Selangor Voters Perception toward Issues in 13th Malaysian General Election

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Abstract

The war on perception has been dominated the worlds political, and Malaysia are not excluded. Being the most populous advanced and wealthy state in Malaysia, Selangor provides ideals demographic representation of Malaysian society at large. This study aimed at understanding the issue that influenced Selangor voters to cast their votes in Malaysian 13th General Election, and thus charting new strategies for future election. In doing so, eleven issues are carefully selected and analysed. Using quantitative design with survey technique, this study involved 1,015 randomly selected respondents that representing 56 states constituencies and 26 parliamentary constituencies. Results are presented and further discussed.

Keywords: Electoral study, Politics, Party Politics, Malaysia, Voting Pattern

1. Introduction

Politics is the art of the possibility. Various issues are exists in it, which if seen from different angle, it provides different perceptions. In the era, which burdened with tones of information, and accompanied with sophisticated tools and media, all the needed information are easily retrieved. Thus, different views are created, which translated into perception. In party politics, these perceptions are increasingly easy tools to use to wage a War on Perception, which ultimately served the objectives and desires of party involved. In this paper, authors discuss few issues that have been carefully selected in a period of a month survey from February to March 2013. Almost all of the issues are pertaining to the social issues such as water supply, education, free speech rights, law, and role of media, road safety, and university services. However, due to the influence of stakeholders, these social issues have become a political issue, and became agenda of some political parties. The authors tried to analyze these issues by taking the initiative to seek the views of the people through random interviews in the state of Selangor.

2. Literature Review

The study on elections and voting behavior in Malaysia has started since Malaysia gained independence and even until today. It is based on a number of researchers who have conducted research in Malaysia through general elections, state elections as well as by-elections. Vasil (1972) have observed the behavior in the constituency of Batu, Kuala Lumpur. He found that Chinese voters in the area have chosen Democratic Action Party (DAP) based on local issues rather than national issues that rose by the Alliance Party candidate. He found that the issues of elections through the candidates, races and localities aspects have been translated in the general elections of 1969 result. The increasing of opposition ethnic-based parties such as The Malaysian People's Movement Party (GERAKAN) and the DAP for the Chinese and Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) for the Malay voters have evidenced a tendency in the change of voting patterns that is due to ethnic sentiment issues that has been focused in the elections.

Rogers (1977) found that the level of political awareness and involvement of the Malays was at low level and men are more active than women. The low level of education of Malays community causes this and so do their political awareness. While Kamlin (1977) in his study also found that the pattern of voting amongst Terengganu people are more focused on local issues that is much related to the development of local area. For Kassim (1978) has observed the political cooperation process or political consensus among the Alliance Party in general elections 1978. He has found that

the Barisan Nasional (BN) political cooperation with PAS has increased the number of votes for the party when the ethnicity factor became the fundamental determinant in that particular election, especially in in 1974. While the voting pattern of Chinese ethnic in Penang state has increased the DAP votes in 1978. This fact is based on the voting pattern in Penang which still towards the ethnicity factor where the Chinese gave their votes to the DAP party instead of BN party.

Gaus (1984) has described the political development of the Malays in Penang, particularly in terms of elections before the independence. In 1952 elections, there is a tendency among voters to votes based on the racial-based organization which is significantly different from the 1955 general election; showed a specific pattern of voting based on political cooperation within the Alliance. Baharudin Ali Masrom (1989) noted that the elections and the voting patterns of the community very closely linked to the personality of the candidate. Thus, the Malays tend to votes based on ethnicity similarity. It is necessary for the Malay candidates in elections have a good image of incorruptible, capable of leading, high morals, good faith and does not have a family issue.

Goh Cheng Teik (1994) also explained the racial politics in Malaysia with every community wants to maintain the welfare and interests of their own race. This situation will encourage voters to vote according to the will of own people and aims to safeguard the rights of own people, which has been transformed in the BN component party as compare to opposition parties. Mohammad Agus Yusoff (1992) also explained the politics of Sabah and found the relation to the elections. He found that the pattern of voting voters in Sabah is more focused on the race or ethnicity itself as well as a strong support for the ruling party's against the opposition parties. Chin Ung-Ho (1996) also has explained about the political developments in Sarawak and specifically on Chinese politics and Sarawak United Peoples' Party (SUPP). He found that there was still an ethnic-based politics amongst Chinese in Sarawak which more focused on SUPP party and ethnic identity.

