

The Influence of Media on the Voting Behaviour Among the Semai Orang Asli at the 14th General Election in Malaysia

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Abstract

Ethnic and religious communalism in large part define the Malaysian political landscape. The 14th General Election (GE14) witnessed a drastic swing in the support of the Bumiputera ethnic voters from Barisan Nasional to Pakatan Harapan. Dissatisfaction with the rising cost of living, voters' increasing awareness of electoral issues and influence of mainstream and social media - all impacted their voting behaviour. This study applies the quantitative method and aims to examine the influence of media on the voting behaviour among the Orang Asli Semai electorate who lives in Batang Padang, Perak, specifically in the polling district of Parliament Tapah, P072 in the Perak State Legislative Assembly constituency of Chenderiang (DUN Chenderiang). Information is gleaned from post-GE14 findings as well as from the experience at previous elections. The research objectives are to identify the media preferences of the Orang Asli Semai electorate and to determine the contributing factors that influence their voting behaviour. A multiple regression test that was used to identify the contributing factors of media instruments' influence on voting behaviour had determined that although the influence of the media is not so major, it nevertheless was a contributing factor that influences voting behaviour among the Orang Asli Semai as agents to deliver and disseminate information regarding social imagery, current events, and issues and policies. The findings can contribute to the improvement of political engagement between political leaders and voters from the indigenous groups which can be used as a political strategy in future elections.

Keywords: 14th General Election, Ethnic, Orang Asli Semai, media influence, electorate, mainstream and social media.

1.0 Introduction

Malaysia's GE14 had turned out to be another watershed in the country's politics as evidenced by the collapse of 60 years of Barisan Nasional (BN) rule where the social media played a major factor in influencing the electorate [1]. Political observers [2] noted the various factors that saw the dramatic election victory which propelled Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to a second premiership making him the oldest Prime Minister in the world at the age of 93. According to the official tally of the Election Commission of Malaysia [3], some 14,940,624 votes were cast, out of 18,359,670 eligible voters from the country's total population of 32.26 million. With 113 seats, Pakatan Harapan (PH) secured a simple majority defeating BN which only managed 79 seats. The third coalition, Gagasan Sejahtera, won 18 seats (as per table 1.1). Together, the three coalitions captured 210 of the total 222 seats, leaving 12 seats for Warisan (8), Homeland Solidarity Party (1), and independent

candidates (3). Warisan, subsequently, extended its support to PH, thereby raising the winning coalition's total number of seats to 121 [5].

TABLE 1.1:
General Election Result

PARTY	SEATS WON			
	GE11	GE12	GE13	GE14
BN	198	140	133	79
BA/BR/PR/PH	20	82	89	113
Independent/GS	1	0	0	30

Source: Adapted from Malaysia Election Commission of Malaysia (SPR).

Moniruzzaman and Farzana [4], attributed BN's defeat at the GE14 to a number of contributing factors including domestic issues and scandals such as 1MDB, Tabung Haji, Goods and Services Tax (GST) implementation and Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia (BR1M) issues, party leadership and economic factors. Chinnasamy and Azmi [5] identified that the influence of social media was even more profound on the electorate given the high internet penetration. Clearly, social media's predictive power remains elusive overpower structure, incumbent advantage, access to resources, politicisation of ethnicity and Islam, and electoral irregularities. Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) leader Abdul Hadi Awang argued that BN's loss could have been partly due to "politically immature" young voters who were influenced by social media and social networking sites. Voters had perceived BN leaders' behaviour as corrupt, which also contributed to the coalition's loss [6].

In addition to social media playing a major role in changing the political scenario in Malaysia, ethnicity and racial-based politics have also been critical in shaping the mindset and attitude of the country's racially diverse electorate [7]. Welsh [7] described the GE14 as a "*Malaysian Tsunami*" and makes the case that Malaysians of all ethnic backgrounds had come out to fulfil their right to vote and had turned against the ruling BN.

