



NEWS RELEASE

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Merdeka Center poll: Youth well informed but politically disconnected

KUALA LUMPUR - Malaysian youth in general seem to be well informed on current issues but they remain politically disconnected as found in a nationwide opinion poll released today.

The poll also found out that the youth of Malaysia feel that government decisions have a lot of impact in their daily lives but there is little that their votes can do to influence the government.

The opinion poll, *National Youth Survey 2008*, was conducted by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research, with funding support from The Asia Foundation, to gauge youth perceptions of lifestyle, current issues, values, politics, and their own levels of civic and social involvement.

The poll was carried out between 13th November and 9th December 2008 and a total of 2,518 randomly selected Malaysian youth between the age of 20 and 35 years old were interviewed by telephone. Respondents were selected on the basis of random stratified sampling along the national population profile and specifically proportional to gender, ethnicity and state of residence.

“This is the third consecutive year we have conducted this poll and we hope the data will help policymakers, grassroots advocacy groups and youth organizations to understand the needs of young people and address their concerns based on factual findings,” said Ibrahim Suffian, the Programs Director of Merdeka Center for Opinion Research.

“These youth will shape Malaysia’s future so it is critical that we look at their attitudes towards their role in the community, in politics or simply to understand how they think,” he added.

Self-efficacy and politics

The poll identified 74% of youth as having low and moderate level of self-efficacy. Although the perceived impact of government has on their daily lives increased from 72% in 2007 to 77% in 2008, the confidence that the youth have in elections declined by 16% when 80% of youth in 2007 said their votes could make some difference compared to 64% in 2008.

Ethnicity and their backgrounds contribute to significant differences in the level of self-efficacy among Malaysian youth. For instance, the majority of ethnic Chinese, who attended Chinese school and Mandarin-speaking, were found to express lower levels of self-efficacy where some felt that there was not much that they can do for the community.

On the other hand, Indian respondents who attended Tamil school and embraced Hinduism have the highest level of self-efficacy. They seem to be energized and feel there is much that they can do.

The Malays and other Bumiputras held moderate views over the efficacy of their votes and their abilities to influence the government.

If voter registration is taken as an indicator of political involvement, the poll shows that such involvement is considered moderate as only 55% of the youth interviewed were registered voters.

Views on political pluralism

The poll shows that young Malaysians had mixed views on political pluralism. There were instances where the youth appeared to be conservative and other times open to some pluralistic ideas. Fifty six per cent (56%) of the youth said they could accept a female Prime Minister and 57% could accept a non-Malay Muslim as Prime Minister. As for the idea of having a non-Muslim as Prime Minister, the level of acceptance declined to 45%.

As for views on political diversity, more Peninsular youth (51%) favored political diversity whereas 58% of East Malaysian respondents favoured the idea of being united under Barisan Nasional. Nonetheless, the survey finds that 77 % youth showed stronger preference for a multiracial party that is able to represent the interests of Malaysians regardless of ethnicity or religion.

The results of the poll are available for download from the Merdeka Center's website (www.merdeka.org) and The Asia Foundation's website (www.asiafoundation.org).

About Merdeka Center for Opinion Research

Merdeka Center for Opinion Research was formally established in 2001 as an independent organization focused on public opinion research and socio-economic analysis. Its members are comprised of social scientists and professionals with qualifications in economics, communications, marketing, and law. Merdeka's mission is to act as a bridge between Malaysians and the leading members of their society – by collecting public opinion and expressing them through survey results, analysis and position papers. For more information, please visit www.merdeka.org.

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