

Voting behavior in Asian democracies: A comprehensive synthesis of contemporary research

Perilaku memilih pada negara-negara demokrasi di Asia: Sebuah sintesis komprehensif penelitian kontemporer

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Abstract

This article aims to systematically review the literature on voting behavior in Asian democracies, particularly in the post-Cold War era, to consolidate fragmented insights and to gain a strong understanding about existing scholarships and political development after the third wave of democratization in the region. Around 41 noteworthy publications from the Scopus database, published from 1990 to 2023, were analyzed by highlighting the diversity and limitations of conceptualizations, theoretical lens, and also methodological approaches to understand complexities and irregularities especially in the factors that influence voting behavior in Asian democracies. This study finds that voting behaviors in Asian democracies are shaped by a complex interplay of sociological, psychological, and rational, as well as institutional and structural factors. As political landscapes change, innovative electoral trends keep arise, and the region is politically and culturally heterogeneous, and maintaining an accurate and contextually based approach to reviewing voter behavior in Asia will remain fundamental for developing both academic discourse and also sensible democratic governance in the region.

Keywords: democratic consolidation; Asian democracies; electoral dynamics; political behavior; voting behavior

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk meninjau secara sistematis literatur mengenai perilaku memilih di negara-negara demokrasi Asia, khususnya pada era pasca-Perang Dingin, guna mengonsolidasikan wawasan yang masih terfragmentasi dan memahami secara lebih utuh perkembangan kajian serta dinamika politik setelah gelombang ketiga demokratisasi di kawasan ini. Sekitar 41 publikasi penting dari basis data Scopus, yang diterbitkan antara tahun 1990 hingga 2023, dianalisis dengan menyoroti keberagaman dan keterbatasan konseptualisasi, kerangka teoretis, serta pendekatan metodologis dalam memahami kompleksitas dan ketidakaturan, terutama terkait faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi perilaku memilih di demokrasi Asia. Studi ini menemukan bahwa perilaku memilih di demokrasi Asia dibentuk oleh interaksi yang kompleks antara faktor-faktor sosiologis, psikologis, rasional, serta faktor kelembagaan dan struktural. Seiring berubahnya lanskap politik, munculnya tren elektoral yang inovatif, dan heterogenitas politik serta budaya kawasan ini, pendekatan yang akurat dan berbasis konteks untuk meninjau perilaku pemilih di Asia akan tetap menjadi landasan penting bagi pengembangan diskursus akademik maupun tata kelola demokrasi yang berkesinambungan di kawasan.

Kata kunci: konsolidasi demokrasi; demokrasi Asia; dinamika elektoral; perilaku politik; perilaku pemilih

Introduction

Voting behavior has become an increasingly important area of study in political science as it has a big influence on democratic processes and election outcomes. A thorough grasp of voting patterns contributes to the creation of successful political policies, which enhances democratic participation and political system stability (Prats & Meunier 2021). Many countries have exposed distinctive voting

patterns, demonstrating how socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors influence electoral choices (Antunes 2010, Satriadi et al. 2021, Kulachai et al. 2023). Voter behavior is difficult to understand because preferences can change suddenly due to changes in societal factors, media influence, and political dynamics (Antunes 2008, 2010).

Voting behavior is a dynamic phenomenon. Individual electoral decisions are influenced by a variety of factors, involving party loyalty, candidate evaluation, demographic characteristics, and outside encouragements such as media campaigns and money politics (Made & Kang 1990, Potters et al. 1997, Javaid & Elahi 2020, Cunow et al. 2021). Research often pays attention on rational decision-making models in developed democracies, where voters evaluate candidates based on their performance records and policies. However, voting behavior is more erratic in emerging democracies, particularly in Asia, where populist rhetoric, identity politics, patronage network, and the media's increasing influence are also becoming more influential (Liddle & Mujani 2007, Hirsch-Hoefler et al. 2010, Riezebos et al. 2011, Biswas et al. 2014, Kumar et al. 2021, Salim 2022, Sajid et al. 2024).

This changing political landscape has led to unpredictable voter preferences, creating significant challenges for both policymakers and political analysts. Although there has been extensive research on voting behavior, the literature is dispersed, with studies focusing on diverse features such as sociological aspects like religion, ethnicity, and primordialism (Berelson et al. 1954, Lazarsfeld et al. 1968), psychosocial reasons such as candidate personality and emotional appeal (Campbell et al. 1960), and rational assessments like policy preferences and performance assessments, where voters seek to maximize their utility (Downs 1957, Fiorina 1981). This discrepancy highlights a research weakness because existing studies often fail to incorporate these diverse factors into a cohesive framework. For synthesizing divergent understanding of the factors influencing electoral decisions, this study aims to carefully assess the literature on voting behavior in modern Asian democracies.

In this context, understanding Asian democracies in the post-Cold War era is crucial and relevant as they characterize diverse political, historical, and sociocultural contexts that are different from the Western-centric democratic paradigm. After the third wave of democratization in 1990s, Asian democracies have developed and adapted to different cultural and developmental contexts, as proven by the miscellaneous democratic resilience of nations like Thailand, the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, India, and Indonesia (Bunbongkarn 1997, Heller 2000, Berlucchi & Hino 2022). Asian democracies have developed in distinctive ways, balancing democratic governance with local wisdom, economic necessities, and geopolitical environments, contrasting to many post-Cold War democracies that occurred as a result of external stimuluses or brisk political transitions (Al-Haj 2015, Masuda & Yudhistira 2020).

