

Voter Ethnicity as a Predictor of Voter Choice: The Mediating Role of Party loyalty

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Abstract—This study aimed at evaluating the empirical relationship between voter ethnicity, party loyalty and voters choice in the Zambian context. A quantitative ex post facto survey design was used to achieve the research objectives. A sample of 200 was selected based on a non-probability technique specifically convenient sampling. The relationship between voter ethnicity, party loyalty and voter choice was analyzed through partial least squares structural equation modelling in Smart PLS 4.0. All the three scales had good reliability coefficients. Convergent and discriminant validity was established. Good measurement model fit was found through CFA. In SEM statistically significant path relationships between voters ethnicity and voters choice, voters ethnicity and party loyalty as well as between party loyalty and voters choice were found. The study also established that party loyalty mediated the relationship between voter ethnicity and voter choice.

Keywords— Voter Ethnicity, Party Loyalty, Voter Choice.

I. INTRODUCTION

Political Scientists need to pay attention to the construct of voter choice due to its link to a lot of outcomes such as improved governance and national development (Douglas,2013; Jenke & Huettel, 2016; Oliver & Ha,2007). Voter choice acts as a foundation for governance and democracy. According to Douglas (2013), we govern ourselves by free choice. Through voting, citizens will determine the country government structure. Without elected officials no laws will be enacted that enhances democracy and national development. According to Jenke and Huettel (2016), voter's choice is to some extent influenced by the candidates stance on policy issues affecting national development. Given the importance of voter's choice there's need to have an understanding on its antecedents. Literature has reported several predictors of voter's choice such as candidates' likeability, party affiliations, demographic characteristics, ethnicity as well as voters' evaluation of an incumbent performance such as developmental projects at the constituency level, performance of the economy or foreign military involvement (Miller & Shanks,1996; Nadeau, Lewis-Beck, 2001). Although there many reported antecedents of voter choice yet practical and theoretical reasons as well as limiting the scope of the study to a governable and meaningful level demands for a selection of variables Two considerations were used. The first one was to consider known antecedents of voter

choice and secondly to examine available voters choice literature for future direction. Based on the above criteria, two variables were considered namely party loyalty and voter ethnicity.

Theoretical Foundation

The cognitive theory of voting action will be used as the central theoretical foundation for this study. This theory emphasizes the importance of active mind process for a voter when making electoral decisions. According to Visser (1998), schema or stereotype defined as organized prior knowledge is central to cognitive electoral decision making in that political relevant schemata function as devices for selecting and organizing political information so as to make inferences and provide shortcuts in vote decision and candidate evaluation.

Research-initiating question

The research-initiating question for this study is therefore: why variance exists in voter's choice, with specific reference to the role that party loyalty and voter ethnicity play in this regard not to the exclusion of other predicting variables. The need for this research study is justified on grounds that to the researcher's knowledge there has been no Zambian study yet that has investigated this specific research problem.

Objective

The general objective was to examine the relationship between voter ethnicity, party loyalty and voter choice. From this general research objective, more specific operational research objectives were derived for this study.

1. To evaluate the influence of voters ethnicity on party loyalty.
2. To evaluate the influence of voters ethnicity on voters choice.
3. To evaluate the influence of party loyalty on or voters choice
4. To investigate whether party loyalty acts as a mediator between voter ethnicity and voter choice

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualising Voters ethnicity

Voter ethnicity is conceptualized as a form of social cleavage that explains voter alignment (Erdmann, 2007). Choe (2003) and Olayode (2015) classified social identities at national level,

