

Generation Y– A Generation that Shapes the Political Landscape and Dimension in Malaysia

Raja Ahmad Iskandar Raja Yaacob, Abdul Mutalib Embong, Azelin M Noor, Abdur-Rahman Mohamed Amin

Abstract—The 13th election in Malaysia is coming soon and everybody is still puzzling with the exact day of it. All these while the government is ruled by the alliance of three main races parties. Somehow, with the emergence of technology, more youngsters are taking more active roles in politics. This paper gives a deep insight with the current scenario of political landscape in Malaysia. Almost 700 questionnaires were distributed to find the voice of the young voters. Three main scopes of social, economics and politics became the highlights of the survey. The findings show that most generation Y requires changes in many aspects of life in the country. The generation also has accepted the concept of one Malaysia instead of believing in ethnic based party when voting. In other words, the credibility of a candidate in election should be given more priority instead of other factors like race and religious belief.

Keywords— Youth, election, generation Y, politics, decision making

I. INTRODUCTION

Young people are referred to the people aged between 15 to 40 years. Commonwealth Secretariat, however, defines the young people those from 15 to 29 years old. It is a transition period where one faces a stage from depending on others to someone who is independent. This mainly involves mental activity like decision making.

In term of culture, young people are often associated with social ills such as being narrow minded, passive, and so forth. Their life is marred by the experience which is not beneficial, meaningful and useful. These young people once were deemed by William Shakespeare as "in cold blood and green decision in" – literally means cold-blooded people or dare to take risk yet they are immature in decision making

Somehow, with the pace of technology, young people start to know life is full of challenges and connecting to legacy of

Raja Ahmad Iskandar Raja Yaacob is with the Department of Management and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS, Bandar Seri Iskandar, 31750, Tronoh, Perak, Malaysia (phone: 0060-53687767; fax: 0060-53656280; e-mail: iskandar_yaacob@petronas.com.my).

Abdul Mutalib Embong is with the Department of Management and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS, Bandar Seri Iskandar, 31750, Tronoh, Perak, Malaysia (phone: 0060-53687757; fax: 0060-53656280; e-mail: a.mutalib_embong@petronas.com.my).

Azelin M Noor is with the Department of Management and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS, Bandar Seri Iskandar, 31750, Tronoh, Perak, Malaysia (phone: 0060-53687766; fax: 0060-53656280; e-mail: azelin_noor@petronas.com.my).

Abdur-Rahman Mohamed Amin is with the Department of Management and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS, Bandar Seri Iskandar, 31750, Tronoh, Perak, Malaysia (phone: 0060-53687774; fax: 0060-53656280; e-mail: urrahman_amin@petronas.com.my).

leadership and excellence in future. Such challenge will certainly become tougher as the environment is expanding fast compared to the atmosphere of the yesteryears. They reveal the new discoveries in various fields too that require wisdom to choose and signify level of maturity.

II. THE EMERGENCE OF Y GENERATION

Generation Y or Millennial Generation (or Millennials) is the demographic after Generation X (Wilde, 2011). There are no precise dates for when Generation Y starts and ends. This group can be referred to those birth dates range somewhere from early 1980s to the mid 2000s.

Generation Y legal are the youths at present, in their 20s and are just entering the workforce. With numbers estimated as high as 70 million, Generation Y is the fastest growing segment of today's population (2011). In Malaysia, it is estimated that there are about 12 million or 42.8 percent Y generation from the whole population (Thien, 2011).

The Y generation basically has their personal laptops, cell phones and other modern gadgets. They have grown up engaging with the Internet. This had led to their expectation of being able to obtain information at exceedingly rapid speeds.

Compared to their parents' and grandparents' generations, Generation Y tends to be more strong-willed, passionate, and optimistic. Generation Y also craves for attention and seek for justice (2011). As social media become the prime source, they start to call for a change to the system and be characterized by a shift in ideology. This is because the generation Y knows they are the future leader of the country who determines the prospect destiny of that nation, they should responsibly and critically participate in the election through voting.

