

Give and Take?: An Analysis on the Perceived Reciprocal Effects of the Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged or Displaced Workers (TUPAD) Program on the Voting Behavior of Its Beneficiaries in Cauayan City, Isabela

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the political implications of the Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) Program in Cauayan City, Isabela, situating it within broader debates on social assistance, political reciprocity, and welfare politics. Specifically, it investigates whether and how participation in a short-term cash-for-work program is associated with beneficiaries' attitudes toward incumbent local officials and their reported voting support. A mixed methods design was employed, combining survey data from 218 respondents (109 TUPAD beneficiaries and 109 non-beneficiaries) with semi-structured interviews of selected beneficiaries. Descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests were used to assess differences in attitudes, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data. Findings indicate that TUPAD beneficiaries report significantly more favorable attitudes toward incumbent officials compared to non-beneficiaries. Interview data further suggest that some beneficiaries express support grounded in gratitude and perceived assistance, although others attribute their political preferences to personal judgment, family influence, or perceptions of program fairness. These results point to the presence of perceived reciprocity and positive political attitudes among beneficiaries but do not establish a direct causal effect on actual voting behavior. The study highlights how social assistance programs may shape political perceptions and reported support, raising important considerations for the nonpartisan implementation of welfare programs and the protection of democratic processes.

Keywords: Reciprocity, Voting Behavior, Social assistance, TUPAD, Political Engagement

I. INTRODUCTION

In an election, people select and reject government office aspirants whom they think are suited or unfit for public office. In the study of Seide (2014), voting is an element of decision-making in democracies. In the Philippines, voting decisions are often shaped not only by political preferences but also by social and economic conditions. As a developing country in Southeast Asia, the Philippines continues to

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deal with poverty and unemployment, which affect the country's economy and the everyday lives of citizens. With the drastic effects of the pandemic, many people became unemployed due to the closure of industries, making families less financially stable, with some barely able to afford three meals a day. These conditions may also affect their attitudes toward government officials and their voting behavior.

One response of the government to these conditions is social assistance, which uses public funds to help alleviate the financial burden of people in need (Lee et al., 2023). One example is the Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) Program, an emergency employment program implemented by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), often in partnership with local government units. The program provides temporary employment to displaced, disadvantaged, and vulnerable workers through a cash-for-work arrangement. Beneficiaries are usually assigned to community-based work, such as environmental cleaning, for a minimum of ten (10) days and, under later policy reforms, up to ninety (90) days of work. The Secretary of Labor and Employment approves TUPAD projects, while local implementers assist in identifying and facilitating beneficiaries based on program criteria. As shown in the study of Maalihan and Conchada (2022), the TUPAD program helped improve household living standards by providing income through temporary work. Social assistance programs such as TUPAD provide short-term financial aid to beneficiaries. Similarly, Callueng et al. (2020) and Strupat et al. (2022) found that social assistance programs help families cope with economic shocks during crisis situations.

However, social assistance grants like TUPAD may also influence the attitudes and voting preferences of beneficiaries. This is based on the idea that people may vote out of rational judgment, gratitude, or perceived obligation because of the benefits they received. One factor that may affect voting preference is shown in the study of Özel and Yildirim (2019), where citizens who benefited from social assistance tended to reward the incumbent and develop a positive evaluation of the incumbent. Likewise, Lawson et al. (2014) assessed the compliance of citizens who received government benefits and concluded that people may feel obliged to reciprocate the good acts shown by politicians connected with those benefits. This is further supported by Graham et al. (2016), who argued that although many people view clientelism as "bribery," some still vote for the politicians behind the distribution because they belong to low-income groups.

In contradiction, welfare regimes that rely more heavily on selective benefits, where the state exerts more effort in determining whether benefit claimants truly deserve benefits, may also create concerns about abuse, misuse, and unfair distribution compared with more universal benefit schemes (Roosma et al., 2015). Findings in the study of Przybylska (2021) confirm that people's awareness of the deservingness of different groups in society may affect how they perceive social benefits and the legitimacy of government action. In this sense, support for incumbent officials may not only come from gratitude or reciprocity. It may also be shaped by satisfaction with program implementation, perceptions of fairness, pre-existing political alignment, family or community influence, and fear of losing access to future benefits.