From the perspectives of ethnicity, [8] contended that BN owes its dominance to a large extent to the solid support from Malay voters (55 percent of the population). Since the implementation of the new economic policy in the 1970s, Malays and other Bumiputera (native, indigenous) ethnic groups (as opposed to ethnic Chinese and Indians, who make up 25 percent and 7 percent of the population respectively, and whose ancestors mostly arrived during the colonial period) have enjoyed certain privileges, such as preferential access to higher education and government contracts. Such privileges are intended to narrow the economic gap between Malays and Chinese.

Resentment at BN's support for such privileges has been simmering and could have been a contributing factor that led to many ethnic Chinese voters to back PH, rather than BN's ethnic Malaysia Chinese Association (MCA). According to [8], in contrast with BN's 'Malay First' policies, the stance of opposition PH parties is more ambiguous; People's Justice Party (PKR) wants to extend Bumiputera rights to all underprivileged Malaysians, while Democratic Action Party (DAP) (backed by many ethnic Chinese and Indian voters) is often accused of being anti-Malay. Based on the racial statistics of the Malaysia Eligible Voters Registration up to Quarter 4/2017 (gazetted on 10 April 2018) (as per Table 1.1), from a total of 14,940,624, the votes from the ethnic communities saw a majority 54.10 percent (8,082,987) from the Malays, 28.07 percent (4,194,316) represented the Chinese race, and 7.09 percent (1,058,741) represented the Indians. In addition, some 5.04 percent (753,052) of the votes were from the Sabah Bumiputera ethnicity, and 4.12 percent (615,138) represented the Sarawak Bumiputera ethnicity. A further 0.56 percent (83,076) of the votes were attributed to the Orang Asli (indigenous) community and 1.03 percent (153,312) were other ethnicity [3].

TABLE 1.2:
Eligible Voters Registration Based on Racial Statistics

RACE / ETHNIC	REGISTERED VOTERS		
	GE12	GE13	GE14
Malay	5,627,072	6,963,333	8,082,987
Chinese	3,417,721	3,937,682	4,194,316
Indian	809,487	969,384	1,058,741
Sabah Bumiputera	447,555	649,625	753,052
S'wak Bumiputera	510,524	536,691	615,138
Orang Asli	40,423	70,076	83,076
Others	69,861	119,211	153,312

Source: Adapted from Election Commission of Malaysia (SPR).

There was a total of 70,076 [5] registered Orang Asli voters in 2013 and this number had increased by 15.6 percent during GE14. Even though the Malay and Chinese votes were a huge percentage and a major contributor to the total votes cast at the GE14, the importance of the Orang Asli ethnic minority votes should not be dismissed as the group has equal right to vote for a political party that can defend and uphold the well-being and best interests of this indigenous group [9].

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 *Orang Asli and Political Participation in Elections*

Nizah [10] emphasised that issues of marginalization of ethnic minorities in socio-economic and political developments has lately raised concern among many in Malaysia. Fang [11] indicated that the Orang Asli is the majority ethnic community in the social context of the minority ethnic communities as compared to other minorities such as Baba Nyonya, Chitty, Portuguese, Sikh and Thais. Though these ethnic minority groups are small in number, they can also be an important bloc in some electoral areas where they are highly populated. In such areas, they are the "king maker" especially when there is a close competition between two competing parties [12].

Previously, based on several studies in Malaysia which took place some 20 years ago, it can be deduced that the Orang Asli did not actively participate in elections given that the average Orang Asli adult did not have the perfect education, [13,14, 15]. Despite some having been educated, the majority, however, were still illiterate. Their involvement in politics is minimal and many lived in the interior and were more concerned about their day to day existence. The Orang Asli's political participation was mostly through the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) political party since 1946, but only as the Head of the UMNO Branch in their village [15]. In addition, the Orang Asli also has an association called Association of Orang Asli of Peninsular that look into the community's welfare [16].

Basically, their conventional political participation involves voting, campaigning and joining an interest group. Some did contest as Independent candidates against BN and other opposition parties, for example in the Jelai State Assembly constituency. Nicholas [17] similarly found that the level of political awareness is low among the Orang Asli community in comparison with the average respondent. They were generally not interested to join any political party and were unaware of current political issues nor have any knowledge as to who was the ruling party or opposition. This underlines the fact that the Orang Asli community are detached from the democratic process of the country.

