

The Role of Society as a Socialization Agent in Influencing Youth Engagement in the Electoral Process in Malaysia

Abdul Hadi Samsi ¹, Mohamad Maulana Magiman ²

¹ *Department of Social Sciences and Management, Faculty of Humanities, Management, and Sciences, University Putra Malaysia, 97000 Bintulu, Sarawak. abdulhadisamsi@upm.edu.my*

² *Assoc. Prof. Department of Social Sciences and Management, Faculty of Humanities, Management, and Sciences, University Putra Malaysia, 97000 Bintulu, Sarawak. mdmaulana@upm.edu.my*

Abstract: Society is one of the socialization agents capable of shaping individual behaviour. In the context of elections, voting is one of the processes of involvement in elections. There are three (3) main aspects of indirect involvement, namely registering as a voter, checking voter registration, and voting in elections. All these aspects have driving factors in ensuring individual awareness of election-related matters. This article explains the role of society in the involvement of young people in the electoral process through 12 statements presented. A total of 1500 respondents across Malaysia aged 21 to 40 were identified in this study. Quantitative methods were used to analyse the demographic characteristics of respondents and the study's findings related to statements about the role of society that can influence youth involvement in the electoral process. Overall, the study's findings indicate that societal factors are at a low level, with only one (1) statement out of 12 presented exceeding 50 percent agreement, namely the statement related to respondents' residence being active in political activities with 799 out of 1500 respondents (53.2%) agreeing. From these findings, society has a role in attracting the interest of young people to participate in the electoral process. However, the method of organizing programs by society is seen as less attractive to young people's participation. Therefore, this article will discuss statements related to the role of society and suggestions to increase youth involvement in the electoral process.

Keywords: Society, Socialization Agents, Youth Involvement, Electoral Process.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article aims to delve into the role of one of the socialization agents, namely, society, in examining the influence it can wield in encouraging youth to participate, either directly or indirectly, in the electoral process, especially in the act of voting during elections. There are three (3) main aspects in the voting process, which include voter registration, conducting voting checks, and casting votes during elections (Harits, 2018; Hamizan, 2016; Abdul 2014).

Youth involvement in voting is perceived as low and uninspiring due to the inadequate role played by socialization agents, to the extent that most youths do not engage in the electoral process (Ismail, 2018; Awang & Mat, 2012). Consequently, issues such as wastage in conducting elections, an unexciting electoral system that fails to garner enthusiasm, and a democracy process that lacks participation become most prominent.

In exploring this matter, it is evident that societal socialization agents can provide encouragement and motivation to youth to actively participate in the electoral process. Furthermore, the influence of the local community is also seen as capable of shaping an individual's political attitudes. Local communities that are active in organizing various activities within their locality can inspire individuals to participate in all the organized activities (Alex, 2013).

Therefore, this article will elucidate the extent to which societal socialization agents can play a role in influencing youth to participate in the electoral process, especially in the voting process, and thus nurture the democratic system in Malaysia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The behavioural political approach involves research on a particular and specific issue or problem and examines whether there is a connection to the broader political process in a country, especially the involvement of the public in political activities such as participation in political parties, engagement in the electoral process, government, and so forth (Barbrook, 1975).

The concept of political culture is crucial to be instilled in every member of society because it can provide an understanding of the actual behaviour of society, especially in terms of awareness and public participation in politics (Bowman & Boynton, 1974). Furthermore, an understanding of the democratic system needs to be emphasized as the history of the democratic process demonstrates that the electoral process can influence the behaviour of the people or voters during elections, as explained in the theory of participation in democracy presented in this study.

Reviewing past studies, there are several articles that have highlighted the role of society in an individual's political engagement. These past studies refer to society's involvement in influencing an individual's political engagement. The findings of these past studies are also consistent in showing that society is one of the most important socialization agents capable of influencing an individual's actions to participate in any political activity (Alex, 2013).

A local community that is friendly, mutually respectful, and always cooperative in organizing various activities can provide encouragement and motivation to the residents to actively participate in all organized activities. Similarly, when it comes to political activities, it can be attractive to the local community, encouraging them to get involved and actively engage in politics if individuals feel comfortable and are able to accept any form of program conducted in their area (Alex, 2013; Jacky, 2013; Clarissa et al, 2000).

Overall, past studies indicate a significant relationship between societal socialization agents in influencing the actions of the local community, especially the youth. However, there are no specific findings that demonstrate a significant influence between societal socialization agents and youth participation in the electoral process. Therefore, this article will focus on the role of society in youth participation in the electoral process in Malaysia.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study in this article employs a quantitative approach. A quantitative method is a type of research that uses more objective and results-oriented statistical analysis. Quantitative research is associated with numerical data and precision. It is based on the positivist inquiry research paradigm, where research is conducted through experimental studies, and numerical data collected is analysed using statistical tests (Schostak & John, 2002).

The design of this study also employs a descriptive method to determine the demographics of respondents, the level of youth involvement in the electoral process, and the factors of society influencing youth participation in the electoral process.

