

# Influence of Political Issues, Media and Personality Traits on Voting Trend

Ismail Sualman<sup>1</sup>, Siti Zabedah Shariff<sup>2</sup>, Shira Haniza Yaakop<sup>3+</sup>, and Azli Mahmood<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> University Technology MARA

**Abstract.** The aim for this study is to look into the role of media communication in information seeking and dissemination regarding issues during election in determining voting pattern. The objective of this study is to identify which media are used frequently to get information about the issues related with politic among the voters. The characteristic of a leader that is chosen by the voters is essential as well, in determining the choosing pattern. This research applies the qualitative method in obtaining information or data to meet the objectives. The respondents for this particular study consist of 198 respondents. The issues that arise play important roles, especially when the election is around the corner as it affects the factors of winning and losing of the ruling party. Some of the issues that the ruling party needs to pay attention to is social problem, illegal immigrants, corruption and economic and businesses because these issues play vital roles in the context of federal government. There were quite a number of respondents who are not satisfied with the way the ruling party manages these issues. Also, by acknowledging these issues, improving the standard living of the nation is within the realm of possibility.

**Keywords:** Media, Political Issues, Personality, Elections.

## 1. Problem Statement

Mass media is to be said as an influential tool in deciding votes that are casted by the voters during an election, but overall factors in choosing a candidate does not fall on mass media's influence entirely. A factor such as leadership or candidate's personality, and also the issue that has been brought up in the campaign determines the outcome of an election. The deciding factors are voters and not the frequency of media campaign that has political issues embedded in them.

Lees-Marshment (2001) has developed a theoretical framework that is known as "Comprehensive political marketing" (CPM) which has five main aspects which firstly is not only limited to political communication but also is related to personal traits, media campaigns and election strategies. Secondly, it applies the overall concept and campaign and marketing practise in an organisational conduct. This means marketing is not only applied in terms of campaign but how the candidate plans, and also the political party design on winnable candidates. Based on the analysis that has been made it covers the duration from the start till the end of the election. It also covers the leadership aspects besides Parliamentary candidates, membership, staff, symbol, constitution, activities and party's program, policies and others.

The third CPM not only applies technique, but also marketing, covering product orientation, sales and marketing and also marketing research, product design and promotion. This means how the 4P's that is product, promotion, price and place in marketing is applied. The fourth CPM integrates political science literature into the analysis which includes marketing integration and adaptation combined with the traditional research. The existence of electronic media and other forms of media such as the Internet has been a medium by certain individuals to transmit ideology, stance and information so that the public can adhere to it. This study is to identify whether the usage of Comprehensive Political Marketing (CPM) is applied or vice versa. Besides that it is to examine the usage of media that has been applied in determining candidacy.

## 2. Research Objective

- 1) To study the characteristic of a leader that is chosen by the voters.
- 2) To examine the factors of political issue in the Election.

---

<sup>+</sup> Corresponding author. Tel.: +006 019 2054481.  
E-mail address: shira\_yaakop@yahoo.com.

- 3) To identify which media are use frequently to get information about the issues related with politic among the voters.
- 4) To see what are the factors that contribute towards the choosing pattern in the election.

### **3. Literature Review**

According to Shamsul et al. (2008) information is a need and insistence because it is a bridge of live to innovate and used to assess a value to develop ongoing intellectual creatively. Nursuria, Sharon (2008) mentioned that interactive forums as well as individual blogs are used to disperse information and message to the masses. In this cyber world individuals as well as political parties relished in the freedom in expressing their concern and opinion to the public; regular announcements regarding party's activities are made on the party website. Mohammad Nor & Shawal (2008), added that the credibility of a political party can be define as the ability to influence voter in order to get their support to the party concerned. Political party plays important roles to attract voters to join the political process and vote in the election. Nevertheless the effectiveness of the political party in playing such role also depends on the credibility of the party. However, to a voter, he or she will be more influenced to a party that have the credibility in his or her viewpoint.

