



CENTER FOR
INSIGHTS IN
SURVEY
RESEARCH



Malaysia Focus Group Research

Motivations and Political Perspectives Among GE15 Youth
Voters (18-25) in Kedah, Negeri Sembilan, and Selangor

June 2023



MALAYSIA FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH
MOTIVATIONS AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES
AMONG GE15 YOUTH VOTERS (18-25) IN KEDAH,
NEGERI SEMBILAN, AND SELANGOR

MALAYSIA FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH: MOTIVATIONS AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES AMONG GE15 YOUTH VOTERS (18-25) IN KEDAH, NEGERI SEMBILAN, AND SELANGOR

Copyright © 2023 International Republican Institute. All rights reserved.

Permission Statement: No part of this work may be reproduced in ny form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without the written permission of the International Republican Institute.

Requests for permission should include the following information:

- The title of the document for which permission to copy material is desired.
- A description of the material for which permission to copy is desired.
- The purpose for which the copied material will be used and the manner in which it will be used.
- Your name, title, company or organization name, telephone number, fax number, e-mail address and mailing address.

Please send all requests for permission to:

Attention Communications Department
International Republican Institute
1225 Eye Street NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005
info@iri.org



Executive Summary

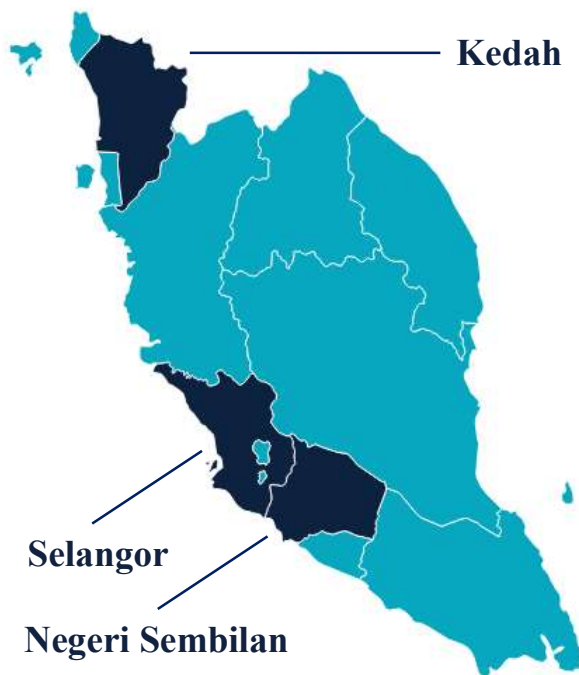
The International Republican Institute's (IRI) Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR) designed and commissioned focus group research investigating the motivations and political preferences among first-time Malay, Chinese, and Indian voters aged 18-25 in Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15) in the key states of Kedah, Negeri Sembilan, and Selangor. Enfranchised by a constitutional amendment adopted in 2019, focus group participants voted for the first time in GE15 and shared their views on the beliefs, party outreach, and family/peer network influences that motivated them to cast a ballot. The findings also offer political parties and candidates several implicit recommendations to improve their engagement with young voters in future elections. In all, nine focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted in May and June 2023, roughly six months after the 2022 general election.

Key Findings:

- **Finding 1:** As first-time voters, participants were motivated in large part by the experience of voting and a sense of duty in casting one's ballot.
- **Finding 2:** Participants were likewise strongly motivated by a desire for "change", which they equated with the opposition coalition, and giving its leader "a chance" to govern.
- **Finding 3:** Even though participants were motivated to cast a ballot in part by a sense of excitement and responsibility, they were divided over Undi18 and the decision to allow 18-to-20-year-olds to vote. Many cited concerns with the influence of social media on youth.
- **Finding 4:** Participants viewed themselves as possessing a more open-minded, less conventional political "mindset" than their parents when it came to deciding how and for whom to vote.
- **Finding 5:** Participants preferred candidates who came across as authentic and relatable and were turned off by what they felt were superficial or performative gestures, like photo ops or aid distribution, during election time.
- **Finding 6:** Participants considered parties' in-person campaign outreach techniques impractical and ineffective at engaging young voters, even if many of them took giveaways offered at such events.
- **Finding 7:** Despite many participants being worried about youth being too easily influenced by social media, all acknowledged that social media is the most effective means for candidates to reach them.
- **Finding 8:** Each ethnic group was also strongly influenced by underlying ethnic concerns; the loss of special privileges (Malays), infringement on personal rights and freedoms (Chinese), and critique of the Bumiputra system (Indians).
- **Finding 9:** Most participants were frustrated with the politicization of race and religion in GE15 and highlighted the need for more inclusive politics.
- **Finding 10:** Influence from participants' families was greater than from friends. Most participants avoided discussion of politics with friends.

Overview

Through this qualitative research study, IRI sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of factors that motivated Malaysian youth aged 18-25 in the states of Kedah, Negeri Sembilan, and Selangor to vote in the 15th General Election (GE15) in November 2022 and to what extent, if any, these first-time voters participated in non-voting election related activities, such as get-out-the-vote (GOTV) and/or volunteer efforts. Discussion on the factors that motivated these youth to cast a ballot in GE15 followed three key lines of inquiry: issues and beliefs; political party/coalition outreach; and the influence of family and friends. Through this line of inquiry, IRI sought to learn more about the issues or beliefs that influenced for which coalition participants voted, what actions and/or approaches coalitions took to engage eligible youth voters were perceived by participants as most/least effective, and the extent to which participants were influenced to vote by friends or family.



To gather these insights, IRI designed and commissioned nine focus groups between May 24 and June 4, three in each state. Kuala Lumpur based market research firm Central Force conducted the focus groups on IRI's behalf. IRI selected Kedah, Negeri Sembilan, and Selangor based on the urban-rural political divide, political competitiveness, and strategic value in forthcoming state elections. Focus group participants, all of whom voted in GE15 in their respective states, were recruited from across each state.

