

From Awareness to Action: Political Awareness and Participation among College Students at a Philippine University

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Date Submitted:
September 05, 2026

Date Accepted:
October 01, 2026

Date Published:
October 23, 2026

DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.23597926

ABSTRACT

This study determined the level of political awareness and political participation of college students at the University of La Salette, Inc., Santiago City, Isabela, and examined the relationship between the two variables. A quantitative descriptive-correlational design was employed. A survey questionnaire adapted from Hermosa (2021) was administered online to 362 college students selected through stratified random sampling across nine college departments. Results showed that respondents were "Highly Aware" politically ($M = 3.35$), with awareness strongest on public issues ($M = 3.44$) and weakest on public policies ($M = 3.27$). Their political participation was "Participative" ($M = 2.87$), highest in election-related activities ($M = 2.99$) and lowest in political discussions and forums ($M = 2.79$).

A moderate, positive, and significant relationship was found between political awareness and political participation with awareness of public policies showing the strongest association with all three participation domains. No significant differences in awareness or participation were found when respondents were grouped by sex, college department, and year level. These results indicate that students are informed and generally engaged, but a gap remains between what they know and what they do, particularly in public forums, consultations, local governance, and collective action. The study recommends university-wide civic engagement programs, the integration of local policy analysis into instruction, and partnerships with local government units and the Sangguniang Kabataan to give students concrete avenues for participation.

Keywords: *political awareness, political participation, civic engagement, college students, youth, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Political participation is one of the clearest expressions of citizenship in a democracy, allowing individuals to help shape the policies, leaders, and institutions that govern their communities. It is not limited to voting during elections; it also includes joining political or civic discussions, expressing opinions on public issues, attending community activities, taking part in student organizations or government, and supporting advocacy campaigns. Among the different sectors of society, college students hold a unique position, as many are first-time voters and emerging civic leaders who will eventually carry the responsibility of sustaining democratic processes. Yet despite greater access to information through digital

platforms, a considerable number of young Filipinos remain disengaged from formal political processes such as voting, public discussions, and civic activism.

Political awareness, which involves knowledge and understanding of political events, government activities, public policies, elections, and social issues, is generally assumed to be a precondition of meaningful participation. However, awareness and participation are not necessarily the same. A student may be aware of political issues without acting on them, while another may participate because of social influence or community involvement without a deeper understanding of the issue involved. Dolipas (2021) identified youth political inactivity as a concern, particularly where young people have limited involvement in voting and political expression.

More recent work shows that this link is neither simple nor automatic. In a systematic review of Philippine studies, Asaytuno et al. (2026) found that the effect of participation on awareness depends on the type, quality, and context of the activity. Social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok expose young people to political information; direct experiences such as community projects and leadership activities provide deeper learning; and political efficacy encourages continued participation. At the same time, socioeconomic inequality, limited civic education, political disempowerment, and unequal access to opportunities, along with age, gender, and digital literacy, can limit how awareness and participation reinforce each other.

Although these studies describe youth political behavior in general, there remains a need to examine how awareness and participation are related within a specific university setting. Recent work at the University of La Salette, Inc. has begun to address the political behavior of its students: Castelo et al. (2026) found that students reported strong political self-efficacy and situational involvement, and that their exposure to political advertisements on social media was modestly related to these attitudes. That study, however, focused on exposure to advertising rather than on whether students' awareness of policies, leaders, and issues translates into actual participation. Students at the University of La Salette, Inc. in Santiago City, Isabela, may differ from students in other institutions in their sources of political information, levels of interest, and opportunities for participation. Moreover, because the study was conducted in the first semester of Academic Year 2026–2027, many respondents were likely below voting age during the May 2022 national and local elections. The study therefore treats election-related engagement, such as campaigning, sharing opinions on election outcomes, reporting prohibited activities, and promoting responsible voting, as distinct from actual ballot-casting, and examines participation in its broader forms.

This study examines the relationship between political awareness and political participation among college students of the University of La Salette, Inc. Rather than assuming that awareness automatically results in participation, it determines whether such a relationship exists and where the gap between knowing and acting is widest. The findings are intended to inform the university, educators, and local stakeholders in designing programs that help students become more informed, responsible, and active members of their communities, and to contribute to the growing literature on youth political behavior in the Philippines.

