

The Impacts of Undi 18 on Political Participation, Awareness and Readiness

Audrey Low Siang Ling^{1*}, Arnold Puyok²

¹Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Univeristy Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Email: audreylow6019@gmail.com

²Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Univeristy Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Email: arnpyk@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The implementation of Undi18 on December 15, 2021, added an estimated 5.8 million new voters aged 18 and older to Malaysia's political landscape. While some see this as a timely move to introduce young people to civic responsibility and encourage active participation, others argue that 18-year-olds are too immature and have low awareness with only 29.03% of the youth participating in the political socialization domain. Consequently, it is crucial to assess the level of awareness and readiness among young people and their readiness to actively engage as voters. This study aimed to assess the level of youth awareness and readiness towards Undi18, examine the extent of their political participation, and analyse factors influencing their awareness and readiness. The study was conducted in Kuching, Sarikei, and Sri Aman, with 585 first-time voters aged 18 to 20 years surveyed via a questionnaire and 30 respondents in focus group discussions. The study found that parental involvement, political experience, social media exposure, educational exposure, and perception of and relationships with politicians were the five main factors influencing youth political participation and awareness and readiness towards Undi18. Geographical factors did not affect the level of awareness and readiness regarding Undi18. Despite the majority of respondents being aware of Undi18 and ready to participate as voters, a significant number were not prepared for higher forms of political participation.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR (*):

Audrey Low Siang Ling
(audreylow6019@gmail.com)

KEYWORDS:

Political socialization
Political participation
Political awareness
Political readiness
Youth
Undi 18

CITATION:

Audrey, L. S. L., & Arnold Puyok. (2024).
The Impacts of Undi 18 on Political
Participation, Awareness and Readiness.
*Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and
Humanities (MJSSH)*, 9(2), e002655.
<https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v9i2.2655>

Contribution/Originality: This study highlights that while youth exhibit heightened awareness and readiness to participate in voting, their involvement often remains limited to this stage. Therefore, a recommendation for educational reform is proposed, emphasizing the incorporation of political subjects and curriculum.

1. Introduction

In the Pakatan Harapan's (PH) "Book of Hope," it is stated that the coalition is committed to lowering the voting age from 21 to 18 years old. This proposal was initially included in the manifesto during the campaign for the 14th General Election (GE14). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the subsequent administration under Perikatan Nasional (PN) postponed the implementation of Undi18 before the 15th General Election (GE15), then opted an automatic voter registration system on December 31, 2021 (Zolkiply, 2021). Anand (2021) estimated that approximately 1.2 million voters between the ages of 18 and 20 would be affected by this policy. According to Lee and Serena (2021), lowering the voting age to 18 years old offers various advantages. Firstly, it has the potential to boost political participation among the youth. The government believes that reducing the voting age would motivate young individuals to engage in addressing crucial national issues and problems. Consequently, participation in political discourse may influence political beliefs, values, and attitudes. Secondly, the reduction in the voting age could prompt young people to voice their opinions. Exercising their voting rights enables youth to foster a sense of autonomy and responsibility. The government contends that voting will contribute to enhancing the patriotism of young individuals over time. Additionally, lowering the voting age promotes substantial voter participation, serving as a strategy aimed at increasing involvement among voters.

Various Members of Parliament (MPs) have responded differently to this policy, with some expressing support. Consequently, the number of eligible voters has surged to 22.5 million, significantly impacting political parties. However, opinions vary regarding the political maturity of 18-year-olds. According to Abdullah's (2020) report in 2020, 62.7% of young people decline political engagement, perceiving it as a complex process. This situation underscores the central concern of the study: assessing the awareness and readiness of Sarawak's youth across different demographic groups regarding the implementation of Undi 18 and their political participation. The study focused on the 18- to 20-year-old age group, as they are the demographic most affected by the policy. Youth, as defined by the Malaysian Inter-Parliamentary Union, includes individuals aged 15 to 30 (Hasnan, 2019). Throughout the research, several factors influencing youth awareness and readiness in the three districts were identified. Parental involvement, political experience, exposure to social media and education, as well as perceptions of and relationships with politicians emerged as key determinants affecting youth political participation. The focus group discussions revealed that while respondents were knowledgeable about Undi 18 and willing to participate as voters, a significant portion were not inclined to engage in more advanced forms of political involvement, such as running for office or collaborating with political figures to advocate for specific causes.

2. Literature Review

Wike and Castillo (2018) initiated a cross-national survey, investigating civic involvement in 14 countries with a young voting age. Their findings underscored the heightened awareness among young people about democratic rights and their potential to effect change through voting. The primary motivators for youth political participation included concerns about healthcare, poverty, and education. Notably, in countries like Australia, where youth have been aware of their democratic rights since 1971, there remains an enduring interest in politics despite a general trend of disengagement from political parties.

Denaley (2021) and Chowdhury (2022) provide insights into the concerns driving youth political participation in the United States, with a majority expressing a belief that their rights are under attack. This heightened awareness translates into a greater inclination to vote for change, as evidenced by voting patterns related to key policy issues. Inspired by countries with a young voting age, Malaysia reduced its voting age to 18, but research findings suggest inconsistencies in youth political awareness, indicating a potential lack of interest in politics.

Youth political readiness, measured through activities like voting, protesting, and online participation, varies globally. Homana's (2018) research in Australia and the United States emphasizes the role of student councils and volunteer organizations in fostering political engagement among young people. Meanwhile, Gnanasagaran (2018) finds Indonesian youth to be disengaged, contrasting with Biney and Amoateng's (2019) findings of high political awareness among Ghanaian youth.

