

Preserving Honest, Orderly, and Safe Election System in the Philippines: A Trend Analysis of Selected Election Statistics

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Abstract

The right to suffrage is a constitutionally-protected right afforded to every citizen in the country, as explicitly pronounced in Article V, Section 1 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, wherein it states that “suffrage may be exercised by all citizens” and its enjoyment is absolute – meaning one’s literacy, property, or substantive requirements, unlike in other laws or rights prior enjoyment, are not necessary for one to vote. The State, to put effect to this right, has established the Commission on Elections, one of the Constitutional Commissions created by the country’s supreme law to implement and safeguard the exercise of the Filipinos’ right to suffrage, as an essential policy tool to uphold democracy and in the maintenance of the balance of political powers. This study aims to provide a descriptive analysis by presenting a trend analysis using selected election statistics collected and maintained by the Commission. Further, it gives some recommendations and ways forward that may be taken into consideration by the actors and stakeholders – that could serve as indispensable inputs necessary to maintain honest, orderly, and clean in the subsequent elections.

Keywords: suffrage, Constitution, trend analysis, democracy

Introduction

Elections in the Philippines have been held since 1935 and administered in a single nationwide ballot system. In this type of election process, each registered voter casts a direct vote, and winning candidates are determined by whoever got the highest number of votes, known as the “plurality-rule” electoral system. For this reason, the election has become an institutionalized contest for a public position, its outcome rest upon the voting public which expresses the people’s sovereign will. But regardless, the election serves as a venue for the country’s citizen to exercise their right to suffrage, a constitutionally-protected right since time immemorial. It is not just an opportunity to fill up vacancies in the State that will give winning candidates the right to rule but a vital mechanism to use the State’s various powers to promote the welfare of the people.

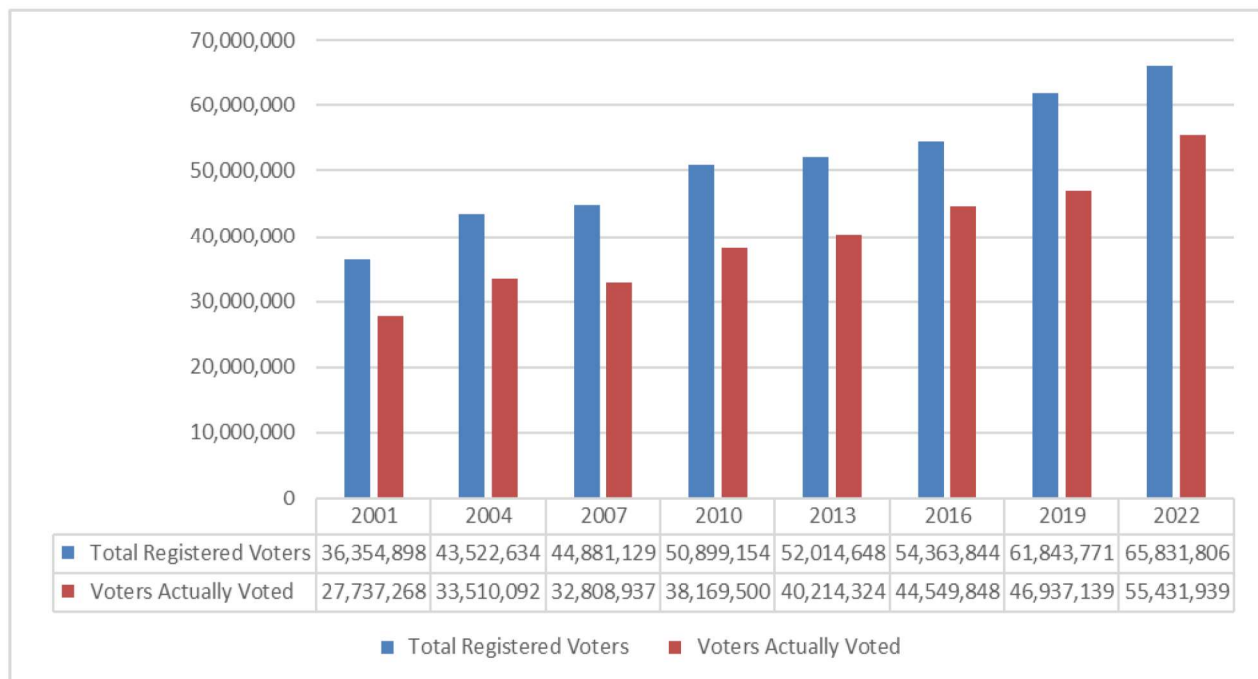
A necessary by-product of elections is the data and information gathered and generated before and after its conduct. Primarily, the Commission of Elections acts as the lead databank of the various election statistics and records, which serve as necessary inputs for the Commission in its different election-related policies and other election related-matters such as planning and logistics. Aside from its internal use, election statistics are widely-used outside the confinements of the Commission, especially in research and media (i.e., news). On the other hand, this report intends to use some selected election statistics to present a trend analysis – the purpose is to show the significant role of these numbers in the preservation of honest, orderly, and safe elections, not just in the recently concluded 2022 national election, but on the next elections.