To get an in-depth understanding of Asian democracies, the study uses a methodical literature review approach. The main theoretical frameworks and empirical information relevant to Asian voting behavior are outlined in this paper. It also synthesizes existing research, based on methodological, theoretical, and empirical approaches to comprehensively understanding Asian countries, particularly for underlining the crucial factors influencing voter preferences and their effects. This study emphasizes how crucial it is to understand how voters behave in Asian democracies in order to promote long-term democratic advancement and enable more inclusive, well-informed electoral procedures.

Research Method

This study examines researches on voting behavior using the systematic review methodology explained by Tranfield et al. (2003). Three essential steps make up the systematic review process, namely planning, carrying out, and sharing the review (Supriharyanti & Sukoco 2022, Yudhoyono et al. 2024). Every step includes painstaking procedures to ensure a thorough and rigorous analysis, producing reliable and significant results. The specific steps for identifying and selecting relevant studies are outlined in the following sections.

Table 1.
Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Source type	Academic journals that have undergone a peer-review process	All other sources
Article type	Conducting empirical evaluations of voting behavior	Not conducting empirical evaluations of voting behavior
Language	English	All other languages
Search parameter	Contain search string keywords in the title, abstract and keywords	Not contain search keywords in the title, abstract and keywords
Relevance	Focusing primarily on the topic of voting behavior	Focusing primarily on the topic of voting behavior

Source: Analyzed by authors

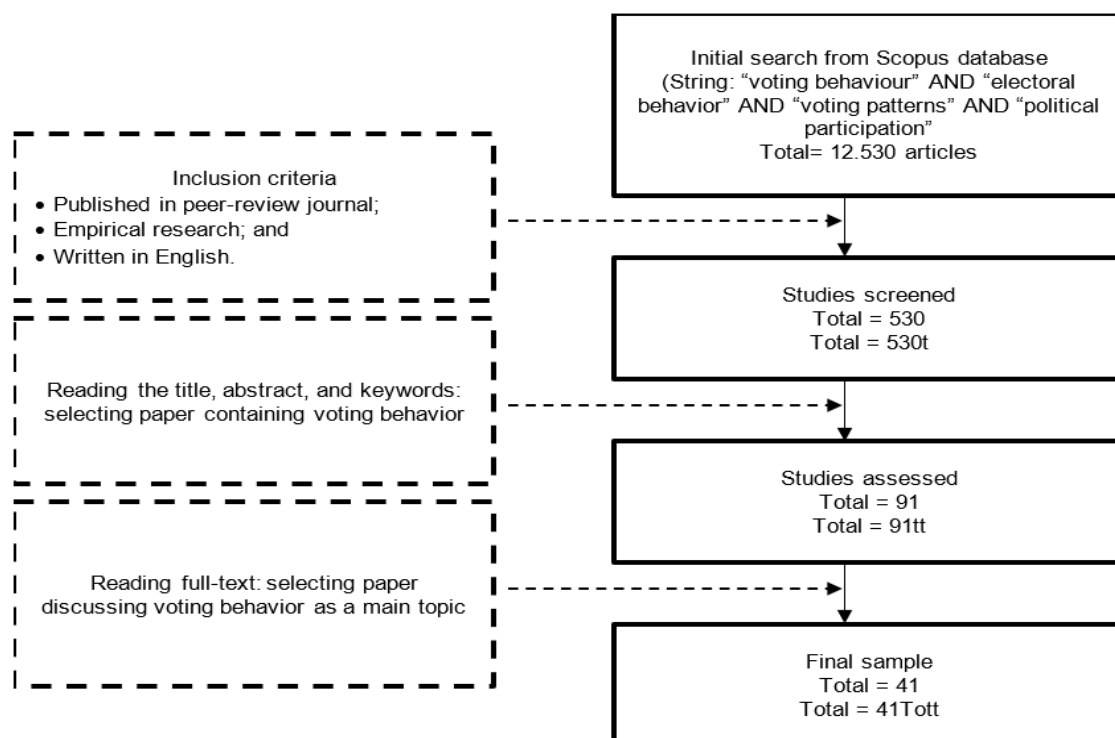


Figure 1.

Search and selection protocol

Source: Analyzed by authors based on Transfield's procedure

This study aims to examine the literature on voting behavior in order to bring disparate ideas together, provide a comprehensive viewpoint, and identify important research gaps that will guide future investigations. In order to achieve this goal, the study poses two main research questions. According to the empirical research that is currently available, the first research question (RQ1) asks what are the main factors influencing voting behavior and what are their effects. The second research question (RQ2) inquires what prospects exist for further research to improve and broaden the current understanding of voting behavior.