Canada stands out with a high level of political participation among its youth (Paula et al., 2022), while Malaysian youth, despite gaining the right to vote, exhibit lower interest in political activities beyond voting (Ahmad & Zain, 2021; Farudin, 2021). A notable gap in research on Malaysian youth highlights the need for comprehensive studies that explore political awareness, readiness, socialization, and participation simultaneously.

Political socialization agents, including schools, family, friends, and political parties, play a crucial role in enhancing youth awareness and readiness for political engagement. Booy and Ghazarian's (2020) research emphasizes the role of education in fostering political knowledge and engagement among Australian youth. However, concerns arise regarding the readiness and awareness of Malaysian youth regarding Undi 18, given the absence of amendments to the education curriculum.

Social media, parents, and politicians also shape political identities and awareness among youth (Alcudia et al., 2020; Intyaswati et al., 2021), with Tamuli and Mallick's (2022) research highlighting the role of parents, peers, and schools in developing patriotism and good citizenship among youth. However, studies in Malaysia consistently indicate limited impact of political socialization agents on youth political participation, primarily contributing to increasing political literacy.

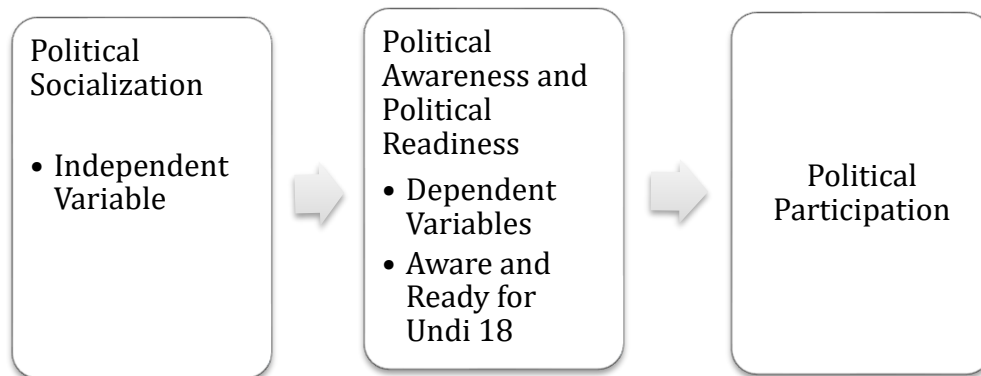
Zulkifli et al. (2022) and Chin (2022) found that youth in Malaysia prefer social media for political news, underscoring its role in increasing awareness and literacy. Despite calls for enhanced political literacy through education, dissatisfaction with politicians remains a significant factor influencing youth political participation in Malaysia (Abdullah, 2020). Recommendations include incorporating in-depth political subjects into secondary curriculums and fostering positive relationships between youth and political socialization agents.

In conclusion, the literature points to diverse global patterns in youth political awareness, readiness, and participation, emphasizing the multifaceted role of socialization agents and the impact of educational mechanisms. The case of Malaysia, following the implementation of Undi 18, presents challenges and opportunities for further research and policy considerations in fostering meaningful youth political engagement.

2.1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework, illustrated in [Figure 1](#), serves as the basis for studying cause and effect in the context of political engagement. In this framework, political socialization is examined as an independent variable influencing political awareness and readiness, both of which are considered dependent variables in the realm of political participation. [Stadelmann \(2020\)](#) highlights that political socialization is operationalized through interactions among individuals, solidifying their political identities and behaviors. Complementarily, [Solhaug \(2018\)](#) notes that political awareness is operationalized through the exchange of political information and the ability to recognize political matters. Furthermore, political readiness is operationalized as an individual's preparedness to engage in political activities, such as voting and campaigns ([Amberan & Jamil, 2022](#)). The operational definition of political participation, as outlined by [Deth \(2021\)](#), emphasises on the requirement for voluntary activity or action. This implies that true political participation involves individuals actively engaging in voluntary activities or taking deliberate actions within the political sphere. Passive activities, such as merely expressing interest in politics or watching news broadcasts, are deemed insufficient to meet the criteria set forth by this operational definition.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



The research examined different political participation levels, as identified in various literature. According to [Jeroense and Splerings \(2023\)](#), the first level is political paradox, where individuals engage in political activities. [Copeland \(2014\)](#) and [Dalton \(2008\)](#) (cited in [Jeroense & Splerings, 2023](#)) discuss two political profiles during political transformation. The first profile includes those who vote but delegate politics to representatives. The second profile includes those who do not vote but engage in political activities. [Engesser et. al. \(2017\)](#) (cited in [Jeroense and Splerings, 2022](#)) define populism as online political engagement. The final level is covert democracy, representing individuals with no interest in politics ([Webb, 2013](#)). The categories mentioned above are significant in determining respondents' level of political participation.

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials and Method

The research utilized a mixed methods approach for data collection, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research instruments. The quantitative data obtained through the Google Form questionnaire provided insights into Sarawak's youth political

awareness and readiness levels concerning the Undi 18 issue. On the other hand, the findings from the focus group discussions offered a nuanced political perspective of youth about Undi 18. The chosen methods, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, were selected strategically to analyze awareness and readiness levels among Sarawak's youth and to explore the factors influencing their political engagement. These align with the research objectives and questions outlined in the article, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the Undi 18 issue from multiple perspectives.

