questions. The group members were asked to proceed in front of the class to elaborate on what they wrote on the paper. After every group has presented, the researcher and the other students in the class asked questions to probe further or clarify the thoughts presented by each group. Key informants such as student leaders and personnel from the BSU (OSS) were interviewed to validate some of the study findings.

The study also used the quantitative method, specifically the descriptive survey research design to describe the BSU students' political participation in their community and university. The study adopted the questionnaire used in the 2004 study on Political Participation of Young People in Europe conducted by the European Union. The questionnaire had three parts: Part 1 includes an enumeration of the different ways of being politically active and requires respondents to place a checkmark on the YES or NO boxes; Part 2 consists of statements about being politically active; Part 3 embodied statements about politics. For parts 2 and 3, the students were asked whether they strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the statements.

The study was conducted at Benguet State University during the first semester of School Year 2017-2018. Total population sampling of the researchers' 143 students from the College of Arts and Sciences, College of Home Economics and Technology, College of Nursing, and College of Teacher Education enrolled in the courses "Politics, Governance with the New Constitution" and "Comparative Government" classes were the



study participants. These students were selected because the researcher intended to understand how students enrolled in a political science class and students majoring in Social Studies perceive and participate in politics.

Before the survey questionnaires were distributed and explained to the respondents, their informed consents were considered by the researcher. The researcher discussed to them the main objective of study, and they were also informed that the results of the study will be utilized to substantiate the researcher's classroom discussions on the topics Politics and Power, and Governance for the succeeding semesters.

Responses to the interview (through classroom recitation) were analyzed thematically and were interpreted. On the other hand, responses to the survey questionnaire were subjected to frequency counts.

Results and Discussion

Perceptions on Politics

Based on the students' responses during the classroom recitation and discussion, the following perceptions on politics were drawn.

Politics is about the Government

Students associated politics as a concept that involves an organized control of the government. This concept definition is the traditional or historical approach to the study of politics, which Dannug and Campanilla (2004) explained. These authors noted that politics concentrates on the formal description of governments (p.10). The students perceived politics as such because they were aware that there is a hierarchy of positions in the government which warrants distribution of power or authority to leaders. This perception is evident since the students were familiar with the common positions and the authorities, both in the national and local government. These leaders were also perceived by the students as alter ego of the people [a person/entity vicariously liable for another (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)]. The students already have the idea that these elected leaders are

acting on behalf of the people, giving realization to the democratic principle "sovereignty resides in the people, and all government authority emanates from them" (Section 1, Article II, 1987 Philippine Constitution).

The students clearly understood that political authority also involves duties and responsibilities, including legislation or the making of laws or policies. This finding coincided with the survey result where 65 of the students agreed that politics refers to discussions in the parliament or congress (Table 1).

In the Philippines, too much discussion happens in Congress primarily because legislation or the process of making laws transpires in this organ of the government. Policymakers deliberate a lot to ensure that laws are well crafted, thereby serving as instruments to promote justice, the common good, and other societal goals.

Table 1 also shows that 62 of the students agreed that politics refers to the activities of parties. The term party pertains to political parties. However, based on discussions, what the students only comprehend about political parties is that they have several candidates for positions in the government. But, they cannot think of and give specific examples of political parties in the Philippines, and they are even confused between political parties and partylist groups. They used the term party list, but they were referring to the idea of a political party. The partylist system is a system of sectoral representation in the House of Representatives, giving voice to the underrepresented sectors in the country to craft laws for their concerns. ACT Teachers, Anak Mindanao (AMIN), Ang National Coalition of Indigenous Peoples Action Na! Inc. (ANAC-IP) were some of the partylists who were given seats in the 17th Philippine Congress.

Table 1 also reflects that 35 of the students strongly agreed that politics is necessary to solve conflicts in society. They perceive that Filipinos elect politicians because the latter will be the ones to solve society's existing problems. This student view exemplified the Structural-Functional Approach of studying politics which Dannug and Campanilla (2004) explained. The government absorbs the demands, needs, complaints, problems of the society and turns these over to pertinent institutions or organs that would provide answers



Table 1*Frequency Distribution of Respondents by Extent of Agreement on Statements Concerning Politics*

Statement on Politics	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1. Politics refers to voting in elections.	29	79	21	11	1	141
2. Politics does not deal with things that are important to people like me.	5	14	37	60	26	142
3. Politics is a necessary way to take care of social issues.	44	67	25	5	0	141
4. Politics is a game played by old men.	4	22	33	57	25	141
5. Politics refers to the activities of parties.	2	62	50	23	5	142
6. Politics is a necessary way to solve conflicts in society.	35	80	20	5	2	142
7. Politics means empty promises.	11	28	73	25	5	142
8. Politics is a way to create a better world.	27	66	46	2	1	142
9. Politics refers to discussions in parliament.	10	65	51	12	1	139
10. Politics is a necessary way to solve international problems.	28	71	36	5	1	141
11. Politics is just corrupt.	8	29	84	17	4	142

or solutions to such concerns through policies or programs.

