The Roles of New Voters Towards National Elections in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

In 2022, Malaysia held the 15th General Election (GE15), which allowed new voters to participate in voting for the first time. The research objective of this study is to explore the role of new voters in GE15. To achieve this objective, this study used the qualitative research method to conduct 2 focus group discussions on 7 Selangor’s new voters, aged between 22 and 24, with bachelor's degrees. They are 3 Malays, 2 Malaysian Chinese, and 2 Malaysian Indians. This research utilized NVIVO12 for thematic analysis of data. The findings show that Informants believe that they play many roles in GE15, they mainly support democracy, change politics, influence politics, promote political participation, and fulfill responsibilities and obligations. In addition, Informants believe that their votes have a significant influence on the political situation, mainly influencing the economy, politics, and promoting democracy. These findings emphasize the role and influence of new voters in Malaysia’s politics, and emphasize the importance of democracy, diversity, and government attention to public opinion.

Contribution/Originality: This study documents the influence of new voters in Malaysia's politics, and emphasize the importance of democracy, diversity, and government attention to public opinion. Informants believe that their votes have a significant influence on the political situation, mainly influencing the economy, politics, and promoting democracy.

1. Introduction

Malaysia 15th General Election (GE15) elected 222 members to the 15th House of Parliament on November 19, 2022. Perikatan Nasional (PN) 74 seats were seen as the “biggest surprise” of this election; Pakatan Harapan (PH) retained its advantage with 82 seats; while Barisan Nasional (BN) suffered their heaviest loss in prior elections with only 30 seats. This is the first time in Malaysian history that no party has won more than half of the seats. On November 24, Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysia’s 10th Prime Minister, was sworn in at the palace in Kuala Lumpur (Hutchinson, 2023). According to Electoral Commission
data, 1.4 million voters, known as "UNDI 18" voters, are between the ages of 18 and 20 (Solhi & Nizam, 2022). These "UNDI 18" voters cast their ballots for the first time in the GE15. This is owing to the Malaysian youth movement UNDI18, which effectively decreased the constitutional voting age restriction (Tirtayana, 2021).

These new voters play a very important role in GE15 because they represent a new generation of voters, and they are also a potentially influential voting group. New voters may have different views from old voters, they have the opportunity to shape the direction of the national political pattern by participating in the electoral process and expressing their preferences through voting. It is undeniable that the influence of new voters on the election results will depend on many factors. However, we cannot deny their role as an important and potentially influential voting group (Abdullah, 2021).

The new voters in Malaysia know little about their importance in the national elections and the impact of their votes on the political situation. This is the problem of this study. Zhu (2021) discussed the impact of the youth voting rate on the presidential election in the United States. Based on historical facts and simulation, he concluded that when young people aged 18 to 29 participated in the election as the total voting population, they were undeniably a huge force influencing the results of the presidential election. The party they support is more likely to win because they have enough votes to play a decisive role in the close election. What’s more, Pandian (2014) highlighted that the Asia Foundation National Youth Survey demonstrated that Malaysian youth’s political views are dynamic and vary over time. Hence, acknowledging young people’s political views is indeed crucial for the nation’s political growth as well as general elections.

In previous studies, there was a lack of research on the importance of new voters aged 18-21 in Malaysia to their role in national elections and the impact of their votes on the political situation. Many young people may not fully understand the consequences of their election choices and the long-term impact they may have on the direction and policies of the country. Thus, it is necessary to raise the awareness of new Malaysian voters about the importance of their role in the national elections and the possible impact of their votes on the national political situation.

The objective of this study is to explore Selangor’s new voters’ views on their role in GE15 and the influence of their votes on the political situation. This study updated the data of GE15, specifically explored the special group of new voters, and studied the role of new voters in Malaysia’s general election and political situation for the first time, which is a gap in this field. This study can fill the gap and provide new insights into the role of new voters in Selangor in GE15. The role of new voters in Malaysia GE15 was studied young people aged 18 to 21 are eligible to vote in this election for the first time, it is vital to learn their perspectives through this research. Additionally, as more young people join politics and become an unstoppable force, people should be more conscious of the importance of youth in national development. More significantly, because existing research on new voters in GE15 is inadequate, this study will serve as a useful resource for future research on new voters in GE15.

