Center for Independent Journalism Malaysia
2008 Media Independence Survey
About Merdeka Center

A Public Opinion Research Organization
Market research for social, economic and political issues
Provides decision support for policy makers
Obtains feedback for communications strategy development

What we do
Qualitative and Quantitative Research
- Focus groups and in-depth interviews, ethnographic surveys
- In person and telephone surveys; random or field intercept

How we do it
Generally, random multistage sampling
Commitment to tell the truth – no matter how painful

Why we do it
Because leaders need to know what the public is thinking
Timely information help saves resources and people
Content

1. Methodology

2. Respondent Profile

3. News and Information Access & Consumption

4. Survey Findings
Methodology

• 1,203 randomly selected respondents aged 21+ were interviewed via telephone for the survey

• Respondents were selected via random stratified sampling method along the lines of state of residence, ethnicity, and gender.

• Survey was carried out between 8\textsuperscript{th} to 14\textsuperscript{th} May 2008

• Survey margin of error estimated at $\pm 2.83\%$
Respondent Profile

**Gender**
- Male: 50%
- Female: 50%

**Region**
- Northern: 13%
- Central: 25%
- East Malaysia: 16%
- Southern: 33%
- Eastern: 13%

**Setting**
- Urban: 55%
- Rural: 45%

**Education level**
- No formal education: 2%
- Primary school: 15%
- Secondary school: 51%
- Diploma/Polytechnics/Teacher’s college/Vocational Institutes: 12%
- Degree: 20%

**Monthly household income**
- < RM1500 per mth: 5%
- RM1501 - RM3000 per mth: 9%
- RM3001 - RM5000 per mth: 14%
- > RM5000 per mth: 31%
- Don’t know: 14%
- No response: 2%

**Region**
- Northern: 13%
- Central: 25%
- East Malaysia: 13%
- Southern: 33%
- Eastern: 16%

**Setting**
- Urban: 51%
- Rural: 49%

**Education level**
- No formal education: 9%
- Primary school: 5%
- Secondary school: 10%
- Diploma/Polytechnics/Teacher’s college/Vocational Institutes: 11%
- Degree: 13%

**Monthly household income**
- < RM1500 per mth: 11%
- RM1501 - RM3000 per mth: 21%
- RM3001 - RM5000 per mth: 20%
- > RM5000 per mth: 12%
- Don’t know: 14%
- No response: 2%

**Age**
- 21-25: 8%
- 26-30: 18%
- 31-35: 18%
- 36-40: 11%
- 41-45: 9%
- 46-50: 8%
- 51-55: 11%
- 56-60: 10%
- Above 60: 13%
**Respondent Profile**

**Ethnicity**
- Malay/Muslim Bumiputra: 44%
- Chinese: 30%
- Indian: 6%
- Non-Muslim Bumiputra: 20%

**Religion**
- Islam: 45%
- Buddhism: 20%
- Hinduism: 6%
- Christian: 22%
- Taoist: 2%

**Occupation**
- Employed - Private: 25%
- Employed - Govt: 13%
- Own Business: 2%
- Self-employed: 12%
- Unemployed: 5%
- Student: 7%
- Homemaker: 24%
- Retired: 11%
Public awareness of the structure of the media industry is limited…

majority believe in government ownership

limited understanding of the concept of media independence

but perceive that govt. has strong influence on the media
Q2. Who do you think owns most of the media in the country?

- Government: 53%
- People/companies connected to the government: 15%
- Independent businessmen: 7%
- The community: 1%
- Political parties: 1%
- Don't know: 8%
- No response: 1%

Q3. Do you understand the concept of media as a watchdog?

- **Strongly understand**: 33%
- **Somewhat understand**: 13%
- **Somewhat not understand**: 19%
- **Do not understand at all/ Don't know**: 35%
Q4. Do you think the media in Malaysia is fulfilling its role as a watchdog to influential factions?

- Yes: 69%
- No: 19%
- Don't know: 12%
Q6. Do you think that owners of media have a significant impact on media content?

- Yes: 78%
- No: 16%
- Don't know: 5%
- No response: 1%
Q7. Do you know laws governing the media? Can you name them?

- Internal Security Act/ ISA: 8%
- Official Secrets Act/ OSA: 1%
- Sedition Act: 2%
- Printing Presses & Publications Act/ PPPA: 7%
- Others: 3%
- Don't know: 77%
- No response: 1%
Public is split over the form of government control on the media
Q8. Do you think the government should control the number of publications and who should be allowed to publish?

Number of publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 494)</td>
<td>(n = 101)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who should be allowed to publish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 43)</td>
<td>(n = 441)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q9. Do you think the government should control the amount of broadcast media and who should be allowed to operate the broadcast media?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of broadcast media</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43% (n = 450)</td>
<td>5% (n = 50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who should be allowed to operate broadcast media</td>
<td>10% (n = 108)</td>
<td>42% (n = 442)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite limitations of awareness of media independence, the majority recognize that media slant impacts credibility and understand that regulations may lead to self-censorship.
Q10. When a news media is said to be "pro-government" or "pro-opposition", do you think it affects the media's credibility?

