

Youth Political Participation in Rural Areas

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Abstract

Ever since the new millennium, registration rates and voter turnouts for the general elections among Malaysian youths between the age range of 21 and 22 years have been low and dismaying, particularly so in non-urban locations. With the number of youths forming a significant percentage of Malaysia's population, targeting eligible youths for the various political parties is imperative in winning the elections. Furthermore, youth participation and engagement in national politics have been impactful in the direction and development of Malaysia's government and administration. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the influence factors on the intention to vote in the next general election among youths in rural areas. The study was conducted using a quantitative design, cross-sectional survey. The unit of analysis was identified through stratified sampling technique. From a sample size of 400 (n=400), the returned rate was 370 or 92.5%. The findings revealed that there was a significant relationship between the factors of youth's to vote in the next general election based on four variables; awareness, persuading method, spatial representation, and political vote choice. The regression analysis ranked awareness as the most influential factor in the youths' intentions to vote. The study also found that the moderating role of gender is the most significant factor among the four influence factors. The findings suggest that the rural youths' intentions to vote in the next general election would be intensified if regular promotions are done to enhance awareness. Therefore, the relevant stakeholders should take note of this when campaigning for their party. Aside from that, the findings provide additional literature to the body of knowledge on the political inclination of the younger generation.

Keywords: Youth; Voice; Politics; Voting; Election; Participation

Introduction

Currently, the governments of the world are facing various challenges, particularly in the form of hegemonic power. For example, in the United States, with the appointment of the new, 45th President elect, Donald J Trump, the voting process and the turn of events in the choice of leaders have never been more prominent. From Barack Obama, a Democrat to Trump, a Republican, the US voters have made their intentions clear. The election process showed that the voice of the people impacts the United States government especially in the decision-making process and administrative body of the country. Even though Trump has limited political background, he was given the mandate and vote from the people to lead them as evidenced by the democratic system applied in that country.

In relation to that, similar application is observed in developing countries such as Malaysia. The election and voting processes require citizens above the age of 21 to register and vote. However, voter turnouts for the past general elections among Malaysian youths between the age range of 21 and 22 years have been low and dismaying, particularly so in non-urban locations. With the number of youths forming a significant percentage of Malaysia's population, targeting eligible youths for the various political parties is imperative in winning the elections. Furthermore, youth participation and engagement in national politics have been impactful in the direction and development of Malaysia's government and administration.

Back ground of the study

Voting in an election is a democratic process. Democracy is a system or concept that is opposite to that of communism. Democracy involves people in the decision-making process [1]. The people mentioned here are the citizens of their country and from whatever background of education, income, races, etc. The system of democracy is where everyone has their right in

choosing their representative for one of the main body of the government, that is, the legislative body that carries out their functions as policy making bodies and authorize the law in the country. Besides that, through the democratic system, the people are given a suitable medium to voice out their opinions, suggestions, ideas and grouses to the government administrating the country. Because of that, there are various programs and actions taken by the government to solve the issues that arose from the public.

Consequently, Malaysia also applies the democratic system where people have their right to choose their representative or leader through the election process. The election process is a fair act in order to vote for a suitable and favorable candidate to represent them in parliament. Because of that, Malaysians that have reached the age 21 years are eligible to vote in the General Elections. Therefore, this study comes at an opportune time as Malaysia awaits the 14th General Election due this year, 2017.

Since 1998, politics in Malaysia has faced the emergence of a new important political trend which has shown significant impact in the increase of political participation among youths in the past general elections. However, it is found that the registration rate to vote among youths aged between 21 and 22 years old still remained the lowest. Lack of understanding in terms of their needs and demands seemed to be one of the major contributors which then affect the youth's decision making and political participation.

Based on the finding from the study conducted by Ming, there is the least number of youth who participate in politic especially in the voting process is due to certain reason. The reason given by the respondent to not participating in the election process because of lack of time to register and a dislike for politics are the most top two reason why the youth are not registering themselves as the voter although have reached the eligible age to vote. There is also another reason given by youth cause that makes them to not register as a voter are unsure of where to register and also unsure the procedure exist for voter registration. This shows the youth knowledge or education and awareness on voting is still at the questionable phase. There are also apathy and laziness that lead to the youth to not register although they are in the voting age.