The 71 focus group participants (38 male, 33 female) who participated in the study were grouped by ethnicity: Malay, Chinese, and Indian. Gender balance was maintained within individual focus groups.¹ Additional information about

methodology, including a detailed breakdown of the respondent profiles, can be found in Appendix A. Participants were recruited using a screening questionnaire (Appendix C.)

In line with qualitative research studies, the findings articulated in this study do not necessarily reflect the opinion of all Malaysian voters aged 18-25 in each of the three states but are indicative of broader trends.

¹ Each focus group contained eight participants, four females and four males. However, the vendor struggled to recruit sufficient Indian participants for Kedah Indian focus group and, as a result, that group contained 1 female and six males.

Malaysia's 15th General Election on November 19, 2022, bookended nearly three years of political turmoil unprecedented in the country's history. After the stunning collapse in February 2020 of the Pakatan Harapan (PH) government, which itself came to power in an upset victory in the last general election, Malaysia entered a period of prolonged political crisis characterized by inter- (and intra-) party conflict and weak, minority government. In the period between PH's collapse and GE15, Malaysia saw three short-lived prime ministers, two of whom were unelected, while the tumult at the federal level precipitated the collapse of several state governments across the country. The onset of COVID-19, public health lockdowns, economic hardship, and a controversial state of emergency exacerbated political and social tensions. Many Malaysians, therefore, hoped GE15 would end the instability and settle – at least for the time being - the political crisis.

GE15 was also the first general election in which young voters enfranchised by a 2019 constitutional amendment were eligible to cast a ballot. Undi18 ("Vote 18"), as the amendment is known, lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 and instituted automatic voter registration. As a result, the voter rolls expanded by a whopping 41 percent ahead of GE15, from approximately 14.9 million in 2018 to roughly 21.1 million in 2022.² Nearly 1.4 million Malaysians aged 18-20 were added to the voter rolls for GE15, constituting roughly seven percent of the eligible voting population. Alongside automatic voter registration, Malaysians between the ages of 18 and 29 made up over one-fifth of eligible voters in the November 2022 polls.³

Alongside the ongoing political crisis and constitutional changes, several youth-led demonstrations during the pandemic – *Kerajaan Gagal, Lawan, Turun*, and others - evidenced the emergence of new youth political attunement and engagement. Young Malaysians, it should be noted, were, disproportionately affected by the economic pressures resulting from the pandemic and lockdowns. Largely urban and, initially, a response to the economic hardship and perceived government inaction, the protests nonetheless vocalized frustrations many young Malaysians harbored towards political leaders as well as underscored the potential electoral significance of youth voters in upcoming elections.

Political coalitions emphasized youth economic empowerment in their campaigns and fielded more young candidates in GE15 than in past elections. In line with Malaysia's system of race-based politics, and in part a result of the heightened competition for the 'youth vote,' campaign outreach efforts often relied on appeals along ethnic and religious lines. Perikatan Nasional (PN), a political coalition dominated by Malay-nationalists and Islamists, was especially active on the fast-growing social media platform TikTok, where it featured videos and livestreams of political

² "About 21.1 million Malaysians eligible to vote," *The Star*, October 21, 2022, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2022/10/21/about-211-million-malaysians-eligible-to-vote>

³ "Youth voters form 50% of GE15 electoral roll: EC," *The Vibes*, October 20, 2022, <https://www.thevibes.com/articles/news/74747/youth-voters-form-50-of-ge15-electoral-roll-ec>

events and talks hosted by religious figures and others that contained racially charged content targeting Malay youth specifically.

Although the outcome of GE15 was as unpredictable as the election was competitive, it was also a contest among politicians long known to Malaysian voters and who have been at the center of the country's elite politics for years, a fact that did not go unnoticed by focus group participants. In the end, more Malaysians voted in GE15 than in any previous election in the country's history on account of the Undi18 constitutional amendment.⁴ Voter turnout among Undi18 voters is estimated as high as 79 percent.⁵

These focus group discussions took place roughly six months after participants voted for the first time in GE15 and, notably, in the early stages of preparations for elections in six states in summer 2023. Since GE15, and as a result of that election, the new, PH-led "unity government" has governed cautiously. Its focus has been on both economic growth and welfare while reiterating its commitment to upholding Islam and Malay rights amid intense pressure from a unified Malay-nationalist opposition.

Findings

Overall, the focus group discussions revealed a sense of excitement in voting for the first time and a desire for change as core motivations, despite what many participants described as a lack of political knowledge and awareness leading up to the election. Participants' attitudes about change and motivation to vote were heavily influenced by a combination of the political developments in the months and years preceding GE15, economic hardship, including inflation, the cost of living, and stagnant wages, and, among Chinese and Indian groups especially, frustration with inequality and lack of opportunity. Yet, 'corruption,' from perceived corruption to discrimination, was a key rationale for participants' desire across state and ethnic groups for change. Indeed, corruption appeared to be a catch-all for the many political and economic problems facing youth.

With a few notable exceptions, where differences in opinion among state groups occurred, especially as it related to support for particular political coalitions, they fell more clearly along ethnic rather than regional lines, as expected. Although most participants across state and ethnic groups cited 'freedom' and 'lack of commitment' as positive attributes about being Malaysian youth, the opinions of Chinese and Indian participants across all three states were clearly reflective of their minority status, especially as it related to racial inequality in university

⁴ "Malaysia Election: Full results," *The Straits Times*, November 19, 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/multimedia/graphics/2022/11/malaysia-ge-2022-live-election-results/index.html>

⁵ Welsh, Bridget, "GE15 generational voting: Looking beyond ethnicity Part 2," *Malaysiakini*, April 14, 2023, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/columns/662221>

acceptance, availability of job opportunities, and, to a lesser extent, home ownership. At the same time, Kedah and Selangor Malay participants' opinions conveyed explicit support for the need to maintain Malay political dominance and special privileges for *Bumiputra*⁶ (Malay participants in the Negeri Sembilan group were decidedly less ethnically ideological). Participants, especially those in the Chinese and Indian groups, often used specific personal experiences to illustrate their points and justify decision making when it came to which coalition they supported in GE15. Generally, participants in the three Kedah focus groups were less articulate in their views than the Negeri Sembilan and Selangor groups and, especially among the Malay and Indian groups there, participants were initially reluctant to share their personal views.