Generation Y and political engagement

Even the age of voting varies from one country to another; there is only a small range of age among the countries which practice democracy. Most governments consider that those of any age lower than the chosen threshold lack the necessary capacity to independently decide how to cast a vote (Brooks, 2009). The voting age is often of such importance that it is set by means of a constitutional provision. 18 is the most common voting age, with a small minority of countries differing from this rule. Those with a national minimum age of 17 include East Timor, Indonesia, North Korea, South Sudan and Sudan. The minimum age is 16 in Austria, Brazil, Cuba, Nicaragua and the Isle of Man, though the Isle of Man is under British sovereignty (2009). People aged 16–18 can vote in Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro if employed. The highest minimum voting age is 21 in several nations and this is only applied

among the 12 countries in this world. Malaysia is one country that the predominant voting age is 21.

There are only limited studies on the roles of generation y in election. Before, young voters were often viewed as uninterested in political activity but the scenario changes with the impact of media social. Generation Y become more rationale, open, mature in choosing their leaders.

“Young people are a lot more interested in these issues [political] than they're given credit for”.

(M Lassiter)

Echoing the same sentiment is Singaporean writer Catherine Lim, who says generation Y is a group completely different from their parents and grandparents, who still see themselves as owing an enormous debt of gratitude to the main party for giving them a better life (Leyl. S, 2001).

During the Singapore's 2011 General Election, there were twelve candidates below the age of 30, making it the largest slate of young candidates ever to stand for elections. The participation of such young people in the elections was seen as a sign of greater political interest and participation from the younger generation, and a commitment from the youth to being part of the process towards greater democracy in Singapore.

The involvement of generation Y in politics is worldwide. For example, Phelps (2005) shows how reported turnout amongst the 18-24 age group was 44.3 per cent, compared with 71.3 per cent for the 35-44 age group and 86.1 per cent amongst those aged 65 or more in the UK's general election in 2005. It is also clear from Phelps' data that turnout has fallen significantly amongst this age group over recent decades. Indeed, the figure for 2005 (44.3 per cent) can be contrasted with the 75.4 per cent reported turnout for the same age group in 1992 and the 88.6 per cent reported in 1964. Indeed, Phelps argues that those young people in the 18-24 age group in 2005 have been subject to a unique array of political influences, many of which have been negative. These include growing up in a highly individualized and marketised society in which not voting is less likely to be seen as a serious neglect of civic duty, and coming of voting age 'in a period characterized by weak leadership, policy incompetence, sleaze and scandal' (2005: 486). This is supported by Henn et al. who conclude that evidence such as this 'indicates that young people in Britain are sufficiently interested in political affairs to dispel the myth that their apparent disconnection from formal politics is as a consequence of their general apathy' (2005:473).

A study by Development of Indicators for Comparative Research in the European Union (EUYOUPART) in 2005 revealed that the turnout of generation Y in European elections was markedly lower than that in national elections. Participation rate was the lowest in Britain: only 1 out of 4 young people bothered themselves with going to the polls. Also, Estonia and Finland were characterized by a relatively low participation rate. In Italy, on the contrary, nearly 9 out of 10 voted (85%). Other countries (Slovakia, Austria, France and Germany) managed to mobilize approximately 50% of the young people. The study also found a comparative analysis between the countries which have distinguished some national

characteristics. The country where the young people are the most politicized is Italy while the one where they are the least politicized is the UK. The former, Has the strongest family and peer socializations while the latter has the weakest.

In Malaysia, a study conducted by the Zentrum Future Studies Malaysia (February 20 to March 5, 2008) clearly indicated that y generation began to look for new materials as alternative sources of information which influenced their decision making in the election. Based on the study, a total of 64.5 percent of the 21 to 29 years group trusted more on blogs and online media to access for the information. In the meantime, a total of 23.1 per cent of them depended on the information presented by television and only 12.4 percent depended on the local newspaper. The Y generation group is more exposed to new media such as web pages, web blogs, web audio video, network and email and the online newspapers. As a matter of fact no costs are required to provide web pages in new media because there are online companies that provide these services for free. The 'blogosphere' phenomenon means the emergence of a web blog that dominates cyberspace and it has become a reference to the y generation voter groups. It becomes increasingly dominant when the nature of political web blog appears in higher rates and receives support from these young voters.

