



# HER SEAT AT THE TABLE

A Research Compilation  
on Women's Electoral  
Participation in the  
Philippines

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**





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Electoral Participation in the Philippines

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15th Floor North Tower, Rockwell Business Center Sheridan  
Sheridan Street corner United Street  
Highway Hills, 1554 Mandaluyong City, Philippines

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*This Executive Summary presents a synopsis of the three research studies commissioned by **UNDP Philippines** and the **Commission on Elections (COMELEC)**, with funding support from the **Government of Spain**, on women's participation in elections as candidates and as voters. The three research studies are:*

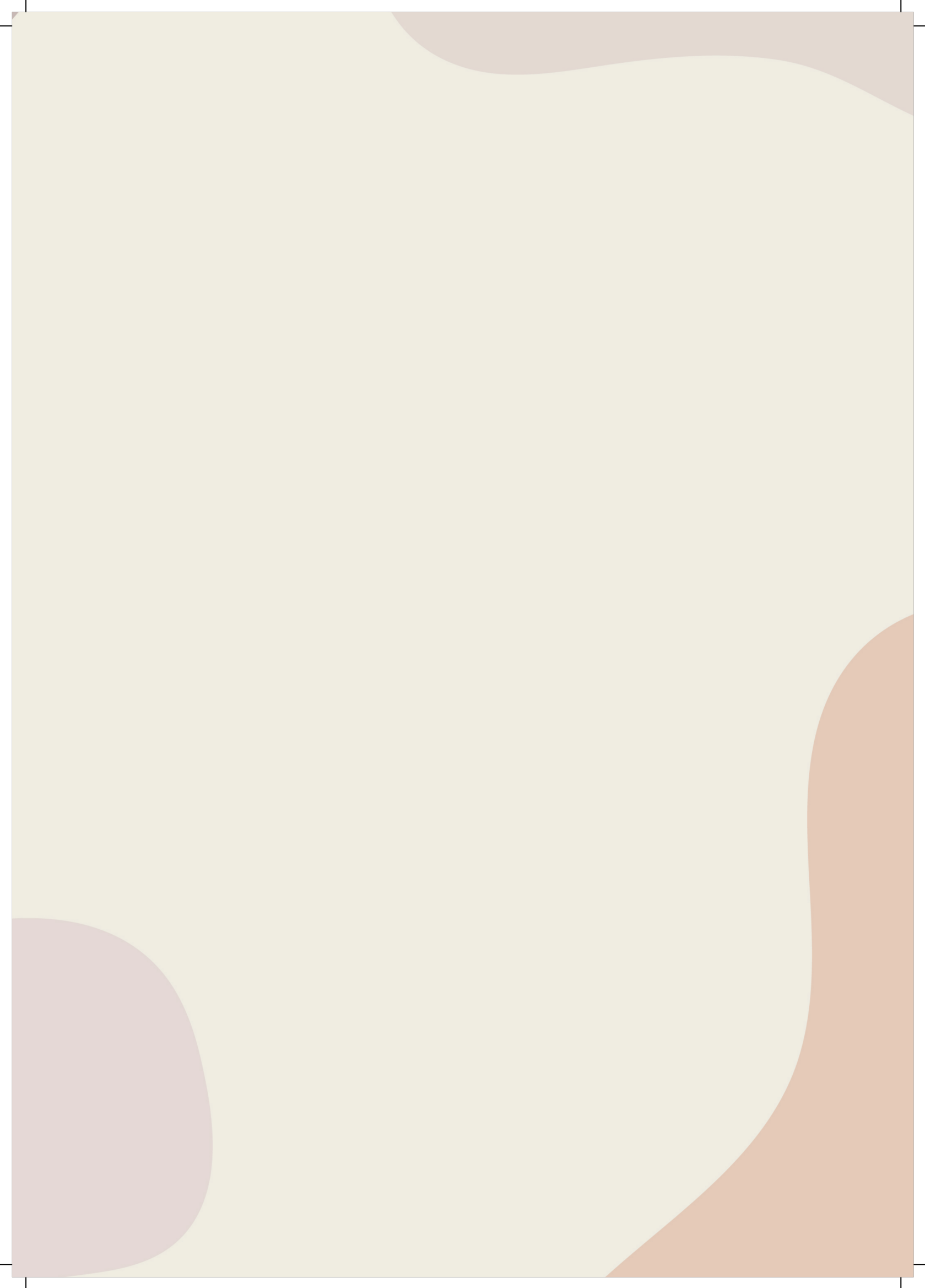
*Guia, Luie Tito and Laoc, Telibert. **Improving the Political Participation of Women in the Philippines: Proposed Interventions for the Commission on Elections***

*Wee-Lozada, Sonia Bea; Brucal, Arlan; Daquis, John Carlo; Halili, Riza Teresita; Cases, Sheena Kristine; and Aguilar, William. **Advancing Transformative Leaders: A Quantitative Examination of the Factors Influencing Women's Candidacy in the Philippines.***

*Encinas-Franco, Jean. **Explaining Sex-Disaggregated Overseas Voting Behavior and Satisfaction Among Overseas Filipinos.***

***Read the full compendium here***





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**G**ender equality is one of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) that is not on-track globally. Furthermore, improving women's representation in Parliament and other spheres of leadership has been essential to gender equality. However, despite women being seen as effective leaders in various sectors of society, including Filipino families and communities, more commitment and bold efforts are needed towards gender-equal leadership, especially in the political arena. To achieve these, the Philippine government has been working consistently to improve gender equality and is further committed to promoting women's representation and political inclusiveness.

