

## **Celebrity Politics: Correlates of Voting for Celebrities in Philippine Presidential Elections**

**Clarissa C. David**

University of the Philippines Diliman

**Jenna Mae L. Atun**

Ateneo de Manila University

### **ABSTRACT**

It is common in the Philippines for celebrities in entertainment, news, and sports to run for public office and win, even with little experience in political life and limited education. The preponderance of celebrities in politics is often identified in the public discourse as a problem with important implications on national policy. This paper examines empirical correlates of voter preference for celebrity Presidential candidates with data from a nationally-representative survey. It finds support for the hypotheses that the likelihood of voting for celebrity candidates for President and Vice President is associated with education, television exposure, and residence in the capital city. The findings are discussed in the context of political knowledge and its role in shaping voter preferences.

*Keywords:* Television, celebrity politics, entertainment politics, vote choice, voter preference

The Philippine political scene is heavily populated by television and film celebrities such as former news anchors, basketball players, television personalities, and film actors. Out of twenty-four Senators in Congress this year, four used to be film or television actors, one was formerly a news anchor and two are married to the country's most popular show business personalities. In 1998 the Presidential election was won by a film actor made famous by his roles in action movies, and in 2004 the Vice Presidential election was won by a former news anchor known for a tabloid weekend television magazine program. In 2007, there were allegations that Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo only won the Presidency because of electoral fraud committed against rival Fernando Poe, Jr. who garnered votes from half of the electorate. Poe was a film actor and high school dropout who never held public

office and had no significant administrative experience. These examples are drawn only from races for national offices, but there are dozens more holding local elective offices across the country. Show business pervades politics even beyond the election of media entertainers in the Philippines. Popular actors, singers, and sports celebrities are hired by politicians during elections to campaign for them, appearing in television ads, campaign rallies, and posters as official endorsers. Entertainment and politics are very closely intertwined in the Philippines, yet little local empirical work has been done to examine how this relationship works and persists.

Research on the factors that influence vote choice is limited in Philippine literature. Most of the published research is comprised of political economy analyses, case studies that document the extent of celebrity and dynastic presence in elective offices, or reflective essays that argue for how the preponderance of celebrity in Philippine politics is problematic and is a symptom of an uninformed electorate. There have been no systematic studies that offer predictive models of voter choice using a large nationally-representative sample of the Philippine population. While the phenomenon of celebrity politicians is not peculiar to this country, its pervasiveness throughout all levels of government likely is, providing a unique opportunity to examine predictors of celebrity voting. There are popular explanations for why Filipinos habitually prefer celebrities with little qualification to run a public office over highly educated politicians with decades of experience. One of the reasons most commonly cited in the national media is the electorate's "disillusionment with traditional politicians" (Vitug, 2004) which then results in resistance to electing public officials with greater experience. Another related reason is the wide reach of free television and cheap movies, offering a slew of alternatives to the traditional politician. The exposure that celebrities get through media has even been targeted for regulation by the Commission on Elections through a provision in the Fair Elections Act that requires media personalities running for elective public office to resign or take a leave of absence from their media employers. Finally, education and social class are believed to be the main segmenting factors that determine a person's likelihood of voting for an entertainer. About a third of the Philippine population is poor, and it is this segment that is often identified as the most important voting bloc, one that is large enough to elect a high school dropout with no public service experience into Presidential office. However, there is little empirical evidence to support any of these claims. At best, basic vote distributions by education and social class released by opinion polling companies reveal small advantages of entertainers over non-entertainers in elections.

This study is the first to examine a large national survey of vote choice for media celebrities seeking national elective office. It is set against the campaign season leading up to the 2010 elections, with three media celebrities running for either President or Vice President, together with a number of Senators. We hypothesize that the preference for media celebrities is associated with media use, education, social class, exposure to political information, and residence around the capital city where the seat of government is located. This investigation attempts to contribute to understanding the relationship between media celebrity and vote choice. A specific agenda for further research is offered to use more precise measures and elaborate on the mechanisms through which deterministic factors influence vote choice among the electorate. This study contributes to the theoretical knowledge about voter decision-making, the understanding of the impact of celebrity status on vote choice, and knowledge about associations between general societal features such as educational and social cleavages and the perpetuation of “entertainment politics” in some countries.

## **PREDICTORS OF VOTE CHOICE**

Globally, there are highly sophisticated models that focus on conditions and elaborate predictions of associations between voter characteristics and vote choice. The assumption is that voters try to make the basis for their decision as simple as possible, depending on a variety of heuristic cues in selecting their candidate of choice (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Lupia, 1994; Mondack & Huckfeldt, 2006).

More politically involved citizens use issue-based voting, conditional on whether those issues are considered personally salient (Belanger & Meguid, 2008). Depending on level of certainty about their choice of candidate, voters in congressional elections have been found to base their vote on ideology, exposure to an intense election campaign, and level of knowledge about the candidates (Basinger & Lavine, 2005). Further, they find that when partisanship is low, voters are more likely to rely on issues, or their assessment of how the sitting president is doing, to determine their candidate preference.