Nadzri and Suhaimee (2008) in their study on 193 blogs, found blogs which have more websites sided the opposition (59.1%) compared to the government (14.5%). Out of that, 26.4% was independent and did not side either the opposition or the government. Meanwhile, most of the issues discussed were related to the transparency of the election (33.1%), human rights, justice and economy (32.5%) and corruption and cronyism (11.3%). This shows that most web blogs had been campaigning to overthrow the government and thus giving advantage to the opposition. Government on the other side, failed to explain the raising matters effectively, especially via media. As a result, new y generation voters had taken this opportunity to give their support to the opposition (Media Asia, 2012).

Y generation voters also often compare the situation in their country to other countries. They often see the issues relating to elements of democracy such as how the government threatens opposition, the opposition functions in the politics, government transparency, human rights and the misconduct of elections instead of being independent and impartial. This group of young voters hopes these elements can be justified or attained like other countries with in the vicinity. Meanwhile, the governments fail to address these doubts. It results the y generation voters to have no choice other than giving support to the opposition in a hope that the latter could improve the situations.

Malaysia's 12th Election

The Malaysia's 12th general election which was held in 2008 results can be a bench mark that show how young people demonstrate variations in using the brain power.

The then election has become a turning point towards the ability of this group in term of intellectuality and ingenuity,

translating their needs. The more important it clearly indicates a clear message that the generation y demands a new, drastic transition in the country.

The election showed tremendous differences compared to general elections before. Amongst is the relationship between ethnic voting patterns and political parties. Traditionally, each ethnic group will give strong support to the party that represents their ethnic interests. Somehow, the 2008 parliamentary elections showed that the largest ethnic groups such as Malay, Chinese and Indians had supported the alliance of oppositions (Election Commission, 2008).

The alliance of oppositions won in many areas of mixed election (there was no ethnic majority in the election). Nevertheless to say, some of the strong fortresses of the ruled government collapsed. The main notion to note is that there was a sign of voters', especially the generation Y to choose the opposition, especially in mixed areas.

Another interesting point is the involvement of this generation Y that seemed explicitly rejecting the idea of development brought by the government. Such agenda was considered outdated and them who demanded for something outrages.

For the generation y voters, the duties and responsibilities to develop countries should come from the government. This task must be carried out by any political parties and the chosen government. Hence, the government should not use development issues to gain votes as it was their stated duties and responsibilities. If the government fails to carry it out, it is better for them to quit from politics or contest in the election.

The issue resolved and reached its peak when the ruled government lost the majority of two thirds parliamentary seats and five states to the opposition. It was a sign towards the new paradigms and trust the generation y voters gave to the opposition

Hence, this study is implemented to ensure that information retrieved is based on arguments that the changes occurred prior to the willingness of generation y voters to do so, It was not because of the protest or perception alone.

The significance of the study

1. It is expected that the study will be able to identify the key factors to the success of opposition party in the last series of the 12th General election. The continuous mood and needs people received might lead to the consistency for opposition, resulting a better performance in the upcoming election.
2. The needs and requirements of the people and the generation Y should be understood by all political parties. They can be a wave of momentum to form a large support and strengthen the party.
3. This study will also propose comprehensive measures to be taken either by the government or opposition to influence the people especially the y generation. Winning the 13th General election is a sign either to form a new government or to retain the current government.

III. THE HYPOTHESES

Based on the electoral statistics for those ages between 21 years to 29 years, it clearly shows an awareness of y-generation in national socio politics. Citing several states in Malaysia such as Selangor, Johor and Perak respectively, it was recorded high number of electoral, each at 214.881 (Selangor), 165.342 (Johor), 156.705 (Perak).

Statistics issued by the Commission of Election (CE) shows the total number of young age registrants in Malaysia has reached a figure of 1,573,096 million.

This group of generation Y voters, including voters who vote for the first time, is studying in institutions or just finishing their studies. This group of voters is often considered as aggressive in searching for right information related to certain matters.

The generation voters always seek for something which relatively high in nature and eager to analyze information. They are also critical, bold and expressive.

They need a space that is free from influences by any parties that may prevent their ideas and views respectively.

