

News Consumption Behaviors among Voters in Capital's Gubernatorial Election: Evidence in Bangkok, Thailand

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Abstract

Understanding voter behavior, specifically how they follow local election news and information, remains a crucial aspect of the study of political communication, particularly in the age of digital technology. This study examines how voters follow such news and information by collecting data via an online questionnaire from 400 voters who participated in the 2022 gubernatorial election of Bangkok, a special administrative area and the capital city of Thailand, and categorizing them by socioeconomic and political variables. Results indicate that voters often follow relevant news and information, primarily through social media. The channels with the lowest popularity are radio and print media. Social, economic, and political variables are the determinants that determine behavioral variations. Males, for instance, are more likely than other genders to follow the news, but females are more likely to watch television, attend seminars, and engage in conversation. Other genders rarely

consume print media. Therefore local election candidates who wish to interact with them should focus on social media. To accurately and successfully communicate political messages to target groups during a local election via media, it is vital to understand the behaviors of each voter group, which may have various requirements.

Keywords: News consumption behavior, Voter behavior, Gubernatorial election, Socioeconomic & political factor, Capital city, Thailand

Introduction

Even in the era of "mass media," a large number of studies have demonstrated that "media" have significant effects on the attitudes and actions of voters (Schmitt-Beck, 2004). These studies include Colwell Quarles (1979) and Gerber et al. (2009) in the United States, Dobrzynska et al. (2003) in Canada, Reeves et al. (2016) in the United Kingdom, Dewenter et al. (2019), Now in the "social media" era, such influence grows, as evidenced by research for the United States by Fujiwara et al. (2021) and Spierings and Jacobs (2014), for Denmark by Ohme et al. (2018), for the Netherlands by Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2019), for Ghana by Kofi Frimpong et al. (2020), for Southeast Asia by Alam and Yousuf (2021).

Therefore, academia, political communication experts, politicians, political campaigners, marketers, and other stakeholders should no longer be asking whether media should be used, but rather what media should be used and how in light of the digital technology that makes media consumption more diverse (Majó-Vázquez & González-Bailón, 2019) to direct messages to their target groups and ultimately obtain more votes (Goldberg & Ischen, 2020). This question shall be asked on the condition that voters' behaviors vary among individuals based on factors such as gender (Benesch, 2012), age, education, socioeconomic status (Artero et al., 2020), which includes profession (Zheng et al., 2021) and income (Thongchan, 2018), or even political background, such as ideology (Sindermann et al., 2021). These aspects are together referred to as social, economic, and political factors.

Since the most recent coup on 22 May 2014, when General Prayut Chan-ocha seized control from the administration of Nitwattamrong Boonsongpaisan after the Constitutional Court removed Yingluck Shinawatra from office, Thailand has not held an election in five years. Since then, the first election was the national election on 24 March 2019, while the first local election was the election of provincial administrative organizations on 20 December 2020, followed by elections for seats in municipalities and subdistrict local administrative organizations on 28 March 2021 and 28 November 2021, respectively.

Pattaya City and Bangkok, the latter of which is also the country's capital, just held municipal elections on 22 May 2022, more than nine years after their previous local elections. Changes in political landscapes ([Ockey, 2017](#); [Punsua & Sripokangkul, 2022](#); [Samneang, 2021](#); [Thammawirod, 2020](#)), particularly the demographic structure, along with the increasingly intense and zealous fight between political groups, from inside and outside the country, for their stance in the capital city, down to the election result, in which the winner won in all ([Wititanon, 2022](#)). These studies will cater to those interested and serve as lessons on political communications that may be useful to future municipal elections in Thailand and other countries with comparable social, economic, and political circumstances.

This study aims to answer two research questions: (1) how and how often do voters in the Bangkok local election receive news and information about the local election; and (2) what social, economic, and political factors determine the differences in voters' behaviors in regards to their consumption of news and information.

Research Method

This study is empirical. This study's population consists of Bangkok's local election voters. To ensure that the population represents voters who participated in

this local election, the population is set to the number of voters who cast a ballot in this local election, which is 2,635,283 (out of a total of 4,402,948 voters). The sample size is 400 through an online questionnaire developed based on a literature review, expert suggestions, and analyses. The questionnaire is available between 5 p.m. on 22 May 2022 and midnight on 29 May 2022.

The majority of the samples identified as females (48.5%), as belonging to Generation Y (born between 1980 and 1997) (46.5%), as Buddhists (84.8%), as having a bachelor's degree or higher (69.5%), as having a stable job as an employee earning between 30,000 and 69,999 baht per month (63.2%), and as having a modest net worth with assets exceeding debts by no more than 1 (63.2%). (42.3 percent). If Bangkok is divided into three rings emanating from its center, most samples reside in the ring between central Bangkok and outer Bangkok (43.5 percent). Additionally, the majority do not belong to any political party (84.5 percent). Most of the samples (45.8 percent) identify as politically moderate and do not favor the current administration (48.8 percent). [Figure 1](#) demonstrates specifics.

The data collected have been validated. The descriptive statistics, which include frequency, mean, percentage, and standard deviation, as well as the inference statistics, which include one-way ANOVA and Scheffe's pairwise comparison, have been computed at a significance level of 0.05.

This study does not require ethics approval because it is non-interventional. Before responding to the questionnaire, all participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the information that would be collected, and the management of the collected information, including how it would be analyzed, kept confidential and disseminated in an academic study without personal identification, as well as their right to withdraw from the study and any potential risks.

