

Research Article

Youth Presidential Picks: Insights from BSU Students' 2022 Election Choices

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ABSTRACT

An examination of the voting determinants of the BSU students is crucial in understanding the elements that influenced their presidential choice during the 2022 Philippine national elections. Knowledge of these elements gives insights on how the socio-educational environment influence the students' political behavior. This exploratory study sought to assess BSU students' perspectives on gender as a factor in leadership selection, investigate the criteria they used in choosing their candidate, and identify the influences that affected their decision to vote for a specific presidential candidate. It used multi-strategy research design where the primary data gathering tool were essay scripts of students. Findings revealed that students considered leadership traits and acts of service towards the governed over gender in choosing a leader; family and educational background, leadership qualities, platforms of governance, recognized experience and track record, and campaign message and behaviors were bases of students in selecting a candidate to vote; and the students' voting behavior is a product of the interplay of influences from family, friends, church, and social media.

Keywords: gender and leadership, student voting behavior, voting criteria, voting influences

1. INTRODUCTION

The last regular Philippine elections was held on May 9, 2022. This was an election unlike any other because it occurred during the global pandemic; it featured the dominant use of social media by candidates for their campaigns; and there was a significant number of youth electorate. Jorge (2022) highlighted that 32.7 million of the 65 million registered voters were youth aged 18 to 30. He emphasized that because they comprise a considerable number of voters, the youth play a pivotal role mobilizing the votes through social media and other multimedia platforms that significantly boost candidates' campaigns. The 1987 Philippine Constitution emphasizes the important role of the youth in shaping the socio-political landscape of the country. Thus, the government encourages them to actively participate in public and civic affairs, especially in exercising the right to vote. Their choices in the elections will greatly shape the future of Philippine politics.

The youth's socio-educational environment influences their political behavior and perceptions of gender roles in leadership. According to Careemdeen, Awang, and Ahmad (2021), the socio-educational environment includes the family, school, community, social network, and virtual access. These impact the youth's education by shaping their knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

It is interesting to note what the youth considered in terms of deciding their choice of presidential candidates in the 2022 elections. According to a 2018 study by the author, probity (*malinis na pagkatao*) and promotion of government programs for development (*nagtataguyod ng programa ng gobyerno para sa kaunlaran*) were key factors in choosing candidates. Similarly, BOSES Pilipinas (2022) shared that the three most important character that Filipinos look for in a candidate include provider of strong leadership, honest and intelligent. It is also worthy to consider if the candidate's gender influenced the youth's presidential choice. A 2008 report by Pew Research Center showed that while the American public rated women higher than men in leadership qualities like honesty and intelligence, a handful viewed men as better political leaders. Most believed that men and women make equally effective leaders. As McCullough (2019) said, strong leadership is not limited by gender; it is about being modest, honest, inspiring, determined, an effective communicator, and open to innovative thinking.

With these in mind, the current study assessed the perceptions of BSU students regarding the influence of gender in the selection of a leader, explored the bases they used in choosing their candidate, and identified the factors that influenced their