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the status quo of socio political situation after the 12th General-election and the election of Parliament and state assembly hall held thereafter.
2. To know the key factors and current performance of the y-generation towards government or opposition
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of new media and their roles in shaping public opinions (new generation) towards government and opposition - pre, during and post elections.
4. To assess the trends and voting patterns of y generation based on channels by finding the main issues, solutions and the mechanism.
5. To identify needs and expectations of y generation towards government or opposition.
6. To recommend measures which can empower government or opposition in the country's political future.

V. RESEARCH METHODS

A total of 700 questionnaires were distributed in this study. It involved all the 14 states in Malaysia: Peninsular and Sabah and Sarawak (The Borneo). The survey was conducted on the respondents by taking into account the number of registered voters / population in each area /locality, based on the number of parties, the composition fraction, parliamentary seats, and locality of region, gender, age and occupation.

Meanwhile, quantitative method will involve analyzing the actual election results by referring to polling data generation according to the selected areas by using statistical analysis.

Out of the total questionnaire, 654 respondents gave feedbacks than were considered valid and be used in this paper.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

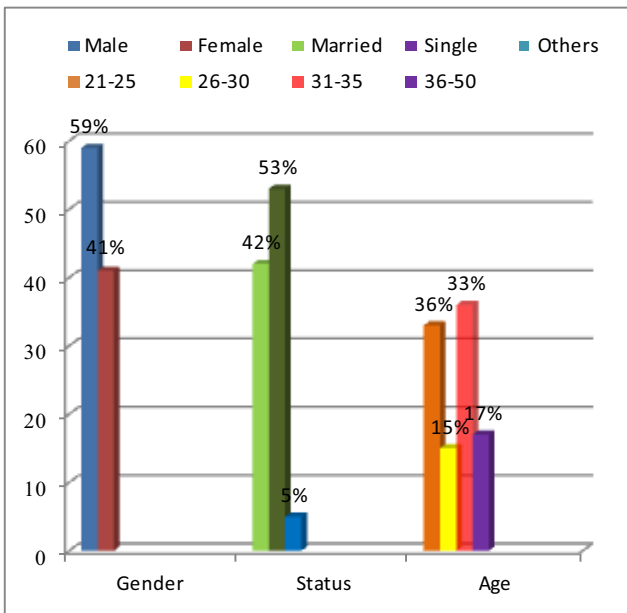


Fig. 1 Respondent profile

Starting with the respondents in Fig. 1, there were 654 respondents, with 59% or 386 males and 41% or 268 females. More than half of the respondents were single. In term of ages 222 or 34% were from 21 to 25 years old, 33% or 216 were from 31 to 35 years old and the remaining were 21 to 30 years and 36 to 40 years old.

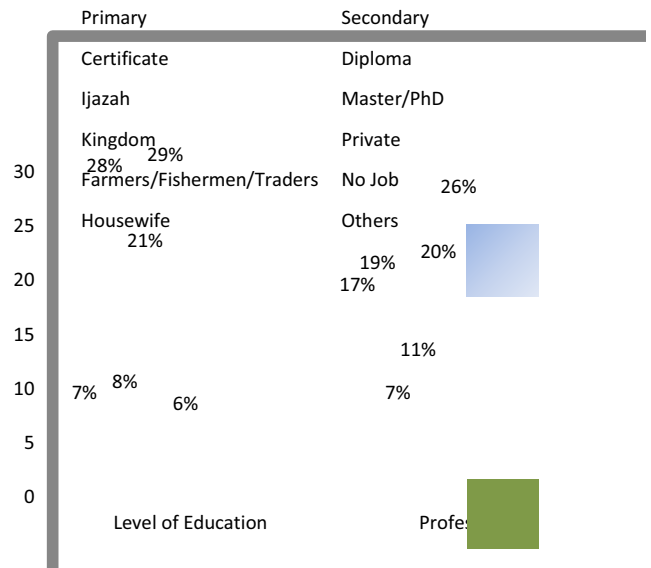


Fig. 3 Respondents' level of education and profession

The tabulation of education levels in Fig. 3 shows that one third of the respondents had a degree (29% or 190), and another one third also had a diploma (28% or 183). The remaining had primary, secondary or PHD qualifications. In term of profession, almost equal percentages came from private or government sector, and were housewives. Eleven per cent had no jobs and the big majority, 26% or 170 were under "others" category. They were mostly students.