language, race, religion, sex, region, caste and occupation. Zambia is one of the most ethnically heterogeneous society with 72 spoken languages (Sikayile, 2014). In terms of distribution of language group by size Bemba is the largest (35.2%), followed by Tonga (15.4%), then Nyanja (14.8), Lozi (8.8 %) and Nsenga (6.1%) (Cheeseman, Nicholas & Ford, 2007). Social cleavages in the form of ethnicity influences voters political attitudes which later influences political behaviour (Lever, 1978). The Zambian political climate unfortunately has always been built along tribal and party lines (Marten & Kula, 2008), leading to sectional cleavages based on regional and linguistic buttressed by the tribal identity of the party leader or the one who initially formed the party as well as on tribal cousinships (Chimbuya). For example the African National Congress (ANC) under Harry Mwaanga Nkumbula had a strong base among the Tonga speaking people as well as among the Lozi tribe. The United National Independence Party (UNIP) under Kenneth Kaunda had strong Bemba and Nyanja support (Bass, 2011). Other examples include: the Agenda for Zambia under Akashambatwa Mbikusita Lewanika among the Lozis, the United Progressive Party (UPP) under Simon Mwansa Kapwepwe, with a strong support base from Bemba's on the Copper Belt, the Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD) under Christon Tembo-Nyanja speaking, the Patriotic Front (PF) under Micheal Chilufya Sata from among the Bemba's and United Party for National Development (UNDP) among the Tongas, Lozis and north westerner (Bass, 2011). This is proven by election results. For example, during the 1991 elections, UNIP by then identified as a Nyanja speaking party, captured 73% of the votes in the Nyanja speaking constituencies but only 17.3% in the rest of the country while the Movement for Multiparty Development (MMD) regarded as a Bemba party got 86.6% of the votes in Bemba speaking constituency (Posner as cited in Bass 2011). The same picture is replicated in the 1968 general elections as well as the 2015 election. In 1968 ANC perceived as a Tonga speaking party got 76.2% in Tonga speaking areas and only 15.9% elsewhere while UNIP by then widely perceived as Bemba dominated was approximately 65% more likely to win votes of people by Bemba speaking constituencies (Posner, 2005). The 2015, and 2016 presidential elections delivered the same ethnic oriented result where by the PF and UPND got high results in their perceived strongholds (Goldring & Wahman, 2016). The 2021 general election results seem to paint a different picture where by UPND shared votes with the PF in the patriotic -Front dominated strong holds a promising indication of issue based politics and not based on ethnicity or vote buying.

Sectional cleavages in Zambia as observed by Bass (2011) as well as Molteno (1974) has continued in the post-independence era. At times sectionalism continues even when a beloved member of the party from its stronghold switches to another rival party. For Example, the late Emmanuel Kasonde in the 1993 by election switching from MMD (predominantly Bemba) to National Party (NP) an alleged Lozi-Tonga speaking party his votes declined by 74% (Posner, 2005). It can be assumed that opposition members of parliament under the UPND serving as deputy ministers in the Micheal Sata PF government feared to cross over and stand under the PF ticket

for fear of losing. Their constituencies are in the UPND stronghold. This is because voters are not willing to give up their sectional affiliations. However, it should be noted that the dynamics of the situation would compel the electorate not to vote for certain candidates other than the issue of sectional cleavages such as practising patronage politics at the expense of national development.

The trend of tribal and regionalism does not just end on membership to parties but also in appointments to key government positions. According to Posner (2005), historical trend in cabinet appointments between 1965 and 1999 tend to support the above statement. Posner further states that although Bemba speakers only constitutes 38% of the population, they took up an average of 55% of the top posts in the mentioned time period. In the third republic Chiluba showed signs of mobilising Bemba support by replacing government ministry posts in legal affairs, foreign affairs and health with fellow clansmen (Osei-Hwedie, 1998). Tribal appointments were vivid in Micheal Sata's government where eleven out of 20 cabinet ministers were northerners (Luapula, Northern and Muchinga province), and the half of deputy ministers were northerners while the majority of appointments in the foreign service was also on ethnic lines (Zambian Watchdog, 2013). Sata's predecessor, Levy Patrick Mwanawasa was also accused of basing most of his government appointments on nepotism. Most of those appointed were allegedly his friends and relatives and mostly people from his region, the Lambaland and lenjeland. During the Kaunda era tribal interest also became supreme forcing Kaunda to walk out of the UNIP National Council and resigned as president especially after Simon Mwansa Kapwepwe challenged Reuben Kamanga for the UNIP vice Presidency and won (Sardanis, 2014). This meant that automatically he was the vice president of the country and he with his supporters monopolised positions in the central committee displacing Muna Sipalo and Arthur Wina. The people from the eastern and the western provinces were not happy such that in the 1968 general elections UNIP lost to the United Party (UP) with demands for secession being echoed (Sardanis, 2014).