Across groups, Malaysian youth also viewed themselves as possessing a distinctly different political 'mindset' than their parents. The focus group discussions revealed that they perceive themselves as more politically openminded than their parents, less corruptible by politicians, and less influenced by conventional political narratives (although they do worry about those younger than them being too easily influenced by political messaging on social media). At the same time, participants across groups are divided over Undi18 and whether the youngest voters possess the maturity and judgement to vote. Participants across all groups expressed particular disapproval with candidates' perceived lack of authenticity, attempts to 'buy' their vote, and the use of divisive racial and religious message during GE15, especially on TikTok. Family, more than friends, had an influence on participants' voting behavior, while utilizing social media as the primary source of information about candidates and coalitions.

The below findings describe the participants' opinions in greater detail. Finding analysis is based on direct observation, review of focus group contemporaneous notes, review of transcripts, and the moderators' summary report. Quotes were minimally edited for clarity if necessary. The original voice was preserved to the largest extent possible, including potential errors in syntax, terminology, or grammar.

Finding 1: As first-time voters, participants were motivated in large part by the experience of voting and a sense of duty in casting one's ballot.

Perhaps unsurprising for a study of first-time voters, participants across all groups expressed excitement and eagerness about the novelty of casting a ballot in GE15 as well as a strong sense of responsibility to vote. Over and over, participants cited looking forward to the *experience* of voting and participating in the electoral process. Indeed, many participants highlighted the value of gaining knowledge and understanding about the voting process and politics in general as a result of participating in the election. They saw voting as an opportunity to learn and acquire experience for the future. While some acknowledged that their individual votes may seem insignificant in the grand scheme, many participants emphasized that every vote matters and expressed a belief in shaping the country's future. Similarly, many participants expressed a strong sense of responsibility as citizens to exercise their right to vote. They emphasized that voting is a

⁶ Literally translated as "son of the soil," the term refers to Malays, Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia, and other indigenous communities in East Malaysia.

duty as a Malaysian citizen and expressed a belief that voting is crucial for the development of the nation. Responses did not vary significantly between the different state and ethnic groups.



- *“When we think about responsibility, it’s the second choice. The first choice is just because we want to experience. Second choice because it’s our responsibility.”* (Female, 23, Malay, Selangor)
- *“I think it’s the responsibility. Common sense. It’s like, after you eat, you have to throw it into the rubbish bin. It’s the same thing. As a Malaysian, you have to vote.”* (Male, 23, Chinese, Selangor)
- *“To me, it’s very sudden. Suddenly, I’m allowed to vote. I feel excited.”* (Male, 20, Chinese, Selangor)
- *“For me, it’s the first time. I feel excited. How is the process like, how is election like.”* (Female, 20, Malay, Selangor)
- *“There’re many people who don’t know how to vote. So, when we vote, we get new experience. Because at the beginning, I don’t know...how to vote, where to enter. When I voted for the first time, that’s when I know...how to do it step by step. Next time, when I need to vote again, I’ve the experience, I know how to go.”* (Male, 20, Indian, Kedah)
- *“During Form 4, 5, I...studied [moral education] which has nine, many [chapters]. One of chapters mentions that we need to make some contribution to our country. One of the [morals] that they teach is [involve yourself in the development of the nation] and from there, my teacher taught me that every vote counts. Thus, I decided to vote.”* (Male, 23, Chinese, Kedah)
- *“To experience it for the first time...We didn’t know what the process was like. Before this, my parents shared pictures and so on. This time, I also wanted to experience it for myself. When it comes to responsibility, I think it’s something that comes naturally. As we grow up, it’s our responsibility to vote. For the first time, I wanted to experience it for myself and also to act out of that responsibility.”* (Female, 23, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“I wanted to experience how it was like dipping my finger [in ink].”* (Male, 22, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“For me, why I vote, because if our one vote will change the whole country’s history, that’s why I vote. Also, it’s my responsibility to vote, because I’m citizen of this country, that’s why.”* (Female, 22, Indian, Negeri Sembilan)

Finding 2: Participants were likewise strongly motivated by a desire for “change,” which they equated with the opposition coalition, and giving its leader “a chance” to govern.

Participants across groups expressed frustration with the country’s politics and cynicism with long-serving politicians in particular. With the exception of some Malay youth in Kedah, they frequently equated their desire for change with giving the leader of the opposition coalition a “chance” to lead and improve the country. Many participants’ views on who to vote for – overwhelmingly the then-opposition PH coalition - were shaped by the political turmoil of the previous three years, a desire for stability, resentment with the state of politics, and economic hardship associated with cost of living. Participants associated the opposition coalition with “change” and frequently described them as “young,” while they associated the parties governing at the time of the election with the status quo and referred to their leaders as “old.”

At the same time, participants’ support for the opposition rested less on specific policy positions and more on protesting the governing parties, although participants across groups identified the opposition with anti-corruption and respect for racial minorities. Similarly, many participants cited a belief that the opposition coalition should be given the opportunity to govern for a full term after having been elected in the last general election but ultimately unseated due to defections and infighting.