Mohamed Abu Bakar (1980) explained the voting pattern in Damansara parliamentary which resulted DAP candidate V. David won the parliamentary seat. He found that Chinese voters in that area has supported DAP due to a large number of Chinese voters voted and has a strong ties to the DAP as opposed to BN party, even with various issues raised such as development and so on. Gale (1986) also looks at the political developments in the context of Sabah state election in 1981 as a competition of political parties representing a specific community in Sabah. He discovered that the 1981 elections results have shown that voters more focused on to support parties that representing different ethnic groups and this has been proven by the success of the Sabah People's United Front (BERJAYA) party.

Ghazali Mahyudin (1999)noted that voting patterns by voter identification approach are still intact. He concluded that voters are still strong to support a political party and it can be witnessed in the electoral decision. On the other hands, Mohd. Fuad Mat Jali & Junaidi Awang Besar (2005) has found that the voting patterns are affected by development factors or economic considerations. It showed that people are still indeed need for development agenda, which will result with economic and job opportunities, and financial assistance too.

Syed Arabi Idid & Safar Hashim (1993) found that the media roles and influences in elections are very much important and affected voting patterns through the news. They found that the mainstream printed and electronic media has given extensive coverage to the BN and highlighting the positive values of the BN candidates. This situation has given extra advantages of the BN party against opposition parties. In another study by Syed Arabi Idid & Mazni Buyong (1995) have found that the mainstream media is exhibiting national issues such as development, government policies such as Vision 2020, national integration and good economic growth. As a result, voters tend to vote for BN as contrary to opposition parties.

The above literatures has evidenced that perception of the voters often influenced by issues that been displayed during elections period. These issues can be in the form of ethnic sentiments, economic and development or even news that formed perception for voters.

3. Research Methodology

By using explanatory study in the form of quantitative design, this study employed a survey approach with a self-developed and self-administered questionnaire. Quantitative method lies in its general acceptance by others as being rational, logical, planned and systematic. Although it feature statistical complexity, quantitative method is regard as being straightforward, fact filled, and 'hard news' (Pierce, 2008). Furthermore, quantitative makes best use of cutting edge computer programs and other new technology, time scale relatively shorten for collecting and analyzing data, and more importantly it conforms to the modern-day business model. While survey method has been considered common in social sciences, thus this study also uses the same methodology for data collection. In analyzing the data, a descriptive technique through mean, frequencies and standard deviation are used to interpret the raw data.

Participants

Using simple random multistage clustered sampling technique, the sample populations for this particular study consists of 1,015 respondents that theoretically cover 56 Selangor state constituencies and 26 parliamentary seats. However, due to missing data prevail; only 1010 respondents' data were examined.

Instrument

A self-developed and self-administered questionnaire is used as instrument for data collection. The questionnaire is divided into four parts, comprising demographic information, In terms of validity and reliability; all spectrums of questions have been tested with Cronbach Alpha value of more than 0.752.

4. Findings and Discussion

There are 11 issues that being examined in this study. However, for the purpose of this article, only 6 issues that are significant to be discussed. Those issues are as follows:

The Use of "Allah" word by the Non-Muslim

The issue of the use of the word "Allah" sparked the debate among masses when Herald-The Catholic Weekly authors use the word "Allah" in its publication on 31 December 2007. According to the Selangor State Fatwa Committee, through the Selangor State Fatwa Committee Meeting No. 3/2008 dated June 10, 2008 (JAKIM, 2008), has proclaimed a ban on the use of the word 'Allah' by non-Muslims in accordance with the decision of the 82nd National Fatwa Council Meetings. However, this issue is still unresolved after Kuala Lumpur High Court granted a delayed on January 6, 2010.

The findings found that 516 respondents (51.1%) did not agree with the statement of "the use of the word by non-Muslims". Based on religious differentiation, majority of the Malays/ Muslim did not agreed, that is 403 respondents. This is understandable, because the use of the word "Allah" has been proclaimed as the exclusive right of Islam with some more others specific words. However, a relatively high number of Malay respondents agreed that the word can be used by non-Muslims is also quite high, with 264 respondents (35%). This percentage is quite high for such issues, and it clearly proves that this issue has a different perception according to their party affiliation. These indicators are very alarming, especially for Muslims, because the authors believed this case should not be politicized, because it involves an understanding of the ones Islamic faith. The government and political parties should be aware of the negative implications of matters affecting the religious sensitivities which to be considered for political party material just for the sake of garbing votes. There should be limitations agreed between the political parties on the issue or problem that cannot be took as political matter. Political parties need to be more mature and accountable to the issues debated. The respondent of Chinese and Indian ethnics also majority does not agree that the word of "Allah" is used by non-Muslims. This clearly shows that only the Malays debating on this issue, and clearly showed that this issue is viewed from the perspective of political parties, which absolutely affecting the Malays themselves.

