

THE YOUNG MALAYSIAN VOTER

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People express interest in the young, either as consumers of products and services or as voters. Interest in the young is focused on due to their numerical presence, at least on paper. Their number makes marketers and political parties keen to know them better. Marketers and political parties have tried their best to win the young over through various means so that they would consume their products or services or cast their votes in favour of the political party concerned.

Marketers extensively study the young to know their income, their preference, or to have a socio-demographic or socio-psychological profile of them. It is the same with the political parties who need to know the socio-demographic profile of young voters. On 7 June, 2012, Utusan Malaysia had an article that incorporated a photograph of a banner whose headline said, 'Pengundi Muda Penentu PRU-13?' (When translated to English, it says, 'The Young will determine the outcome of the 13th General Election?'). Scholars and political analysts have statistics on the effects of the young on the outcome of elections and by-elections.

This paper addresses the concerns of the young in the electoral process, by first acknowledging their numerical presence as voters during elections. The young voters have played their role during the previous elections and would continue to do so in the coming elections. But over the years the role that the young has been playing has changed. How do the young make their presence felt? Among others, they make their presence felt by articulating contemporary issues through new technology and new communication gadgets. The young voters have been able to communicate on issues that are attractive and meaningful to the general public. How do the young or adolescents gain their political or party identification? Party identification is the essence of understanding how citizens and the young interpret public affairs and make political decisions (Wolak, 2009). The young are able to articulate

their thoughts and ideas in the realm of politics. And Wolak (2009) says that articulation¹ is derived from their parents through the process of socialization.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

In our previous study on the Malaysian youth, we found that political discussion among themselves was high, with 60% talking about politics with their friends, 52% with family members, 46% with parents and only 32% were talking about politics with political activists. Another study, albeit limited in scope, also indicated a high political interest among the young (Teo & Rashidah, 2011).

Youths realize early about politics from 18 to 22 years of age. This age seems to correspond to those who have left Form Five when they feel liberated from the confines of the school to have their own thinking on politics. Age has been a variable to study the political process, voter turnout, and the effects of voting on the political development of the country. Voting is one area that has been the concern of decision makers. Recently, the Chairman of the Election Commission expressed his disappointment that not many young people have registered, as many as he would have liked them to. The irony is that the number of voters going out to vote is declining in mature democracies and the number of people registering as voters has not been encouraging either.

In a democracy, voters are the major component of the political system. This is not an exception in Malaysia. People have been known to have fought and have died for the right to vote, but in Malaysia the right to vote came with the achievement of independence. Every Malaysian citizen above the age of 21 has the right to register and vote during the elections. This meant that politicians, including prime ministers, spend time and money to woo and win the support of the voting public to be

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