

## Malaysian Youth Political Participation

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### Abstract

The previous literature had show that low political participation of Malaysian youth, the effect of this situation will be discuss further in this article regarding youth development. This article use narrative literature review method to get the suitable article to be reviewed. Focus of this article are upon critical analysis of the literature published in books, electronic or paper-based journal articles, report and seminar paper. This article will help to developed the studies on the challenge and benefit of Malaysian youth participation in politics in several field. It can be seen today the negative narrative of adult towards youth have institutionalizes into programs and policy which make building the youth potential becomed harder. Youth political participation in Malaysia from literature show that they are inclined to get information from internet, involved with platform such as youth parliament and active as general election voters. There are four challenge that faced by effort for youth political participation in Malaysia which is the idea of youth participation is accomplished by placing one youth on a board or committee, the idea of youth participation means that adults surrender their roles as guides and educators, the idea of adults are ready for youth participation and the last one is the idea of adults are ready for youth participation. The answer for youth political participation is the development of physical space where youth can participate with political organization and enhance thier potential. The way forward is for all political and youth organization to start providing a physical space for thier youth member to organized and used it as thier creativity allow them. The issue of youth political participation in Malaysia today show that the adult are still given a room for youth participation, but the room for the participation are too small and limited.

**Keywords:** Youth Participation, Nation Building, Political Participation, Malaysia, Youth Development.

### Introduction

Research by Umami et al (2016) show that 57% repondent among Malaysian university student have low political knowledge which make them ignorance about the nation governance and administration system. That ignorance can be translate towards low political participation among youth in Malaysia, this fact can be prove with data from Malaysian Youth Index since 2015 until 2020 which show every year the level of youth political socialization are unsatisfactory (IYRES, 2020). In fact the research by Razali et al (2020) show that only 39%

youth in Malaysia involve with political party activities and 32% contribute ideas in political party. Political participation are not just exist in partisan political party but also in other organization, the nature of politic itself is about power which means involvement of youth to get power can also happens in youth organization (Modebadze, 2010).

Political participation of Malaysian youth are very low not just in political party, it is also low in youth organization. Registrar of Youth have reported that from 13.88 million youth in Malaysia, only 2.7 million are involved with youth organization (Sani & Saad, 2018). The previous literature had show that low political participation of Malaysian youth, the effect of this situation will be discuss further in this article regarding youth development. This article try to close the gap by discussing about low youth political participation upon their effect on youth development in Malaysia. This article will also enriched the literature regarding youth development field especcially issue about youth political participation in Malaysia. This fact have driven the development of this article to be narrative article, this article aims to review the political participation of Malaysia youth and their effect on youth development.

This article use narrative literature review method to get the suitable article to be reviewed. This method start with describing the state of the specific topic or theme that regards to political participation among youth in Malaysia from a theoretical and contextual point of view. There is no limitation or list that been used to retrieved the suitable article during database search. Focus of this article are upon critical analysis of the literature published in books, electronic or paper-based journal articles, report and seminar paper. This article will help to developed the studies on the challenge and benefit of Malaysian youth participation in politics in several field.

### **Concept of Youth Political Participation**

Youth participation is a right protected by the Convention on the Rights of the Child which been proclaimed by the United Nations in 1959, it has become the basis for the Convention of the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 (Checkoway, 2011). Article 12 states that youth have the right to participate in decision-making processes relevant to their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard, this includes participation of youth in any filed of society including politics. Article 15 states that youth have the right to create and join associations and to assemble peacefully, this associations includes political party and youth organization which make youth free to engage and express thier political activity. Youth participation have different understanding for different community which based on culture and age (Rivera & Erlich, 1998). Participation should start with individual, organizations and communities so that empowerment can exist (Schulz et al., 1995).

Participation can be understand as individual involvement in the institutions and decisions that affect them (Rajani, 2001), the concept of participation in youth development will includes efforts by youth to take initiative and organize around policy issues that concern them. It can't work only by one side but it need both side (youth and adult) to work together so that the way of participation will exist (Checkoway, 1998). Youth and adult allies are instrumental to participation, youth can't operate in isolation and adults play various roles in the youth participation process from reaching out to nurturing (Zeldin et al., 2005). This adult known as community allies serve as mentors to encourage youth to participate in community

(Checkoway et al., 2003). Youth participation can be expressed with their involvement for civil rights and reform agenda as this event prepares youth for their roles as citizens and engages them in the renewal of civil society (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2001).

