
Color Politics in the IP Barangays of Butuan City

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The electoral process in the Philippines plays a vital role in its democratic framework, empowering citizens to choose their leaders. The May 2022 elections revealed the significant influence of political color preferences, especially among marginalized groups such as Indigenous Peoples (IP). This study explored the political color preferences in two IP barangays in Butuan City—Barangay Anticala and Bonbon—focusing on whether their color choices reflected broader electoral trends in the city. It also examined the socio-political factors influencing these preferences and how they shaped the voting behavior of these communities. Data were collected through key informant interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings

indicate that the color red, associated with Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., was the dominant preference among IP communities in both barangays, mirroring the broader trend in Butuan City. Several factors influenced this preference: Marcos's strong leadership image, association with the Duterte legacy, the selection of Sara Duterte as his running mate, and his message of national unity. The study highlighted the role of symbolic elements like color in shaping political identification and voter behavior, underscoring the importance of leadership, continuity, and unity in engaging marginalized communities in the electoral process.

Key Words: Election, Color politics, Indigenous peoples, Social media, Voting behavior, Marcos, Duterte

I.Introduction

The electoral process in democratic systems plays a vital role in shaping a nation's political landscape. In the Philippines, elections enable citizens to choose leaders who will influence the country's political and social direction. Political campaigns in the Philippines, like in many other democracies, involve various strategies such as advertising, celebrity endorsements, jingles, rallies, and speeches to influence voter behavior. A key element in these campaigns is the strategic use of political colors. These colors symbolize political allegiance, facilitate voter identification with candidates, and create strong visual recall that aids decision-making (Sawer, 2007).

The primary objective of this study is to examine the influence of political color preferences on the voting behavior of Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities in Barangays Anticala and Bonbon, Butuan City, during the May 2022 elections. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) determine whether the political color

preferences in these IP barangays aligned with broader electoral trends in Butuan City; (2) explore the socio-political factors influencing these preferences; and (3) investigate the role of symbolic elements, such as color, in fostering political identity and participation among marginalized groups. Furthermore, this study intends to contribute to a broader understanding of how political symbolism intersects with voter behavior, particularly in marginalized communities.

The 2022 Philippine elections also saw an increased reliance on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as tools for political communication. This shift occurred especially because traditional campaign methods like rallies, were limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the accessibility of digital media raised concerns about inclusivity, particularly among marginalized communities such as Indigenous Peoples (IPs), who often face challenges in accessing technology and media. These challenges were especially prevalent in rural areas like Barangays Anticala and Bonbon, where limited access to modern communication tools hindered

IP communities to fully engage with mainstream electoral discourse (Dyson & Underwood, 2006).

Despite these barriers, the IP communities in Barangays Anticala and Bonbon actively participated in the May 2022 elections. A striking observation was the widespread preference for the color red, which symbolized the candidacy of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., and mirrored broader electoral trends in Butuan City. This study explores how political color preferences in these IP communities align with city-wide trends and investigates the factors influencing these preferences.

The concept of "color politics" posits that political colors serve as visual symbols of political identity, evoking emotional responses and reinforcing group allegiances (Marini, 2017). Previous studies have demonstrated that political colors are not only for aesthetics but are also strategically used to communicate ideological stances and rally support (Palatino, 2022). In the Philippines, colors such as yellow, pink, and red have become deeply embedded in electoral discourse, with each color symbolizing distinct political affiliations. Notably, red, in

particular, has come to represent the political alignment with Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and his supporters (Colcol, 2022).

For IP communities, the strategic use of color in political campaigns extends beyond its symbolic value. Colors function as mnemonic devices, simplifying political identification for voters who may not have had access to the complex political discourse of urban elections. The use of red, associated with Marcos Jr., acted as an easily recognizable cue, allowing voters to align with his candidacy without needing to engage deeply with political platforms or policies. In this way, political colors served as both a tool for mobilization and as means of simplifying electoral choices for marginalized groups (Jayma & Porquis, 2017).