Politics is the Election of Personalities

The students highlighted that politics is made lively by the people who are able to ascend to position through elections. Table 1 shows that 79 of the students agreed that politics refers to voting during elections. This student perception coincided with Dannug and Campanilla's (2004) assertion that there is politics where there are elections and decisions (p.19). Based on classroom discussions, it is evident that the students knew the concept of suffrage and elections. Although they were not yet familiar that the term suffrage technically pertains to the right to vote, they already had this conception that elections were held for people to vote and choose leaders who will have a seat in the government. This thought of the students about politics and elections reflects the earlier student perception that politics

is where democratic principles are seen.

The students noted that only the influential are involved in politics. The term influential as used by the students pertained to the rich people and the oligarchs. According to Hays (2008), these people who run the system are also the ones who benefit from it (par. 33).

The students also distinguished that in Philippine politics, only those who were popular and famous, or those who have appeal or charisma were able to secure the survival of their personal interests or goals. These students' opinions presented the fact that they had the idea of the prevailing popularity politics in the Philippines, even if they were not yet familiar with this jargon. Heydarian (2015) emphasized that Philippine politics is all about popularity because there are no genuine mass-based political parties, no programmatic discourse on policy alternatives and their virtues, and there is



extremely limited opportunity for grilling candidates on the specifics of their policy agenda (par. 6). The author further argued that as long as 'popularity' is the name of the game, voters and their choice of candidates will be shaped mainly by surveys rather than an in-depth assessment of the competencies and integrity of individual candidates (par. 15).

Table 1 also showed that 57 students disagreed that politics is a game played by older men. This result is because many young male and female politicians are elected into offices. Although, one cannot disregard the fact that Philippine politics is populated by the so-called political veterans (the old ones). Evangelista (2018) asserted that there are no stopping political veterans from staying in public office for a longer period despite the years that they have assumed various government positions. Some political veterans ran for senatorial posts in the 2019 midterm elections, such as former Senator Juan Ponce Enrile, former Senator Manuel Lapid, Senator Cynthia Villar, Governor Maria Imelda Josefa Marcos, and former interior secretary Manuel Roxas.

Moreover, some of the students also likened politics to the HBO fictional series *Game of Thrones* because they noted that people would do everything to ensure they have the position. The *Game of Thrones*' story focused on the battle of the characters for the Iron Throne, the seat of the King of the Seven Kingdoms. The battle for the throne is full of backstabbing and bloodletting (McKinney, 2015). Indeed, Philippine politics is synonymous with the plot of this popular television series. A handful of people contend and compete with one another for certain positions in the government. Alliances are seen through the formation of new political parties or the unison of existing political parties. Political "turn-coatism" (or party-switching) is evident in the country. Political butterflies also transfer from one political party to another depending on the availability of offered posts for candidacy.

However, the students note that once they are assured of the office, it seems that the programs, help, and solutions promised by the candidates become broken promises and lies. The students expressed that there were instances when the so-called promises of these candidates did not materialize or were not realized once they were

elected into position. This observation somehow negated the survey result (Table 1), where 73 students neither agreed nor disagreed that politics means empty promises. Koop (2017) explained that voters tend to view politicians as promise-breakers because this maybe is a result of widespread media coverage of broken campaign promises (par.7). He, conversely, explained that politicians sometimes have trouble squaring their ambitious campaign promises with the cold reality of governing once in office. He underlined that candidates simply could not know of all potential problems and limitations to the promises they make until they are elected (par. 9).

Politics is Corrupt

Discussions revealed that students viewed politics as wicked. They regarded politics as bad due to certain undesirable issues. They identified schemes, bribery cases, controversies as well as graft and corruption as the primary issues in Philippine politics. The students also stressed that corruption is not only on money; corruption of time and the minds of followers were also accentuated. It is not surprising that students had an undesirable view of politics because it is what they see, read, or hear from the different forms of mass media every day. They were able to have a glimpse of these political controversies probably because they were forced to as part of the subject's requirement. Part of the researcher's classroom activity was the "What's New?". Every meeting, before class discussions would formally commence, the researcher would call three of her students to share what is new in Philippine politics. These students were asked to share in class current news (national or local) about Philippine politics, which they had learned through the various forms of mass media and social media. The researcher noticed that most of the news reports shared in class dealt with the negative aspects of the country's politics. Graft and corruption, political killings, personal issues/controversies of politicians, substandard government projects, poverty, and drug-related issues were some of the most commonly shared news in class. Students rarely reported affirmative news about the administration's programs or policies.

