

Voting Decision and the Influences on Voter Behavior

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Abstract

This paper examines the complex relationship between voter behavior and political marketing electoral campaigns, with a particular focus on the decision-making process during electoral campaigns. The study aims to identify the psychological, social, and communicational factors that influence how individuals respond to political messages and how these responses translate into voting decisions. By employing quantitative research based on a structured questionnaire, data were collected from a diverse sample of voters. The findings show that emotional appeal, candidate image, and media exposure—particularly via social media—play a critical role in shaping voter perceptions and electoral choices. The paper concludes that understanding voter behavior is essential for designing effective political marketing campaigns and enhancing democratic engagement.

Key words: voter behavior, voter behavior, research, campaign communication.

J.E.L. classification: M31

1. Introduction

In contemporary democratic societies, the act of voting is no longer seen as a purely rational decision based on ideological alignment or policy preferences. Instead, it is shaped by a complex mix of psychological, emotional, and socio-cultural factors. In this context, political marketing has emerged as a strategic tool designed to influence voters' perceptions, attitudes, and decisions (Kocaman & Coşgun, 2024). By integrating concepts from commercial marketing, communication sciences, and political psychology, political marketing campaigns have evolved to place increasing emphasis on candidate branding, emotional resonance, and media visibility.

Numerous studies have emphasized that political behavior is influenced not only by long-term political socialization but also by the design and delivery of campaign messages (Abbas, 2024). Emotional appeals, the perceived authenticity of candidates, and the use of simplified yet powerful narratives can significantly impact the decision-making process, especially among undecided or less politically engaged voters (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

A particularly relevant theoretical framework is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which distinguishes between central and peripheral routes of persuasion. Voters who engage critically with political content process information through the central route, while those less involved are influenced by peripheral cues such as visuals, slogans, or celebrity endorsements (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This distinction is essential for understanding why certain marketing strategies are more effective with specific voter segments.

Furthermore, the increasing relevance of digital media and social platforms in political communication cannot be ignored. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok offer political actors direct access to audiences and the possibility to deliver tailored content in real time. Social media influencers, algorithm-driven feeds, and viral content play a significant role in shaping political discourse and, implicitly, voting behavior (Jabr, 2023). These tools are increasingly used not only to inform but also to mobilize and emotionally engage voters.

Given this background, the present article aims to explore how marketing strategies influence voter behavior and voting decisions. Through a combination of theoretical analysis and empirical data, the study examines the main mechanisms through which political marketing shapes public opinion, focusing on the role of emotional and digital engagement in the voting process.

2. Literature review

In recent years, the study of voting behavior has moved beyond rational choice theory, incorporating psychological, emotional, and social influences into the analysis of electoral decisions. Voters are no longer passive recipients of campaign messages; instead, they actively interpret, evaluate, and respond to political communication in increasingly complex media environments (Kocaman & Coşgun, 2024). Political marketing, defined as the strategic use of marketing tools in the political arena, plays a central role in shaping electoral preferences by targeting voter values, emotions, and identities (Kotler & Kotler, 1999).

A growing body of literature suggests that emotional appeals and candidate image are among the most influential factors in modern campaigns. Chukwu and Chiadika (2024) argue that political advertisements are particularly effective when they evoke emotional responses such as hope, fear, or anger. These emotions act as cognitive shortcuts, simplifying complex political decisions. Similarly, Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (1986) helps explain how voters process political messages through central or peripheral routes, depending on their level of involvement. Highly engaged voters evaluate the substance of political arguments, while less engaged individuals rely on peripheral cues like tone, slogans, or visual aesthetics.

Digital communication has amplified the role of political marketing. Social media platforms now function as major channels for direct voter engagement, enabling campaigns to deliver personalized and segmented messages. As Vargas-Merino et al. (2024) demonstrate through structural equation modeling, perceived value and symbolic representation significantly influence trust in political candidates. Campaign spending, image quality, and message clarity all contribute to how voters perceive candidate credibility.