Thus, this study aims to delve deeper into the role of political color preferences in shaping voting behavior among IP communities in Butuan City. By examining the factors contributing to the dominance of red as the preferred political color, this research seeks to provide insights into the intersection of color symbolism, political identity, and voter behavior in marginalized communities. Ultimately, this exploration aims to contribute to understanding color politics in the Philippines and

highlight the unique challenges Indigenous Peoples face in contemporary electoral processes.

II. Methods and Materials

This study employed a qualitative research design to assess the political color preferences of Indigenous Peoples (IP) in Barangays Anticala and Bonbon, Butuan City. The primary method for data collection was key informant interviews, which were conducted with influential community leaders, including Baes and Datus. These leaders were selected due to their authoritative roles in shaping the political views of their communities, particularly during elections. Their insights were crucial for understanding how political color preferences developed in these areas and how they might reflect broader electoral trends.

The interviews were conducted in July 2022, two months after the May 2022 national elections. This timing allowed for the collection of relevant data that captured the political climate and attitudes of the community leaders following the election,

providing a reflective analysis of how political color preferences were formed and their impacts on the community.

Ethical considerations were central throughout the research process. The study adhered to established ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees, ensuring they were fully aware of the purpose of the study and their role in it. Moreover, the confidentiality of participants was maintained, with personal identifiers removed from all transcripts. Additionally, respect for cultural norms and privacy was emphasized, ensuring that the study was conducted with sensitivity to the community's values and traditions.

The data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and a thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the responses. This method allowed for the identification of recurring themes related to political color preferences, the factors influencing these preferences, and the broader socio-political context shaping voting behavior within marginalized communities. The analysis was guided by the conceptual framework that underscored the relationship among color

symbolism, political identity, and social influence, which helped to uncover patterns and offered a deeper understanding of how political symbols, such as color, were used as tools of political identification and expression within the IP communities of Butuan City.

III. Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the interviews revealed several key factors influencing political color preferences among the Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities in Barangays Anticala and Bonbon, Butuan City. Notably, the dominant political color preference was red, closely associated to the candidacy of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. This preference mirrored broader political trends observed throughout Butuan City, where Marcos was also the favored candidate. The findings highlighted various themes, including perceptions of leadership, the Duterte legacy, the appeal of unity, and the strategic use of color in Marcos' campaign. Each of these factors played a significant role in shaping the IP communities' electoral choices.

Perception of Strong Leadership

One of the most significant reasons for the preference for red was the perception of strong leadership associated with Marcos Jr. Many community leaders compared Marcos to his father, Ferdinand Marcos Sr., emphasizing his strength and authoritative leadership style. This perception of strength resonated deeply with the IP communities, who value strong leadership, particularly in the context of their marginalized status. For these communities, the desire for stability and direction in the face of socio-political challenges made red an effective symbol of leadership. The color became more than just an aesthetic choice; it was imbued with meaning that signified security, stability, and the hope of leadership that could address their concerns (Sawer, 2007).

Association with the Duterte Legacy

Another crucial factor influencing the preference for red was Marcos's alliance with Sara Duterte, the vice-presidential candidate in the 2022 elections. The IP communities, having

benefited from the policies of President Rodrigo Duterte, were inclined to support the continuation of these policies through Marcos. Many of the community leaders noted that Duterte's administration had positively impacted the IP communities, particularly through infrastructure projects and social governance strategies aimed at marginalized groups. As a result, Marcos, as a candidate closely associated with Duterte, symbolized not just a new political figure but the continuation of the policies that had already begun to uplift their communities. The color red, in this case, represented not only Marcos' candidacy but also the continuation of the Duterte legacy, reinforcing a sense of political continuity that was seen as essential for further progress (Welle, 2022).

Appeal for Unity

The theme of unity emerged as another central reason for the IP communities' preference for Marcos. Many community leaders highlighted that Marcos's campaign slogan, "Unity," resonated strongly with IP voters, who have historically felt politically and socially isolated. The appeal of unity offered a vision

of inclusion, signaling hope for greater political representation for marginalized communities. The color red, which was closely associated with Marcos and his message of national cohesion, symbolized not just political alignment but also a sense of belonging within a unified national vision. The color thus took on additional significance, representing the IP communities' desire for social and political inclusion, and providing hope for a future where their voices would be heard and respected (Dimaano, 2022).