However, the situation today has changed tremendously with the Orang Asli community keenly aware of the political landscape especially at the youth level and are fighting for their rights [12]. The differences can be seen through an increase in the number of Orang Asli registered voters in the country's general elections. Based on the Racial Statistics of the Malaysia Eligible Voters

Registration from GE12 until GE14, a total of 83,076 of Orang Asli has registered which was an increase of 51.3 percent from a total of 40,423 during GE12 [3]. A similar trend can be observed in DUN Chenderiang where only 3,234 Orang Asli were registered as voters during GE12 but saw an increase of 47 percent during GE14 with 6,108 registering [18].

Historically, indigenous peoples or Orang Asli ethnic minorities, have traditionally been long-time BN supporters, and have been described as BN’s “fixed deposit” [19]. While demographically small, the Orang Asli votes do, however, make a significant difference in certain constituencies. The Orang Asli, numbering 200,000, make up about 1 percent of the Peninsular Malaysia population [20].

BN’s win in the Cameron Highland by-election post-GE14 show that the Orang Asli voting patterns have only slowly shifted toward the ruling PH government coalition, continuing the traditional tendency to vote for BN as per in GE14 [56]. With the Orang Asli making up 21.74 percent of voters, the by-election was an important test for Orang Asli preferences [21]. Of particular importance was that the by-election marked a historic juncture in Malaysian politics as Ramli Mohd Nor, the Orang Asli candidate for BN, became the first Orang Asli candidate from Semai tribe to be elected to parliament.

2.2 Theoretical Framework and Defining Variables

The Newman and Seth [22] model has initially been chosen to measure the relationship between different decision-making factors and voter’s intentions as one of the most common models for measuring voter’s behaviour. Although criticized and modified by many authors, it is specifically useful in traditional and evolving democracies and it offers both practical and theoretical solutions as compared to previously developed models, and has also been subject to empirical tests during elections in various countries at various levels [24]. Previously this original model identified seven domains to guide voter behaviour as discussed above (issues and policies, social imagery, emotional feelings, candidate image, current events, personal events and epistemic issues).

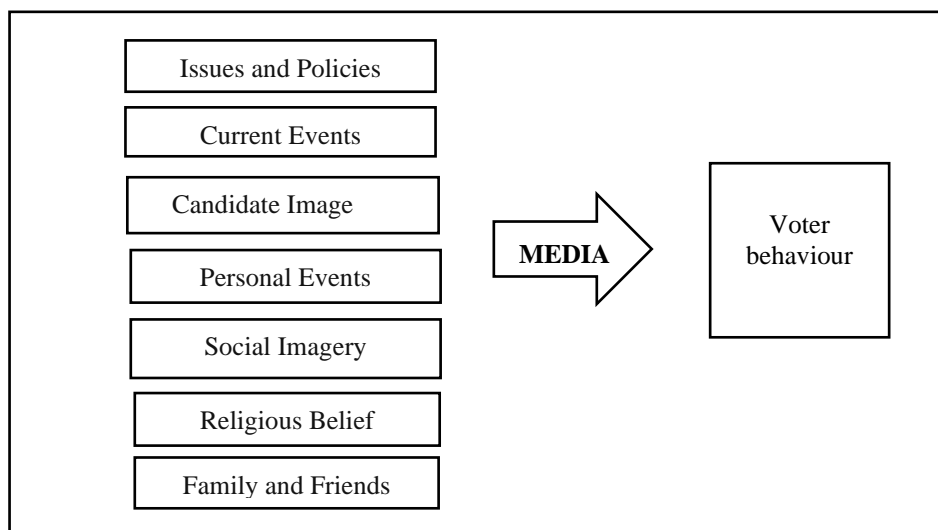


Figure 2.1. Updated Model of Newman and Seth Model (1985) by Cwalina et al. (2008).