To enable evidence-based policy making, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Philippines have commissioned research with the following objectives:

1. To identify gender-responsive and intersectional strategies to improve overseas registration and voting turnout.
2. To examine and identify factors influencing women's participation and candidacy in electoral politics.
3. To examine sex-disaggregated overseas voting and registration behavior and satisfaction among Overseas Filipinos (OFs).
4. To identify strategies COMELEC can adopt to improve women's representation in political elections.

The studies show that the Philippines has a good overall progress in gender equality.

However, women's political participation has been limited among certain groups and is dependent on certain occasions. Despite existing gender equality initiatives such as those implemented by the Philippine Commission on Women, the COMELEC Gender and Development programme, and other actors and initiatives, women are still discriminated against in the electoral arena.

As the research studies show, the barriers to women's electoral participation are systemic and range from social and cultural norms, institutional discrimination, resource limits, and the lack of technical skills.

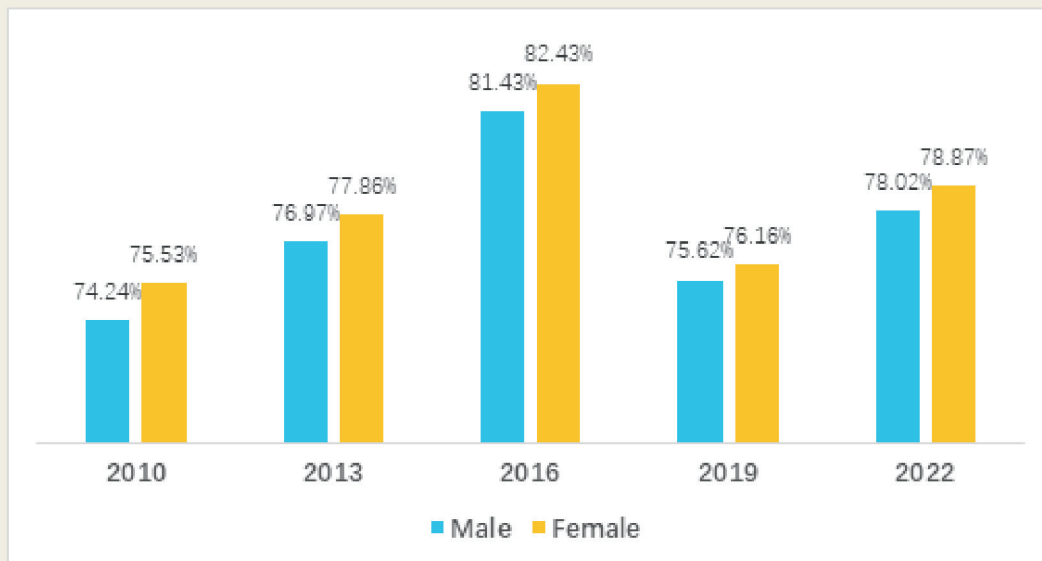
Gender equality and women's empowerment are important components of inclusive growth as supported by the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023-2028 and as part of the country's commitments to SDGs. The COMELEC, as the Philippines' constitutionally created election management body, bears the primary duty to improve the political participation of women.

To close the gender gaps in voting turnout and electoral candidacy, the COMELEC should enhance its digital capacity to facilitate evidence-based policy-making and overseas electoral participation; and launch advocacy campaigns for wider awareness and buy-in of key electoral stakeholders. Achieving gender-equal elections would require not only support from the political parties and voters, but also collaboration among a wider set of stakeholders such as other government agencies, civil society organizations, and academia.

