What Does Youth Want?
A Qualitative Study On The Type Of Leadership Preferred By Malaysian Youth

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Abstract

Youth in Malaysia is becoming increasingly politically engaged and active. They are also more inclined to be more open-minded and open to diversity. They also increasingly support parties and candidates seen as more progressive and reform-minded. In addition, they are less likely to support parties seen as entrenched and out of touch with the needs of citizens. The topic of leadership is of great importance in today's society, particularly when it comes to the role of youth in shaping the future. Hence, this study aims to identify the criteria of the national leaders preferred by the youth of Malaysia. In order to achieve the objective of this study, the phenomenological qualitative research design was used to conduct this study. The data were collected through an in-depth interview with the seven informants who fulfilled the study's criteria. The study found three main criteria as the baseline for choosing the leader. In addition, another five sub-criteria were found to select the leader to represent their voices. Young people tend to vote for candidates who have an attitude of integrity, morality, fundamental rights, and democratic competence in government management of the people's aspirations. The implication of this study indicates that the young generation's voices on their belief concerning integrity, morality, fundamental rights, and democratic competence are more important in building up the nations.

Keywords: Leadership, Criteria, Youth, Preferred, Young voters

1.0 Introduction

One key aspect of the global political and economic landscape is the growth of countries and economies driven by globalisation. Globalisation refers to the increasing integration of economies and societies worldwide by exchanging goods, services, information, and ideas. According to [17], globalisation has led to greater interconnectedness between countries and economies and brought about new challenges, such as inequality and power imbalances. In addition, [10] and [22] explain how the forces of globalisation have led to a shift in power from nation-states to transnational actors and how this has affected the global political and economic order. For example, a leader with strong values around teamwork and collaboration may prefer a more democratic and participatory leadership style, whereas a leader who values individual achievement may prefer a more autocratic leadership style. Understanding one's values and purpose helps leaders make better decisions, especially in ethical dilemmas. Moreover, by understanding their purpose, values and character, leaders can develop a leadership philosophy that guides their decision-making, behaviour and communication style [16]. It can help leaders to be more consistent and authentic in their leadership, which is essential for building trust and credibility with followers.

The topic of leadership is of great importance in today's society, particularly when it comes to the role of youth in shaping the future. As the next generation of leaders, today's youth will play a critical role in shaping the country's direction, and they must be equipped with the necessary skills and qualities to lead effectively. [24] and [22], in a comprehensive review of the leadership literature, note the wide variety of theoretical perspectives and point to fundamental differences between trait, behaviourist, political and humanistic approaches to the theories of leadership. In economics and politics, it is essential to understand the leadership criteria preferred by youth and how they may differ from those of older generations. According to [14], authentic leaders are trustworthy, genuine and consistent. Understanding one's purpose, values, and character is essential to leadership development. This self-awareness can help individuals understand how they approach leadership and what leadership style is most authentic and effective. It allows leaders to understand their strengths and weaknesses and how to leverage them best to lead effectively.

Youth in Malaysia is becoming increasingly politically engaged and active. Research by the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS), which surveyed the attitudes of the youth towards politics in Malaysia, found that the youth in Malaysia are more informed and politically active than previous generations [35]. They are also more inclined to be more open-minded and open to diversity. Another study by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research, a Malaysian research firm, found that younger Malaysians are more likely to support parties that are seen as progressive and reform-minded and are less likely to support parties that are seen as entrenched and out of touch with the needs of citizens [18]. These studies, among others, provide evidence that youth in Malaysia is becoming increasingly politically engaged and active, and they are increasingly interested in issues such as good governance, human rights, and economic development. They also increasingly support parties and candidates seen as more progressive and reform-minded. In addition, they are less likely to support parties seen as entrenched and out of touch with the needs of citizens. Hence, this study aims to identify the criteria of the national leaders preferred by the youth of Malaysia.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Young Voters

Voting is a civil responsibility which needs to be fulfilled by every citizen. It is essential in order to maintain its democracy. Voting reflects a common and effective democratic process that expresses the public's will and acceptance or rejection towards a political agenda, candidate or party [16]. To be eligible to vote during the election, an individual must be a Malaysian citizen of 21 years old and must reside in the constituency that they wish to be registered apart from being unrestricted or prohibited by law in force [30]. However, the amendment of the voter eligibility age of 18 years in Malaysia and automatic voter registration was officially gazetted on 15 December 2021. This change shows that Malaysia is ready to emulate the democracy of other developed and developing countries. Moreover, it is a step forward to ensure that the numbers that determine the country's leaders are appropriately represented by all ages.