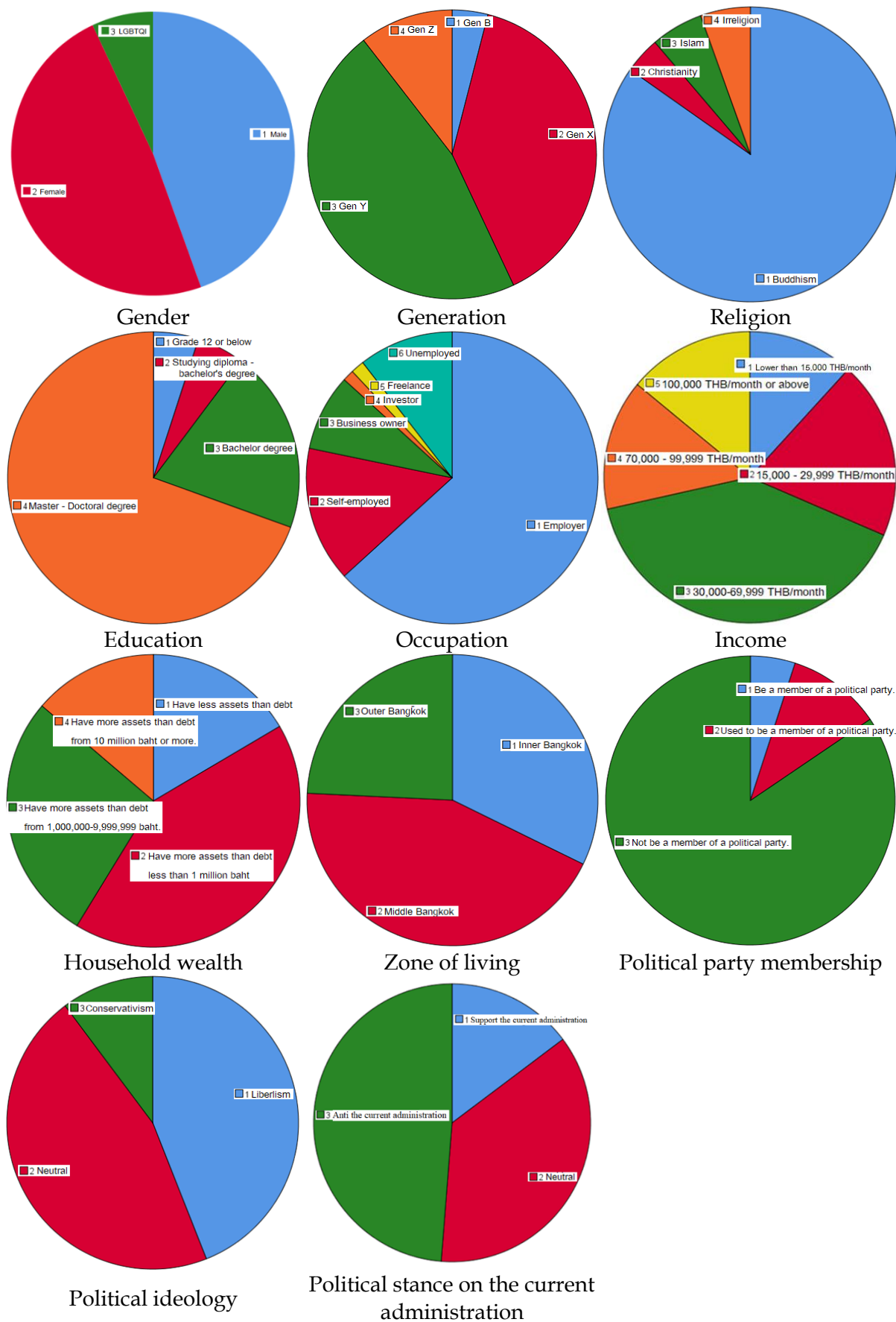


Figure 1. Demographic characteristics of samples

Research Results & Discussion

Consumption of news and information concerning Bangkok's gubernatorial election

The analysis reveals that similar to other urban areas (Artero et al., 2020; Sudulich, 2011), Bangkokians have a high level of news and information consumption regarding their local election (mean = 2.52/3), with more than 60 percent (61.25 percent) usually following the news and information about the election and another one-third following the news and information about the election only occasionally (32.25 percent). Only a small percentage of voters who participated in the gubernatorial election (3.75 percent and 2.80 percent, respectively) rarely or never follow the news or election-related information (Figure 2).

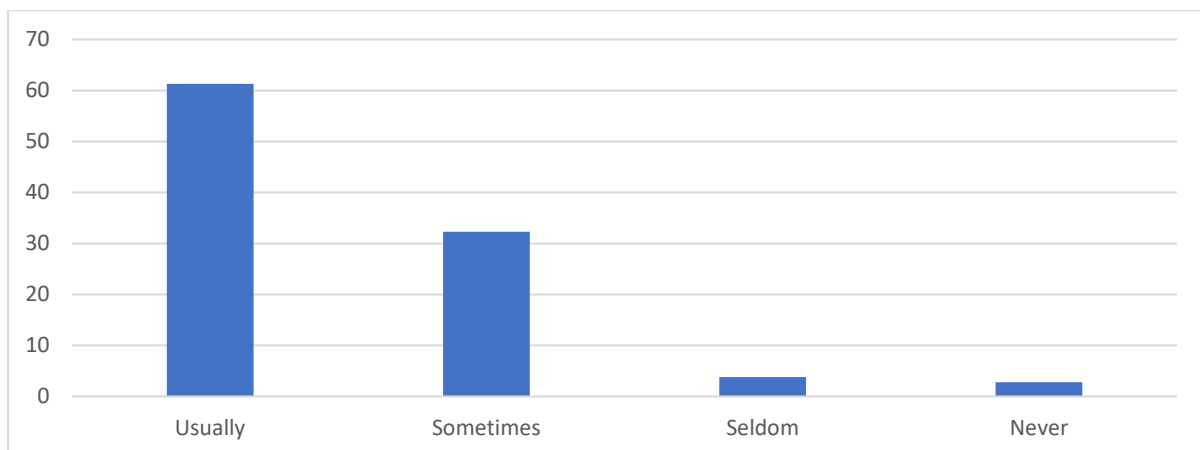


Figure 2. Frequency of consumption of news and information about Bangkok's gubernatorial election in percentage