In addition, the possible norm of exchange between voters and local officials may be understood through Social Exchange Theory. Social Exchange Theory explains relationships in terms of rewards, costs, and reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano et al., 2017).

In the context of this study, TUPAD may be viewed as a benefit received by beneficiaries, while political support may be viewed as a possible form of reciprocation. Reciprocity refers to the exchange of favors between parties, where individuals who receive benefits may feel the need to return the favor through support, loyalty, or favorable attitudes. In a deeper picture, individuals who receive rewards or assistance from incumbent local officials may feel a debt of gratitude and may express this through support for the officials during elections. Social Exchange Theory and the idea of reciprocity are therefore useful in examining the “give and take” relationship that may exist between TUPAD beneficiaries and incumbent officials. As examined in the study of Ciptono et al. (2021), social exchange happened in Tuban Regency, East Java, where the norm of exchange was perpetuated between the candidate village head and voters. The exchange was used to reciprocate acts of kindness because of the rewards people received; the voters rewarded the candidate by supporting them.

While existing studies discuss social assistance, reciprocity, and voting behavior, there remains a need to examine how these dynamics appear in local social assistance programs such as TUPAD, particularly in Cauayan City, Isabela. More specifically, it is important to determine whether TUPAD beneficiaries differ from non-beneficiaries in their attitudes toward incumbent local officials and whether beneficiaries perceive the program as influencing their political engagement, voting behavior, and attitudes. Thus, this study does not assume that TUPAD directly determines voting behavior. Rather, it examines whether there are perceived reciprocal effects and differences in political attitudes associated with being a TUPAD beneficiary.

Subsequent to this, this research examined the perceived reciprocal effect of the TUPAD program on voting behavior, attitude, and political participation in the Philippines, particularly in the City of Cauayan, Isabela. Specifically, this study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) What is the level of attitude of TUPAD and non-TUPAD beneficiaries of Poblacion, Cauayan City toward incumbent local officials? (2) Is there a significant difference in the attitude of Cauayan City TUPAD and non-TUPAD beneficiaries toward incumbent local officials? (3) What are the respondents’ perceived influences of the program on their political engagement, voting behavior, and attitude toward incumbent local officials?

II. METHODS

In this study, the researchers employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. Specifically, the study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design, where quantitative and qualitative data were collected within the same phase and integrated during the interpretation stage to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). This design was appropriate as it allowed the comparison and triangulation of numerical data with contextual insights.

For the quantitative portion, the survey questionnaire consisted of fifteen (15) close-ended items, all aligned with the study's problem statements. A four-point Likert scale was used to measure responses: 4 - Strongly Agree, 3 - Agree, 2 - Disagree, and 1 - Strongly Disagree. The instrument primarily measured respondents' attitudes toward incumbent local officials, including perceptions of performance, fairness, and trust. Selected items (Items 13-15) captured reported political support, such as intention to vote and continued support for incumbents.

For the qualitative component, the researchers used a semi-structured interview guide to collect deeper insights from selected TUPAD beneficiaries. These interviews explored respondents' experiences with the program and their perceived influence of TUPAD on political engagement, attitudes, and reported voting support.

The questionnaire underwent pilot testing with a small sample of respondents to ensure its reliability and validity. Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure reliability, and the test yielded a score of 0.905, indicating high internal consistency. However, this measure reflects internal reliability and does not fully establish construct validity, which is acknowledged as a limitation of the instrument. Additionally, the interview guide was validated by research experts to ensure the appropriateness and clarity of the questions.