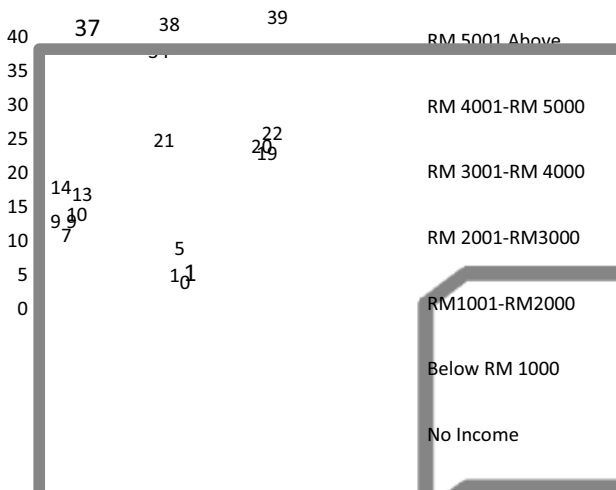


Fig. 2 Respondents' income rate and frequency of voting

As in Fig. 2, most of the young voters have either no income (37%) or less than RM3000 (39%). This study involved three main races. Indians formed 38% of the samplings, followed by Malay (34%), Chinese (21%) and 7% were the aboriginal indigenous and the natives of Sarawak and Sabah. The two later states are situated in Borneo or East of Malaysia. The aboriginal indigenous are mostly found in Peninsular or West Malaysia. Almost 20% of the respondents never voted in the election. The rest showed that only 22% voted once followed by 39% voted twice and another 20% voted three times.

Political perspective

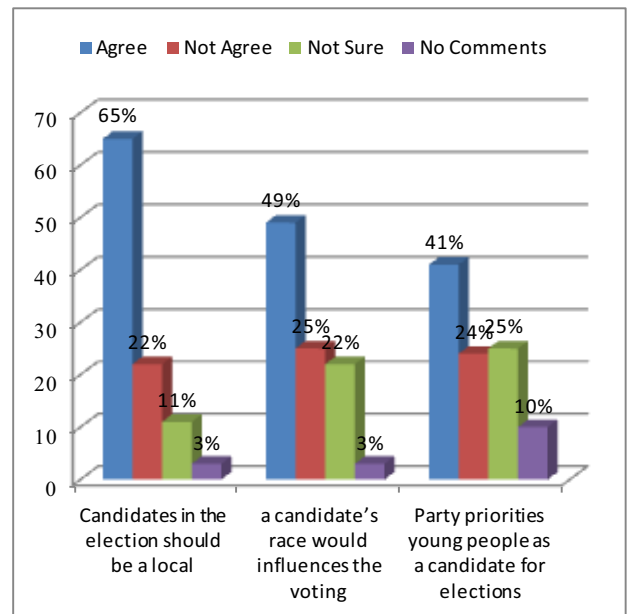


Fig. 4 Criteria of the candidate for General Election

The second section of the questionnaire had three sub areas. The first area was about the political perspectives. Question one was pertaining the issue of having a local person as a

candidate, as in Fig. 4, which 65% of the respondents agreed, 22% disagree, 21% were not sure and 3% gave no comments about it. It is mentioned that generally the respondents' view that by having local candidate to contest in their respective area will give big impact to any political parties who contest. Question two stated that a candidate's race would influences the voting. 49 of the respondents agreed with this statement compared to 25% disagreed, 22% were not sure and 3% gave no comments in this issue. However the candidate's race will depends to the local demography. Next was a statement that the party priorities youngsters as a candidate in which 41% agreed with this statement compared to 24% disagreed, 25% were not sure and remaining 10% gave no comments which the survey conclude that the current scenario of general election wants the young candidates to be the candidates.