Learning more about the relationship between factors that influence youth and their intention to vote in coming general election will offer an explanation which will lead to finding the encouraging factors for youths' participation and involvement in politics especially for the coming general election. As for the study conducted, the factor study is awareness, persuading method, spatial representation, political vote choice and social benefit or welfare.

The aims or objectives of the study conducted is about to determine the factors of that influence youth's intention to vote in next general election and also to identify the moderating role of gender on the relationship of influence factor towards the intention of youth to vote in next general election. The specific research question of the study is what are the factors that would influence youths to vote in the next general election? And also what is the effect of the moderating role of gender on the relationship of influence factor towards the intention of youth to vote in next general election?

Therefore, in order to provide insights to relevant parties towards the causes of youth's intention to vote, it is crucial to conduct a case study to identify the influential factors of the intention to vote in the next general election among youths in rural areas: a case study of Mersing District, Johor.

Literature Review

Basically, in evaluating the participation of youth in the political world need a careful consideration due to the youth or specifically Gen Y norms are differed and more towards being influence by the external factor in making any decision in their life. This is including matter related to the politics. As stated in the survey by, found that majority of Malaysian youth are politically sensitive due to their knowledge and awareness of government policies

such as 'Vision 2020' and '1 Malaysia' and also they have the courtesy to the state of their communities and the nation. Because of that, there is several element or factors that the researcher investigates based on the Rational Choice Theory that is awareness, persuading method, spatial representation, political vote choice and social benefit or welfare.

Awareness

Basically, in evaluating the participation of youth in the political world need a careful consideration due to the youth or specifically Gen Y norms are differed and more towards being influence by the external factor in making any decision in their life. This is including matter related to the politics. As stated in the survey by, found that majority of Malaysian youth are politically sensitive due to their knowledge and awareness of government policies such as 'Vision 2020' and '1 Malaysia' and also they have the courtesy to the state of their communities and the nation. Because of that, there are able to judgmentally assess the performance of the executive body in the country in carrying out their function effective and efficiently including the function of the non-profit organization (NGO) as one body that acts as interest group that influence in the government decision. However, the study also found that also they acknowledge about their right, the program held and the policy exists, the youth still perceived that themselves as less empowered to those act. Meaning that their existence not giving any value towards the decision made by the government or country towards the nation future and citizen right. There are only 39% of youth polled say that they can make a difference in solving problems within their communities while 61% are feeling not involve the community in making a decision. The sense of engagement amongst youth increased marginally in 2012 to 2008 when only 36% of the respondent of the study said they could make some transformation in the community. However, in term of their apparent impact towards the government, only 41% of youth could effect in term of how government work. Because of that, due to no sense of engagement or accountability among the youth in the political world lead to the lessening a number of them who are turnout during Election Day.

Persuading method

Every people that involve in political arena although different ideology has the same aim in acquiring and retaining voter and party members. However, currently, political membership, engagement and also participation are declining. Because of that, in the literature by Winchester et al. stated that the lower involvement of the youth in the political world due to the knowledge gap that apparently need some investigation that can be related to the marketing strategy but in the political context. The process related are called as awareness-trial reinforcement that is used to increase the interest of the young Australian voter in identifying their commitment in the future election. This method is same like "trial" of the product but being used to the voting system in identifying customer behavior and in this context are a young voter, the level of interest are being measured. This really helps in creating awareness and readiness for the young voter, especially first time to vote in getting the knowledge about the procedure and action should be taken in order to exercise their right as a citizen in the country. Besides that, through the awareness- trial reinforcement also help the political parties in understanding the situation that causes or lead to the loyalty of the voter towards competing parties during Election Day. This can help them to know the demand of the people and gain their support in the election process. One of the methods to persuade is using manifesto and campaign activities that mostly done by individual or political parties.

Spatial representation

Political preferences of voters on a linear scale numbered from left to the right, from zero to one hundred. Voters and political parties have a certain place on the scale according to their political position which mean is voters are scattered in the range according to a distribution with the only mode, parties tend to put themselves also in this mode and, therefore to approach each other and vice versa [2]. In the representation form, it is more common to known as a frame and this terminological may have inhabited the theoretical union. Meaning

that the voters tend to vote people that are come from the same level of them and more understanding to their condition compared to the people that are set up by the parties to just win by the popularity vote. This is because there are varies ideology between the candidate in the election that becomes the policy. It can be seen through the general election there is always the new policy that is introduced to the people or citizen that want to attract their attention and their vote. This is because, when the representative is from the citizen, so although what matters to voters are not the intentions or the political discourse of the parties that is their ideology, but also their concrete action that makes the voters want to vote them [2].