# The Story in our Stats

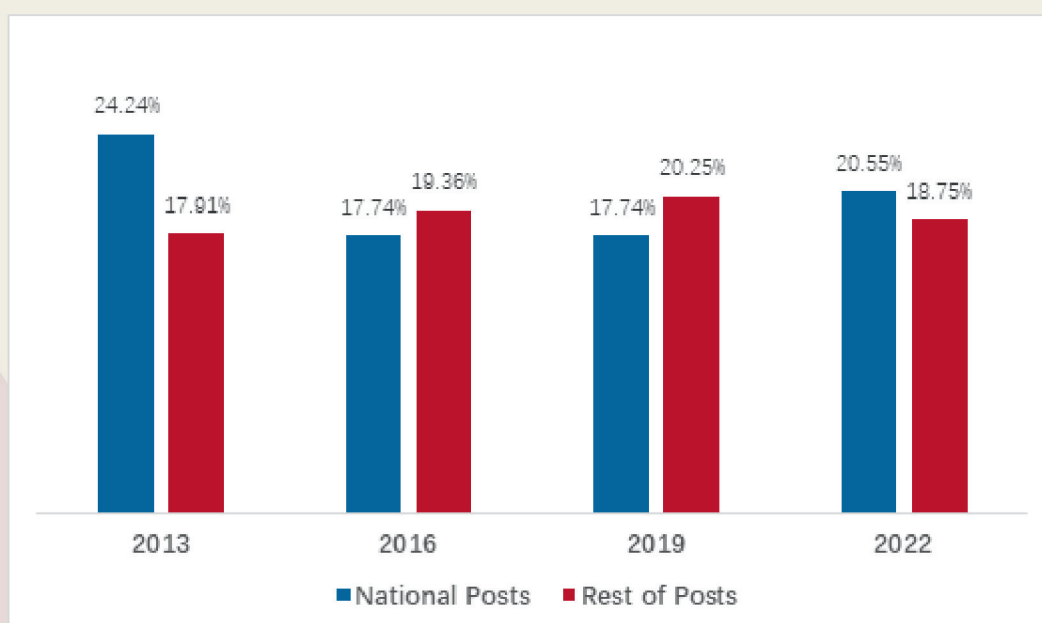
## Women's Political Participation in the Philippines

Voter turnout among women registered voters in the Philippine elections (Figure 1) have consistently been higher compared to those of males since 2010 to 2022, with the highest registering at 82.43 percent (compared to 81.43 among males) in 2016.



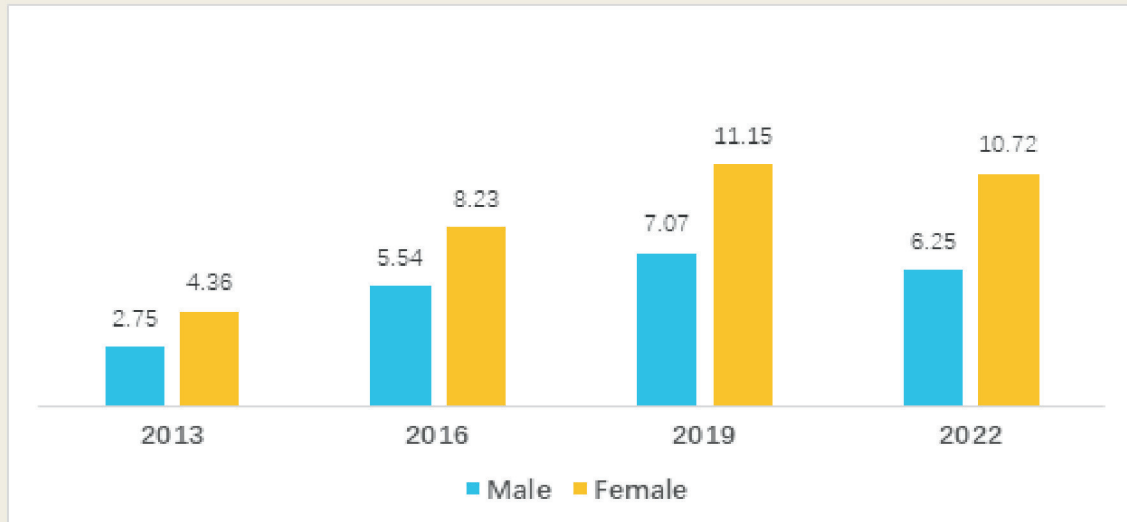
**Figure 1.** Voter Turnout in Philippine National and Local Elections, 2010 to 2022

Meanwhile, the percentage of women among candidates for elective positions (Figure 2) have remained around 20 percent from 2013 to 2022, except among national posts in 2013 which registered at 24.24 percent.

