

The national security concerns of the Philippines: A students' perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the national security concerns of the Philippines through the perspectives of Filipino students, emphasizing their level of awareness, understanding, and attitudes toward various security issues. Recognizing the evolving nature of threats—from traditional military challenges to non-traditional threats like cyber security, economic stability, and natural disasters—the research aims to identify gaps in knowledge and perceptions among the youth. Using quantitative methods, data were gathered from students enrolled in higher education institutions, focusing on their demographic profiles and views on national security areas including military, cyber, economic, food, and energy security. The findings reveal that students are mostly aware of immediate threats such as disasters, terrorism, and misinformation but lack comprehensive understanding of larger issues like energy dependence and maritime conflicts. The study highlights the importance of integrating national security education into curricula, promoting interactive learning methods, and fostering psychological safety and national belonging to enhance security awareness. The insights gathered underscore the need for policymakers and security agencies to develop inclusive, youth-centered strategies that address both external and internal threats. Ultimately, empowering young Filipinos through targeted education and participation in nation-building can strengthen the country's overall security framework, ensuring resilience amid the dynamic security landscape.

Keywords: Philippine national security, youth perception, awareness, national security policy, security threats

Date Submitted: August 29, 2025

Date Accepted: September 30, 2025

Date Published: October 29, 2025

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0404541>

Recommended citation:

Navarra, L. W. M. (2025). The national security concerns of the Philippines: A students' perspective. *Pantao (The International Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences)* 4 (4), 5880-5889.

<http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0404541>

INTRODUCTION

National security is a crucial aspect underpinning the stability and sovereignty of any nation. For the Philippines, a country characterized by diverse geographic, social, and economic challenges, the concept of security extends beyond traditional military threats and encompasses economic stability, cybersecurity, food security, and energy sufficiency. The Philippines faces numerous internal and external threats, including natural disasters, terrorism, cybercrime, economic vulnerabilities, and resource dependencies, which threaten national stability.

Youth, especially students in higher education, represent a vital demographic that can significantly influence national security outcomes. Their perceptions, awareness, and understanding of security issues shape future policy directions and societal resilience. Previous studies highlight the importance of youth engagement in security discourse, emphasizing education's role in fostering informed and active citizens.

Despite the critical importance of youth perspectives, there is limited empirical data on Filipino students' understanding of national security issues. Most existing research focuses on policymakers, security agencies, or military perspectives, leaving a gap in the perceptions held by the younger population. Understanding these perceptions can help policymakers craft more inclusive security policies and educational programs that resonate with the youth.

This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how Filipino university students perceive national security, what they identify as the key threats, and how well they understand the various dimensions of security.

Statement of the problem

This study seeks to explore the national security concerns of the Philippines from the perspective of Filipino students. It aims to assess their level of awareness, understanding, and attitudes toward various dimensions of national security, including military, cyber, economic, food, and energy security. By identifying how students perceive threats, prioritize government actions, and evaluate existing security measures, the study endeavors to provide insights that can inform educational reforms and policy initiatives aimed at enhancing youth engagement in nation-building and security awareness. Specifically, the study follows the following objectives:

1. To assess the demographic profile of students regarding age, gender, course, and location.
2. To measure the level of understanding of the youth on national security.
3. To identify the perspective of the students on how secured is the Philippines in the area of Military, Cyber Security, Economic, Food and Energy Security.
4. To analyze which sector do students think the government should prioritize in enhancing national security.

METHODOLOGY

The mixed method will be used for the development of the study. The study used the mixed method for the development of the study which is the combined use of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2003) to get detailed insights into how youth perceive national security.

For the quantitative part of the study, it will focus on the respondents' profile, and the students' perspective on the following areas: military, cyber, economic, food and energy security. Upon gathering the numerical survey, the quantitative part of the study can be done by identifying the respondents most influenced areas. Also, identifying on what sector should the government prioritize in enhancing the countries national security.

For the qualitative part of the survey, it will tackle the respondents' level of understanding to national security as a whole. As an open-ended question, it manages to view and understand the respondents' ideas and opinions without boundaries since no scale are given. Also, it will tackle the question on what the Philippine government is doing to promote national security.