This student perception about politics somehow opposed the survey result (Table 1), where 84 students neither agreed nor disagreed that politics



is corrupt. The social scientist Joseph S. Nye defined corruption as the abuse of public office that may come in forms such as bribery, extortion, embezzlement of government resources, violation of campaign laws, and electoral fraud for personal enrichment (Gale, 2006). The survey result reflected that the students were still considering the view that corruption is not always present in the country's government. However, Sorote (2012) underlined the World Bank report that about 20% of the country's annual budget is lost to corruption annually. About 30% of government contracts are also said to be diverted to corruption (par. 12). Indeed, corruption exists, but the students were also aware that the Duterte administration exerted efforts to eradicate corruption and corrupt public officials. Their consciousness about these measures could be brought about by the circumstance that they need to be familiar with local or national news for them to be able to participate in the classroom recitation, "What's New?".

The students also stressed that politics is a dirty game because according to discussions, whenever candidates or politicians compete for the electorate's support or vote, cases of bias, dishonesty, and backstabbing between and among these people exist. Moreover, the students also underscored that politics is also chaotic since it entails war of political dynasties or kinship. It was not surprising that the students had this conception about politics because of the details they saw in news reports by the media. In addition, some students were able to participate during the 2016 national elections as voters; hence, they were exposed to these issues during the campaign period. Two of the students even narrated that vote-buying was prevalent in their place. These students highlighted that the smallest amount of money a candidate gave to every voter was Php500.00.

On a general note, the students conveyed the traditional notion that politics is about the government of a state and all its undertakings. Remarkably, they were only familiar with a democratic form of government. They have an idea that through elections, politicians are placed in government positions, and only the influential, popular, and self-serving people are often elected in the Philippine government. It is noteworthy to consider that although students have a traditional perception of politics, they saw it as the society's

messiah; it will solve societal problems through the government and its elected leaders.

Students' Interest in Politics

There were 30 groups of students, and the majority of the groups (19 groups) unanimously stated that students were not generally attracted to politics due to the following reasons:

Students are more Interested in Less Serious Stuff

The students noted that they were more fascinated with showbiz gossip, Korean drama series, sports, computer games, concerts, and movies than politics. Apart from these, the students also stressed that they are more focused on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. The students expounded that they were already disappointed with politicians in the Philippines. The students who experienced voting further stressed that they trusted and voted for certain politicians, some of whom end up being involved in corruption, drugs, and other issues. Based on these answers, it is evident that students do not desire to look into concepts that are too serious and require too much critical thinking. Their interest may also be affected by how they look at the usefulness of things to their daily lives. This student opinion corresponds to Ransford's (2000) assertion that college students practice privatism, meaning "they are interested in their private lives now; they will wait a few years until they are older and settled in their lives before taking an interest in public matters" (par. 4).

Students are Politically Apathetic

Students disregard elections. The students mentioned observing fewer and fewer young people participating in the election than the overall population. They also underlined that they are not even interested in registering. This thought of the students probably holds only for themselves because, according to Tubadeza (2016), the millennials dominated the number of registered voters for the May 2016 elections (par. 1). She underlined that out of the 54.36 million registered voters in the country, 24.73 million were youth voters (par. 2 and 3). The number is almost half of the total number of registered voters, which indicates that more youth are interested in participating in the country's



elections. Ransford (2000) also underlined that “many students believed it is their duty to vote, but leave the rest of political actions up to others” (par.13).

The student respondents in this study also added that young people base their votes on popularity and friendships. Although the youth indeed considered these two factors in voting for a candidate, Dolipas (2018) revealed that the students also consider probity (*malinis na pagkatao*), and someone who promotes government programs for development (*nagtataguyod ng programa ng gobyerno para sa kaunlaran*) in voting for a candidate.