2. Literature Review

Young people in the computer age, especially new voters, are characterized by more use of social media as a source of information. Social media will contain some political content as a tool for social connection (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020). Young people may express
their political thoughts online and keep up with the newest political news on social media (Hassan et al., 2021). Hassan et al. (2017) view relied on the research support of other scholars. Users of social media with powerful political beliefs and convictions can take part in various online political activities. It can increase people's awareness of external political efficacy as well as their internal political efficacy. People can assess the role of the political system and the government in achieving their political goals in this way (Pei, et al., 2017). Briefly, we can learn from research on social media use and political efficacy that using social media can help young people be more effective in politics.

Increased political engagement, such as voter turnout, involvement in political movements, electoral participation, and wider citizen and community participation, are all connected to internal political efficacy. Additionally, it has been discovered that better internal political efficacy is associated with political engagement, including involvement in election campaigns, voting, and the intake of political information. As a result, it is possible to conceptualize the link between political involvement and political efficacy as a two-way and cyclical process. Political efficacy is increased through engagement in politics, and vice versa (Khoo, et al., 2021). In the meanwhile, this viewpoint is also shared by Kunz et al. (2013) which thought there is a reciprocal link between political engagement and internal political efficacy (Kunz, et al., 2013).

According to the interpretation of political efficacy, we can understand that the level of governance effectiveness of young people is constantly changing with the accumulation of political knowledge and participation in political activities, so it is challenging to measure the level of governance effectiveness of new voters in Malaysia, but we can try to study their political efficiency level over some time. Khoo et al. (2021) determined that compared with most Malays, the political efficacy of Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indian minorities was significantly improved. After Bersih 5 and GE14, these three categories indicated increased levels of political efficacy (Khoo et al., 2021). They used an online survey to conduct longitudinal research on Malaysians before and after the two events, to analyze their political attitudes. Their research methods can accurately obtain the research results. This evidence was used to prove the political efficacy level of Malaysians after the Bersih 5 and GE14, but it did not prove the political efficacy level of new voters in GE15. In short, political efficacy will be affected by the use of social media, and will also interact with political participation. The ideas and behaviors of new voters are closely related to political efficacy, so it is necessary to understand the impact of political efficacy on them in Malaysia GE15.

2.1. Reasons for Young Voters to Vote

As young people are the future masters of the country, researching their ideas is a key point. Therefore, several scholars have investigated the reasons why young people vote in general elections. Kadriu and Marmilova (2022), analyzed the motivations for voting among young people in Kosovo and Russia in their study. They discovered that young people in Kosovo and Russia voted for the same things. Young people participated in voting because they thought it fascinating, were concerned about the future of their nation, wished to convey their political views, and desired to ensure that their vote was considered. Kadriu and Marmilova (2022), used the qualitative research method to conduct in-depth interviews with UBT College students and compared the results with similar research results in Russia (Kadriu & Marmilova, 2022).
At the same moment, other professors have also been examining this topic. For the sake of maintaining their nation's democracy, Javaid and Elahi (2014) argued that casting a ballot is a civic duty that every member of a nation must carry out. Voting is an effective and widely used democratic method that represents the public's endorsement or rejection of a national agenda, candidate, or party (Javaid & Elahi, 2014). We can notice that these professors’ perspectives and Kadriu and Marmilova's (2022) study findings have a lot in common. They all are convinced that young people may exercise their civic duty to vote, voice their thoughts, and have an impact on national politics. Although they lack research on new voters in Malaysia, it is reasonable to apply this conclusion to new voters in Malaysia.