Although tribal politics is condemned by government and other influential members of society, it is done in a hypocritical manner in pursuit of political power. According to Scerritt (2006) those in power campaign on ethnicity lines in regions where they have support while condemning opposition parties for practising tribalism. For example, UNIP scandalised UPP leaders as a manifestation of Bemba tribalism followed by the arrest of two UPP leaders (Sardinis, 2014; Szeftel, 2000). Molteno (1974) further gives evidence of how the MMD branded the NP in 1993 and the UPND in 1998 as vehicles for the Lozi and Tonga tribes.

Conceptualising Party Loyalty

Party loyalty is defined as a strong feeling of support or allegiance to a certain party (Dickinson, 2018). Party loyalty can be conceptualized using the attitude approach, behavioural and the multidimensional approach. Loyalty can be conceptualized as an attitude towards the party (Morais, Dorsch & Backman, 2004), which eventually leads to the formation of beliefs and

opinions that influences the occurrences of party loyalty in terms of feelings of attachment, commitment to the party and political preferences (Back, 2005; Baloglu, 2002; Kandampully & Hu, 2007; Rauyruen & Miller, 2007). According to Harris and Goode (2004) party loyalty can also be based on party knowledge and beliefs that the party is preferable to its competitors.

Conceptualising Voters Choice

Voter’s choice is conceptualized as intentions by the electorates to vote for political candidates of their choice (Andrews & Inman, 2009). Political choices are often influenced by partisan affiliation, evaluation of the national economic conditions, candidates stance on salient issues, candidates likeability, clientelism as well as ethnicity (Miller & Shanks, 1996; Posner, 2005; Tomz & Van Houweling, 2008). Through vote choice voters are able to choose candidates that represent their views, beliefs and affiliations (Tomz & Van Houweling, 2008).

Relationship between Voter Ethnicity and party loyalty

To a certain extent political party preferences are influenced by ethnic variables (Ivers, 1978). By belonging to certain ethnic groups voters are more likely to join or favour political parties with similar values and beliefs like theirs. In Lee, Chen, Tsai, Yen, Chen and Lin (2016), the path coefficient between ethnic identity and explicit political party preference was statistically significant $\beta = 0.48, p < .001$. The path coefficient between ethnic identity and implicit political party preference was also statistically significant. It can therefore be proposed that voter ethnicity positively influences party loyalty.

Relationship between Voter ethnicity and Voter Choice

Ethnicity in the form of language, regionalism, race and religion influences individual’s political beliefs which later influences political preferences. Empirical evidence in a study done in Taiwan by Lee, Chen, Tsai, Yen, Chen and Lin (2016) found that the path coefficient between ethnic identity and vote choice was statistically significant $\beta = 0.24, p < .01$. It is therefore hypothesized that voter ethnicity positively influences voter choice.

Relationship Between Party Loyalty and Voter Choice

Political party preference acts as an antecedent to voting behaviour in that party values and beliefs in forms of ideologies and norms helps in forming attitudes of allegiance hence determines ones voting behaviour (Dickinson, 2018). In Lee et al., (2016) party preference influenced vote choice through voting intention. A positive relationship between party loyalty and voter choice is therefore hypothesized.

Party loyalty as a mediator in the relationship between Voter ethnicity and Voter Choice

Political attitudes and beliefs formed due to ethnic identities goes a long way in influencing ones attachment to a certain political party hence influencing ones voting behaviour. It is therefore hypothesized that voter ethnicity positively influences voter choice indirectly through party loyalty

Conceptual model

The structural model in figure 1 depicts the specific hypothesised path linkages between voter ethnicity, party loyalty and voter choice. Voter ethnicity is portrayed as the independent variable whilst party loyalty and voters choice as dependent variables.

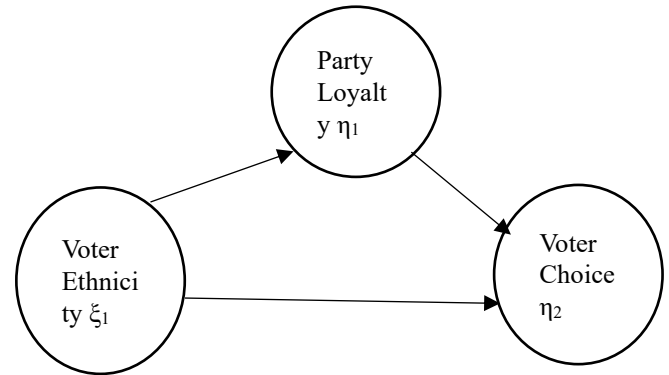


Figure 1: Structural model depicting the relationship between voter ethnicity, party loyalty and voter choice.