Political vote choice

Because of that, the key to the voters' support of the candidates is that the parties or candidates are successful in providing the outcomes all desire, but vote against parties that fail to do so. It also can be known as the economic voting in the election. Most of the voters demand the government's economic is being recorded and they want the government to deliver prosperity, even if they are unclear exactly the way to achieve it because the voters will judge it via the general performance in managing their desired by the government.

The moderating role of gender on the relationship of influence factor towards the intention of youth to vote in next general election: Generally, social norms in viewing male and female in stereotyping views are common in every factor of lice including in the political participation and also decision making. Mostly, people viewed male are more aggressive in a voice out the opinion and bold in making a decision compared to the female. This is due to the stereotype of the gender based in behaving and reacts. Because of that, intention to vote also maybe influence by the existence gender as the moderator between factor influence the intention of youth with the intention of youth to vote in coming the general election. Gender factor also has a great impact on another factor in determining choice and decision making and also how to react or behave as for example engagement of youth in political fairs, access to education, income and access to leadership roles. Besides that, the parent role does give impact on the children behaves in term of gender. Other than that, the style or interest of the youth to participate in the political also different among gender. This is due to the male are more towards radical way and female more feminine and selective and structured in making choice. Female have the engagement or interest in politics but in an informal manner that is through programs, volunteer work and many other that unrelated to formal connection compared to a male that is more confidence in voicing out their opinion and bolder in every action taken. Because of that male are more prefer to have formal involvement in politics. Therefore, either this different in gender could lead to different in intention to vote among the youth in coming the general election.

Methodology

This case study employed a quantitative research approach using a two-stage sampling technique; stratified and convenience samplings. The units of analysis for this study were youths living in the district of Mersing, Johor. From a sample size of 400 (n=400), the returned rate was 370 or 92.5%. The instrument for primary data collection was questionnaires that were administered to a focus group of youths at various entities in Mersing, such as secondary schools and polytechnics. Prior to actual data collection, a pilot study was conducted to ascertain the reliability and validity of data and instrument.

Finding and Discussion

This study contributes knowledge regarding factors that influence youth intention to vote in Malaysia specifically in terms of Awareness, Spatial Representation, Political Vote Choice, Social benefit or Welfare and lastly the psychological and persuading method which focusing on Mersing District, Johor.

Firstly, based on the correlation result among all the independent variables that are awareness, spatial representation, political vote choice, social benefit or welfare and persuading method, political vote choice does have strong correlation value compared to another variable with the r-value is 0.367 when the p-value is less than 0.05. Meaning that political vote choice gives a lot of impact in determining the intention to vote of youth in coming the general election. Political vote choice is basically is about the act of voting by the people. How they react toward the election and the campaign make the candidates or parties. It also the way can determine the chances of the party during the general election. Other than that, the voter's tend to consider the benefit and cost in their vote. Because of that, the benefit more cost is being implemented and measure by the people to vote and turnout during the Election Day. The benefit and cost also the one that influencing the motivation and intention of the voter to turn out and vote for the parties of candidate that they are a favour with. This does supported with literature saying that the political choice is in term of the strategic voting which means that at least that some voter that anticipate with the consequences of their vote if their vote is decisive, so the act of voting that motivates the voter turnout becomes a potential for affecting the outcome. Meaning that, the anticipation of the youth towards the effect of their action. Cost and benefit are become a priority for the youth in making a decision or in behaving especially in influencing their intention to vote in coming the general election.

Besides that, awareness also becomes the main role in influencing the intention of youth to vote in coming the general election. This is because in term of the correlation value awareness has also strong in giving impact towards the intention to vote of youth in coming general election with r-value is 0.362 following the strength of the political vote choice. Awareness is basically about how the individual being influence by the external factor that leads to him or her make the decision. It also stated that about behavior that is due to selfishness or social type of voters that are depending on their attitude or behavior in appreciating other opinion or take others perception into consideration in voting during the general election and also acceptance of them towards to the benefit offered to them. Because of that, among the activities or program that lead to the awareness volunteerism become the major contribution either directly or indirectly influence the way of youth to think and making a decision. Other than that, the knowledge or awareness lead to the understanding of their right and also understand the important to have a good policy in channeling their opinion and voice to determine the future of the country. This is supported by the literature that stated besides that, the awareness of the youth also can relate as the youth engagement in unlimited activities such as volunteer work, charity projects, youth councils, youth media projects voting, work on the political campaign and also social movement activity.