This study utilized the Scopus database for its extensive and reliable search capabilities, to identify relevant studies. The database was retrieved through the Padjajaran University's library in October 2024. A systematic search strategy was developed to ensure the inclusion of a broad range of studies related to voting behavior from 1990 to 2023, indicating the evolving Asian democracies in the post-Cold War era. A combination of core keywords was used to maximize the inclusivity of the search: "voting behavior," "voter behavior," "electoral behavior," "political behavior," "voting patterns," and "political participation." This strategy allowed for a detailed search across various aspects of voting behavior. The initial search found 12,530 articles in potentially relevant studies on the topic. The articles were filtered through some inclusion criteria: they must be published in peer-reviewed journals, present empirical research, and be written in English. This process reduced the results to 530 articles. After examining the titles, abstracts, and keywords of these studies, 91 were recognized as relevant to the research focus. A full-text examination was further piloted to assess eligibility, and, ultimately, 41 studies were selected for inclusion in the final review. Table 1 illustrates the inclusion and exclusion criteria, while Figure 1 outlines the search and selection process.

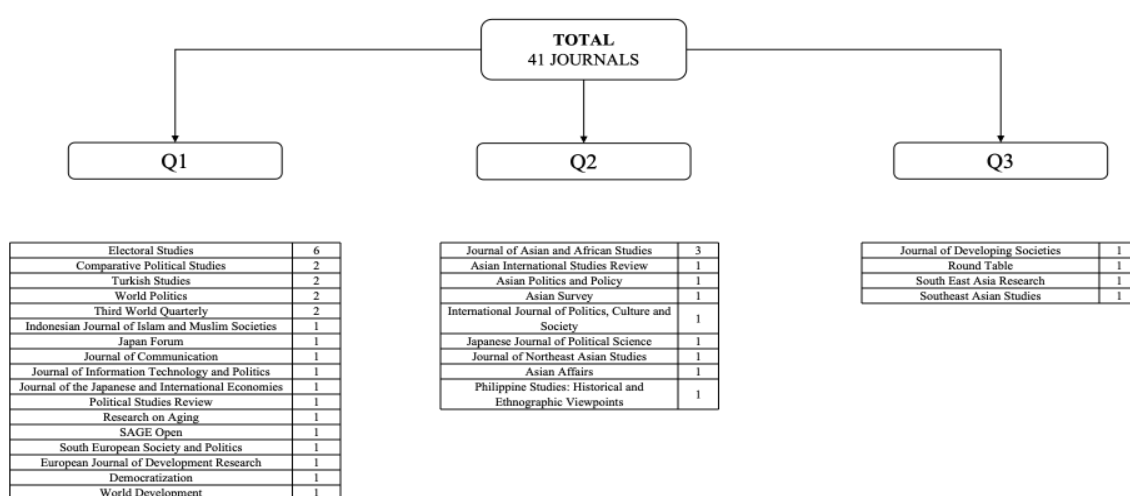


Figure 2.

List of journals

Source: Compiled by authors

The quality of the selected studies was systematically assessed using the Scopus journal ranking system, a widely recognized and frequently employed metric in systematic literature reviews (SLRs) within the field of political science. Scopus was chosen due to its extensive indexation of high-impact and reputable academic publications. This ranking system categorizes journals into four quartiles based on their citation impact relative to other journals within the same discipline. A substantial proportion of the studies included in this review were published in top-tier academic outlets, with 26 studies (63.4%) appearing in Quartile 1 (Q1), signifying the highest level of scholarly quality. An additional 12 studies (29.3%) were published in Quartile 2 (Q2), while four studies (7.3%) were featured in Quartile 3 (Q3). A comprehensive summary of the journal distribution is provided in Figure 2.

The process of extracting data from the 41 chosen studies involved the methodical gathering of key information such as authorship, title, publication year, journal source, theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, country of study, and important factors influencing voting behavior. The authors ran data extraction independently to guarantee objectivity and reduce any probable biases. All data were carefully recorded in an Excel spreadsheet to increase inter-reviewer reliability. Furthermore, supplementary sessions were done to combine the gathered information into an extensive master file, which allowed for a watchful analysis of new tendencies and understandings in the results.

Results and Discussion

This part delivers summary of the assessed literature along with the synthesized study findings. The findings and results of the study are divided into several sub-chapters, including: (1) a multifaceted lens of voting behavior in Asian democracies; (2) theoretical lens; (3) methodological lens; (4) antecedents and consequences of voting behavior in Asian democracies; (5) future empirical, theoretical, and methodological directions.

A Multifaceted lens of voting behavior in Asian democracies

Voting behavior in Asian democracies has been widely studied by social and political researchers from various perspectives. They offer a dynamic and complex political landscape shaped by a range of historical, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts. Asian democracies have developed through unique paths that balance democratic governance with indigenous customs, economic necessities, and geopolitical experiences, in contrast to Western democracies that typically follow a linear path based on individual rights, institutional stability, and liberal democratic principles (Wade & Kang 1990, Sheaffer & Weimann 2005, Sheaffer et al. 2011, Al Haj 2015, Wong et al. 2019, Kagitani & Harimaya 2020). Asian democracy is an adaptive process impacted by regional factors and historical legacies, rather than adhering to a single model (Kam et al. 1999, Al Haj 2015, Thompson 2016a, 2016b, Berlucchi & Hino 2022).