The research employed an online sample size calculation, resulting in a determined sample size of 384 respondents. This calculation was based on a margin of error of +/- 5%, a confidence level of 95%, and an estimated 666,000 new young voters in Sarawak, as reported by Yeo (2021). Stratified sampling was then implemented to draw 384 respondents from the total pool of 666,000 voters, divided by three, yielding 128 respondents evenly distributed across three research locations. Following focus group discussions with students from three distinct schools, a questionnaire was distributed to individuals sharing similar demographic backgrounds. This process included reaching out to acquaintances within the specified age range of 18 to 20 years old, residing in Kuching, Sarikei, and Sri Aman. The questionnaire's Cronbach Alpha values for the awareness and readiness sections were found to be 0.88 and 0.93, respectively, as determined from the pilot test. Table 1 provides a detailed distribution of the sample size across the three different locations.

Table 1: Districts, Types of Localities, Targeted Respondents and Total Number of Respondents

No	Districts	Localities	Targeted Respondents	Total Number of Respondents
1	Kuching	Urban	128	207
2	Sarikei	Sub-urban	128	194
3	Sri Aman	Semi-rural	128	184
		Total respondents	384	585

A focus group session was conducted with 10 participants from each location. Each session lasted between 50 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes, and the questions asked were designed to align with the research objectives and provide answers to the research questions. A consent letter from the faculty was obtained before approaching the students.

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was employed to extract quantitative data, which was subsequently subjected to a descriptive analysis to determine the mean. This mean served as an indicator of the awareness and readiness levels of the youth regarding the Undi 18 issue. The discussion findings, obtained through focus group discussions, were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis. This qualitative method was employed to identify and understand the various political participation factors that emerge from the discussions. The thematic analysis enabled the researcher to uncover patterns, themes, and key insights within the qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing youth political participation in the context of the Undi 18 issue.

3.2. Ethnic Background of Respondents According to Districts

Questionnaires were distributed accordingly to the respondents' polling districts. The report from Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) compiled a record of Sarawak's ethnic population. It is found the indigenous population is the most predominant in Kuching, Sarikei and Sri Aman, as can be observed in [Table 2](#).

Table 2: Ethnic Backgrounds According to Districts

No	Districts	Malay	Other Indigenous	Chinese	Indian and others
1	Kuching	224 265	152 216	218 716	4031
2	Sarikei	7339	19 200	16 904	103
3	Sri Aman	14055	38438	7251	132

Source: [Department of Statistic Malaysia \(2020\)](#)

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Respondents' Demographic Background

[Table 3](#) shows 585 respondents were recruited. There were 347 (59.3%) females and 238 (40.7%) males. Majority of them were 18 (43.1%) and 19 (33.5%) years old, due to the fact that the majority of respondents were Form 6 or Pre-U students. The data in [Table 3](#) also reveals that Chinese, Iban, and Malay are predominant races, and respondents came from different polling districts.

Table 3: Demographic Data

Category		Frequency(n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	347	59.3
	Male	238	40.7
Age	18	252	43.1
	19	196	33.5
	20	137	23.4
Ethnicity	Malay	99	16.9
	Chinese	187	32.0
	Indian	18	3.1
	Bidayuh	65	11.1
	Malay/Melanau	44	7.5
	Kenyah	19	3.2
	Kayan	29	5.0
	Kelabit	16	2.7
	Iban	107	18.3
	Jawa	1	0.2
Education	Matriculation	30	5.1
	STPM	419	71.6
	A' LEVEL	15	2.6
	O'LEVEL	7	1.2
	Others	114	19.5
Locality	Padungan (N09)	20	3.4
	Pending (N10)	30	5.1

Batu Lintang(N11)	132	22.6
Tupong (N06)	15	2.6
Belawai (N35)	11	1.9
Semop (N36)	6	1.0
Repok (N39)	127	21.7
Meradong (N40)	14	2.4
Meluan (N42)	7	1.2
Pakan (N41)	25	4.3
Balai Ringin (N30)	6	1.0
Bukit Begungan (N31)	15	2.6
Simanggang (N32)	160	27.4
Others	17	2.9

4.2. Awareness Towards the Lowering of the Voting Age to 18

The awareness towards Undi 18 was measured based on a five-point Likert scale as follows: 1 = not at all aware, 2 = slightly aware, 3 = somewhat aware, 4 = moderately aware, and 5 = extremely aware.

Table 4 indicates that all respondents exhibit a high level of awareness regarding their political rights and recognize the significance of political socialization agents in enhancing youth's political literacy. The highest mean score, at 4.11, corresponds to the statement "I am aware of my right as a citizen as stipulated in the Federal Constitution." On the other hand, the lowest mean score, at 3.92, corresponds to the statement "I'm aware that the amendment to lower the voting age to 18 was unanimously passed in the parliament on July 16, 2019." Furthermore, respondents demonstrate elevated awareness regarding the necessity for the national education syllabus to include more subjects on election and voting, as evidenced by a mean score of 4.05. Overall, the findings from Table 4 suggest a robust awareness among the respondents concerning their political rights and the role of political socialization agents in contributing to youth's political literacy.