Participation of youth regarding issues of power as a group are usually underrepresented in the political process (Checkoway, 2011), adult political organizations manage to build their own sense of power by perceived power with others using their ability to affect relationships in the community (Delgado & Staples, 2008). The superior power of adults in the political process has made youth political participation become a passive presence or token roles in adult agencies, this situation happens when adults use youth involvement to legitimize decisions that already have been made so that they can get public approval (Checkoway, 2011). Too often the issues expressed by youth are the ones given to them by adult authorities (parent or teacher) and it's not necessarily translated into youth participation, the real youth participation will arise when youth identify their own issues. This situation is known as adultism which flows from the assumption that adults are better than youth because of their age. Youth images today are portrayed to withdraw and disengage from democracy (Zukin et al., 2006). The problem arises when news media portray youth as victims of poverty and adults view them as troubled, it is sad when youth accept these conceptions and let it weaken them (Finn, 2001). Today the negative narrative of adults towards youth has been institutionalized into programs and policies which make building the youth potential become harder (Nixon, 1997).

### **Malaysian Context of Youth Political Participation**

We can see youth participation has been discussed in pre and post independence of Malaysia. There are older leaders who were involved much earlier in the independence movement such as Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM) which helped the younger leaders in developing new independence movements such as United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Parti Komunis Malaya (PKM), Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API) and Angkatan Wanita Sedar (AWAS) (Ahmad, 2008). The development of youth involvement in independence for Malaya was closely guided by elder leaders in PKMM, this organization is the first independence movement that was officially formed which gave their leaders a little more experience compared to other movements. The PKMM leaders helped to develop other movements for the same cause, there are also some of the PKMM leaders such as Tun Ghafar Baba who entered other organizations such as UMNO to develop new leaders. This is how youth participation has worked in pre-independence times in Malaysia. After that, we can see youth participation has been used in post-independence in Malaysia. It can be seen that youth played a major role as the voice of society within the 1960s and 1970s, several youth involvements have brought changes in policy making in the government such as the Hamid Tuah incident in 1958 and 1967. Youth in this incident urged the Selangor state government to amend the law regarding land opening for poor farmers, the government in this case worked together with youth to give justice to the poor farmers. The same thing happened in the development of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in 1970 (Abu Bakar, 1973). Even today youth and adults are working together in developing Malaysia through several platforms such as Kementerian Belia dan Sukan, Majlis Perundingan Belia Negara and Majlis Belia Malaysia. The problem arises from the support of youth by adults in Malaysia. There have been situations in Malaysia where youth participation in nation building seems like restricted and not fully supported by adults. It can be seen before the amendment of Akta Universiti dan Kolej Universiti (AUKU) in 2012, only youth who study outside Malaysia could get involved in Perhimpunan Agung UMNO

(PAU) and directly give a speech in that event (Rosdy, 2014). It also been reported by Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM, 2014) that the administration of Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Malaysia Sabah Labuan (UMS) and Universiti Institut Teknologi MARA Kota Kinabalu (UiTM K.K) since 1 January 2014 have taking action towards 24 student who get involved in peaceful demonstration even though the law allow it.

Malaysian youth today tend to trust information from the internet compare to other information mediums (Besar et al., 2012), the opportunity created by information technology especially through new media has increased the practice of participation among youth in voicing out thier opinion (Akmal & Salman, 2015). Malaysian youth fond to used online media to convey opinions by joining discussion groups that discuss current issues through social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Blogs (Abdul Wahab & Abdul Rahim, 2013). The capability of information technology platform to open up space for diversify information have encourages the use of new media among youth in Malaysia, compare to mainstream media which are seen to be biased and choose news that has commercial value (Balaraman & Ibrahim, 2013). The respond of Malaysian youth towards political participation on the real world seem to be guided by the influence of new media. The preferable of policy or leader for youth is highly influenced by new media, in fact youth behavior on real world and new media is highly similar regarding political participation (Akmal & Salman, 2015).

Other than information technology platform, the development of youth political participation also involve physical platform such as policy making discourse. The youth parliament is a youth development program that empowers youths to be spokespersons to the community in the aspects of personal development and youth leadership (Mohamad Sani & Saad, 2018). This program had been implemented in United Kingdom since 2000 and the idea have been adopted by Malaysian government since 2015 but it is decided to be implemented in accordance to the Malaysia norms, culture and laws. The development of Malaysia youth parliament is almost similar to the youth parliament in 33 countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Timor Leste, Philippines, Bangladesh and some European countries. This platform manage to connects the opinions and voices of youth with politicians and decision makers at highers level (United Nation, 2003), the election of members or representatives in Malaysian youth parliament is carried out democratically to represent the views of the youth in the areas represented. Using this platform, youth have a proper channel to discussed about socio-cultural, economic, legal and environmental issues through meaningful participation (UK Youth Parliament, 2016). Before Malaysia youth parliament been introduced, there are another platform been used to discussed about youth issue known as Majlis Perundingan Belia Malaysia (MPBN). However, the MPBN platform only involves the participation of youths who are associated with youth organization. That is why Malaysia youth parliament been introduced, this platform give chance for youth who are not interested to join youth organization to have proper platform for voicing out thier concern. Researched done by Sani and Saad (2018) show that implementation of the proposal from Malaysia youth parliament get feedback directly from the governement, all proposal will be carried by minister into cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister.