Cultural and contextual variables also influence voting behavior. In their study of the Indian electorate, Reddy and Naidu (2024) highlight the relevance of religious and regional identity in campaign strategies. Messages that align with deeply held cultural beliefs tend to generate stronger emotional responses and higher voter loyalty. This finding echoes earlier work by Newman (1994), who emphasized the importance of aligning political messaging with voter self-concept and socio-cultural background.

Furthermore, consumer behavior theory has increasingly been applied to political contexts. Theodorou (2024) posits that voters behave much like consumers, responding to campaigns that are emotionally engaging, consistent, and easy to relate to. This approach reflects the broader trend toward personalization in politics, where voters expect not only representation but also identification with candidates' narratives.

As the boundaries between political communication and commercial marketing continue to blur, concerns about ethical standards in political advertising have intensified. The manipulative potential of emotionally charged messages, especially when amplified through algorithms, calls for greater transparency and regulation. Despite these challenges, political marketing remains a powerful tool for fostering democratic participation—provided it is used responsibly and in ways that respect voter autonomy.

One of the most persistent findings in political science is the importance of party identification. According to the Michigan model, developed in the 1950s, voters often inherit political preferences through early socialization, particularly from family, peers, and educational institutions. This partisan identification becomes a psychological anchor that shapes how individuals interpret political events and candidates throughout their lives (The American Voter, Campbell et al., 1960).

Recent studies in psychology emphasize that voting decisions are not purely rational but are influenced by emotions and social context. A 2023 study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* categorized voter behavior among postgraduate students into three types: rational, emotional, and mixed, revealing the strong impact of emotional and psychological variables—even among politically aware individuals (Hasan et al., 2023).

Political campaigns increasingly employ marketing strategies drawn from commercial advertising to influence voter choices. A systematic review published in the *Journal of Political Marketing* identified five theoretical frameworks for understanding political marketing: rational choice, emotional appeal, candidate image, branding, and digital communication (Kocaman & Coşgun, 2024). Social media platforms have further amplified the influence of political marketing, allowing for segmented and targeted messaging.

The Columbia model emphasizes the role of interpersonal relationships in shaping political behavior. Studies by Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) found that individuals are more likely to vote similarly to those they interact with regularly, such as family, neighbors, and coworkers. These networks serve as powerful conduits for political norms and information, reinforcing shared attitudes and reducing exposure to conflicting viewpoints. One of the most influential studies that addresses the Columbia model is the book *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign* by Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet. Originally published in 1944 and reissued by Columbia University Press in 2021, this work is considered foundational in the field of voting behavior.

Emotions like fear, anger, and hope are critical in mobilizing voters. Research shows that fear prompts individuals to seek more information and evaluate candidates more carefully, whereas anger leads to quicker, more intuitive decisions (Valentino et al., 2011). Negative campaigning, while often criticized, can be effective if strategically employed; its impact varies based on voter partisanship, message framing, and political context.

Digital media has increased ideological polarization by promoting echo chambers—spaces where users are primarily exposed to viewpoints that align with their own. This selective exposure reinforces existing beliefs and limits the potential for deliberative democratic engagement. A 2020 study on echo chambers found that such environments deepen political divides and reduce empathy toward opposing views (Cinelli et al., 2020).

3. Research methodology

This study is based on a quantitative approach aiming to explore voter behavior in the context of the Romanian presidential elections scheduled for April 2025. The main objective is to assess the degree of electoral mobilization, voting intentions, and the various psychological, social, and media-related factors that influence the decision to vote. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, which included both closed and semi-open questions targeting voting participation, candidate preference, and motivation for electoral engagement.

The research was conducted on a sample of 1001 individuals, selected to reflect the socio-demographic diversity of the Romanian voting population. The sampling method ensured representativeness across variables such as age, gender, education level, and geographical distribution. The data collection process took place through online survey methods during the pre-election period, allowing for the analysis of real-time electoral attitudes in a politically dynamic context.