Table 4: Awareness Towards the Lowering of Voting Age

Statements	Not At All Aware (1)	Slightly Aware (2)	Somewhat Aware (3)	Moderately Aware (4)	Extremely Aware (5)	Mean
I am aware about the lowering of voting age to 18	20 (3.7)	42 (7.2)	77 (13.2)	193 (33.0)	253 (43.2)	4.05
I am aware of the importance of youth vote to form a better governance	19 (3.2)	43 (7.4)	78 (13.3)	207 (35.4)	238 (40.7)	4.03
I am aware that one of the aims of the lowering of voting age is to empower the	15 (2.6)	31 (5.3)	79 (13.5)	220 (37.6)	240 (41.0)	4.09

youth to be future leaders						
I am aware that the amendment to lower the voting age to 18 was unanimously passed in parliament on 16 July 2019	20 (3.4)	38 (6.5)	114 (19.5)	211 (36.1)	202 (34.5)	3.92
I am aware that any 18 years old now can contest in federal and state elections	19 (3.2)	35 (6.0)	91 (15.6)	217 (37.1)	223 (38.1)	4.01
I am aware that Malaysia is not the only country that allows the 18 years old to vote	22 (3.8)	34 (5.8)	106 (18.1)	208 (35.6)	215 (36.8)	3.96
I am aware that lowering of voting age will broaden the country's voting population	10 (1.7)	36 (6.2)	93 (15.9)	224 (38.3)	222 (37.9)	4.05
I am aware that the lowering of voting age will pave the way of the young people to participate in the political process more actively	9 (1.5)	32 (5.5)	95 (16.2)	221 (37.8)	228 (39.0)	4.07
I am aware about my rights as a citizen as stipulated in the Federal Constitution	15 (2.6)	23 (3.9)	81 (13.8)	231 (39.5)	235 (40.2)	4.11
I am aware about the need for the national education syllabus to include more subjects on election and voting	8 (1.4)	34 (5.8)	93 (15.9)	233 (39.8)	217 (37.1)	4.05
I am aware of the great influence that the young people will have on the election if they come out to cast their vote	7 (1.2)	39 (6.7)	85 (14.5)	239 (40.9)	215 (36.8)	4.05

The focus group discussion conducted for this study yielded valuable insights. The majority of the respondents expressed agreement with the implementation of Undi 18, citing democracy rights as a significant factor. These findings align with several past literature sources, including [Azmi and Chinnasamy \(2019\)](#), [Edquist \(2019\)](#), [Badaru and Adu \(2021\)](#), and [Mahmud \(2022\)](#). These studies have collectively found that in countries with young voting ages, including Malaysia, there is a widespread awareness among the youth regarding their constitutional rights. The consistent agreement among respondents and the alignment with existing literature reinforce the understanding that young individuals in Malaysia are well-informed about their rights, particularly in the context of Undi 18.

The discussion further unveiled that all respondents advocated for the implementation of political subjects and curriculum to enhance political literacy and provide valuable experiences for youth. This perspective is consistent with several mentioned literature sources, including [Alcudia et al. \(2020\)](#), [Booy and Ghazarian \(2020\)](#), and [Suhaimi \(2022\)](#). Respondents also indicated a preference for entertainment over political news for leisure, leading them to potentially overlook certain political issues. This observation aligns with findings from [Alcudia et al. \(2020\)](#). Despite the inclination towards entertainment, social media remains the primary platform for accessing political news among respondents. They perceive it as a cost and time-effective means of staying informed, corroborating with insights from [Intyaswati et al. \(2021\)](#), [Tamuli and Mallick \(2020\)](#), and [Zulkifli et al. \(2022\)](#). The discussion findings, therefore, mirror existing literature on the importance of incorporating political education in curricula and the significant role of social media in shaping political awareness among the youth.

4.3. Readiness to Participate as Voter and to Participate in the Political Process

The readiness towards Undi 18 was measured based on a five-point Likert scale as follows: 1 = not at all ready, 2 = slightly ready, 3 = somewhat ready, 4 = moderately ready, and 5 = extremely ready.

[Table 5](#) shows that respondents are highly ready to vote but not willing to take their engagement to the next level, such as connecting with the politician and competing in the election. According to [Table 5](#), the highest mean score is 3.97, which corresponds to statement 4: "I am ready to carry out my duty as a citizen to vote in the election." The lowest mean score is 2.58, which corresponds to statement 15: "I am ready to stand as a candidate in the election." Despite respondents' willingness to participate in political programs, their responses on political engagement remain unsatisfactory, as evidenced by statement 10 ("I am willing to participate in any political activities") with a mean score of 3.56.

Table 5: Readiness towards the Lowering of Voting Age

Statements	Not At All Ready (1)	Slightly Ready (2)	Somewhat Ready (3)	Moderately Ready (4)	Extremely Ready (5)	Mean
I am ready to vote in the coming election.	17 (2.8)	37 (6.3)	84 (14.4)	334 (57.1)	113 (19.3)	3.84
I am ready to support any candidates to my liking thought the ballot box	10 (1.7)	37 (6.3)	79 (13.5)	339 (57.9)	120 (20.5)	3.89
I am ready to support any political party to my liking through the ballot box	16 (2.7)	27 (4.6)	86 (14.7)	344 (58.8)	112 (19.1)	3.87
I am ready to carry out my duty as a citizen to vote in the election	7 (1.2)	30 (5.1)	68 (11.6)	346 (59.1)	134 (22.9)	3.97
I am ready to campaign for any candidate to my liking in the election	16 (2.7)	35 (6.0)	102 (17.4)	343 (58.6)	89 (15.2)	3.78
I am ready to campaign for any political party to my liking in the election	17 (2.9)	48 (8.2)	95 (16.2)	345 (59.0)	80 (13.7)	3.72