Research Questions

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1 Year level
 - 1.2 College department
 - 1.3 Sex
2. What is the level of political awareness of the respondents in terms of public policies, political leaders, and public issues?
3. What is the level of political participation of the respondents in terms of voting, political discussions/forums, and activism?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' political awareness and political participation?

5. Is there a significant difference in the political awareness and political participation of the respondents when grouped according to their demographic profile?

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on two complementary theories. The Theory of Political Socialization holds that individuals develop political beliefs, values, and behaviors through a lifelong process shaped by agents such as the family, schools, peers, and the media (Ladia, 2025). It explains how students acquire political knowledge and attitudes. The Civic Engagement Model, also known as Civic Voluntarism Theory, emphasizes that active engagement in civic life depends on resources such as information, skills, and access to community involvement (Hofer, 2021). It explains why awareness may or may not lead to action. Together, the two theories frame political awareness as a resource developed through socialization and political participation as the outcome that this resource makes possible but does not guarantee.

Literature Review

Political Awareness Among University Students

Across national contexts, university students generally demonstrate high political awareness, although its depth varies. Al-Khaza'leh and Lahiani (2021) found high awareness among students of Al Ain University, with differences by faculty, sex, and year level. In the Philippines, Hermosa (2021) reported high awareness of public policies, political leaders, and public issues among students of Laguna State Polytechnic University, and found that awareness of political leaders was linked to voting and public discussion, while awareness of public issues was associated with voting. High awareness, however, does not automatically translate into participation. Badaru and Adu (2021) found that although South African university students were highly aware of their political rights, only a small proportion voted in student and national elections, even as awareness and participation were positively and significantly related.

Social Media and Digital Political Participation

Young people increasingly participate through digital and issue-based activities such as online campaigns, hashtags, and petitions, though such participation may be more symbolic than sustained (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021). The effect of social media on political knowledge depends on the quality of information and the level of interaction, exposing youth to misinformation and polarization as well as to useful content (Koc-Michalska et al., 2021; Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023). Online involvement does not automatically produce offline participation (Zyad, 2023), and treating online expression as a substitute for voting may weaken formal engagement (Torres, 2025). In the Philippines, Domino et al. (2023) found that social media use predicted participation mainly through political interest, while Santos (2023) and Osumo et al. (2025) showed that the platform used and the user's digital literacy and motivation shape whether online exposure becomes meaningful participation. Among University of La Salette students, TikTok and Facebook were the most used platforms and the main channels through which political advertisements reached them, and exposure was associated with political self-efficacy, involvement, and perceptions of advertisements but not with peer and family influence (Castelo et al., 2026).

The Role of Universities and Civic Education

Universities can serve as spaces for political learning, dialogue, and civic development, but only when students are given genuine opportunities to express opinions and take part in decision-making (Al-Khaza'leh & Lahiani, 2021; Watfa & Ait Ali, 2025). The lack of civic education contributes to youth disengagement and students who doubt that their opinions matter benefit from seminars and opportunities to apply democratic principles in classrooms and organizations (Dolipas, 2021). Also, Lundberg (2024)

found that participation in mock elections improved Swedish students' political knowledge and, to a lesser extent, their interest, efficacy, and engagement.

Political Efficacy, Interest, and Civic Responsibility

Attitudinal factors help determine whether awareness becomes action. Ladia and Panao (2023) found that internal political efficacy was strongly related to online, interpersonal, and offline participation among Filipino youth during the 2022 elections. Çiçekli (2025) showed that political interest and the perceived usefulness of participation shape whether knowledgeable students become active, while Baizhumakzy et al. (2025) found that civic responsibility, rather than patriotism, strengthened the link between political culture and participation. Feio and Oliveira (2025) added that news exposure raises awareness only when young people can evaluate sources and distinguish reliable information from misinformation.