The questionnaire design was guided by existing theoretical models in political science and voter behavior, such as the Columbia and Michigan models, and it aimed to capture both rational and emotional determinants of voting. Variables such as perceived civic duty, political efficacy, ideological orientation, media trust, and social influence were operationalized and measured through Likert-type scales and single-choice questions. Analytical methods included frequency distribution analysis, comparative interpretation of response categories, and correlation assessment between key behavioral indicators.

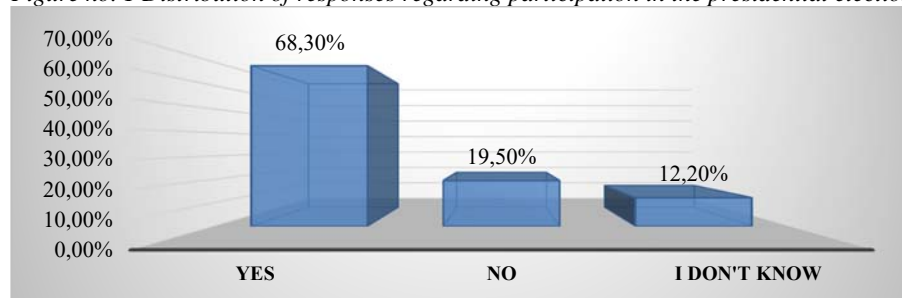
The methodology adopted offers both a snapshot of current electoral predispositions and a foundation for predictive insights regarding voter turnout and preference formation in the upcoming elections. It also contributes to a broader understanding of democratic engagement and the evolving role of political communication in shaping voter decisions.

4. Findings

Voter turnout is a key indicator of citizens' engagement in a democratic system. In the context of the presidential elections scheduled for April 2025, understanding the level of electoral mobilization and the intention to participate in the vote becomes a central concern in the analysis of voter behavior. The present study aims to highlight the Romanian electorate's attitude toward voting participation, by analysing the responses of a sample of 1001 individuals to the question: "Will you participate in the presidential elections in May 2025?"

The results show that 68.3% of respondents stated they intend to vote, while 19.5% said they would not, and 12.2% remain undecided. These figures suggest a positive predisposition toward democratic engagement, comparable to turnout levels in previous presidential elections. At the same time, the 12.2% of undecided respondents represent a volatile group, susceptible to influence from electoral campaigns and socio-political dynamics in the lead-up to the election. Those who declared they would not participate (19.5%) may reflect a lack of trust in the political system, disinterest, or other forms of civic alienation that deserve further investigation.

Figure no. 1 Distribution of responses regarding participation in the presidential elections

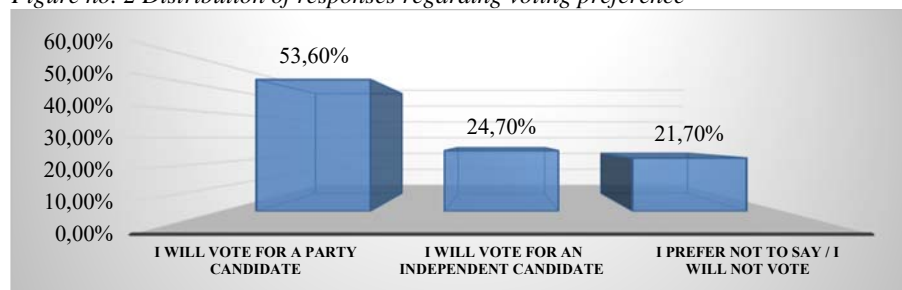


Source: Authors' contribution

The analysis of electoral behavior is not limited to the intention to vote, but also targets the specific voting options expressed by citizens. In this regard, the question concerning how respondents intend to vote in the May 2025 presidential elections provides valuable insights into electoral preferences. The answers reflect the degree of political polarization, support for existing parties, or openness to independent alternatives.

