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**BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR ELECTION
EDUCATION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a framework for educating university students on political issues during elections, with a specific focus on the impact of the Undi18 campaign. This campaign enables 18-year-olds to vote or contest in elections and has had a significant effect on the democratic landscape in Malaysia, as evidenced by its implementation during the PRU-15 election. The framework comprises two critical components: (1) evaluating university students' perspectives on elections in Malaysia, and (2) measuring the extent of university students' knowledge about political issues during elections. The framework has been developed by reviewing the current literature on election education and is intended to be adaptable for use in various educational contexts and by instructors from different fields. The aim is to enhance the level of political awareness and engagement among

university students and to promote the strengthening of democratic processes.

Keywords: Election Education, University Students, Political Issues, Voting, Democratic.

INTRODUCTION

According to a report by Melati A. Jalil and Noel (2017) on malaysiainsight.com, some individuals in society have an indifferent attitude and feel disappointed towards elections due to certain issues. Undi18, which involves the proposal to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 years old, has brought amendments to Article 47 (Qualifications for Members of Parliament) and Article 1 of Article 119 (Qualifications of Electors). This approval is a significant recognition for the youth and symbolizes the practice of democracy within the political system in Malaysia. The proposal, initiated by Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman on July 16, 2019, resulted in amendments to the voting age and eligibility to become representatives in Malaysia, lowering it from 21 years to 18 years. The proposal received the approval of 211 out of 222 members of parliament after two voting sessions. In October 2022, the Election Commission (SPR) announced a 28 percent increase in the number of voters, with 5.8 million young individuals automatically registered as new voters (Malaysiakini, 2022).

Undi18 may sound relatively new in Malaysia, but the application of a minimum voting age of 18 has been practised in the majority of European countries since the 1960s. Countries such as Bangladesh, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Pakistan, and Korea have also granted voting rights to their youth as early as 18 to 19 years old. The student community in Higher Education Institutions (IPT) is highly regarded as one of the esteemed young groups, given their status as educated individuals actively involved in politics. However, there is a conflict for students to actively engage in politics due to the existence of the Universities and University Colleges Act (AUKU). Since the establishment of AUKU in 1965, student involvement in politics has decreased due to strict actions taken by the government against those involved in politics and violating AUKU. Therefore, this study aims to explore the extent to which Undi18 can empower students leading up to the 15th General Election (GE15).

Despite rumours questioning the political maturity of 18-year-old youths, numerous arguments are discussing this matter. Particularly when it comes to university students, the issue of maturity should not arise, considering that they are an educated group. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the age of 18 is recognized as adulthood, allowing individuals to make decisions involving socioeconomic contributions to society, bear citizenship responsibilities, be bound by contractual agreements, pay taxes, be granted the right to marry, work, and take full responsibility for themselves (Malaysiakini, 2022). Therefore, Undi18 is a step that provides opportunities for the younger generation to actively participate in making decisions regarding the future of the country, such as voting and becoming candidates in elections.

Now, the voices of young student activists should not be underestimated. According to student representative Muhammad Zafran Shamil Zulkifili, the Head of the Legal and Ethics Exco, National University of Malaysia (UKM) Student Representative Council, students no longer want to just sit, listen, and obey. They are now an active group that wants to lead. Just look at the example during the major floods that hit the country. It was this group that took proactive action in leading NGO groups to provide assistance. This statement is supported by Nur Syareeza Abdullah, a student at Tun Hussein Onn University, who explains the maturity and wisdom of student groups that focus more on realistic and achievable manifestos or promises (Malaysiakini, 2022).

Although approved since 2019, Undi18 has not yet shown its impact on general elections. The full effect of the approval of Undi18 has also not been fully experienced due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, soon after its approval in 2019. This pandemic has had a significant impact on the country's political system and has made history with Malaysia experiencing three different Prime Ministers during the pandemic period (2020-2022). The administrations of Tun Dr. Mahathir (2018-2020), Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin (2020-2021), and Dato' Sri Ismail Sabri Yaakob (2021-2022). Currently, the position is belonged to Dato' Seri Anwar Bin Ibrahim starting November 2022 till now. This indicates political instability, making it difficult to predict the governance pattern for the upcoming GE15. The date for GE15 was on Saturday, 19 November 2022.