The number of Malaysian youth voters recorded was 7 360 570, almost equal to the adult voters which is 7 449 430 voters in the 13<sup>th</sup> General Election. The number of youth voters seem to increased significantly compare to 12<sup>th</sup> General Election which show only 4 360 000

youth voter (Joko et al., 2016). Most of youth participate in General Election been offered with material development, this had been proven not to be desired by youth in Malaysia. Youth tend to focus on issue of good governance such as justice, transparency, corruption, cronyism and nepotism when it come to manifesto of General Election. The youth participation fond to change from family and religious influences towards new media influence, any party who are not voicing out the issues of social injustice seem to be unpopular among Malaysian youth (Inter Research and Studies, 2013). The participation of Malaysian youth in General Election also driven by four indicator which is education, age, gender and religion (Joko et al., 2016). The youth with higher education have higher percentage to get involved with General Election, the youth who are categorize as late youth (25 to 30 years old) also have higher percentage to get involved with General Election. Male Malaysian youth have higher percentage to get involved with political activity in General Election (campaigning and joining political party), Malaysian youth will get excited to involved with General Election when issue of religion (which seem to be closely related to ethnic ties) been touch.

A research by Moten (2011) show that only 79% of Malaysian population involved with voting activity in General Election, it show that the involvement of youth in Malaysia quit quit high when it comes to voting but thier participation in other political activity show a different pattern (such as low participation in political party and youth organization). This situation had been proven by Mohamad Razali et al. (2020) when thier research show only voting show high involvement of Malaysian yout (65%) while other political activity (campaigning, become member of political party and having contact with political party) show low participation (27%-44%). Saad & Salman (2013) found out that Malaysian youth political participation are closely related to socio-economic, youth who are classified as labour class (B40) are not interested in politics because this field aren't directly effecting them in term of income. This is why data by Mohamad Razali et al. (2020) show that only 30% of Malaysian youth have high political participation while others (70%) have medium and low participation, the participation of Malaysian youth are closely related to two main issue which is interest and family. A research by Syam et al (2002) found that ethnic background have direct effect upon Malaysian youth political participation, Malay youth fond to actively participate in political participation compare to other ethnic. It is interesting when the data show that Membership of Malay youth in political parties is less favorable, eventhough they are likely to support government programs in strengthening the national development agenda. The mentality of youth from urban and rural areas are very different when it comes to inclination towards political parties where urban youth focus on political party who fought for humanitarian issues, while rural youth focus on political party who fought for development of infrastructure (Besar et al., 2012).

### **Youth Political Participation Challenge in Malaysia**

Youth political participation in Malaysia today often divided between defenders of more adult-controlled policies and youth desires for participation. O'Donoghue et al. (2003) had listed four myths surrounding youth participation that hinder effort to build a convincing youth merits, this myth had been found to be challenge for youth in Malaysia to fully participate in political activity. Zeldin & Christens (2012) had also discussed the myth in youth development and community change context, it is proven that the myth are quit true in certain situation.

The first myth that become challenge for youth political participation in Malaysia is the idea of youth participation is accomplished by placing one youth on a board or committee. A lot of political organization have begun to create space for youth representatives. Although this marks a potentially important first step in opening the door to youth voice and participation, it also may limit the involvement of youth by creating tokenism and exclusivity. Inserting one or a few youth into an adult organization runs the risk of involving youth as tokens or decorations which prevents the formation of any opportunity for meaningful participation (Hart, 1992), the same idea have been raised by Institute of Corporate Directors Malaysia (ICDM) chairman Tan Sri Zarinah Anwar when she citing PwC's Annual Corporate Directors' Survey 2018. The report said it is important to add younger corporate board members who are better skilled to contribute to a company's digital transformation and help boards oversee new opportunities and challenges to drive business growth (May & Ying, 2019). Exclusivity will occurs when only the most privileged or skilled youth are chosen to participate, it is important to remember how multiple and diverse youth backgrounds and experiences. Youth who may not come from privileged backgrounds or who may not yet have the skills to participate effectively will be exclude, this situation have been shown when all of participant in 'Program Felo Perdana' have higher education background and ties with some ministry (either they are Youth Parliament member, special officer of the minister or minister himself) (Arshad, 2016).