Cwalina et al. [24] proposed an updated model for Newman and Sheth’s model (as Figure 2.1) and assumes a causal relationship between the cognitive elements; that the media influences cognitive attitudes and the voters’ feelings; and that there is an interaction between media and cognitive domains. Two variables were excluded from the updated Newman and Sheth model; emotional feelings and epistemic issues. Meanwhile, three variables were included; family and friends influence, religious beliefs and media influence.

In this study, the researcher has adopted and adapted the same model but the updated model being proposed by [24] comes with a different approach where the factors of voting behaviour are

being tested as the media instruments during elections in order to analyse whether these variables are the major factors that contribute and influence the indigenous voting behaviour (as per Figure 2.2). The updated model have been tested by [25] in their study among the rural community in Egypt.

However, some variables need to be excluded from the updated model and some others included to suit the needs of the environment and the will of the indigenous community based on findings in the researcher’s literature review. Through an exploratory attempt of the model, the researcher had identified four factors as the media instruments namely, issue and policies, candidate image, current events and social imagery of the political party together with media influence. [24] also stated that these four factors had been regularly portrayed by the media as part of the political campaign during elections. This will help the simple nature of the Orang Asli to digest the issues at hand.

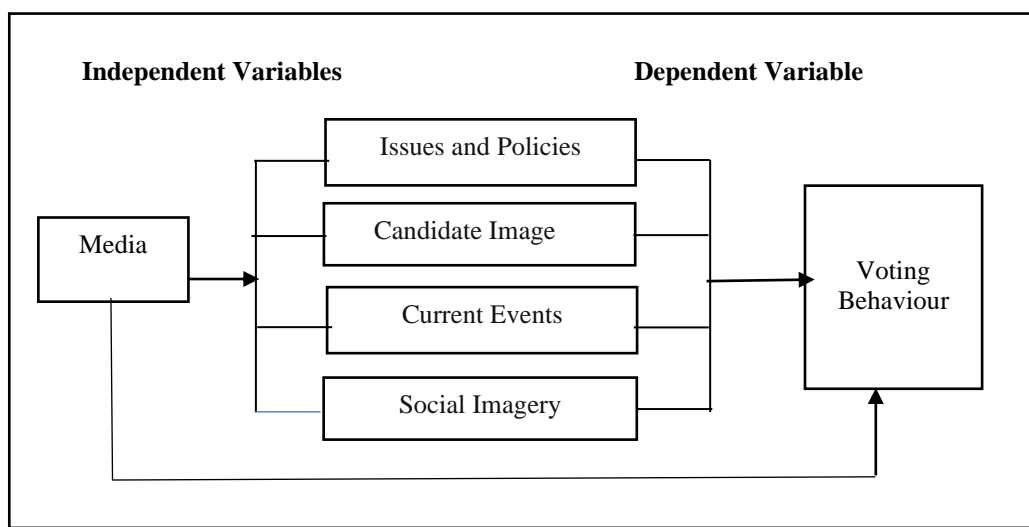


Figure 2.2. Proposed Conceptual Framework

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

As stated above, this study has applied quantitative research to examine the influence of media on voting behaviour among the Orang Asli Semai in the polling district of Parliament Tapah, P072 specifically in DUN Chenderiang (N47). This study employed a survey method with questionnaire as the mode of communication among 440 respondents aged from 18 years old and above. This study aims to determine the predictive voter’s choice behaviour factor (media instruments which consist of issues and policy, candidate image, current events, and social imagery) that contribute to the voting behaviour of the Orang Asli Semai.

The first section is focused on the demographic profile. The following sections B, C and D analyses the research objectives which are Media Literacy, Media Influence, Media Preferences, Issues and Policies, Candidate Image, Current Events, Social Imagery and Voting Behaviour. Except for the first section, all the responses from the other sections are placed on a 5-point range Likert-type scale question. The data collected will be analysed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.