On media, the alternative media is the type of media that is controlled by the society through the process of check and balance against the mainstream media that is controlled by the ruling party and corporate enforcer. The main factor that entices the usage of alternative media is due to the control and restriction imposed by the mainstream media. (Nor Azween & Nidzam, 2008). Compared to traditional media, alternative media such as websites, emails and blogs has created an acceptance to information which is broader, unbound and democratic. Socio-political blogs has started to become a popular medium accessed during cyber confrontation during the 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysia General Election 2008. Campaigning through the cyber world, political blogs, SMS, emails and video conferencing has become a new method that heats up the campaign environment during the 13 days before the commencement of the election by candidates. The usage of the cyber space through alternative media such as blogs, websites, emails and SMS enables the society to voice out simultaneously enhance the society's participation in democracy. The role of alternative media that has been applied in a broader sense can be seen clearly in the previous 12<sup>th</sup> General Election 2008, and henceforth marks the evolution of digital democracy in Malaysia (Nursuria Mahrif & Sharon 2008).

According to Mohammad Shatar (2008) during election season, the element or issue that the voters will consider is the characteristics of the leaders. Their capability is under scrutinized and whether these potential leaders display commitment and sincerity as a mediator to the people and government. These candidates are also seen whether they have the ability to influence and convince them for votes. Beside those characteristics, the ability to be an example, to fulfil what the society wants and needs is crucial and if they fail to do so, votes will deteriorate. It is important to have a trait of a holistic leader.

### **4. Methodology**

In this research the method that was use in is the questionnaire survey which is a quantitative approach. The research design used was a survey conducted on 180 respondents either residing or working in one of the State Government Assembly in Johor Bahru, the capital of Johore, Malaysia. In this method, the questions forwarded to the respondents in the area are in a standardized format in order to make them easy to answer each question asked. In this research, stratified sampling has been utilized, which is better compared to random sampling because it reduces sampling error. The common characteristic in this research sampling is that they are adults and a verified voter that has been registered with the Election Commission. The respondents are from different background and are not chosen based on gender to avoid bias. Survey research consists of two basic types of questions, which is open ended and close-ended question. In this research, both close-ended and open-ended questions are utilized. For the close ended questions respondents were asked to select an answer from a list provided by the researcher. One of the benefits of using close-ended questions is that it provides greater uniformity of respond and the answer is easily quantifiable for computer analysis. All data were analyzed using a proper software tool. For more detailed statistical analyses, researcher use program SPSS 16 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) from window. Quantitative analysis of the data from all questionnaires was performed and for further quantitative analysis to view the voting patterns.

### **5. Finding**

## 5.1. Criteria of the Leaders

Based on Table 1, the respondents had chosen a few criteria of the leaders that they would like to have. The main criteria is that such leaders should be free from bribery (83.3%), able to fulfil promises made (82.3%) and covers designated area (81.3%). Leaders that are going to uphold the community's rights are the ones that need to be free from any form of bribery. They see it as a lack of character if any of them are involved in bribery such as money politics and mould their way into society by using money.

Table 1: Criteria of the leaders that they would like to have

Criteria of Leaders	Mean
Able to Fulfil Promise	1.17
Discipline and not Selfish	1.18
Open Minded and able to Foresee	1.19
Dedication	1.21
Intelligent	1.22
Educated	1.22
High Leadership Skills	1.22
Sincere	1.23
Kind Hearted	1.23
Firm	1.23
Fair to all Races	1.24
Free from Bribery	1.25
Responsible	1.25
People Oriented	1.28
Knowledge in Religion	1.28
Trustful and Honest	1.29
Give and Take/Considerate	1.30
Visionary	1.31
Covers Designated Area	1.32
Friendly	1.33
International Outlook	1.46

Those leaders that have strict principles and good ethics would win the hearts of the *rakyat* (people). Being liable towards the promises that have been made to the *rakyat* is also crucial as it will gain the *rakyat's* continuous support for the coming years. These leaders need to promise what they can achieve and not just propagate empty promises. Delivering according to the capability of the leaders, would undoubtedly generate votes. 81.3% of the respondents feel that a leader should cover designated area thoroughly and all the *rakyat's* concerns are heard. The leaders should not only listen during an upcoming election, but during off election season, their presence is equally important. The leaders need to understand the problems of the *rakyat*, in order to overcome them.

## 5.2. The Factors of Winning and Losing by the Ruling Coalition in the Election

The respondents were asked the issues that the nation needs to address and the results shows that Social Problems (40.9%) is the most important issue that needs to be addressed followed by Illegal Immigrants (23.7%), Corruption (22.2%) and Economy and Businesses (20.2%). Majority of the residents still think that social problems is at its pivotal where it is not a constructive environment for children to be raised in. Children might emulate what is displayed on the media, and perceive it as a norm, if not handled immediately. Social problems such as baby dumping and incest are common, and it should be made uncommon to the extent of non-existent. Support groups and enforcer should work hand-in-hand in tackling this issue as it does reflect on the votes as it hinders the progress of a developed country to move forward where social problems are rampant.