As for the channel of news and information consumption, the analysis reveals that most survey respondents follow news on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (mean = 2.53/3), compared to the other channels. The second most used consumption channel is television (mean = 1.89/3), a moderate to somewhat high level (although a decrease from a study nearly a decade ago by Papathanassopoulos et al. (2013) who attempted to show that television maintains its leading role and a different result from a Chinese case study from last year, where television was found to be the most important channel for political news and

information) (Zheng et al., 2021). These findings are explicable in light of an Austrian study by Russmann and Hess (2020), which reveals that although young people enjoy social media, they are comfortable with conventional media and merely switch their consumption channels from offline to online. Participating in seminars and engaging in dialogues with others (mean = 1.44/3), as well as rallies and candidate brochures (mean = 1.32/3), are rated as moderate to low. Radio and print media, such as newspapers and magazines, are the least utilized channels (mean = 1.10/3) (Figure 3).

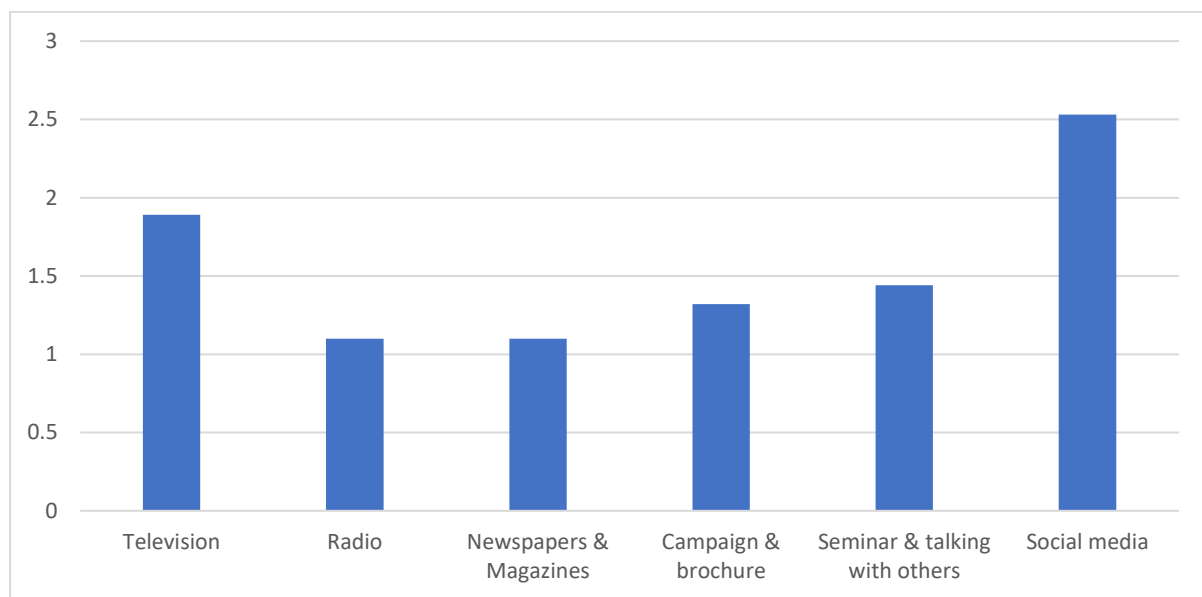


Figure 3. Means of reported use of different channels to follow news and information about Bangkok's gubernatorial election

Analysis of the consumption of news and information about Bangkok's gubernatorial election by social, economic, and political factors

Table 1 compares the frequency of news and information consumption regarding Bangkok's gubernatorial election by social factors, such as gender (consistent with the study by Benesch (2012) and Khumjing and Prakongsilpa (2010) but not with Jitvarthasin and Rathachatranon (2019)), religion, and education, economic factors, such as occupation, income, and household wealth (consistent with the study by Thongchan (2018), Artero et al. (2020)) Differences in these parameters are compatible with differences in news and information intake. However, variances in generations and living places do not suggest such differences.

Table 1. Comparison analysis of frequencies of use of channels to consume news and information about Bangkok's gubernatorial election by social, economic, and political factors

Factors	Frequency	Channels					
		Television	Radio	Newspaper & magazines	Campaign & brochure	Seminars & having conversations with others	Social media
Social							
Gender	.000**	.000**	.883	.001**	.001**	.000**	.000**
Generation	.112	.000**	.001**	.028*	.122	.496	.019*
Religion	.000**	.092	.000**	.000**	.000**	.010*	.002**
Education	.003**	.003**	.391	.032*	.000**	.000**	.000**
Economic							
Occupation	.000**	.000**	.000**	.006**	.000**	.000**	.000**
Income	.005**	.000**	.862	.000**	.000**	.000**	.001**
Household wealth	.000**	.056	.000**	.261	.000**	.000**	.427
Zone of living	.106	.376	.490	.019*	.027*	.132	.088
Political							
Political party membership	.017*	.027*	.209	.077	.549	.828	.000**
Political ideology	.000**	.029*	.000**	.007**	.000**	.000**	.000**
Political stance on the government	.000**	.000**	.000**	.219	.001**	.000**	.000**

Note: ** = significant at .01 level; * = significant at .05 level.

Males (mean = 2.67/3) tend to follow the news and information more than females (mean = 2.48/3) and those of different sexual orientations (mean = 1.86/3), according to additional research. People with a higher level of education tend to follow the news and information more frequently than those with a lower level of education. Those who self-identify as politically liberal (mean = 2.74/3) are more likely to follow the news and information than those who self-identify as politically moderate (mean = 2.39/3) or politically conservative (mean = 2.15/3). Those who oppose the current administration (mean = 2.81/3), as well as those who support it (mean = 2.47/3), tend to follow the news and information more regularly than those who are neutral (mean = 2.15/3).