The development of Asian democracies is also influenced by economic modernisation, nation-building following independence, and post-colonial dynamics. In contrast to the well-developed democratic traditions in many Western countries, Asian democracies have experienced consolidations, reversals, and transitions, demonstrating the region's dynamic and fluid political governance. For instance, Japan magnificently integrated Western parliamentary democracy into its preexisting political culture after adopting its 1947 Constitution (Mizoguchi 2010). Although Japan has implemented democratic institutions, bureaucratic governance and consensus-building are still highly valued in its deeply entrenched Confucian administrative traditions (Kabashima & Reed 2001, Jou & Endo 2016, Berlucchi & Hino 2022). Similarly, since its independence in 1947, India, the largest democracy in the world, has maintained a robust electoral system. India's democracy has sustained despite its vast ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity as well as socioeconomic disparities due to its federal structure, institutional resilience, and deeply rooted political pluralism (Heller 2000).

Meanwhile Taiwan and South Korea have successfully transitioned to democracy following periods of authoritarian rule. Both nations transitioned to democratic governance in the latter half of the 20th century as a result of economic modernisation, civil society activism, and growing demands for political freedom (Tsai & Chao 2008, Kim & Roh 2019). These examples show how democratisation in Asia has often been intertwined with social transformations and economic progress, rather than stemming solely from ideological commitments to liberal democracy.

While many Western democracies prioritise political liberalization as a prerequisite for economic development, some Asian nations have pursued economic growth as a foundation for political stability. In contrast to rapid political liberalization, the concept of "Asian values," which gained reputation in the 1990s, places a higher priority on social harmony, economic prosperity, and strong governance (Sobari 2016). In Singapore's quasi-democratic system, regular elections are held, but political competition is negligible. Mutalib (2000) argued that the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) has safeguarded its governance model by emphasizing economic efficiency, social stability, and a meritocratic system over the adversarial nature of Western-style democracy.

Furthermore, in multiethnic societies such as Malaysia and Indonesia, democratic institutions have had to strike a equilibrium between religious and cultural pluralism and national unity. Islamic influences and local governance systems have impacted Indonesia's democratic development, and subsequently

were more influential in Suharto's 1998 authoritarian transition to a decentralized democratic system (Ong 2010, Sobari 2016, Masuda & Yudhistira 2020, Warburton et al. 2021, Hicken et al. 2022). On the other hand, Bhutan offers a distinctive approach that blends democracy with the Buddhist notion of Gross National Happiness (GNH), ensuring that political governance aligns with cultural values and sustainable development principles (Givel 2015).

Contrasting to Western nations, which often operate within long-standing alliances, Asian democracies must navigate challenging regional security issues, territorial disputes, and shifting great-power rivalries. For instance, the Philippines has witnessed a reversal of democracy under Rodrigo Duterte, with populism and strongman politics coexisting with democratic institutions (Thompson 2016a, 2016b). Similarly, Thailand has experienced periods of both democratic progress and military intervention, highlighting the fragility of regional democratic consolidation (Bunbongkarn 1997, Thompson 2016a). Due to the adaptability and flexibility, Asia is a crucial component in defining contemporary democratic trends worldwide since democracy there is still a dynamic, context-driven process rather than a one-size-fits-all system.

Theoretical lens

While the complex interactions between psychological (Campbell et al. 1960), sociological (Berelson et al. 1954, Lazarsfeld et al. 1968), and rational theories (Downs 1957, Fiorina 1981) typically prevail in Western democracies, elections in Asian countries are often impacted by ethnic, religious, and communal identities (Liddle & Mujani 2007, Al Haj 2015, Sobari 2016, Masuda & Yudhistira 2020). These elements are essential where political affiliations frequently coincide with shared identities. In Malaysia, there is a strong correlation between voting behavior and ethnicity, where Malay-Muslims primarily support UMNO and PAS, while Chinese and Indian voters incline to support other parties. In India, caste and religion still have a substantial effect, and parties intentionally exploit these aspects to gain support (Heller 2000, Ong 2010, Welsh 2014).

In addition, psychosocial factors underscoring the prominence of a candidate's personality, charismatic leadership, personalistic politics and emotional resonance also have a substantial impact on voters' preferences (Antunes 2010, Mahsud & Amin 2020, Anand & Reddy 2024). In the Philippines for instance, leaders like Rodrigo Duterte or Ferdinand Marcos Jr. won elections by using personality-driven politics, strongman rhetoric or populist appeal rather than substantive policy proposals (Claudio 2022, Estranero 2022). Meanwhile Thaksin Shinawatra in Thailand have also used similar tactics of welfare populism and direct involvement to win over a large number of supporters (Thompson 2016b). In South Korea, public sentiment and emotional reactions to political crises frequently influence voters' political inclinations, as proven by Moon Jae-in's climb to power after Park Geun-hye's impeachment (Hahm & Heo 2020, Lee & Lee 2024).

Despite these factors, Asian voters also use logical calculations of the public policies, government's performances, state's economic performance, governance efficacy, and policy outcomes to choose their political preferences (McGann 2016, Dowding 2017). The politically literate voters habitually evaluate the advantages or disadvantages of political parties and candidates before electing those who will best serve their interests (Becker 2023). It commonly happens in Taiwan and Hong Kong where people usually focus on political parties' policy preferences related to China. The domination of Liberal Democratic Party (自由民主党, Jiyū-Minshutō) in Japan's political landscape is also mostly recognized as to its ability to sustain economic stability (Tsai & Chao 2008, Ho et al. 2013, Tsai 2017, Wong et al. 2019). Despite limited political dynamics, Singaporean voters also value pragmatism over populist rhetoric and evaluate parties according to their capacity and capability to achieve better economy and provide high-quality public services (Mutalib 2000, Oliver & Ostwald 2018).