Young people have often been categorised as a group apart from conventional politics, and this disengagement contributed to the growing sense of apathy and even alienation towards politics. The biggest obstacle for young people to get involved in politics is their negative view of politicians. They perceived that many young people did not care or attempt to address the issues that mattered to them [25]. Professor Tan Sri Ibrahim Abu Shah issued his statement in The Star, commenting on the importance of voter education and its meaning in a democratic society. According to him, political literacy is essential to reining those eligible to register as voters [18]. The public should be aware that voting is apolitical, whereby educating the public using a campaign drive is a suitable approach to encourage youngsters to participate during the election. However, this act should not solely fall on the government's responsibility. Instead, civil societies and non-governmental organisations have a role in inculcating awareness about the system [2]. Choosing a better leader than the previous General Election shows how involved the youth are in political

affairs with the encouragement of accepting their responsibilities, which indicates their readiness and awareness towards politics.

2.2 Candidates

In the modern age, election candidates who are active and popular on social media have a higher chance of winning the hearts of voters, especially young people who will be voting for the first time in a general election. It is even more so when candidates play on issues that are considered sensational and attract voters' attention. The question of true or false, genuine or fake, does not seem to be the primary concern of most social media users [22]. Social media platforms have paved the way for the reconceptualisation of political engagement, especially among the youth. The Internet reduces the barriers to participation and thus reduces social inequality in public life [25]. However, politicians still lack mastery of the methods and techniques of information delivery in the context of involvement in community discussions. If the mechanism is not strengthened or framed strategically between politicians, the people and the media, the smooth administration of the new leadership will face difficulties. As is often said, leaders are not created; they are born with specific attributes such as vision, discipline, commitment, trust, integrity, invention, motivation, authority, dedication, humility, and creativity [4]. Most of these traits in a leader, if not all, help an organisation succeed. [11] agree that leaders must articulate their vision to inspire people to support it. He or she must speak clearly and fervently because fervour is contagious.

[1] Stated that different leadership styles aid decision-making. A particular leadership style is one that the leader chooses [3]. Based on the nature of their job and the differences in their task performance, some organisations may pick the same leadership style, while others may choose a different one [8]. A competent leader must possess the discipline to focus there and the team's actions on the objective while working toward their vision with a single thought. The hallmark of a leader is action. A leader never complains; they always take action in pursuit of the vision, motivating others to follow suit as they do so. They also develop teams of individuals who are dedicated to working together to accomplish shared objectives.

The most incredible way to understand youth is as a transition from childhood dependence to adulthood independence. Youth is, therefore, a more fluid category than other established age groupings. However, age is the most straightforward method to categorise this group, especially regarding employment and education, as "youth" is frequently used to refer to a person between the ages of leaving compulsory school and landing their first job. It has also been mentioned by [26] that young people are not only our nation's future. Everyone is also one of the fundamental forces driving change and societal advancement. In addition, it has a significant impact on economic growth. Moreover, people create many social connections during this period, forming a personality characterising our generation.

3.0 Methodology

This research utilises phenomenological qualitative research because it would like to explore youth perceptions in choosing their national leader. Furthermore, [5] mentioned that as the study of phenomena' nature, qualitative research is particularly suitable for addressing why certain phenomena are observed (or not), evaluating intricate multi-component treatments, and concentrating on the enhancement of interventions. In addition, the phenomenological research design is used because [33] mentioned that a phenomenology is a research approach that focuses on describing the ordinary meaning of the lived experience of several individuals about a particular phenomenon.

In terms of data gathering, the researchers employed face-to-face interview sessions. In addition, researchers used an in-depth interview with the semi-structured question to collect the data. [5] mentioned that the main benefit of conducting in-depth interviews is that they offer far more thorough information than other data collection techniques, including surveys. Besides, in-depth interviewing is a qualitative

research technique that entails holding lengthy one-on-one interviews with a select few respondents to learn their opinions on a given concept, initiative, or circumstance.