Symbolic Use of Color

The symbolic use of color was another significant finding in the study. In a community with limited access to modern media, the color redacted as a powerful mnemonic device, simplifying political choices for voters who might not have had access to detailed political platforms or information. Given that many IP communities have restricted access to diverse media channels, including digital platforms, the use of color became an effective tool for political identification. The color red in Marcos' campaign served as a visual cue that allowed voters to easily associate him

with leadership, continuity, and unity, bypassing the need for deeper engagement with the more complex aspects of political discourse. As noted by Marini (2017), political colors are not merely aesthetic; they function as symbolic tools that shape voter perceptions and reinforce political identity. In the case of the IP communities in Butuan City, red was a simplified yet powerful method of political mobilization.

The Role of Social Media and Information Accessibility

While social media platforms played a significant role in shaping the political discourse during the 2022 elections, the study revealed challenges the IP community faced due to their limited access to digital media. Many IP voters in Barangays Anticala and Bonbon relied on traditional forms of media, such as television and radio, to gather electoral information. This digital divide made it difficult for these communities to engage fully with the modern electoral campaigns disseminated primarily through social media. However, despite this limitation, the color red helped bridge the gap, allowing voters to make informed choices based on visual symbols alone. In this context, the color served not just as a symbol of Marcos' campaign but as

a vital tool for political participation, enabling voters to identify with a candidate despite not having access to the broader digital discourse of the election (Pearce et al., 2020).

Despite these challenges, the symbolic use of color in political campaigns helped bridge the gap between the voters and the candidates. Political colors, like red, served as accessible markers that simplified the decision-making process for IP voters who were less exposed to the complex dynamics of electoral campaigning. The thematic analysis revealed that color acted as an effective tool for simplifying political participation in these communities, enabling voters to identify with a candidate even without in-depth knowledge of the candidate's platform or policies. This finding aligns with that of Palmer and Schloss (2010), who argue that political colors can effectively communicate ideologies and rally support, even in communities with limited access to media.

IV. Conclusion & Recommendations

This study concluded that the color red, associated with Ferdinand Marcos Jr., significantly influenced the political engagement of Indigenous Peoples (IP) in Barangays Anticala and Bonbon, Butuan City. Despite challenges such as limited access to information technology and traditional media sources, these communities actively participated in the electoral process, aligning their political preferences with broader trends across the city. The preference for red reflected deeper socio-political influences, including a desire for strong leadership, the continuity of policies initiated during Duterte's administration, and an overarching appeal for unity. Red therefore became more than a political symbol; it was a powerful tool for mobilization and identity formation in these marginalized communities.

While color symbolism alone could not fully explain voting behavior, it serves as an effective mechanism for political identification and engagement, especially in areas with limited access to campaign information and digital media. The thematic

analysis in this study reveal that red, as a visual marker, simplified the decision-making process for IP voters, helping them identify with Marcos's candidacy and align with the broader political landscape. Moreover, the findings highlighted the importance of symbolic elements in political campaigns and their effectiveness in fostering voter participation within marginalized groups. However, despite color symbolism playing a crucial role in shaping voter behaviour, it is essential to acknowledge that a more profound understanding of electoral issues remains critical for informed decision-making.

Based on this study's findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance political engagement among marginalized communities. First, it is vital to improve information accessibility in rural and Indigenous communities. Strategies should include leveraging traditional media, such as radio and local newspapers, in tandem with digital platforms, to disseminate electoral information effectively. Community meetings could also serve as platforms for discussion and education regarding electoral processes.

Second, civic education programs should be tailored specifically to the needs of Indigenous communities. These programs should focus on the importance of voting, critical political engagement, and how to evaluate candidates. Collaboration between local governments and civil society organizations is essential to deliver these programs effectively and empower Indigenous communities to engage in the electoral process.

Finally, political campaigns must adopt inclusive strategies that recognize the unique challenges that hound marginalized groups. A better understanding of the symbolic power of colors can help political campaigns design more accessible messaging and engaging platforms that resonate with various community demographics. Additionally, it is crucial to ensure the active participation of Indigenous communities in the electoral process, empowering them to contribute to shaping the future directions of the nation and guaranteeing that their voices are included in the democratic process.

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