However, voting behavior in Asian democracies is also generally influenced by internal political dynamics, in which incumbents' strategic use of power, patronage networks, clientelism, vote-buying and money politics have a big impact on political outcomes. Studies on electoral competitions in Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and also Malaysia uncover how these factors limit voter independence and create political distortions for substantive democratic development (Bunbongkarn 1997, Thompson 2016b, Canare et al. 2018, Hicken et al. 2022).

Furthermore, the concentration of power among ruling elites, the strategic use of state resources, gerrymandering and also the use of military interventions in certain countries like in Cambodia, Myanmar and also Thailand, may limit political competition, constrain institutional structures on election outcomes and also resist democratic consolidation (Bunbongkar 1997, McCargo 2005, Stokke & Aung 2020).

Methodological lens

Current research on Asian voting behavior has used both quantitative and qualitative methods, showcasing a diversity of analytical techniques. Of the 41 reviewed papers, 21 (51.2%) employed quantitative methods based on surveys, regression analysis and causality assessments. Twelve studies (29.3%) combined qualitative methods, mostly comparative and descriptive narrative analysis. The remaining studies combined qualitative and quantitative frameworks in mixed-methods approaches to better comprehend voting behavior.

Related to units of analysis, around 38 of the 41 (95.0%) were conducted at the single-country level, showing a solid concentration on national electoral dynamics. Notably, around six studies (14.63%) was elaborated on Indonesia, five studies (12.20%) subject to Japan, followed by the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan (each with four studies, or 9.76%). Philippines and Turkey each contributed three studies (7.32%), while other countries like Bhutan, India, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Pakistan, Myanmar, and Cambodia were each assessed in a single study (2.44%). Additionally, two studies (4.88%) adopted a comparative, multi-country approach, analyzing cases such as Hong Kong-Taiwan and the Philippines-Thailand.

Antecedents and consequences of voting behaviour in Asian democracies

Antecedents of voting behaviour in Asian democracies

To synthesize the empirical evidence on the factors influencing Asian voting behavior, drawing insights from these studies, various antecedents and consequences of voting behavior in Asian democracies have been systematically categorized into thematic and sub-thematic classifications, as presented in Figure 3. This structured synthesis is directed to improve understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of voting behavior in Asia.

Based on Figure 3, voting behavior in Asian democracies is induced by a wide range of antecedents or the factors shaping electoral choices. A deeper understanding of the processes influencing behaviors and societal trends is made possible by analyzing antecedents to make theoretical models and empirical research more accurate. Voters in Asia operate within a political environment substantially influenced by communal affiliations, leadership personalities, pragmatic policy considerations, and systemic power structures (Choi 2019, McCargo 2005, Liddle & Mujani 2007, Sohn & Kang 2012). The antecedents underscore the complex and dynamic characteristics of democratic participation in the region which are consisted of various aspects such as identity and social structures, candidate perception and emotional appeals, policy preferences and performance evaluation, electoral systems and political structures, and also money politics and incumbent power.

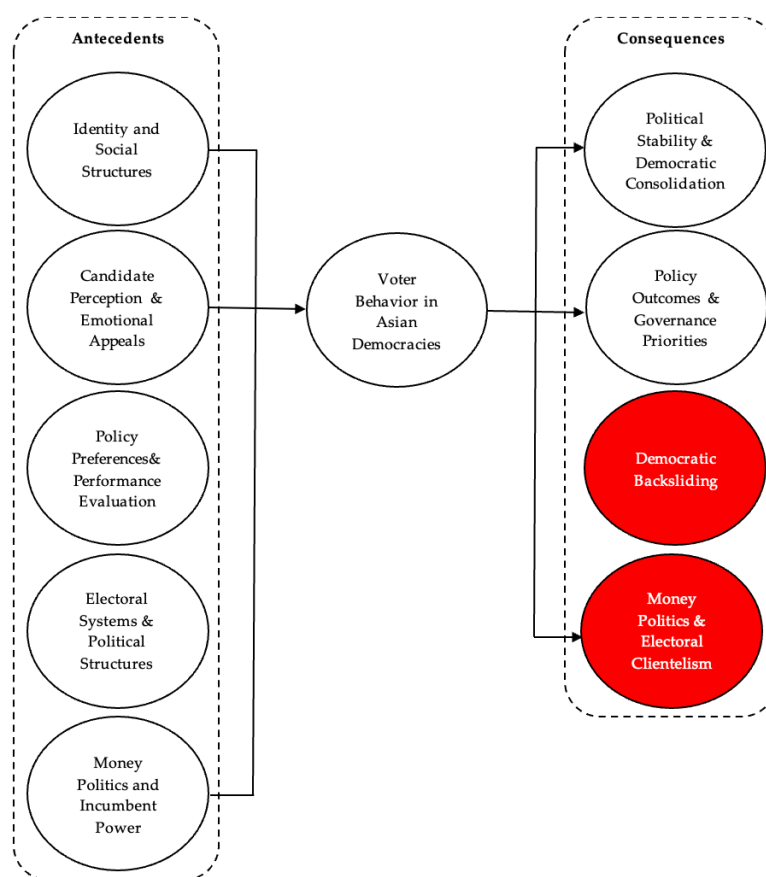


Figure 3.