Females constitute the majority of those who follow the news and information via television (mean = 2.19/3) and participate in seminars and chats with others (mean = 1.59/3) when each channel is considered separately. In addition to the finding that LGBTQI tends to follow news and information about Bangkok's gubernatorial election less frequently than other genders, it was discovered that they rarely consume it via publications (mean = 0.43/3). That social media may be the most effective channel for candidates in local elections to communicate with them (mean = 1.61/3). (Figure 4).

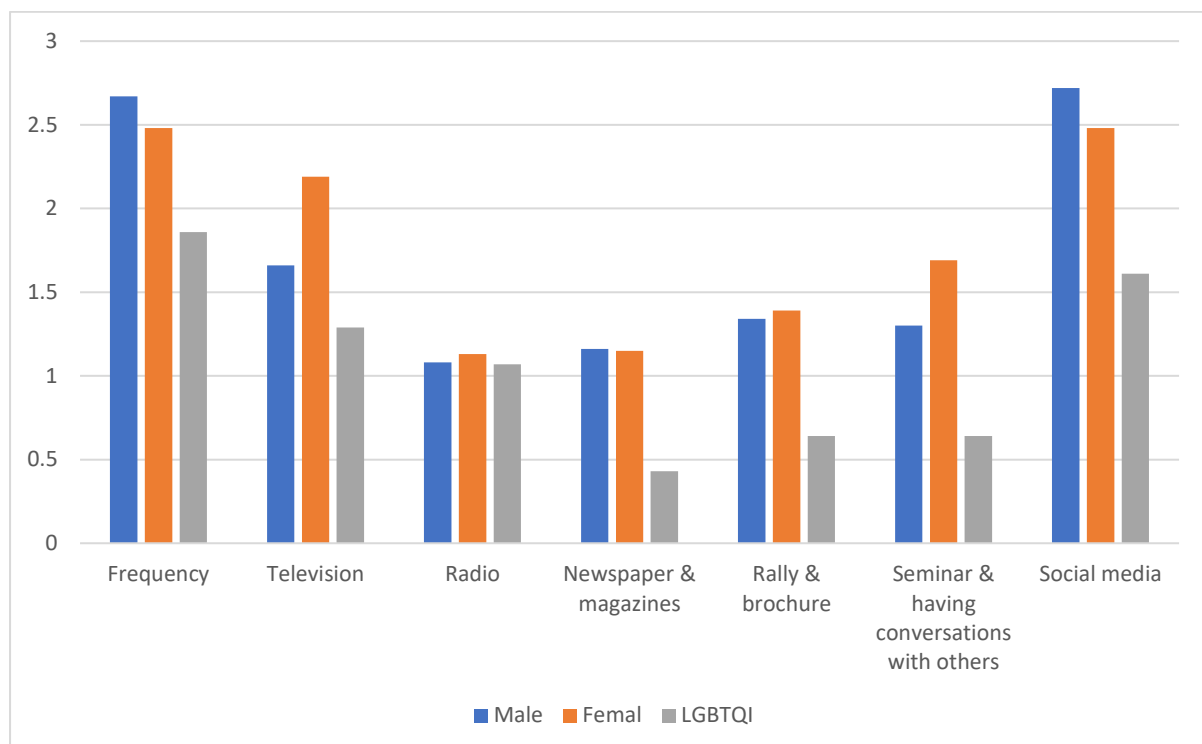


Figure 4. Frequency of use of various channels to follow news and information on Bangkok's gubernatorial election by gender

Intriguingly, this survey indicates that all generations of local election voters in the capital city of Thailand follow election news and information with equal frequency. Although the frequency declines with age, no statistically significant variation exists between the ages. Generation B is most likely to watch television (mean = 1/3) and read print media (mean = 1.63/3), according to a detailed examination. This is contrary to the trend of the candidates' rallies, brochures, and social media, which is negatively connected with the age of the survey respondents (Figure 5).

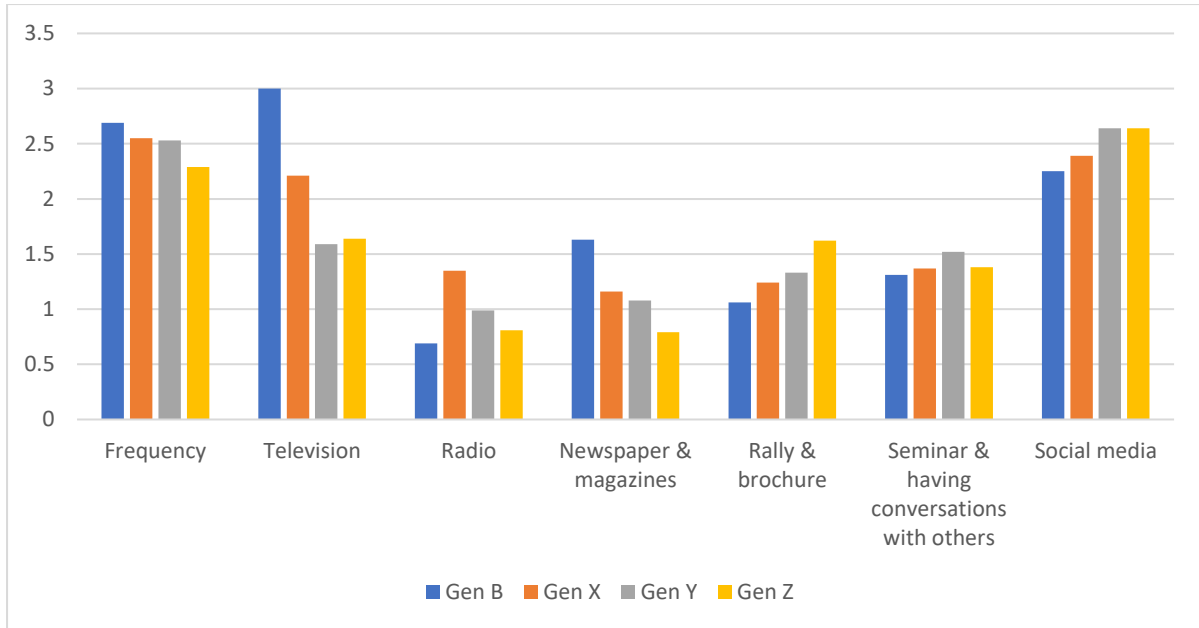


Figure 5. Frequency of consumption of news and information about Bangkok's gubernatorial election from different channels, classified by generation

In terms of print media (mean = 0.27/3) and radio (mean = 0/3), which they rarely read or listen to, Muslim voters follow local election news and information the most frequently (mean = 3/3). Consequently, if local election candidates seek to engage with them, social media may be the most effective route (mean = 2.32/3), comparable to how candidates communicate with female voters (Figure 6).

