INTERGENERATIONAL PREFERENCES ON THE ATTRIBUTES OF LOCAL POLITICAL CANDIDATES

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Abstract

Voter preferences play a critical role in shaping democratic practices, particularly in societies characterized by generational diversity. This study examines the key attributes prioritized by Generation X, Y, and Z voters in the four districts of Tuguegarao City in evaluating local political candidates, especially in the context of the upcoming 2025 National and Local Elections. Utilizing a convergent-parallel mixed-methods design, the research employed stratified random sampling for quantitative data and quota sampling for qualitative inputs, involving 120 respondents through structured questionnaires and follow-up in-depth interviews. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed independently, and later integrated to develop a comprehensive understanding of generational electoral behavior. Findings reveal both shared and generation-specific preferences. Across all cohorts, voters consistently valued transformational leadership, crisis responsiveness, strong community communication, and conservative platform orientation. Personality was ranked as a secondary but influential attribute. However, educational attainment was not seen as a decisive criterion despite majority of the respondents are tertiary graduates. Candidates with humanities-based occupational backgrounds, and proven grassroots engagement were preferred. There was also a broad rejection of candidates closely aligned to candidates who graduated abroad, elementary and high school graduate, worked in entertainment industry, regularly use social media for projects, centralized leadership style, and focused on legislative accomplishments. Voters also emphasized economic policy relevance, and consistency in public service delivery. Variations in policy preferences, particularly on gender-related issues, further illustrate generational divides in political orientation in which generations reject liberal policy-oriented platforms. Generational differences, however, underscore the complexity of voter behavior. Generation X favored actionable platforms and party-aligned leadership, reflecting a pragmatic and conservative orientation and views experience as not a crucial basis for choosing a candidate. Generation Y prioritized political credibility, proven governance, and ethical consistency over ideological affiliation or public image. Generation Z valued educational background but demonstrated an ongoing struggle between progressive ideals and vulnerability to misinformation highlighting contradictions in digital activism and actual voting behavior. These results suggest the necessity for political stakeholders to adapt campaign strategies and civic engagement efforts to resonate with both shared democratic values and the nuanced expectations of each generational group. By aligning political messaging and candidate development with generational priorities, more inclusive, credible, and effective local governance can be promoted.

Keywords: *Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z, intergenerational voter preferences, local political candidates, candidate attributes*

Introduction

One of the most fundamental expressions of political freedom and democratic engagement is the right to suffrage, empowering citizens to elect leaders who embody the principles of good governance, social justice, and public accountability.

Electoral behavior, particularly the attributes voters prioritize in political candidates, plays a crucial role in shaping democratic systems. Globally, generational differences have emerged as a significant factor in voter preferences, with generational replacement driving shifts in electoral dynamics. Research suggests that values and voting habits formed during formative years tend to remain stable over time (Brug & Franklin, 2018); however, generational subsets may exhibit distinct political deviations, as their early experiences and socio-political environments often differ in significant ways (Fisher, 2023). Younger cohorts are increasingly engaging in political expression through social media. As they are being immersed in digital technology, Generation Z has mostly shifted their activism from the streets to the virtual realm of diverse social media platforms (Velasco, 2024). They tend to hold more liberal positions on social issues, which strongly influence their voting behavior (Perrett & Baldassarri, 2024). However, they also exhibit lower voter turnout but higher engagement in non-institutional political activism (Nemčok & Wass, 2021). This underscores the importance of understanding how intergenerational cohorts influence electoral outcomes and governance, especially at the local level.

In the Philippines, electoral behavior is deeply intertwined with traditional systems of political patronage, familial ties, and political dynasties. Voters often use familial ties to candidates as heuristics for vote choice, with closer social proximity increasing the likelihood of support (Ravanilla et al., 2022). Political candidates are disproportionately drawn from central families, and family network centrality contributes to higher vote shares (Cruz et al., 2018). Local political machines, rather than national parties, play a crucial role in mobilizing voters through patronage and vote-buying (Hicken et al., 2019). These machines are built on relational clientelism, where politicians cultivate long-term relationships with brokers (Aspinall & Hicken, 2019). The persistence of political dynasties is associated with political violence, suggesting that power concentration leads to weaker governance and provokes conflict (Mendoza et al., 2022).