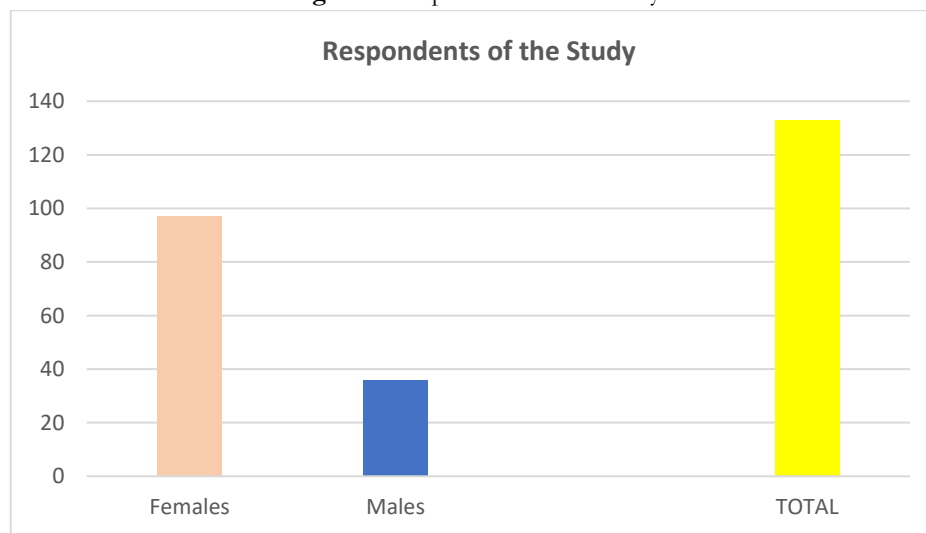
decision to vote for a certain presidential candidate. The study's output will provide guidance to course facilitators in the College of Social Sciences on which topics or concepts must be continued and further enhanced in the civic education component of the subject syllabus in the general education (GE) courses in order to help BSU students make informed opinions and political choices. Also, the study's findings may serve as guidance to the university or college student governments, university or college student officers as well as politicians, future candidates and their campaign managers to identify and understand the aspects which students value; hence, capitalizing on these in the upcoming elections. Moreover, the study will inform educators and even policymakers on the generational differences in attitude towards gender roles and where gender biases continue giving ideas on what possible solutions can be done in order to achieve gender parity in leadership.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was an exploratory study that used multi-research design. The quantitative method was used to collect numerical data such as the number of student respondents, their sex, and the presidential candidates they voted during the May 2022 national elections. On the other hand, qualitative method was applied to categorize essay responses to codes, organized these into themes, and analyzed these and the numerical data.

Non-probability convenience sampling was employed in this study because of time and budget limitations. The study's respondents were one hundred thirty (133) Benguet State University students enrolled in the subject The Contemporary World (SS 23) under the College of Social Sciences during the Second Semester of Academic Year 2021-2022 (January to May 2022) and during the First Semester of Academic Year 2022-2023 (August to December 2022). There were ninety-seven (97) female student respondents and thirty-six (36) males. Since convenience sampling was used, the results may not accurately represent the opinions of the majority of the students enrolled in Benguet State University during the mentioned period. This approach might bear potential biases and restrict the external validity of the results. Hence, the study's results do not apply to the entire student population of the University.

Figure 1. Respondents of the Study



The primary data collection tool used in the study was the essay scripts from students, assigned as one of the activities in the subject "The Contemporary World" (Soc Sci 23). This activity followed a unit on global citizenship where the researcher, who also served as the subject facilitator, discussed the importance of fulfilling civic responsibilities as one of the hallmarks of global citizenship. With the May 2022 elections approaching, the students were asked to answer three essay questions: (1.) What is your preferred gender for the president? (2.) Who among the 10 presidential candidates do you prefer or have you voted for? Explain your reasons.; and (3.) What platforms of your chosen candidate would you like to see implemented? Students had forty-five minutes to complete these questions; after which, their papers were collected and scored accordingly. Prior to the activity, the students' informed consent was considered by the researcher. The researcher explained what the activity was for and told students their responses would be used in the study. Participation was voluntary; students who chose not to include their essays in the study could do so without prejudice to their scores. Data collection was done from January to May 2022 (Second Semester of School Year 2022-2023) and August to December 2022 (First Semester of School Year 2023-2024). Thematic analysis was used to analyze

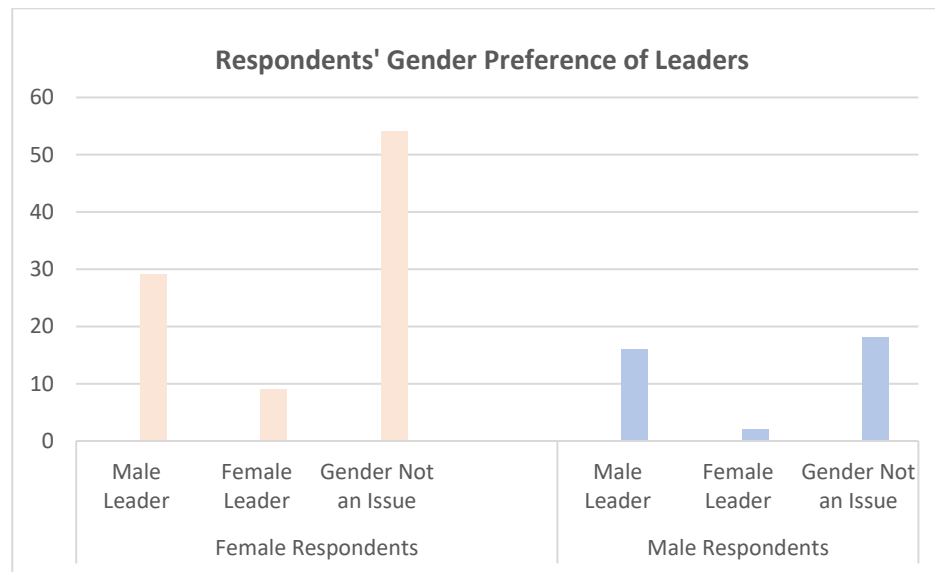
data. Initial codes were created from the essay responses and subsequently organized into themes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Gender Neutrality in the Selection of Leader