The target population for this study includes students from various programs and universities. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who could provide relevant insights into the topic. A sample size of 50 respondents was determined to support both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study

This study utilized a survey questionnaire to gather data from respondents regarding their perceptions of national security in the Philippines. The instrument was divided into five (5) core domains of security aligned with the Human Security framework: Military Security, Cyber Security, Economic Security, Food Security, and Energy Security. A survey questionnaire will be prepared by the researchers using a five- point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1.00 to 1.49) to Strongly Agree (4.50 to 5.00)

For the questionnaire that will focus on answering the main and specific problem, the questions are categorized based on five dimensions of national security: Military Security, Cybersecurity, Economic Security, Food Security, and Energy Security.

Under Military Security, the items include beliefs about whether the Philippine military is adequately equipped to defend the nation from external threats, whether the presence of military forces in conflict-prone areas provides a sense of security, whether strengthening the Armed Forces should be a top national priority, and the respondents' confidence in the military's ability to respond to national emergencies or disasters.

For Cybers ecurity, the items assess concerns regarding the growing threat of cyber-attacks against government and private institutions, opinions on the government's investment in digital infrastructure protection, the role of educational institutions in promoting cybersecurity awareness, and the importance of cybersecurity in today's digital age.

In the Economic Security dimension, the questionnaire explores beliefs about how economic inequality threatens stability, the significance of a stable job market, the impact of climate change on food supply, and the contribution of foreign investments to national security.

Regarding Food Security, the items focus on the importance of access to affordable and nutritious food, the prioritization of local food production over imports, the threats posed by climate change to food supply, and the effectiveness of government programs in supporting food sustainability.

Finally, for Energy Security, the questions address the need to reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels, the importance of investing in renewable energy, concerns over power shortages affecting national stability, and the promotion of energy conservation in educational and community settings.

The data for this study was collected through a structured survey instrument administered by the researcher. A total of 50 respondents were obtained and 50 respondents were used in this study.

The data collection employed a mixed-mode approach. Some student researchers utilized Google Forms to distribute the questionnaire online, allowing for convenient and accessible participation, particularly for digitally engaged respondents. Others conducted the survey through face-to-face or online interviews, either by reading the questions aloud or guiding the respondents through the form manually. This method allowed for a more personal approach and accommodated participants with limited internet access or digital literacy.

Once all responses were gathered, the data were consolidated into a single excel sheet for analysis. This combination of digital and interpersonal data collection ensured diversity in respondent access and response style, contributing to the richness of the mixed methods research design.

To ensure the confidentiality of the respondents, aliases and codes will be shown instead of their actual names. Also, the online form that submitted by the respondents does not include their names or private/sensitive information

The data obtained from survey questionnaires will be processed and analyzed using statistical methods to assess the respondents' perceptions of national security across different domains. Quantitative analysis will be employed to interpret the responses by finding the Mean or average:

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved a total of 50 respondents from various municipalities and cities in Bulacan, representing a range of ages, genders, and academic programs. These participants were selected to provide a broad view of how Filipino youth understand and perceive national security in different domains. The research utilized a descriptive quantitative design through a structured survey questionnaire, which gathered demographic data and responses related to military, cyber, economic, food, and energy security. This section presents the findings and interpretations drawn from the collected data, integrating both descriptive statistics and thematic insights from participants' written responses.

Demographic profile of respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents reveal a diverse group of young individuals whose perspectives reflect a mix of socio-cultural and academic influences. Out of 50 participants, 36% were between 18 to 20 years old, 44% were between 21 to 23 years old, and 20% did not specify their age. This distribution suggests that most of the respondents belong to late adolescent and early adult stages—periods typically associated with higher civic awareness and social participation. In terms of gender, 52% identified as male, 28% as female, and 20% chose not to disclose their gender, indicating a relatively balanced representation with some opting for privacy.

Geographically, the respondents came from various municipalities and cities in Bulacan. Pulilan, Hagonoy, Calumpit, and Sta. Maria each accounted for 10% of the total sample, while

Bustos, Guiguinto, Malolos, and Pandi each contributed 8%. Bacolor represented 6%, San Fernando 4%, and Sto. Tomas 2%, while 20% of the respondents did not specify their location. This regional distribution shows that perceptions of national security were gathered from both urban and semi-rural areas, allowing for a more inclusive understanding of youth perspectives. In terms of academic background, the respondents were enrolled in a wide array of courses, including BSA, BSCE, and BSBA (each 10%), BSCPE (20%), and BSCM (6%). A smaller proportion studied Psychology (4%), BSCS (4%), and other fields such as Biology, Pharmacy, Industrial Engineering, MSE, and BSEE (2% each), with 20% not disclosing their courses. The heterogeneity of the group ensures that the findings reflect viewpoints across disciplines, genders, and locales.

