

Malaysian Political Values Survey

13th July 2010

Boulevard Hotel, Kuala Lumpur

Brief Summary of Analysis
[Handout]

Presentation by:



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From January to April 2010, the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research carried out a survey among 3,141 adult Malaysians aged 19 and above with a view to understand their attitudes and values towards political participation. The objective of the study was to contribute towards a better understanding of the Malaysian electorate and to move beyond simplistic labels of race and ethnicity that is typically the primary filter through which politics are discussed. In order to flesh out the qualitative characteristics of each group, we also conducted focus group discussions that aimed to elicit responses that explained each groups' views of the world and politics as it affects them.

The survey found that Malaysians do share political attitudes and values that transcend ethnic cleavages and that in some cases, a person's socio-economic class can provide greater explanation for their attitudes and political orientation than cultural or racial underpinnings. For example, a Malay farmer in Pahang has a lot more in common with a pepper grower in Sarawak as compared to a Malay office worker in Shah Alam.

Values that split:

- 1) Malaysian unity:
48% of Malaysian public felt Malaysia is more united while 43% feels otherwise. The views were divided by region where 60% of East Malaysian stated the country is getting more united by only 45% feel such way.
- 2) Issues that Malaysian electorate felt dividing the country
- 13% stated political instability, which is the highest, and 13% don't know.
- Religious and ethnics issues are secondary
- 3) Split on views whether government spend public fund prudently. 54% disagreed to government spending prudently while 37% disagreed. Split between East and West Malaysians, across level of education, access to internet and also income level.
- 4) Malaysian Malays/ Bumiputras were split on who has benefitted from government programs. 48% agreed that government assistance program benefitted ordinary people while 45% thought that the rich and politically connected had benefitted from it.
- 5) Interests in politics were split in the society. 52% of people over 50 years old expressed interest in politics while only 28% of those below 30 years old expressed interest.
- 6) Among the Malays/ Bumiputras, views that people should be accorded the same rights were not shared by all citizens. 59% of the population thought that Malays/ Bumiputra should continue to be accorded with special rights. The views are divided across regions.
- 7) Among non-Bumiputras, 46% thought that One-Malaysia is a political agenda to win non-Malays votes. 39% still thought it is a sincere effort while 16% stated "don't know" or not willing to respond.

Values that unite:

- 8) When asked if they are capable in bringing a change to the issues mentioned, 66% of population felt incapable.
- 9) Democratic country is the most desired issue among electorate to see change.
- 10) 63% felt that making ends meets is a struggle for them (63%) despite ethnicity or region.
- 11) Malaysians generally felt secure with the status of their jobs (67%).
- 12) It is inexcusable to expect assistance from friends and relatives in high positions in government as that would be tantamount to abuse of power (65% agreed).
- 13) In general, public perceived corruption problem as serious but they were optimistic that it can be fixed. (69% overall)
- 14) Among Malays/ Bumiputra respondents, people perceived that NEP / affirmative actions were still needed to help Malays / Bumiputras to move ahead (72%).
- 15) Generally, Malays/ Bumiputra respondents agreed that main threat to Malays/ Bumiputra position is corruption among its leaders (70%) rather than demands made by other races.
- 16) 63% of population were not confident that government's aid programs were reaching the needy. The view was consistent across ethnic lines, region and urban/rural settings.

From the survey we identified seven groups of people according to five value orientation (9 specific questions) that gauged respondents' values. These values orientation were :

- *Identity* : Attitude in self-identification whether they would choose to be identify as a Malaysian, follower of a religion or according to ethnicity
- *Self-efficacy*: capability of bringing change, urgency to see these changes take place
- *Attitudes towards government*: trust in government ability to solve problems, confidence in government aid reaching the needy, and belief in government spending on public fund
- *Attitudes towards politics*: Interest in politics, whether they feel empowered politically
- *Social and economic value* : satisfaction towards economic condition at present

After performing the cluster analysis, we were able to identify seven distinct groups that went along shared attitudes and values:

1) True Believers

- They were the socially-conservative, staunch believers of their religion. They were those who said religion is very important to them. Agreed that Hudud law should be implemented in this country and they opposed to attending concerts.
- They are also very politically conscious and show strong distrust towards government. Among the Malays/ Bumiputra in the group, they disagreed that Malays/ Bumiputra should be united under UMNO but more rooms should be given to other parties.