However, younger voters, particularly Generation Y and Generation Z, are increasingly challenging these norms, favoring candidates who advocate for progressive policies and reforms. This shift is evident in local elections, where the personal backgrounds and track records of candidates significantly influence voter choices. Despite the persistent dominance of clientelism and political dynasties (Sidel, 2018; Hicken et al., 2019), progressive candidates are beginning to disrupt these entrenched systems, driven by younger generations' emphasis on integrity, wisdom, and progressive values (Timoteo, 2021). Personality-driven politics and weak party systems further complicate the electoral landscape, highlighting the need for a more profound understanding into generational preferences, particularly in the context of local elections.

While much research has focused on voting behaviors like party loyalty and voter turnout, less attention has been given to how different generational cohorts prioritize specific attributes in local political candidates. Attributes such as educational attainment, political track record, personality, political patronage, occupation and platforms carry varying levels of importance for each generation, shaped by their unique historical and cultural experiences. For instance, student voters emphasize competence and accomplishments (Anabo, 2021), while older generations tend to value political experience and party loyalty (Berz & Jankowski, 2022). These generational distinctions highlight the growing need for customized political strategies that address the evolving priorities of diverse voter groups.

As the 2025 Philippine midterm elections approach, with approximately 68 million voters expected to participate (Locus, 2024), understanding generational dynamics becomes increasingly vital. The elections are poised

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to reflect a major demographic shift, with Generation Y and Generation Z emerging as the dominant voting bloc. According to data compiled by GMA Integrated News Research, Generation Y comprises 25.94 million or 34.15% of the voting-age population, while Generation Z accounts for 21.87 million or 28.79% together forming a powerful 68% majority of the electorate. In contrast, Generation X makes up 17.64 million (23.22%), and Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation represent just 10.50 million (13.83%). This generational transformation is amplified by the rapid growth of the electorate, which expanded by over 10 million from 65.7 million in 2022 to 75.9 million in 2025 (Funtanilla, 2025).

This demographic reality highlights the importance of examining how generational values and priorities may influence electoral outcomes and governance approaches. This study aimed to identify how different generational cohorts in the Philippines prioritize candidate attributes such as educational attainment, occupation, personality, political patronage, political track record, and platform. By bridging gaps in the existing literature, the research provided actionable insights into the evolving political landscape and the preferences of Filipino voters in the local level. The findings not only informed political campaigns but also contributed to the development of inclusive and representative governance by addressing the distinct needs and values of each generational cohort.

Research Methodology
Research Design
The study employed a convergent-parallel mixed-methods design, collecting quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously but analyzing them separately before integration to provide a comprehensive understanding of intergenerational preferences for local political candidate attributes. Conducted in the four major districts of Tuguegarao City such as Eastern, Centro, Northern, and Western where the study involved registered voters from Generations X, Y, and Z who participated in the 2022 national and 2023 local elections, with current political leaders excluded to minimize bias.

A combination of stratified random sampling (for the quantitative component) and quota sampling (for the qualitative component) ensured balanced generational and district representation. Data collection instruments included a validated and Filipino-translated questionnaire that gathered demographic data and assessed preferences on six candidate attributes such as educational attainment, occupation, personality, platform, political track record which were adapted from Murcia & Bolo, (2017) and political patronage based on Anastacio & Morandarte (2023) and an interview guide used for in-depth interviews to uncover deeper motivations behind these preferences. Upon securing approval from barangay captains and respondents' informed consent, questionnaires were distributed and collected, followed by interviews with selected participants. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative responses. Ethical standards were strictly observed, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent, ensuring the reliability and integrity of the research process.

Discussion
Profile of the Respondents
Table 1. Profile Distribution of Respondents by Generational Cohort, District, Sex, Educational Attainment, and Religious Affiliation (*n=120)*

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Generational Cohort	Gen X	40	33.33
	Gen Y	40	33.33
	Gen Z	40	33.33
District	Northern	30	25.00
	Western	30	25.00

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	Centro	30	25.00
	Eastern	30	25.00
Sex	Male	69	57.50
	Female	51	42.50
Educational Attainment	Tertiary Level	62	51.67
	Junior High School Level	26	21.67
	Senior High School Level	26	21.67
	Elementary Level	21	17.50
	Alternative Learning System	8	6.67
	Short-term Vocational Courses	2	1.67
Religious Affiliation	Roman Catholic	100	83.33
	Others	14	11.67
	Iglesia ni Cristo	5	4.17
	Methodist	1	0.83

The table highlights the dominant characteristics across the respondent demographics. All three generational cohorts such as Generation X, Y, and Z were equally represented with 40 participants each, ensuring a balanced generational analysis. Geographically, respondents were also evenly distributed across the four districts of Tuguegarao City, promoting fair representation. The majority of respondents were female (57.5%), indicating a stronger female voice in the sample. In terms of education, over half (51.67%) had attained tertiary-level education, suggesting a relatively educated participant pool. Furthermore, Roman Catholicism emerged as the predominant religious affiliation, with 83.33% of the sample identifying as such. These dominant traits collectively provide a strong foundation for analyzing intergenerational political preferences within a diverse yet balanced demographic context.