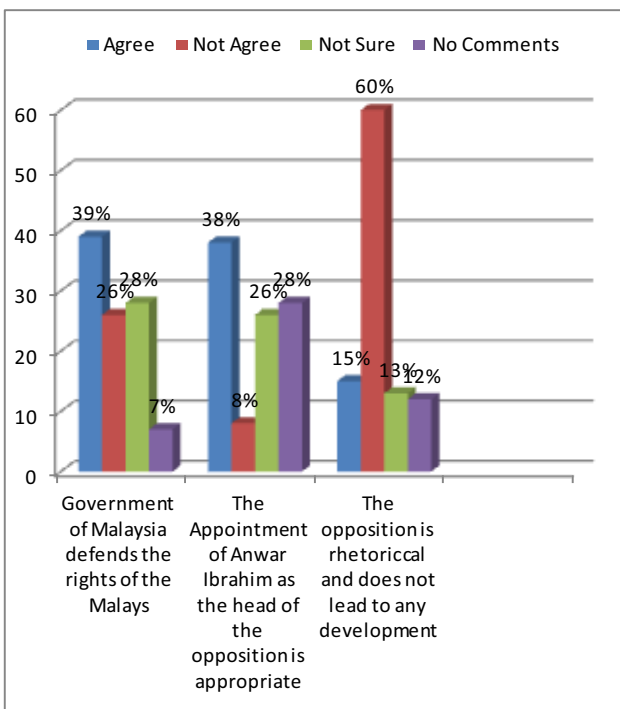


Fig. 5 Issues about the rights of Malays and opposition parties in Malaysia

Under the same section, respondents were asked about three issues, as in Fig. 5, namely the protection of the rights of the Local People (in this context the Malay People) by the government, the appointment of Anwar Ibrahim as a leader among oppositions which was considered as a need and whether the opposition's vision is only a rhetoric and does not lead to any progress to the country. Almost the same results were found in the first and second statements in which almost 40% of the respondent agreed. Somehow, more than half of the respondents or young voters disagree that the existence of oppositions is rhetoric. It shows that they realised the existence of opposition parties in the country which contradict to most ideas that the young voters do not care about politics. It also shows the needs for the existence of opposition parties in the country as a 'watchdog'.

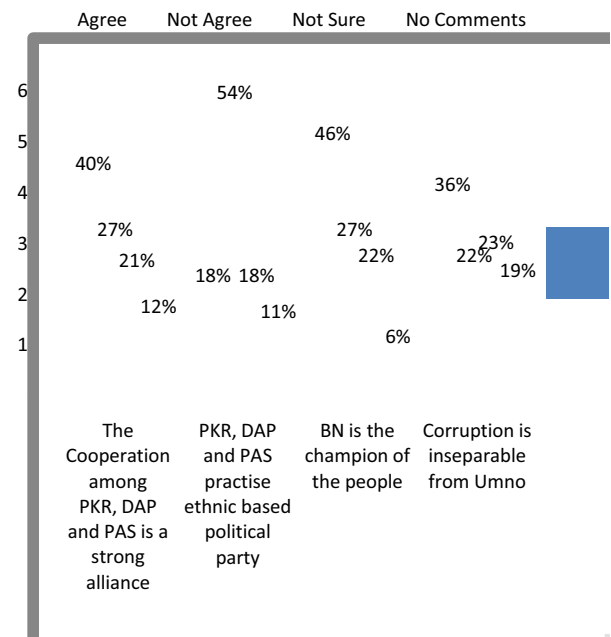


Fig. 6 Coalition of the ruling government and opposition

Next questions, as in Fig. 6, are more on the perception towards Barisan Nasional (BN) as the coalition of the ruling government which consist of United Malay National Organization (UMNO), Malaysia Chinese Association (MCA), Malaysia Indian Congress (MIC) and other small parties. Unlike BN, the opposition parties are the cooperation amongst a small number of political parties like Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) as an Islamic based party, Democratic Action Party (DAP) as a multi racial party but dominated by Chinese and Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) as a multi racial party. One of the questions is about the cooperation among these opposition parties which is considered as strong where 40% of the respondents agreed, 27 disagreed and the rest either were not sure or gave no comments. For the question stating that these opposition parties are ethnic based and only emphasize on their ethnics, more than half of the respondents disagreed with it. 46% of the respondents somehow, by this respond show that the argumentation that the opposition front practising racisms is not true. Agreed that UMNO always claim they are the champion of the people with 46%. The figure somehow, decreased by ten percent with the statement that UMNO cannot be separated from the corruption. Interestingly only 23% of the respondents disagreed with the statement.