Trend Analysis of Selected Statistics

Registration

For an individual to take part in the election, they must register. However, this is not mandatory but is self-initiated by the voter, meaning registration is done in person. Over the years, the Commission has done a series of campaigns to encourage Filipino to register and vote. Moreover, special facilities have been provided by the Commission for those going abroad for employment to register before they leave the country. Overseas Foreign Workers (OFWs) may apply for certification of their registration for overseas absentee voting.

Figure 1. Total Registered Voters and Voters Voted: 2001 to 2022



It seems that elections have become a particular essential activity for every Filipino over the years, as implied by Figure 1, wherein the increasing number of registered voters only tells that more and more Filipinos have allotted a portion of their time to go to a city or municipal Election Officer's offices or mobile registration offices to register. Among the numbers, the 2001 (+7.1 million) and 2022 (+3.9 million) elections have recorded a significant increase in registration. Likewise, voters turnout has also been significantly increasing, but still, there are registered voters who have failed to vote.

Some literature signifies that election has an impact on economic growth. In the first place, this should be the true purpose of the election – that is, to select leaders that will steer the economy thru effective and efficient policymaking, such as crafting social legislation and economic policies (i.e., business and labor laws). Citing Moricz and Sjöholm (2014), the presence of better governance is assumed to have higher growth. But the question is? Could more Filipinos who opted to vote lead to better governance? In the Transparency International's *2019 Corruption*

*Perception Index (CPI)*¹a report, the Philippines ranked 113th (out of 180 countries) with a corruption perception index score of 34, wherein in the said year, the voters' turnout was 75.90 percent. In the same year, the country also posted a 5.9 percent annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate, which is slower than recorded in the previous year's 6.2 percent.

Better governance starts from the voter himself – they should register with honesty and good faith so their vote will form part of the sovereign will that will advocate for better governance. The Commission has launched a series of initiatives to promote honest elections over the years.

Voting precincts

Pursuant to COMELEC Resolution No. 10724, to prevent disenfranchisement of voters in the country, Project of Precincts (POPs) are established across regions, with which the purpose is to provide correct names and addresses of voting centers so that registered voters can freely, conveniently and safely exercise their right to vote on election day. The precincts are uniformly or evenly clustered to ensure voters are fairly distributed among the clustered precincts.