Based on a sample of 1001 individuals, the distribution of responses is as follows: 53.6% stated that they would vote for a party-affiliated candidate, 24.7% said they would vote for an independent candidate, and 21.7% declared they would not vote or preferred not to express their choice. The results suggest a majority inclination toward party-supported candidates, while also indicating a notable level of support for independents—highlighting a significant potential for protest voting or a preference for figures perceived as outside the traditional political system. The 21.7% share represents an area of uncertainty, which may be explained by a lack of trust, indecision, or reluctance to express a clear political opinion.

Figure no. 2 Distribution of responses regarding voting preference



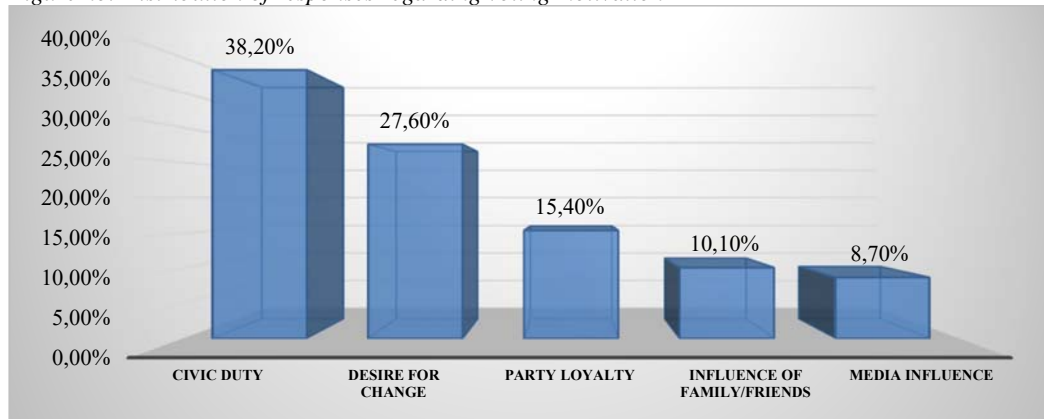
Source: Authors' contribution

Understanding the motivations behind voting participation is essential to grasp the deeper nature of electoral behavior. The question "What is the main reason why you will vote?" provides valuable insights into the values and factors that drive voters to take part in elections.

The results indicate that civic duty emerges as the leading motivation, being selected by 38.2% of respondents. A significant portion, 27.6%, identified the desire for political change as their primary driver, while 15.4% mentioned loyalty to a political party. Other influencing factors include social influence—namely family and friends (10.1%)—and media exposure (8.7%).

These findings reflect a combination of internalized democratic norms, dissatisfaction with the current political context, and the influence of external social environments. They also suggest that electoral mobilization strategies should appeal not only to ideological alignment but also to voters' sense of responsibility and need for transformation.

