



## Youth Political Participation in Selangor

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### Article Information

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### Abstract

The youth constitute a significant demographic within Malaysia's population. With the implementation of the "Vote at 18" initiative, they now have increased opportunities to actively engage in political activities. This study aims to examine the extent of political participation among young individuals in Malaysia. The research employs a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design, utilizing convenience sampling that involves 374 respondents. The study employs descriptive analysis and reliability analysis. The findings of the study indicate that the level of political participation among the youth is at a notably high level, as evidenced by a mean value of 4.24 and an excellent level of reliability at a significant value of 0.842. These results demonstrate that young people are actively involved in both direct and indirect political activities. Consequently, the role and function of the youth have become significant within society and the nation.

### INTRODUCTION

Several scholars have noted a crisis in the civic and political engagement of young people over the past two decades. This is evidenced by a decrease in voting among eligible youth in national elections compared to older generations. Additionally, the proportion of young people participating in national elections has dwindled in numerous countries over the last few decades. These trends have led to concerns that the future of democracy might be at risk, as political engagement in adulthood often stems from habits formed in youth, and today's young individuals will eventually become tomorrow's adults (United Nations, 2018). Active community involvement has been shown to influence political behavior more than passive engagement (Almond, 2000). Individual political participation is closely tied to societal disparities based on socioeconomic class, geography, ideology, religion, urban and rural influences (Almond, 2000). Such participation indirectly plays a pivotal role in shaping government actions, with young people not only demonstrating increased political motivation but also greater optimism for their country's future (Weiss, 2020).

According to "Young and Involved" (2022), many young individuals engage in politics without formally joining political parties. Since 2019, they have been instrumental in the "Fridays for Future" campaign in Germany, utilizing actions like climate strikes to exert pressure on politicians. Youth groups are also active in human rights organizations such as Amnesty International. Additionally, young people participate in labor unions, such as the Federation of German Trade Unions (DGB), which boasts approximately 500,000 members aged up to 27 years old. These members actively advocate for the rights of interns, trainees, and recent graduates.

Presently, the political participation of young individuals remains a significant global concern (Kitanova, 2019). Their engagement in promoting and supporting innovations, along with their unique perspectives, worldview, and psychological tendencies, renders them a vital demographic for politicians and political parties (Fjerza, Gega & Memaj, 2014). Consequently, their participation is pivotal in shaping the extent of future youth involvement in politics (Visser et al., 2011). This involvement plays a critical role in shaping their participation as adults (Earl, Maher & Elliott, 2017). Young people have the potential to drive societal change and by involving them, ongoing political initiatives might adapt policy processes to be more transparent and responsive to the younger generation, fostering a sense of citizenship among young individuals (EACEA, 2013). This can be observed in Malaysia, where the voter distribution by age and percentage in the 15th General Election (PRU15) last year was dominated by young people.

Political participation among young individuals in Malaysia dates back to the first General Election in 1955, when those 21 years and older who met residential requirements were eligible to vote (Lim, 2016). However, in the recent 15th General Election, Malaysian youth as young as 18 were granted voting rights and automatically registered (Jaafar, 2022). Young voters actively engaged in politics, with some even being elected as political representatives. Nevertheless, the convergence of various challenges and advanced technologies has ushered in a new paradigm of political participation among young individuals. The 14th General Election in 2018 marked a significant moment in Malaysia, with youth—termed the "kingmakers"—accounting for 41% of all votes (Chinnasamy & Mohamed Azmi, 2018).

As stated by Longley (2021), political participation encompasses a range of community actions aimed at influencing public policy directly or indirectly by affecting those responsible for policy decisions. Such participation includes activities like campaign volunteering, financial contributions to candidates, contacting public officials, petitioning, protesting, and collaborating on political matters. Voting in elections is particularly associated with political participation.

In light of this, it's evident that many young individuals are indirectly involved in political activities. The implementation of UNDI 18 as a milestone for youth political engagement in Malaysia could infuse new vitality into politics and decision-making. Young people have the potential to inject creativity, innovation, and digital proficiency into the political landscape.