Still on elections, the students also narrated that they are not serious about electing their classroom officers in a classroom setting. They probably did not see the need for officers since they are already in college. Also, they mentioned that they attended the Supreme Student Government (SSG) campaign and voted during the scheduled elections at the BSU main campus for compliance's sake. They also observed that only a few candidates ran for positions; some even did not have opponents. The researcher personally observed that whenever classes were suspended to give way for the mass campaign of students in the school gymnasium, only a handful of students would proceed to the gym and participate. Most of the students would loiter around the campus instead. This observation gives the researcher the impression that these students were politically apathetic; disinterested in university issues. The researcher also observed that when candidates do their classroom campaigns, most of the students in the class were not paying attention to the party's or candidates' platforms or proposals. They listened quietly without any questions. They only reacted when the candidates were able to tell humorous tales. The same attitude was described by the BSU Student COMELEC Chairperson, who mentioned that not too many students participate in campus politics. She cited that for the school year 2018-2019, only 2,985 of the total 6,400 enrolled students participated in the student elections. Clearly, there was no majority reflected in the voter turn-out. She elaborated that students are apathetic to the elections because, based on students' explanations, they could not see any visible projects done by the past administrations of the SSG (C.G. Alos, personal communication, January 11, 2019). This attitude

reflects Beach's (2015) claim that students want to see results (par. 3).

Students are Politically Immature

The students emphasized that they were not captivated by politics because they were not interested in political issues or decisions. They believed that authorities are the ones responsible for political matters. The students regarded themselves as useless and have nothing to do to help resolve political issues. Moreover, they also had this notion that even if they speak out their opinions, these would not matter because they think they are voiceless in the world of politics. These thoughts boil down to one impression: they are still students who were not that confident that they can contribute something to politics even at that age.

Furthermore, they also think it is useless for their complaints to be heard or expressed since politics has its own rules. They had grown weary based on their school experiences. Based on discussions, there were several instances when these students tried to complain about certain instructors/professors to authorities (department chairperson or college dean), but their complaints fell on deaf ears because no action was done to answer or solve them. Hence, even if they had the urge to say something against their subject instructor/professor, they opted to keep quiet. Beach (2015) emphasized Stephen Young's assertion that there is a dire need to directly address and hear the concerns of the young people for them to have a reason to be engaged, to vote (par. 3).

Students are Clueless on the Essence of Politics

The students noted that they cannot understand the concept of politics in the country. They believed that politics does not bring positive impact to their lives. They comprehended that people like them do not get benefits from politics. Hence, when there are seminars concerning politics, they would prefer not to attend unless required for a subject. It is evident here that the students could not fully understand the role politics play in their lives and the country's future; hence, the apathy. Based on the researcher's observation of some colleagues and stories from some students, some course facilitators required students to attend seminars



but did not explain the significance or the relationship of the seminar/conference to their subject or topic. Hence, students simply obeyed for attendance checking and took notes for a check-up quiz on their next scheduled meeting with the course facilitator.

On the other hand, some of the groups (11 groups) strongly considered that today's youth are generally interested in politics for the following reasons:

Politics is Beneficial

The students stressed that their interest in politics was fueled by what the government can afford to give its people. They noted that the government focuses on the welfare of the youth; hence, they acknowledged benefits like scholarships or free tuition fees. The students knew about these scholarships because most of them were in school through scholarships. Based on the interview with the Section Head of the Scholarship Unit of the Office of Student Services in Benguet State University, even before the full implementation of the Free Tuition Fee Law, most of the students in the university were scholarship grantees already. She cited that as of December 29, 2018, 1,124 undergraduate students were availing of government-sponsored scholarships (K.C. Ngina, personal communication, January 7, 2019).

Students knew about the free tuition fee law because mass media reported many discussions about it in 2017 around the time this study was being conducted. On August 3, 2017, President Duterte signed into law Republic Act 10931, otherwise known as the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (Mollman, 2017). Mollman stressed that this law would grant tuition-free education at over 100 state universities and colleges (par. 1). Despite discussions on how the government will sustain the implementation of the law, the students were able to appreciate that somehow the government under the Duterte administration is doing something to help poor students graduate from college. This student notion attested the survey results (Table 1), where 60 students disagreed that politics does not deal with things that are important to people. Education is a very significant concept in the country since it is perceived to be the primary means to escape

poverty. Hence, through educational policies, the students were able to see that politics is an essential topic that is worthy of their concern.

Students Regard Themselves as Catalysts of Change

The students also believed in the cliché that the youth are the future and hope of the Philippines. Hence, they highlighted that the results of their actions now may speak or reflect the future. The students were able to understand that the issues today will have an impact on their future. Essentially, they also recognized that students cannot really get away from politics because it is part of people's daily lives. This student perception could be the result of the classroom discussion on the thoughts of Aristotle about man being a political animal. Discussions pointed to the fact that politics is everywhere, affecting the day-to-day existence of man. It was also emphasized in the context of the discussion that since politics impacts one's life, being a student is not an excuse for them not to like the subject or participate in conversations about issues in politics. This result coincided with the survey result (Table 1), where 67 of the students agreed that politics is necessary to take care of social issues.