Figure no. Distribution of responses regarding voting motivation



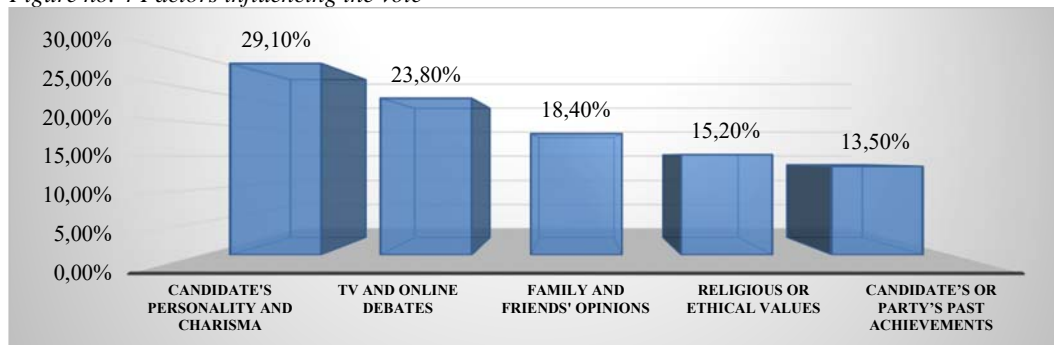
Source: Authors' contribution

Analysing the mechanisms behind voting decisions requires a closer look at the factors that shape voters' candidate preferences. The question "What most influences your vote?" investigates the personal, social, and ideological triggers that impact electoral choices.

According to the results, 29.1% of respondents are primarily influenced by the candidate's personality and charisma. Another 23.8% emphasized the role of TV and online debates, while 18.4% highlighted the impact of family and friends. Additionally, 15.2% pointed to religious or ethical values, and 13.5% were guided by the candidate's or party's past achievements.

These findings underline the diverse and intersecting forces that drive voting behaviour emotional appeal, media narratives, interpersonal influence, and moral or historical evaluation. The data confirm that voters make decisions based on a complex mix of subjective perceptions and perceived credibility.

Figure no. 4 Factors influencing the vote



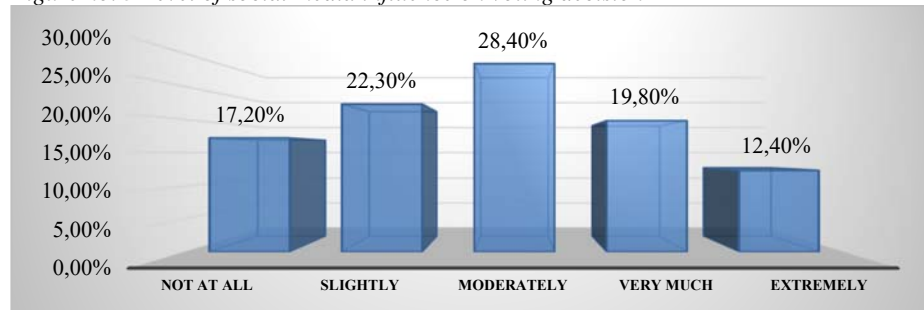
Source: Authors' contribution

As social networks increasingly shape public discourse, their role in influencing voting behavior has become more prominent. The question regarding the impact of digital platforms on electoral decisions explores how respondents perceive this form of influence.

The results reveal that 28.4% of individuals feel moderately influenced by social media content, while 22.3% report only a slight influence. In contrast, 17.2% state that these platforms have no impact on their decision. On the higher end of the spectrum, 19.8% indicate a strong influence, and 12.4% describe the impact as extreme.

This distribution illustrates a significant degree of digital influence, with more than 60% acknowledging at least some level of effect. While a portion of the population remains resistant or sceptical, the data confirm the growing relevance of social media as an opinion-shaping force in contemporary electoral dynamics.

Figure no. 5 Level of social media influence on voting decision



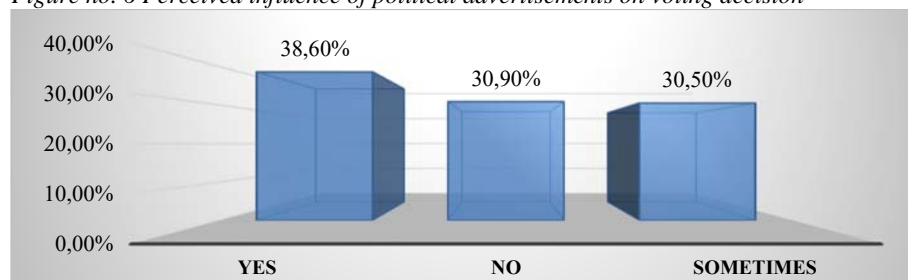
Source: Authors' contribution

In the context of an electoral landscape heavily marked by promotional content, evaluating the impact of political advertising on voting behavior offers valuable insight into voter receptivity. The corresponding question aimed to explore how respondents perceive the influence of such campaign tools.