Given the mixed-methods design, the researchers selected 109 TUPAD beneficiaries and 109 non-beneficiaries, totaling 218 respondents from the Poblacion Cluster of Cauayan City, Isabela, specifically from Barangays Cabaruan, District 1, and District 2. The researchers requested the TUPAD beneficiary master list from each barangay in the Poblacion area, but only three barangays were able to provide their lists. Due to safety concerns, other barangays were not included in the data collection. From the 175 listed TUPAD beneficiaries for the year 2024 in these barangays, a sample size of 109 was determined using the Raosoft sample size calculator.

To ensure consistency, the following inclusion criteria were applied: (1) TUPAD respondents must be official beneficiaries listed for the year 2024, (2) each respondent must come from a different household, and (3) respondents must be residents of the Poblacion cluster. For the comparison group, non-beneficiaries were selected based on the criteria that they were residents of the same barangays but had not received assistance from the TUPAD program. Simple random sampling was employed to select TUPAD beneficiaries, providing each individual with an equal chance of selection (Singh, 2003).

For the non-beneficiaries, purposive sampling was used to identify individuals who met the criteria but had not received assistance from the TUPAD program. According to Zulueta and Constales (2003), purposive sampling involves the selection of participants based on the purpose of the study. While this approach allowed for comparison, it may introduce sampling bias, which is acknowledged as a limitation.

In addition, six (6) TUPAD beneficiaries were purposively chosen for the qualitative interviews. These participants were selected based on their willingness to participate and their ability to provide relevant insights about the program. While the number of interviews is limited, the qualitative data were used primarily to support and contextualize the quantitative findings rather than to achieve full thematic saturation.

The data were analyzed using different methods based on the nature of the information. Frequency and percentage distributions were used to determine the demographic profile of the respondents. To address the first research problem, descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation, were employed to assess and measure the attitudes of both TUPAD beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries toward incumbent local officials.

For the second research problem, the researchers conducted an independent samples t-test to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the attitudes of TUPAD beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries regarding incumbent local officials. All quantitative statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

For the third research problem, thematic analysis was used to gain a deeper understanding of the qualitative data gathered from the TUPAD beneficiaries. This involved identifying, coding, and organizing key themes and patterns within the responses, as described by Naeem et al. (2023). The qualitative findings were then used to explain and support the patterns observed in the quantitative results, thereby strengthening the overall interpretation through triangulation.

Ethical Considerations

The respondents were asked to provide informed consent before participating in the study. The researchers explained the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study to ensure that the respondents understood their participation. Respondents were also informed that they had the right to decline participation, withdraw at any point, or withhold any information they did not wish to disclose. For the interviews, respondents gave consent for the proceedings to be recorded. The researchers also ensured compliance with Republic Act No. 10173, or the Data Privacy Act of 2012, by protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of all respondents. All personal information and responses were treated with strict confidentiality and were not disclosed to any unauthorized parties.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 below presents the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of sex, age, educational attainment, and electoral participation. These characteristics provide contextual background for understanding respondents' attitudes and political engagement.

In terms of sex, the sample is relatively balanced, with a slight majority of female respondents (51.8%) compared to male respondents (48.2%). Regarding age, most respondents fall within the working-age population, with the largest group aged 31–40 years (31.3%), followed by those aged 41–50 years (29.1%). Smaller proportions are observed among respondents aged 20–30 years (19.4%), 51–60 years (17.0%), and 61–70 years (3.7%).

With respect to educational attainment, the majority of respondents are high school graduates (50.5%), followed by those who completed elementary education (25.7%) and college education (23.4%). Only a minimal proportion reported having a

master’s degree (0.5%). This distribution reflects the general profile of individuals targeted by social assistance programs such as TUPAD.