Exposure to informative media coverage of politics has been empirically illustrated to influence attitudes about candidates and vote choice (e.g., Benoit & Hansen, 2004). In particular there is sufficient historical evidence that seeing informational political advertisements can affect candidate evaluations, among other attitudes

(Valentino, Hutchings, & Williams, 2004). Assessments of character (i.e., integrity and competence) are consequential to one's overall positive evaluation of a candidate (Mondack & Huckfeldt, 2006). Specifically, character becomes more important when partisanship and information availability is weak, both of which are true for the Philippines (Quimpo, 2007).

### **CELEBRITY IN POLITICS AND CELEBRITIES IN POLITICS**

Much of the literature on the role of celebrity in politics can be traced back to the increasingly important role that media plays in elections and news. That the more prominent role of media in politics leads to a "dumbing down" of electoral decision-making has been argued for some time (Marsh, t'Hart, & Tindall, 2010; Van Zoonen, 2006). Meyer and Gamson (1995; McKernan, 2011) believe that having celebrities in politics highlights a more personal and dramatic style of public discourse. Not all scholars agree that the involvement of celebrities in politics necessarily signals a demise of deliberative debate (Street, 2004), as some think that the presence of celebrities in the political world has the potential of "reinvigorating democratic politics" (Marsh et al., 2010, p. 332). The study of celebrity in politics has attracted interest in different countries (for review, see Marsh et al., 2010). Still, while the literature points to academic interest in researching this phenomenon, systematic empirical research is typically not available (Marsh et al., 2010).

Celebrity endorsements of politicians can influence agreement with political positions, make disagreeing statements less disagreeable (Jackson & Darrow, 2005), or affect assessments of candidate viability in an electoral race (Pease & Brewer, 2008). A study of the impact of celebrity on campaigns (Payne, Hanlon, & Twomey, 2007) in the 2004 U.S. presidential elections predicts that celebrity and entertainment will increasingly become important particularly for the youth bloc. Many such studies, however, make claims based not on nationally-representative data but on individual cases, candidates, or elections.

Celebrity is "the attribution of glamour or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere" (Rojek, 2001, p. 10). It is described in anthropological literature as being based on affective rationality (Hughes-Freeland, 2007), whereby individuals feel closeness and affinity for others who exist at a distance but whose presence in everyday life is constant through the media. It is problematized because celebrity is a source of power, whether by entertainers, politicians, sports figures or centers of scandal; the basis of this power is through the affective rationality of the many

(Marshall, 1997). Celebrities are argued to be creations of culture, and the worship of celebrity to be based on emotion, irrationality, and sentiment. McKernan's (2011) review of the literature on celebrity in politics concludes that in much of the conceptual work published, celebrity carries an assumption that such status is a result not of individual achievement but of the "construction of a public personality" (p.192). Talent, skill, or accomplishment, therefore, need not be the bases for celebrity, although of course being a celebrity does not necessarily mean that one is lacking in any of these.

There are broad classifications of celebrity in politics, one simple example being that of Street's (2004). First are politicians who become celebrities by engaging popular culture to promote their existing political functions and goals. Second are celebrities who turn politicians, those whose main profession is entertainment and who use their celebrity status to influence the political realm through issue or candidate advocacies, claiming "the right to represent people and causes" (Street, 2004, p.439) without necessarily seeking elected office. While both kinds are present in the Philippines, the more prevalent phenomenon of celebrity in politics is the kind introduced to the research literature by Mukherjee (2004): the celebrities or entertainers who become politicians either by appointed or elected offices and who have an official capacity in governance.

Celebrities aspiring to be politicians can have an advantage going into an election, the clearest of which is basic name recall or familiarity with a broad spectrum of voters (Zwarun & Torey, 2011). Additionally, they have been found in other countries to be able to use their identities as "political outsiders" and market themselves as the better, cleaner, newer alternative to often-entrenched politicians (Marsh et al., 2010; Mukherjee, 2004). Media's preference for the more famous candidates creates an even more lopsided playing field as celebrities get more television airtime and newspaper column inches during a campaign, fueled by public fascination (West & Orman, 2003) and general media logic (van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe, & Fiers, 2008).

Some studies have suggested that electorates may be more amenable to "alternative" politicians, such as celebrities, when the levels of trust in the existing corps of politicians are low (e.g., Hautamaki & Karto, 2006). In these situations where large swaths of the public are disillusioned, voters are more open to political outsiders. Others have also suggested that the mechanism at play may be parasocial interaction (Centeno, 2010), where individual voters feel a personal relationship and close affinity to political candidates who are playing a media-created role, although the quality of evidence for this is suspect.