The researcher undertook a face to face survey with the respondents and was accompanied by the Tok Batin (community leader) for the respective areas, as well as officers from JAKOA and Batang Padang District who act as an enumerator to guide the Orang Asli Semai respondents. This is necessary due to the difficulty that the Orang Asli Semai face in understanding the concept as well as possible language barrier. The assistance rendered enabled the respondents to complete the questionnaires within a reasonable timeframe. The questionnaires were distributed to eight (8) Orang

Asli settlements in DUN Chenderiang namely, Kg. Sungai Bindu, Kg. Lata Kinjang, Kg. Dusun 100, Kg. Sungai Larek, Kg. Batu 6, Kg. Batu 7, Kg. Batu 8 and Kg. Batu 14.

4.0 Results and Discussion

This section identifies and summarises the media preferences and the contributing factors that play a major role in influencing the voting behaviour of the Orang Asli Semai electorate during the general election.

4.1 *Identifying the Media Preferences Used by the Orang Asli Semai Electorate to Access News on Political Development.*

TABLE 4.1
Media Use for News and Political Development

Media	Mean	Preferences	Percentage
Social Media	2.65	Facebook	27.5
		Twitter	5.6
		Instagram	1.7
		YouTube	18.6
Newspaper	2.49	Utusan Malaysia	5.9
		Berita Harian	17.6
		Kosmo	14.2
		Harian Metro	12.0
		Sinar	7.1
Television	4.21	RTM1	25.2
		RTM2	1.5
		TV3	53.4
		ASTRO Awani	15.7
		NTV7	0.7
Radio	2.95	Asyik FM	35.0
		Nasional FM	12.0
		Klasik FM	9.3
		Hot FM	4.7
		ERA FM	5.4

Table 4.1 shows the media selection preferences of the Orang Asli Semai electorate in accessing information on the latest political development. Most of the respondents agreed that they get the latest update from the television with the highest mean of 4.21 as compared to other media. In particular, they trust TV3 the most as their source of political news with a percentage of 53.4 percent. Only 17.6 percent mean 2.49 of respondents read the newspaper to get the latest update and that they trust the Malay Daily Berita Harian as their source of political news.

Meanwhile, with a second highest mean of 2.95, the Orang Asli Semai respondents picked RTM's Asyik FM with a total of 35.0 percent for the radio channel that is trusted for latest political developments. Some 12.0 percent tuned in to RTM Nasional FM; 9.3 percent chose RTM Klasik FM; 5.4 percent received their political news through Era FM; and lastly 4.7 percent (19) get their political news from Hot FM.

With a third highest mean of 2.65, social media account was trusted most for the Orang Asli Semai to get the latest political developments. The majority of the respondents comprising 27.5 percent chose Facebook as their most trusted social account. YouTube came second with a total of 18.6 percent. This is followed by Twitter 5.6 percent and lastly, Instagram with 1.7 percent. Meanwhile, 46.6 percent of the respondents did not have internet coverage to connect to the social media.

4.2 *Determining the Contributing Factors That Influence Voting Behaviour Among the Orang Asli Semai Electorate.*

In order to identify contributing factors that influence the voting behaviour of the Orang Asli Semai, Construct B2 Media influence is included as independent variables. Four key instruments that influence voters' choice behaviour were tested in this study and conducted on the Orang Asli Semai voters while Construct D Voting Behaviour is dependent variable. The instrument that were identified were highlighted by the media during the election campaign that influenced voters' behaviour based on the research by [22] that has improved Sheth and Newman's original model. This section is divided into four sub topics as follows: C1 encompasses questions regarding Issues and Policies; C2 delves on a candidate's image; C3 has questions on current events; and C4 focusses on social imagery of the political party.

TABLE 4.2
Media Influence

Media Influence	Percentage (%)	Mean
1. My political views are influenced by the print media.	37.9	2.65
2. I do not believe the political news presented in the social media.	56.1	3.28
3. The electronic media influences my perception of a political party.	49.5	3.10
4. I believe in the political news broadcast by electronic media.	36.2	3.55