Preference of the Respondents on the Attributes of Local Political Candidates
Table 2. Most Preferred Attributes of Political Candidates Across Generations X, Y, and Z

Attributes	Indicators	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z
Educational Attainment	Educational Level	The level of education a political candidate finished is not important as long as they can read and write.	The level of education a political candidate finished is not important as long as they can read and write.	The level of education a political candidate finished is not important as long as they can read and write.
	School Attended	The school a political candidate graduated from is not an important factor in choosing them.	The school a political candidate graduated from is not an important factor in choosing them.	The school a political candidate graduated from is not an important factor in choosing them.
Occupation		A political candidate who works in community service, like a Community	A political candidate who works in the fields of humanities, social sciences,	A political candidate who works in the fields of humanities, social sciences,

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		Outreach Worker.	or philosophy, like a lawyer.	or philosophy, like a lawyer.
Personality	Citizen Engagement	A political candidate who is easy to talk to and approachable.	A political candidate who is easy to talk to and approachable.	A political candidate who is easy to talk to and approachable.
	Leadership Approach	A political candidate who can handle difficult situations.	A political candidate who can handle difficult situations.	A political candidate who can handle difficult situations.
	Leadership Style	A political leader who is transformational.	A political leader who is transformational.	A political leader who is transformational.
Political Patronage	Political Connection	A political candidate who is loyal to their political party.	A political candidate who does not come from a political family.	A political candidate who comes from a political family.
	Political Campaign Favors	A political candidate who supports community projects and organizations by providing funds or resources.	A political candidate who supports community projects and organizations by providing funds or resources.	A political candidate who supports community projects and organizations by providing funds or resources.
Political Track Record	Political Experience	Experience should not be the main basis for choosing a political candidate.	A political candidate with experience in public administration, such as a governor, mayor, barangay captain, or councilor.	A political candidate with experience in public administration, such as a governor, mayor, barangay captain, or councilor.
	Political Achievement	A candidate who prioritizes public safety and demonstrates effective crisis management like disasters, pandemic, etc.	A candidate who prioritizes public safety and demonstrates effective crisis management like disasters, pandemic, etc.	A candidate who prioritizes public safety and demonstrates effective crisis management like disasters, pandemic, etc.
Platform	Policy Focus	A political candidate who prioritizes	A political candidate who prioritizes	A political candidate who prioritizes

		economic growth and job skills development.	economic growth and job skills development.	economic growth and job skills development.
	Policy Orientation	A political candidate who promotes conservative ideas, such as religious freedom, pro-life views, and family-centered policies.	A political candidate who promotes conservative ideas, such as religious freedom, pro-life views, and family-centered policies.	A political candidate who promotes conservative ideas, such as religious freedom, pro-life views, and family-centered policies.

The table shows the most preferred specific characteristics across six attributes, revealing that across all generations, educational attainment is not regarded as a decisive factor, whether considering the candidate's educational level or the school attended. Regarding occupation, Generations Y and Z expressed a preference for candidates with backgrounds in humanities and social sciences, while Generation Z shows a stronger inclination toward candidates with a community outreach background. In terms of personality, all three generations (X, Y, and Z) similarly value candidates' approachability and communication skills, especially in citizen engagement, transformational leadership style, and resilience in handling difficult situations.

Notably, preferences regarding political connections differ across generations. Generation X favors candidates with party loyalty, while Generation Y rejects political dynasties, and Generation Z is more likely to support candidates from political dynasties. Despite these differences, all cohorts prefer candidates who support community projects and programs.

When it comes to political track record, Generations Y and Z share a preference for candidates with public administration experience, such as elected or appointed officials. However, Generation X does not view political experience as a crucial factor in selecting a candidate. Additionally, Generations X, Y, and Z all show equal preference for candidates whose achievements center around crisis response, with a focus on economic and labor development platforms, as well as a lean toward conservative policy orientation.