In terms of electoral participation, an overwhelming majority of respondents reported participating in the most recent election (98.2%), while only a small proportion did not (1.8%). Similarly, nearly all respondents (99.5%) expressed an intention to vote in the next election, indicating a high level of political participation across the sample.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Profile Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Female	113	51.8%
	Male	105	48.2%
Age	20-30	42	19.4%
	31-40	68	31.3%
	41-50	63	29.1%
	51-60	37	17.0%
	61-70	8	3.7%
Educational Attainment	Master’s Degree	1	0.5%
	College	51	23.4%
	High School	110	50.5%
	Elementary	56	25.7%
Participation in the Last Election	Participated	214	98.2%
	Did not participate	4	1.8%
Plan to Vote in the Next Election	Plans to vote	217	99.5%
	Does not plan to vote	1	0.5%

Note. Total number of respondents = 218. Percentages may not total exactly 100% due to rounding.

Overall, the respondents are predominantly working-age individuals with varying educational backgrounds and high levels of electoral participation, providing a relevant context for examining their attitudes toward incumbent local officials.

B. The Level of Attitudes of the TUPAD and Non-TUPAD Beneficiaries Towards Incumbent Local Officials

Table 2 presents the level of attitudes of TUPAD beneficiaries toward incumbent local officials. Overall, respondents reported a strongly agree level (M = 3.36, SD = 0.10), indicating generally favorable perceptions of incumbent officials.

The three indicators with the highest mean scores are Item 15 (M = 3.54, SD = 0.62), Item 3 (M = 3.50, SD = 0.63), and Item 8 (M = 3.48, SD = 0.67). These items relate to expectations of future programs, efforts of officials to mobilize resources, and effectiveness in addressing local issues. These findings suggest that beneficiaries perceive incumbent officials as responsive and capable of addressing community needs.

These perceptions are supported by the experiences of respondents. For instance, one respondent stated, “Yes, TUPAD helped. Because I bought it for rice, and I also bought it for household necessities” (Respondent 1). Another shared, “I was able to buy using the money for our daily needs because I have two children” (Respondent 2). Similarly, a respondent noted, “Let’s just say it became a bridge for

us to buy rice, essentials like food, soap, and something like that. It helped us somehow” (Respondent 4). These responses highlight how the program contributed to addressing immediate financial needs, which may be associated with positive evaluations of local officials.

However, lower mean scores were observed in Item 6 (M = 3.11), Item 7 (M = 3.18), and Item 11 (M = 3.20), which relate to fairness of distribution, deservingness of beneficiaries, and transparency. Although still within the “agree” category, these results indicate that some beneficiaries have reservations regarding the implementation of the program.

Table 2

Level of Attitudes of TUPAD Beneficiaries Towards Incumbent Officials

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Descriptive Interpretation
1. The incumbent local officials have empathy.	3.39	0.76	Strongly Agree
2. The incumbent local officials prioritize the needs of the people.	3.32	0.71	Strongly Agree
3. The incumbent local officials are doing their best to have the resources to help the people overcome financial burdens.	3.50	0.63	Strongly Agree
4. The incumbent local officials do what’s best for the community.	3.50	0.69	Strongly Agree
5. The incumbent local officials treat their people fairly.	3.15	0.91	Agree
6. Government social assistance is distributed fairly	3.11	0.93	Agree
7. Local officials grant slots in the financial assistance program to those who are deserving	3.18	0.89	Agree
8. The incumbent local officials are doing great in addressing the local issues	3.48	0.67	Strongly Agree
9. The incumbent local officials are doing great in implementing social assistance for the residents	3.41	0.68	Strongly Agree
10. The incumbent local officials are helpful	3.50	0.68	Strongly Agree
11. The incumbent local officials are transparent	3.20	0.72	Agree
12. The incumbent local officials understand the challenges faced by those who have financial problems	3.42	0.71	Strongly Agree
13. The incumbent local officials deserve my vote in the next local election	3.29	0.86	Strongly Agree
14. Will support the incumbent local official’s plans over the following years of their service.	3.43	0.70	Strongly Agree
15. There will be more projects and programs to come through the initiative of the incumbent local official in the future.	3.54	0.62	Strongly Agree
General Weighted Average	3.36	0.10	Strongly Agree

This is further reflected in the respondents' statements. One respondent mentioned, "But sometimes, our officials, they usually pick who to put in the beneficiary list" (Respondent 4). Another expressed concern, "It's because, ma'am, there are others that receive double benefits, while we are not receiving any" (Respondent 5). In addition, a respondent noted, "I hope it can be given to those who really need it more" (Respondent 2). These responses suggest that while beneficiaries generally view the program positively, concerns about fairness and transparency remain.