Zwarun and Torrey (2011) argue that voting for celebrities is likely a result of peripheral processing. This mechanism is part of the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) which outlines two forms of information processing, central and peripheral. Central processing signals a more deliberate and motivated thought-process where the person exposed to a message will think about it in a very involved manner. It leads to more lasting behavior and opinion change than peripheral processing. In peripheral processing people rely more on heuristics or shortcuts when making opinions and decisions, such as the attractiveness of a speaker in a message, or the production value of a television advertisement. Additionally, when it comes to thinking (labeled *cognitive misers*, e.g., Lang, 2000), so given a chance they would take the easier route to processing. Following this logic, Zwarun and Torrey (2011) test the effect of high levels of need for cognition and of information on the likelihood of voting for a celebrity, but find that these do not lead to a significantly higher chance of selecting a media personality. They speculate then that selection of such candidates may in fact be a result of rational, deliberate, and informed decision-making.

In this paper we are able to test the effects of correlates of voter choice for celebrities. The direction of influence hypothesized between these factors and the likelihood of celebrity preference for vote choice is based on findings in the research literature reviewed above.

## **HYPOTHESES**

The literature on celebrity in politics and the influence of factors such as education on voter choice suggests that citizens' propensity to select entertainment personalities for elected public office would be associated with their levels of formal education and socio-economic class such that those who are less educated and have lower income would be more likely to vote for celebrities. In turn, variables such as access to political information, which for the vast majority of citizens is through television news, is hypothesized as related to vote choice. The following hypotheses will be tested:

H1: Those with more years of education will be less likely to vote for celebrities.

H2: Those with higher economic status will be less likely to vote for celebrities.

H3: Those living in the capital city (National Capital Region or NCR) will be less likely to vote for celebrities.

H4: Those who are more interested in elections will be less likely to vote for celebrities.

The relationship of television with voting for celebrities is complex since the status of celebrity is often gained through a candidate's appearance in TV and film, but often in the context of entertainment rather than news. News, on the other hand, is the main source of political knowledge. Thus, the following hypotheses related to TV will be tested:

H5: Those who watch less TV will be less likely to vote for celebrities.

H6: Those who watch more news on TV will be less likely to vote for celebrities.

Hypothesis tests are conducted using a national survey of young Filipinos who will have been of voting age by the time of the 2010 presidential elections.

## **METHOD**

### **Context Background**

Data were collected from January 26 to February 5, 2009, fifteen months before the 2010 Presidential election. Among those to be elected include the President, Vice President (not necessarily from the same political party), twelve nationally elected Senators, and local officials like Governors and Mayors. While the official date for filing of candidacy was months away, there were clear indicators in the media as to who were considering a run for the top national positions. These names were compiled and included in the survey questionnaire; all possible candidates were considered under the President and Vice President vote. The margin of error for national estimates is +/- 3%, while for subnational area estimates it is +/-6%.

The survey was commissioned by the campaign group of one sitting Senator who was considering a run for the Presidency or Vice Presidency. Data were collected by private market research firm TNS Incorporated. The questionnaire included questions designed to measure affinity toward candidates, evaluations of candidates, psychological characteristics, media use, attitudes about economic and social issues, and political discussion. Among the items were a series of trial heat questions about voting for President and Vice President.

### **Sample and Interview Procedure**

The survey included 1,500 respondents of only those ages 17-45 because of an interest in examining how well a particular candidate would do among the young. Multi-stage probability sampling was used to select sample spots nationally, specifically probability proportional to size for the selection of municipalities and barangays (smallest political unit), interval sampling to draw households, and simple random sampling for selection of the respondent to interview in the household. A quota of 50% female was imposed for the sampling design. The total sample was split by quota across four geographic areas (n=300 each), the greater metro area around the capital called National Capital Region (NCR), North Luzon, South Luzon (for purposes of this analysis North and South Luzon were combined), Visayas, and Mindanao in order of closest to farthest from the capital city of Manila.

The questionnaire was translated into four languages, including the official national language of Filipino. All interviews were conducted face-to-face by trained interviewers.

### **Measures**

*Vote for Celebrity.* Two trial heat questions were asked for President and Vice President and the same list of candidates was presented to respondents for both offices. Three candidates were classified as celebrities. First was Joseph Estrada who was a very popular action movie actor before entering politics. He was President between 1998 and 2001 when he was ousted through the second People Power after an impeachment trial failed. He was convicted of plunder in 2007. Second was Loren Legarda who was a TV news anchor and journalist before entering politics. Third was Noli de Castro, the incumbent Vice President at the time of the survey, who was formerly a newscaster and host of a weekly television magazine exposé program. Two versions of the dependent variable were computed. First, respondents scored 1 if they selected any of these three for President or Vice President. The resulting dummy variable is the main dependent variable (1=79%; 0=21%). Second, respondents scored 1 if they selected a celebrity for BOTH the President and Vice President positions. The resulting variable is the other dependent variable (1=25%; 0=75%).

*Education.* Respondents were asked what their highest educational attainment is. Ten categories were offered ranging from no formal education to postgraduate.