Table 3. Least Preferred Attributes of Political Candidates Across Generations X, Y, and Z

Attributes	Indicators	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z
Educational Attainment	Educational Level	A political candidate who finished elementary and high school.	A political candidate who finished elementary and high school.	A political candidate who finished elementary and high school.
	School Attended	A political candidate who graduated from a school abroad.	A political candidate who graduated from a school abroad.	A political candidate who graduated from a school abroad.
Occupation		A political candidate who works in the entertainment	A political candidate who works in the entertainment	A political candidate who works in the entertainment

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		field, like an actor, singer, or dancer.	field, like an actor, singer, or dancer.	field, like an actor, singer, or dancer.
Personality	Citizen Engagement	A political candidate who can easily inspire and motivate others.	A political candidate who is Christian and actively attends church.	A political candidate who is Christian and actively attends church.
	Leadership Approach	A political candidate who regularly shares their successful projects on social media.	A political candidate who regularly shares their successful projects on social media.	A political candidate who regularly shares their successful projects on social media.
	Leadership Style	A political candidate who is open to everyone and supports democracy. A political candidate who leads with centralized authority and strict control.	A political candidate who leads with centralized authority and strict control.	A political candidate who leads with centralized authority and strict control.
Political Patronage	Political Connection	A political candidate who is a relative or family friend.	A political candidate who is a relative or family friend.	A political candidate who is a relative or family friend.
	Political Campaign Favors	A political candidate who supports my business or livelihood. A political candidate who gives benefits to their campaign supporters.	A political candidate who supports my business or livelihood.	A political candidate who supports my business or livelihood.
Political Track Record	Political Experience	A political candidate with experience in	A political candidate who is	A political candidate who is

			currently holding a position.	currently holding a position.
		public administration, such as a governor, mayor, barangay captain, or councilor.		
	Political Achievement	A political candidate focused on practical community improvements through laws and policies.	A political candidate focused on practical community improvements through laws and policies.	A political candidate focused on practical community improvements through laws and policies.
Platform	Policy Focus	A political candidate who prioritizes research and modern technology.	A political candidate who prioritizes research and modern technology. A political candidate who prioritizes the agriculture sector.	A political candidate who prioritizes research and modern technology. A political candidate who prioritizes transportation and infrastructure.
	Policy Orientation	A political candidate who promotes liberal principles, such as divorce, LGBT rights, and reproductive rights.	A political candidate who promotes liberal principles, such as divorce, LGBT rights, and reproductive rights	A political candidate who promotes liberal principles, such as divorce, LGBT rights, and reproductive rights

The table reveals the least preferred specific characteristics across six attributes. Regarding educational attainment, Generations X, Y, and Z are generally disinclined toward candidates who have completed only elementary or high school and show minimal interest in those who studied abroad. They also tend to avoid candidates whose occupation is in the entertainment industry. In terms of personality, Generation X is not particularly drawn to candidates who are inspirational, while both Generations Y and Z show limited favor toward candidates with church involvement.

In leadership approach, all generations express a strong aversion to candidates who use social media to display political achievements and exhibit a diminished preference for centralized leadership styles. Notably, Generation X equally shows a lack of enthusiasm for both democratic and centralized leadership styles. Regarding patronage, all generations exhibit little interest in candidates with whom they have personal ties or those who support their own businesses. However, Generation X is equally indifferent toward candidates who support their own businesses and those who provide benefits during campaigns. Across all generations, there is a consistent tendency to disregard candidates currently in office.

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Across generations, there is a marked disinterest in candidates focused on achieving legislative work, incumbent officials and platforms centered on research and technology. Additionally, Generation X is less inclined to favor candidates with public administration experience. Generation Y shows a comparable lack of preference for platforms focused on research, technology, and agriculture, while Generation Z shows a similar disinterest in platforms centered on research, technology, and transportation and infrastructure. Lastly, there is a clear rejection of liberal policy orientation, with all generations showing a distinct preference for conservative policies over liberal ones.

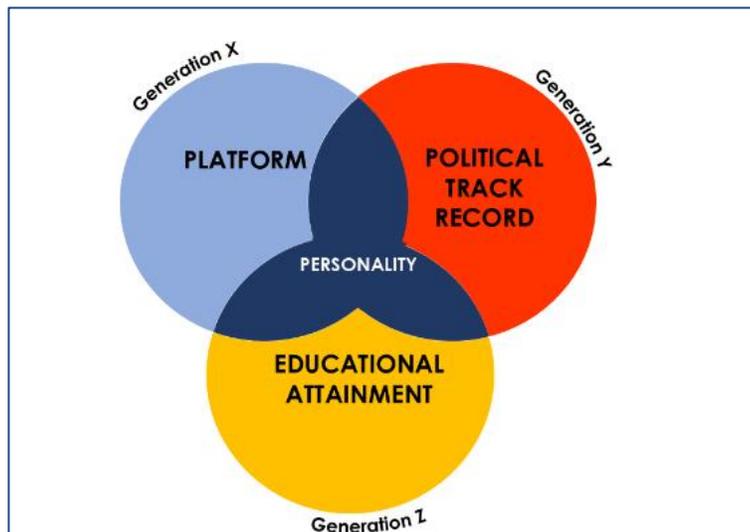### 3 Intergenerational Preferences of Local Political Candidates