The findings show a nuanced distribution of responses. A significant proportion, 38.6%, acknowledged that political ads influence their voting decisions. In contrast, 30.9% reported being unaffected by this form of messaging, while 30.5% stated that they are influenced only occasionally.

These results reflect the mixed effectiveness of political advertising while a notable segment of the electorate responds to these stimuli, an almost equal share either resists their influence or reacts selectively. This suggests that campaign strategies relying on advertising should be carefully tailored and complemented by more personalized or issue-focused engagement.

Figure no. 6 Perceived influence of political advertisements on voting decision



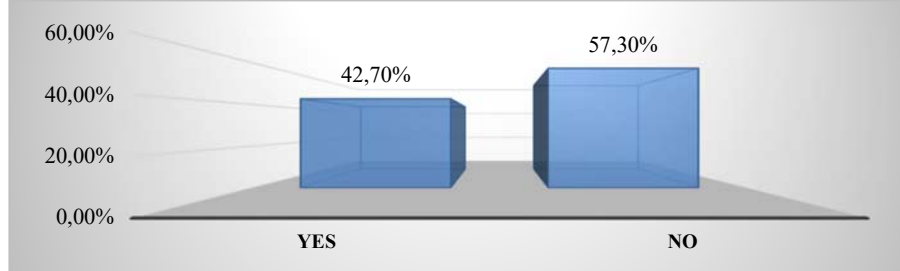
Source: Authors' contribution

The emergence of influencers and political commentators on digital platforms has introduced new, informal channels through which political opinions are shaped. This question explored the extent to which voters engage with these alternative sources of influence.

The responses reveal that 42.7% of participants report following such figures on social media, suggesting a substantial level of exposure to informal political content. On the other hand, 57.3% indicate that they do not engage with this type of commentary.

These results point to a divided media landscape, in which a notable share of the electorate supplements traditional information sources with content from non-institutional voices. The growing influence of such figures may play a strategic role in reaching segments of the population less responsive to conventional political messaging.

Figure no. 7 Share of respondents following influencers or political commentators on social media



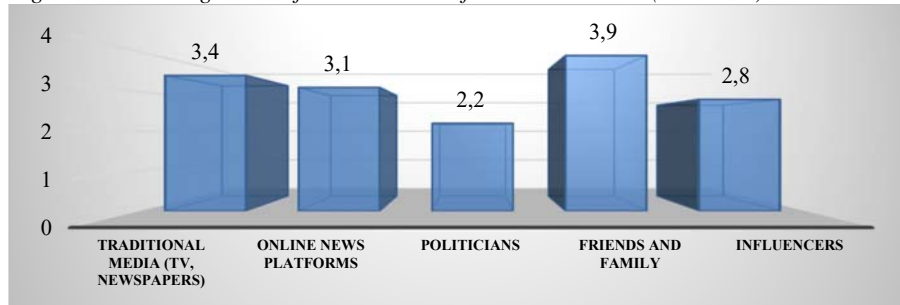
Source: Authors' contribution

Trust in information sources plays a central role in shaping political attitudes and voting intentions. This item assessed how various types of sources ranging from institutional to interpersonal are perceived in terms of credibility during the electoral process.

The results reveal a clear hierarchy of trust. Personal networks, such as friends and family, received the highest average score (3.9 out of 5), underscoring the enduring relevance of interpersonal influence. Traditional media also maintained a relatively strong position (3.4), followed by online news platforms (3.1). At the lower end of the spectrum, politicians were assigned the least trust (2.2), while influencers scored slightly higher (2.8).

These findings reflect a persistent scepticism toward institutional or self-interested sources and a greater reliance on familiar or established forms of communication. The data suggest that, despite the digitalization of political discourse, credibility remains closely linked to perceived authenticity and relational proximity.