Similarly, the survey also revealed that 71 students agreed that politics is a necessary way to solve international problems. Indeed, politics answer local, national, or international issues. Politics (through the government) provides avenues for discussing solutions that will cure or answer issues or problems in society and between and among states. Discussions that highlighted the issue and possible solutions over the Kalayaan Island and Benham Rise between the Philippines and China; US President Donald Trump and the changing US policies on immigration; and Brexit (Britain's exit from the European Union) were done in class. These discussions enabled the students to understand that politics exists because of the conflicts created by these issues, but politics is also much needed to end such. This implication may affirm the survey result (Table 1), where 66 students agreed that politics is a way to create a better world.

Young people also want to make a change. Based on discussions, students explained that many youths are involved in politically related



events like rallies, symposia, and elections. Here we see Beach’s (2015) claim that students want to affect change and deal with an issue they know of (par. 3). However, when these students were asked if they had joined any rally, the majority answered no simply because no opportunity was given to them to join. The students also claimed that as young citizens of the country, they should be aware of every issue in their country. Through this, they can speak out about what they want to revise on politics or the wrongdoings of politicians. To be able to do this, students turn to technology. Through their gadgets and the various social media applications, they can access local, national, and international news.

Part of the students’ concern for change is their continued vigilance after they cast their votes. The students elucidated that they are more concerned when a person already takes a position. These students underlined that they were concerned because it is their government and because they voted for these people.

These results show that although most students were politically apathetic, a handful of them still saw the beauty and essence of politics in man’s life. Somehow maturity was seen in how these minority of students saw themselves being the future of the Philippines; hence, they ought to be interested in Philippine politics and assumed even the simplest act of voting during elections.

Image of Politics as Portrayed by Media

Table 2 shows both the positive and negative images of politics as projected by mass media.

Politics is Charitable

Interestingly, the only positive depiction of politics as acknowledged by students was that politics is charitable (*mapagkawang-gawa*). They explained that people can always approach their barangay captain or any local leader for help like financial assistance or solicitations. The traces of patronage politics where the politicians ensure that they are able to respond to the material needs of the electorate, most especially during the election season, in exchange for the latter’s vote or support, was identified by the students, although they were not yet familiar with the term patronage politics.

Politics is Off-Putting

Based on student interviews, politics was bad because most of the news reports are about corruption committed by government officials, cases of officials involved in illegal drugs, abuse of authority by politicians, conflicts between and among politicians, problems of the government, fake news, and the president cursing during his speeches. It was not surprising that the students viewed politics this way because these were the actual issues in 2017 when this study was conducted.

Politics is Filthy

In addition, the students also regarded politics as a dirty job. Remarkably, the students looked at being a politician as a career, a profession. Again, they regarded politics as filthy because, according to discussions, whenever candidates or politicians compete for the electorate’s support or vote, cases of bias, dishonesty, and backstabbing between

<p>Table 2</p> <p><i>Identified Images of Politics Based on Media Portrayal</i></p>	
Positive Image of Politics	Negative Image of Politics
<p><i>Mapagkawang-gawa</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Politics is negative because most of the reports given are about crimes, corruption, officials involved in illegal drugs, abuse of authority, conflicts between politicians, problems of the government; the president curses during speeches & interviews; fake news - It is one of the dirtiest jobs. - Filthy and chaotic



and among these people exist. Moreover, the students also underlined that politics is also chaotic since it entails war of political dynasties or kinship.

The students also noted that media projects that politics is pretentious and inhumane. They noted that the media portrays politicians as the controllers because politicians overuse their authority and use other people for their benefit. Media also depict the personal biases and self-interest of these politicians. Instead of being the first ones to abide by the laws implemented in the country, these politicians are among the ones who do not obey them. This description is evident among oligarchs, the influential ones who the students earlier identified as the only ones who have the most chance of being elected to government posts.

In general, media plays a huge role in shaping students' perceptions of politics in the Philippines. Students literally interpret what they see or hear from any form of mass media. Since mass media broadcast more of the polluted side of Philippine politics, more students look at politics negatively.

Political Participation of BSU Students

Institute for Social Research and Analysis [ISRA] (2004) noted that political participation pertains to any voluntary action that aims to influence political decision-making processes (p. 20). Table 3 presents the political activities in the community that the students engaged themselves in. Of the 25 enumerated political activities, having voted in elections and having attended a public meeting dealing with political or social issues were the activities engaged in by the majority of the BSU students.