Statistical hypotheses

In order to test the validity of the proposed relationships in the structural model, the following specific research hypotheses were tested:

- Hypothesis 1: voter ethnicity (ξ_1) is positively related to party loyalty (η_1) (H01: $\gamma_{11} = 0$; Ha1: $\gamma_{11} > 0$).
- Hypothesis 2: voter ethnicity (ξ_1) is positively related to voter choice (η_2) (H02: $\gamma_{21} = 0$; Ha2: $\gamma_{21} > 0$).
- Hypothesis 3: party loyalty (η_1) is positively related to voter choice (η_2) (H03: $\beta_{21} = 0$; Ha3: $\beta_{21} > 0$).
- Hypothesis 4: party loyalty (η_1) mediates the relationship between voter ethnicity (ξ_1) and voter choice (η_2)

III. RESEARCH METHODS

Study Design

A quantitative ex post facto survey design through variance based structural equation modelling-partial least square (PLS-SEM) was used to achieve the research objectives.

Sampling/Sample

A non-probability sampling method, specifically convenience sampling, was used. The research hypotheses were empirically evaluated using a sample of 220 respondents from Kazungula district of Zambia. 300 Questionnaires with cover letters were distributed to identified participants. Only 220 completed questionnaires were returned.

Measuring Instrument

Voter Ethnicity was measured using 8 adapted items from the tribalism scale (Abdelrahim, 2019). Initial item analysis in SPSS showed that item 3 was a poor item and was consequently flagged out. The original tribalism scale has a cronabach alpha of between 0.760 and 0.899. Five items adapted from Sasmita and Suki (2014) were used to measure brand loyalty. The brand

loyalty had a Cronbach alpha of 0.735 (Sasmita & Suki, 2014). Voter choice was measured using three adapted items from the purchase intention/ brand choice factor (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Baek, Kim & Yu, 2010). An acceptable Cronbach alpha of 0.88 was recorded for this construct.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed through partial least squares (PLS) statistical technique by using SMART PLS 4.0 for measurement model fit and hypothesized path relationships. The hypothesized relationships in the model were tested using a two-step approach (Anderson & Gebing 1988). The first step requires that the measurement model be evaluated as to whether the measurement items possess the appropriate psychometrics properties to represent each construct (Baek, Kim & Yu, 2010).

Outer model analysis involves testing for reliability and validity of the scale (Shafi, Rabbani, Alam & Gul, 2020). According to Henseler (2010) the traditional criterion for assessing internal consistency reliability is Cronbach’s alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR). The criteria for acceptability in this case were Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability > .70 (Nunnally & Berstein, 1994). Outer model analysis further involves testing for convergent validity, factor loadings and discriminant validity. According to Jamil (2012), convergent validity refers to the degree to which individual items load onto their designated construct. The criterion for convergent validity is the average variance extracted (AVE) as proposed by Fornell and Lacker (1981). An AVE value > 0.50 indicates sufficient convergent validity (Fornell & Lacker, 1981). This means that a latent variable can explain at least half of the variance of its indicators on average (Jamil, 2012). Discriminant validity concerns the degree to which the measures of different constructs differ from. In this study discriminant validity was measured using the Fornell and Lacker method (Shafi, Rabbani, Alam & Gul, 2020). The Fornell and Lacker (1981) criterion requires a latent variable to share more variance with its assigned indicators than with any other variable. According to Fornell and Lacker (1981), the value of discriminant validity must be greater than the value of AVE of convergent validity for each construct.