Barriers to Youth Political Participation

Structural and psychological barriers continue to limit youth participation in the Philippines. Senior high school students' involvement has been constrained by limited knowledge, limited opportunities, and uncertainty about how to contribute (Ibardeloza et al., 2021). Filipino youth remain marginalized from formal decision-making and political violence, inequality, and corruption discourage engagement (Basinillo et al., 2024). Borja et al. (2024) argued that the country's high electoral turnout masks a broader political disempowerment in which nonelectoral participation remains limited, while Nucum et al. (2024) identified low political efficacy and social-media-related social anxiety as predictors of youth disengagement. At the local level, Domingo et al. (2026) found that residents of Santiago City, most of them young adults, experienced little difficulty using the city's e-government platforms, such as the KaisaKa app, and viewed them as highly beneficial, but that limited awareness of how to use these platforms remained the main gap and that engagement was not uniform across demographic groups. This suggests that channels for local participation exist, but citizens are not always aware of how to use them.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component determined the respondents' levels of political awareness and political participation as they naturally existed, without manipulation. The correlational component determined whether a significant relationship existed between the two variables; the results indicate association rather than causation. A comparative component examined whether awareness and participation differed across demographic groups.

Study Site and Participants

The study was conducted at the University of La Salette, Inc., a private higher education institution in Santiago City, Isabela, Philippines. Participants were college students officially enrolled in the university during the first semester of Academic Year 2026–2027.

Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Procedure

From a population of 6,244 college students, a sample of 362 respondents was computed using the Raosoft sample size calculator at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Stratified random sampling was employed, with the nine college departments serving as strata and the sample allocated proportionally to the size of each department (Table 1). Respondents were then randomly selected within each stratum to ensure that all departments were represented.

Table 1. *Population and Sample Distribution by College Department*

College Department	Population	Sample
College of Arts and Sciences	314	19
College of Accountancy	361	21
College of Nursing, Public Health, and Midwifery	1,714	98
College of Medicine and Allied Medical Program	1,024	59
College of Information Technology	240	14
College of Business Education	845	49
College of Teacher Education	244	15
College of Engineering and Architecture	1,342	78
College of Criminal Justice Education	160	9
Total	6,244	362

Research Instrument

Data were gathered using a structured survey questionnaire adapted from Hermosa (2021) and revised to fit the context of the University of La Salette, Inc. The questionnaire had three sections: (1) the demographic profile, covering sex, college department, and year level; (2) political awareness, with 14 items on public policies (4 items), political leaders (5 items), and public issues (5 items); and (3) political participation, with 15 items on voting (5 items), political discussions/forums (6 items), and activism (4 items). All 29 items were rated on a four-point Likert-type scale.

Data Analysis

The demographic profile was summarized using frequency and percentage. Weighted means were used to determine the levels of political awareness and political participation, interpreted using the scale below. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to test the relationship between overall awareness and participation and between their domains. To test for differences across demographic groups, an independent-samples t-test was used for sex, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for college department and year level. All tests were conducted at the 0.05 level of significance.

Scale	Range	Political Awareness	Political Participation
4	3.26–4.00	Highly Aware	Highly Participative
3	2.51–3.25	Aware	Participative
2	1.76–2.50	Less Aware	Less Participative
1	1.00–1.75	Not Aware	Not Participative

Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical standards for research involving human participants. Permission was obtained from the University President, the Registrar, and the deans of the college departments before data collection. The opening section of the online questionnaire explained the purpose of the study, how the data would be used and stored, and the respondents' right to participate voluntarily or withdraw at any time without penalty; consent was required before answering. No coercion was used. The respondents' identities and personal information were kept confidential, responses were reported only in aggregate form, and the data were used solely for academic purposes. Because reflecting on one's political engagement may cause discomfort, items were worded neutrally and respondents were free to skip the survey at any point.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile

Table 2. *Demographic Profile of the Respondents (n = 362)*

Profile	<i>f</i>	%
Year Level		
1st Year	181	50.0
2nd Year	39	10.8
3rd Year	88	24.3
4th Year	54	14.9
College Department		
Arts and Sciences	19	5.2
Accountancy	21	5.8
Nursing, Public Health, and Midwifery	98	27.1
Medicine and Allied Medical Program	59	16.3
Information Technology	14	3.9
Business Education	49	13.5
Teacher Education	15	4.1
Engineering and Architecture	78	21.5
Criminal Justice Education	9	2.5
Sex		
Female	226	62.4
Male	136	37.6
Total	362	100.0