The second myth that become challenge for youth political participation in Malaysia is the idea of youth participation means that adults surrender their roles as guides and educators. The discussions of youth participation will involved the roles that adults must play as supporters and educators, the adults will help to socialize youth into practices and habits of the professional world. It is the adult duty to gave them feedback to help youth improve. The adult should be open to the unique voices and contributions of youth, at the same time they also must help youth learn how to recognize the norms of the public arena or the specific practices. Most of adult will surrender thier role as guides and educators for youth and consider youth as thier competitors.

The third myth that become challenge for youth political participation in Malaysia is the idea of adults are ready for youth participation. Adults need to adapt to youth participation as much as youth do, the sad situation is even the best-intentioned adults may not yet understand what youth participation means. It is not just youth who are needed to get proper training but adult also must get ongoing training and development in how best to support youth and fulfill their roles as allies, adult must understand that they need to support learning and change of youth so that effective participation can be developed. This situation can be seen in Malaysia when the organization that focus on training the youth worker (also known as adult) only been formed in 2019, this organization been named as Institut Pembangunan Dan Kecemerlangan Kepimpinan (i-LEAD). Their effort to create a proper recognition for youth worker only started in 2020 by introducing certificate for that field, until 2021 the certificate course had not been finished yet by any adult deu to pandemic covid issue. This situation show that there aren't any proper training been developed before this to provide the adult with enough skill to work with youth.

The fourth myth that become challenge for youth political participation in Malaysia is the idea of youth are ready to participate and they just need the opportunity. Authentic youth

participation requires them to be given the time and space to develop the skills they need to participate effectively, this means that youth need to have ongoing training and support during the participation process. Youth can engage meaningfully in decision making by joining workshops and practice to developed thier skill and potential. While growing thier skill, youth need to get involved with real world issues and projects where they can see the larger community or public impact. This the idea that been used in UPM when they introduce “Executive Diploma in Youth Development Work (DBKP)” , youth who get involved in this program only need to attend class on Saturday and Sunday every week (from 9 am to 5 pm). Youth who enroled in this program can still participate in youth development activity in the community from Monday to Friday, on weekend they can pursuit thier academic class. The sad situation is this program only offered for diploma level, there is no offer for degree level program for DBKP until now.

### **Way Forward for Youth Political Participation in Malaysia**

The issue of youth political participation in Malaysia had been given high attention since late 1980’s. It started with formulation of Dasar Pembangunan Belia Negara in 1985, this policy then been amend in 1997. After that there have been new discourse for formulation of Akta Pertubuhan Belia dan Pembangunan Belia in 2007, then more discourse have arisen such as Dasar Belia Malaysia in 2015 and Transformasi Nasional 2050 in 2018. The same issue of negative image of youth had been discussed in Dasar Belia Selangor (2015), the core issue regarding opportunity of the voice for youth leaders are not been given fair attention and selective in nature. There is also situation where youth image are described with wrong doing and social ill (youth bashing), youth is shown in the mass media with negative attitude (Ismail & Suandi, 2009). The former Minister of Youth and Sports, Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman also acknowledges participation of youth in leadership (such as youth organization) is low (Ahmedullah, 2018). This problem need a real solution and one of the solution that can be used is the development of physical space where youth can participate with political organization and enhance thier potential, another problem arise where discoursed in Malaysia regarding aspect of physical space are ignored until today. The aspect of physical space is not a norm for youth partiicipation discoursed in Malaysia. This situation can be checked in Malaysian Youth Policy, this policy had not stated any plan or strategy for development of physical space for youth development program in Malaysia even though Zeldin & Collura (2010) have highlighted about importance of youth participation in certain chosen places.

There have been some effort that been done by the government to developed Youth Center for youth participation, this effort can be seen by development of International Youth Centre and Y-Centre KBS. The development of this center aren’t focused on relationship between youth and adult. This center focuses more on providing youth with facility for their physical and social activity limited among youth. It can be said that the management of this center looked at youth as end user and not their partner which explains why the discourse of partnership between youth and adult have not been brought up in these facilities. The way forward is for all political and youth organization to start providing a physical space for thier youth member to organized and used it as thier creativity allow them. The issue of youth program and youth worker to help enhancing youth participation have become a nornal in youth development discourse, a new angle of physical space need to be given a chance to be explore. There have been discourse of usage of physical space in community organization, the

result of this platform show a positive result to attract participation of youth (Jonsson & Larneby, 2018).

### Conclusion

Even though youth participation started to be discussed around year 2013 in Malaysia context, but it has been practice before without academic acknowledgement. It is only recently the idea to nominate youth for leader position have been brought forward, it have never been taken seriously before in malaysia context. The idea have been delayed by the older leader until today, but still pushed by the Minister of Youth and Sport (Malaysia Kini, 2018). It seem like the adult are still given a space for youth participation, but the room for the participation are too small and limited.

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