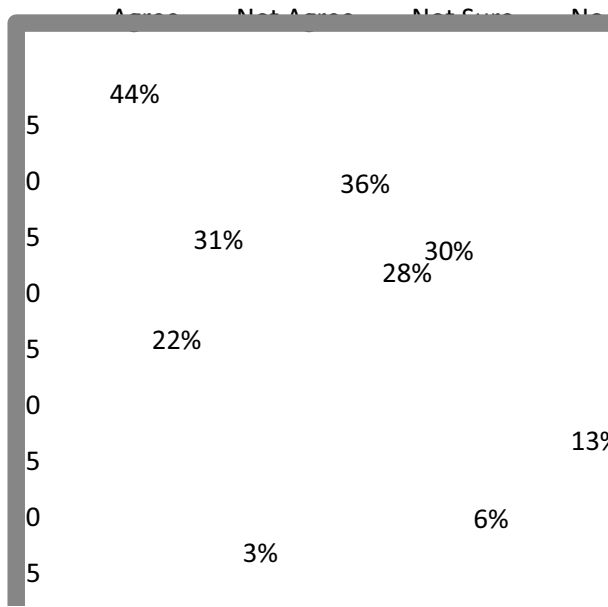


Fig. 7 The concept of 1Malaysia

The next clusters of questions, as in Fig. 7, are about the concept of “1Malaysia” which was idealised by present government. In this concept, government claims every Malaysian has an equal right and stresses on national unity and ethnic tolerance. Almost 40% of the respondents agreed that they knew the concept, compared to 22% disagreed and 31% were not sure of the concept. Almost similar results were found in term of youths’ understanding and acceptance towards this concept and to the statement that the present government would keep their election manifests. As for the graph shown, the young generation becomes observer or reserve themselves in understanding or accepting the policy of the government until the next coming general election.

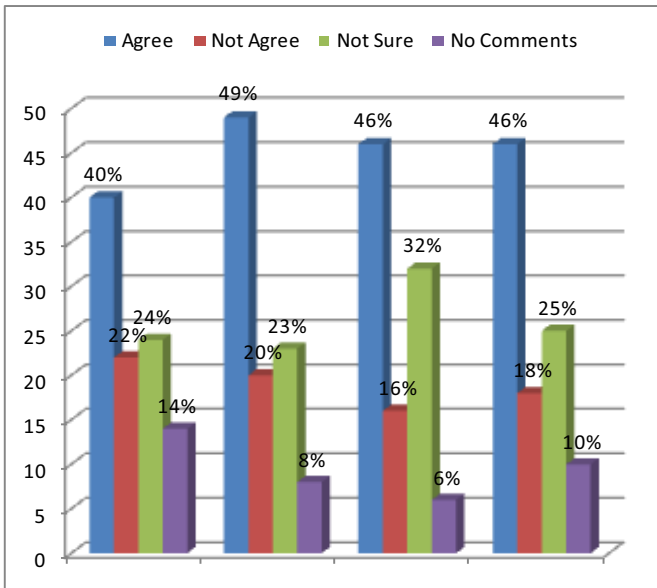


Fig. 8 People’s welfare

The second section of the questionnaires was focusing on people’s welfare. As in Fig. 8, amongst the government’s roles are to create employment opportunities for the youngsters, to prove sufficient facilities for sports, cultural and art activities and to assist the single mothers. Almost similar responses were given to these three statements in which around 40% to 50% agreed, about 15% disagreed and the remaining were either were not sure or gave no comments. From the comment, it shows that the young generation is having a big trust to the current government in the issue pertaining welfare. The final question was on their satisfaction towards the elected representative. 46% of them agreed, 18% disagreed, 25% were not sure and 10% gave no comments, and this results come either their representatives are from the ruling government or from the opposition.