Table 2 shows that half of the respondents (50.0%) were first-year students; no fifth-year students were drawn, as this level applies only to programs with an extended curriculum. The largest share came from the College of Nursing, Public Health, and Midwifery (27.1%) and the smallest from the College of Criminal Justice Education (2.5%), reflecting the proportional allocation. Most respondents were female (62.4%). Because many respondents were in their first year, a large part of the sample was likely below voting age during the 2022 elections, so the voting domain is best read as election-related engagement rather than as a measure of ballot-casting.

Level of Political Awareness

Table 3. *Weighted Mean Distribution of the Respondents' Level of Political Awareness*

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Public Policies		
I am aware of the laws, ordinances, and/or barangay resolutions in my community.	3.17	Aware
Public policies are mostly aimed at protecting the rights of individuals.	3.33	Highly Aware
Public policies are clearly implemented by the government to all its citizens.	3.25	Aware
The participation of the community and the private sector is essential in implementing public policies.	3.32	Highly Aware
Domain Mean	3.27	Highly Aware
Political Leaders		
Political leaders are often referred to as public servants.	3.36	Highly Aware
They are responsible for creating and implementing policies meant for the common good.	3.44	Highly Aware
Officials meet the qualifications required of a leader.	3.15	Aware

Elected political leaders are accountable to the people.	3.33	Highly Aware
Political leaders are either elected or appointed.	3.36	Highly Aware
Domain Mean	3.33	Highly Aware
Public Issues		
Rising prices of food and commodities due to inflation.	3.51	Highly Aware
Current status of the impeachment trial of VP Sara Duterte.	3.41	Highly Aware
Rising tension between the Philippines and China in the West Philippine Sea.	3.45	Highly Aware
The Philippines' participation in the U.S.-led Pax Silica initiative.	3.51	Highly Aware
Mining exploration in Dupax del Norte, Nueva Vizcaya.	3.33	Highly Aware
Domain Mean	3.44	Highly Aware
Overall Political Awareness	3.35	Highly Aware

Table 3 shows that the respondents were "Highly Aware" overall ($M = 3.35$) and in all three domains. Awareness was highest for public issues ($M = 3.44$), led by rising food and commodity prices and the Pax Silica initiative ($M = 3.51$ each), and lowest for public policies ($M = 3.27$). The lowest single indicator was awareness of laws, ordinances, and barangay resolutions in one's own community ($M = 3.17$), followed by the belief that officials meet the qualifications of leaders ($M = 3.15$). Students therefore appear more attentive to national, highly mediatized issues than to the local and procedural side of governance, and somewhat reserved in their evaluation of incumbent officials.

Level of Political Participation

Table 4. *Weighted Mean Distribution of the Respondents' Level of Political Participation*

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Voting (Election-Related Engagement)		
Campaign actively for my chosen candidate during elections	3.13	Participative
Serve as a watcher during elections	2.68	Participative
Give and share feedback, thoughts, or opinions about election outcomes	3.03	Participative
Report prohibited activities during elections	2.96	Participative
Use social media for campaign awareness and responsible voting	3.15	Participative
Domain mean	2.99	Participative
Political Discussions/Forums		
I participate in public forums and debates of candidates during the campaign period.	2.69	Participative
I actively participate in public forums and discussions on social media.	2.78	Participative
I attend public consultations on pressing issues in the community.	2.64	Participative
I post/share ideas on social media that spark political conversations.	2.80	Participative
I attend public forums on barangay and city/municipal ordinances.	2.69	Participative
I distinguish legitimate news from fake news about candidates during the campaign period.	3.14	Participative
Domain mean	2.79	Participative
Activism		
I air my sentiments and grievances through social media.	2.93	Participative
I participate in political rallies and movements.	2.57	Participative
I share my views about government with my peers and in school.	2.93	Participative
I express activism through the arts (pen, lens, brush, voice, body, imagination).	2.87	Participative
Domain mean	2.83	Participative
Overall Political Participation	2.87	Participative