Based on the above description, several questions arise. Firstly, what is the perception of students towards general elections in

Malaysia? Secondly, what is the perception of students towards the implementation of the Undi18 policy? As young individuals, they are exposed to various information through social media. Therefore, they have access to various current issues, including the Undi18 policy. But are they ready for this policy? Are they mature enough to make choices that determine the country's leadership. Lastly, to what extent are students aware of political issues leading up to the 15th general election? Since the country was hit by Covid-19, students have also been affected by the pandemic's impact. Apart from changes in the university learning system, they face various problems related to job opportunities and economic stability. According to Dr. Norsimah Dasan, a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Psychology and Education (FPP), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), students' stress levels are a concern due to the Covid-19 pandemic (HarianMetro, 2022). Based on this situation, this study examines students' awareness of current political issues to:-

- 1) What is the perception of students towards elections in Malaysia?
- 2) To what extent are students aware of political issues leading up to the 15th general election?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by Muhammad Ali Embi and Ahmad Faiz Abd Hamid (2005) shows that the level of trust among university students in Malaysia towards the government is relatively low. The author emphasizes that the main factors contributing to this lack of trust are closely related to issues of corruption, transparency, and accountability that often arise in our political landscape. This issue needs to be taken seriously as its impact includes a lack of concern among the younger generation towards national politics, leading to a low voter turnout and a lack of participation in the political process.

Meanwhile, a study by Abdul Hadi Samsi et al. (2013) examined the factors influencing the involvement of young people in politics in Malaysia. These factors include demographic influences, influences of political party leadership, influences of mass media, and influences of social environment. According to their findings, based on studies in fourteen states, a significant number of individuals aged between

22 and 40 years old do not register as voters because they prioritize their careers and education over politics. Additionally, according to a census in 2000, the number of young people reached nearly 12 million, and out of that number, 70 percent showed no interest in politics, 10 percent were pro-government, and 20 percent remained neutral. During the 13th General Election (PRU13), the study argued that the involvement of young people in politics showed a decline compared to the 1998 Reformasi movement, where the involvement of young people in politics grew dramatically not only in terms of support but also in terms of mindset as the younger generation.

Similarly, research has been conducted on the target group of students. A study by Pandian (2014) found that a survey conducted among 400 university students in Malaysia showed that the majority of respondents had voted in the previous general election, with the ruling political party receiving the highest number of votes among respondents. The study also found that voting behavior among students is influenced by various factors, including political ideology, family background, and peer influence. In terms of their perception of political party leadership, students prioritize integrity and accountability as the most important qualities among political leaders. Students also expressed the desire for transparency and inclusiveness in the political process in Malaysia.

This is in line with what Nik Muhd Mustaqim Nik Abdul Aziz (2014) discussed in his book, "Perspectives of Students on Electoral Practices in Malaysia." The findings of a survey conducted among students from three different universities in Malaysia showed that the majority of students have a positive view of the electoral process and believe that their votes can bring about change. However, many students also express concerns about issues such as election fraud, the influence of money in politics, and the lack of transparency in the electoral process. Researchers also explain that the level of political participation among university students is encouraging, as many of them report participating in activities such as attending political rallies and engaging in online political discussions.

Norshuhada Shiratuddin et al. (2016) examined the role of Generation Y in contemporary politics, particularly during the 12th and 13th General Elections (PRU12 and PRU13). According to them, Generation Y is a generation that utilizes technology in all aspects

of life. They have full trust in mass media as a platform to bridge the gap between the people and the government, especially in decision-making and expressing opinions. Generation Y becomes the primary target for both the government and the opposition in their efforts to gain support. However, it should be noted that the Undi18 generation belongs to Generation Z.

Norshuhada Shiratuddin et al. (2016) investigated the role of the Y generation (Millennials) in contemporary politics, especially during the 12th and 13th General Elections (PRU12 and PRU13). According to the authors, the Y generation is a tech-savvy generation that utilizes technology in all aspects of life. They have full trust in mass media as a platform to bridge the gap between the people and the government, particularly in decision-making and expressing opinions. The Y generation becomes the primary target for both the government and opposition parties in their efforts to gain support. However, it should be noted that the Undi18 generation belongs to Generation Z, which includes individuals born from 1997 to 2012 (Undi18 applies to those born in 2004). This generation was born when technology was already well-developed, and their dependence on technology is greater compared to the Y generation. Studies on elections in Malaysia cannot be separated from the student population, as students now play a major role in achieving the objectives of elections in Malaysia.