Ahead of GE15 in Malaysia, the "Sheraton Coup" sparked political unrest there, and the Covid-19 epidemic put Malaysia under economic hardship. The well-being of the population was directly impacted by these variables. Due to these factors, new voters in Malaysia are more concerned with concerns relating to the economy and the welfare of the populace. They also desire political and racial stability as well as an uncorrupted nation (Nawab, 2014). The new voters' motivations are reflected in their willingness to use their ballots to address these problems so that Malaysia may advance under the direction of the next prime minister. Similar to the above, Abd Rahim et al. (2017) also came to an agreement that solving problems is what drives young Malaysian voters to cast ballots. They discovered that young Malaysian voters frequently assess how well political parties handle challenges or follow through on election-related pledges (Abd Rahim, et al., 2017). They used qualitative research methods to conduct focus group discussions for the new voters in rural, semi-urban, and urban areas of GE14. The data showed that the top three preferences were national growth and development, ethnic stability, and problems, and thus reached a conclusion. Their research methods are very effective for this study. These studies reflect that young voters will understand the information about political parties through some channels before voting and make voting decisions after careful consideration. In summary, there are many causes for young voters to vote, however, the main reasons are to express their opinions, solve problems or difficulties, and promote the development of the country.

2.2. The Power of Young Voters' Voting

In previous studies, few scholars have studied the impact of a voter's voting. However, reviewing the research in this field can help people understand the impact of the voting of new voters in Malaysia. Gelman et al. (2012) explored the voter voting decisiveness in the 2008 US presidential election and concluded that an American vote has a 1 in 60 million probability of becoming the deciding factor in the presidential election on average. Varied voters have different opinions on which candidate is best, yet many voters may consider that their choices will benefit millions of others in addition to themselves (Gelman, et al, 2012). Based on the formula for determining the votes proposed by Gelman et al. (2012), we may infer that this is correlated with the total number of votes. The scientific findings on how the voting of American voters will affect the results of the general elections can be applied to Malaysia generally because the national elections are similar, although the total number of votes in the general elections in the United States and Malaysia are different. We are conscious that while an individual's vote may not have much of an influence on the general election, it will have a significant impact on the outcomes, national policies, and people's lives if it is successful.
In a research by Rekker (2022) on how young voters can help prevent electoral turbulence, the results reveal that young voters do adhere to election trends religiously and that the volatility of individual levels can have a significant impact on the volatility of election results (Rekker, 2022). He used the quantitative research method to select voters from 21 countries from 1948 to 2019 and compare the percentage of voting shares of political parties among young voters and older voters, to reach a conclusion. Through his research, we can realize that young voters' voting patterns typically serve as a "weather vane" for the outcomes of general elections. They can always succeed or influence the outcomes of the general election. As a consequence, we can have a feeling that young voters' votes may significantly affect the outcome of the elections. Even if Rekker (2022) did not study Malaysia and did not prove whether there were transnational differences in the research conclusions, we can consider that Rekker (2022) research conclusions can be used through the election results of GE14 in Malaysia, because young people in Malaysia do have an impact on the election results. In sum, the voting power of one new voter must be small, but the overall power of this group of people is large. The vote of the new voters will have an impact on the results of the general election, which will further affect national politics and even the future development of the country and the quality of life of the people of the country. It can be stated that the influence of the new voters is enormous.

3. Research Method

3.1. Participants and Sampling

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country, with about 67% of Malays, 25% of Malaysian Chinese, 7% of Malaysian Indians, and 1% of others. According to the main ethnic groups and their proportions in Malaysia, this study needs 3 Malays, 2 Malaysian Chinese, and 2 Malaysian Indians. They are new voters aged 18-21, who voted in GE15 in Selangor. This can ensure that the research is fair and will not be biased toward any race. The data for this study was collected from the research site in Selangor. The researcher uses convenience sampling. The most typical type of non-probabilistic sampling is convenient sampling, which gathers samples by gathering those that are around the Internet service or in a specific location (Edgar & Manz, 2017). For this study, convenience sampling method was utilized by randomly approaching young individuals on the streets of Selangor. The purpose of this approach was to assess their eligibility as participants based on specific criteria. These criteria included being between the ages of 18-21 and having actively participated in GE15 as new voters. During the recruitment process, potential participants were fully informed about the objectives and expected outcomes of the study. Additionally, their consent was sought before proceeding with any data collection or further involvement in the research. It is important to note that convenience sampling allows for a relatively quick and efficient way to gather data from a specific population subset without employing complex sampling techniques.