This observation is consistent with the study of Przybylska (2021), which states that people's awareness of the deservingness of different groups may influence perceptions of social benefits and the legitimacy of government action. Similarly, Maningas (2023) pointed out that issues in beneficiary listing and organization may affect how programs are perceived by the public.

Overall, the findings indicate that TUPAD beneficiaries hold favorable attitudes toward incumbent local officials. These attitudes may be associated with their direct experience of receiving assistance and the perceived benefits of the program. As supported by Edeer (2023), individuals may evaluate incumbents positively when they anticipate continued benefits. However, these results should be interpreted as reflecting attitudes and perceptions, rather than direct evidence of voting behavior.

Table 3

Non-TUPAD Participants' Level of Attitude Towards Incumbent Officials

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Descriptive Interpretation
1. The incumbent local officials have empathy.	3	0.69	Agree
2. The incumbent local officials prioritize the needs of the people.	2.89	0.74	Agree
3. The incumbent local officials are doing their best to have the resources to help the people overcome financial burdens.	3.02	0.69	Agree
4. The incumbent local officials do what's best for the community.	3.11	0.58	Agree
5. The incumbent local officials treat their people fairly.	2.29	0.82	Agree
6. Government social assistance is distributed fairly.	2.23	0.80	Disagree
7. Local officials grant slots in the financial assistance program to those who are deserving.	2.15	0.83	Disagree
8. The incumbent local officials are doing great in addressing the local issues.	2.80	0.74	Agree
9. The incumbent local officials are doing great in implementing social assistance for the residents.	2.59	0.85	Agree
10. The incumbent local officials are helpful.	2.90	0.59	Agree

11. The incumbent local officials are transparent.	2.26	0.85	Disagree
12. The incumbent local officials understand the challenges faced by those who have financial problems.	2.71	0.73	Agree
13. The incumbent local officials deserve my vote in the next local election.	2.10	0.90	Disagree
14. Will support the incumbent local official's plans over the following years of their service.	2.49	0.80	Agree
15. There will be more projects and programs to come through the initiative of the incumbent local official in the future.	2.83	0.63	Agree
General Weighted Average	2.63	0.10	Agree

Table 3 presents the level of attitudes of non-beneficiaries toward incumbent local officials. The overall mean ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.10$) corresponds to an “agree” interpretation, indicating moderately positive but less favorable attitudes compared to TUPAD beneficiaries.

The highest-rated items include Item 1 ($M = 3.00$), Item 4 ($M = 3.11$), and Item 3 ($M = 3.02$), suggesting that non-beneficiaries still recognize certain positive qualities of incumbent officials, such as empathy and efforts to address community needs.

However, lower mean scores were observed in Item 6 ($M = 2.23$), Item 7 ($M = 2.15$), and Item 11 ($M = 2.26$), which are interpreted as “disagree.” These items relate to fairness, deservingness, and transparency. In addition, Item 13 ($M = 2.10$) indicates that non-beneficiaries are less likely to agree that incumbents deserve their vote. These findings suggest that non-beneficiaries are more critical of how social assistance programs are implemented.

These results indicate that perceptions of inequality in benefit distribution may influence attitudes toward incumbent officials. As noted by Anderson and Dupont (2020), access to benefits and services can shape perceptions of inclusion or exclusion, which in turn may affect attitudes toward governance. Similarly, the perceived unfair distribution of assistance may lead to less favorable evaluations of public officials.