A study by Marshelayanti Mohamad Razali and Siti Nor Adila Ayob (2018) also examined the perception of Malaysian Studies students regarding the 14th General Election in Malaysia. The study focused on the level of awareness and interest of Malaysian Studies students in politics, their perception of the electoral process, and their voting behavior. The findings showed that the majority of students were aware of the electoral process, but their level of interest in politics was relatively low. This is because students perceive elections as important events and believe that their votes can bring about change in the country. However, the study found that students' voting behavior is influenced by factors such as family and peer pressure, rather than their own political understanding.

Additionally, Tiung et al. (2018) explain in their study that the use of propaganda and misinformation during the electoral process is crucial in shaping public opinion and influencing election outcomes. Such propaganda is disseminated and amplified through social media, especially during campaign periods. The author also states various types of propaganda and misinformation used during Malaysia's PRU-

14, including fake news, manipulated images and videos, misleading statistics, and selective reporting. This situation can influence the behavior of voters, especially among the student population, the majority of whom are not fully understand the intricacies of the country's politics.

The involvement of young people in Undi18 is also supported by Junaidi Awang Besar (2020) in their study, which shows that the perception of State Assembly members in a certain area who agree with the proposal to lower the voting age is important. The study found that factors such as the need to increase youth participation in the democratic process, the maturity level of 18-year-old teenagers, and the preparations set by other countries in lowering the voting age influence the stance of the assembly members on this issue. However, some assembly members expressed concerns about the readiness of 18-year-olds to vote and the potential effects on the electoral process.

According to a study conducted by Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah and Sabri Mohamad Sharif (2020), the implementation of Undi18, which lowers the voting age from 21 to 18, is seen as a positive step towards encouraging youth participation in politics. Undi18 is considered to have the potential to increase youth participation in politics and contribute to the implementation of a more vibrant and inclusive democratic system in Malaysia. The involvement of young people in conventional politics in the past has led to a lack of interest and understanding of political issues and a sense of apathy and disappointment with the country's political system.

Positive perceptions of students towards the Undi18 policy can also be seen in a study conducted by Wan Rozima Mior Ahmed Shahimi et al. (2020), which examined the readiness of young voters in Malaysia to participate in elections. The authors conducted a survey among 390 respondents aged between 18 and 25 years in Selangor, Malaysia. The results showed that young voters are interested in politics, with 70 percent of respondents stating that they follow political news and updates. However, many still lack knowledge about the political system and the electoral process, with only 46 percent of respondents reporting that they are familiar with the voting process.

Undi18 demonstrate the thought patterns and voices of 18-year-old young people through the 15th General Election (PRU-15). The PRU-

15 witness an increase of 50 percent from the 14.9 million voters in the previous PRU-14. In other words, the number of voters in PRU-15 is expected to reach 22.5 million after accounting for the increase in 18-year-old voters and automatic registration (Nisar Mohammad Ahmad, 2022). This is a crucial point in determining the extent to which Undi18 can become a symbol of the country's democracy. Students, especially young people who have the right to vote and be involved in politics, face several restrictions imposed by the government based on the Universities and University Colleges Act (AUKU).

According to Ali (2022), PRU15 is an eagerly awaited election by all Malaysians, as the country's leadership has constantly changed since the Covid-19 pandemic era. PRU15 is expected to be highly contested, and no party has an advantage. With the implementation of UNDI18 in PRU15, young people are seen as actors who raise many political issues and expose government weaknesses. Students also play a significant role as they are educated individuals who can serve as examples for other young people, especially those who do not have access to higher education.

Undi18 (Vote18) showcase the thought patterns and voices of 18-year-old young people through the 15th General Election (PRU-15). The upcoming PRU-15 is expected to witness a 50 percent increase in the number of voters compared to the previous PRU-14, reaching an estimated 22.5 million voters after taking into account the increase in 18-year-old voters and automatic registration (Dr Nisar Mohammad Ahmad, 2022). This is a crucial turning point in determining the extent to which Undi18 can become a symbol of the country's democracy. Students, especially young people who have the right to vote and engage in politics, face several restrictions imposed by the government based on the Universities and University Colleges Act (AUKU).