3.2. Instrumentation

This study uses the focus group discussion to collect the data, the following are the research instruments.

i. Focus Group Discussion guide. A detailed guide designed by the researcher for the focus group discussion, which includes the discussion process and a series of topics and questions to guide the focus group discussion. These themes and
questions are relevant to the research question to ensure that the data resulting from the discussion help to answer the research question.

ii. Data analysis software. Through focus group discussions, the researcher will obtain a huge amount of text data. The researcher chose NVIVO12 software for the thematic analysis of the data. The researcher firstly annotates the transcript using code memos to enhance the understanding. Then, the researcher names the code according to her own understanding, which will become the theme. After that, the researcher categorizes the code, logically forming a structured hierarchy. Finally, the transcript is encoded by dragging the transcript fragment into the corresponding theme as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

### Table 1: Selangor’s new voters view their role in GE15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Files</th>
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<tr>
<td>Support Democracy</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support the democratic system</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Politics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change the government</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>change the leader</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence Politics</td>
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<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change the future development</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>influence the election results</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>push the government to solve problems</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stabilize the political situation</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Promote Political Participation</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>exercise the voting right</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>express voice</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>play an exemplary role</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfill Responsibilities &amp; Observations</td>
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<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take responsibility for the vote</td>
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<tr>
<td>undertake the obligation</td>
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</table>

### Table 2: Selangor’s new voters view the influence of their votes on the political situation

<table>
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<td>develop the economy</td>
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<td>influence future decision-making direction</td>
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<tr>
<td>influence the election results</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>influence the government</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>stabilize politics</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Democracy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promote diversity of political views</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strengthen the government's attention to public opinion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Results and Discussion

By analyzing the data, this research has made some findings on their roles in GE15. Firstly, new voters believe that their role in the election can be mainly divided into five categories. The first category is support democracy, where new voters can support the democratic system. The second major category is change politics, where new voters can change the
leader, and change the government. The third category is influence politics, where new voters can change the future development, influence the election results, push the government to solve problems, and stabilize the political situation. The fourth category is promoting political participation, where new voters can express their voice and play an executive role. The fifth category is fulfilling responsibilities and objections, where new voters can exercise the voting right, take responsibility for the vote, and undertake the objection. The analysis results of new voters’ views on their roles in GE15 is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: New voters’ views on their roles in GE15

According to the participant, the involvement of new voters in the upcoming Malaysian general election holds significant consequence. New voters contribute towards enhancing democratic values by encouraging support for the existing democratic framework within Malaysia. Given that Malaysia’s political system operates on a foundation of democracy, it is imperative to not only establish but also sustain and solidify this governing principle.

Furthermore, the conception among new voters that they have the power to transform politics through leadership and government. The underlying rationale behind conducting elections is to offer citizens a chance at bringing about change. This is because some new voters are dissatisfied with their former leaders and government.

A third significant factor is the belief among newly registered voters that they can contribute to shaping political outcomes by influencing future development, promoting desirable election results, pressuring the government to address issues and promoting political stability. The upcoming GE15 promises to have a far-reaching impact on Malaysia's politics, inspiring newfound hope in these young voters who see themselves as critical stakeholders eager for positive change.