During the interview session, the informants were selected based on the criteria needed by this research. The requirement for the informant are:

1)   Citizen of Malaysia
2)   Youth aged 18 to 35
3)   Male or female
4)   Any races
5)   Normal voters

For the research, researchers interviewed seven informants. The data are then were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is used in this study to examine themes or patterns of meaning within data. Besides, it allows for discovery with room to pursue thematic paths as the conversation evolves, even though it often follows a guide or protocol developed before the interview and focuses on a core topic to provide a basic structure [19]. To make this study reliable, first, the researchers went through the member checking of the transcribing. Then, the researcher gets the approval for the clean transcribes. This process ensures that the meaning or messages are well conveyed. Before the data collection, the researchers validated the interview protocol with the three experts in the field of political communication. The average rate given by these three experts is 4.2 out of five, which indicates that the interview protocol is highly valid. In addition, it describes that the interview protocol can provide unbiased data for the investigation. A minor amendment was needed for the term used so informants would easily understand them.

4.0 Findings

The findings focus on Malaysian youth's opinions in choosing their candidates. Accordingly, the informants are classified as Informant 1 (I1), Informant 2 (I2), Informant 3 (I3), Informant 4 (I4), Informant 5 (I5), Informants 6 9I6) and Informant 7 (I7).

4.1 Criteria

a) Irresponsible candidates

In general, irresponsible candidates may refer to individuals who are running for political office but do not have the qualifications or integrity to hold such a position. It could include individuals who have a history of corruption, have lied or misled the public, or have a history of breaking the law. Additionally, irresponsible candidates may not have clear or realistic plans for governing or may engage in divisive or hateful speech. Candidates that fail to do their responsibility are the primary reason why youth in Malaysia do not vote for them in the next election.

During the interview, researchers discovered that I2, I3, I4, I5 and I7 were significantly rejected and did not want to repeat the same mistake twice for choosing the wrong candidate who failed and was irresponsible. It can be reflected by what has been explained by I3 that a leader who cannot fulfil his/her responsibility should not be reelected back as a leader. However, I3 mentioned that candidates always had a chance to correct their mistakes.

A leader's sole responsibility is to lead the country and its people. One failed leader that could not fulfil his/her duty as the leader should not be reelected back as the leader, but they would still have the chance to be one of the ministers in the cabinet. Leading a country is significant, and leading a democratic country is even more challenging. Because leaders need to listen to the people, as our voices are our votes, a leader should take and bring the people out of misery and poverty and

make the country a better country in many aspects. A leader can fail. People are born to fail and make mistakes, I get that. However, were the mistakes prolonged to an extent when the country is suffering? Like Najib's case with 1MDB that put Malaysia in significant debt? If the mistakes were corrected and the leader took proper action, then I guess that's fine."

(Informant 3)

However, I6 was neutral and stated that it would depend on his failures as a candidate, such as lack of support, lack of campaign funds, lack of public appeal, lack of governance skills and experience, or poor performance in debates.

It would depend on his 'failure', whether it is based on mass (people) perception or his duty as the country leader, and the impact of his failure." If the manifesto is above 70% and his works are good, why not just I vote for him?.

(Informant 6)

b) Believability

Malaysian teenagers' views on political parties greatly depend on their backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences. However, some common factors may influence a teenager's view of a political party. A teenager may align with a particular political party based on their stance on issues that are important to the teenager, such as education, healthcare, or the environment. During the interviews, I2, I3 and I7 stated that their political party view is based on how candidates and parties doing their job will benefit people and our country's economy. It shows that these three informants prefer a party that fulfills their job without any fishy agenda and clean parties.

I would choose a political party that is faithful and caring to the people. Furthermore, I would choose the one that can raise the country's economy and name.

(Informant 2)

Their work, vision, how they do their work, and how efficient and trustworthy their promises are. A leader who is firm but flexible.

(Informant 3

c) Prefered Candidate

i- *Clean candidates vs Corrupted candidates*

"Clean candidates" is a term that is often used to describe political candidates who are seen as honest, ethical, and free from corruption. On the other hand, a "corrupted candidate" is a term that is often used to describe political candidates who engage in corrupt or illegal activities or who are influenced by special interests. Based on the interview, I2, I3, I5, and I7 stated they would not prefer a corrupt candidate even if they can lead and prefer clean candidates even if they lack experience leading a nation.