I am prepared to openly support the candidates of my liking	13 (2.2)	29 (5.0)	82 (14.0)	357 (61.0)	104 (17.8)	3.87
I am prepared to openly support the political party of my liking	13 (2.2)	41 (7.0)	97 (16.6)	349 (59.7)	85 (14.5)	3.77
I am ready to participate as a party committee and party volunteer	31 (5.3)	50 (8.5)	116 (19.8)	311 (53.2)	77 (13.2)	3.60
I am ready to participate in any political activities organized by a party	28 (4.8)	64 (10.9)	119 (20.3)	299 (51.1)	75 (12.8)	3.56
I will influence my peers to vote	14 (2.4)	47 (8.0)	98 (16.8)	334 (57.1)	92 (15.7)	3.76
I am ready to spend more time reading political news	42 (7.2)	59 (10.1)	145 (24.8)	271 (46.3)	68 (11.6)	3.45
I am ready to participate in public advocacy and social movement activities	51 (8.7)	76 (13.0)	186 (31.8)	217 (37.1)	55 (9.4)	3.25
I will start build connections with politician and NGO leader	73 (12.5)	109 (18.6)	191 (32.6)	161 (27.5)	51 (8.7)	3.01
I am ready to stand as a candidate in the election	196 (33.5)	94 (16.1)	110 (18.8)	132 (22.6)	53 (9.1)	2.58

During the discussion, 16 respondents expressed agreement to vote, eleven refused, and three remained neutral. The most commonly cited reasons for agreeing to vote were a sense of self-responsibility and a desire for a stable government. These findings bear similarity to several mentioned literature sources, including [Azmi and Chinnasamy \(2019\)](#), [Dzaki \(2022\)](#), and [Guzman and Medina \(2023\)](#). However, they differ from [Shahimi et al. \(2020\)](#), whose study found a high frequency of respondents expressing hesitation to vote (132), with 40 respondents outright refusing to vote. The contrast in findings emphasizes the nuanced nature of individual attitudes towards voting, showcasing the importance of considering various factors that contribute to the decision-making process. The reasons provided by respondents in this study align with broader themes identified in the literature but also highlight the variability in perspectives on political participation.

Respondents also expressed hesitation to connect with politicians and run in elections, citing concerns about politicians' perceived arrogance and disregard for the voices of the youth. They perceive the political arena to be complicated and toxic, aligning with similar responses found in the literature mentioned by [Biney and Amoateng \(2019\)](#) and [Farudin \(2021\)](#). Consequently, the political behavior of the respondents aligns with the first profile under political transformation, falling into the category of individuals who vote but delegate responsibilities to representatives. This categorization is in line with the classification proposed by [Copeland \(2014\)](#) and [Dalton \(2014\)](#). The hesitancy to engage directly in political activities reflects a broader sentiment among the youth regarding the challenges and complexities associated with active political involvement.

4.4. Factors Affecting Awareness and Readiness of Youth Towards the Lowering of Voting Age

The discussion findings reveal five factors associated with youth's awareness and readiness level towards the Undi 18 issue. The primary factor identified is the role of parents, as they represent the first source of values for children to learn, even if they may not directly influence youth's political identity (Rahman & Yesmin, 2020). Respondents from political households were observed to be more capable of providing constructive views on political issues, aligning with several cited literatures, including Azmi and Chinnasamy (2019) and Stadelmann (2020). The acknowledgment of parental influence underscores the importance of family dynamics in shaping youths' perspectives on political matters and their readiness for civic engagement, particularly in the context of Undi 18.

The second factor identified is an individual's level of political experience, encompassing activities such as voting and other politically-related engagements that contribute to the improvement of youth's political literacy (Galston, 2021). Edda (one of the participants of the focus group discussion), for example, participated in the Literasi Advokasi program, which provided her with a better understanding of how exercise her democratic rights. This underscores the importance of creating an environment conducive to political discussions as a means to spread awareness and cultivate readiness, aligning with literature mentioned by Yaakub et al. (2023). The emphasis on political experience emphasizes the practical aspects of political engagement, illustrating how direct involvement can enhance political literacy and contribute to an individual's preparedness for civic participation.

The third factor identified is social media exposure, attributed to the high penetration of the Internet that enables youth from three districts to access political news online, given its powerful capability for spreading news within seconds (Genner & Suss, 2017). Respondents mentioned that they spend a significant amount of time online, and as a result, come across political news in their newsfeeds. This observation corresponds with several mentioned literature sources, including Intyaswati et al. (2021), Turkmenoglu (2023), and Zulkifli et al. (2022). The prevalence of social media as a platform for political information dissemination underscores its impact on shaping youth awareness and readiness, reflecting the evolving dynamics of information consumption in the digital age.

The fourth factor identified is educational exposure to political subjects and curriculum, as it plays a crucial role in guiding youth to navigate their lives and develop critical thinking skills (Abulencia, 2021). Respondents emphasized that subjects such as general knowledge, history, and civic education are insufficient to provide a solid foundation in politics. Consequently, they advocate for the implementation of political subjects and curriculum to ensure equal exposure for all youth, regardless of their background. This perspective aligns with several literatures, including Alcudia et al. (2020), Booy and Ghazarian (2020), and Chin (2022). The call for a comprehensive political education underscores the importance of formal educational structures in fostering political awareness and readiness among the youth.