The original variable was recoded to have higher values for more years of education. Sixteen percent (16%) completed up to an elementary education, 48% have some high school or completed high school, 24% have vocational education or some years of college, 12% either finished college or obtained schooling beyond the college degree. In the regression models, the omitted category is the one with the lowest educational attainment (completed up to elementary education).

*Economic Status.* A simple measure of economic class was employed to categorize potential voters based on the area of residence and the construction of the house. For instance, respondents who live in a depressed slum community are placed in category E, while those living in gated communities are in category A. In rural areas, the material construction and size of houses together indicate status. For instance, homes built mostly with concrete would fall into the ABC category, while homes made mostly with soft materials and scavenged materials such as palm leaves and bamboo would fall under category E. Since there is a very small proportion of Filipinos in the wealthy categories of ABC, these are combined into one group ABC (8%), the large middle class is in category D (61%), and the poor are in category E (30%). In the regression models, the omitted group is ABC.

*Living in NCR.* Region or area of residence approximates proximity to the seat of politics and news, the capital city of Manila. The closest area is NCR (20%), followed by Luzon (40%), then Visayas (20%), and finally the southernmost cluster of islands Mindanao (20%). In the resulting regression equation the omitted category is Luzon.

*Interest in Elections.* Two variables were used to indicate general interest in the elections. The first asked about their general interest in the concept and system of elections. The response options in lowest to highest coded values were not at all interested (7%), slightly not interested (12%), neither interested nor not interested (27%), slightly interested (39%), very interested (15%). The second asked respondents how they get information about the elections. Thirty-four percent (34%) say they are only accidentally exposed to election information, another 34% report that they are sometimes accidentally exposed and sometimes actively seek out the information, and finally 32% say they actively seek election information.

*Exposure to TV.* Respondents were asked how many hours of television they watched during a typical day. Categories of response options were, don't watch TV (5%), less than an hour (7%), 1-2 hours (34%), 2-4 hours (28%), 4-6 hours (16%), 6-8 hours (7%), and more than 8 hours (4%). The variable was coded such that higher values indicate more television viewing.

*Exposure to TV news.* Separately from the question about television viewing in general, respondents were asked about their television news viewing. The response categories were less than an hour (36%), 1-2 hours (56%), more than 2 hours (4%), and do not watch television (5%). The variable was coded such that higher values indicate more television viewing. Another question asked respondents where they get their information about politics; 90% named TV as a source, and 10% named other sources.

*Controls.* A number of control variables were included in the final predictive model. These included urbanity (53% rural), sex (50% male), and a 15-item political engagement scale ( $\alpha=.83$ ,  $M=2$ ,  $SD=3$ , Range=0-15). Also included as controls are variables derived from respondents being asked what their source of information about elections were in a multiple response question. Eighty-four percent (84%) mentioned media, 2% mentioned celebrities, 56% mentioned members of their social networks (e.g., parents, neighbors, friends), and 30% mentioned leaders in their community (e.g., local politicians, church leaders, community leaders).

Table 1 provides a summary of the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the study.

**Table 1. Summary of the Descriptive Statistics of the Variables (N=1,500)**

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Dependent variables</i>				
Voter preference for celebrities for EITHER President or Vice President	.79	.41	0.00	1.00
Voter preference for celebrities for BOTH President and Vice President	.25	.43	0.00	1.00
<i>Socio-demographic variables</i>				
Male	.50	.50	0.00	1.00
Urban	.47	.50	0.00	1.00
Education				
Up to elementary*	.16	.36	0.00	1.00
High school	.48	.50	0.00	1.00
Vocational/College	.24	.43	0.00	1.00
College graduate and up	.12	.32	0.00	1.00
Economic class				
ABC*	.08	.27	0.00	1.00
D	.61	.49	0.00	1.00
E	.30	.46	0.00	1.00
Area				
Balance Luzon*	.40	.49	0.00	1.00
Visayas	.20	.40	0.00	1.00
Mindanao	.20	.40	0.00	1.00
National Capital Region (NCR)	.20	.40	0.00	1.00

**Table 1. Summary of the Descriptive Statistics of the Variables (N=1,500) (Cont'd.)**

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Exposure to TV and TV news</i>				
Amount of time spent watching TV	2.80	1.33	0.00	6.00
Amount of time spent watching news on TV	1.58	.64	0.00	3.00
TV as source of political news	.90	.30	0.00	1.00
Source of information on elections				
Media	.84	.37	0.00	1.00
Celebrity	.02	.14	0.00	1.00
Social Network	.56	.50	0.00	1.00
Source of info on elections: local leaders	.30	.46	0.00	1.00
Election-related information seeking	.99	.81	0.00	2.00
Interest in the concept and system of election	3.42	1.10	1.00	5.00
Index: Political engagement	1.96	2.69	0.00	15.00

*\*These variables are omitted in the logistic regression models.*

## Analysis

Bivariate relationships between the main dependent variable “voting for celebrity politicians” and the key independent variables were examined using cross tabulations to first examine basic associational evidence. Finally, two logistic regression models predicting voter preference for celebrities using two dichotomous dependent measures were estimated to examine simultaneous associational relationships.