Remarkably, the students were able to participate in elections by voting, which is one of the most common forms of political participation, as White (2015) noted. This finding also suggested that the researcher's conventional thinking about the students as politically apathetic may not be an accurate generalization. This result confirms Beach's (2015) claim that many students believe that it is their duty to vote (par. 14). The result indicated that the students made an effort to visit the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) office in their respective communities

to register. They exercised their right to suffrage during the 2016 national elections. This result showed that these students care for their country, assuming that they voted the candidate they thought could bring the needed social, economic, and political changes in the Philippine society. This result also coincided with the earlier mentioned interview data that these students want to make a change. Hence, a number of these students claimed that many of the youth are involving themselves in politically-related activities like elections.

The second political activity participated in by most of the students was attending public meetings that deal with either political or social issues. This result showed that the students were not indifferent to the concerns that afflicted their communities. In addition, they also claimed that the consequences of their actions now may speak or reflect their future. Hence, they deemed it necessary to be aware of the issues that plague the community at present since these issues, in a way, may have an impact on their future.

In addition, this also affirmed the statement in Table 1 where 35 students strongly agreed that politics is a necessary way to solve conflicts in society. Hence, it is commendable that they were familiar with and able to understand these issues. It would be easier for them to decide which candidates they will be giving the authority to serve the government. Moreover, by partaking in public consultations about community issues, the students would further recognize their important role in the community. Perhaps, they would realize what they needed to do in their little ways to help mitigate or solve the issue/s.

On the other hand, the study also revealed that majority of the students did not participate in rough political activities to express their unhappiness with the Philippine government. They did not join in rough political activities such as illegal demonstrations; political events where violent confrontations between political opponents occur, blocked streets or railways; and political events involving violent confrontation with the police. This finding reflected that students in Benguet State University were not into extreme forms of protests. The researcher has been affiliated with the institution for almost a decade and has not witnessed any single instance



Table 3*Political Activities Engaged into by BSU Students in their Community*

Have you ever.....?	No	Yes	Total
1. voted in elections	43	106	149
2. cast an invalid vote	137	10	147
3. not voted out of protest	123	21	144
4. contacted a politician	115	29	144
5. attended a public meeting dealing with political or social issues	83	63	146
6. signed a petition	107	42	149
7. collected signatures	113	36	149
8. held a political speech	133	16	149
9. distributed leaflets with a political content	117	32	149
10. boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	139	10	149
11. bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	117	31	148
12. written political messages or graffiti on walls	139	10	149
13. worn a badge with a political message	123	26	149
14. participated in a legal demonstration	118	30	148
15. participated in an illegal demonstration	147	2	149
16. participated in a strike	144	5	149
17. donated money to support the work of a political group or organisation	111	38	149
18. contributed to a political discussion on the internet	123	26	149
19. written an article, e.g. in a students' newspaper, organisation journal, or the internet	115	34	149
20. written or forwarded a letter/ an email with a political content	133	16	149
21. participated in a political event where property was damaged	144	3	147
22. participated in a political event where there was a violent confrontation with the police	145	4	149
23. participated in a political event where there was a violent confrontation with political opponents	147	2	149
24. occupied houses, school/university buildings factories or government offices	97	51	148
25. blocked streets or railways	146	3	149

when university students assembled and organized or participated in protests around political, social, or even academic issues.

The BSU Student Organization Unit (SOU) head remarked that BSU students are allowed to protest in the university as long as they get a permit from his office, and the requirements

(like not to disturb classes) will be complied by the would-be student protesters. Alternatively, the students' political thoughts may be aired through their school-based newspapers like the Mountain Collegian or even through the university's online platform for student thoughts, the BSU Shoutout page. The SOU head underlined that he encourages student organizations to come up



with activities or platforms like posters or online discussions where students of the university can discuss the pertinent issues in the society (like the increasing incidence of HIV AIDS in the Cordilleras), but he noted that discussing is not the interest of BSU students (R. Fiangaan, personal communication, May 14, 2019). The researcher agrees with his description of BSU students in this aspect. The researcher has been with the university for a decade, and attests that it is not the fascination of students to discuss matters, concepts, or issues.

Table 4 shows activities that students did for a political party. A large number of students had participated in activities concerning a candidate's political party. Although the students did not clearly understand the nature of political parties, they acknowledge that candidates for elective government positions come from certain parties. The majority of the students supported an election campaign and tried to convince others to vote for a candidate. In general, these activities of political parties were also seen at Benguet State University annually when students campaigned for positions in the SSG.