The fifth factor identified is the relationship with politicians, which serves as a major barrier for respondents to engage further in politics. Respondents expressed concerns about the perceived arrogance of politicians and viewed their democratic rights as meaningless in the current political climate. This sentiment aligns with the findings of

the [Abdullah \(2020\)](#) study, which reported that 62.7% of youth are dissatisfied with the arrogance of politicians. The dissatisfaction with politicians' behavior emerges as a significant factor influencing the reluctance of youth to actively participate in political activities, highlighting the importance of fostering positive relationships between politicians and the youth to encourage greater civic engagement.

In conclusion, the factors identified in the study suggest that geographical location does not exert a significant influence on respondents' awareness and readiness. The advanced technology, particularly the widespread availability of the Internet, enables respondents from different geographical locations to access global politics within seconds. This technological interconnectedness appears to mitigate the impact of physical location, allowing youth across diverse regions to stay informed and engaged with political issues. The findings underscore the transformative role of technology in shaping the political landscape, breaking down geographical barriers and fostering a more interconnected and globally aware youth population

5. Implications and Recommendations

The research explores the factors influencing youth's awareness and readiness in politics, particularly in the context of the Undi 18 issue. Parental involvement, political experiences, social media exposure, educational exposure, and the relationship with politicians were identified as significant factors. The research findings suggest that a more profound socialization process leads to higher political literacy, increased awareness, and enhanced readiness in politics. This aligns with existing literature, including [Halim et al. \(2020\)](#), [Anderson and Kuswanto \(2021\)](#), [Zetra et al. \(2022\)](#), and [Yaakub et al. \(2023\)](#). Notably, the study concludes that geographical location has no discernible effect on youth's awareness and readiness regarding Undi 18. Furthermore, the research fills a gap by providing key insights into respondents' political socialization and participation based on their geographical location in Sarawak. This addresses a previously unexplored aspect in the existing literature ([Moshidi et al., 2021](#); [Kelana et al., 2022](#); [Suhaimi, 2022](#)). The study contributes valuable insights to the understanding of youth political engagement, shedding light on the intricate dynamics influenced by various factors and socialization agents.

To enhance the future political participation of the youth, the government should undertake educational reforms by incorporating political subjects into the curriculum. Students ought to be permitted to engage in constructive criticism within the classroom, fostering a genuine comprehension of politics rather than focusing solely on theoretical learning geared toward examinations. A viable approach could involve the adoption of a political education program, such as James Weinberg's "The Politics in Schools." This initiative aims to support schools in augmenting youth political participation during elections by providing tailored lesson plans, political specialists, and extracurricular resources ([Weinberg, 2020](#)).

This study serves as a preliminary exploration into the awareness and preparedness of the youth in Sarawak for politics. Future research endeavors should contemplate enlarging the sample size to procure more comprehensive data on the Undi 18 issue, employing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Furthermore, it would be valuable to explore the effectiveness of political education and investigate the perspectives of politicians on youth politics. This would contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing biased attitudes towards youth involvement in politics

6. Conclusion

The study aims to evaluate the awareness and readiness of Sarawak's youth regarding the reduction of Malaysia's voting age to 18. While previous research in Sarawak has predominantly focused on factors influencing political readiness, there is a notable gap in understanding the overall political perspective of youth on the lowered voting age.

The research identifies five key factors significantly influencing youth awareness and readiness: parental involvement, political experience, exposure to social media, educational exposure, and the perception and relationship of youth with politicians. Parental involvement emerges as a pivotal factor, with parents serving as agents of political socialization, nurturing their children's political literacy through engaging them in political discourse. Political experience, encompassing activities like voting, campaign speeches, and elections, plays a crucial role in shaping youth's political awareness and readiness. However, the majority of respondents have limited political experience, mostly confined to high school or college-level activities, which may not adequately prepare them for real-world political engagement. The study also highlights the impact of social media on youth awareness, noting that while the majority of respondents frequently use social media, they tend to prioritize daily entertainment over political news due to the perceived stress and confusion associated with politics. Educational exposure through curriculums and extracurricular activities is identified as the fourth influential factor, with respondents emphasizing the importance of courses such as civics, history, and General Knowledge in shaping their political education. However, the study suggests that current curricula may fall short in adequately preparing students for political careers. The perception and relationship of youth with politicians constitute the fifth influencing factor, revealing that negative stereotypes and perceived immaturity of youth hinder their participation in politics.

The study challenges previous assumptions by demonstrating that geographical locations in Sarawak do not impact youth awareness, readiness, or political engagement. It underscores the significance of parents and institutions as crucial political socialization agents. In conclusion, the research emphasizes the need for future studies with a larger sample size to provide policymakers with comprehensive insights into the political perspectives of youth in Sarawak. This data could prove instrumental in informing decision-making processes related to youth participation and political awareness.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The study adhered to ethical standards outlined by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). All procedures involving human participants followed the institutional research committee's ethical guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants following the Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) (HREC) protocols.

Acknowledgment

We would like to express our gratitude to all respondents from different schools and universities across three districts who voluntarily participated in this study.