TABLE 4.3
Issues and Policies

Issues and Policies	Percentage (%)	Mean
1. The overlapping issue of Orang Asli settlements and forest reserves.	50.0	3.16
2. Problem of rural electric supply.	39.0	2.78
3. Problem of rural water supply.	58.0	3.32
4. Decreasing income from rubber produce.	36.2	2.69
5. Decreasing income from palm oil produce.	63.4	3.44
6. The PPRT household necessities for the Orang Asli settlements.	53.2	3.18
7. Abject poverty among the Orang Asli community.	49.5	3.47
8. The problem of basic education dropouts among the Orang Asli students.	53.4	3.21

Table 4.4
Candidate Image

Candidate Image	Percentage (%)	Mean
1. The candidate must have good leadership value.	50.2	3.19
2. The candidate must have good communication skills.	45.6	2.94
3. The candidate must have good education background.	58.0	3.32
4. The candidate must be free from corruption.	58.1	3.35
5. The candidate must be a local candidate.	63.4	3.44
6. The candidate must be an approachable person and easy to deal with.	58.1	3.35
7. The candidate must be a religious person.	51.5	3.30

Table 4.5
Current Events

Current Events	Percentage (%)	Mean
1. The GST issue affected my vote.	58.8	3.31
2. The 1MDB scandal affected my vote.	11.5	2.71
3. The toll abatement scandal affected my vote.	10.8	2.78
4. Issue of misuse of power and status by the former Prime Minister's wife affected my vote.	10.7	2.68
5. Pledges to resolve the customary reserve land of Orang Asli has an impact on my voting decision.	58.8	3.32
6. The policies of the previous government had greatly improved the socioeconomic status of the Orang Asli.	49.5	3.17
7. BR1M assistance help to ease the burden of the Orang Asli community.	59.1	3.33
8. The PPRT Assistance Programme has a positive impact on the Orang Asli.	58.1	3.32
9. The Food Assistance Programme has an impact on the welfare of the Orang Asli.	53.4	3.31

TABLE 4.6
Social Imagery

Social Imagery	Percentage (%)	Mean
1. I choose a party that represents a single race.	12.2	2.70
2. I choose a party that represents a multiracial community.	54.0	3.28
3. The party that fights for the rights of the Orang Asli community influences my vote.	58.8	3.10
4. I do not choose political party that are not clean or practice abuses.	58.9	3.36
5. The logo that is used by a political party influences my vote.	9.8	3.55

TABLE 4.7
Orang Asli Semai Voting Behaviour

Voting Behaviour	Percentage (%)	Mean
1. I voted for the political party.	73.5	3.69
2. I vote not based on issues and sentiments	55.4	3.33
3. I voted every five years for my right as a citizen of Malaysia	57.1	3.37
4. I voted because everyone voted	28.5	2.92
5. I voted not based on political views that was broadcast in the media.	59.5	3.39
6. I will vote for a party that defends the fate of my people.	57.6	3.31
7. I voted for political party based on my evaluation without any influence by anyone.	87.5	4.01
8. I voted for the political party at the request and encouragement of political party activists.	12.5	2.70
9. I voted for the political party at the request and encouragement of family and friends.	13.2	2.71

Multiple regression is used in the study in order to make a forecast or to identify contributing factors. Two or more variables will be used to forecast individual criteria so as to acquire a more accurate forecast. Thus, in this study, multiple regression analysis has been conducted to examine the significant relationship between media influence and four (4) other media instruments as the independent variables consist of issues and policies, candidate image, current events and social imagery of the political party towards the voting behaviour of Orang Asli Semai electorate. The step wise method is used to determine which variables are significant to be used in the models. Initially, there are five (5) variables and after using step wise regression, only four (4) variables are left that

met the method's criteria which is probability (F) to enter a variable would be ≤ 0.5 and probability (F) to remove a variable would be ≥ 0.1 . The analysis is presented in the following table.

Table 4.8
Multiple Regressions Analysis

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	β	t	Sig.
Voting Behaviour	Social Imagery	.312	7.245	.000
	Current Events	.516	7.851	.000
	Media Influence	.267	6.054	.000
	Issues and Policies	-.303	-4.579	.000
		R ² :		
	F Value:			20.969
	Sig F Change:			0.000

According to Table 4.8, the value of R² of 0.435 indicates that 43.5 percent of the variation in voting behaviour can be explained by the model containing social imagery, current events, media influence and issues policy, and the remaining 56.5 percent is unexplained in this study. Media instruments used to measure the voting behaviour in this study refer to media influence, issues and policies, candidate, current events and social imagery. Hence, there are unknown variables that are important in explaining the voting behaviour of Orang Asli Semai that have not been considered in this study.