Overall, non-beneficiaries exhibit lower levels of agreement compared to beneficiaries, suggesting that lack of access to the program may be associated with less positive attitudes toward incumbent officials.

Table 4.
Level of Attitude of TUPAD and Non-TUPAD Participants Towards Incumbent Local Officials

	N	Mean	SD	Descriptive Interpretation
Non- TUPAD	109	2.63	0.10	Agree
TUPAD	109	3.36	0.10	Strongly Agree

Table 4 above presents the comparison between TUPAD and non-TUPAD respondents. TUPAD beneficiaries reported a higher level of agreement (M = 3.36, SD = 0.10) compared to non-beneficiaries (M = 2.63, SD = 0.10).

This difference suggests that being a beneficiary of social assistance programs such as TUPAD is associated with more favorable attitudes toward incumbent local officials. Beneficiaries, having directly received assistance, may evaluate officials more positively, while non-beneficiaries may base their assessments on perceptions of fairness and accessibility of the program.

This finding is supported by Campbell (2005), which suggests that beneficiaries of social assistance programs may develop more favorable political attitudes. Likewise, Watson (2015) notes that individuals facing economic constraints may rely more on government support, which can shape their perceptions of public officials. Dharma et al. (2022) also found that social assistance may influence political evaluations, although such influence should not be interpreted as direct evidence of voting behavior.

However, these findings should be interpreted with caution. The results reflect attitudes toward incumbent officials, not actual voting behavior. While favorable perceptions may be associated with support, they do not necessarily indicate that beneficiaries will vote for incumbents, as political preferences may also be influenced by other factors such as personal judgment, social influence, and perceptions of fairness.

B. Significant Difference in the Attitude of TUPAD and Non-TUPAD Beneficiaries Towards the Incumbent Local Officials

To determine whether the TUPAD program has a reciprocal effect on the voting attitude of its beneficiaries, the T-test for Equality of Variance was conducted. Likewise, the following are the hypotheses of the study:

H_0 = There is no significant difference in the attitude of TUPAD and non-TUPAD beneficiaries towards incumbent government officials.

H_a = There is a significant difference in the attitude of TUPAD and non-TUPAD beneficiaries towards incumbent government officials.

Table 2 below presents the results of the independent samples t-test. The findings indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of TUPAD and non-TUPAD beneficiaries toward incumbent local officials. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 5

Independent Samples t-test on Attitude Toward Incumbent Local Officials

Test Condition	F	Sig.	t	df	p-value	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	3.268	0.072	-10.768	216	< 0.001*	-0.73740	0.06848
Equal variances not assumed	—	—	-10.768	211.272	< 0.001*	-0.73740	0.06848

*significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

This result suggests that TUPAD beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries differ in how they evaluate incumbent officials. Beneficiaries, who directly receive assistance, tend to report more favorable attitudes, while non-beneficiaries are relatively less positive in their evaluations.

These findings may be interpreted in light of Social Exchange Theory, which explains how individuals respond to perceived benefits through favorable attitudes or support (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano et al., 2017). Similarly, Baker and Bulkley (2014), as interpreted by Boddewyn and Buckley (2017), explains reciprocity as a form of “paying forward,” where individuals may feel inclined to respond positively after receiving assistance. Tobias et al. (2014) also found that recipients of government benefits may continue to support incumbents as part of this exchange dynamic.

This pattern is reflected in some respondents’ statements. For example, one respondent shared, “Yes, I really have a plan to support the local officials because they help a lot of people who are in need, like us” (Respondent 1). Such responses suggest that positive experiences with the program may be associated with favorable attitudes toward incumbent officials.

However, it is important to note that the statistical test only demonstrates a difference in attitudes, not a direct causal effect of the program on voting behavior. The findings indicate association rather than causation, and attitudes may still be influenced by other factors such as perceptions of fairness, personal judgment, or social influences.