Ability is something that a person can learn, understand and experience, and from there, they can work on their ability. However, a corrupt candidate is someone who has done a lot of bad things. Bad things happen when someone makes a wrong decision, so I do not see how a corrupt candidate could have the ability to lead a country."

(Informant 2)

ii-   *Race-based candidate vs Ideeology*

"Race-based candidates" refers to political candidates who base their campaign or political platform on appealing to a specific racial or ethnic group. In some cases, race-based candidates may use divisive language or rhetoric that promotes the interests of one racial or ethnic group over others. However, all informants preferred and voted for a candidate based on ideology, not race. "Ideological candidates" refers to political candidates who base their campaign or political platform on specific beliefs or ideologies. These candidates may align with political ideologies such as liberalism, conservatism, socialism, or libertarianism. Based on the interview, I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, and I7 stated that ideology based is their characteristic in choosing political candidates.

The researchers found that racially based politics is irrelevant for informants as all informants mentioned that the nations were already free and independent from colonisation, and racial based politics are not as important today as they were when we first gained independence.

I believe that ideology-based parties are preferable to race-based parties. This is because race-based parties are less important today than when we first gained independence. Back then, the British dominated the country using the notion of 'pecah and perintah,' which divides people based on race and forces them to live apart from one another. However, ideological parties are crucial in sustaining unity in today's setting. Furthermore, they may strengthen their ideology by having each race contribute ideas and opinions via their unique lenses.

(Informant 2)

Other than that, based on I1 and I6 stated that races could not be changed, but ideology can make politics stay and power.

Based on ideology. Because you cannot change your race, but an idea survives everything."

(Informant 1)

iii-   *Court Case Candidates*

"Court case candidates" refers to political candidates with pending or previous court cases. These court cases may be related to criminal charges, civil lawsuits, or other legal matters. Based on the researcher's interview, informants I1, I2, I4, I5, and I7 disagree and refuse to vote for candidates with court cases. I2 mentioned that candidates who have court cases but are still allowed to run in the general election are selfish and disrespectful.

"They are selfish and only think for their benefit. They do not even have the capability of becoming a leader."

(Informant 2)

However, I3 and I6 stated it depends on the candidate's case and needs to confirm whether the allegations are true or not

"Depends on what case they have. Furthermore, see whether the allegations are true or not. If the allegations are true with evidence spread around, then no."

(Informant 3)

"As I said earlier, a person is still innocent until proven guilty. Then, of course, it will damage the party's reputation. But, you know, the public does not want to know the term proven guilty itself. It depends on the party whether the person will be chosen as a candidate even if he or she still has a court case."

(Informant 3)

TABLE 1
The description of consideration of the preferred candidates

Candidates	Description
a) Clean candidates	- Transparency: Clean candidates are open and transparent about their backgrounds, qualifications, and campaign finances. They are also willing to disclose any potential conflicts of interest. - Responsiveness: Clean candidates are responsive to the needs of citizens and are willing to listen to and address the concerns of their constituents.
b) Corrupted candidates	- Lack of Transparency: Corrupted candidates may be secretive about their background, qualifications, and campaign finances and may not disclose potential conflicts of interest. - Lack of Integrity: Corrupted candidates may engage in unethical or illegal behaviour, such as accepting bribes or embezzling funds. They may also be influenced by special interests, such as corporations or wealthy donors, rather than the needs of their constituents.
c) Race-based candidates	- Focus on specific issues or policies that disproportionately affect one racial or ethnic group: Race-based candidates may focus their campaign or political platform on specific issues or policies that disproportionately affect one racial or ethnic group rather than addressing the needs and concerns of all citizens. - Lack of inclusivity: Race-based candidates may not be inclusive in their campaign or political platform and may not reach out to or engage with communities not of their specific racial or ethnic group.

d) Ideological candidates	- Passionate about their beliefs: Ideological candidates may be passionate about their beliefs and be seen as genuine in their convictions. - Clear vision and plans: If elected, ideological candidates may have a clear vision and plans for implementing their ideology.
e) Court case candidates	- Pending or previous legal issues: Court case candidates may have pending or previous legal issues that could influence voters' perceptions of their character or qualifications for office. - Criminal charges: Court case candidates may face criminal charges, such as fraud, embezzlement, or bribery, which could question their ethics and integrity. - Civil lawsuits: Court case candidates may be involved in civil lawsuits, such as defamation or breach of contract, which could also question their ethics and integrity.