General understanding of the youth on the word “national security”

Responses from the participants indicate a comprehensive and informed understanding of the concept of national security. Most youth described it as the protection and assurance of a nation’s safety, encompassing the well-being of its people, institutions, and territorial integrity. They associated national security with the prevention of wars, terrorism, cyberattacks, and economic instability while maintaining peace and order. Furthermore, respondents recognized that national security extends beyond military defense to include economic stability, environmental safety, public health, and technological resilience. Their definitions emphasize the government’s responsibility to ensure citizens’ protection in all aspects of life. Summarizing their insights, national security emerges as a multifaceted framework that involves mobilizing a nation’s resources and manpower to shield it from both internal and external threats. Students’ perspective on how secured the Philippines is in selected areas

Military security

In terms of military security, respondents generally agreed on the importance and adequacy of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in safeguarding the nation. The mean rating of 3.20 indicated agreement that the Philippine military is sufficiently equipped to defend the country against external threats, while the presence of troops in conflict-prone regions received a slightly higher mean of 3.40, suggesting that visible military presence enhances public confidence. However, the strongest consensus was found in the statement emphasizing the need to strengthen the AFP, which received a very high mean of 4.70. Despite this support, the findings suggest a degree of cautious optimism among the youth—while they acknowledge the military’s critical role, they also express concern about the country’s defense readiness and modernization pace.

Cybersecurity

Results showed overwhelming agreement among the respondents regarding the vital role of cybersecurity in national defense. All items related to cybersecurity received mean scores above 4.50, reflecting heightened awareness and concern about digital threats. A mean of 4.65 indicated strong recognition of the growing risk of cyberattacks on national institutions and private sectors, while a mean of 4.70 highlighted the widespread belief that the government must increase

investment in digital protection. Participants also supported integrating cybersecurity awareness into school curricula, showing that they see education as a preventive measure against cyber threats. Collectively, these results underscore the youth's understanding that cybersecurity is as important as physical defense in maintaining national stability.

Economic security

Economic stability was viewed by respondents as an essential component of national security. The youth strongly agreed that a stable job market contributes directly to peace and social order, with a mean rating of 4.65. Similarly, there was strong agreement that economic inequality poses a significant threat to societal stability, revealing the respondents' awareness of socio-economic disparities. However, confidence in existing policies promoting long-term economic resilience was moderate, as reflected by a mean of 4.10. While most agreed that foreign investments play a role in economic security, their optimism was tempered by concerns about uneven benefits. Overall, the findings depict an economically aware generation that values employment, equality, and sound financial governance as foundations of national safety.

Food security

The youth respondents displayed a deep understanding of the link between food access and national stability. The belief that access to affordable and nutritious food is central to national security received the highest agreement, with a mean of 4.70. A mean of 4.50 indicated strong awareness of climate change as a critical threat to the country's food production capacity. Respondents expressed support for promoting local agricultural production over imports, demonstrating a nationalistic inclination toward food sovereignty. However, the perceived effectiveness of government food security programs received a mean of 4.00, suggesting that while youth appreciate existing efforts, they see room for improvement in implementation and sustainability. This reflects a generation conscious of environmental issues and supportive of local initiatives that ensure long-term food availability.

Energy security

Energy security emerged as the domain with the highest level of agreement among all categories. All indicators under this area received very high mean scores, culminating in the strongest result of the study—a mean of 4.90 for the belief that energy conservation should be promoted in schools and communities. Respondents also expressed strong support for investments in renewable energy and for reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels, reflecting an environmentally aware and forward-thinking generation. The emphasis on sustainable practices and clean energy solutions suggests that the youth regard energy independence as fundamental to both national progress and security.

Sectors that the national government should focus on in terms of security

When asked which sectors should be prioritized by the national government, respondents identified cybersecurity and energy security as the most critical. Both domains achieved very high levels of agreement, with cybersecurity rated at a mean of 4.70 and energy security at 4.90. The findings indicate that the youth view technological and environmental sustainability as central to the nation's future stability. They see cybersecurity as essential in protecting information infrastructure and energy as indispensable to maintaining economic and social systems.