State leaders are architects of change because they direct their country towards social, economic, and political growth; hence, good leadership should be determined by behavior not gender (Ramalho, 2019). This notion is substantiated by this study's finding that 72 of the students claim gender does not matter in selecting a presidential candidate.

Figure 2. Respondents' Gender Preference of Leaders



The students' comments indicating that gender of the leader is not a factor worthy of considered included: "there is no gender when it comes to giving and serving the people;" "a man, woman, and even part of the LGBTQ community can lead the country; we should get rid of the notion that men make better leaders compared to women;" "all genders have what it takes to be a ruler;" "men and women can make equally good leaders;" "both can change the country;" and "male, female, LGBTQ these three can lead the Philippines as long as their intentions is to run the government correctly; with clear visions and good intentions for the country." These comments clearly show that the students are no longer constrained by the gender stereotype that holds believes only men can be great leaders; rather, they have been convinced that LGBTQ people can also be excellent leaders for the state.

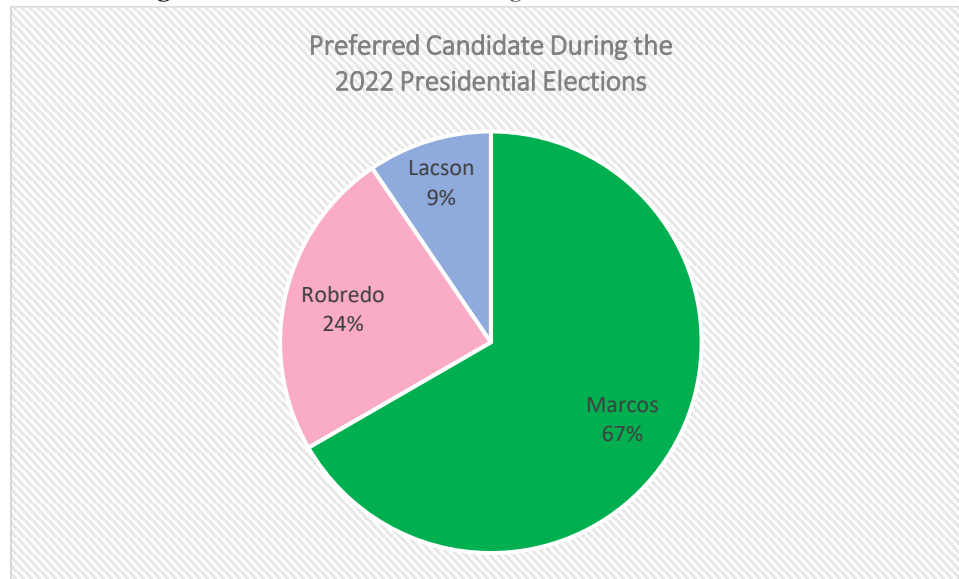
Furthermore, the students emphasized that traits and qualifications of leaders should top gender as a factor to consider in a leader. They gave concrete examples of characteristics they believed a Filipino leader should have, which were reflected in the following responses: "leadership ability is demonstrated through a person's attitude and dedication, not gender;" "character and qualities are what matter[s] when choosing a leader for the country;" "we should consider the candidate's intellect;" "it is not gender that matters, but the determination and willingness to lead;" "the candidate should be sincere in improving the country;" "patriotic;" "trustworthy;" "faithful to their oath;" "have no record of illegal activities;" "committed to serving the country;" "able to stand and fight for the rights of citizens in times of crisis and prevent corruption;" and "exhibit desirable qualities such as compassion, being a good listener, eloquence, wisdom, justice, impartiality, and consideration."