Figure 2. Number of Established and Clustered Precincts: 2007 to 2022

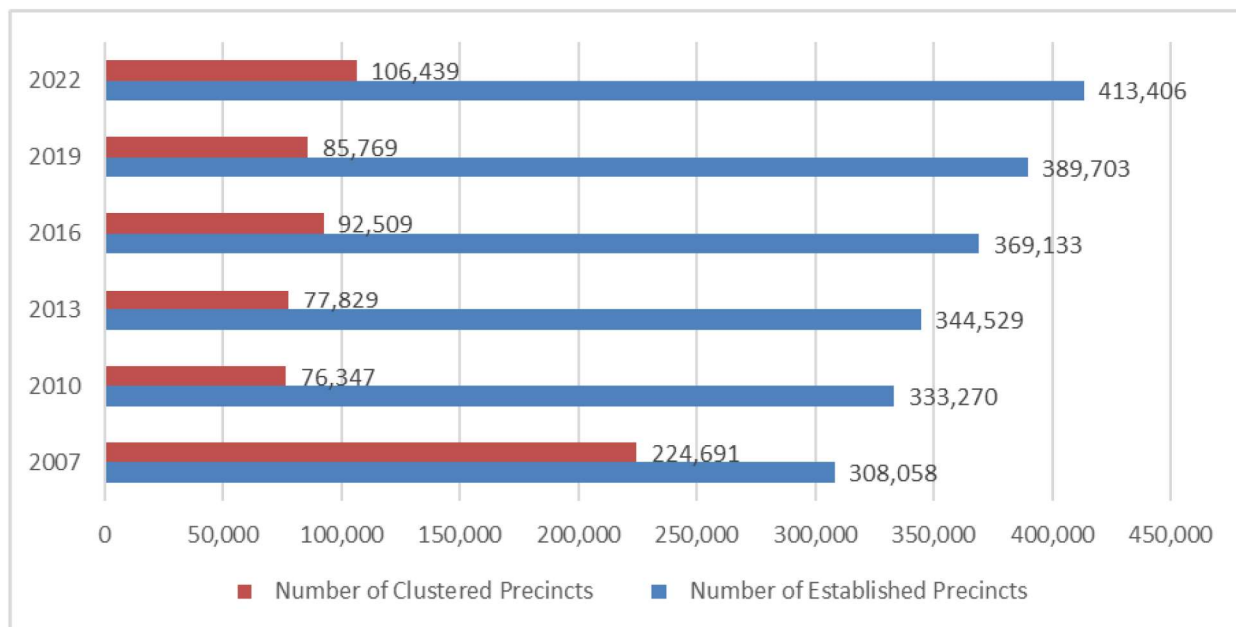


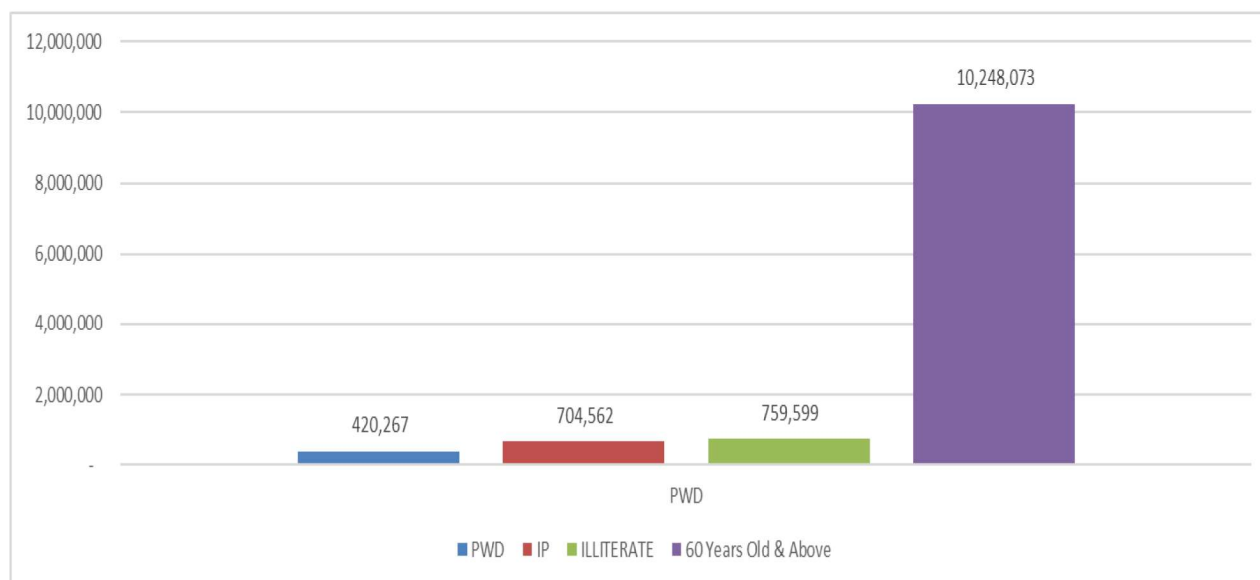
Figure 2 presents data on the voting precincts, which are classified into clustered and established precincts. The said figure illustrates that over the years, the number of established precincts steadily increased, as well as the number of clustered precincts. Overall, the apparent trend the data intends to imply is that as the number of registered voters increases, voting precincts correspondingly increase.