5.0 Discussion

Everyone, especially young voters in the country, was making a deliberate decision about how they would vote because the election outcome would significantly impact the country's future. In addition, the public will decide who will succeed the current leader over the following five years. Young Malaysians are overcoming the challenge of being the decisive electoral force. They are lining up to volunteer for political causes, eager to make their voices heard and influence politics [8]. The former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammad, also said, *"Malaysian youths are now more politically aware than in previous years. This step is needed to give them the opportunity, space, and voice to design the country's democracy through elections"* [32]. Therefore, young voters will study, locate, and select their preferred candidate for leader depending on the criteria established by national leaders and the political party they affiliate with.

Based on this study, youths were uninterested in the local political scene due to aggressive political advertisements and campaigns as they felt that such campaigns were harassing their privacy, forcing them to digest political manifestos [20]. It is supported that nowadays, youngsters do not want to know their manifesto. They only choose the candidate and their background. For example, during Johor by State Election, the voters voted for Barisan Nasional (BN) because BN only "sold" their ideas *"Kestabilan & Kemakmuran"* (stability and Peace) and came out with new faces of candidates. This new and young candidate is vital for producing leaders who have new and creative ideas in terms of development and developing the area, along with having a high value of integrity and being able to convince voters. Therefore, it is unsurprising that BN, especially UMNO has solid support in this state election [4].

Based on this research is aligned with [10] that social media access to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube significantly influences the decision to vote. Greater access to social media demonstrates greater motivation for political expression and exposes the political ideology that leads to the decision to vote among young people [34]. In addition, access to media leads them to get involved more in creating and sharing original content later. However, greater access to media content is also significant to have greater exposure to provocative information that influences aggressive action in joining political activities such as street demonstrations and provocation [1] and [31].

Widespread awareness of politics can also make a young voter more critical. For young voters, the selection of a representative candidate not only depends on personality factors but also broadens the question of the candidate's background and the party they represent. In addition, the voting trend of young people is also heavily influenced by issues closely related to their interests [28]. This study proves that young voters are more inclined to the candidates concerned about rising costs that burden daily life, job opportunities, affordable housing and the increasingly limited job opportunities offered, which in their view, require an immediate solution. In addition, young voters are now more mature and outspoken about the issues they face and are less susceptible to being swayed by racist political sentiments. Finally, this study indicated that act dimensions positively influence the decision to vote among new young voters.

6.0 Conclusion

Voting is always going to be incredibly important for each person. In Malaysia, general elections are held every few years to select one rational individual from among a sea of candidates running for office on behalf of the numerous parties that are now active in Malaysia. These candidates are vying for office on behalf of the various parties now active in Malaysia. Regardless of whether or not a person voted in the election, the future of the nation, the state of the economy, and the quality of life of its citizens will all be impacted by the decisions made in this case.

In conclusion, young people tend to vote for candidates who have an attitude of integrity, morality, fundamental rights, and democratic competence in government management of the people's aspirations, in contrast to parties that offer a policy that prioritises interests in the future. It is because young people believe that integrity, morality, fundamental rights, and democratic competence are more important than interests in the future.

In addition, regardless of whether the media plays a beneficial or adverse role for the public, especially the younger generation in Malaysia, it does play an essential function for the public. It is especially true for the younger generation. Greater access to social media demonstrates a greater motivation for political expression and exposes the political ideology leading to the decision to vote among young and older people. The decision to vote is also significantly impacted by one's use of social media, and this aspect bears excessive weight among younger voters.

In order to complete this research, many youths must treat the topic with the seriousness it deserves. Additionally, general elections only occur once every five years. Therefore, it is crucial that they take notes, perform research, and make a decision while selecting the leader we will select depending on the criteria in this country. Also, it would be great if there were some supplementary education on this subject for young people to vote with more knowledge in the next election.

7.0 References

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