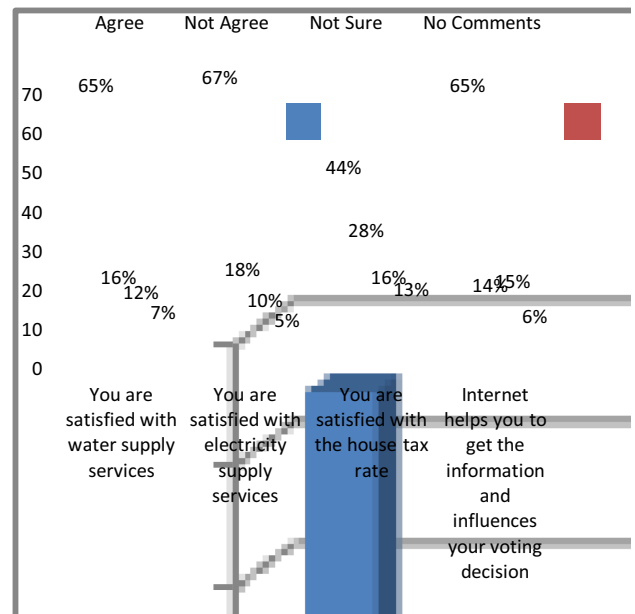


Fig. 9 Basic necessities services

The next cluster was on basic necessities services involving water supply, electricity and rate for quit rent. More than 60% was satisfied with the water and electricity supplies compared to only 44% that were satisfied with the quit rent rates. 16% and 18% each were not happy with the service of water and electricity compared to 28% who was not happy with quit rent rate. The next item is internet which helps the respondents to access for information and make decision in voting. 65% of the respondents agreed that they relied on internet for such purposes, compared to 14% (disagree), 15% (not sure) and 6% (no comments). However the result meant to be agreed since most of the respondents were the urban people.

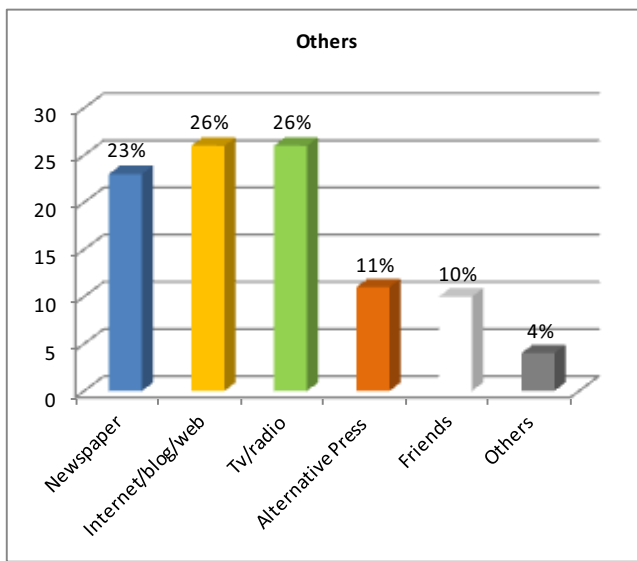


Fig. 10 Sources of information

The last section was more an open ended section. As in Fig. 10, it was on how the respondents access the information pertaining the government and leadership. 26% of the respondents got it from either internet or television and radio. 23% got the access from newspaper, about 10% either from alternative press or friends and 4% from other sources. The interesting part in this section was the question on prominent leaders whom the young voters think have influential power. Respondents named Najib Razak (the prime minister) and some other opposition leaders like Anwar Ibrahim, Nik Abdul Aziz and Lim Kit Siang most compared to other leaders. This determines that the young generation do have some political awareness and having some responsibility towards having a good governance and leader.

VII. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, this study is expected to bring the young political generation to a higher level of thought. Society should not let these young people to be used during the campaign as they are synonymous to *mat rempit* (illegal racers), waving flags in the elections. On the contrary, society should understand their problems and challenges their encounter, and then try to discuss and find the solutions for that. The young people should not feel so eager to beat the opposition party, and forget their grass root. They should not feel proud of exclaiming the dagger *kris* and forget to defend their squatter people.

It is very important to bring back the dignity of this young Malaysia. Young people are valuable assets of the country. They will be the future leaders. Their characters need to be shaped that promise the prosperity of the nation especially in facing the global challenges.

General election plays an important role to sharpen the mind and leadership of the younger generation. With the latest advancement in information of technology, young people get the advantage to access any types of the information, whether it comes from the ruling government or the opposition.

Regardless of the claims about the deteriorating political activism among Generation Y, it is time for the youth to get activated. Generation Y may be turned against “white guys in suits”, but they play a very important role to change the face of politics in Malaysia.

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