Table 1. The Use of "Allah" word by non-Muslims

		Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	Total
Ethnicity	Malay	264	403	85	752
	Chinese	41	57	44	142
	India	17	56	43	116
Total		322	516	172	1010

From the data above, it can be understood that this issue is not explained with a scientific and accurate from experts. As a result, this issue has been politicized by partisan according to their benefits gained.The number of those who are unsure (172) or 17% proved that this issue is no solution, as there is no progress in the courts. However, there is a complete situation in the state of Sarawak as the state government has officially proclaimed that use of "Allah" word are allowable even for non-Muslim in the name of freedom and respect of religion (Astro Awani, 2015).

The 'BERSIH' 1.0, 2.0 & 3.0

The phenomenon of Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH) 1.0, which began as early as 2007, before the elections to the 12th (GE12), followed with BERSIH 2.0 on 9 July 2011 and BERSIH 3.0 on 28 April 2012 that demands of eight-point to ensure of more transparent of electoral process, fair and just. Among the highlights are the Reliability of Voters List, the Reformation of Postal Votes, the Use of Inedible Ink, Free and Fair Media Access, 21 days of Minimum Campaigning Period, Strengthening Public Institutions, Stop Corruption and Stop Dirty Politics. Table 2

summarized data findings on the perception of voters on BERSIH 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 according to ethnicity.

Table 2. BERSIH 1.0, 2.0 & 3.0

		Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	Total
	Malay	360	320	72	752
Ethnic	Chinese	65	44	33	142
	India	36	63	17	116
	Total	461	427	122	1010

Table 2 above showed a total of 461 respondents (45%) agreed with BERSIH rallies. However, 42% of respondents did not agree with the rallies. These findings proved that social issues which eventually became a political issue, makes people are divided among themselves. It also proved that there is perception building contributed by influenced of different political parties. However, the percentage of those who are not sure of the issue, that by 12% or 122 respondents reflecting the actual situation of the Malaysian who are not concerned about the current situation, as 17% of respondents were uncertain about issues of "Allah" word previsouly.

Reflecting ethnicity, the Indians, a total of 63 people who did not agree with the BERSIH rallies, as compared with 44 Chinese ethnics who also disagree, eventough BERSIH chairman is headed by Ambiga Sreenevasan, an Indians descendents. Therefore, it is obviously, that BERSIH rallies are not ethnic issues as Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) rally earlier. Data are also evidenced a trend of Chinese voters to make changes during the elections, as was done by the Indian voters in GE12 previously (please refer to "Chinese Tsunami" of GE13 on www.spr.gov.my).

Table 3. BERSIH Rally Based on Age

		Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	
Age	21-30	253	236	50	539
	31-40	147	107	32	286
	Total	400	343	82	825

When viewed in terms of age, 36% of respondents aged between 31-40 does agreed with BERSIH rallies, as compared to 64% of those between ages of 21-30 agreed with the statement. This group of respondents between ages 21-30 also do not agree with BERSIH rallies (69%). These findings clearly demonstrate that young people, and may be also the first-time voters that clear with BERSIH motive and later decided for themselves.This contributes to the psychological theory of Gen Y, which is where they make their own choice. Reports, visuals and internets sources also quoted that most of the participants of the rallies are those in the age category above. The government should be concerned with such matters because they are the majority of voters compared to those aged 40 years and above, which constitute only 30% of the total electorate.The composition of this group may also be those who are working in the urban areas, and possibly are private sector employees (actually 519 people from the respondent's data).

In conclusion, the BERSIH rallies are the claims or recommendations to the Election Commission (EC) and the government to improve the electoral process, which perceived as a priority by young people in democratization but not the indoctrination process. But still some voters are opposing BERSIH approach, which showed democracy, are still blooming in Malaysia. Of the late, BERSIH 4 which are plan to be conducted in August 2015, but some believed the very objective of its establishment are deviated.

The Election Commision (EC) confidence

The people of Malaysia, and other countries, desired for a democratic election generally. In Malaysia, the Election Commission (EC) is the authority that is responsible and oversees for the electoral process in Malaysia. However, criticism of the affairs of voting elections often creates multiple perceptions to the voters.