## RESULTS

Two logistic regression models were run predicting celebrity voter preference for President OR Vice President, and predicting celebrity voter preference for both offices. The coefficients are reported in Table 2. The overall model yields a pseudo- $R^2$  of 14% (Nagelkerke) for voting celebrity for either offices, and 9% for picking celebrities for both offices. The models include demographic variables, measures of exposure to television and television news, sources of information on elections, and interest in the elections.

**Table 2. Results of Logistic Regressions Predicting Voter Preference for Celebrities for President and/or Vice President**

Predictors	Voter Preference for Celebrities for Either President or VP <sup>a</sup>			Voter Preference for Celebrities for Both President or VP <sup>b</sup>		
	<i>B</i>	Exp ( <i>B</i> )	S.E.	<i>B</i>	Exp ( <i>B</i> )	S.E.
Constant	2.63			0.44		
<i>Socio-demographic variables</i>						
Male	-0.55	0.58***	0.14	-0.37	0.69**	0.13
Urban	-0.36	0.70*	0.17	-0.04	0.96	0.16
<i>Education</i>						
High school	-0.04	0.96	0.23	-0.42	0.66*	0.17
Vocational/ Some college	-0.54	0.58*	0.25	-0.95	0.39***	0.22
College graduate and up	-0.86	0.43**	0.28	-1.48	0.23***	0.31
<i>Economic class</i>						
D	0.18	1.20	0.23	0.12	1.12	0.28
E	0.63	1.88*	0.26	0.22	1.24	0.30
<i>Area</i>						
Visayas	-0.32	0.72^	0.19	-0.38	0.69*	0.18
Mindanao	-0.20	0.82	0.20	-0.07	0.94	0.17
National Capital Region (NCR)	-0.65	0.53**	0.20	-0.49	0.61*	0.22
<i>Exposure to TV and TV news</i>						
<i>Amount of time spent</i>						
watching TV	0.17	1.19**	0.07	0.12	1.13*	0.06
<i>Amount of time spent</i>						
watching news on TV	-0.24	0.78^	0.13	-0.17	0.84	0.12
<i>TV as source of</i>						
political news	-0.12	0.89	0.27	-0.24	0.79	0.22
<i>Source of information on elections</i>						
<i>Source of info on elections</i>						
Media	-0.16	0.85	0.23	-0.06	0.95	0.19
Celebrity	0.43	1.53	0.56	0.05	1.05	0.42
Social Network	0.23	1.26	0.14	0.20	1.23	0.14
Local Leaders	-0.09	0.92	0.16	-0.08	0.92	0.15
<i>Election-related</i>						
information-seeking	-0.15	0.86^	0.08	-0.03	0.97	0.08

**Table 2. Results of Logistic Regressions Predicting Voter Preference for Celebrities for President and/or Vice President (Cont'd.)**

Predictors	Voter Preference for Celebrities for Either President or VP <sup>a</sup>			Voter Preference for Celebrities for Both President or VP <sup>b</sup>		
	<i>B</i>	Exp (B)	S.E.	<i>B</i>	Exp (B)	S.E.
Interest in the concept and system of election Index:						
Political engagement	-0.04	0.96	0.06	-0.08	0.92	0.06
<i>Percent correct</i>	78.7%	75.7%				
<i>R-square Cox &amp; Snell</i>	0.089	0.061				
<i>R-square (N=1,458)</i>						
<i>Nagelkerke</i>	0.137	0.090				

<sup>a</sup>p<0.1\*<sup>b</sup>p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001; Probability cutoff=.5

a. Percent correct for 0: 9.7%; Percent correct for 1: 97.5%

b. Percent correct for 0: 99.6%; Percent correct for 1: 1.9%

All the hypothesis tests were conducted with control variables applied. The first hypothesis predicted that those with more years of education will be less likely to vote for celebrities. Dummy variables for each of the four categories of educational attainment were entered in the model, excluding the lowest category (i.e., reached up to elementary education) for comparison. Results in Table 2 suggest that those with more education were significantly less likely to select a celebrity candidate for President or Vice President, supporting H1, in both models. The odds ratio of voting for a celebrity for either office when respondent has vocational education or has reached college level, compared to those who only reached elementary school, is 0.58, and when the respondent graduates from college, the odds ratio is 0.43. This means much smaller odds of voting a celebrity candidate for President or Vice President, for those who have had vocational education or had some years in college and those who have graduated from college compared to those who have completed up to elementary education, controlling for the other variables in the regression model. Results show partial support for Hypothesis 2 which predicted economic status as significant determinant of celebrity voter preference, but this effect is only significant for the model predicting voting a celebrity for either offices. For those who belong in class E, the odds of voting for a celebrity either for President or Vice President is 1.88 times higher than those who belong in classes ABC, controlling for the other variables in the regression.