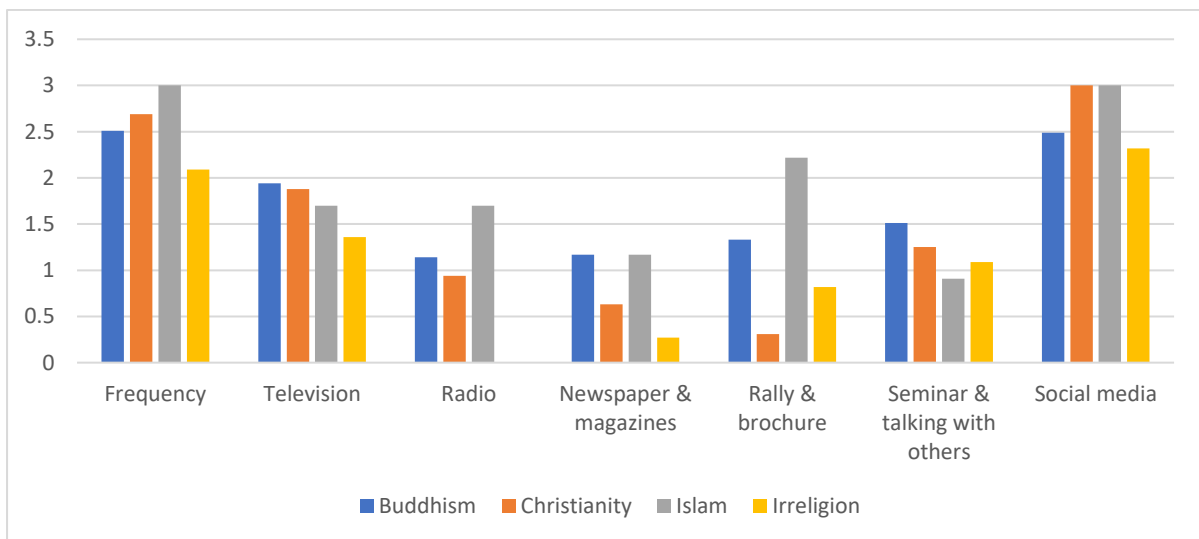


Figure 6. Frequency of consumption of news and information about Bangkok's gubernatorial election from different channels, classified by religion

Figure 7 shows that students are most excited about following the news and information on the local election (mean = 2.52/3), especially through social media (mean = 3/3). Those who only receive compulsory education or below overall follow the news and information least frequently (mean = 2/3), with television (mean = 2/3) and social media (mean = 1.75/3) found to be most consistent with their behavior. They also hardly follow the other four media (mean = 1.25/3) equally for all four channels). Radio is relatively less effective compared to other channels for all educational levels.

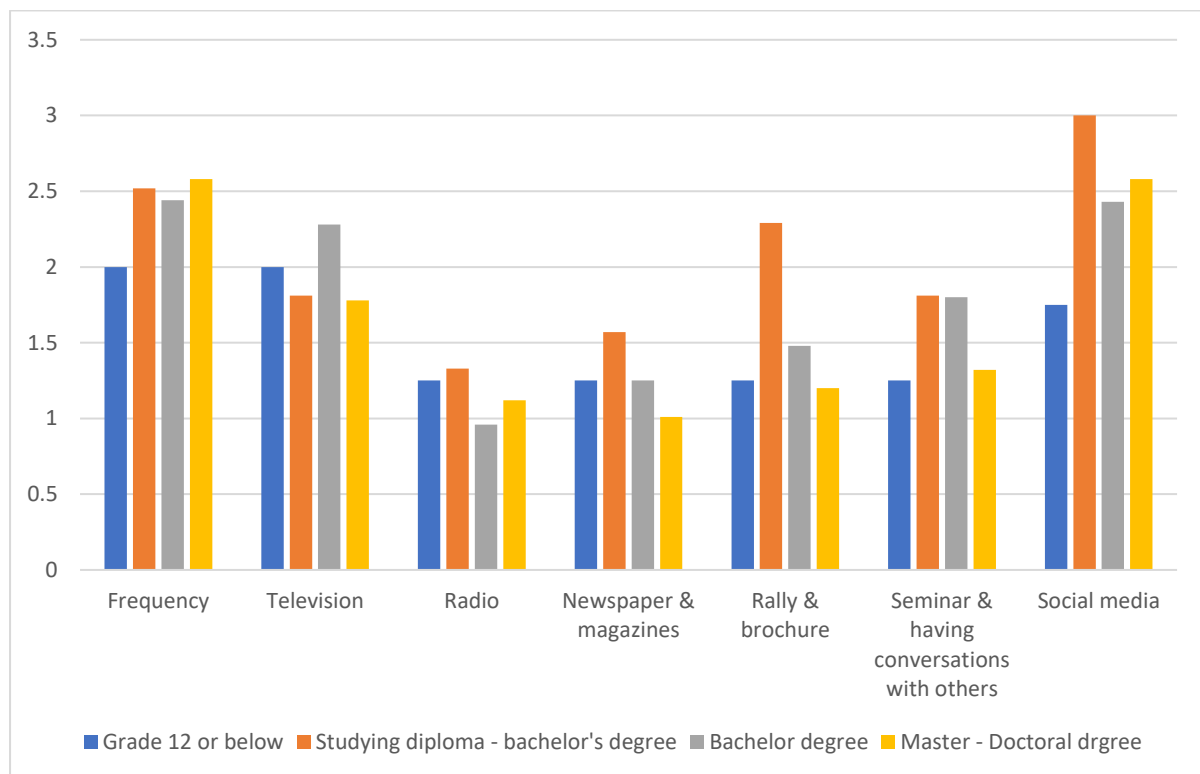


Figure 7. Frequency of consumption of news and information about Bangkok's gubernatorial election from different channels, classified by educational level