Funding

This study received no funding.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- Abdullah, M. (2020, December 12). Ahli politik punca belia di Malaysia kecewa dengan demokrasi - Tinjauan. *Astro Awani*. <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/ahli-politik-punca-belia-di-malaysia-kecewa-dengan-demokrasi-tinjauan-272819>
- Ahmad, Z., & Zain, Z. M. (2021). Political involvement among youth in Malaysia: Lessons Learnt. *International Journal of Media and Communication Research (IJMCR)*, 2(1), 11–22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.25299/ijmcr.v2i1.6122>
- Abulencia, C. (2021, October 13). Why is education important and how does it affect one's future? *World Vision Canada*. <https://www.worldvision.ca/stories/education/why-is-education-important>
- Alcudia, A.K., Charr, I., Lorejo, M. A., Malila, J. M., & Mumar, M. T. (2020). *Generation Z political awareness: Opinion and concerns* [Research project, University of Mindanao]. http://www.academia.edu/55309189/GENERATION_Z_POLITICAL_AWARENESS_OPINIONS_AND_CONCERNS
- Anderson, I., & Kuswanto. (2021). The influence of political awareness, political socialization, and mass media on political participation in Jambi province. *Jurnal Studi Sosial Dan Politik*, 5(2), 203–216. <https://doi.org/10.19109/jssp.v5i2.8742>
- Azmi, N. M., & Chinnasamy, S. (2019). Selangor young voters' awareness and motivation during GE14. *Journal of Media and Information Warfare*, 12(1), 1–31. <https://ir.uitm.edu.my/id/eprint/42585>
- Amberan, M. A. B. T., & Jamil, H. (2022). Voter age limit: Readiness as a voter among secondary school students in Kuala Kangsar District, Perak. *Social Science Journal*, 12(2), 1–14. <https://resmilitaris.net/menu-script/index.php/resmilitaris/article/view/134>
- Anand, R. (2021, March 25). Malaysia delays lowering voting age, will affect 1.2 million people if election held this year. *The Straits Times*. <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-postpones-implementing-lower-voting-age-affecting-12-million-people-for-next>
- Badaru, K. A., & Adu, E. O. (2021). The political awareness and participation of University Students in post-Apartheid South Africa. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, 6(3), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2021.22>
- Biney, E., & Amoateng, A. Y. (2019). Youth political participation: A qualitative study of undergraduate students at the University of Ghana. *Journal of Politics, Economics and Society*, 1(1), 9–25. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2075-6534/2019/s1n1a1>
- Booy, J. L., & Ghazarian, Z. (2020). Young people and politics in Australia: An introduction. *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, 3(3), 189–192. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-020-00025-1>

- Chin, C. (2022, August 21). Undi18: How Malaysian youths can become better voters in GE15. *The Star*. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/education/2022/08/21/don-poor-political-literacy-among-youths>
- Chowdhury, I. (2022, April 19). What will young Australians do with their vote? *The Conversation*. <https://www.anu.edu.au/news/all-news/what-will-young-australians-do-with-their-vote>
- Copeland, L. (2014). Conceptualizing political consumerism: How citizenship norms differentiate boycotting from boycotting. *Political Studies*, 62(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12067>
- Dalton, R. (2008). Citizenship norms and the expansion of political participation. *Political Studies*, 56(3), 76–98. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00718.x>
- Deth, J. W. V. (2014). A conceptual map of political participation. *Acta Politica*, 49(3), 349–367. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ap.2014.6>
- Denaley, N. (2021, December 1). *Young Americans share concerns about democracy, the Biden administration, the repercussions of the pandemic, and climate change in the latest IOP survey*. Harvard Kennedy School. <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/faculty-research/policy-topics/politics/harvard-youth-poll-finds-young-americans-gravely-worried>
- Department of Statistic Malaysia. (2020). *Principal statistics of population on census year, Sarawak*. Malaysian Government. Department of Statistic Malaysia. <https://newss.statistics.gov.my/newss-portalx/ep/epFreeDownloadContentSearch.seam?cid=2394>
- Dzaki, M. Z. (2022). Sifat dan tingkah laku politik pengundi Undi-18 di Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Swasta (IPTS) di Pulau Pinang. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 7(11), e001941–e001941. <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v7i11.1941>
- Edquist, G. J. (2019, April 5). Young people care deeply about politics even if they can't get excited about elections - *ABC Everyday*. <https://www.abc.net.au/everyday/do-young-people-care-about-politics/10905604>
- Engesser, S., Ernst, N., Esser, F., & Buchel, F. (2017). Populism and social media: How politicians spread a fragmented ideology. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(8), 1–18. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1207697>
- Farudin, F. (2021, March 19). Undi 18: Sedia atau tidak Generasi Z? *MalaysiaNow*. <https://www.malaysianow.com/my/news/2021/03/19/undi-18-sedia-atau-tidak>
- Galston, W. A. (2001). Political knowledge, political engagement, and civic education. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4(1), 217–234. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.4.1.217>
- Genner, S., & Suss, D. (2017). Socialization as media effect. *The International Encyclopaedia of Media Effects*, 4(4), 1890–1904. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781118783764.wbieme0138>
- Gnanasagaran, A. (2018, June 9). Will Indonesian youths vote for change? *The Asean Post*. <https://theaseanpost.com/article/will-indonesian-youths-vote-change>
- Guzman, P. D., & Medina, A. (2023, November 29). *Youth and the 2024 Election: Likely to vote and ready to drive action on key political issues*. CIRCLE. <https://circle.tufts.edu/2024-election-youth-poll>
- Halim, H., Mohamad, B. B., Dauda, S. A., & Azizan, F. L. (2020). Malaysian youth political participation: A conceptual framework and hypothesis development. *Talent Development and Excellence*, 12(2), 1072–1086.