- *“...The government has changed three times; thus, I choose to give [the opposition] the chance.”* (Male, 23, Chinese, Kedah)
- *“They are [saying] they’re going to change but they are not changing... so why not we try to change a new government and see what’s going to happen.”* (Female, 24, Indian, Selangor)
- *“...In the past, we have always been having the same government and Malaysia stayed the same. Why don’t we vote for change and get a different government? If the government can’t bring about changes, they should quit and let other people lead. The choice is in our hands.”* (Male, 24, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“I just think why not just give him [the opposition leader] a chance. Like [the previous two prime ministers] we’ve seen what they have already done... Why not just go for him [the opposition leader].”* (Male, 21, Indian, Selangor)
- *“[The opposition] are still undergoing some tasks, but it [was] incomplete. Since it is incomplete, I wanted to give them another opportunity...”* (Female, 21, Chinese, Kedah)

- *“I felt that, as a Malaysian, from my point of view, I want to give [the opposition leader] a chance, for him to make some changes to the country.”* (Female, 24, Indian, Selangor)
- *“For me, I would give [the opposition] the chance, allow them to govern to see whether that they are able to improve Malaysia.”* (Male, 20, Chinese, Kedah)
- *“We have to give [a] chance to the younger people to govern the country. We don’t have to rely on old people...So, we want to give a chance to [the opposition leader] to make some changes to Malaysia...In the end, it’s because of the corruption. Because a lot of corruption happened when we were governed by the old people...”* (Male, 25, Indian, Kedah)
- *“So we give them a chance to shine in the next five years. If they don’t do a good job, then we change.”* (Female, 23, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“Give a chance to [the opposition]. For them to become a leader, maybe they’ll bring changes to the country.”* (Male, 20, Indian, Kedah)

Finding 3: Even though participants were motivated to cast a ballot in part by a sense of excitement and responsibility, they were divided over Undi18 and the decision to allow 18-to-20-year-olds to vote. Many cite concerns with the influence of social media on youth.

There were a range of opinions regarding the soundness of allowing 18-to-20-year-olds to vote, but participants’ views fell primarily into either one of two camps: that Undi18 voters were mature enough to make informed decisions and have their own opinions, or that they are not yet mature enough and lack the ability to judge or understand the complexities of politics. However, participants in both camps expressed unease about the influence of social media on young voters and, especially among those who disagreed with Undi18, how impressionable young voters are. Indeed, participants who disagreed with Undi18 frequently tied young voters’ perceived lack of maturity to the belief that they are too easily influenced by content on social media to make informed decisions at the ballot box.

Participants also highlighted the importance of exposure to news, articles, and information about political parties and issues. Some expressed concerns that not all 18-year-olds may have the necessary exposure or knowledge to make informed voting decisions, especially if they rely on their parents’ opinions or lack access to diverse sources of information. Support for or against Undi18 did not fall along state or ethnic lines, although all participants in the Negeri Sembilan Indian group disagreed with allowing 18-to-20-year-olds to vote.



- *“I think is important because it allows more youngsters to pay attention to politics and have the right to vote for the party they want. Elders may only follow others, but the youngsters emphasized more on policies, focusing on their preferred party.” (Female, 21, Chinese, Kedah)*
- *“I agree to a certain extent, but not everyone who turns 18 or 19 has the exposure that a lot of us do living in Selangor and everything, to the news and articles. They won’t be so sure what’s going on... this is happening, that is happening, who is corrupted, who is not, who is better. So, it’s kind of hard to tell. Usually after they turn 18, follow their parents and everything. I think, voting 18, there’s up and downs.” (Male, 19, Indian, Selangor)*
- *“Nowadays people like after 11 or 12 years old, they’re getting matured, they know what is happening, what they need to do.” (Male, 21, Indian, Selangor)*
- *“Because 18 to 21 years old⁷ is an age that you are just about to be exposed to the society. They still don’t have the ability in judgement. They don’t know how society works. Furthermore, they’re easily influenced by social media...They’re easily influenced by TikTok. I think it’s not a wise choice.” (Male, 23, Chinese, Selangor)*
- *“Nowadays, political parties create many ads, and posted on Instagram, ask to vote this and that. When you vote this, this is what you’ll get. So, when people look at those things, they will feel that it’s good. They’re kids.” (Male, 22, Malay, Selangor)*
- *“To me, everyone has the responsibility, no matter what age... But, I think 18 is quite Ok, because they’re capable [of their own] judgement. They can search from all sources. Although they’re easily influenced, but, I think no matter at what age, they’re able to be influenced easily. It’s up to that person whether to do more research on it or not.” (Male, 20, Chinese, Selangor)*
- *“They’re not mature yet, to think about the future of their own life.” (Male, 22, Indian, Negeri Sembilan)*
- *“When these people enter society, they will be influenced by society, they will know what the problems are, and they can make their voices heard earlier. Between 18 and 21, they may feel like voting but if they’re unable to vote, they won’t be able to do their part.” (Male, 20, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)*

⁷ The participant is referring to the Undi18 constitutional amendment, which granted Malaysians aged 18 to 20 (not 21) the right to vote. Malaysians aged 21 already possessed the right to vote.

- *“Why did they suddenly change the voting age from 21 to 18? I think 18-year-olds are not mature yet. Furthermore, our education system hasn’t been educating us about politics. We only briefly learn about the different prime ministers we’ve had over the years, gaining independence in history subject.”* (Female, 22, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“Why are some people against reducing the voting age to 18? I think it’s a good thing that it’s reduced to 18 years old...Some people say 18-year-olds are not mature yet. I think it’s up to us to increase our maturity.”* (Male, 21, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)

Finding 4: Participants viewed themselves as possessing a more open-minded, less conventional political “mindset” than their parents when it came to deciding how and for whom to vote.

This view was especially strong in Kedah and Selangor, where participants expressed a mix of frustration and disappointment with their parents and grandparents for accepting the status quo, sometimes unquestioningly. Participants generally associated the country’s political and economic troubles with the politicians and parties that older generations supported and lamented the lack of political alternatives available to them. Participants implicitly questioned why older generations continued to vote for the same coalitions without seeing changes they now seek while several participants described their parents and grandparents as “brainwashed” or too easily persuaded by political leaders. Similarly, many participants described having different, higher expectations and needs than their elders.