To respondents, illegal immigrants need to be apprehended in around the city area and suburbs. They also suggest enforcers to be alert and lookout for syndicates that bring in illegal immigrants near the Malaysian borders and those who entered legally using a visitor's visa or student's visa should be observed carefully. The enforcers should track down illegal immigrants vigorously and increase rewards for whistle blowers and strict penalty to those found harbouring illegal immigrants. Another finding is that the respondents suggest that the illegal immigrants should be sent back to their respective countries to avoid dissatisfaction from Malaysians. There are probably dishonourable politicians, corrupted civil servants and the use of bribes that still exist in Malaysia thus complaints regarding it falls onto deaf ears or there are too

many for The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) to react to such individual complaints. The channels for informing MACC should be increased and protection is given to whistle blowers. 20.2% of the respondents feel that Economy and Business is not booming for Malaysia due to those problems. Many would like to venture into local businesses that would profit the well being of the residence thus pumping revenues for state and Malaysia as a whole.

### **5.3. The Factors That Contribute Towards the Choosing Pattern in the Election**

To identify what are the factors that contribute towards the choosing pattern among the voters in the general election, the respondents were asked of their level of interest in politics and their involvement in politics to get a better picture. The respondents were later suggested to fill in the criteria that determine their votes. Peace and national security is the main factor that will determine the voting pattern amongst voters. This statistic is followed by the transparency and justice and obligation to religion.

Peace and national security is crucial in determining votes. The ruling coalition needs to maintain and uphold the peace amongst the multi racial, multi beliefs and difference in background of the people in Malaysia. The current political setting in Malaysia is in turmoil and it disrupts the peace of the Malaysians. Streets demonstrations are at large, and to some Malaysians this seems the only way that they will be heard. The ruling coalition needs to instil the value of being united under the *Jalur Gemilang*, the Malaysian National Flag. With that, national security will not be forsaken.

The transparency of dealings or method of execution is needed to gain the trust of Malaysians. Explanation of government projects are to made public and such transparency will garner votes. If the government reflects sincerity in their visibility in every project, they will not be scrutinized and undermined, but admired. It will abolish doubts and many would not only be satisfied but proud of how Malaysia is being managed. Justice is crucial to the people and flaws in the justice system should be rectified. Acts should be reviewed and amended to suit the changing times. Law enforcers should not abuse the power that they hold for personal gain. With law enforcers being close to the *rakyat* (people), many problems can be solved.

The ruling coalition also needs to embrace and guide a path to the *rakyat* according to the teachings of Islam. Guiding the *rakyat* with the ways of Islam would be rewarding in life and hereafter. Obligation to religion is a must and should not be taken lightly as it would garner the people's faith not only in God but also the administration.

### **5.4. Media Used to Get Information about The Issues Related with Politic**

Respondents utilize mainstream media such as television and radio to obtain information regarding politics. Both have 17.2% respondents for television and 9.1% respondents for radio and 7.1% for online television. The utilization of the mainstream media indicates that respondents do believe the mainstream and such source can be trusted when obtaining information regarding current political issues. Those respondents also believe that discussion helps. 14.1% respondents agree that discussion with Muslim Clerics does have a bigger impact. Same goes with discussion with teacher that has 7.1% respondents. Threat letter, SMS/MMS and Blogs are the least source that the public would resort to when obtaining information regarding current political issues. This show that respondents does not believe or trust such content derived from threat letters, SMS/MMS and blogs.

### **5.5. Internet Usage in Obtaining Information about Political Issues**

51.5% respondents used online version of the mainstream media which are the *Berita Harian*, followed by *Utusan* (43.4%). Respondents utilize search engines such as Google that mounts up to 31.8% and Yahoo, 28.3% to obtain information regarding current political issues. Blogs has 27.3% that obtain political issue information from them. Only a fraction goes to The Rocket as little 2.0% and Malaysia Today as little as 5.6% to their websites.