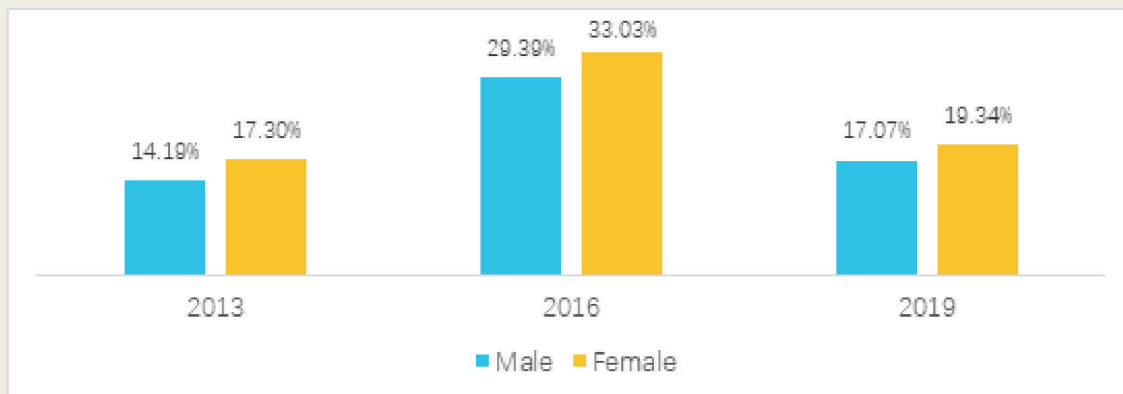


**Figure 2.** Percentage of Women Candidates in the Philippine National and Local Elections, 2013 to 2022

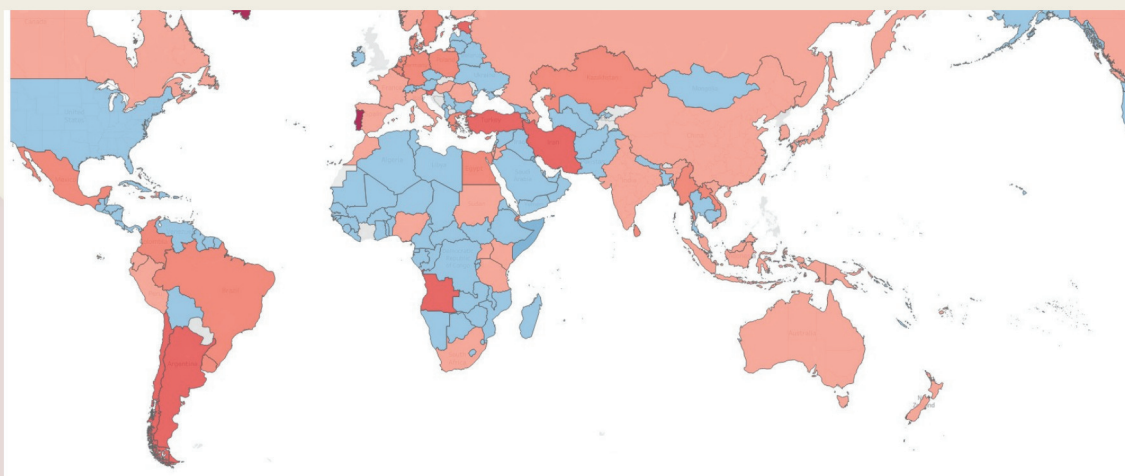
Meanwhile, in terms of overseas voting, **the number of registered overseas voters** (Figure 3) and **the voter turnout** (Figure 4) **among females have been consistently higher compared to that of males**. Furthermore, the gender gap in voter turnout percentage tends to favor males in the Middle East and Africa (blue) and females in Asia and Latin America (red) (Figure 5).