Table 4 shows that the respondents were "Participative" overall ($M = 2.87$), with election-related engagement highest ($M = 2.99$), followed by activism ($M = 2.83$) and political discussions/forums ($M = 2.79$). No domain reached the "Highly Participative" level, although all awareness domains did. The highest-rated items were using social media for campaign awareness ($M = 3.15$), distinguishing legitimate from fake news ($M = 3.14$), and campaigning for a candidate ($M = 3.13$). The lowest were joining rallies and movements ($M = 2.57$), attending public consultations ($M = 2.64$), serving as an election watcher ($M = 2.68$), and attending forums on candidates and local ordinances ($M = 2.69$ each). Students thus participate more readily in forms that are online, individual, and low-cost than in forms that are offline, collective, and tied to local institutions.

Relationship Between Political Awareness and Political Participation

Table 5. *Correlation Between Political Awareness and Political Participation*

Political Awareness	Voting	Discussions/Forums	Activism
Public Policies	0.492*	0.496*	0.454*
Political Leaders	0.397*	0.371*	0.318*
Public Issues	0.428*	0.367*	0.381*
Overall Awareness × Overall Participation	$r = 0.541^*$	$p < .001$	Moderate (+), Significant

*Significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5 shows a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between overall political awareness and political participation ($r = .541$, $p < .001$); hence, H_01 is rejected. All nine domain-level correlations were positive and significant. Awareness of public policies had the strongest correlations with every participation domain ($r = .454$ to $.496$), while awareness of political leaders had the weakest ($r = .318$ to $.397$). With $r^2 \approx .29$, awareness accounts for roughly 29% of the variation in participation, leaving most of the variation to other factors.

Differences When Grouped According to Demographic Profile

Table 6. *Test of Difference in Political Awareness and Participation Based on Sex*

Variable	Female	Male	t	p	Decision
Political Awareness	3.35	3.35	-0.081	.935	Not significant
Political Participation	2.85	2.90	-0.731	.465	Not significant

Table 7. *Test of Difference in Political Awareness and Participation Based on College Department and Year Level*

Variable	Grouping	df	F	p	Decision
Political Awareness	College Department	8, 353	0.875	.537	Not significant
Political Participation	College Department	8, 353	1.035	.409	Not significant
Political Awareness	Year Level	3, 358	0.641	.589	Not significant
Political Participation	Year Level	3, 358	1.129	.337	Not significant

Tables 6 and 7 show no significant differences in political awareness or participation when respondents were grouped by sex (t-test) or by college department and year level (ANOVA), as all p-values exceeded .05; hence, H_02 is not rejected. Female and male students, students across the nine departments, and students across year levels showed comparable levels of awareness and participation.

The high political awareness of the respondents is consistent with Hermosa (2021), who used the same three domains among Laguna State Polytechnic University students, and with Al-Khaza'leh and Lahiani (2021) and Badaru and Adu (2021), suggesting that high awareness has become a common characteristic of university students across settings. The pattern within that awareness, however, is uneven. Students were most aware of issues that affect daily life or dominate national news and social media, mirroring Feio and Oliveira (2025) and the platform-driven exposure described by Santos (2023) and Osumo et al. (2025). Their weaker awareness of local laws and ordinances supports the observation that Filipino youth remain distant from governance structures beyond voting (Borja et al., 2024), while their reserved view of officials' qualifications echoes the concerns about corruption reported by Dolipas (2021) and Basinillo et al. (2024).

Participation trailed behind awareness. This partly departs from Hermosa (2021), who found high involvement in voting, discussions, and activism, yet the respondents were considerably more engaged than the South African students in Badaru and Adu (2021). The concentration of participation in online and individual activities is consistent with Zyad (2023) and Agojo et al. (2023), and with Ladia and Panao (2023), who found that Filipino students turned to online platforms as their main space for political expression before the 2022 elections. Unlike the Chilean youth in Torres (2025), however, Salettinian students rated election-related engagement highest, suggesting that online activity complements rather than replaces electoral participation. The relatively high rating for detecting fake news is encouraging given the mixed effects of digital media on democracy (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023). The low rating for forums and consultations may also reflect limited awareness of the local channels already available, echoing the awareness gap that Domingo et al. (2026) observed among users of Santiago City's e-government platforms. It may further reflect a lack of accessible spaces and networks rather than a lack of interest, since social capital strongly predicts Filipino students' participation (Ladia, 2025) and universities move students toward active citizenship only when they provide genuine opportunities for dialogue (Watfa & Ait Ali, 2025).