Surprisingly, the survey reveals that investor respondents do not follow gubernatorial election news and information, regardless of channel. To follow the news or information, freelancers do not utilize print media, rallies, campaign brochures, seminars, or chats, while social media remains the most effective method relative to other channels. In addition, the survey reveals that television is still the most effective medium for business owners (mean = 2.82/3), whereas radio is the most successful medium for freelancers (mean = 3/3). (Figure 8).

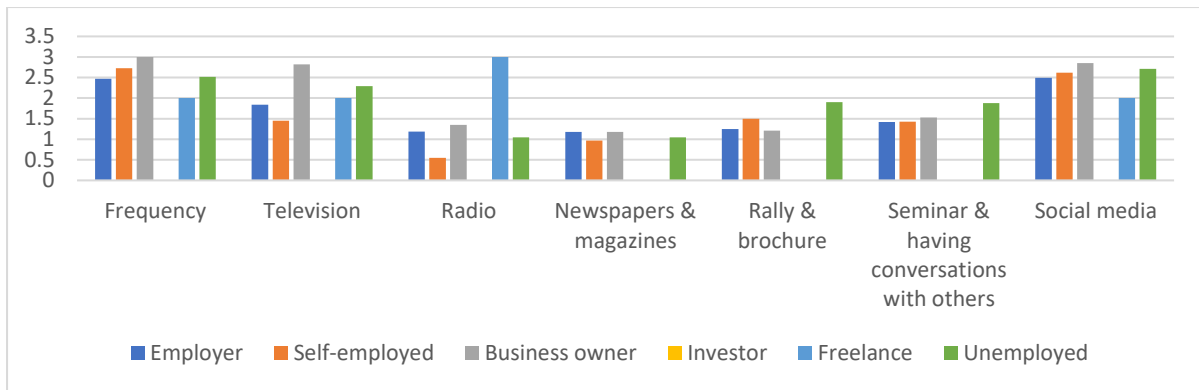


Figure 8. Frequency of consumption of news and information about Bangkok's gubernatorial election from different channels, classified by occupation

When categorized by income, it is discovered that all groups follow news and information regarding Bangkok's governor race at a level ranging from moderately high to extremely high. However, there are variances when comparing the various media channels via which they follow the news. For example, all income groups consume radio at a moderately low level; the highest income group is the primary consumer of social media and adopts social media as the primary channel of news consumption (mean = 2.8/3), whereas the other five channels are used at a low or moderately low level (mean = 1.02/3, 1.13/3, 0.038/3, 0.48/3, and 0.7/3, respectively) (Figure 9). When family income is considered, the pattern is not significantly different, except that the wealthiest tend to consume local election news via television and radio at a reasonably high level (mean = 2.13/3 and 1.62/2). (Figure 10).

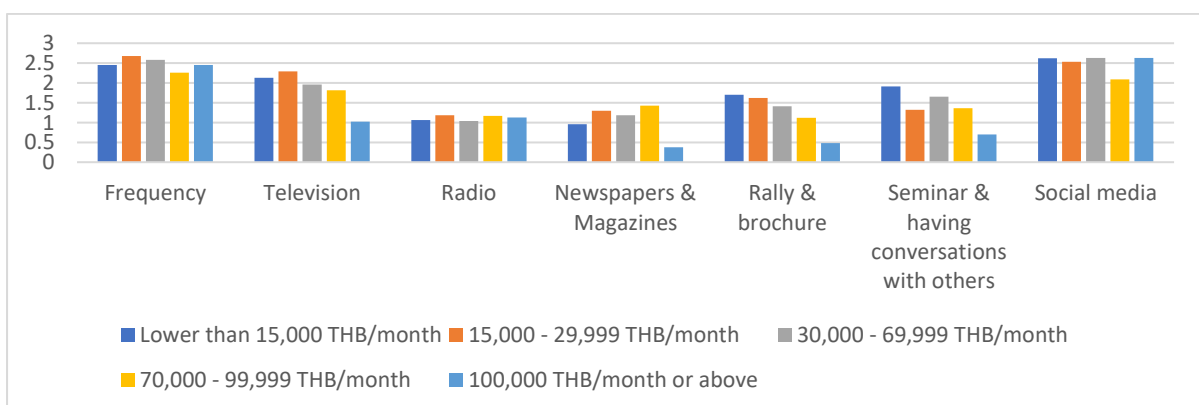


Figure 9. Frequency of consumption of news and information about Bangkok's gubernatorial election from different channels, classified by income