Structural model assessment can only be done once the measurement model has successfully been validated (Jamil, 2012). When evaluating the appropriateness of the overall model in partial least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) the SRMR and the NFI values are the most used indicators (Huang, 2021). The SRMR value ranges from 0 to 1. According to Hu and Bentler (1998) when the SRMR value is less than 0.08 it can be regarded as a good fit of the model. The NFI value ranges from between 0 and 1 and as such when the NFI value is > 0.90 it is an indication that the model fits well (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). According to Huang (2021), path analysis using t values is another criterion for the assessment of PLS-SEM. A t value > 1.96 means that a significant level of 0.05 has been attained, > 2.58 it means a significant level of 0.01 has been attained while values > 3.29 means that a significant level of 0.001 has been attained. The coefficient of multiple determination (R²) is another criterion used for assessing PLS-

SEM. The R² value also ranges between 0 and 1. The higher the value the high the explanatory power (Huang, 2021). According to Chin (1998) R² values of 0.67, 0.33 and 0.19 in PLS-SEM path models as substantial, moderate and weak.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographics

The sample had a mean age of 2.50 and standard deviation of 1.06. The sample was comprised of male (53.2%) and female (46.8%) participants. 19.5% of the respondents were aged between 18-25, 30.7 % between 26-32, 33.5% between 33-40, 12.6% between 41-47 while 3.7% aged 48 and above. The level of qualification in the sample was distributed as follows, with certificate (30%), diploma (35%), bachelor’s degree (15.7%), master’s degree (4.9%), PhD (0.4%) and others (1.3%). The demographic profile of the sample is shown in table 1.

TABLE 1. Frequency distribution of sample data

items	Background Variable	No	Percentage
Gender	Male	117	52.5%
	Female	103	46.2%
Age	18-25	42	19.5%
	26-32	66	30.7%
	33-40	72	33.5%
	41-47	27	12.6%
	48 & above	8	3.7%
Education	Certificate	67	30%
	Diploma	78	35%
	Bachelor’s Degree	35	15.7%
	Master’s Degree	11	4.9%
	PHD	1	0.4%
	Others	3	1.3%
	Non	28	12.6%

Construct Reliability and Validity

All the three scales met the reliability coefficient benchmark of above 0.70. indicating good reliability and internal consistency (Pallant, 2010). The voter ethnicity scale obtained a Cronbach alpha of 0.824, the Composite reliability (rho_s) of 0.847 and Composite reliability (rh_c) of 0.870. The Party Loyalty scale recorded a Cronbach alpha of 0.852, a Composite reliability (rho_s) of 0.857 and a Composite reliability (rh_c) of 0.894. The voter choice scale had a Cronbach alpha of 0.859, A Composite reliability (rho_s) of 0.890 and a Composite reliability (rh_c) of 0.914 as shown in table 2.

The factor loadings of all the items as shown in table 2 were significantly large > .50 set for this study except for one item

ETH 5 under the ethnicity scale which could not be flagged out due to few items remaining in the scale. The AVE values for the three constructs except for the voter ethnicity scale were > .50 which is an indication of good convergent validity. Although the AVE value fell short of the standard yet it is acceptable because 0.497 is more closer to 0.50. Table 3 shows that the square root value of the diagonal AVE is greater than other correlations coefficient values in the matrix. Moreover, all the values for discriminant validity were greater than the value of AVE of convergent validity.

TABLE 2. Frequency distribution of sample data

Dimensions	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Ethnicity	ETH 1	0.768	0.824	0.847	0.497
	ETH 2	0.710			
	ETH 4	0.668			
	ETH 5	0.387			
	ETH 6	0.814			
	ETH 7	0.764			
	ETH 8	0.719			
	ETH 8	0.719			
Loyalty	LOY 1	0.851	0.852	0.867	0.630
	LOY 2	0.825			
	LOY 3	0.844			
	LOY 4	0.750			
	LOY 5	0.685			
Choice	CHO 1	0.887	0.859	0.890	0.780
	CHO 2	0.895			
	CHO 3	0.868			

TABLE 3. Discriminant Validity Test (Fornell-Larcker)

Dimensions	ETH	LOY	CHO
ETH	0.705		
LOY	0.376	0.883	
CHO	0.495	0.457	0.794

Note: The bold slash text is the square root value of AVE and the rest are the correlations coefficients between the dimensions

PLS-SEM Analysis

Good model fit was attained. The SRMR value in this study was 0.076. Although the NFI value of 0.767 is less than 0.90 yet it is closer to the standard value hence acceptable (see table 4). From table 5 it can be seen that hypothesis 1 has been confirmed. The path coefficient between voter ethnicity and party loyalty was statistically significant with a t value of 8.741 and a p value of 0.000. For hypothesis 2, a statistically significant path coefficient between voter ethnicity and voter choice was established with a t value of 2.472 and a p value less than 0.05. The path between party loyalty and voters choice was also significant. A t value bigger than 3,29 was recorded meaning that a significant level of 0.001 was attained. The PLS-SEM path analysis model is shown in figure 2.