According to the views of Irma Wani Othman et al. (2021), the concept of legal literacy is synonymous with the ability to understand and interpret legal terms and concepts in a meaningful and relevant way to daily life. The author argues that legal literacy is important for students to effectively participate in campus politics. It also plays a significant role in promoting a generation of young leaders with high charismatic leadership qualities. The author further suggests that legal literacy can play a crucial role in the country's electoral process by

empowering students to make informed decisions and take political actions.

However, a study conducted by the author Mohd Zamirul Mohd Dzaki (2022) discusses the importance of the Undi 18 policy in expanding youth participation in electoral politics and understanding the voting behavior of Undi 18 voters. This is because the findings of the study indicate that Undi 18 voters in private higher education institutions in Penang have a high interest in politics and are actively engaged in political issues. The study also found that Undi 18 voters tend to be more liberal and left leaning in their political ideologies and prioritize alternative media sources. The researcher also highlights some challenges faced by Undi 18 voters, such as a lack of political education and the influence of family and peers on voting decisions.

According to Ali (2022), PRU15 is eagerly awaited by the entire society as the government's leadership has constantly changed since the era of the Covid-19 pandemic. PRU15 is expected to be highly contested, and no party has an advantage. With the presence of UNDI18 in PRU15, the youth are seen as actors who raise many political issues and expose the weaknesses of the government. Students also play a crucial role as they are educated individuals and serve as examples for other young people, especially those who do not have access to higher education.

The Undi 18 policy, which allows the younger generation to vote, has encouraged readiness among various parties, including students. StraComm (2022) states in their writing that the Student Representative Council (MPP) of USIM has actively implemented efforts to educate and encourage students to exercise their right to vote to the best of their ability. The MPP has conducted several activities such as voter registration campaigns, forums, and campaigns to increase political awareness among the student community. The positive feedback received from students regarding the upcoming 15th general election indicates that the student population has a sense of responsibility and recognizes the importance of their votes in shaping the future of the country.

The author suggests that more efforts need to be made to educate young voters about politics and the importance of voting, including creating more opportunities for civic education in schools and

improving access to information about politics and the electoral process. Additionally, the author recommends that political parties engage with young voters and address their concerns about issues such as unemployment and education to build trust and increase youth participation in politics. The author also emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive environment for young voters, such as ensuring easy and accessible voting. They suggest using technology, such as online voter registration and voting, to enhance access to the electoral process.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilizes quantitative methods. The research data is taken from the survey method involved distributing questionnaires to UUM students, particularly those taking the Constitution of Malaysia subject for Semester A212, to assess their level of awareness regarding political issues leading up to the 15th general election. This group of students was chosen due to their exposure to the Malaysian electoral system and politics through the relevant subject. According to records at the School of Government Studies, more than 150 students are enrolled in the subject under Mr. Mokhtafizam and Dr. Zuliana Azwa.

The questionnaire utilises a Likert scale with five response options: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) unsure, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. The information and data collected through the questionnaire were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics was employed for data analysis. Secondary data was obtained from previous studies, books, journals, reports from ministries, and other printed materials available either in libraries or online sources.

ANALYSIS

The analysis of basic respondent information includes gender, age, ethnicity, state, parliamentary constituency for voting, highest educational level, status, first-time voters, participation in voting, reasons for not or not yet deciding to vote in PRU15, and feelings about voting in PRU15 for 317 respondents who are students of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) taking the Malaysian Constitution subject for Semester A221 at the Centre for Government Studies.

From the analysis,

- Gender: Most respondents are female (64.4%), while male respondents make up 35.6 percent of the sample.
- Age: The information about age is not provided in the given text.
- Ethnicity: The largest ethnic group among the respondents is Malay (82.6%), followed by Chinese (8.8%), Indian (4.1%), Bumiputera Sabah (2.8%), and Bumiputera Sarawak (1.6%).
- State: Respondents come from various states, with the highest number from Kedah (17.4%), followed by Selangor (14.8%) and Kelantan (11.7%).
- Parliamentary Constituency: No specific information is provided in the given text.
- Highest Educational Level: The majority of respondents have a Bachelor's Degree (63.4%), followed by Diploma (16.4%) and SPM (7.3%).
- Current Status: Most respondents are students (92.4%), while a small percentage are employed (5.7%) or job-seeking (1.3%).
- First-time Voters: Most respondents are first-time voters (88.0%), while 11.7% are not.
- Verification of Voting Status for PRU15: A large majority of respondents (94.0%) have verified their intention to vote in the upcoming PRU15, while a small percentage have not (3.8%) or are undecided (1.9%).
- Reasons for Not or Not Yet Deciding to Vote in PRU15: Majority will vote in PRU15 (94.0%)
- Feelings about Voting in PRU15: The majority of respondents express excitement (60.6%) about voting in PRU15, while a smaller percentage feel fearful or worried (12.0%), confused (21.8%), or have other feelings (5.0%).
- Feelings about Voting in PRU15: The majority of respondents express excitement (60.6%) about voting in PRU15, while a smaller percentage feel fearful or worried (12.0%), confused (21.8%), or have other feelings (5.0%).