Conceptual framework of antecedents and consequences of voting behavior in Asian democracies

Source: Analyzed by authors

Table 2 provides a more detailed explanation regarding the various sub-themes of antecedents identified based on clusters of major antecedents and consequence themes previously examined. In general, as the essential antecedents, sociological factors are a noteworthy basis of voting behavior especially in social environments where ethnic, religious, and familial ties strongly determine political alliances. Ethnic-based voting is a recognized occurrence in Malaysia characterized by communal divisions, where the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), and the Democratic Action Party (DAP) have historically represented the Malay, Chinese, and Indian communities, respectively (Ong 2010). Caste-based mobilization in India also plays a crucial role in shaping electoral outcomes. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has appealed the lower-caste communities demonstrating the tenacious influence of social stratification on political preferences (Heller 2000). Regional identities in Indonesia, especially in Aceh where local parties address specific cultural and religious sentiments, to some extent also play significant political roles (Liddle & Mujani 2007, Sobari 2016, Masuda & Yudhistira 2020, Warburton et al. 2021, Salim 2022).

Meanwhile religious affiliations and identity are also closely linked to governance. In Pakistan, electoral politics are primarily influenced by Islamic political ideologies, with parties like Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) engaging voters through religious sentiment (Sajid et al. 2024). Strong participation of Islamic organizations and religious leaders in national or local elections in Indonesia is also another evident (Masuda & Yudhistira 2020). The Catholic Church's position on public moral and ethical matters related to divorce, reproductive health and corruption is also strongly influential in the Philippines' politics (Cartagenas 2010, Thompson, 2016b).

Table 2.
Antecedents and consequences of voting behavior in Asia

	Theme	Subtheme
Antecedents	Identity and Social Structures	Ethnicity and Communal Identity
		Religion and Political Mobilization
		Familial and Social Networks
	Candidate Perception and Emotional Appeals	Candidate Personality and Charisma
		Emotional and Populist Appeals
	Policy Preferences and Performance Evaluation	Economic Performance and Government Effectiveness
		Issue-Based Voting and Policy Preferences
Consequences	Electoral Systems and Political Structures	Electoral Rules and Voting Mechanisms
		Political Party Structures
	Money Politics and Incumbent Power	Money Politics
		Patronage Networks
		Incumbent Advantage and State Control
	Political Stability and Democratic Consolidation	Strengthening Democratic Norms
		Electoral Volatility and Shifting Power
		Stable Party Dominance
		Endurance of Political Dynasties
Consequences	Policy Outcomes and Governance Priorities	Populist Policies and Welfare Programs
		Identity-Based Policy Making
		Pragmatic and Economic-Driven Policies
	Democratic Backsliding	Political Fragmentation and Coalition Instability
		Rise of Authoritarian Populism
		Electoral Manipulation
		Incumbency and State Control Over Elections
	The Persistence of Money Politics and Electoral Clientelism	Vote-Buying and Transactional Elections
		Weakening of Political Accountability

Source: Analyzed by authors

Meanwhile religious affiliations and identity are also closely linked to governance. In Pakistan, electoral politics are primarily influenced by Islamic political ideologies, with parties like Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) engaging voters through religious sentiment (Sajid et al. 2024). Strong participation of Islamic organizations and religious leaders in national or local elections in Indonesia is also another evident (Masuda & Yudhistira 2020). The Catholic Church's position on public moral and ethical matters related to divorce, reproductive health and corruption is also strongly influential in the Philippines' politics (Cartagenas 2010, Thompson 2016b).

Furthermore, psychological factors exemplified to communal ties, candidates' emotional resonance and perception, leadership charisma and individual image play a significant political role (Lupia & McCubbins 1998, Nai & Maier 2016). Rodrigo Duterte's strongman persona and tough-on-crime rhetoric resonated with voters pursuing decisive leadership in the Philippines (Thompson 2016b). Thaksin Shinawatra's

populist economic programs and direct outreach to rural and working-class communities demonstrated strong personalistic leadership in Thailand (Thompson 2016b). Similarly, Indonesia's 2014 and 2019 presidential election demonstrated both Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and Prabowo Subianto leveraging nationalist rhetoric and patriotic sentiments to consolidate electoral support (Salim 2022).

Rational decision-making based on policy preferences and governance performance is also a crucial determinant in more urbanized and economically developed democracies. Voters' perception on incumbent leaders' capability to deliver growth, employment, and development determine public political preferences like in Japan (Berlucchi & Hino 2022) and also Taiwan (Tsai 2008, Huang & Wang 2014, Tsai 2017). Rational decision-making is also becoming more popular among younger and urban voters in South Korea and Singapore strongly concerning about employment, social welfare, gender equality, labor rights, housing affordability and living expenses (Wade & Kang 1990, Mutalib 2000).

Meanwhile, institutional factors such as electoral systems and the use of state influence also play fundamental roles to shape Asian voter preferences. In Malaysia, UMNO have historically profited from Malaysia's first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system. In Indonesia, the proportional representation system nurtures a fragmented coalition in a multiparty system. In Singapore, the People's Action Party (PAP) has created a strictly regulated electoral environment inhibiting opposition parties to challenge its dominance (Mutalib 2000). For preserving its electoral dominance in Cambodia, Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has also purposefully suppressed opposition (McCargo 2005). In Thailand, military-backed governments have protected elite-dominated governance by using constitutional amendments to limit the opposition forces (Bunbongkarn 1997).