BSU students who engage in campus politics organize themselves into political parties like STEP UP (Students Transmuting Evident Partition into Upgrade Partnership). Student candidates contend for president, vice president, press information officer, college senator (representative), or representative to the judicial branch of the SSG. These parties also campaign for school issues they plan to address once their candidates are elected into office. Party platforms include tangible projects like sports equipment, student lounge, food court, shade in the oval, transparency of records, student involvement through upgraded seminars, training, and workshops (M.A. Micu, personal communication, March 22, 2019). These platforms are made known to the student body through

classroom campaigns, flyer distribution to students, and mass campaigns in the university gymnasium (L.D. Mablay, personal communication, March 23, 2019). For the student political parties to convince others to vote for their party or their candidates, their strategy is to convince a student from every college (especially those who feel left out on the campus) to be part of the party (M.A. Micu, personal communication, March 22, 2019). Consequently, the friends, classmates, and supporters of these specific candidates will support the person and will ask or even lobby for others to do the same (R.F. Jr., personal communication, May 14, 2019).

Table 5 shows the typical activities students carried out in school. Many students attended meetings and took active roles in such meetings. Having attended students' meetings and taken an active role in such meetings may have been literally interpreted by the student respondents. Based on observations, students organize and attend meetings aligned to their particular subjects. They usually did this when there were remaining minutes from the subject time or after their class hours. They group themselves or discuss as a class matters involving their requirements and mechanics of such. These meetings took place often in classrooms and sometimes in the university front lawns. Taking an active role was evident because these meetings were often noisy; almost everyone desired to speak and be heard. Whatever the topics of these meetings, what was essential was the circumstance that students got interested in attending and contributing to these meetings.

Table 5 also reveals that many students had been a member of the student council or the SSG. In the researcher's previous classes, there is always a student who is an SSG officer. Whenever discussions about school or student issues arise, their classmates pinpointed them as the key people who can address the issues.

Table 4

Activities Done by Students for a Political Party

Activity	No	Yes	Total
1. supported an election campaign	81	66	147
2. tried to convince others to vote for a candidate or a party	82	64	146



Table 5*Activities Done by Students at School*

Activity	No	Yes	Total
been a member of a student council	59	87	146
had a function as a speaker for the class	36	110	146
attended a students' meeting	141	8	149
taken an active role in such a meeting	62	87	149
participated in a protest movement at school	7	142	149
organized a political event at school	20	128	148

However, the OSS head emphasized that there is voter apathy at BSU. He narrated that not so many students pursue positions in the SSG, and also, not too many students participate in the election. He explained that a small number of students file candidacy in the past 2 or 3 years because the requirements (like academic load, residency requirement) limit them. They recognize that student officers have increased responsibilities. The students probably were overwhelmed by such responsibilities. They also acknowledged that they could be bullied or bashed by their fellow students once they fail to perform the duties that go with their position or deliver tangible projects.

Moreover, he also discussed that the OSS conducts regular Servant Leadership Training where 100 slots are given to interested students who like to learn about leadership values. He noted that they emphasized that students need not run for office because they can always help or serve in their little ways. He noted that this advice might have been imprinted in the student participants because not too many BSU students are interested in running for posts in the SSG. He underlined that of the 100 slots, 60 participants were present. Of the 60, around 30 students who underwent the training were serving their colleges through their student organizations, where they see that their service is more effective (R. Fiangaan Jr., personal communication, May 14, 2019).

On the other hand, he also noted that in the past two or three years, students were motivated to participate in the SSG through voting, but they were discouraged that only a handful of candidates run for office and sometimes unopposed. This

observation was affirmed by students when they underlined that only a few candidates ran for positions; there were even some who did not have opponents. In addition, students also remarked that there were no visible SSG Projects. The BSU Student COMELEC chairperson recounts that students were apathetic to the elections because as students explained, they could not see any visible SSG projects (C.G. Alos, personal communication, January 11, 2019). On the other hand, the SOU head underlined that sometimes the studentry was unfair because they gauge the SSG effectivity on tangible projects implemented. He remarked that not all projects are tangible because the SSG generates only a small amount from the fees they collect from students and is not enough to finance several tangible student projects. Hence, the students think their campus officers are not working compared to their college student government officers, who could purchase several materials for the college (R. Fiangaan Jr., personal communication, May 14, 2019).

Based on these findings, despite the presence of activities and opportunities where students can freely engage to realize their political awareness and commitment, they did not maximize such opportunities for several reasons. Hence, these university students were not politically active. Table 6 reflects the extent of the students' agreement about being politically active. It shows that 79 students strongly agreed that it is important to play one's part to make a better world. Interestingly, 54 also strongly agreed that even if they cannot change things, it is still important to try. This result was evident when the outgoing BSU SSG President stated when he was elected president that he had high hopes



that some aspects of the university Commission on Elections (COMELEC) will be improved (G.S. Tugbo, personal interview, May 14, 2019). He proposed to the COMELEC if it is possible to conduct an absentee voting system to cater to the plight of some students who were out of campus (due to on-the-job trainings) during the schedule of elections (G.S. Tugbo, personal communication, May 14, 2019).