It should be noted that there are special precincts established exclusively for persons with disabilities and senior citizens. According to RA 10366, the law authorizes the Commission to establish precincts for the abovementioned demographic segment to exercise their right to vote

¹ The CPI is the most widely used global corruption ranking in the world. According to experts and business people, it measures how corrupt each country's public sector is perceived to be.

in elections. In the recently concluded election, 420,267 and 10.2 million registered PWD and Senior Citizens voters, respectively (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Registration Statistics on Vulnerable Sectors: 2022



The passage on the right to suffrage in the Constitution does not qualify who is allowed and not allowed to vote – it is framed non-discriminatorily. A person, educated or not, may register to vote. More than half a million of them registered for the 2022 election. Meanwhile, voters who are members of the indigenous sector posted almost the same number of registered voters as the latter (Figure 3).

National and Local Election

During national elections, voters can elect a President, the head of State and chief executive, and Vice-President. And at the same time, voters may elect 12 senators, who have six-year terms and may not serve for more than two consecutive terms, where this rule does not apply to the President and Vice-President.

Table 1. Number of Candidates for Presidential, Vice-Presidential, and Senatorial Positions: 2001 to 2022

	2001	2004	2007	2010	2013	2016	2019	2022
President	-	5	-	9	-	6	-	10
Vice-President	-	4	-	8	-	6	-	9
Senator	36	48	37	61	33	50	62	63

It is apparent in Table 1 the increasing number of candidates aspiring to become the country's chief executive and vice-president, and the same is true for the senatorial positions. However,

one observation that can be derived from the said table is that more individuals are vying to secure a senatorial seat during presidential elections.

At the local level, voters elect congressman/congresswoman and party-list representative, aside from electing local elective officials (governor, vice-governor, mayor, vice-mayor and councilors). The former are elected for legislative districts apportioned based on the population of the provinces and cities this position will represent in the House of Representatives (HOR), wherein 20 percent of the seats are allotted for the party-list representatives. Both positions serve for three years and may be elected for three consecutive terms.

Table 2. Number of Candidates for House of Representatives, Party-list Representatives, and Local Officials in Cities and Municipalities (vs.Number of Seats): 2001 to 2022

	2001	2004	2007	2010	2013	2016	2019	2022
House of Representative	668 (209)	649 (212)	700 (219)	801 (229)	630 (234)	634 (238)	623 (245)	688 (253)
Party-list Representative	162 (53)	66 (53)	93 (54)	187 (57)	123 (58)	115 (59)	134 (61)	177 (63)
Governor	244 (79)	284 (79)	239 (81)	801 (80)	630 (80)	634 (59)	623 (61)	688 (63)
Vice-Governor	238 (79)	227 (79)	203 (81)	241 (80)	191 (80)	206 (81)	183 (81)	218 (81)
Board Member	2,002 (742)	2,107 (756)	1,788 (770)	2,041 (766)	1,755 (766)	1,813 (776)	1,715 (780)	1,884 (782)
City/Municipal Mayor	4,256 (1,609)	4,256 (1,615)	4,108 (1,628)	4,534 (1,634)	3,923 (1,634)	4,158 (1,634)	3,963 (16,34)	4,300 (1,634)
City/Municipal Vice-Mayor	4,332 (1,609)	4,306 (1,615)	4,005 (1,628)	4,337 (1,634)	3,823 (1,634)	3,796 (1,634)	3,592 (1,634)	3,819 (1,634)
City/Municipal Councilor	40,632 (13,320)	38,274 (13,290)	35,131 (13,414)	37,758 (13,502)	33,704 (13,530)	33,737 (13,540)	32,931 (13,544)	34,852 (13,558)

As observed in Table 2, the number of candidates vying for a seat in the legislative branch is gradually increasing, as well as the number of candidates for the local chief executive (governor and mayor). The opposite is observed in the number of council and board members candidates, whereas a decreasing trend is observed. This trend could possibly be attributed to the fact that these candidates, when successfully elected in the said positions, aim to run for a higher position in the next election.