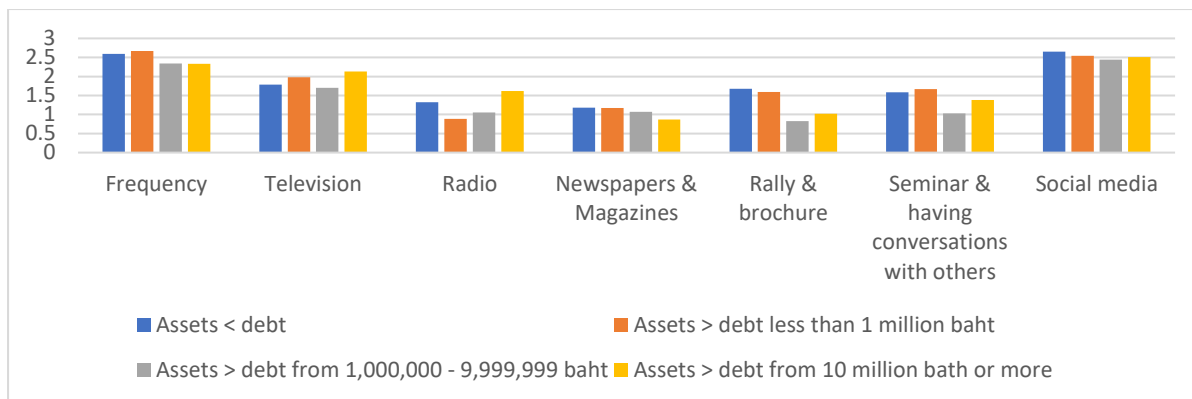


Figure 10. Frequency of consumption of news and information about Bangkok's gubernatorial election from different channels, classified by household wealth

Even though [Figure 11](#) indicates that the greater a voter's distance from the center of the capital city, the more frequently they follow local election news and information, similar to their social media usage. However, [Table 1](#) has already demonstrated that this distinction across regions is not statistically significant regarding news consumption and social media use. Differences in local election news consumption between areas are statistically significant only for print media, where residents in the innermost part of Bangkok consume more than those in the middle periphery (mean = 1.29/3 and 1.07/3, respectively), and rallies and brochures, where residents in the outermost part of Bangkok consume more than those in the innermost part of Bangkok (mean = 1.55/3 and 1.07/3, respectively).

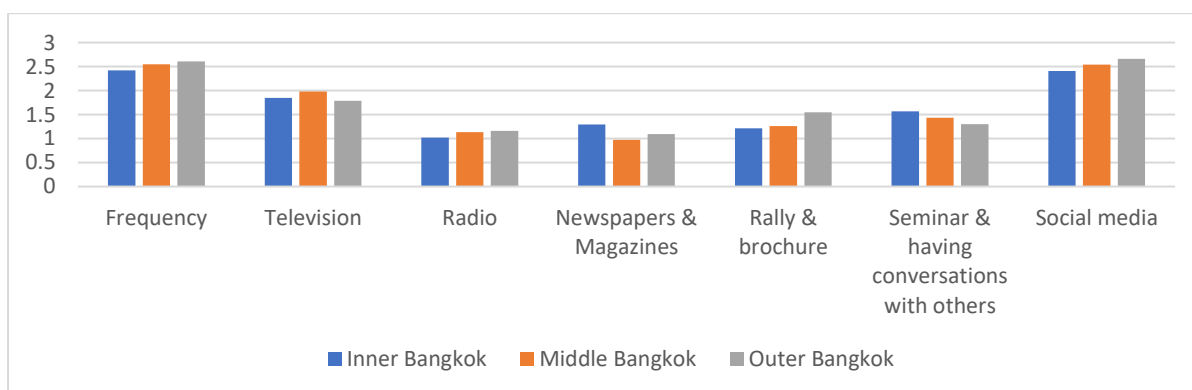


Figure 11. Frequency of consumption of news and information and channels of such consumption about Bangkok's gubernatorial election from different channels, classified by residential areas

Historically, party membership was a significant predictor of political activity. However, research conducted during the previous ten years has yielded divergent explanations. [Thananithichot \(2011\)](#) invites us to consider the dramatic increase and decrease in the number of members of political parties between 1999 and 2009, from 4.9 million members rising to slightly more than 25 million members in three years, and down to approximately 4.6 million members a few years later, which may indicate that entry and exit from membership of political parties cannot explain the level of political participation. This is consistent with the phenomenon in Europe, where political party membership is declining and is no longer a reliable measure of youth political engagement ([Weiss, 2020](#)).

This study result supports the conclusion that current members of political parties do not follow local election news or information more closely than former members or non-members. In contrast, they consume news and information through social media less frequently than former members (mean = 2.25/3 and 2.76/3, respectively) and less frequently than non-members (mean = 2.25/3, 3/3, and 2.49/3, respectively). ([Figure 12](#))

This finding indicates that being a political party member does not necessarily reflect a considerably higher level of political awareness or interest in political news. In contrast, former members who are not now affiliated with any political party are more likely to follow local election news.

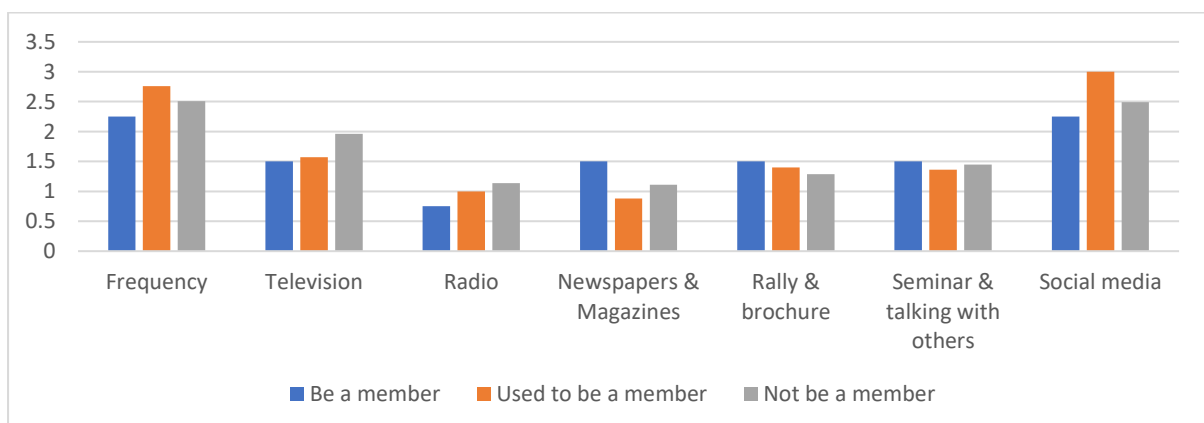


Figure 12. Frequency of consumption of news and information and channels of such consumption about Bangkok's gubernatorial election from different channels, classified by political party membership status

The continuity of political ideas and attitudes toward the current administration is intriguing. Liberal and anti-administration voters (mean = 2.74/3 and 2.81/3, respectively) are more likely to follow local election news than conservative and pro-administration voters (mean = 2.15/3 and 2.47/3, respectively). In addition to rallies and candidate brochures (mean = 1.51/3 and 1.48/3, respectively), the former group follows the news through participation in seminars and conversations with others (mean = 1.7/3 and 1.65/3, respectively). Television tends to be the favorite medium for conservatives and current government supporters (Figure 13-14).