The BSU Office of Student Services (OSS), in partnership with the various student organizations at BSU, had taken the initiative to stage an election-related student activity prior to the recently concluded 2019 Philippine midterm elections. The goal of this activity was for the students to be enlightened about the topic and be engaged by actively participating in the forum by asking questions to the invited resource speakers. Although the project only reach its first phase, the SOU head assured that the

same activity would be pursued by the OSS in the next elections, again with the primary aim of engaging students to discuss issues (R. Fiangaan, personal communication, May 14, 2019).

In addition, the OSS head underlined their plans to engage students politically. They plan to hold mock elections and commend the colleges with the most number of students who participated in the elections. They hope that the students will take these strategies as inspiration to encourage others to come out and vote during elections (R. Fiangaan, personal communication, May 14, 2019). These narratives clearly indicate that although the OSS head sees voter apathy among BSU students, he still thinks of several activities that will somehow engage students even in the simplest ways possible. He is optimistic that somehow, BSU students' attitude towards politics will soon be improved.

Table 6

Extent of Agreement on the Statements About Being Politically Active

Statement on Politics	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
It is important to play one's part to make a better world.	79	54	6	2	0	141
It is interesting to be politically active because you meet influential people	23	64	47	8	1	143
It is pointless trying to change things.	1	10	47	47	36	141
Even if I cannot change things, it is still important to try	54	69	18	1	0	142
I am too busy with my own life to be politically active.	4	15	68	48	7	142
It is interesting to be politically active because it is good for your career.	14	52	61	13	1	141
I am too exhausted to engage in politics in my free time.	2	20	70	42	7	141
If you are bothered by something, you need to try to change it.	32	73	32	4	1	142
It is interesting to be politically active because you learn a lot of useful things.	40	61	37	3	1	142
I don't have enough time to be politically active	5	19	64	45	8	141



Finally, they also strongly agreed that it is interesting to be politically active because you learn many useful things. This outcome showed that the students acknowledge the essence of politics and the significance of effectively participating in its processes. By attending meetings, they were able to speak out their opinions; by being a member of the student council, they were given the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of their fellow students by seriously attending to their fellow student complaints and predicaments about school matters.

Conclusions

The study concludes that 1) students already had an understanding of politics even before the concept was introduced to them in classroom discussion. They perceived politics as pertaining to a democratic form of government; involves the election of famous personalities, and it is corrupt; 2) The majority of BSU students are more attentive to less serious stuff (like computer games and Korean drama) than politics; 3) The majority of BSU students negatively understand politics due to issues of political corruption often highlighted by media; 4) BSU students are engaged in community politics by voting in elections and attending public meetings dealing with political or social issues. In addition, they primarily participate in school politics by attending student meetings and taking active roles in such meetings.

Recommendations

The study suggests that course facilitators of Political Science subjects objectively process their students' comprehension of politics by carefully examining the contexts of local or even national issues. The course facilitators can continuously encourage their students to watch the news from different news channels to have a balance of news feeds from where they can draw objective conclusions or generalizations. They can also advise students to watch foreign news coverage of local or national events in the Philippines to glimpse an outsider's point of view. By doing so, the positive impacts of politics will also be highlighted.

In addition, political apathy among BSU students may be reduced by the following suggestions: a) college-based student organizations may encourage students to be part of the organization and participate in its activities, hoping that in the long run, they will be able to realize the importance of engagement; b) the BSU OSS should encourage college-based student organizations to have activities that nurture political participation or awareness among its members. These activities may include symposium or seminar on timely issues that are related to the courses in the college concerned, leadership training for student leaders, writing a section in the newsletter or in the college-based paper or bulletin where students may express their points of view about issues in the university or the locality, and so on; c) the university can create civic spaces in the university, such as small areas or spaces in the library or in the college buildings, where students can freely hold small meetings or gatherings to discuss matters or issues concerning them; and d) course facilitators of subjects that are related to politics (like NSTP instructors) may utilize research as one of the subject's requirements, and the topic of such student endeavor may be issues in the university or the locality (that may not be necessarily political). This strategy will somehow foster students' civic or political awareness apart from enhancing their research skills like interviewing people and discussing with them.

Moreover, BSU student COMELEC and SOU may continue partnering with each other and the different college-based student organizations to promote students' political engagement. The partnership may include a reorientation of the duties and responsibilities of student leaders as well as the feasible projects that such leaders may accomplish. By doing this, the student leaders and the student electorate will be further enlightened about the student government. SOU should continue strengthening its activities aligned with politics, like holding online forums or discussions or giving commendations to college organizations with the most students who participated in the SSG elections.



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