Table 4. Confidences on Election Commission

		Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	Total
	Malay	261	374	117	752
Ethnic	Chinese	23	88	31	142
	Indian	55	37	24	116
	Total	339	499	172	1010

49% respondents said they were not convinced of the transparency of the EC in carry out its responsibilities in managing the elections. Ethnically, the Indian voters showed their confidence in the EC with the 47% agreed with the EC believes his duties. However, the Chinese voters that are 62% said they were dissatisfied with the EC performance. This can be assessed by a number of online reports and social networks site that showed the existence of phantom voters, leakages in the list of voters and report to the EC after the elections, which majority is coming from the Chinese community and obviously can not be verified. It is an indicator that people are still less confident with the EC although many improvements have been made. A cross examination with findings in BERSIH respondent's data, proved the existence of a particular trend among Chinese voters, that are not satisfied with the work of the EC and it translated into support for the BERSIH rallies (See Table 2).

The author believes the EC, as a whole should be reformed in terms of structure, mandate, jurisdiction, and their accountability in changing the perception of voters against the EC.

Table 5. Election Commission based on Employment Type

		Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	Total
	Government	71	83	49	203
Work	Private	165	281	73	519
	Total	236	364	122	722

The findings of the analysis based on the work type of the respondents indicated 364 respondents said they were not convinced by the EC in managing the elections. This shows that most private sector workers or the government servants have a negative perception against the EC, with 40% government employees and 54% of the private sector workers are unsure of the EC competence on the task. However, 30% of private sector employees and 34% of government employees are still confident with the EC to do its task, while only 122 (16%) respondents did not sure with the above statement. The number of those who are not sure on this issue is quite large, with led to the author believed that most of them came from those who were first-time voters during 13th general election.

The Suitability of Islamic Penal Code (Hudud) Implementation

Hudud law is Islamic law that cannot be disputed, at least by Muslims. But what can be discussed is how it can be implemented in Malaysia. The issue of Hudud Laws has been the key elements for elections campaigning for a long time, and has been refreshed by Datuk Nik Aziz *(the late of)* statement in September 2011. As the result, once again the perception of Hudud law, and not how the Hudud law should be implemented surfaced. As a result, there are many incorrect perceptions of Hudud law (see Sinar Harian, 2011, 2012; SIS, 2011; Zainah Anwar, 2011).

Table 6. The Implementation of Hudud Based on Ethnic

		Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	Total
	Malay	544	100	108	752
Ethnic	Chinese	28	67	47	142
	India	25	53	38	116
	Total	597	220	193	1010

Based on survey results, 597 respondents agreed that hudud laws are feasible to be implemented, while 220 respondents did not agree and 193 people are not sure about the statement. This finding demonstrates that the media as in the above reference highlights the issue of hudud, is contrast to the perception based on ethnicity. 72% of Malays

agree that hudud law is feasible to be implemented in Malaysia now, as compared to just 13% who did not agree, and 14% say they are unsure about the suitability of hudud laws implemented in Malaysia now. These findings clearly show that most respondents do not reject hudud law, but it is clearly oppose to the mainstream media use of set agenda. The author believes this matter should not be discussed by the masses, but should be within the Islamic scholars who assume this responsibility for better understanding to the Muslim/Malays in particular, because this matter also involves the issue of faith, as the word of "Allah" issue.

While the Chinese with 47% and Indian of 45% said hudud laws are not feasible these present times. But if we look to the findings above, 33% of Chinese and 32% of Indian are not sure about this statement. This proved that the Chinese and Indian communities are lack of information and knowledge on hudud law, which ultimately creates a different perception. For example, (see the statement of the President of MCA, on Oct 18 2012 or the President of Malaysian Indian United Party (MIUP) (May 2013) that featured irrelevant individual. The management of perception is very important, and in a situation like this, which certainly weakens the Malays themselves in the end.

Free Education

Various stakeholders have long debated in the issue of free education. This issue is getting more attention by the public when Pakatan Rakyat (PR) has included this issue in their campaign manifesto for the GE13. This issue also become a 'viral' in virtual space or social networks as a result between KS Bawani, a law undergraduate student and Sharifah Zohra, a president of little-known Suara Wanita 1Malaysia (SWIM) with popular phrase of "Listen, listen, listen" ("Full Story: Bawani vs Sharifah Zohra," n.d.).