In addition, structural factors such as patronage, monetary politics, and the power of incumbents have a major impact on electoral behavior. In countries where political rivalry is fueled by clientelist transactions, vote-buying and patronage are well-established. Material incentives and direct financial transfers are commonly used in Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia to keep voters loyal and to win votes, particularly in local elections (Canare et al. 2018, Hicken et al. 2022).

As opposed to the ideologically-driven voting patterns found in many Western democracies, traditional communal ties, charismatic leadership, pragmatic policy preferences, and structural constraints often play a role in Asian elections (McCargo 2005, Liddle & Mujani 2007, Sobari 2016, Thompson 2016a, Tsai 2017). The development of election processes shows that democratic engagement in Asia does not follow a standard trajectory but rather adapts to unique political, economic, and cultural dynamics of each country. Voting patterns in Asian democracies also produce a wide range of results that affect governance, policy preferences, political stability and democratic integrity. Because different political cultures and institutional structures produce distinct patterns of electoral participation and democratic evolution, the outcomes of voting behavior are not constant. Gaining a deeper thoughtful of the Asian democratic development and election behavior needs an understanding of these antecedents.

Consequences of voting behavior in Asian democracies

One big effect is that it affects the stability of politics and the outcome of elections. In some democracies, voters' preferences match up with long-standing political structures, which keeps one party in power for a long time. In competitive democracies like South Korea, Taiwan, and Indonesia, voters often evaluate their leaders and hold new elections when they are unhappy with how the economy is being run or with corruption. Voter choices affect policy priorities forcing governments to evaluate and promote new missions and platforms to meet the voters' needs and maximum utilities (Heller 2000, Thompson 2016b). Where rational voting prevails, policies tend to focus on economic growth and governance effectiveness (Mutalib 2000). Therefore, the consequences of the voting behavior range across political stability, democratic consolidation, impactful policy outcome, and governance well-performance, and,

in the opposite way, also creating democratic regression, political fragmentation and electoral ironies (Ong 2010, Sohn & Kang 2013, Thompson 2016b, Tsai 2017, Choi 2019, Kim & Roh 2019, Stokke & Aung 2020, Warburton et al. 2021).

The trajectory of democracy in Asia is also profoundly shaped by voting behavior, with both democratic consolidation and democratic backsliding occurring across different contexts. Where voters prioritize accountability and institutional integrity, democracy has consolidated, as seen in South Korea and Taiwan's relatively stable electoral transitions (Cheng & Lin 1999, Jhee & Park 2019). However, in many countries, electoral manipulation, vote-buying, and patronage networks undermine democratic resilience and limit democratic competition (McCargo 2005, Sobari 2016, Canare et al. 2018, Hicken et al. 2022). In some cases, voter preferences for strong leadership and nationalist rhetoric have led to the rise of authoritarian populism increasing centralization of power (Kalaycioglu 2015, Thompson 2016a, Kayaoglu 2017, Hazama 2021).

Another consequence of voting behaviors in Asian democracies is the reinforcement of political dynasties, incumbent power structures, misuse of state resources and control electoral processes to maintain dominance (Al Haj 2015, Stokke & Aung 2020, Sajid et al. 2024). These situations thus undermine democratic integrity by sustaining the dominance of electoral clientelism, money politics, and unfair elections. Vote-buying is still a common practice in some Asian countries influencing election outcomes with short-term financial inducements rather than long-term policy discussions (Canare et al. 2018, Hicken et al. 2022). The long-term development of democratic institutions is usually obstructed when voters prioritize short-term material gains over democratic accountability, which makes political reforms more difficult. In general, voting behavior has wide-ranging consequences on governance, electoral stability, and democratic legitimacy in Asian democracies. Voter participation has frequently strengthened democratic norms and accountability, but in other cases, it has made electoral fraud, populist governance, and the breakdown of institutions easier.

Future empirical, theoretical, and methodological directions

Analyzing voting patterns in Asian democracies presents chances for further empirical researches, particularly for filling in gaps related to theoretical foundations, causes, and consequences of political decision-making. Further scholarly study could advance understanding of the complex interplay of sociocultural, psychological, rational, institutional, and structural factors given Asia's diverse contexts.

Current studies on Asian voting behavior most likely depend on well-known Western electoral theories, but it is still debatable whether these models are applicable in various political contexts. Regional diversities signify the need for more context-specific theoretical frameworks. To make sure that conventional electoral theories correctly reflect local dynamics, future research must experimentally observe how specific factors affect Asian voting behavior. Our understanding of voting behavior under different types of regimes will be also enhanced by comparative studies on electoral paradoxes like the coexistence of democratic institutions with elite dominance or the continuation of semi-authoritarian leadership within electoral frameworks happening in many countries.

Second, more in-depth empirical research is needed to understand the factors that affect contemporary voting behavior. While previous research has extensively examined race, religion, and economic success, leadership perception, institutional trust, and digital political activity need stronger attention. The rise of social media-driven political mobilization, changes in voting patterns across generations, the impact of authoritarian resilience, and also the influence of civil liberties, media regulation, and electoral management on voting behavior must be explored deeper. Further research into how technological advancements influence voting behavior and political persuasion in hybrid political systems is necessary due to the rising use of big data and AI-driven electoral techniques.