Barangay Elections

Table 3. Number of Barangays and Candidates per Elective Position (Candidates vs. Number of Seats): 2007 to 2018

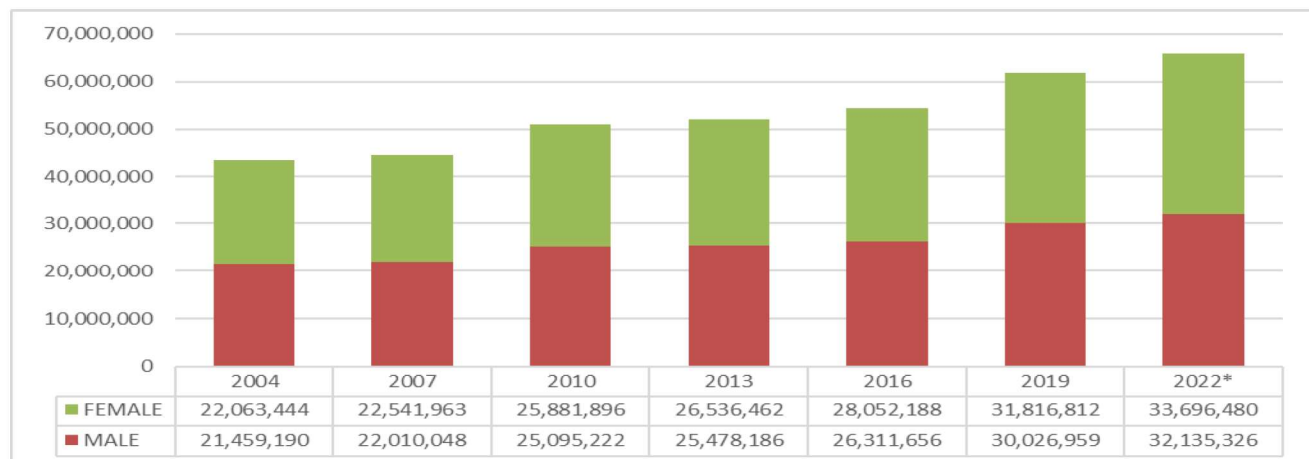
	2007	2010	2013 ¹	2018
Number of Barangays	41,995	42,025	42,028	42,044
Punong Barangay	105,376 (41,995)	96,621 (42,025)	94,834 (42,028)	91,786 (42,044)
Barangay Kagawad	775,520 (293,965)	757,947 (294,175)	723,864 (294,196)	663,771 (294,308)
SK Chairman	98,183 (41,995)	87,290 (42,025)	-	87,091 (42,044)
SK Kagawad	392,613 (293,965)	437,584 (294,175)	-	350,720 (294,308)

Note: 1/ The SK election was postponed

Table 3 depicts the decreasing number of candidates for Punong Barangay and Barangay Kagawad over the past four Barangay Elections, which is evident in the number of SK Chairman and SK Kagawad. The introduction of various reforms for the youth council by the Congress has caused the postponement of the administration SK election in 2013, mainly on introducing a new provision that will allow the barangay council to use a portion of SK fund for youth development program. This reform has introduced by Republic Act No. 10742² In 2016.