- *“Youngster as compared to elders have a different mentality which could bring [modernity] to Malaysia.”* (Female, 21, Chinese, Kedah)
- *“I felt like, oh, all this while, the older generation were brainwashed...and if I look at my grandparents and younger generation like us right now, I felt like my grandparents are so much worse, the old ways. I felt like we really need a change for this country.”* (Male, 22, Indian, Kedah)
- *“...I’m thinking, why not change. All these [parties] are the same. Every year, it’s the same. Every time we go back, we’re going to vote, the same thing. Actually, we’re not the one who felt that but it’s our [elders]...I ask my relatives in my hometown, why do they vote for...the same one. They said one of the reasons is religion. Then I asked them, what about other issues? Like water issue. When I go back to my hometown, it’s always the same issue, water issue. There’s no improvement.”* (Male, 21, Malay, Selangor)

- *“I think now all the parties standing are from my parents’ generation, they all have the same mentality. I wasn’t convinced with what my parents told me...They were very easy to [be] convinced with a lot of simple things.”* (Male, 23, Indian, Selangor)
- *“As a youngster, we have a different view. What our parents want is different from what we want.”* (Female, 22, Malay, Selangor)
- *“For youngster, we can see that old people are ‘old stakeholders’ [a saying of older generation who are traditional and arrogant in their thinking]. They have experienced things based on the past. It would be difficult to change their mindset. If you have family members, like my parents who are also ‘old shareholders,’ they will follow their ancestors on what was passed down for them. It is the 21st century, we should change our mindset towards this election.”* (Male, 23, Chinese, Kedah)
- *“They [older generation] thinks differently.”* (Male, 25, Indian, Kedah)
- *“I think [the older generation’s] mindset is different. Young generation is the future. So, I think they can think wisely, and contribute more to the people. Not like previous old generation, they just focusing on religion, money corruption.”* (Female, 18, Indian, Kedah)
- *“They’re just focusing on religion, race, money. Just the three.”* (Male, 22, Indian, Kedah)

Finding 5: Participants preferred candidates who came across as authentic and relatable and were turned off by what they felt were superficial or performative gestures, like photo ops or aid distribution, during election time.

The focus groups revealed that participants across all state and ethnic groups were turned off by candidates’ inability or unwillingness to sincerely connect with voters and who engaged in what they considered performative gestures during the election, such as taking pictures with voters while distributing aid. They were critical of politicians who only seemed to show up during election season or who, in their view, only disingenuously interacted with the community for personal-political gain. Participants expressed a desire for action over words, for politicians who they see prioritizing practical assistance and demonstrating concern for people’s welfare over visibility or publicity, especially during floods. Some participants found it off-putting when politicians brought excessive aides, cameras, or entourages during their interactions with the community. Participants overwhelmingly preferred candidates to take a more genuine, casual, or natural approach to community engagement.



- *“I think there’s no need to take pictures just to let people know that you help other people. I think you should just talk to the people and leave. What are the pictures for? ...We know elections are coming up, so we know that they take pictures only to show that they’re doing their job.”* (Male, 22, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“You want to win, you do it. You put in the effort. If he is going to stand, he has to put in the effort, then I’ll definitely support him because he’s putting the effort.”* (Male, 23, Indian, Selangor)
- *“Just show up, there’s no need to prepare... If the person really does their job, everyone will know about them without having to see their pictures.”* (Female, 20, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“What puts me off is the number of cameras that follow them when they go into the field to meet the people. There’s no need to have so many people from the press with them when they meet the people, take videos and so on. There’s no need for an escort and so on.”* (Male, 22, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“I don’t know which party came over. They said, ‘I bring tools and everything for communal work, to clean together.’ After that, he said, ‘Don’t forget what we did today.’ ... He came just to say that.”* (Male, 24, Malay, Selangor)
- *“What we like is when we see them working. They don’t have to say anything.”* (Female, 22, Malay, Selangor)
- *“When the election is near, they help a lot. After they win the election, they don’t bother.”* (Male, 20, Indian, Kedah)
- *“They interviewed uncles.⁸ ‘Uncle, is your food delicious?’ The uncles ignored them. Some uncles even told them to go away. That’s very awkward. I think that’s very ineffective...They only did it for the sake of doing. They should do something more practical. Not just ask you some questions and take pictures with you.”* (Female, 20, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“They shouldn’t make it feel like they’re trying to persuade us to vote. They should act like our friends, just casually talking about the state of the country and how to solve the problems.”* (Male, 21, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“Less talking, just do it...Not just because, ‘Ok, if I win, I’ll do this.’ Why don’t you do that now?”* (Male, 22, Indian, Negeri Sembilan)

⁸ “Uncle” is a term commonly used to refer to older, unrelated males.

Finding 6: Participants considered parties' in-person campaign outreach techniques impractical and ineffective at engaging young voters, even if many of them took giveaways offered at such events.

Ceramah (political rallies), *kenduri* (community banquets), walkabouts at night markets and coffee shops, political talks, and similar campaign activities were considered by participants across state and ethnic groups a waste of time and resources in reaching younger voters. Participants across all groups in Kedah and Negeri Sembilan reported seeing more such events than their peers in Selangor and, except for a minority of participants in the Negeri Sembilan Chinese group, were either dismissive or skeptical of these activities and generally viewed them as outdated and impractical, especially for youth. Some participants even described these activities as uncomfortable or intrusive. Nor did participants believe that those who did attend were persuaded as a result of participating. In addition to being viewed as ineffective, participants across groups generally associated these activities with suggestive aid distribution or outright vote buying by politicians ahead of the election.