Discussion

The study provides a holistic understanding of how Filipino youth conceptualize national security, revealing a generation that views security as multidimensional rather than purely militaristic. While military defense remains an important pillar, the youth highlight digital, economic, environmental, and energy concerns as equally vital. The data reveal moderate confidence in the Armed Forces' current capabilities but overwhelming support for modernization and strengthening efforts. On the other hand, cybersecurity and energy security received the strongest attention, reflecting contemporary realities shaped by technological advancement and environmental awareness.

Economic and food security were also seen as inseparable from overall stability, with employment and equitable food access seen as basic prerequisites for peace and prosperity. Respondents' moderate confidence in existing government policies indicates a desire for stronger implementation and more inclusive programs. The findings collectively suggest that young Filipinos perceive national security as an interconnected web of social, technological, and environmental factors. Their insights point toward a progressive redefinition of national defense—one that embraces sustainability, innovation, and shared responsibility across sectors of society.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive view of how Filipino youth understand and evaluate national security in the modern era. Drawing from the perceptions of 50 respondents from diverse municipalities, academic programs, and social backgrounds, the research revealed that today's youth view national security not as a singular, militarized concept but as a broad, interconnected framework encompassing digital, economic, food, and energy dimensions. Their understanding reflects a generational shift toward a more holistic, inclusive, and forward-looking conception of what it means to protect the nation and its people.

First, the study concludes that the youth recognize the multifaceted nature of national security, going beyond traditional notions of military defense. For them, true national security also entails safeguarding the economy, ensuring access to food, protecting digital infrastructure, and securing sustainable energy sources. This multidimensional perspective highlights their awareness of emerging global issues such as cyberattacks, climate change, and economic inequality—challenges that require comprehensive and cooperative solutions rather than isolated military responses.

Second, while the respondents acknowledge existing government initiatives, there is a strong demand for improvement and modernization across all security domains. In particular, the

military and cybersecurity sectors are viewed as critical yet underdeveloped areas that need increased attention. The respondents' moderate trust in current defense and digital protection systems suggests a call for stronger leadership, better technology, and transparent governance. The youth's responses reveal their desire for a government that is both proactive and adaptive—capable of responding to evolving global and domestic threats with efficiency, innovation, and accountability.

Third, the study emphasizes that cybersecurity and energy security stand out as the top priorities among the youth. Their strong concern for these areas reflects their dual consciousness as digital natives and environmentally aware citizens. The emphasis on cybersecurity underscores their understanding of how digital infrastructures have become essential to economic stability, education, and governance. Meanwhile, their advocacy for renewable energy, conservation programs, and reduced dependence on imported fuels indicates a forward-thinking commitment to sustainability. This aligns with global calls for green transitions and positions the Filipino youth as key voices in shaping the nation's long-term resilience.

Fourth, the results demonstrate the youth's deep sense of civic engagement and national responsibility. Their responses reveal awareness that national security is not solely the government's duty but a shared endeavor involving citizens, educators, and communities. The strong support for education-based initiatives, policy reforms, and active participation in awareness campaigns reflects a socially conscious generation that values knowledge, dialogue, and inclusivity in addressing national challenges. This civic-mindedness suggests that young Filipinos are willing to contribute ideas, time, and energy toward creating a safer and more sustainable nation.

Lastly, while the respondents generally express support for current government efforts, the study finds a measured confidence in institutional readiness, particularly in economic and food security. Although they recognize the government's role in promoting employment, ensuring equitable distribution of resources, and sustaining agricultural productivity, many respondents remain cautious about policy implementation and long-term consistency. This critical optimism indicates that the youth believe in the government's potential yet expect greater transparency, efficiency, and collaboration with civil society.

In conclusion, the Filipino youth's perspectives reveal a progressive and pragmatic understanding of national security—one that integrates defense, development, and sustainability. Their concerns and recommendations highlight the need for a national agenda that combines technological innovation, environmental protection, and socio-economic equity. If nurtured through inclusive policymaking and education, this generation's insights could redefine the future of Philippine national security, transforming it into a holistic pursuit of peace, prosperity, and resilience for all.

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