C. Perceived Influence of the TUPAD program on Beneficiaries and Non-beneficiaries’ Voting Attitudes, Behavior, and Political Engagement

This section discusses the perceived influence of the TUPAD program on beneficiaries’ political engagement, attitudes, and reported voting support.

1. Influence on their Political Engagement

The findings suggest that TUPAD contributes to improving the immediate economic conditions of beneficiaries, which may shape their perceptions of government programs. As noted by Maalihan and Conchada (2022), cash-based assistance allows beneficiaries to manage household needs more effectively, leading to higher levels of satisfaction compared to other forms of assistance.

This is reflected in respondents’ experiences. One respondent shared, “Yes, the money I worked for 10 days helped... I was able to buy using the money for our daily needs because I have two children” (Respondent 1). Similarly, another respondent noted that the assistance helped purchase rice and other household necessities, especially during periods of financial strain (Respondent 2). In some cases, the assistance was used as small capital for livelihood, such as starting a poultry business, which continues to generate income (Respondent 3).

Despite these positive experiences, respondents also emphasized that the assistance is temporary in nature. One respondent explained, “It’s not for a lifetime... it became a bridge for us to buy rice, necessities like food, soap... it helped us somehow” (Respondent 4). Other respondents echoed similar sentiments, noting that the program helped them cope with daily expenses, particularly food consumption, but only for a limited period (Respondents 5 and 6).

These findings are consistent with Lee and Hwang (2016), which noted that cash transfer programs have become a common strategy among developing countries to address poverty and provide social protection. While limited in scope, such programs function as short-term safety nets that improve immediate well-being and may influence beneficiaries' perceptions of government responsiveness.

2. Influence on their Voting Behavior and Attitude

The findings suggest that participation in the TUPAD program may be associated with positive attitudes and reported support toward incumbent officials. As discussed by Dharma et al. (2022), beneficiaries of social assistance programs may be more likely to express support for incumbents who are perceived to have provided benefits.

This is reflected in respondents' statements. For instance, one respondent stated, "Yes, I really have a plan to support the local officials because they help a lot of people who are in need, like us" (Respondent 1). Another respondent emphasized performance-based support, stating, "I will support the local official... what I know has helped and has been proven" (Respondent 2). Similarly, a respondent noted that support may be extended to officials who are perceived to have delivered tangible results (Respondent 5).

However, not all responses reflect a direct link between receiving assistance and political support. In some cases, support is influenced by other factors such as family ties. For example, one respondent stated, "I will definitely continue to support the local officials. I have a cousin who is a local official" (Respondent 3). This supports the findings of Singh (2020), which highlight the role of social and familial influence in voting behavior.

Other respondents emphasized that receiving assistance does not necessarily create an obligation to support incumbent officials. One respondent explained, "Not because it was passed through their hands... it doesn't mean that I am obligated to support and vote for them" (Respondent 4). Another respondent added, "I think, I keenly measure who's deserving for me to vote" (Respondent 6). These responses indicate that some individuals rely on personal judgment rather than reciprocity.

These findings are consistent with McGann (2016), which suggests that voting preferences may be influenced by the distribution of public goods but are not solely determined by them. Similarly, Leeuw (2017) discuss how government assistance may shape political perceptions, while still allowing room for independent decision-making.

3. Perceived Voting Obligation

Table 6 presents the distribution of respondents based on their perceived obligation to support incumbent local officials. Among non-TUPAD respondents, only 32 (29.4%) reported a perceived obligation to support the incumbent, while a larger proportion, 77 (70.6%), indicated no such obligation. In contrast, among TUPAD beneficiaries, a majority, 71 (65.1%), reported a perceived obligation, compared to 38 (34.9%) who reported no such obligation.

Table 6

Perceived Voting Obligation Between TUPAD and Non-TUPAD Respondents

Response	TUPAD (n = 109)	%	Non-TUPAD (n = 109)	%
Perceived Obligation to Support the Incumbent	71	65.1%	32	29.4%
No Perceived Obligation to Support the Incumbent	38	34.9%	77	70.6%

These results suggest that TUPAD beneficiaries are more likely to report a sense of obligation toward incumbent local officials compared to non-beneficiaries. This pattern may be associated with their direct experience of receiving assistance from the program, which may contribute to more favorable evaluations of incumbent officials.