**Figure 3.** Number of Registered Overseas Voters (in hundred thousands), 2013 to 2022



**Figure 4.** Overseas Voter Turnout (in percentage), 2013 to 2019



**Figure 5.** Gender Gap in Overseas Voter Turnout, 2019



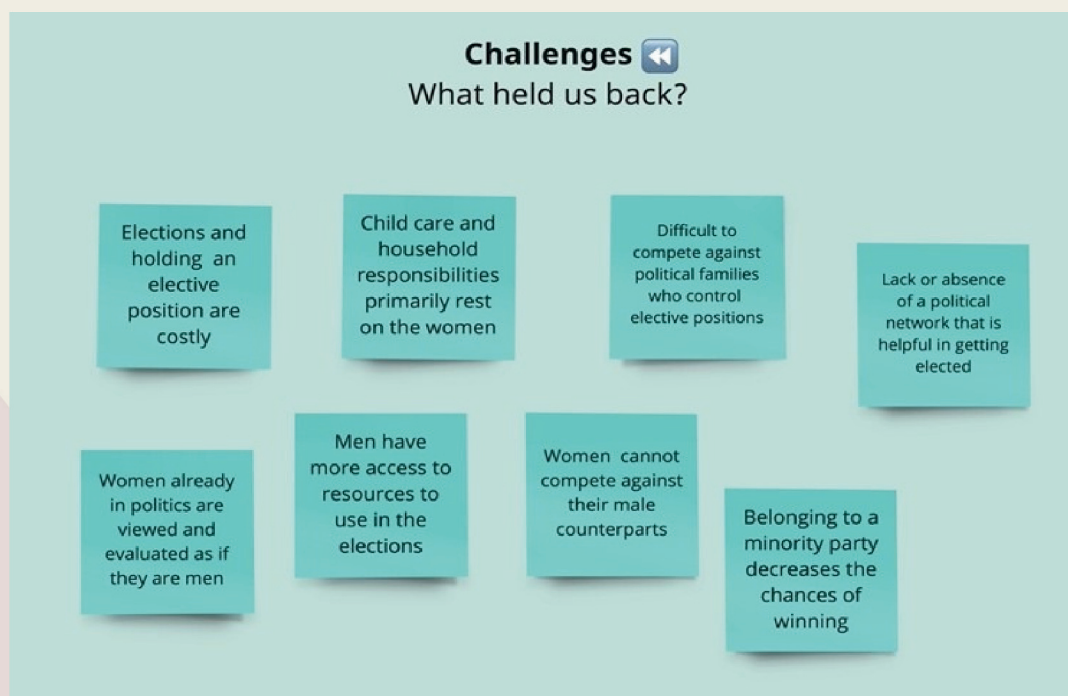
# Highlights of the Research Papers

## Improving the Political Participation of Women in the Philippines: Proposed Interventions for COMELEC

by Atty. Luie Tito Guia and Telibert Laoc

This in-depth investigation is motivated by the fact that women comprise only about a fifth of candidates in national and local elections. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions conducted by the Democratic Insights Group (DIG) reveal that **women running as candidates in political elections face persistent challenges that are socio-cultural, institutional, and personal barriers** (Figure 6):

- Social and cultural norms, such as women being more confined to domestic affairs, prevent or delay their decision to choose a political career. More people still believe that men make better political leaders than women.
- Moreover, women have more difficulties in accessing or raising campaign funds. The high financial cost of elections is a significant roadblock to women's participation. It is therefore essential to make electoral participation more affordable.
- Women were also described as more risk-averse than men and less tolerant of corruption, electoral violence and fraud exacerbated by the current zero-sum electoral system. This gives merit to more inclusive options such as the design of proportional representation (PR) electoral systems and ranked-choice voting.



**Figure 6.** Challenges for the political participation of women in the Philippines

Given these barriers, it was suggested that there should be subsidies to reduce election costs, incentives for women's membership in parties and political education for gender awareness. Strategies that were identified include those indicated in Figure 7 below.



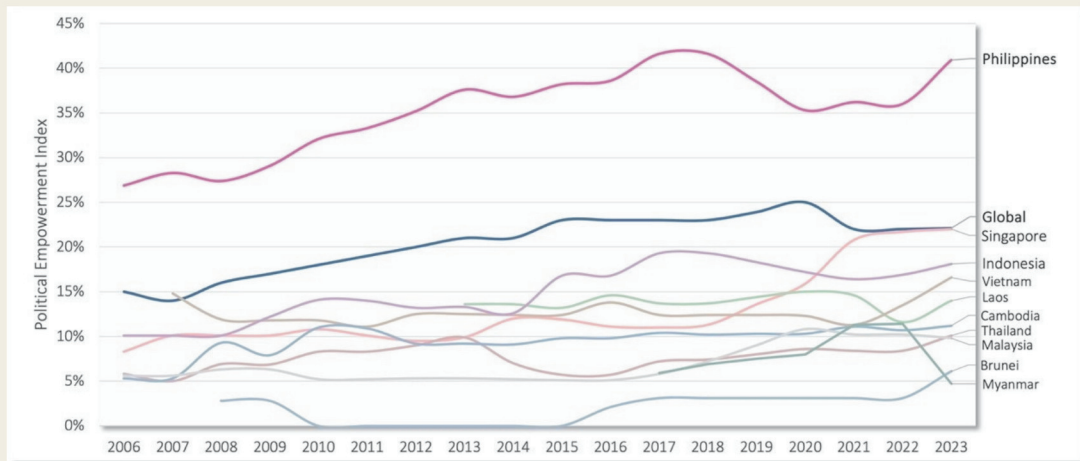
**Figure 7.** Strategies for improving the political participation of women in the Philippines

## Advancing Transformative Leaders: A Quantitative Examination of the Factors Influencing Women’s Candidacy in the Philippines

*by Sonia Bea Wee-Lozada, Arlan Brucal, John Carlo Daquis, Riza Halili, Sheena Kristine Cases, and William Aguilar*

Complementing the qualitative approach of the previous research, this paper uses quantitative methods to analyze available data to identify key trends, patterns, and relationships among variables on women’s electoral participation.

According to the Women Political Empowerment (WPE) Index of the World Economic Forum (Figure 8), **the Philippines has constantly remained above the Global average with a generally increasing trend.** Though there was a drop between 2018 and 2020, the number rebounded since 2022 and reached 40.9 percent in 2023, near the peak values of the index in 2017 and 2018 at 41.6 percent.