A total of 1500 respondents were identified. The study focuses on the selection of youth aged 21 to 40 years old. This age range was chosen because according to the Malaysian Constitution through the Election Commission, it allows this group to vote, in addition to the youth age limit in Malaysia, which starts from 15 years old up to 40 years old (Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 2010).

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Demographics

Respondent demographics consisted of 1500 individuals, comprising youths aged 21 to 40 years in Malaysia, selected randomly. Out of the total respondents, 745 individuals (49.7%) were male, and 755 individuals (50.3%) were female for this study. Among the respondents, 813 individuals (54.2%) were aged 21 to 25 years, 269 individuals (17.9%) were aged 26 to 30 years, 180 individuals (12.0%) were aged 31 to 35 years, and 238 individuals (15.9%) were aged 36 to 40 years.

For the ethnic category, there were 906 Malay respondents (60.0%), 449 Chinese respondents (30.0%), and 145 Indian respondents (10.0%). As for religion, Muslim respondents numbered 895 individuals (59.6%), Buddhists were 357 individuals (23.8%), Hindus were 136 individuals (9.1%), and Christians were 112 individuals (7.5%).

The educational status of the respondents indicated that 337 individuals (22.5%) had completed their Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM), 455 individuals (30.3%) had a Diploma or STPM qualification, 627 individuals (41.8%) held a bachelor’s degree, and 81 individuals (5.4%) had a master’s degree or higher. In terms of their occupation, 278 individuals (18.5%) were involved in the public sector, 409 individuals (27.3%) worked in the private sector, 222 individuals (14.8%) were self-employed, 516 individuals (34.4%) were students, and 75 individuals (5.0%) were homemakers or unemployed. Table 1 presents the quantitative demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1: Quantitative Respondent Demographic Characteristics (N = 1500)

Demographic	n	%
Gender		
Male	745	49.7
Female	755	50.3
Age		
21 years – 25 years	813	54.2
26 years – 30 years	269	17.9
31 years – 35 years	180	12.0
36 years – 40 years	238	15.9
Ethnicity		
Malay	906	60.0
Chinese	449	30.0
Indian	145	10.0
Religion		
Islam	895	59.6
Buddhism	357	23.8
Hinduism	136	9.1
Christianity	112	7.5
Highest Educational Level		
Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM)	337	22.5
Diploma/STPM	455	30.3
Bachelor's Degree	627	41.8
Master's Degree and Above	81	5.4
Occupation		
Public Servant	278	18.5
Private Sector	409	27.3
Employee Self-Employed	222	14.8
Student	516	34.4
Homemaker/Unemployed	75	5.0

Overall, female respondents outnumbered males, with respondents aged 21 to 25 years being the most responsive to the survey questions. Meanwhile, the ethnic breakdown follows the sampling method of this study. The highest educational level, bachelor’s degree, had the highest response rate compared to respondents with Malaysian Certificate of Education, Diploma/STPM, and master’s degree and above. The student group had the highest

response rate compared to respondents working in the public sector, private sector, self-employed, and homemakers or unemployed individuals.

The Influence of Society on Youth Participation in the Electoral Process

Table 2 presents the research findings that show statements for each factor driving youth engagement by society in politics. Each statement is measured using a descriptive approach, which determines the quantity and percentage for each stated statement.

Based on the research findings for the statements regarding the factors driving local communities, it is at a low level, with only one statement showing agreement exceeding 50 percent. Out of 1500 respondents, 799 individuals (53.2%) agreed that the community around them is active in political activities, while 473 individuals (31.5%) disagreed, and 228 individuals (15.2%) strongly disagreed. As for the statement indicating that respondents are informed about election issues from the surrounding community, 725 individuals (48.4%) agreed, while 458 individuals (30.5%) disagreed, and 317 individuals (21.1%) strongly disagreed. Regarding the statement about respondents being exposed by the community regarding voter registration in elections, 692 individuals (46.1%) agreed, 473 individuals (31.5%) disagreed, and 228 individuals (15.2%) strongly disagreed.

For the statement that election issues are often discussed by respondents with the local community, 559 individuals (37.2%) agreed, 520 individuals (34.7%) disagreed, and 421 individuals (28.1%) strongly disagreed. Those who only follow the majority opinion of the local community regarding election-related matters numbered 339 individuals (22.6%) agreed, 644 individuals (42.9%) disagreed, and 517 individuals (34.5%) strongly disagreed. Local communities play a crucial role in influencing the political party choice of respondents. It was agreed by 493 individuals (32.8%), disagreed by 513 individuals (35.4%), and strongly disagreed by 476 individuals (31.7%). Respondents often participate in activities organized in their residential areas, with 436 individuals (29.1%) agreeing, 572 individuals (38.1%) disagreeing, and 492 individuals (32.8%) strongly disagreeing.