## **6. Conclusion and Discussion**

The media that are strongly trusted by the people in order to get information on political issues are the mainstream media. On the other hand, the development of information and technology (ICT) has given the voters alternatives when it comes to seeking information on political issues. The general public still prefers to use conventional media such as newspapers and television, rather than the new media that implies the usage of internet such as websites and blogs. Almost half of respondents are not influenced by the mainstream media while the other half believes that the information they read in the mainstream media is

factual and will influence their vote in the general election. The issues that arise play important roles, especially when the election is around the corner as it affects the factors of winning and losing of the ruling party. Some of the issues that the ruling party needs to pay attention to is social problem, illegal immigrants, corruption and economic and businesses because these issues play vital roles in the context of federal government. There were quite a number of respondents who are not satisfied with the way the ruling party manages these issues. Also, by acknowledging these issues, improving the standard living of the nation is within the realm of possibility.

Findings of this research reveal that the society is mainly concern on issues such as the increase of immigrants that are working in Malaysia illegally, social problems, public safety and poor infrastructure accomplishments in the area. Failure of the local enforcement agencies to overcome these issues will reflect negatively in the result of the general election. These issues may not seem 'important' to the ruling party but with the election date around the corner, overcoming these problems can restore and refresh the faith of the general public in the government. Local enforcements agencies need to solve these issues, in order to uphold the trust, support and respect of the society. This research has shown that the society wants a leader who is disciplined, intelligent, responsible, free from bribery and able to uphold the manifestos they made during the election campaign. The public needs a leader who is charismatic, who shows positive attitude and optimism in order to win the votes of the public. The people's voting pattern in the general election is still undefined but it is commonly influenced by the issues and how it is solved. Some of the issues are the public safety, racism, job opportunities and social issues.

The attitude of the leader also determines the result and pattern of the votes. The society have the right to pick a leader they deem fit to lead them, their economy and welfare of the society to a more positive outcome. The issues that arise are more or less the same in the nation level, state level and local level, which emphasize on social problems and illegal immigrants as the main theme to be solved. With the research that has been done, we are able to identify that the level of satisfaction is not up to par with the people's expectation on how the political party should tackle such issues. Matters should be handled thoroughly to gain the people's confidence in order to gain trust and votes in return. The mainstream media are still in people's hearts, but the ruling coalition needs to emphasize on the alternative media users that are increasing day by day. Catalyst of losing 2/3 of the parliamentary seats indicates that alternative media should not be ignored, where opposition has used to their advantage in gaining support. Not only the medium that is utilized but the criteria or the characteristics of a leader is important whether they impose a great influence that enables voters to vote for them. Being a leader that acts as an intermediary between the people and government, they have to execute their task with sincerity and honesty. They need to go and visit the people and make changes where necessary. They need to improve the standard of living of the people.

## 7. References

- [1] Ismail Sualman, Illias Md Salleh & Norsham Firdaus. Media and Election: A Case Study in the *Permatang Pauh By-Election*, Penang. *Prosiding Malaysian Politic Seminar. Political Landscape of Malaysia's Election*, UiTM Shah Alam: UPENA. 2008, pp. 123
- [2] Mohammad Nor Othman, Shawal Kaslam. Credibility of Political Parties: What are Factors to the declining of *Barisan Nasional* and the increase support of the Opposition Parties in the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election in Malaysia. *Prosiding Malaysian Politic Seminar. Political Landscape of Malaysia's Election*. UiTM Shah Alam: UPENA. 2008, pp. 203
- [3] Nursuria Mahrif, Sharon Pearl Henry Serub. Roles of Money, Media and Political Machinery Reconsidered: The Malaysian 12th General Election 2008. *Prosiding Malaysian Politic Seminar. Political Landscape of Malaysia's Election*. UiTM Shah Alam: UPENA. 2008, pp. 679
- [4] Nur Azween Zakaria, Nidzam Sulaiman. Alternative Media as an Agent in Enhancing Wider Views: A Case Study on the 12 Malaysian General Election. *Prosiding Malaysian Politic Seminar. Political Landscape of Malaysia Post Election*. Uitm Shah Alam :UPENA. 2008, pp. 249.
- [5] Mohammad Shatar Sabran. Strategies in Captivating Voters During Election. *Prosiding Malaysian Politic Seminar. Political Landscape of Malaysia's Election*. UiTM Shah Alam: UPENA 2008, pp 723.
- [6] Lees-Marshment (2001) Political marketing and British political parties <http://www.emeraldinsight.com>.