Figure no. 8 Average level of trust in main information sources (scale 1–5)

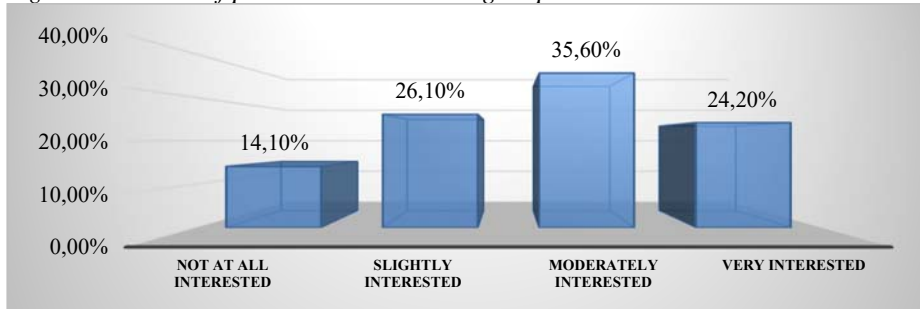


Source: Authors' contribution

The level of interest in politics is a fundamental indicator of civic engagement and participation in democratic life. This question aims to assess voters' general attitude toward politics, regardless of their actual voting behavior.

The distribution of responses shows that 35.6% of respondents declared themselves moderately interested in politics, while 24.2% reported being very interested. Another 26.1% indicated a low level of interest, and 14.1% stated they were not interested at all. These results suggest that, although there is a strong core of engaged citizens, a significant portion of the population remains distanced from political topics, which may affect participation and the quality of electoral decision-making.

Figure no. 9 Level of political interest among respondents

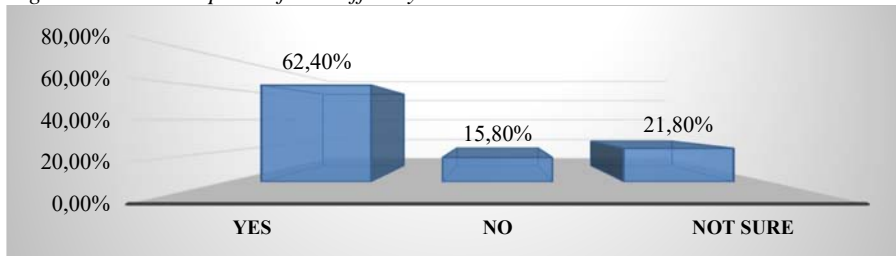


Source: Authors' contribution

Perception of voting efficacy is an essential indicator of trust in democracy. This question explores the extent to which citizens believe their vote makes a difference in the political process.

The majority of respondents (62.4%) believe their vote can make a difference, while 21.8% are unsure and 15.8% believe it has no impact. This distribution suggests a relatively positive level of trust in electoral mechanisms, but also a need to reinforce civic efficacy.

Figure no. 10 Perception of vote efficacy



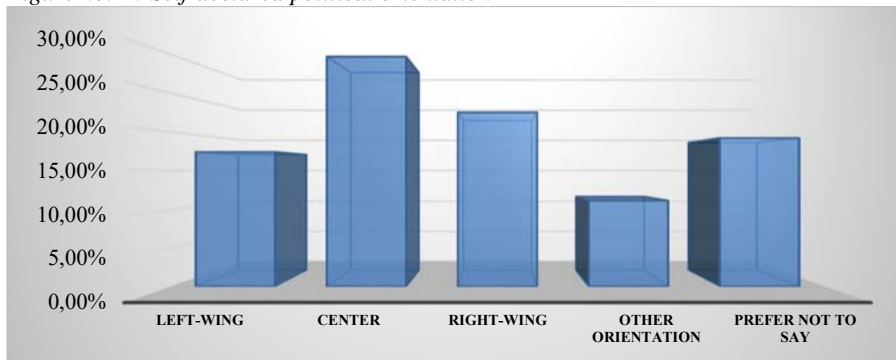
Source: Authors' contribution

Ideological self-identification represents a key dimension in understanding electoral behavior, offering insights into how voters position themselves on the political spectrum. This question explored both declared orientation and the degree of openness in expressing political identity.