TABLE 4. Model Fit

	SRMR	NFI
Model	0.076	0.767

TABLE 5. Path Analysis Verification

Path Analysis	Path coefficient	T value	p Value	Hypothesis
ETH → LOY	0.495	8.471	0.000	H1 Valid
ETH → CHO	0.198	2.472	0.013	H2 Valid
LOY → CHO	0.359	3.580	0.000	H3 Valid

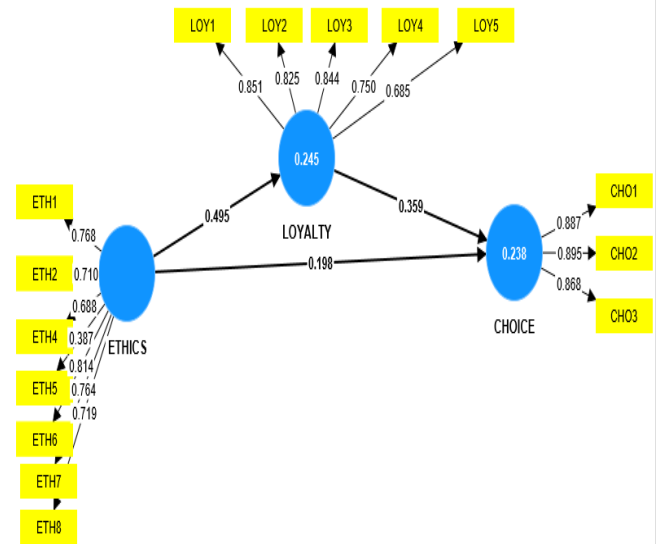


Figure 2. Path Diagram-PLS-SEM path analysis

Table 6 shows that the explanatory power of voter ethnicity to party loyalty is 24.5%. Voter ethnicity explanatory power to voter choice is 23.8%. It can therefore be said that the model in this study has a moderate degree of explanatory power.

TABLE 6. R² value

Path Analysis	R2	R2 Adjusted
Ethnicity → Loyalty	0.245	0.242
Ethnicity → Choice	0.238	0.231

The test of mediation effect can also be detected by the t value of indirect effect (Huang, 2021). In this study party loyalty mediates the relationship between voter ethnicity and voter choice. The indirect effect value is 0.178, t value is 3.281 and a p value of 0.001 which reaches a significant level hence hypothesis 4 is established (see table 7).

TABLE 7. Mediation effect verification

Independent variable	Intervening variable	Indirect effect	Hypothesis
Ethnicity	Loyalty	0.178 (t=3.281)	H4 Valid

With Cronbach's alpha above .70 reliability for all the scales was established. In this study both convergent and discriminant

validity was established. Good model fit was attained with an SRMR value below 0.80 and NFI value closer to .90. In terms of path analysis this study aimed at investigating the empirical relationship between voter ethnicity and voter choice. Through a path diagram it was further proposed that party loyalty acts as a mediator between voter ethnicity and voter choice. Research results have shown that voters choice in terms of candidates to vote for during elections is to some extent influenced by ones ethnicity. Results has also shown that one's ethnic cleavages influences membership and loyalty to certain political parties perceived to be from the same ethnical area or possessing a lot of members or leaders from the same ethnic region. This means that such a citizen is more likely to vote for a candidate from his or her ethnic group regardless of what is offered by the candidate hence confirming hypotheses one and three. These results are in line with Erdmann (2007), who after analysing individual survey data found that ethno-political identity was one of the factors that accounted for election results in Zambia.

V. CONCLUSION

PLS-SEM was used to evaluate the postulated conceptual model. Research results in this study have provided evidence that voter ethnicity influences voter choice through party loyalty. From the political science perspective there are several lessons that can be drawn from this study. Good governance can only be enhanced if the electorates are educated on the ills of politics based ethnicism. A non-probability procedure specifically convenient sampling and ex-post facto research design was used in this study making it difficulty to generalize the results. Future studies should replicate the study using bigger sample sizes.

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