- Believed that threat to Malay / Bumi political position is corruption among its leaders.
- They are financially well-off, receive higher education and mostly male urbanites. This group also has high access to alternative news.

2) Accommodative working class

- They were socially conservative and religion was very important to them. They also thought that religion is necessary to ensure good moral values and opposed to the thought that couple can live together without intention to marry.
- They identified themselves as Malaysians (93.5%) first instead of by religious beliefs or ethnicity. They believed that 1Malaysia is a sincere effort to unite all Malaysians.
- Less interested in politics and comparatively more non-Malays/Bumiputra in the group thought that minority shall not make much demands of the majority (19%).
- They were the young working class, mostly government servants living in urban areas. They received higher education but belonged to the middle income group.

3) Disgruntled White Collar

- They were the disgruntled because they were basically unhappy with the condition in the country and felt being unfairly treated. Like the “True Believers” , they had very low trust in government.
- Comparatively more liberal in social values. 43% thought it is alright for couple to stay together without intention to marry. They were very dissatisfied with the national economy and not confident it would improve in one year time.
- They had rather low self-efficacy in bringing change.
- This group consisted of the financially well-off, those in management and executive level in private sector as well as professionals. They did not have very high education but they earned the most among all groups. They followed news on national political, economic and finance most closely.
- *“The only thing that we can do to bring change is by voting the right person.”*

4) Insecure Underclass

- The Insecure Underclass feared that the non-Bumiputras/ Chinese/ Indians were trying to take over the country. This fear was reflected in the belief that demands from other races were the main threat to Malay/ Bumiputra economic and the country cannot forego affirmative action for the Malay/ Bumiputra.
- They feel strongly that whichever party in power makes no difference. Such sense of powerlessness was transfer to their trust and dependent on the government’s role in solving problems.
- They were the low income, low education group and mostly lived in rural areas. They were not interested in politics and followed news on religion and culture. They belonged to the lowest income group where about half of them had a household income RM1500 or less in a month.
- This group constituted the highest percentage of unemployed respondents.

5) Pro-establishment Working Class

- Like the “True Believers”, religious identity and religious values strongly defined them.
- The difference was that they had high trust in government ability in solving problems. Albeit the confidence in government ability, they were less confident in government’s aid reaching the poor.
- Nonetheless, they still thought that the Malays/ Bumiputra should continue be accorded with special rights and privileges.
- About half were not satisfied with national economy at present but confident it will improve in one year time (64%).
- Malay and Muslims were over-represented in this group. Many were living in rural areas and their residential areas were usually dominated by one ethnic group. Mostly were professionals, people who hold executive position or self-employed.
- *“Keistimewaan hak bangsa Melayu harus diberi keutamaan kerana di sini adalah Tanah Melayu.”*

6) Partisan Underclass

- They were the least race-conscious and they identified themselves as Malaysians (76%).
- Although they belonged to the lowest income group but confident that the national economy will improve. They were the hopeful and had high trust, high confidence level in government.
- They felt that they were not discriminated in this country and opined that all religious adherents should be allowed to practice their beliefs.
- They felt strongly that they were incapable of bringing change but they also feel the country is getting more united (59%).
- They were the older, male, rural folks. This group comprised of the financially worst-off and had the highest percentage of retirees and homemakers. They were also the least educated and more self-employed.
- They were active in participating in organizations or political parties.
- There is a strong sense of trust in the government e.g. *“Kami mesti undi pemerintah.”*

7) Disenchanted Bystanders

- Same as “Disgruntled White Collar”, they felt that they had been unfairly treated and had less trust in government’s ability in solving problems.
- They tend not to have opinion in some issues or take milder position, such as views on 1 Malaysia (don’t know 14.5%) although mildly sceptical; almost split on their views on the direction of the country but many stated “don’t know” (9.8% compared to 6% of general population).
- Members of this group expressed the least interest in politics and felt that no matter which party was in power, things are going to be the same. Hence, they did not participate in political parties or NGOs.
- There were slightly more female than males in this group, mostly aged between 31-50 years old. They belonged to the higher income group and involved in private sector or self-employed.