Thirdly, empirical research on the consequences of election choices in Asian democracies is also still limited. The short and long-term effects of voting behavior on policy formation, governance stability, and democratic consolidation require to be investigated. Furthermore, empirical research should assess the effects of voter disenfranchisement, populist governance, and election manipulation on democratic legitimacy inhibiting some degrees of political freedom and electoral integrity. Given the developing global discourse on democratic backsliding, understanding how voting behavior affects democratic resilience or erosion in Asia is crucial for thorough comparative electoral studies. To deeper Asian electoral studies, empirical research must modify to changing political environments and trends like populism, digital campaigning, or even institutional manipulation.

The intricacies of Asian voting behavior necessitate a great deal of scholarly research into broader theoretical frameworks. While recent electoral theories offer valuable insights, they are less so in their pertinence to Asia's diverse political contexts as they often fail to address the hybrid dynamics of authoritarian and democratic influences, the influence of political patronage, and the persistence of identity-based voting behaviors. In order to better reflect the unique political, economic, and governance dynamics, future research should progress and elucidate theories of voting behavior.

Future theoretical studies also should investigate further who controls the electoral system, how political elites exercise control over democratic process, and how voting behavior is influenced by political power structures. In many cases, these concerns are still insufficient and out of step with the realities of Asian democracies requiring a more complex and all-encompassing approach.

The integration of multi-theory frameworks combining models of electoral behavior, governance theory, and political-economic theory is also a promising avenue for further study to understand how the quality of governance affects voters' opinions of democracy or how shifting economic conditions influence election outcomes. Future research should look into how the politico-economic and governance factors in countries with political unpredictability, unstable leadership, widespread corruption, social media-driven electoral mobilization, digital political participation, foreign influence and also state control over elections establish a vital area for theoretical advancement. The multi-theory approach may fill in the gaps in contemporary studies given the complex interrelationships between electoral integrity, governance quality, and economic development; a multi-theory approach is anticipated to offer a clearer foundation for understanding the long-term evolution of voting behavior in Asia.

The study of Asian voting behavior provides an opportunity for more sophisticated methodological approaches to advance the breadth and depth of electoral research in the region. Even though recent research provides valuable insights, more longitudinal studies, comparative case studies, and mixed-methods approaches are still required to fully comprehend the changing dynamics of voter decision-making. Future research should progress our understanding of Asian voting behavior by using a variety of methodological frameworks involving both macro and micro-level analyses expanding geographically and applying innovative research designs.

Future methodological approaches should also be directed to investigate individual-level political engagement, socialization, exposure to political information, electoral trends, generational shifts, and the long-term impacts of political events. Furthermore, future research should look into voting behavior at both the national and local levels to evaluate the influence of regional disparities, urbanization, and digital political mobilization on electoral outcomes.

Second, mixed-methods research offers a promising opportunity for enhancing the voting behavior studies by combining quantitative analysis with qualitative approaches. Current studies rely on either survey-based statistical approaches or qualitative political discourse analysis. Integrating both approaches within a single study would provide a richer and more holistic perspective allowing researchers to

explore more complex electoral questions, validate findings through multiple data sources, and generate both explanatory and exploratory insights into voting behavior. By employing both large-scale statistical models and in-depth case studies, researchers can cross-validate data and information, identify electoral patterns and develop more vigorous theoretical structures.

Third, comparative case studies would also significantly enrich the field. While much of the literature is based on single case study, there is a necessity for greater empirical research on lesser-studied democracies and hybrid regimes in South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia and also the Middle East, where, to some extent, democratic processes intersect with varying degrees of authoritarian influence, political instability, and religious mobilization. Research in this area will be more theoretically complex, empirically supported, and pertinent to the current discussion on Asian democracy and governance when methodological objectivity is improved.

Conclusion

This study finds that voting behavior in Asia democracies is intensely influenced by a complex interplay of sociological, psychological, rational, institutional, and structural factors, highlighting the region's unique and dynamic and context-dependent democratic paths which is also ever-changing due to historical legacies, cultural traditions, economic concerns, and also geopolitical factors, in contrast to Western democracies where ideological alignment and issue-based voting predominate. As a consequence, established elite dominance, relatively weak political institutions, and structural restrictions on electoral competition have been the driving forces behind political stagnation, democratic regression, and electoral manipulation in a number of Asian democracies, which has led to a decline in democratic integrity and governance effectiveness.

Some limitations of this study include the absence of meta-analysis of empirical data. Besides, although Scopus is a reputable resource, but it may not include all relevant literature, particularly related to country-specific in Asia. In addition, only English-language sources were analyzed in the review, leaving out potentially significant studies written in other Asian languages such as Indonesian or Malay, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, and others. Therefore, future research should incorporate a variety of data sources and empirical validation based on multilingual investigations.

Furthermore, to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of voting behavior across different political systems, future research should include mixed-methods approaches, comparative case studies, and longitudinal analyses to address the unique political issues facing the region. Future research also should focus on areas exhibiting distinct political, historical, and cultural factors in Asia. In addition, enhancing methodological rigor would guarantee that studies in this area continue to be theoretically complex, empirically supported, and pertinent to the current discussion of democracy and governance in Asia. By doing so, we could provide more adequate political overview and also future prediction about political stability, security and development in Asia.

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