A small group of students still hold gender stereotypes regarding males and females in leadership roles (see Figure 2). Forty-five (45) students thought that gender matters in selecting a leader as they assumed that males were more suitable leaders in connection with their attributes. These responses can be attributed to a number of reasons. For example, "I was taught that men should lead" may have been taught by family members, relatives, and educators who shared the same belief in a patriarchal society. Finally, this mindset may be affected by the way men and women leaders are represented in the global media.

Student's Presidential Pick and the Reasons Behind the Choice

Among the ten candidates during the May 2022 elections, the students' top three preferences included Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. (67%), Maria Leonor G. Robredo (24%) and Panfilo M. Lacson (9%) (see Fig.3).

Figure 3. Preferred candidate During the 2022 Presidential Elections



The reasons why the students voted for these candidates included the candidate's demonstration of leadership traits, the candidate's sound platform of governance, the candidate's proven track record, the candidate's message and attitude during the campaign, and the candidate's family and education background. These bases are briefly discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

The Candidate Demonstrated Leadership Qualities or Traits

Wigan (2018) asserted that in the 21st century, the qualities, skills, and qualifications of potential leaders must be considered by those they govern. This thought is echoed by the students as evidenced by statements such as "qualities, character and achievements [are] what matters when choosing someone to lead the country." Furthermore, they emphasized that a leader is one who "has great leadership and management skills" and "exhibits the desirable qualities ..." like being "compassionate towards citizens, a good listener, eloquent speaker, wise, just, unbiased, considerate, patriotic." This was also evidently seen in the words of those students who voted for Marcos; they said, "he is compassionate... he has good heart for the people." Indeed, kindness to other people is still an irrevocable trait of a leader.

In addition, both Marcos and Robredo mirrored sincerity and dedication to public service. Students wrote, "I felt his genuine dedication in serving the Filipinos;" "I have seen how sincere she serves the country." In addition, the acts of service of these two candidates were also remembered by the students. Marcos "filed bills to promote economic growth, to improve the state education." In addition, "he donated to people without publicizing them to media" wrote one of the respondents. Another one underlined "despite not being in politics last year, he has still the compassionate heart to help others not for title or fame or attention." Similarly, Leni Robredo's acts of service to the people also left a mark to the students. One of the students remarked, "I see her efforts and sacrifices in order to respond to the needs of the people as soon as possible not just to solve the problem for the meantime but also provide a solution that can function in the long run despite receiving a low budget from the government." In addition, "she also did a lot of service to the people as a vice president like how responsive she is with the ongoing pandemic doing what she can do to help the front liners and the people." Indeed, acts of service towards the governed is seen by the students as a concrete mark of a leader's sincere commitment to render service because these show that the leader is willing to accord time and resources in order to provide solutions to the concerns of the citizenry.

The students also considered integrity as an essential leadership trait. One of the students noted that Marcos was voted "because of his integrity." This result coincides with the 2018 study of the author where it was remarked that the most important personal characteristic of a politician is probity (*malinis na pagkatao*).

In addition to the above stated leadership traits, the youth also noted that having a sharp mind and a strong sense of patriotism made them vote Marcos for presidency. Intelligence is important for without it, it will be difficult for a president to manage the state, to decide on matters and solve problems that confront it. Similarly, a leader's patriotism determines the extent of what they will do to promote and protect the interests of the public and the state in general.

Moreover, the students also wanted a God-fearing president. The students who voted for Marcos noted, "I want my candidate to have fear in the Lord." It is understood that if a candidate fears God, they will not engage in graft and corrupt practices once they are in office.

The Candidate has Sound Platforms of Governance

The majority of the students who voted for Marcos noted he "made clear his platforms and good intentions for our country;" had "clear platforms on how he will improve our country;" and that they "just read some of his platforms that made [them] decide to vote for him." Similarly, some students chose Robredo "*dabil sa kanyang plataporma*" (because of her platform) and mentioned that "she has promising platforms." Students who voted for Lacson also cited his platforms as their reason for support. This finding aligns with the author's 2018 study which highlighted that BSU students preferred a candidate who promotes government programs for development ("*nagtataguyod ng programa ng gobyerno sa kaunlaran*") and who promotes alternative program for development ("*nagtataguyod ng alternatibong programa para sa kaunlaran*").