Besides, Table 4.8 also reported that the F-value is 20.969, significant $p < 0.01$ indicating that the proposed conceptual model of this study is a good illustration of the relation between the voting behaviour and predictor variables (media influence, issues and policy, current events, social imagery). In other words, the independent variables (media influence, issues and policy, current events, social imagery) has significantly explained the variance in the sense of national belonging.

Which independent variable has the highest beta indicates that it is the most significant variable towards the dependent variable. Thus, current events that show the highest positive beta at 0.516, indicates that they contributed the strongest effect toward the voting behaviour as compared to other independent variables.

Overall, all the hypotheses investigated and tested in this study have been supported with the exception of candidate image that was initially included in the original research framework. All four predictors (independent variables) in the model can significantly explain the voting behaviour among the Orang Asli Semai. The candidate image predictors may not be suitable for this model due to the justification of this finding that rests on the fact that ethnic voting means voting for the party that is most identifiable with the voter's own ethnic group, no matter who the individual candidates may be [27]. Clearly in this study, it is the party and not the ethnic identification of the candidate that mattered where 73.5 percent of the Orang Asli Semai choose to vote for the political party rather than based on the candidate or sentiment. This is explained in the Political Behaviour Theories in the context of long-term influences on political orientation where the majority of voters had voted as per their party loyalty. The link between electoral behaviour and the social groups to which they belonged was quite stark and it shows that there is an influence of social groups on political outcomes.

Findings from this study also indicate that the model is Voting Behaviour (y) = $Y = 1.024 + 0.312$ Social Imagery + 0.516 Current Events + 0.267 Media Influence – 03.03 Issues Policies (as per Figure 4.1). We can conclude that the major contributors regarding voting behaviour among Orang Asli Semai are current events followed by social imagery of political party, media influence and lastly issues and policies. In the context of the study, current events refer to issues and policies that developed during the course of the electoral campaign that were broadcast by the media.

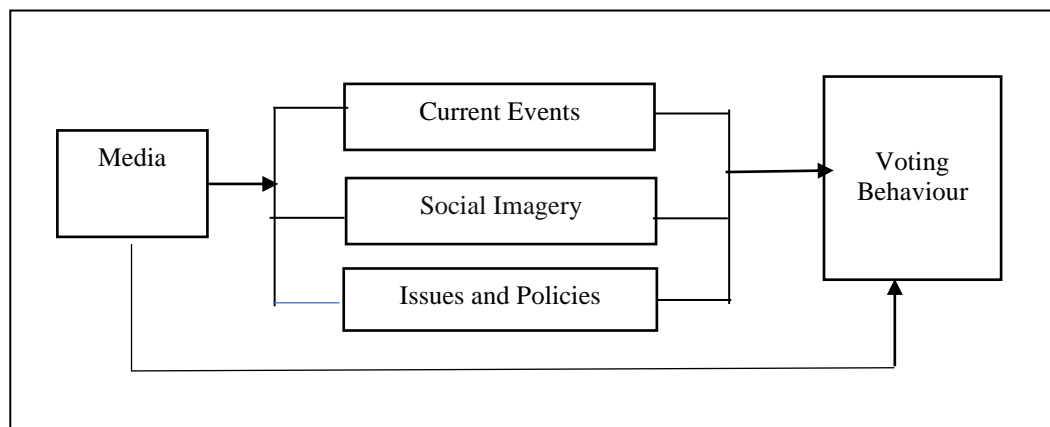


Figure 4.1 Tested Research Model with the Exclusion of Candidate Image Factor.