This tendency is reflected in respondents' statements. For instance, one respondent shared, "Yes, I will vote for them again... because I was selected as one of the beneficiaries" (Respondent 1). Another respondent stated, "I am obliged to reward those who I know have really helped and who have really done well" (Respondent 2). Similarly, another respondent described support as a form of returning the favor after receiving assistance (Respondent 3).

However, this perceived obligation is not uniform among all beneficiaries. Some respondents rejected the idea of obligation, emphasizing that assistance is a government program rather than a personal favor. One respondent stated, "I am not obligated to vote for them, it was just passed through their hands, it's not from them" (Respondent 4). Another respondent expressed concern about the idea of vote buying, indicating that voting decisions should not be influenced by material benefits (Respondent 5). Similarly, one respondent emphasized independent decision-making, stating, "I think, I keenly measure who's deserving for me to vote" (Respondent 6).

These findings are consistent with Özel and Yıldırım (2019), which suggest that beneficiaries of social assistance may develop positive evaluations of incumbents. Reciprocity, as discussed by Baker and Bulkley (2014) and Boddewyn and Buckley (2017), refers to the tendency to return favors after receiving benefits. Likewise, Tobias et al. (2014) and Bustikova and Corduneanu-Huci (2017) highlight how political support may be expressed as a response to benefits received.

However, the findings also indicate that reciprocity does not fully determine political behavior. In contrast to Lawson et al. (2014), which suggests that beneficiaries may feel obligated to reciprocate, this study shows that many respondents maintain independent judgment. As noted by Pradhanawati et al. (2019) and Şener et al. (2023), voting behavior is influenced by multiple factors, including socio-economic conditions, rational evaluation, and social pressures.

Overall, the findings indicate that the TUPAD program contributes to improved short-term economic conditions and is associated with generally positive attitudes toward incumbent local officials. While some beneficiaries express a sense of reciprocity or obligation, others emphasize personal choice, fairness, and independent evaluation in their voting decisions. Thus, the influence of the TUPAD program on political attitudes and reported support is not uniform. Rather, it reflects a combination of program experience, perceived benefits, social context, and individual judgment. Importantly, these findings represent perceived influence and reported attitudes and should not be interpreted as direct evidence of actual voting behavior.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic caused widespread unemployment and economic hardship, prompting the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) to implement the TUPAD program as a form of emergency employment assistance for displaced and disadvantaged workers. This study examined the attitudes of TUPAD beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries toward incumbent local officials and explored the perceived influence of the program on political attitudes, voting support, and political engagement.

The findings show a significant difference between the attitudes of TUPAD beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. TUPAD beneficiaries reported more favorable attitudes toward incumbent local officials, while non-beneficiaries expressed more critical views, particularly on the fairness, transparency, and distribution of the program. The qualitative findings further suggest that some beneficiaries associate the assistance they received with gratitude and support for incumbent officials. However, not all beneficiaries viewed the program as creating a political obligation. Some respondents emphasized that their voting decisions remain based on personal judgment, perceived performance, and independent evaluation.

Overall, the study suggests that TUPAD may be associated with favorable political attitudes and perceived reciprocity among some beneficiaries, but it does not establish a direct causal effect on actual voting behavior. The findings highlight the need to implement social assistance programs in a transparent, fair, and nonpartisan manner to protect both the integrity of public welfare programs and democratic decision-making.

It is recommended that future studies include a larger and more diverse sample, examine actual voting behavior more directly, and consider other factors such as political affiliation, family influence, community pressure, and perceptions of program fairness. Future research may also compare TUPAD implementation across different barangays or localities to better understand how social assistance programs shape political attitudes in varying contexts.

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