Previously in Malaysia, the eligibility age for voting in general elections was 21 years old. Following the defeat of the Barisan Nasional in the 14th General Election, the opposition party at the time deliberated and proposed the introduction of a bill named UNDI 18, which sought to lower the voting age to 18 for general elections (Chai, 2022). Subsequently, the Constitution (Amendment) Act 2019 (CA2019), enacted on September 10, 2019, lowered the voting age to 18, allowing for the candidacy of younger individuals in elections and establishing automatic voter registration for individuals aged 18 and above. The inception of UNDI 18 in Malaysia stems from the government's intention to empower the youth in the nation, as articulated by former Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob (Berita Harian, 2021). The implementation of UNDI 18 signifies the government's confidence in the active involvement of young individuals in the national developmental process. Moreover, UNDI 18 provides a platform for programs tailored to the youth, such as the Parliament Digital initiative.

However, in the present scenario, following the implementation of UNDI 18, and the subsequent eligibility and automatic registration of 18-year-olds for voting, a pertinent question arises: are these individuals truly prepared to engage in politics (Ahmad & Mohd Zain, 2021)? The challenge lies in the involvement of 18-year-olds who may lack awareness and understanding of the intricacies of politics. These individuals have recently completed their schooling and are awaiting their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia results; thus, the question remains—are they adequately prepared for this responsibility? Consequently, the primary focus of this study is to examine the extent of political participation among youngsters subsequent to the implementation of UNDI 18 in Malaysia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the coming years, the youth population is expected to increase significantly. Recognizing the pivotal role of young people, the Malaysian government introduced the National Policy on Youth Development in 1997, which was subsequently revised in 2017 to become the Malaysian Youth Policy (MYP). As previously highlighted, the youth

constitute a valuable asset and form the backbone of the nation. In 1985, the Malaysian government launched the National Youth Policy (NYP) as a platform for developing and implementing youth-oriented programs. A decade later, the government, through the Ministry of Youth and Sports, evaluated the policy and introduced the National Youth Development Policy (NYDP) in 1997. The NYDP acknowledges the role of young people as catalysts for national development towards achieving developed nation status (Ahmad & Mohd Zain, 2021).

The active participation and involvement of young people in societal and democratic practices are crucial to address their needs and ensure the realization of their fundamental rights (United Nations, 2018). Such engagement empowers young individuals to advocate for their peers effectively. Additionally, their participation leads to improved decision-making and outcomes. Effective participation and leadership by youth necessitate a conducive environment, clear objectives, and supportive policies at all levels. Undoubtedly, young people represent the future leaders of their nations, serving as the driving force behind the country's progress towards equality with developed nations. Consequently, the upcoming general election will center on the youth vote, exerting pressure on governments to perform and garner their support (Leong, 2015). Active involvement of young people in decision-making at local and higher levels is a fundamental requisite for establishing a more inclusive and democratic society.

Academics and researchers have shown increasing interest in the examination of political engagement among young people. Malaysian scholars began focusing on this demographic during the 2008 general election. To comprehend young individuals' political engagement, one must consider three key factors: their political outlook, behavior, and political socialization (Abdullah, 2021). Numerous variables influence individual political participation. Among these, a noteworthy driver is curiosity in politics, as evidenced by the prevalence of political engagement among young individuals (Zhang, 2022; Mohamad Razali et al., 2016). This curiosity may be partly attributed to the impact of social media, which exposes teenagers to political information more extensively than previous generations. The educational system and familial influences also play substantial roles. Parents and families play a pivotal role in shaping political orientations from an early age, while the education system contributes to political awareness through education and participation opportunities. Research underscores that education and family are critical agents of political socialization. Furthermore, peers and external influences play a significant role in motivating political engagement (Abdullah, 2021).