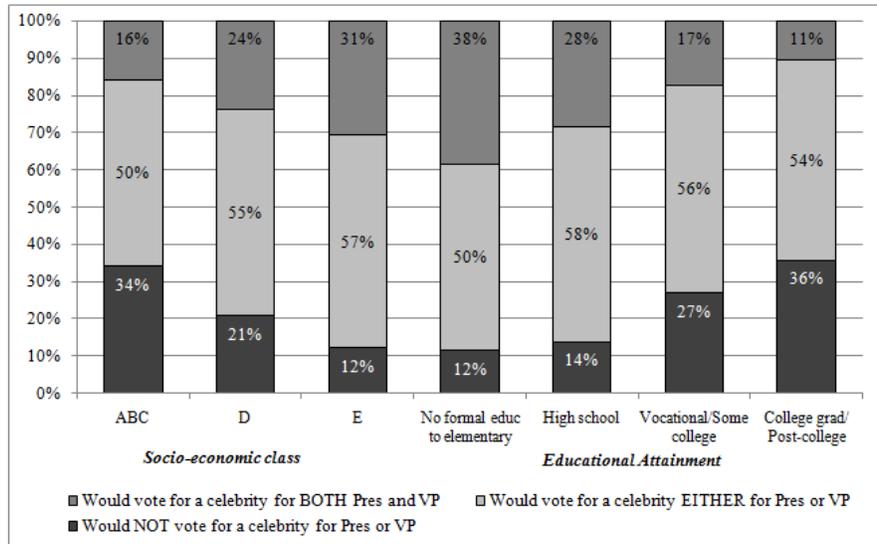
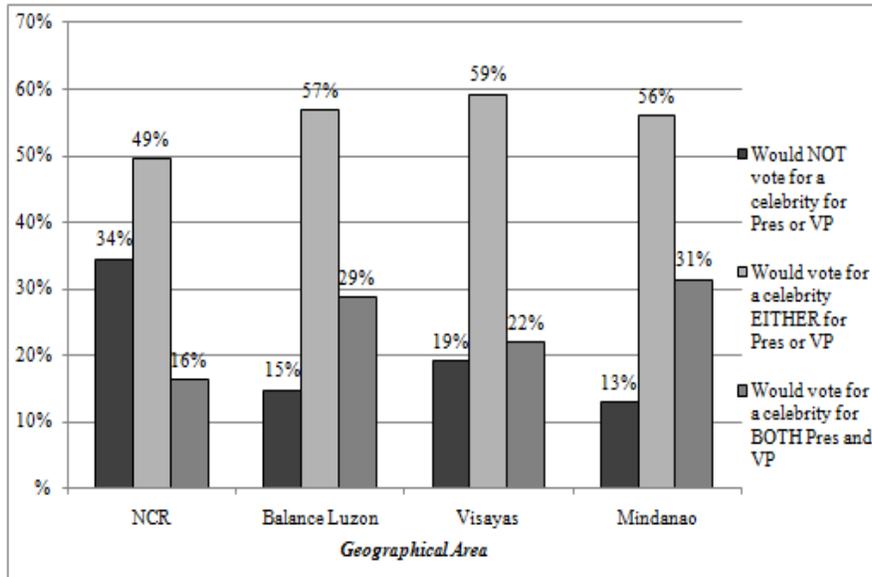


Figure 1. Celebrity voting preference for President and Vice President by Economic Class and Educational Attainment

Figure 1 more clearly illustrates the magnitude of differences with bivariate distributions of voting preference for celebrity candidates by economic class and education. On economic class, it is evident that at the bivariate level there is a significant relationship with voting for celebrities, with the wealthier respondents being less likely to vote for celebrities. Among those in the ABC classes, only 16% selected candidates for both offices, among those in the D class it is 24%, and among those in the E class it is a higher 31%. Those with higher educational attainment are less likely to select a celebrity for both President and Vice President. Only 11% of college graduates selected a celebrity for both offices, compared to 17% among those with some college, 28% among those with a high school education, and 38% among those with only up to an elementary education.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that those living in NCR are less likely to vote for a celebrity. The set of dummy variables indicating location in one of the four geographic clusters was entered into the model excluding Luzon as the comparison category. Results show that for both models, those in NCR, where the seat of political power and media are located, are less likely to vote for celebrities. H3 is therefore supported.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of responses at the bivariate level, indicating that there are more voters in Balance Luzon and Mindanao who express a preference for celebrities for both the Presidency and the Vice Presidency.