- *“Nowadays, people don’t want to go to Ceramah because they’re talking useless stuff. We are also not interested...it’s useless.”* (Male, 22, Indian, Kedah)
- *“When it comes to talks, people don’t really go there to listen to the talks.”* (Male, 21, Malay, Kedah)
- *“Not very successful...It was a little forced. It made me feel very awkward and want to leave.”* (Female, 19, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“When [the] election is over, they’ll disappear.”* (Female, 22, Malay, Selangor)
- *“It’s a way to attract us [with money, food]. We are not stupid. We know what they’re trying to do.”* (Male, 22, Indian, Kedah)
- *“If you’re at the night market, you’re forcing people to watch them, to take things from them.”* (Male, 20, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“[Ceramah] have no effect on me...What they have done does not influence me.”* (Female, 19, Chinese, Kedah)
- *“Specialization on the new trend, like follow the new trends. Come to our generation. Don’t think in your generation, please. Engage with younger people.”* (Male, 22, Indian, Negeri Sembilan)

- *“It’s ineffective publicity. Effective publicity is more practical.”* (Female, 20, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)

At the same time, many male participants welcomed the giveaways offered by candidates at such events – cash, meals, petrol vouchers, groceries – and agreed that failing to take the giveaways would constitute a loss since the candidate was going to distribute it anyway. However, some participants in the Kedah groups and seven of the eight participants in the Selangor Malay group indicated that giveaways could be effective in influencing their vote or the votes of youth but more as a demonstration of charity for the needy rather than outright vote buying.

- *“That’s not corruption...they wanted to give us money, so we took it.”* (Male, 20, Malay, Kedah)
- *“It’s a loss if you didn’t take it.”* (Male, 21, Malay, Kedah)
- *“They used it as a bait.”* (Male, 19, Malay, Kedah)
- *“I think it might be effective for older people. But for us, not really. We still want money, but if we attend their campaigns, we just simply take the money. Just take it, but we don’t vote for you...If they’re giving, I accept. No problem.”* (Male, 22, Indian, Kedah)
- *“[Meals] are effective. We will still consider [the candidate]. For example, they’re trying to buy votes. Something like that.”* (Male, 19, Malay, Kedah)
- *“Some people, B40 people,⁹ they suddenly don’t have food. They heard that somebody [is] giving food, and they just go, and they see these people at the party over there. They just go there to get food.”* (Male, 22, Indian, Negeri Sembilan)

Finding 7: Despite many participants being worried about youth being too easily influenced by social media, all acknowledged that social media is the most effective means for candidates to reach them.

The focus group discussions highlighted the primacy of social media when it comes to political engagement of younger Malaysians. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok played a critical role in attracting attention, disseminating information, and shaping the political opinions of Undi18 voters. The focus group discussions revealed that younger Malaysians relied on social media as a source of news and political information, with most considering it more influential than traditional forms of campaign outreach (see above).

⁹ Bottom 40 percent, or B40, refers to the bottom 40 percent income group in Malaysia.

Further, rather than simply being passive consumers of political content on social media, participants indicated often turning to social media to gather information and form opinions about candidates in GE15. They sought guidance from others on social media platforms, which influenced both their decision-making process and motivation to vote (content featuring inked fingers was cited by participants across groups on numerous occasions). Short videos on platforms like TikTok were particularly effective in capturing participants' attention. However, like above, participants also stressed the importance of authentic and relatable content for it to be credible and effective.

While TikTok was referenced by many Chinese participants, Malays appeared the most responsive to that platform. Many Chinese participants indicated using Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, Xiaohongshu, and the YouTube channel BBK Network.



- *“Social media is good. They attract attention. It’s from the social media that we know what they do, where they go. For example...they visit this place and that. Facebook, Instagram.”* (Female, 22, Malay, Selangor)
- *“That’s the first time we vote, so most of the time we don't know who to vote for, so we listen to what people say on social media.”* (Female, 20, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“When you need to make a decision, you need to refer to some sources, right? You would check your phone. Social media, Facebook video, someone you follow on Instagram, TikTok. Social media is more influential on youths.”* (Female, 22, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“Shorts videos such as in TikTok, 'douyin' since many people use them.... Because shorter videos are straight to the point.”* (Male, 20, Chinese, Kedah)
- *“Five years before this, many people campaigned in person. But during the recent election, there were many TikTok videos, every time you slide TikTok, you would see videos related to the general election. The best platform is social media.”* (Male, 20, Malay, Kedah)
- *“...The younger generation, they’re more exposed to social media. They’re also critical thinker to think whether it’s right or not. Because in Twitter, there’s a lot of, that fellow say this, that fellow say that, we’re able to know. We have our own sense to think what’s right and wrong. It’s not bad to have social media.”* (Male, 21, Indian, Selangor)
- *“It didn’t do much unless they told me about their plans on TikTok. They upload the content and it’s up to you whether you want to view it. They’re not hard selling. If you don’t like them, you don’t have to watch it. If you like them, you can watch it.”* (Male, 20, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)

- *“Use Tik Tok and Instagram.”* (Male, 22, Indian, Negeri Sembilan)

By contrast, most participants found candidates’ and parties’ use of WhatsApp campaign messaging – a ubiquitous outreach technique - both ineffective and annoying.

- *“It’s a joke.”* (Female, 22, Malay, Selangor)
- *“Not serious.”* (Male, 22, Malay, Selangor)
- *“Trolling.”* (Male, 21, Malay, Selangor)
- *“When forwarded many times, I’ll just ignore.”* (Female, 23, Malay, Selangor)
- *“Not effective. They were annoying.”* (Female, 25, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“They were like spam calls...I close the message right away. I don’t even see who the candidates are.”* (Male, 22, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“They were annoying. It’s an infringement of our privacy. And they want us to vote for them. I don’t know where they got our phone numbers, and they asked us to vote for them.”* (Female, 20, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“‘If you vote [for] me, I [will] give you RM100 something.’ So, I just ignore.”* (Female, 22, Indian, Negeri Sembilan)

Finding 8: Each ethnic group was also strongly influenced by underlying ethnic concerns; the loss of special privileges (Malays), infringement on personal rights and freedoms (Chinese), and critique of the *Bumiputra* system (Indians).

Participants’ beliefs and voting behavior reflected the complex interplay of racial identity, equality, and politics in Malaysia. Malay participants’ sentiments generally revolved around the preservation of Malay rights, privileges, and ownership of the lang. Several Malay participants referred to Malaysia as *Tanah Melayu*¹⁰ in the focus groups. Malay participants expressed fears of potential marginalization and the erosion of Malay political dominance. By contrast, Chinese participants voiced concerns about being perceived as outsiders or immigrants (*pendatang*) and emphasized cultural preservation, equal opportunity, and the avoidance of dominance by

¹⁰ *Tanah Melayu* refers to the Malay peninsula and historically has been used to signify the ancestral land of the Malay people, culture, and heritage. The term is often associated with the concept of *ketuanan Melayu*, or “Malay supremacy.” This ideology asserts that the Malay ethnic group, along with indigenous people, should be given certain privileges and special rights in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and politics.