The responses reveal a dominant centrist tendency, with 29.7% of participants identifying at the center of the spectrum. Right-wing affiliation was declared by 22.5%, while 17.4% associated themselves with left-wing values. Additionally, 11.2% selected an alternative orientation, and a significant 19.2% opted not to disclose their ideological stance.

These results indicate a moderate ideological landscape, but also point to a degree of political reservation or disengagement. The relatively high percentage of respondents who abstained from self-placement suggests either a lack of identification with existing political categories or a reluctance to express personal convictions in a polarized environment.

Figure no. 10 Self-declared political orientation

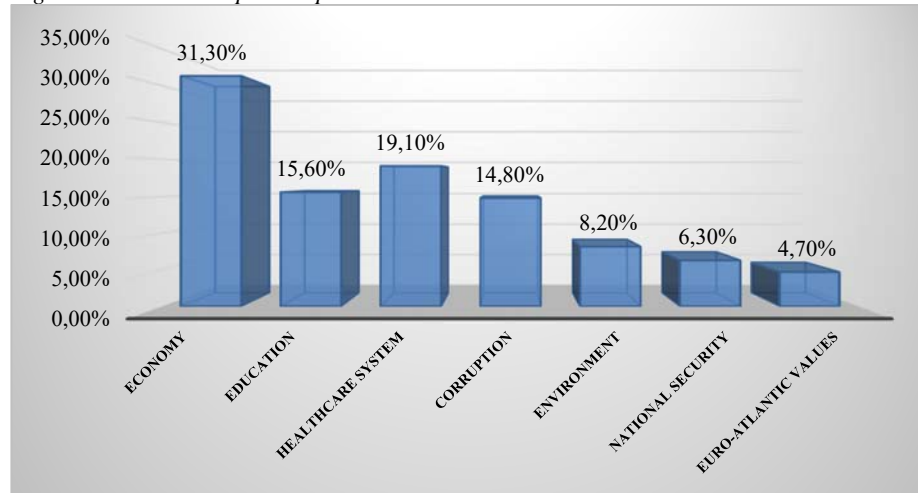


Source: Authors' contribution

This question aims to identify citizens' priorities in relation to the public agenda. The responses reflect the areas considered critical for the country's future.

The economy is seen as the most important issue by 31.3% of respondents, followed by healthcare (19.1%), education (15.6%), and corruption (14.8%). The environment (8.2%), national security (6.3%), and Euro-Atlantic values (4.7%) are mentioned less frequently, yet remain relevant for specific segments.

Figure no. 11 Most important perceived issues



Source: Authors' contribution

5. Conclusions

Overall, these studies converge on the idea that modern voter behavior is shaped by an interplay of rational assessment and emotional resonance, both of which are strategically targeted through political marketing. The use of digital tools, audience segmentation, and emotional storytelling has become essential in shaping how voters perceive candidates and make decisions at the polls. As political marketing continues to evolve, further research is needed to understand its long-term implications for democratic participation and the ethical boundaries of persuasive communication.

Voter behavior is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by a wide range of psychological, social, and political variables. Over time, researchers have developed several models and theories to explain how and why individuals decide to vote for a particular candidate or party. This document synthesizes key findings from contemporary scientific literature, highlighting six main factors that shape voter behavior.

Voter behavior is shaped by a dynamic interplay of rational and emotional factors, identity, social influence, and strategic communication. Understanding these factors is essential for both scholars and practitioners of political science, particularly in an era where digital tools and media saturation increasingly mediate political engagement.

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