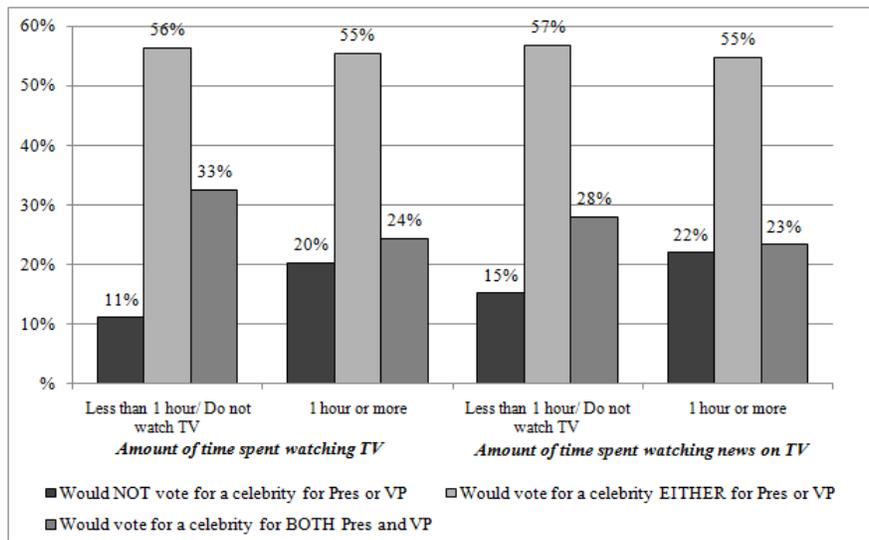
Note:  $N=1,459$ ; Pearson Chi-square=68.24\*\*\*

Figure 2. Celebrity voting preference for President and Vice President by Area

Hypothesis 4, which states that those with greater interest in the elections will be less likely to select a celebrity candidate, was not supported. Two variables were included in the model, interest in the concept of elections and election-related information-seeking. Neither one was statistically significant in the model.

Finally, Hypothesis 5 was supported while Hypothesis 6 was not supported. Those who watched more television were more likely to select a celebrity for President or Vice President (odds ratio=1.19), while the odds are similar when voters selected celebrity for both (odds ratio=1.13). The direction of this exposure effect is the reverse for television news, although it only approaches significance level ( $p=0.1$ ), whereby those who spent more time watching news on TV were less likely to select a celebrity (odds ratio=0.78). The third measure of following political news on television did not yield significant results. Media as a source of information on elections, and celebrities themselves as a source, were not significant either. Figure 3 shows the distribution of voting for celebrities by the amount of time respondents

spend watching TV in a typical day, and the amount of time they spend watching news on TV. It illustrates the same direction of relationship between voter preference and TV consumption and news consumption, although in the regression that controls for other variables, the relationship with news consumption is not significant.



Note: N = 1,459; Gamma (TV exposure) = -0.23\*\*; Gamma (TV news exposure) = -0.15\*\*

Figure 3. Celebrity voting preference for President and Vice President by TV exposure and TV news exposure

In sum, voting for celebrities in national elective political office is significantly related to education, economic class, residence in NCR, and general TV exposure.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Popular discourse about the determinants of voter preference for celebrities revolves mainly around social or economic class and education. This is supported by the data, with economic class exhibiting significant influence independent of educational attainment. “Poorness” and “poverty” plays a central role in Philippine political discourse, and probably in many other developing and underdeveloped countries; the political identities ascribed to the “poor voting bloc” is rife for further research. Appeals to the masses or the poor abound during political campaigns in

the Philippines, with political messages that are very simple and using forms that mimic those of commercial television advertisements in tone, feel, and atmosphere. This large segment of the population relies solely on television for political news, raising concerns that echo those of Meyrowitz (1985) about the medium's potential for influencing political decision-making by focusing attention on the human qualities of politicians over their competence, their "populist empathy" over their potential for leadership (summarized by Street, 2004, p. 249).

Education has a robust effect on preference (or lack thereof) for celebrity candidates. What might it be about formal education that affects the likelihood of voting for a celebrity? The ability to form a cohesive and connected picture of politics and current events should be an area of further research. That is, even with theoretically the same amount of news consumption, a more highly educated citizen will be better able to understand the broad implications of any given political position than someone with little education. This relates to the aptitude for complex reasoning and critical thinking, including general knowledge about the fundamentals of how government works, all of which are learned in basic and secondary education. The country's population is highly skewed toward those with less than a high school education, and therefore many voters may be operating with little broad-based knowledge about the electoral and governance systems, which in turn influences the type of reasoning applied when selecting candidates for whom to vote.

Alternatively, education may be acting as proxy measure for political knowledge. The relationship between higher educational attainment and greater political knowledge has been empirically supported (e.g., Gronlund & Milner, 2006; Jerit, Barrabas, & Bolsen, 2006). Similarly, education and economic or social class are often found to be positively associated (e.g., van de Werfhorst & Dirk de Graaf, 2004). There is substantial research that indicates levels of political knowledge affect various attitudes and opinions that are related to voter choice. Political knowledge, or rather, the lack of it, has been found to be associated with reliance on partisan preferences and symbolism (e.g., Nicholson, Pantoja, & Segura, 2006), susceptibility to political campaign advertisements (Valentino, et al., 2004), voting "incompetence" in terms of selecting candidates that would best fit voter preference (Andersen, Tilly, & Heath, 2005; Baum & Jamison, 2006), and use of gender or race cues in vote choice (e.g., McDermott, 1997; 1998). The reverse of this is that the knowledgeable are more likely to use issue or candidate platform information in forming candidate preferences (Nicholson et al., 2006). In order to isolate its effects on preference for celebrity candidates from general educational levels, more experimentation is needed.