Malays. For Indian participants, critiques of Bumiputra privileges and a desire for socio-economic equality were highlighted. Indian participants expressed fear of being forced to convert to Islam, resentment with policies that separate races, and the need for inclusion and equal opportunity in education and home ownership.

The focus groups also revealed noteworthy differences among Malay participants in the Negeri Sembilan group and the Kedah and Selangor groups. While both the Kedah and Selangor Malay groups share common concerns related to the preservation of Malay rights and political dominance generally, the Negeri Sembilan Malay group's emphasis on internal Malay unity distinguished it from the other two Malay groups. The Negeri Sembilan Malay group expressed worries that the lack of Malay unity and intra-Malay conflicts are hindrances to achieving national unity. Their motivations stem from a desire for Malay solidarity and the preservation of Malay privileges to prevent a decline in their socio-economic standing. In contrast, the Kedah and Selangor Malay groups exhibited fear of marginalization by the Chinese, potential oppression of Muslims, the need for Muslim political dominance, and the preservation of Malay land ownership and privileges.



- *“Muslims should govern the country.”* (Male, 21, Malay, Selangor)
- *“They wanted to get rid of Jawi...¹¹”* (Male, 19, Malay, Kedah)
- *“Because this is the Malay land...If the leaders are Chinese, I fear that Malays won’t get anything.”* (Female, 20, Malay, Kedah)
- *“I’m worried that Malays will fall [if the leaders are Chinese]”* (Female, 25, Malay, Kedah)
- *“But for me, it’s very difficult for us to have unity in Malaysia because we have so many different races. Even Malays are not united and hate each other. So, it’s very difficult.”* (Female, 23, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“We can see that in terms of work, Chinese people are always at the top. Once these special rights are abolished, they will rise and we will be overtaken. That’s the concern.... If we want to be at their level, we have to be competitive.”* (Male, 22, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“If we really want to be united and talk about fairness, there has to be equality, which means everyone gets the same things. Those who are hardworking will get what they deserve, nobody will be special, majority, minority, these issues won’t exist.”* (Female, 20, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)

¹¹ *Jawi* refers to the system of writing for the Malay language derived from Islam.

- *“Sometimes us Chinese will get treated as outsiders. They will use this when talking about racial topics, saying how we came from outside and do not belong here. If they really want to become “Satu Malaysia”¹² this viewpoint is not good and should be abandoned.”* (Female, 19, Chinese, Kedah)
- *“They’ll give properties to Bumiputra only.... If we want to buy houses, they will ask you for Bumiputra status. If not, they say that we’ll have to look for Bumiputras or Malays.”* (Male, 20, Indian, Kedah)
- *“I think [Bumiputra privilege] is a way to separate the community. You want unity, but you’re separating us...”* (Male, 22, Indian, Kedah)
- *“In the past, Chinese could not take part in constructions projects. Even if we tried to bid for a project, we won’t win the project. They usually award the project to their own people. If they only prioritize people and not quality, our roads will deteriorate very quickly.”* (Male, 20, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“I think we don’t need the Bumiputra concept in Malaysia. Because we have three religions in [this country]. We have to respect them all....Bumiputra means, wherever we go, Bumiputra get the first place. Then, followed by Indian, Chinese and all. We don’t need that concept actually.”* (Female, 21, Indian, Negeri Sembilan)

Finding 9: Most participants were frustrated with the politicization of race and religion in GE15 and highlighted the need for more inclusive politics.

The focus group discussions strongly suggested most participants rejected divisive racial narratives and messages in GE15 campaigns. Most participants across different state and ethnic groups expressed discomfort and frustration with politicians’ emphasis on and politicization of racial and religious issues. With the notable exception of Malays in Kedah and Selangor, they generally perceived it as a regressive approach and preferred a focus on practical issues. Participants in the Indian and Chinese groups as well as the Negeri Sembilan Malay group voiced concerns about perceived Muslim-Malay extremism and several cited fears of a repeat of the May 1969 sectarian riots in Malaysia. They emphasized the importance of accepting and respecting others, regardless of their religious or ethnic backgrounds. Similarly, many participants believed that political parties employed racial and religious narratives as a strategy to gain votes and viewed such tactics as attempts to manipulate voter sentiment rather than address substantive issues.

¹² *Satu Malaysia*, or One Malaysia, was a political concept to promote national unity and harmony among Malaysia’s diverse ethnic and religious groups.

Most participants highlighted the need for inclusive politics that transcend simply racial or religious identity. They expressed dissatisfaction with instances where assistance or support was perceived to be politicized or biased towards a specific group, emphasizing the importance of treating all individuals equally. The focus group discussions also revealed concerns about the spread of hate speech, fear mongering, and discriminatory rhetoric, particularly through online platforms like TikTok. Participants condemned such behavior and expressed frustration with its negative impact on Malaysian society.



- *“I think it’s a sentiment that’s being played by political parties to buy votes.”* (Female, 22, Malay, Selangor)
- *“That makes me very uncomfortable. Come on, we’re in the 21st century. How long do you want to talk about racial issues? [We need] to move forward, and not backward.”* (Male, 21, Indian, Selangor)
- *“On the polling day, after the results were announced, I was a little scared that the racist incident...13th May would happen again. At the time, on TikTok, many Malays post about 13th May, saying that it might happen again.”* (Female, 22, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“I wanted to vote for someone who didn’t politicise religion as much.”* (Male, 24, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“At the end of the day, I feel like, even during election, it’s only religion and race issue came up.”* (Male, 22, Indian, Kedah)
- *“We don’t want extremists.”* (Male, 21, Indian, Selangor)
- *“It’s not wrong to have religious mindset, but they need to accept others.”* (Male, 22, Indian, Kedah)
- *“[“Islamic” parties] don’t pay attention to more important issues. They pay attention to petty issues.”* (Female, 22, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“Certain parties like raising racial issues, issues that shouldn’t be brought up. For example, 13 May. We are all happy now but why did they want to bring it up? They do it on purpose to make people fight among themselves. Religion.”* (Female, 20, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“[They say,] ‘If you don’t vote a certain way, you’re a kafir.’¹³ They punish others.”* (Male, 24, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)

¹³ *Kafir* is a term that refers to non-believers of the Islamic faith.