Table 7. Free Educations to Replace PTPTN Loan

		Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	Total
Ethnic	Malay	568	132	52	752
	Chinese	118	16	8	142
	Indian	85	18	13	116
	Total	771	166	73	1010

This statement showed a 75% of the Malays agree of free education to replace the Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Negara (PTPTN) loan, while the Chinese have been as much as 83% and Indians 73% also expressed their approval to the above statement. It showed that, if given the chance, people are generally looking forward free education and PTPTN is abolished. While the score for disagreed is below 15% for all three ethnic groups, and scores of unsure is below 10% for the three ethnic groups.

These findings proved that the issue of free education and PTPTN loans is abolished is an issue that became the priority for all respondents and the authors believed that this is in fact a real problem of society at large. A ready-debt burden once graduated multiplied with no job security makes students; fresh graduate and family were haunted with the issue. Although various efforts have been taken by the corporation itself, among others with blacklisting bad debtors, a reduction in interest rates, and 'Ujrah' offers which is based on Islamic concept, also an offer specific discounts from the government budget for year 2013 for the early settlement did not get much attention from citizens. This issue worsened when it became a strategic issue in the political parties election campaigns.

Table 8. Free Education Based on Age

		Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	Total
Age	21-30	428	86	25	539
	31-40	229	40	17	286
	Total	657	126	42	825

The above data findings indicated that 79.6% respondents agreed that PTPTN should be abolished and replaced with a free education. This is understandable because, these are the majority debtors when PTPTN was incorporated in 1997.

Table 9. Free Education Based on Education Level

		Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	Total
Level of Education	PMR / SRP and down	43	17	11	71
	SPM / STPM or its equivalent	245	57	35	337
Total		288	74	46	408

		Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	Total
Level of Education	Diploma / Degree	444	80	23	547
	Masters / PhD	43	12	5	60
Total		487	92	28	607

Comparatively, if viewed from the level of education aspect, 81.1% of diploma or degree holders' agreed that PTPTN is abolished and replaced with a free education. It is very easy, because they are the ones who become the main borrowers to the PTPTN. While those the SPM/STPM achievers, 72.7% agreed with the above statement. It is most likely; these are the potential borrowers' people when they pursue their studies to the next level. It is showed that the issue is not for a particular group, but involved all academic levels.

The government must seriously pay their attention to the issue, while short-term solution or delaying the issue is an option, simply because the group of borrowers is much greater than interest groups. If the issue is still being polemics and politicized, it could effect and change the political landscape in the coming 14th general election, which will witnessed the 21-30 age group will increase by 5 million, which means a potential of 5 million votes in the election, while the interest groups (those who are over 50 years old) will diminishing.

Mainstream Media Confidence

Media credibility began to attract scholarly attention as early as virtual media come into existence. Earlier studies have showed that media, whether newspaper or online news are differ in terms of its features and credibility (Mustaffa, Ibrahim, Samani, & Rahim, 2010). Traditional mainstream media owned by the ruling party has obviously primitive in its nature by making racial and religious crisis as a factor in trapping people's political beliefs (Abu Hassan, 2012). There were also, media that tend to focus on success stories, and predatory to other parties as for example fear politics tactic drawing upon Malays that might soon be in great peril if BN did not won in election (Lemiere, 2014). This nature creates rather a different perception among respondents. Table below descriptively shows the voters confidences on mainstream media, specifically on TV3 channel and Utusan Malaysia publication.

Table 10. Votes Confidences on Mainstream Media By Age

		Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	Total
Age	21-30	162	306	71	539
	31-40	71	167	48	286
Total		233	473	119	825

About 57.3% of respondents are not confidence on mainstream medias. Most probably, this groups is most likely may have an alternative sources to compare with mainstream media reports. Based on group age, the 21-30 groups, 56.7% of them did not agree with the statement, as compared to 31-40 age group that constitute 58.3%did not agree with statement. However, based on employment differences, government workers have high confidence toward mainstream media as compared to private employee.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, all 6 presented issues are significant enough to discussed on for better understanding the perception that clouding voters in Malaysian 13th general election. 2 from the above issues are more religious polemics that being viewed for political benefits. The other 4 issues are mainly on civil liberties and civic participation, and democratization that took place. It also witnessed that BN are badly weakened from GE13 results. These issues must be handled

strategically and efficiently for upcoming GE14. As for now and for sure, BN are face a completely different situation, challenges and greatly changed nation.

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