In addition, the students are knowledgeable about the platforms of the candidates they voted. Those who voted for Robredo highlighted several of her platforms: a.) "focusing on sustainable and modern practices for agriculture, building green and resilient infrastructure;" b.) "restore trust in government;" c.) "women empowerment;" d.) "good governance and transparency;" e.) "job opportunities;" f.) "better health treatment;" g.) "retraining and skills matching program;" and h.) "education... because it is hard to find a job without education."

On the other hand, the students who voted for Marcos highlighted the following platforms of his: a.) "build build program that aims to achieve golden age of infrastructure;" b.) "development of agricultural sector. Return the golden age of Philippine economics;" c.) "revival of Bataan Nuclear Power Plant;" d.) "continuity of President Duterte's policies such as infrastructure development;" e.) "return again the death penalty to those people who committed crimes;" and f.) "pursue war on drugs but different approach focusing on prevention, education and rehabilitation."

The students were aware of these platforms because most of the candidates utilized social media during the campaign to reach out to young voters. Arugay (2023) mentioned that in the May 2022 elections, social media played a significant role because the youth are highly connected to social media applications, and they used these as sources of political information for their voting preferences.

The Candidate's Recognized Experience or Track Record

Those who supported Marcos cited his proven track record in governance, leadership, and public service. One student said, "I did some research on his performances as senator and they are all good." Similarly, those who voted for Robredo noted her capability to lead the entire country mentioning her effective tenure as vice president, her office's highest COA rating for three consecutive years, and her commendable COVID-19 response. Lacson's supporters considered his extensive experience in both the legislative and executive branches of government spanning over 40 years, as a significant factor in their decision. One student mentioned, "he came from PNP which means he has a lot of experiences in ruling and discipline. He was also a senator for 3 terms and so he knows how different sectors of the government run." Another student said, "Commander, Provincial Director, PNP Chief, and Senator. He was able to eradicate the *Kotong* culture of the corrupt police and his Anti-organized Crime Task Force reducing the syndicates engaging in kidnapping, drug trafficking and other illegal activities. He has also authored, sponsored and co-authored hundreds of key measures including the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020." Their responses showed that they were aware of the candidates' performance in public service, and this had given them glimpse of what this candidate is capable of doing once given another chance to be in the government. It is evident from these responses that the students, as Gordon (2021), emphasized are now more discerning in choosing the next leader of the country.

The Candidate's Campaign Message and Attitude

Students who supported Marcos highlighted their preference for his campaign slogan, "*sama sama tayong babangon muli* (together, we will rise again)," noting that "his campaign's message was focused on uniting the country." This message resonated with the students who had witnessed the nation divided because of politics and various issues. They sought a candidate who could

unite public officials across political parties to address the nation's most pressing socio-economic problems.

In addition to the campaign slogans, the students also took note of the candidate's attitudes or behaviors towards their fellow candidates during the campaign period, and employed this as one of their bases for voting. Majority of the students cited that Marcos "was focused on his campaign not on his fellow candidates," and "he's been criticized and cancelled for his late father's actions; he's very genuine and doesn't insult his co-candidates." Another student said, "he never talked back against the people or opponents who [were] against him or destroying him. Instead, he kept still, smiling, humble and silent and he never intended to make fun or criticize them." His nonchalant behavior despite everything thrown at him made him even popular among the students with one citing, "I admire him most for not making fun of or maligning his fellow presidential candidates; he remained calm and focused solely on his campaign," and "I admire him of his braveness and the way he talks with confidence despite the issues of the past." Other students regarded his calm behavior as kindness stating, "people are throwing bad words against him and his family but he chose to be kind."

On the other hand, there were a minority of students who expressed their dislike about the attitudes of the other presidential candidates during the campaign period, with one citing, "I hate people who talked badly about others" and "I was turned off by the only woman candidate because of her lame campaign ideas like doing some construction under the rain, the self-centered behavior of her supporters, her unprofessional behavior and words given that she's a lawyer and her opposition against the former president during her vice president regime." These reactions may have stemmed from the widespread exposure on various multimedia platforms where candidates and their supporters openly criticized other candidates verbally and through demeaning political memes circulated on social media.