Celebrity status is gained largely through media exposure, and the results support one of two hypotheses pertaining to media. Those who watch more television are more likely to vote for celebrities. We expected that those who watch more news, controlling for the amount of non-news television consumed, are less likely to vote for celebrities but this was not supported by the data. The results pertaining to general television use point to the important role the medium plays in creating “fame” or people who are endowed “fame” and thus, these people have a distinct advantage when they run for public office. Vitug’s (2004) hypothesis that voters of celebrities are selecting these candidates because of disillusionment with traditional politicians is not supported here. If it were correct we would see indicators related to high levels of political knowledge to be predictive of celebrity votes, but the pattern of the data suggests the opposite. The more likely mechanism is name recall, that is, those with little knowledge are likely to vote for the celebrities. These findings support the assertion of Quimpo (2007) that character becomes more important when partisanship and information availability is weak, but in this case the manifestation of character is that which is deeply related to familiarity and affinity to candidates because they are celebrities.

While in other countries it is likely that simple fame or celebrity may work against a candidate for public office (see van Aelst et al., 2008), where a history in the entertainment industry may be viewed negatively, in the Philippines it seems the opposite is true. As mentioned earlier in the paper, there are many other examples of celebrity politicians in lower national offices and local offices, and where it is clear that there are no other educational or experience qualifications that may explain a successful electoral run other than fame in the areas of entertainment or sports. To give a specific example, the world-renowned boxer Manny Pacquiao won as a Congressman in the 2010 elections. He did not complete a high school education (other than an equivalency in order to be qualified to receive honorary college degrees) and had no work experience outside of the sport before he ran for office. Similarly, in the Presidential race of 2004, film actor Fernando Poe, Jr. received close to half of all votes nationally, even without completing high school and not having any experience in government service.

The reviewed literature on celebrities in politics points to a few possible mechanisms through which media help provide an advantage to famous entertainers when they run for office. Citizens may feel a closeness with those media celebrities who exist at a distance because of the constant presence in their lives through television or film (Hughes-Freeland, 2007), a phenomenon much like the notion of parasocial interaction which has been found to be associated with a likelihood of

positive attitudes toward candidates (Centeno, 2010) and with instrumental television news use (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). The large extent to which celebrities and entertainment permeate political elections may also create what Marshall (1997) calls the “affective rationality of the many,” suggesting that the importance placed on celebrity could make voters prime affect over cognition (e.g., Balmas & Sheaffer, 2010). Related to this is the idea that the construction of a public personality (McKernan, 2011) is already in place for celebrities, and that this familiarity makes celebrity candidates more attractive to voters (Zwarun & Torrey, 2011). On the side of media, there is also a distinct possibility that celebrity candidates get much more news coverage than other candidates, and the sheer amount of news treatment provides them with the top-of-mind effect needed to crowd out others in voters’ minds. This would be consistent with West and Ormon’s (2003) contention that media prefer to cover more famous celebrities, and thus the electoral advantage widens even if one tries to control media appearances in non-news content. These mechanisms need to be tested in order to refine the field’s understanding of how celebrities have an advantage.

The directions of influence between the hypothesized predictors and preference for celebrity candidates are all consistent with the basic argument that the variables may be indicators of the broader concept of political knowledge. There is, however, no available direct measure of political knowledge, and it is not measured on any regular basis by national opinion polls in the country. Since the literature brought to bear in this and other areas of research consistently support the relationship of education, class, media exposure, and proximity to centers of political and economic activity with political knowledge, there is a promising area of research here if direct measures become available.

A limitation of this study that can be addressed by future research is the focus on Presidential and Vice Presidential vote choice. Since the choices are for the highest offices, the celebrity politicians running have already accumulated significant years in political practice. Thus, younger voters may know them primarily as politicians rather than celebrities. In order to isolate this, primary data need to be collected to ask respondents their reasons for selecting celebrities.

Further research is clearly needed. Empirical tests on data for voter preferences using lower-level political offices may be more sensitive to the hypotheses regarding preference for celebrities. That is, voter decisions for Presidential and Vice Presidential votes are probably more informed generally than decisions on

Senatorial and Congressional picks. In these smaller elections, the effect of celebrity-centered factors such as simple name recall or likeability and other related political attitudes may be clearer.

The international published literature on celebrity and voting is not directly responsive to the situations of countries like the Philippines, namely, countries where democratic elections are held but where high incidence of poverty, low education, and low political knowledge shape national politics. This paper presents an initial attempt to examine the role of celebrity in politics. Much more elaboration is needed in modeling the reasoning behind voter preference for celebrity candidates in politics.

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**Clarissa David, Ph.D.** <ccdavid2@up.edu.ph> is a Professor at the College of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City.

**Jenna Mae Atun** <jenna.atun@gmail.com> is a lecturer at the Department of Communication, Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City.