While many Malaysian youths are enthusiastic about voting, some have become disengaged due to intrusive political advertising and campaigns that infringe upon their privacy and compel them to digest political manifestos (Bischof & Senninger, 2017). Age discrimination persists in the Malaysian political landscape, favoring older demographics. Individuals who engage in electoral activities from a young age are more likely to sustain their political engagement, turning it into a habitual practice (Chinnasamy & Mohamed Azmi, 2018). Nevertheless, when it comes to political programs and current concerns, young people remain less active and involved. Comprehensive diagnostic analyses are necessary to ascertain causal variables and potential remedies in all sectors.

Political participation as the process of gathering and disseminating political information, engaging with politicians, participating in campaigns, voting, encouraging others to vote, and taking part in selecting future representatives (Gil De Zuniga et al., 2012). These actions occur within physical and practical environments, such as attending political events and fundraising for candidates' campaigns. Similarly, online political participation involves activities like signing petitions, gathering political information through social media, and interacting with political figures on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Jennings, Suzuki, & Hubbard, 2020).

Compared to older individuals, young people exhibit lower levels of traditional political involvement, including voting, party membership, and formal political activity (Putnam, 2000). However, they engage actively in alternative forms of political participation, such as internet activism, social movements, and issue-based campaigns. Digital platforms and social media have emerged as critical tools for political discourse and mobilization. Political socialization plays a vital role in shaping young people's political engagement, influenced by their families, schools, peers, and community networks.

Incorporating young people's participation in endorsing and supporting innovative ideas, coupled with their distinct perspectives, values, and psychological tendencies, positions them as a pivotal target demographic for politicians and political parties (Fjerza, Gega, & Memaj, 2014). On a global scale, enhancing youth political engagement is of paramount importance (Kitanova, 2019). Therefore, early involvement of young people significantly shapes their likelihood of participating in future politics (Vissers et al., 2011), underscoring the link between their present engagement and future participation as adults (Earl, Maher, & Elliott, 2017). Integrating this target group into current political initiatives may foster more transparent and accountable political processes for the younger generation, while instilling a sense of citizenship among youth (Mohamad, Dauda, & Halim, 2018).

## METHODOLOGY

This conducted study employed a quantitative approach and utilized a cross-sectional study design. The study focused on individuals aged between 18 and 30 years old, commonly referred to as "youngsters" in Selangor. The sample consisted of 384 respondents, chosen through convenience sampling from a population of 1,721,100 (Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 2021). Data were gathered using a questionnaire administered through Google Forms, distributed across various communication platforms including WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram. The collected data were subjected to analysis using descriptive statistics such as means and reliability analysis.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Profile of Respondents*

The demographic profile of the 374 respondents is outlined in this section, encompassing variables such as gender, race, marital status, and academic qualifications. As depicted in Table 4.1 below, the entire respondent pool (374 respondents, 100%) comprises young individuals from Selangor. The distribution reveals a majority of female respondents, constituting 221 individuals at 57.4%, followed by male respondents totaling 164 individuals at 42.6%. Moreover, the ethnic breakdown showcases that the majority of respondents are Malay, accounting for 217 individuals or 56.4%. This is trailed by Chinese respondents at 91 individuals or 23.6%, Indian respondents at 72 individuals or 18.7%, and a smaller category labeled as "others," comprising 5 individuals or 1.3%.

Shifting the focus to marital status, a significant proportion of respondents are single, comprising 190 individuals or 49.4%. The remainder is distributed between married individuals, totaling 167 or 43.4%, and single parents, constituting 28 individuals or 7.3%. In terms of academic qualifications, the highest proportion of respondents possess a degree qualification, amounting to 123 individuals or 31.9%. Subsequently, respondents holding a diploma account for 102 individuals or 26.5%, whereas those with a master's degree are represented by 71 individuals, equating to 18.4%. Notably, 33 respondents hold a certificate qualification, contributing to 8.6% of the sample. Furthermore, 23 respondents present Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia qualifications, making up 6% of the respondents. A total of 22 respondents hold PhD qualification, representing 5.7% of the group. Additionally, 10 respondents hold Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia qualifications, comprising 2.6%. Finally, 1 respondent falls under the category of "other qualifications," accounting for 0.3% of the sample.