Women's Participation

Figure 4. Number of Registered Voters by Sex: 2004 to 2022

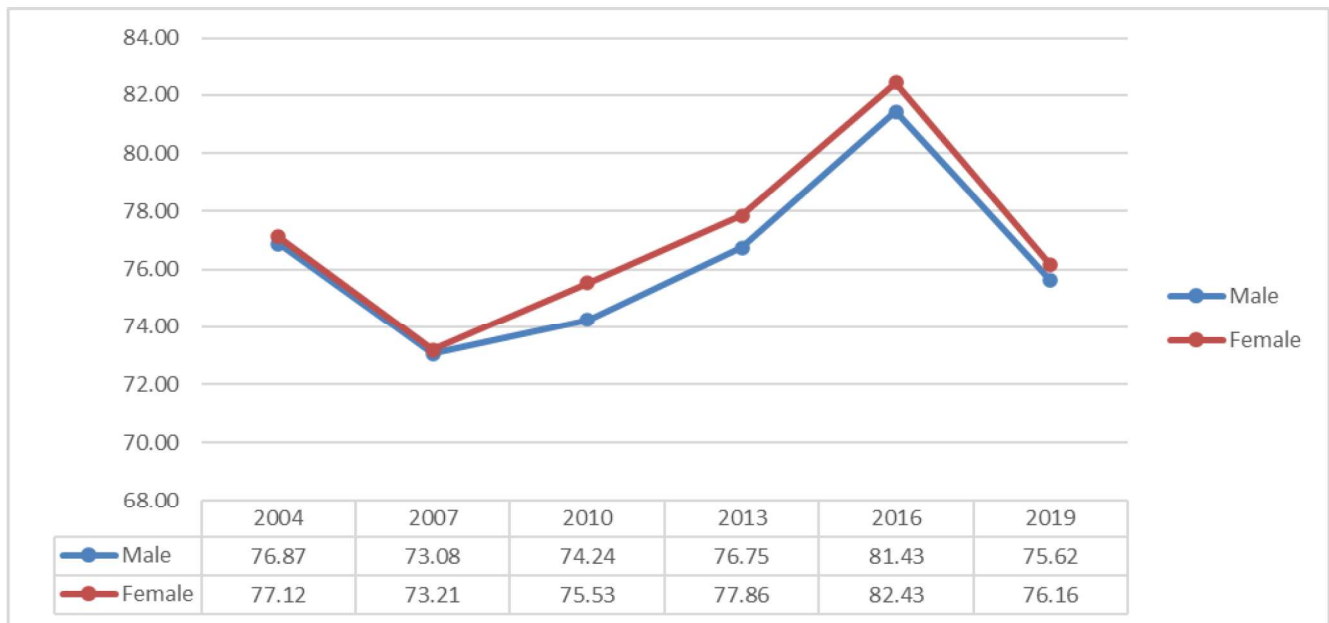


Depicted in Figure 4 is the number of registered voters disaggregated by sex. It is observed that the number of female registered voters steadily increases, indicative of the trend that more

²An Act Establishing Reforms In The Sangguniang Kabataan Creating Enabling Mechanisms For Meaningful Youth Participation In Nation-Building, and For Other Purposes

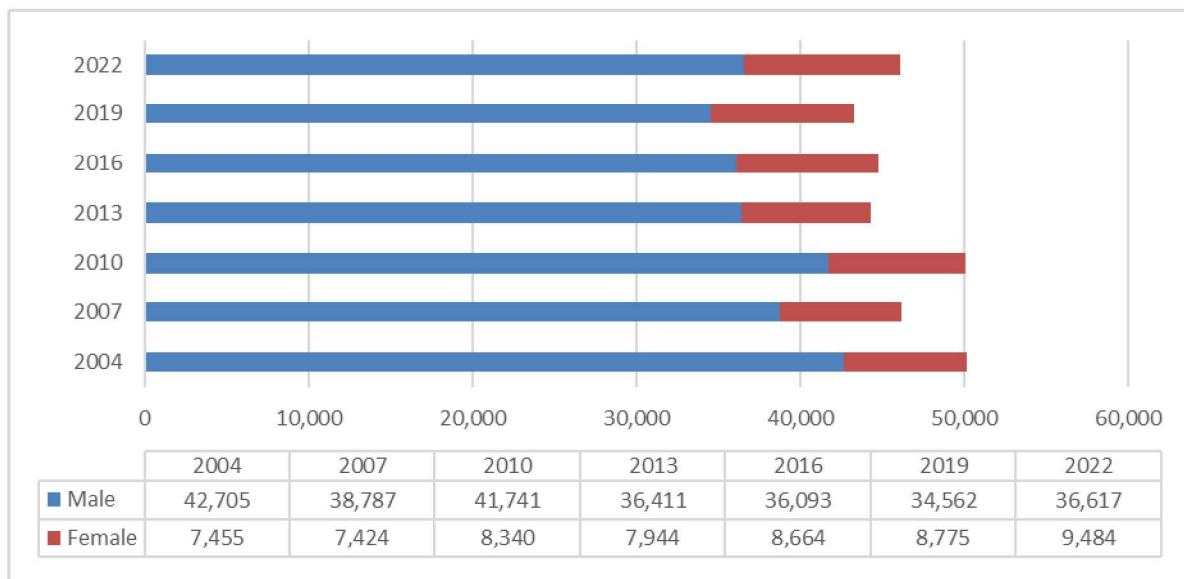
females are inclined to participate in elections every year than males. In terms of voters turnout between sexes, more females have voted than males (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Voters Turnout by Sex: 2004 to 2019