From the entire factor studied, the most influential towards the intention of youth to vote in coming general election is awareness. This can be shown through the prediction equation that is produced from the data collected in this study in the equation below.

Predicted Intention=1.762+(0.205 × awareness)+(0.018 × spatial representation)+(0.204 × political vote choice) – (0.078 × social benefit or welfare)+(0.153 × persuading method).

From the equation above, indicates that every factor gives a positive influence on the intention of youth to vote in coming general election except social benefit or welfare. Meaning that candidates or political parties, by referring to this equation can know that social benefit and welfare is no longer favor by the youth. It still can persuade the youth but effect in the minimum range towards the intention of the youth. In other words, if the candidates or competing parties keep focusing on giving many things in order to gain favor by the youth, it becomes a waste of the effort. Hence, they should change the view or the direction in addressing the need and demand of the youth in another way.

This is because referring to the equation the factor that most influence youth to vote is awareness. Awareness gives impact towards the intention of the youth to vote in coming the general election. Based on the previous literature there are many programs held by the government and also opposition in raising the awareness about the important to exercise their

right in the country through a voting process by those that have to reach the eligible age to vote. As in Malaysia, the eligible age to vote is 21 years old and above has the right to participate in the Election Day. Meaning that the increase the awareness leads to the increase of the intention of youth to vote in coming the general election. This is because, without awareness, there is no sense of belonging that makes the youth to participate or engage in any political activities in the country including electing their representative in the parliament during Election Day. This is because, there are literature that stated about there are only 39% of youth polled in National Youth Survey that said they can make a difference in solving problems within their communities while 61% are feeling not involve the community in making decision.

Other than that, from the equation above indicates the prediction for persuading method factor by referring to the b-value=0.153. This value indicates that, as the persuading method level increases by one level, the intention to vote also increase by 0.153. Therefore, if there is an effort to increase the one level of persuading method used to influence the youth, it will lead to the increase in the intention of youth to vote in coming the general election. This interpretation is true only if the effect of other factors remains constant. Meaning that, if the activity promoting the information is enthusiastically done it will lead to the increase the intention of youth to vote in coming the general election. Because of that activity that involves persuading must be increased due to it will lead in improve and encourage the intention of youth to vote in coming the general election. Campaign and manifesto are having closed relation with mass media in the assurance of the successful delivery the information that the individual or political parties want to distribute to the public. Mass media is one method that can influence the psychological and perception of the voter to turn up during the election. It is the one that acts as a medium in promoting and campaigning to the parties that compete in the election. In psychological, there is an explanation for most of the electorate is motivated to vote by some mix personal appeals and encouragement by the media that can increase the interest in the election as the election approaches in the same way that the public gets excited about World Series, the Academy Awards, and so forth.

As for the spatial representation factor stated in the equation, the bvalue=0.018 where it indicates that when a there increase in the level of spatial representation, the intention to vote also increase by 0.018. Therefore, if there is an effort to increase the leadership style or investment by the political parties or candidates to gain support in term of spatial representation, it will lead to the increase in the intention of youth to vote in coming to the general election. This interpretation is true only if the effect of other factors remains constant. Because of that, the increase the spatial representation factor, the increase of the intention of the youth to vote in coming to the general election. This is needed and also important. Although it just gives low correlation towards the intention the increase in the value of spatial representation also leads to the increase of the intention of youth to vote in coming to the general election. This shows that, it is required for the voter to have accurate and detailed information about their interest candidates that compete, however, there are weaknesses which are the voters are unable to cope with the complexity and information overload, used indicators such as the positions taken in relation to candidates and electoral issues by certain media, public figures, organization or entities, uncertainty for reasoning about the interest of the electoral proposals [2].

Other than that, the prediction for political vote choice by referring to the b-value=0.204. This value indicates that, as the political vote choice increases by one level, the intention to vote also increase by 0.204. Hence, if there are an effort by the parties competes in the Election Day to increase one level of political vote choice, it will lead to the increase in the intention of youth to vote in coming to the general election. This interpretation is true only if the effect of other factors remains constant. Meaning that the activity like campaigning and provide good and influential manifesto is needed under this element of a factor. This is because cost and benefit are being focused on individual especially youth in making a selection to act or behave. Because of that, it needed to increase the effort in ensuring the benefit and cost that being

imagine and calculate by the youth are under the jurisdiction or control of the parties or individual that participate in politic in order to gain the favor from the youth and in the meantime encourage them to vote in coming to the general election. This is supported by the literature that stated about the voters that are thinking in term of the group and national benefits, so they are motivated by the national conditions, and their turnout is consistent with the assumption.