The Candidate has Strong Family and Educational Background

One of the students wrote he voted for Ferdinand Marcos Jr. "because of his educational and family background." Similarly, another noted voting Leni Roberdo because "she has good educational background having studied economics and law." This respondent even added that "she's the only one who has the credentials" because of her educational attainment. Another respondent remarked that she also voted for Robredo "dahil sa kanyang edukasyon... (because of her education)". Those who voted for Panfilo Lacson also underlined that he "has great educational background being able to graduate in 1996 with Master's Degree in Government Management." Based on these remarks, clearly the youth took time to read the information written on these flyers or information they saw in the various social media applications during the campaign period. Furthermore, knowing these pieces of background information about the candidate may also provide a glimpse of the would-be leadership style, would-be priorities in terms of government programs, would-be approach to people and the like. The trust and respect of the students on the candidate may likewise be influenced by these pieces of information.

Determinants of Students' Voting Behavior

The 2018 study of Dolipas revealed that the family or relatives are the foremost people who influenced the students in selecting a candidate to vote for. The current study corroborates this, finding that family still continues to play a crucial role in students' choice of candidate. Students who voted Marcos did so because they were steered by their family. They cited reasons such as, "my family...because they say that Bongbong is a kind and great president;" "my household told me to vote for BBM because they believe he can also make a difference just like his father;" "influence of family; they are always saying that this candidate is the one who can make our country better;" "with the support of my father since he is also a PBBM supporter. Some of my questions about the Marcoses were all answered by him." Similarly, those who chose Robredo were also influenced by their families. One student noted, I "had a deep discussion with family... about her and believe she is fit to be a president."

Apart from the family, the preference of the students' friends also played a significant role in influencing their choice of whom to vote for. One student cited, "my ... friends because they say that Bongbong Marcos is a kind and great president." Friends, arguably, wield considerable influence in the students' lives.

The church or religion is another significant social institution that profoundly influenced the students' choice of candidate. This is evident from their responses such as "as a member of INC we have what we call unity in voting. What our leader said is what we will vote;" "because of my religion Iglesia ni Cristo. I follow my religion wholeheartedly and was not forced, I did it because we have unity." This trend is consistent with the Philippines being a predominantly Catholic nation where the electorate turns to the church for guidance.

Social media emerged as a significant social institution that had a considerable influence on the voting choices of the students. Those who voted for Marcos said, "based on what I've read and found out from social media which is basically correct and I validated these things from further searching on history and watching documentaries of the people who experienced the running of the late President Marcos;" I watched his interviews and I liked his answers a lot;" "social media promotions also helped

a lot especially when they featured his response to calamities and when he paid respect to the SAF 44 members;” “I watched the story of FM and his family; I really felt sad because they are so pitiful and underestimated by those corrupted people of the Philippines; I know he will follow his father’s legacy.” Conversely, those who voted Robredo conducted research on her background using social media. One student noted, “social media... I did research on her background credentials and achievements.” These findings validate Arugay’s remark (2022) that the results of the May 2022 national elections will likely be shaped by social media. He further underlined that the usage of and reliance on social media platforms had been part of the campaign strategy of the candidates; thus, making this an essential feature of contemporary electoral political machine.

Clearly, the students relied solely on what they saw or read on social media apps without considering books or interviews with key people to verify information. It is also concerning that these students appear to distrust what they were taught in school or what is written in books. One student said, “I only see the bad things that was written in our History books. I was never there during his regime;” “I watched the story of FM and his family; I really felt sad because they are so pitiful and underestimated by those corrupted people of the Philippines; I know he will follow his father’s legacy.”

The author observed with concern how students embraced information from social media apps over the teachings provided by their teachers, instructors or professors in the University. Their version of research is looking for information available in the world wide web without clear indications of data validation. If there is, validation is sought from their family or friends.

4. CONCLUSION

For the students, the candidate’s leadership traits and acts of service towards the governed, rather than gender, are significant factors in choosing the leader of the country. In addition, the candidate’s family and educational background, leadership qualities, platforms of governance, recognized experience and track record and campaign message and behaviors also influenced the students’ choice. Finally, how they voted is a product of their family, friends, church, and social media networks.

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