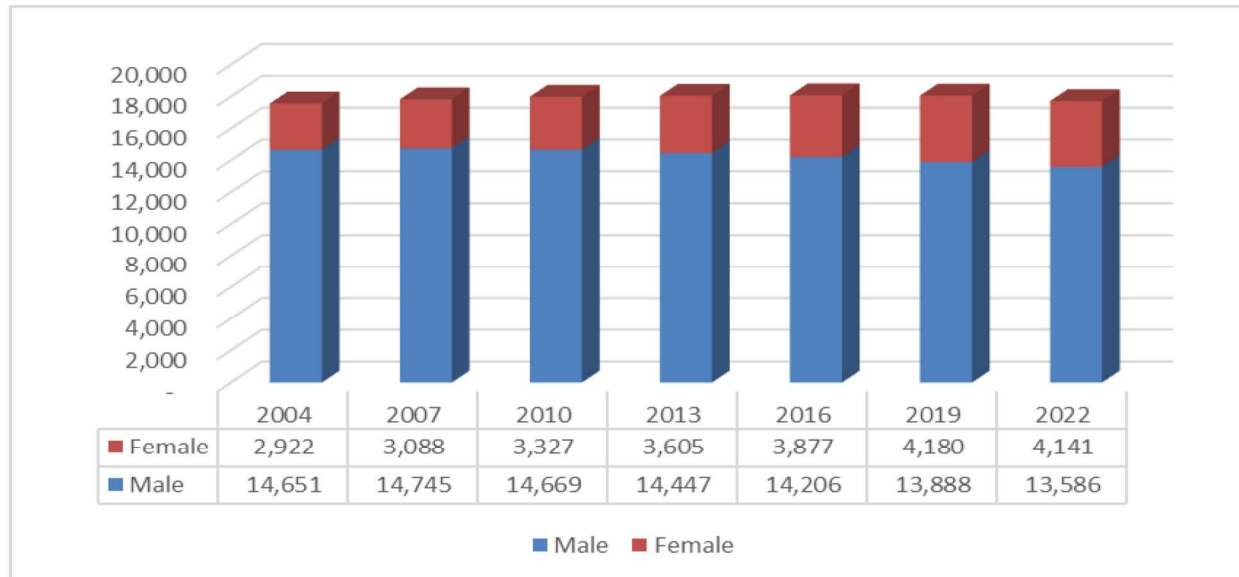
However, examining the statistics on candidates, it seems that males dominate this. Looking at Figure 6, more males filed their certificate of candidacy than females, and this trend is consistent in every election. Thus, more males have been elected to various national and local elective positions (Figure 7).

Figure 6. Number of Candidates by Sex: 2004 to 2022



Further, because of the trend observed in the preceding figure, thus, the outcome is that more males have been elected to various national and local elective positions, as presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Number of Elected Candidates by Sex: 2004 to 2022



Quoting the article by Encinas-Franco (2021), "since 2019, women have compromised 28 percent of the House of Representatives and 29 percent of the Senate, slightly higher than the 2020 worldwide average of 25.5 percent." Nonetheless, several landmark legislations in the Philippines have been proposed by women legislators, such as the Violence Against Women and their Children Act (VAWC) and Magna Carta for Women, authored by former Senators Loi Ejercito-Estrada and Jamby Madrigal, respectively.

Conclusion

The statistics presented reflect the Filipinos' high regard for the primordial value of the election. Every year, more and more Filipinos have allowed their precious time, despite their busy schedule to go out from the comfort of their home to come to various election precincts to register and eventually vote during elections. No wonder these statistics indicate that citizens in the country believe in our electoral system – one that is honest, orderly, and safe. Indeed, the election is an instrument by the State that gives its citizen the implicit power to participate in policymaking indirectly.

Though most of them legislative and local governments are occupied mainly by males, as evidenced by the statistics pertaining to women's participation in legislation and local governance. With this, it should be high time for women to have increased visibility in the political arena so that more women-centered legislative measures could be proposed along the way. And it is good to note that our Constitution recognizes the role of women in nation-building and the role of the State to craft laws which recognize the fundamental equality of men and

women, in which the best possible way that this could be done is for women to step up and normalize women leadership in policymaking.

Ways Forward

Upon examination of the various election statistics, the following are suggestions that may be considered by the government to further improve elections in the Philippines:

1. Institutionalization/Establishment of governance statistics or indicators that could serve as metrics to measure the contribution and outcome of an election in national development;
2. Continue to build partnerships and linkages with the private sector on using their various facilities and establishments as venues for voters registration;
3. Harness the benefits of digitalization to increase further the awareness of Filipinos on the election and other related activities such as conducting webinars and posting infographics on social media sites; and
4. Creation of an "election research unit" that will undertake studies and research in all areas of election

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