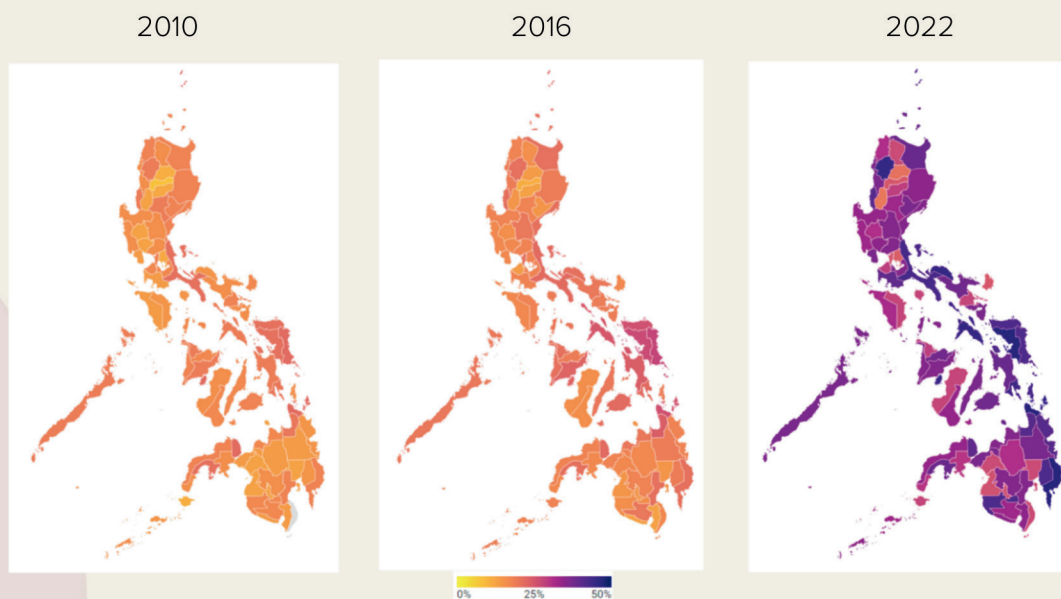
**Figure 8.** Women’s Political Empowerment Index of ASEAN Countries, 2006-2023

Meanwhile, the data from COMELEC for the election years 2010, 2016, and 2022 show **an increasing share of women’s participation as candidates at the province level** (Figure 9). Notably, there is significant variation in the pace of this increase, with more pronounced growth observed in provinces along the Eastern seaboard, characterized by lower income and frequent exposure to natural hazards like typhoons and earthquakes.

The authors ran several regression analyses to identify trends and drivers underlying increased women's participation as candidates.

**The quantitative analyses found that:**

- Most women run with a political party, though men are prioritized over women when deciding who will be fielded in elections.
- More than half of the variations in women’s political participation are caused by unobserved factors, which require more research to identify behavior nudges that effectively improve women’s political participation.
- Natural disasters and political dynasties are the main driving factors for women’s participation in politics, further research is needed to understand the local context.



**Figure 9.** Percentage of Female Candidates by Province Across Election Years



# Explaining Sex-Disaggregated Overseas Voting Behavior and Satisfaction Among Overseas Filipinos

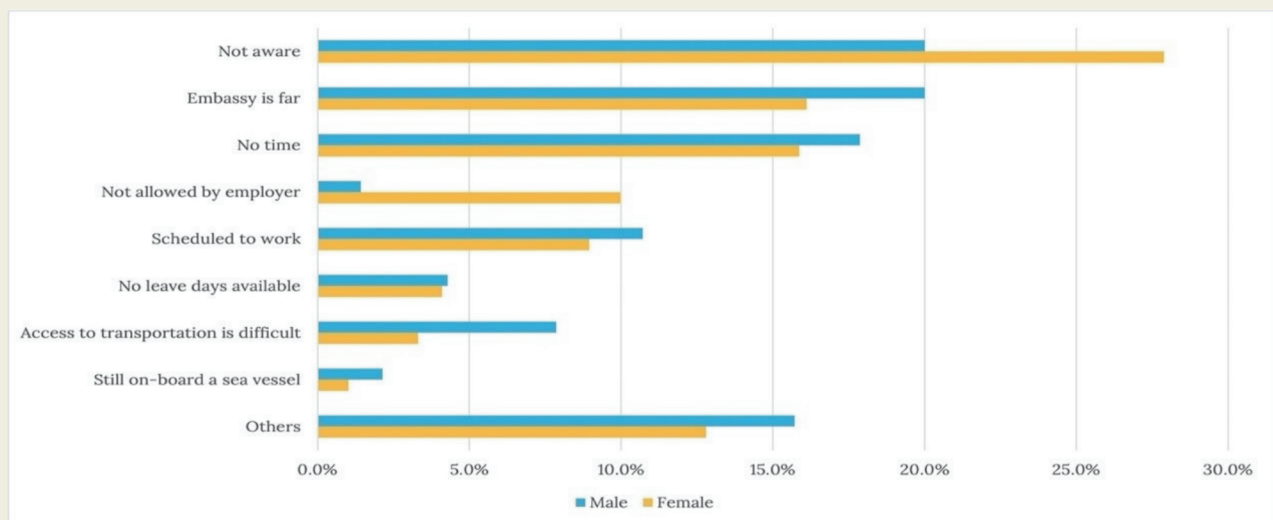
by Jean Encinas-Franco

This paper employs a survey of 1,200 Overseas Filipinos (OFs) to determine and analyze their registration and voting behavior, including low voter turnout of women OFs in the Middle East and Africa. Apart from confirming common knowledge that low voter turnout is due to access and mobility issues, the study also highlighted nuances in how different demographic profiles and contexts affect OF registration and voting behavior.