TABLE 4.1  
PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS (N=374)

Profile	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	164	42.6
	Female	221	57.4
Race	Malay	217	56.4
	Chinese	91	23.6
	Indian	72	18.7
	Other	5	1.3
Marital Status	Single	190	49.4
	Married	167	43.4
	Single Parent	28	7.3
Academic Qualification	SPM	23	6.0
	STPM	10	2.6
	Certificate	33	8.6
	Diploma	102	26.5
	Degree	123	31.9
	Master	71	18.4
	PHD	22	5.7
	Other	1	0.3

Cronbach's alpha is commonly utilized to assess dependability in order to ascertain the accuracy, consistency, and stability of items. According to Pallant (2016), Cronbach's alpha values of 0.6 and above are considered indicative of good reliability and acceptable indices. However, Cronbach's alpha values below 0.6 are deemed to reflect poor reliability. Additionally, values falling between 0.60 and 0.80 are considered moderately acceptable. When the value

ranges from 0.80 to 1.00, it is considered excellent (Pallant, 2016). As showed in Table 4.2 below, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the political participation variable in this research is calculated to be 0.842. The values obtained in this research are indicative of good reliability, acceptability, and dependability, as they all surpass the threshold of 0.60.

Table 4.2  
RELIABILITY TEST

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Assumed
Political Participation Among Youngsters in Selangor	6	0.842	Excellent

#### *Mean and Standard Deviation*

Table 4.3 presented below displays the mean scores categorically. A mean score range of 1.00 to 2.00 is classified as low, while a range of 2.01 to 3.00 falls under the medium category, and a range of 3.01 to 4.00 is deemed a high level, following the classification system by Wiersma (Khairunnajwa Samsudin, Mohd Mahzan, A., & Anuar Ahmad, 2017).

Table 4.3  
LEVEL OF MEAN SCORE RANGE

Mean Score Range	Level
1.00 – 2.33	Low
2.34 – 3.67	Medium
3.58 – 5.00	High

In this study, the questionnaire was designed using the Likert Scale for each statement, and respondents were required to provide their responses to the questions. The Likert Scale employed is as follows: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = moderate, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The calculated average mean score for political participation is 4.00. The standard deviation is 2.7103, suggesting that the data points are closely clustered around the mean, indicative of a low level of variability. The mean value falls within the range of 3.01 to 4.00, indicating a high level of political participation among youngsters in Selangor. This suggests that youngsters in Selangor are actively engaged in political activities in the present day.

Table 4.4  
MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Political Participation Among Youngsters in Selangor	4.24	2.71	374

## CONCLUSION

The population in Malaysia, specifically, and globally, is predominantly composed of a high percentage and quantity of young individuals. This highlights the significant role and function of the youth, necessitating due attention within society. The conducted study reveals that political participation among the youth is notably positive and encouraging. Political participation among the youth can occur directly or indirectly, such as active involvement in political party activities or exposing oneself to political information through mass media and scholarly readings. The decisions and actions of the Malaysian government, involving the youth as voters in the 15th general election and subsequently in the 15th state general election encompassing six states – Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Pulau Pinang, Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu – are seen as commendable steps and a promising beginning. The youth in Malaysia have been granted the right and opportunity to participate equally in selecting and determining national leadership at both parliamentary and state levels. However, political participation among the youth necessitates proper guidance and exposure, particularly at the secondary school level, to ensure an appropriate level of maturity for their engagement in the voting process. This aspect requires adequate attention to prevent the youth from making misguided choices when selecting representatives during elections, which could lead to negative consequences for the future and the country. Therefore, by implementing the Vote at 18 legislation, the government is recommended to assess and

formulate suitable policies at the secondary school level, integrating political and civic education elements into the curriculum.

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