The analysis of the data indicates that most respondents (60.6%) have a positive emotional response, expressing excitement about voting in the upcoming PRU15. This suggests a sense of enthusiasm and anticipation among the respondents towards participating in the democratic process. It indicates that they perceive voting as an

important opportunity to exercise their civic duty and have a voice in shaping the future of their country.

However, a smaller percentage of respondents (12.0%) express feelings of fear or worry. This could suggest concerns or anxieties related to the electoral process, such as the outcome of the election, potential consequences of political decisions, or uncertainty about the future. These respondents may perceive voting as a more challenging or consequential decision, leading to feelings of apprehension. Additionally, a significant portion of respondents (21.8%) indicate feelings of confusion. This could imply a lack of clarity or understanding about the political landscape, issues, or candidates. It suggests that there might be a need for more information and education to enhance the respondents' political literacy and help them make informed decisions during the election.

The presence of other feelings (5.0%) among the respondents highlights the diversity of emotions and perspectives regarding voting in PRU15. These could include indifference, scepticism, or a combination of different emotions not captured by the provided options. Overall, the analysis reflects a range of emotional responses among the respondents towards voting in PRU15. While a significant portion expresses excitement, indicating engagement and enthusiasm, some respondents experience fear, confusion, or other emotions. These findings underscore the importance of addressing concerns, providing education and information, and fostering an inclusive and informed electorate in the lead-up to the upcoming general election.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, the study acknowledges that the approval of Undi18, which lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 years old, is a significant recognition for the youth and symbolizes the practice of democracy within the political system in Malaysia. This policy change has amended Article 47 and Article 119 of the Malaysian Constitution, allowing 18-year-olds to vote and become representatives. Apart from that, the study also acknowledges that the student community in Higher Education Institutions (IPT) is highly regarded as an educated and politically active group. However, their active engagement in politics is hindered by the existence of the Universities and University Colleges Act (AUKU). AUKU has led to a decrease in student

involvement in politics due to strict actions taken against politically active students. Thus, the study aims to explore how Undi18 can empower students leading up to the 15th General Election (GE15).

More importantly, the study emphasizes that Undi18 brings a new change to the political democracy landscape in Malaysia. It provides opportunities for the younger generation to actively participate in making decisions regarding the future of the country, such as voting and becoming candidates in elections. The study also highlights that the age of 18 is recognized internationally as the age of adulthood, allowing individuals to take on various responsibilities. It also discusses the full impact of Undi18 has not been fully experienced due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic shortly after its approval in 2019. The pandemic has created political instability in Malaysia, with several changes in leadership. The political instability makes it difficult to predict the governance pattern for the upcoming GE15.

Likewise, the study recognizes the increasing activism and leadership aspirations among young student activists. They no longer want to be passive participants but seek to take proactive action and lead in various domains, including politics. This indicates a shift in the mindset and attitude of young students who are becoming more engaged and concerned about social and political issues.

To sum up, this study is able to answer the research questions to explore students' perception of general elections, their perception of the implementation of the Undi18 policy, and their awareness of political issues leading up to GE15. The study reviews and references various previous studies and literature that examine youth involvement in politics, perceptions of elections, and the role of young voters in shaping political outcomes. These studies provide insights into the factors influencing youth participation, the role of technology and media, and the importance of political education and transparency. For Methodology, the study adopts a quantitative method, and the survey is distributed to UUM students. The data is analysed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics.

Overall, the study aims to shed light on students' perceptions, awareness, and involvement in politics leading up to the 15th General Election, particularly in the context of the Undi18 policy. It acknowledges the significance of youth participation in the democratic

process and seeks to understand the challenges and opportunities faced by young students in Malaysia.

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