For instance, regardless of sex, OFs with older age, higher educational attainment, and longer stay abroad tended to register and vote.

However, female OFs at a younger age or in Middle Eastern countries tended to be disadvantaged.

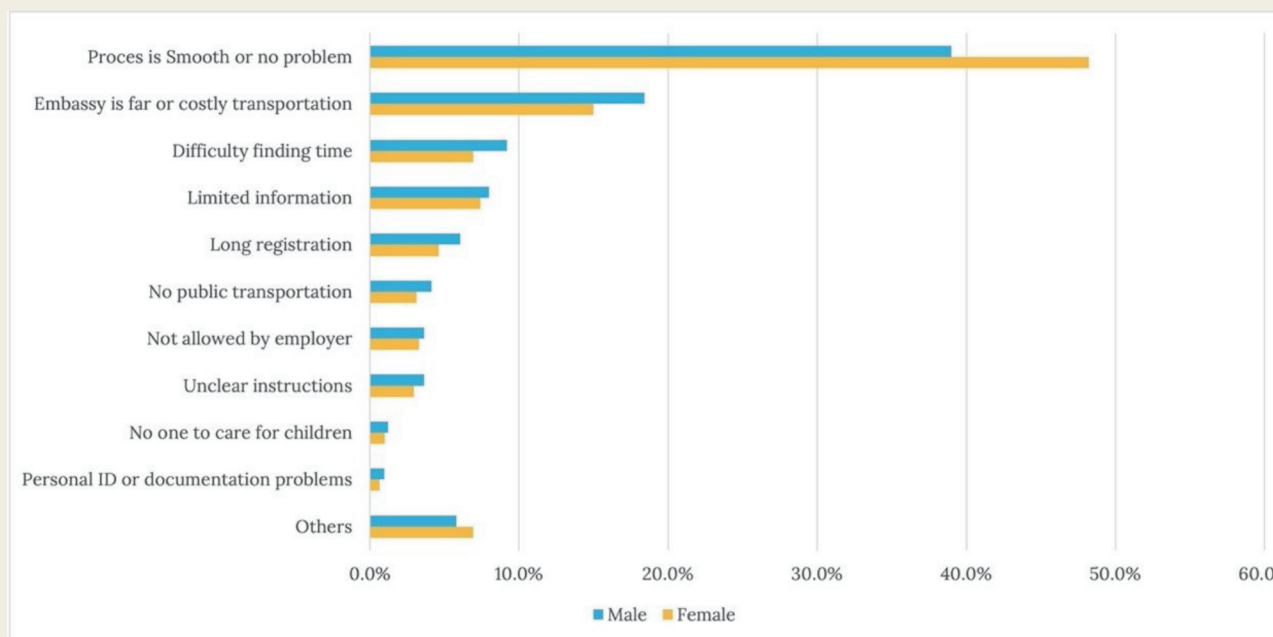
The survey also found that the **top reasons for failing to register** (Figure 10) are **being unaware of the registration procedure (26 percent), finding the embassy too far (17 percent) or no time (16 percent)**. A higher proportion of females (27 percent) was unaware of the registration procedure than males (20 percent). Meanwhile, more males found the embassy was too far (20 percent) or had no time (18 percent) compared to females (16 percent for both).



**Figure 10.** Top Reasons of Overseas Filipino Respondents for Not Getting Registered

According to the surveys on experiences of the registration process (Figure 11), 44 percent of participants reported the registration process to be smooth or no problem with a higher rate among females (48 percent) than males (39 percent). The most frequently mentioned problems include the transportation to the embassy being too far or costly (16 percent), difficulty finding time (8 percent), and limited information (8 percent). All the identified problems have higher reporting rates from males than females.

The main problems experienced by OFs in registration and voting were transportation and time costs. It is for this reason that OFs strongly supported an online voting system to improve voting convenience and efficiency. Other efforts to improve knowledge and experience of registration and voting nevertheless continue to be necessary.



**Figure 11.** Top Experiences of Overseas Filipino Respondents During Registration

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Collectively, the three studies recognized the efforts being done by COMELEC and other electoral reform actors and the progress that has been made over the years in promoting women's participation in the elections. However, much needs to be done to dramatically improve the participation of women whether as candidates or as voters. The studies identified the following recommendations:



- **INVEST** in digital and data solutions to improve the general public's access to information about the democratic rights and political processes in the Philippines.



- **CRAFT** a comprehensive agenda for increasing women's participation in elections and attain a voluntary quota of the percentage of women candidates in all contests among political parties.



- **IMPLEMENT** gender awareness advocacy programs that draw attention to women's leadership and positive contributions to the quality of governance and well-being of Filipinos.