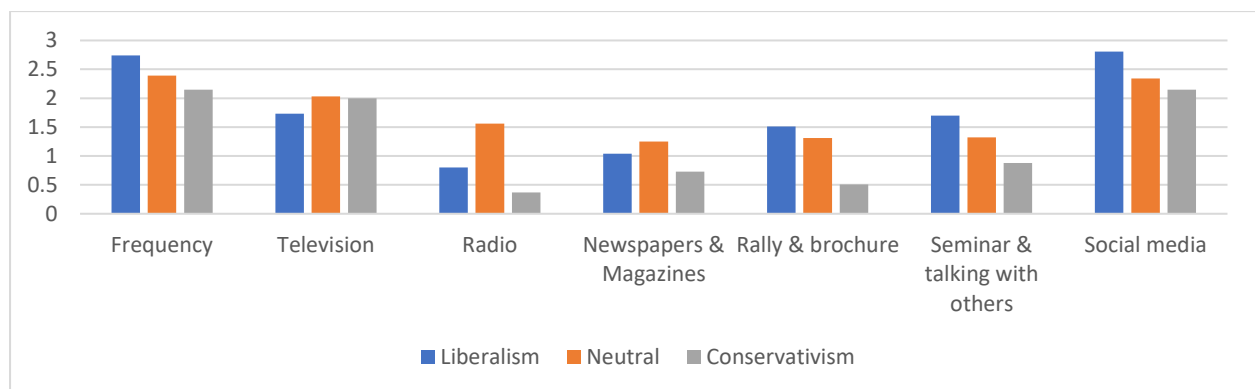


Figure 13. Frequency of consumption of news and information and channels of such consumption about Bangkok's gubernatorial election from different channels, classified by political ideologies

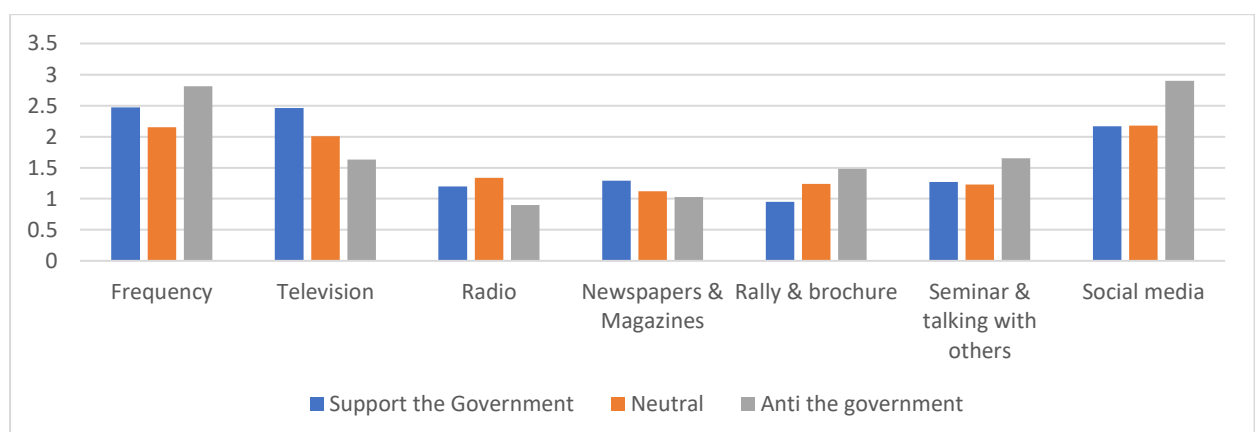


Figure 14. Frequency of consumption of news and information and channels of such consumption about Bangkok's gubernatorial election from different channels, classified by stance towards the current administration

Conclusion & Recommendations

In summary, lessons learned from voters in Bangkok, Thailand, indicate that inhabitants of the capital city of a developing country nowadays follow local election news and information closely, with social media becoming the primary medium. Television continues to be a significant medium but second behind social media. Radio and print media are comparatively infrequently utilized channels. Analyses based on social and economic criteria demonstrate that voters with various endowments consume local election news differently. Analyses of political determinants also reveal the current situation of the globe, in which the consumption of news about local elections via various media has sharply differed among individuals with varying political views and attitudes toward the current administration. For example, female voters, voters in Generation B, voters who own businesses, and conservative voters like television, but male voters and those who oppose the current administration prefer social media.

Based on this research, local politicians and stakeholders can be advised to consider using the appropriate media to communicate their messages to each voter group under the voter behaviors, which are dependent on their respective personal endowment and political affiliation, to ensure that the communication is effective and that the messages reach their intended recipients. However, the breadth of this study does not permit us to conclude that communications will translate into votes, even if they reach their intended receivers. In the subsequent stages, it will be necessary to empirically demonstrate whether voters rely on news and information when casting their ballots and, if so, what news and information voters want to know and use to make their voting decision so that local politicians and stakeholders can tailor their messages to the voters' preferences and increase their chances of winning the local election.

This poll collects data only from voters in the capital city, an urban location, so its applicability to political communication for municipal elections in rural areas may be restricted. In addition, because the survey is conducted online and distributed via social media, respondents may be biased towards those who have access to the internet and often use social media.

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