- Yes: 55%
- Maybe yes: 21%
- Maybe no: 3%
- No: 6%
- Don't know: 15%
Q11. Do you think the current requirement to license the media have a significant impact on the accuracy of news content?

- Yes: 63%
- No: 28%
- Don't know: 8%
- No response: 1%
Q11A. Why? (Among those who answered in the affirmative in Q11, n = 761)

- Tied to law & regulations: 10%
- The truth will be censored by government: 3%
- No media independence & freedom of speech: 4%
- Government will be able to control & censor media (e.g. sensitive, false, negatives, anti-govt news): 9%
- For quality, accurate & trustworthy news: 12%
- News might not be accurate: 4%
- Permit is needed to publish news: 1%
- Media will be in favor of one particular faction: 2%
- Media will be more careful of reporting for fear of its license being revoked: 7%
- Media influence will not be abused by irresponsible factions: 1%
- For safety purposes: 1%
- Need to be controlled because there is too much freedom: 2%
- So that the standard of media is maintained: 1%
- Others: 3%
- Don't know: 31%
- No response: 10%
Public supports the idea on peer-review among media practitioners as a form of regulation

majority recognize that media could do with less censorship

split on how ethnic issues ought to be reported

scores a variety of factors were moderate
Q13. Instead of laws, do you think public opinion and peer pressure within the industry are better tools for regulating the media?

- Yes
- No to public opinion, yes to peer pressure
- Don't know
- Yes to public opinion, no to peer pressure
- No
- No response

60%
10%
24%
3%
2%
1%
Q15. Do you think media should be left independent in deciding what it wants to report?

- Yes: 76%
- Neutral: 20%
- No: 2%
- Don't know: 2%
Q14. Should the reporting of the following areas be censored?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Indifferent</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Censoring coverage on street demonstration</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censoring coverage on allegation/implication of corruption</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censoring coverage on the outbreak of diseases</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censoring vulgurities, indecent pictures, lurid and obscene details</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5% 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censoring names of crime victims/criminals</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q14. Should the reporting of the following areas be censored?

- Censoring coverage on human right abuses
  - Yes: 24%
  - Indifferent: 7%
  - No: 64%
  - Don't know: 5%

- Censoring coverage on allegation on faulty government policies
  - Yes: 28%
  - Indifferent: 9%
  - No: 60%
  - Don't know: 3%

- Censoring coverage on opposition parties
  - Yes: 26%
  - Indifferent: 12%
  - No: 59%
  - Don't know: 3%

- Censoring coverage on racial conflicts
  - Yes: 47%
  - Indifferent: 10%
  - No: 41%
  - Don't know: 2%
Q25. If 1 = very unfavourable and 5 = very favourable, please rate the local mainstream media on the following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Very unfavourable</th>
<th>Somewhat unfavourable</th>
<th>Indifferent</th>
<th>Somewhat favourable</th>
<th>Very favourable</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>No response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Truthfulness (story based on facts, thorough research)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness (adequate response from all sides of the issue)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectivity (not biased towards any sides, no stereotypes, no exaggeration)</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of issues covered</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of opinions included</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical (source clearly attributed, accusation checked with the accused, no sensationalism, respectful of privacy)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Public felt that media helped them make choices in the last elections but not necessarily in favor of the ruling government. A large majority consumer more than one source of information for news for comparison.
Q19. In general, did your choice of media help you make an informed decision on who you should vote for during the general election?

- Yes: 64%
- No: 29%
- Don't know: 5%
- No response: 2%
Q20. How would you describe the slant in reporting of the following media during elections?

- On the side of BN
- Balance
- On the side of the opposition
- Don't know
- No response

Analysis and editorials in the mainstream media:
- 50% On the side of BN
- 27% Balance
- 5% On the side of the opposition
- 17% Don't know

Reporting of the internet source:
- 9% On the side of BN
- 23% Balance
- 22% On the side of the opposition
- 44% Don't know

Reporting of the mainstream media:
- 70% On the side of BN
- 21% Balance
- 4% On the side of the opposition
- 4% Don't know
Q23. During the elections, did you read from more than one news media to compare their reportage on a same issue?

- Yes: 31%
- No: 67%
- Don't know: 2%
Majority of the public want to see improvements in the media

- more critical and analytical
- improved access
- element for public feedback
Q27. Would you like to see changes leading to greater media independence?

- Yes: 87%
- No: 8%
- Don't know: 3%
- No response: 2%
Q28. In general, what kind of changes do you think is needed?

- Repeal outdated media laws: 8%
- Introduce more laws to control media: 11%
- Have more critical media: 26%
- Make it easier for public to start a media e.g. tv, press etc.: 19%
- Set up a complaint mechanism on the media: 23%
- Others: 5%
- Don’t know: 5%
- No response: 2%
Q31. Who do you think should play the most important role in improving media independence in Malaysia?

- The government: 35%
- NGOs: 10%
- The media owners: 8%
- The media practitioners: 10%
- The public: 30%
- Don't know: 4%
- No response: 3%