- https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341323262_Malaysian_Youth_Political_Participation_A_Conceptual_Framework_and_Hypothesis_Development
- Hasnan, H. A. (2019, July 3). Belia kini berumur 15 hingga 30 tahun. *Astro Awani*. <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/belia-kini-berumur-15-hingga-30-tahun-211731>
- Homana, G. (2018). Youth political engagement in Australia and the United States: Student councils and volunteer organizations as communities of practice. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 17(1), 41–54. <https://doi.org/10.4119/UNIBI/jsse-v17-i1-1674>
- Intyaswati, D., Maryani, E., Sugiana, D., & Venus, A. (2021). Social media as an information source of political learning in online education. *SAGE Open*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/215824402111023181>
- Jeroense, T., & Spierings, N. (2022). Political participation profiles. *West European Politics*, 46(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.2017612>
- Kelana, D. W. N. A., Ariffin, N. N., & Kipli, N. A. (2022). Sarawak's political landscape: A conceptual analysis among youth. *International Journal of Social Science Research*, 4(3), 199–208. <https://myjms.mohe.gov.my/index.php/ijssr/article/view/19659>
- Lee, M., & Serena, J. (2021, November 12). Why Is Undi18 so important? Taylor's College. Retrieved September 3, 2023, from <https://college.taylors.edu.my/en/life-at-taylors/news-events/news/why-is-undi18-so-important.html>
- Mahmud, M. S. (2022). Awareness and attitudes towards the election campaign of Bangladesh: A field study on selected area. *Social Science Research Network*, 6(2), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4543551>
- Moshidi, M. H., Latif2, N. S. F. A., & Yi, C. S. (2021). Youth perception towards readiness of youth in Kuching, Malaysia: Are they ready to vote? *E-Proceeding 8th International Conference on Public Policy and Social Science (ICoPS) 2021* (pp.569-574). Google Scholar. <https://ir.uitm.edu.my/id/eprint/55224/>
- Paula, A., Khanam, F., & Sano, Y. (2022, July 19). Political participation, civic engagement and caregiving among youth in Canada. *Statistic Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/42-28-0001/2021001/article/00006-eng.htm>
- Rahman, Md. S., & Yesmin, Most. N. (2020). The role of family in shaping political affiliation in Bangladesh: A comprehensive observation. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal): Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(4), 3197–3214. <https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v3i4.1353>
- Shahimi, W. R. M. A., Chin, K. Y., Ashroffie, A. H., & Husin, H. M. (2020). Voting at 18: Are Malaysian young voters ready to vote? *International Journal of Advanced Research in Education and Society*, 2(2), 96-105. <https://myjms.mohe.gov.my/index.php/ijares/article/view/9658/4526>
- Suhaimi, N. (2022, August 16). Platform to resolve issues, empower youth. *New Sarawak Tribune*. <https://www.newsarawaktribune.com.my/platform-to-resolve-issues-empower-youth/>
- Stadelmann, M. A. (2020, July 23). *Political Science: What is political socialization?* Dummies. <https://www.dummies.com/article/academics-the-arts/political-science/general-political-science/political-science-what-is-political-socialization-272091/>
- Solhaug, T. (2018, August 22). *Political awareness, conceptualization and operationalization for research*. ECPR. <https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/PaperDetails/41662>

- Tamuli, M., & Mallick, S. (2022). The colossal word of political socialization and its impact on society. *International of Journal Current Research*, 14(12), 23033–23034. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366953265_THE_COLOSAL_WORLD_'POLITICAL_SOCIALIZATION'_AND_ITS_IMPACT_ON_SOCIETY
- Turkmenoglu, A. T. (2023). The role of media in the process of socialization: A study on University Students. *Journal of Humanities and Societies*, 13(1), 401–439. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369982047_The_Role_of_the_Media_in_the_Process_of_Political_Socialization_A_Study_on_University_Students
- Wike, R., & Castillo, A. (2018, October 17). *Many around the world are disengaged from politics*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/10/17/international-political-engagement/>
- Webb, P. (2013). Who is willing to participate? Dissatisfied democrats, stealth democrats and populists in the United Kingdom. *European Journal of Political Research*, 52(6), 747–772. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12021>
- Weinberg, J. (2020). *Politics in schools: "what exists" and "what works"?* Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust. <https://www.psa.ac.uk/resources/politics-schools-what-exists-and-what-works>
- Yaakub, M. T., Kamil, N. L. M., & Nordin, W. N. A. W. M. (2023). Youth and political participation: What factors influence them? *Jurnal Institutions and Economies*, 15(2), 87–114. <https://doi.org/10.22452/ijie.vol15no2.4>
- Yeo, B. (2021, November 5). Early lifting of Sarawak emergency disenfranchised young voters, says coalition. *Focus Malaysia*. <https://focusmalaysia.my/early-lifting-of-sarawak-emergency-disenfranchised-young-voters-says-coalition/>
- Zetra, A., Khalid, K. A. T., Yanuar, F., & Marisa, S. (2022). Political awareness, knowledge, and participation relationship using structural equation approach. *Jurnal Wacana Politik*, 7(1), 46–56. <https://doi.org/10.24198/jwp.v7i1.36325>
- Zulkifli, N. B., Omar, S. K., Johari, N. F., & Hassan, M. S. (2022). Pengaruh media baru dan penglibatan politik belia. *Advances in Humanities and Contemporary Studies*, 2(2), 63–77. <https://doi.org/10.30880/ahcs.2021.02.02.007>
- Zolkiply, Z. I. (2021, March 26). PAS setuju SPR tangguh pelaksanaan Undi 18. *Berita Harian*. <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/politik/2021/03/800510/pas-setuju-spr-tangguh-pelaksanaan-undi-18>