There is also the factor of social benefit or welfare. From the equation, the b-value for social benefit or welfare is -0.082 indicates that when there is increase by one level of the social benefit or welfare, the intention of the youth will decrease by 0.078. Hence, this shows that for social benefit or welfare it does not need any increases in value due to the effect that the intention of youth to vote will keep decreases. This interpretation also will become true if every variable or factors remain constant. Social benefit or welfare basically is about the idea of the economic voting which is the economic factors that become one of the considerations that influence their intention to vote. Meaning that the candidate or parties offered many influential things especially in term of monetary towards the public or in this scope of the study is youth. However, this element no longer being attractive to the youth due to the nepotism and favoritism that occurred in giving and distributing such prosperity and monetary benefit to the people. As for example, it can be seen in every election which every party will offer in monetary reward to those under the party and also encourage them by giving money for a ticket to go back to the registered place for voting. However, it no longer persuades the youth. Because of that, it becomes wasteful and also leads to the reduction of the intention of the youth to vote in coming the general election. This is supported by the literature that stated about most of the voters demand the governments economic is being recorded and they want the government to deliver prosperity, even if they are unclear exactly the way to achieved it because the voters will judge it via the general performance in managing their desired by the government.

On top of that, based on the result in term of gender female are likely to participate more in the coming general election compared to male. This is because every moderating effect for every element favors female compares to male. Meaning that the intention of women is more influenced by every independent variable in this study. This is supported by the previous study in Dolan (2014) which shows that the turnout rate of a young woman was nearly seven percent point high than young men in the recent presidential election. This indicates that the research finding is supported the previous study although the nature or governing system of the country is different. Besides that, there are also literature saying that the role of parent especially mother in political participation towards the children that may impact mostly to the daughter due to the young women tend to be more selective in their choices and get support from the parent to choose and to be more structured with the supervision of the adult which are their parent in making any decision [3].

Suggestion for Further Research

As for future study, it is suggested to carried out similar study by considering same factors due the people judgement is differ from time to time and also the future researcher to consider another factor which has more influence towards youth intention to vote because based on this study findings there are 76.7 percent factors that are still unknown that will influence the intention of youth to vote in coming general election [4-6].

Other than that, the scope of this study is only encountered in Mersing District, Johor. Therefore, this study is limited to youth that lives in Mersing District, Johor only. The researcher suggests that the future research to enlarge the sampling size to another area which will cover the whole population of Johor or carried it out at other places that have political tension like Selangor or also carried out in an urban area as the comparative study for the current study that the researcher had carried out and etc. [7-14].

Besides that, the suggestion that can be made for future research is to conduct the study using the qualitative method. This is because it will give freedom to the respondent to express their opinion and experience that hard to find in any literature. In the meantime, the researcher can get the information or data detailed and specific about the factor that influences the intention of youth to vote in coming the general election [15-23].

Conclusion

For many political parties and leaders, the capability to reach the youth is through the awareness program or medium such as that have being done must continuously done as for example the existence of Rakan Muda, IM4U, PLKN and promoting the right through social media are significant in persuading the youth to vote in coming general election. Besides that, they also can participate and engage in government process in making a decision and addressing the need and demand in a right way and deliver or distribute the prosperity equally among the youth and also a citizen of the country. Sharing the idea in developing nation is one of a good way in engaging them through marketing the information via social media and also mass media that have a greater access by these people because it will create curiosity and also encourage them to participate through the messages that will resound and memorable to them. It is important to stress that the awareness is more important in persuade and encourage the youth to turnout on Election Day. This is because, without proper awareness, the youth will keep on critique without exercising their right and also blaming for the voting process due to lack of knowledge and awareness about politics and voting in a proper way. Therefore, it would always be prudent for government, government agencies, NGOs, interest body and also opposition in creating something that leads to improve the awareness of the youth regarding their participation in voting and encourage them to turnout during Election Day through campaigning, manifesto, do programs like roadshow and also program related to giving awareness about exercising their right through election process.

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