Turning to the statement that the respondents' place of residence has cooperated with the Election Commission (SPR) to open voter registration counters for elections, only 545 individuals (36.3%) agreed, 487 individuals (32.5%) disagreed, and 486 individuals (31.2%) strongly disagreed. The statement that the local community plays a crucial role in influencing the political party choice of respondents found that 517 individuals (34.5%) agreed, 527 individuals (35.1%) disagreed, and 456 individuals (30.4%) strongly disagreed. Regarding the local community being perceived as active in political activities, 639 individuals (42.6%) agreed, 511 individuals (34.1%) disagreed, and 350 individuals (23.3%) strongly disagreed. For areas where respondents felt there were frequent political programs, only 583 individuals (38.8%) agreed, 509 individuals (33.9%) disagreed, and 408 individuals (27.2%) strongly disagreed. Finally, the statement related to respondents only following the majority opinion of the surrounding community in political matters showed that only 339 individuals (22.6%) agreed, while 614 individuals (40.9%) disagreed, and 537 individuals (36.5%) strongly disagreed.

For a clearer understanding of the statements regarding the factors related to the local community, please refer to Table 2 below:

Table 2: Statements for Local Community Factors (N1500)

Bil.	Statement	Total	Percentage (%)
1.	The community in my area is active in political activities.		
	Agree	799	53.2
	Disagree	473	31.5
	Strongly Disagree	228	15.2
2.	I have been exposed to voter registration in elections by the local community.		
	Agree	692	46.1
	Disagree	520	34.7
	Strongly Disagree	288	19.2

Bil.	Statement	Total	Percentage (%)
3.	Election issues are always discussed by me with the local community.		
	Agree	559	37.2
	Disagree	520	34.7
	Strongly Disagree	421	28.1
4.	I only follow the majority opinion of the local community regarding election-related matters.		
	Agree	339	22.6
	Disagree	644	42.9
	Strongly Disagree	517	34.5
5.	The local community plays a crucial role in influencing the political party choice I support.		
	Agree	493	32.8
	Disagree	531	35.4
	Strongly Disagree	476	31.7
6.	I often participate in activities organized in my residential area.		
	Agree	436	29.1
	Disagree	572	38.1
	Strongly Disagree	492	32.8
7.	I am informed about election issues from the surrounding community.		
	Agree	725	48.4
	Disagree	458	30.5
	Strongly Disagree	317	21.1
8.	My place of residence has cooperated with the Election Commission (SPR) to open voter registration counters for elections.		
	Agree	545	36.3
	Disagree	487	32.5
	Strongly Disagree	468	31.2
9.	The surrounding community plays a crucial role in influencing the political party choice I support.		
	Agree	517	34.5
	Disagree	527	35.1
	Strongly Disagree	456	30.4
10.	The community in my area is active in political activities.		
	Agree	639	42.6
	Disagree	511	34.1
	Strongly Disagree	350	23.3
11.	My area often organizes political programs (Example: Talks, Programs with leaders, and others).		
	Agree	583	38.8
	Disagree	509	33.9
	Strongly Disagree	408	27.2

Bil.	Statement	Total	Percentage (%)
12.	I only follow the majority opinion of the surrounding community in political matters.		
	Agree	339	22.6
	Disagree	614	40.9
	Strongly Disagree	537	36.5

Analysing the community factors through the statements in Table 2, out of the 12 statements presented, the community can provide encouragement to young people to participate in the electoral process. However, the research findings show that only 53.2 percent of respondents find that the local community is active in political activities. From these statements, only 48.4 percent of respondents can learn about election issues from the surrounding community. Referring to this trend of responses, it is evident that young people need guidance from the surrounding community to understand the importance of registering and voting during elections. The concept of political culture is crucial to instil in the community, as it can serve as an agent in raising awareness and understanding of the actual behaviour of the community, especially in terms of awareness and participation in politics (Bowman & Boynton, 1974).

From the findings of this study, it is also evident that the community fails and is less supportive in providing encouragement and motivation to young people to actively engage in politics, with most of the presented statements falling below 50 percent agreement. To change this situation, the level of community awareness needs to be improved towards creating a local population that is friendly, respectful, and cooperative in carrying out various activities. If this condition can be established, it can enhance the involvement of young people in all activities conducted because they begin to feel comfortable and able to accept any form of program conducted in the area (Alex, 2013).

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings obtained from this study indicate that the role of community socialization agents plays a limited role in motivating young people to engage in the electoral process. However, the role of the community is still considered relevant as one of the socialization agents capable of encouraging youth participation in the electoral process.

In the theory of political participation proposed by Mibrath and Goel (1977), it is shown that the participation of youth in the electoral process is at the second level, which is the Spectators level. This means that youth are involved in at least one part of the entire electoral process. This indicates that there is external motivation, and one of them is the influence of the community in increasing youth awareness of participation in the electoral process. Therefore, the socialization agents of the community highlighted in this article play a significant role in the political behaviour of youth. This article also calls for local communities to help raise youth awareness in the electoral process through local activities and knowledge sharing as efforts to enrich the democratic system in Malaysia.

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