Figure 2. Venn Diagram Showing the Intergenerational Preferences of Local Political Candidates' Attributes

Figure 2 underscores the generational variations in what voters prioritize when selecting political candidates. Generation X values Platform the most, focusing on policies and governance strategies. Generation Y emphasizes the Political Track Record, seeking candidates with proven leadership and integrity. Generation Z, on the other hand, places significant weight on Educational Attainment, associating academic qualifications with the capacity to solve societal problems. The diagram illustrates the importance of aligning a candidate's attributes with the preferences of each generational cohort, while also highlighting that an ideal candidate could combine the best attributes from all three areas.
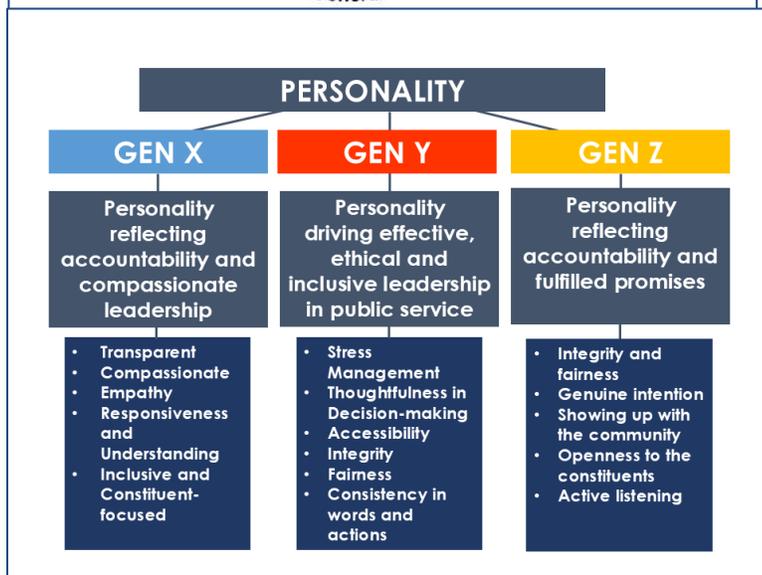

Figure 3. Personality as the Second Attribute Preferred Across Generations

In the figure, personality emerges as the second each generation prefers when evaluating a local political candidate. This indicates a common thread across all three generations where personality traits are consistently deemed essential, following the core priorities of political platform, track record, and educational attainment.

Conclusion

This study reveals that electoral preferences across Generations X, Y, and Z are shaped by a blend of historical context, ideological formation, and lived socio-political experiences. Generation X values pragmatic leadership grounded in action over credentials, challenging traditional assumptions about political merit while still emphasizing party loyalty and crisis readiness. Generation Y, as a transitional cohort, blends conservatism with cautious openness to reform, prioritizing credibility, ethical governance, and competence over image or pedigree. Meanwhile, Generation Z, though highly aware and vocal in digital spaces, demonstrates a complex interplay between progressive ideals and practical decision-making, reflecting their ongoing negotiation with a political system that often falls short of their expectations. Together, these findings illustrate that while generational lines influence political attitudes, they also reveal internal contradictions and nuanced decision-making processes.

These generational dynamics hold important implications for political engagement, campaign strategy, and civic education. Political leaders can no longer rely on traditional credentials or populist appeal alone to secure support; instead, they must adapt their approach to resonate with each generation's distinct values demonstrating local relevance to Generation X, balanced reformism to Generation Y, and authenticity paired with systemic awareness to Generation Z. Moreover, the gap between political ideals and electoral behavior, especially among the youth, signals an urgent need to strengthen civic literacy and political discourse. Importantly, the results reflect not only voters' choices but also the type of political leaders that rise to power and, by extension, the prevailing image of the Philippine political society, one shaped by competing expectations, generational transitions, and evolving standards of governance. By investing in sustained, values-driven engagement and education across all age groups, stakeholders can promote a more informed, discerning, and participatory electorate, thereby enhancing the democratic process at both local and national levels.

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