Based on Political Behaviour theories, the role played by the media is crucial particularly in disseminating information during electoral campaigns, debates and commercials given its impact in influencing and shifting certain political behaviour [26]. Three main issues that affected the Orang Asli Semai during the election campaign were issues highlighted in Section C3 including BR1M assistance with 59.1 percent, with burden of GST and pledges to resolve the customary reserve land of Orang Asli sharing the same score of 58.8 percent. Meanwhile, the dimension of Social Imagery in Section C4 represents the stereotyping of the candidate or party to appeal to voters by making associations between the candidate and selected segments in society. 58.8 percent respondents chose a party that fights for the rights of the Orang Asli, and a party that represents a multiracial community rather than a single race party receiving 54.0 percent. Traditionally, indigenous peoples or Orang Asli ethnic minorities, have been long-time BN supporters, and have been described as BN's "fixed deposit" [56]. While demographically small, the Orang Asli votes do, however, make a significant difference in certain constituencies.

Previously, the Orang Asli political participation was mostly through the UMNO party through the establishment of ties between Heads of the Branch (Batin) in their villages and UMNO officials, receipt of numerous benefits under the government's rural development programme and increasing political awareness and concern during the election campaigns [16]. It is noted that the Orang Asli have continued to vote primarily for the BN coalition despite their many significant concerns. In the GE14, Edwards [12] observed that in an election based on the call for change, the fact that the Orang Asli have continued to favour BN underlines their trust and desire for continuity.

Although the influence of the media in this study at ($\beta=.267$) is not so major, it nevertheless was a contributing factor that influences voting behaviour among the Orang Asli as agents to deliver and disseminate information regarding social imagery, current events and issues and policies. This is also supported by the Political Behaviour theories where the short-term factors also affect voting behaviour where the media and the impact of individual election issues are among these factors. These factors differ from the long-term factors as they are often short-lived. However, they can be just as crucial in modifying political orientation. The ways in which these two sources are interpreted often relies on the individual's specific political ideology formed by the long-term factors.

5.0 Conclusion

Politics in Malaysia have been shaped by ethnic and religious dynamics where in the post-war years leading up to the country's independence in 1957 and in the decade that followed, growing economic disparities between ethnic majority Malays and the Chinese and Indian communities led to the emergence of political formations organised along communal lines.

It is clear that the role that the media plays impacts greatly on the country's many races. The media has a strong social and cultural impact upon society particularly during elections and is used extensively by the various political movements as part of their platform to disseminate, gain and retain their political agenda in order to influence the electorate to vote and support their respective political parties. Both mainstream and the social media play an important role in influencing the voting behaviour of the electorate. Although the influence of the media is very significant among the major ethnic groups, with youth and urbanites more savvy in accessing political information, it only has a small influence, however, on the Orang Asli electorate. This is due to the differences in the level of media literacy in light of the stark differences due to educational and economic backgrounds.

Based on the findings of this study, there is indeed a positive significant relationship between media influence, issues and policy, current events and social imagery of political party which play an important role in influencing the voting behaviour of the Orang Asli Semai. Meanwhile, the element of candidate image has been excluded and not identified as a contributing factor in their voting behaviour and this findings can be linked to the previous study by [27] which stated that ethnic voting means voting for the party that is most identifiable with the voter's own ethnic group, no matter who the individual candidates may be.

Clearly, it is the party and not the ethnic identification of the candidate that matters. In an ethnically divided society, voter turnout increases because voters want to register their affiliation with the same party they would ordinarily be affiliated with. It confirms the findings as to why the media has a small influence towards their voting behaviour. Apart from highlighting the large and significant difference between media literacy and its relationship with the education background and income levels, this study has also help acquire a better appreciation and understanding regarding media usage and the voting preferences of the Orang Asli Semai.

Finally, this study has endeavoured to identify the issues and areas that must be addressed by the federal and state governments as well as the relevant agencies like Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA) to better uphold and defend the rights and welfare of the Orang Asli Semai. It should not be a subject that is only visited every five years as another general election looms. Though these ethnic minority groups are small in number, they can be an important bloc in some electoral areas where they are highly populated. In such areas, they are likely to become the "king maker" given the tight competition between the two or more competing political parties.

6.0 References

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