The moderate correlation between awareness and participation agrees with Badaru and Adu (2021) and Osumo et al. (2025), and parallels the modest associations Castelo et al. (2026) found between social media exposure and the political attitudes of students in the same university. It also supports the Civic Engagement Model, which treats information as a resource that makes participation possible. Its moderate strength is equally important: awareness is necessary but not sufficient. Internal efficacy (Ladia & Panao, 2023), political interest and perceived usefulness (Çiçekli, 2025), civic responsibility (Baizhumakzy et al., 2025), and social anxiety from social media use (Nucum et al., 2024) likely account for much of the remaining variation. The domain-level results also depart from Hermosa (2021), where awareness of political leaders was the domain most related to participation. Here, awareness of public policies was the strongest correlate of all three forms of participation, yet it was also the domain with the lowest awareness. The domain most strongly linked to participation is therefore the one with the most room for improvement, making policy-focused civic education, including experiential approaches such as mock elections (Lundberg, 2024), a promising lever.

The absence of demographic differences contrasts with Al-Khaza'leh and Lahiani (2021), who found differences by faculty, sex, and year level, and with the gender gap in traditional participation reported by Ayomipo and Ramoroka (2024). That study, however, found no gender gap in political talk and online information-seeking, which are precisely the forms in which the respondents were most active. The lack of differences across departments and year levels suggests that students draw on a shared environment of news, social media, family, and peers, consistent with the Theory of Political Socialization (Ladia, 2025), and that their orientations are largely formed before college. This reinforces the view that universities add to students' political engagement through deliberate programs rather than time spent in school alone (Dolipas, 2021; Watfa & Ait Ali, 2025). These comparisons should be read with caution, as some subgroups

were small, such as the College of Criminal Justice Education ($n = 9$) and second-year students ($n = 39$), which may have limited the tests' ability to detect smaller differences.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it is concluded that the college students of the University of La Salette, Inc. are "Highly Aware" politically, most strongly on public issues and least on public policies, particularly local laws and ordinances; that they are "Participative" but not highly participative, most active in election-related and online activities and least in offline, collective, and local forms; that a moderate, positive, and significant relationship exists between political awareness and political participation, with awareness of public policies being the strongest correlate; and that political awareness and participation do not differ significantly by sex, college department, or year level.

These findings imply that Salettinian students are not politically inactive in the sense of being uninformed or apathetic. A gap nonetheless exists between what they know and what they do, and this gap lies in public forums, consultations, local governance, and collective action rather than in awareness or online engagement. Because the pattern is shared across the student body, interventions are likely to be most effective when they are university-wide and when they provide structured opportunities to participate rather than information alone.

Recommendation

The university, through the Office of Student Affairs, should institutionalize campus-wide civic engagement programs such as policy forums, candidate debates, mock elections, and an annual civic engagement week. Faculty handling general education courses and the National Service Training Program may integrate the analysis of actual local ordinances and national policies through policy briefs, simulated council sessions, and community-based projects. Student government and organizations may lead peer discussion circles and town-hall meetings. The city and barangay governments of Santiago City and the Sangguniang Kabataan may partner with the university to open public consultations and ordinance hearings to students, schedule them at accessible times, livestream them, and accept student input online, including through existing city platforms such as the KaisaKa app (Domingo et al., 2026). Students are encouraged to extend their engagement beyond social media and to share verified information within their networks. Future researchers may examine political efficacy, interest, civic responsibility, family socialization, and social capital as predictors of participation, use qualitative methods to explain low forum and consultation attendance, include actual voter registration data for respondents of voting age, and compare Salettinian students with students from other universities in the region.

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