In addition, the new generation of voters believes in the importance of expressing their voices and setting an example to encourage political participation. They view their involvement as a way to contribute towards Malaysia’s progress through actively engaging in politics and inspiring others to do so as well.
Lastly, new voters hold the belief that casting their vote is a crucial responsibility and civic duty, where they are tasked with making rational choices and being accountable for both their individual voting decisions as well as the overall welfare of the nation. This conviction stems from their understanding that voting reflects an obligation to uphold democratic values through rational decision-making and committed participation in governance.

New voters believe that the influence of their votes on the political situation can be mainly divided into three categories. The first category is influence economy, where new voters can contribute positively towards promoting economic growth. This is because, especially through COVID-19, new voters realized the importance of the economy to the political situation, and they hoped for economic recovery and growth. During the COVID-19 pandemic, new voters realized the significance of economic issues in driving political landscape. Consequently, these individuals hoped for economic recovery and growth. The second category is influence politics, in this regard, they have a potential impact on future policy directions, election outcomes and government stability. The influence of voting on politics is a crucial aspect affecting the overall political situation due to its direct impact. The third category is promoting democracy, where new voters can promote diversity of political views, and strengthen the government’s attention to public opinion. The significance of democracy in Malaysian politics arises from its multicultural nature, as the nation comprises diverse communities. Additionally, young voters anticipate that their opinions are taken seriously. In summary, the research found that Selangor’s new voters expressed a desire to actively participate in elections to contribute to national development, and also emphasized the importance of their votes having an influence, especially in Malaysian politics. The analysis results of the views of new voters on the influence of their votes on the political situation are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: New voters on the influence of their votes on the political situation

Based on the data collected from the focus group discussions of Selangor’s new voters, it can be concluded that they believe they have played an important role in GE15 and their votes will have a great influence on the political situation in Malaysia. One implication from the data is that the Malaysian government should value the ideas of young people, not just new voters. Some young people in Malaysia are willing to speak up, participate in politics, and contribute to the development of the country. Therefore, the Malaysian government can reach out to young people in Malaysia through various channels, such as social media, to ensure that their voices are heard and increase their political participation. Another implication from the data is that the Malaysian government should focus on the thoughts and expectations of new voters in Malaysia, such as education, environment, welfare, etc., through the research results of this study. The Malaysian government can try to formulate relevant policies to address these issues, making new
voters in Malaysia believe that their ideas have been valued, thereby providing trust and support to the government.

5. Conclusion

In summary, this research paper The Reporting of the Roles of New Voters towards National Elections in Malaysia aimed to explore the role of new voters in GE15 by exploring Selangor’s new voters’ views on their role in GE15 and the influence of their votes on the political situation. Guided by the theory of political efficacy, this research took Selangor as the research scope, and used qualitative research methods to collect data through focus group discussions on seven new Selangor voters of different races. By analyzing the data, this study obtained findings that can effectively answer the research objectives. At the same time, this study acknowledged the limitations brought to the study by scope, sample size, and selection of informants, and also provided suggestions for future research directions. In order to realize the research objectives of this research, the researcher adopted the qualitative research method, and conducted semi-structured interviews through focus group discussions. This data collection method can help the researcher to discuss new voters’ views in depth with key informants. In the selection of key informants, this study selected 7 new Selangor voters aged 22 to 24 with a bachelor’s degree, whose gender and race are different to ensure data richness. With the consent of informants, this study obtained their views on their role in GE15 and the influence of their votes on the political situation.

Anyhow, several limitations hinder flat conclusion, the researcher provides the following suggestions for future research directions. The study currently only addresses qualitative research method to deeply understand the views of new voters through focus group discussions. Due to the small sample size, the generalization of the research results is limited. Therefore, in future research, researchers can consider using quantitative or mixed research methods to gather data from a wider range of new voters, to better determine the role of new voters in GE15. The scope of this study is Selangor, and the informants are all new voters from Selangor. The research results may vary depending on the region. Therefore, in future research, researchers may consider expanding the scope to other states in Malaysia to investigate whether there are regional differences in the views of new voters, to make the research results more accurate.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (JKEUPM). All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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