- **INSTITUTE** capacity-building programs and other mechanisms that nurture and support women political leaders in various stages of their career—from deciding to run to leaving a legacy—to counteract patronage politics and other barriers.



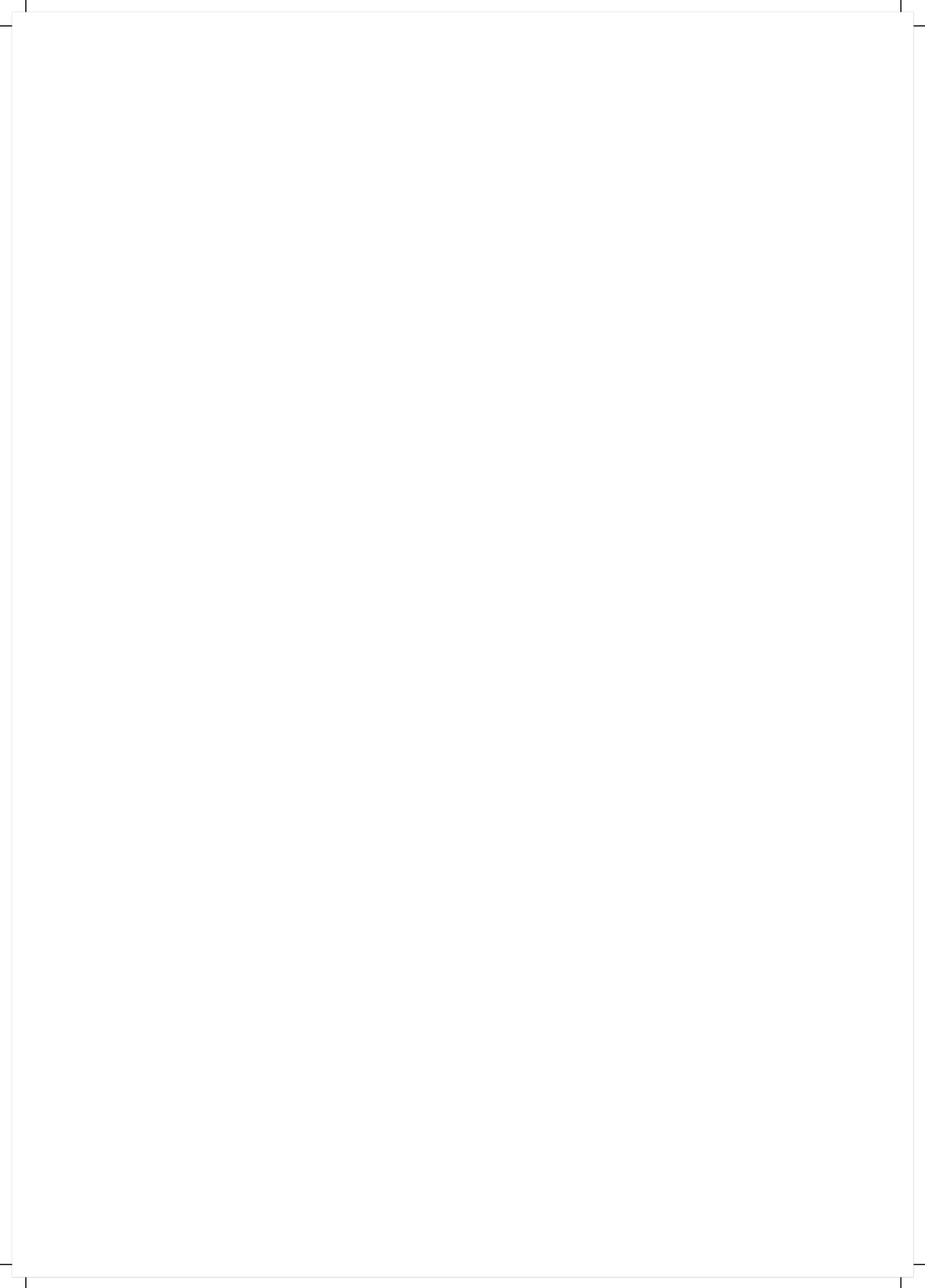
- **EXPLORE** online registration and voting with consultation from migrant groups and key stakeholders to ensure security and transparency.



- **STRENGTHEN** education awareness and access interventions for overseas voters by considering approaches which consider the diverse backgrounds and needs of OFs and their country contexts.



- **PARTNER** with universities, research institutions, or communications firms in conducting implementation research to understand the local context and find effective behavioral nudges that can be used for campaign or advocacy efforts.





**Spanish  
Cooperation**

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**United Nations Development Programme**

Philippines Country Office

15th Floor North Tower, Rockwell Business Center Sheridan

Sheridan corner United Streets, Bgy. Highway Hills,

1554 Mandaluyong City, Philippines

Email: [registry.ph@undp.org](mailto:registry.ph@undp.org)

Website: <https://www.ph.undp.org/>