- *“We can accept all races with an open mind. We shouldn’t bring up any issues. We shouldn’t question anything that they do. That’s the only way we can be united.”* (Female, 20, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“Fear mongering on TikTok.”* (Male, 22, Indian, Negeri Sembilan)

Finding 10: Influence from participants’ families was greater than from friends. Most participants avoided discussion of politics with friends.

Overall, the focus group discussions suggest that family, more so than friends, played a role in shaping youth participants’ voting decisions, although the degree of influence varied. Generally, family influence was stronger among Malay and Chinese participants than Indian. Several participants mentioned being influenced by family voting habits observed from an early age and being encouraged to vote similarly in GE15. While some participants valued and trusted family members’ opinions on how to vote, others asserted their independence in decision-making or disagreed entirely.

The influence of friends was generally perceived to be limited, and many participants, especially those in the Malay groups, expressed a reluctance to discuss politics with friends due to the potential for argument or conflict, something they actively sought to avoid. Although some participants reported being aware of their friends’ political opinions, often through posts on social media, they asserted that this awareness did not significantly impact their own voting choices. Many Indian participants mentioned discussing voting decisions with friends and being open to discuss politics, but there was an acknowledgement of differing opinions.



- *“[I talk about political stuff] with family, but not with friends. Because if I were to discuss with my friend, it’ll become an issue. We’ll fight.”* (Male, 24, Malay, Selangor)
- *“[Friends are] afraid to talk about that.”* (Male, 24, Malay, Selangor)
- *“I think there wouldn’t be any influence [from family], as that is my vote. I will vote according to my preference.”* (Male, 22, Chinese, Kedah)
- *“My vote is my own business. [My family members’] vote is their own business. I pick the one that I want to pick. But I think we pick the same party anyway.”* (Male, 20, Malay, Kedah)

- *“I think I was influenced by my family since I was a child. My family members always voted, and would get each other to vote, or come back to vote.”* (Female, 22, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“I watched the news while having dinner and listened to my parents’ opinions. They were always saying, “Why does the government want to do this? Why this? Why cause us to suffer?” After listening to their opinions, I felt that we should vote. After I entered secondary school, I had this desire to vote.”* (Male, 21, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“If they [friends] tell everyone who they vote for, then I would be against it. I have a Malay friend on Instagram. During those two weeks, he posted bad things about [the opposition] every day. It was very obvious who he would vote for. That made me angry.”* (Male, 21, Chinese, Negeri Sembilan)
- *“But I don’t really [talk politics] with my family...I don’t want to argue with them... With friends, I can’t argue with them.”* (Female, 23, Malay, Negeri Sembilan)

Conclusions

The focus groups revealed that participants were primarily driven to vote by a combination of the experiential aspect of voting, a sense of civic duty, and a desire for change stemming from frustrations with political turmoil and economic hardship. As expected, participants affirmed the effectiveness of social media in shaping younger voters’ political opinions, even if they were uneasy about its effects on young voters. Authenticity and relatability were prized attributes in candidates, while traditional campaign outreach techniques were deemed impractical and ineffective on younger voters. Although one’s ethnic identity played a significant role in shaping participants’ opinions and voting behavior, as expected, it was not exclusively determinative, and most participants were frustrated with politicians’ emphasis on racial issues and disagreed with parties using race to ‘bait’ voters. Finally, family influence was more significant than that of friends as political discussions among friends were generally avoided.

The focus groups also revealed distinctions between the state and ethnic groups. Among the different state groups, Kedah participants were generally less articulate in their political views and tended to portray conventional sentiments on race and religion than their peers in Negeri Sembilan and Selangor. Participants in Negeri Sembilan possessed the most substantive and, among the Malay groups, most politically inclusive opinions. Among the different ethnic groups, Malays consistently emphasized the importance of Bumiputra rights (especially in Kedah) and generally cast the idea of racial unity and harmony not as political equality among ethnic groups but - in varying gradations - as an acceptance of Malay political dominance among all Malaysians. For their part, Chinese and Indians framed racial unity in terms of civic equality, fairness, merit, opportunity, and even economic growth.

Alongside the findings were sentiments that warrant additional investigation in future research which could lend valuable new insights into the motivations and preferences of Undi18 voters. For instance, despite expressing strong support for Bumiputra-first policies, several participants in the Kedah Malay group complained about what they perceived as inequality and favoritism among Malay elites in government policies intended to uplift the Bumiputra community, an indication that economic circumstances are also an important influence. Likewise, deeper investigation into Undi18 voters' social media consumption can help us better understand influence on voting behavior.¹⁴ Future research should apply additional, intersectional angles of analysis, such as class or wealth, source(s) of information, and other factors, to interrogate motivations more fully.

Finally, the findings are also noteworthy for the implicit recommendations they offer political parties to improve appeal to and engagement with younger voters.

- Political parties should not mistake participation by young voters in public campaign events such as *ceramah* as enthusiasm or genuine support. Some participants welcome the giveaways and may only attend to take them.
- Parties should not assume that Undi18 voter turnout in GE15 will be repeated in future elections. While eventful, the excitement and novelty generated by Undi18 among first-time youth voters is unlikely to be replicated again; Parties will need to appeal to young voters in different, more innovative ways to count on their participation.
- Even if some young voters, especially Malays, are sympathetic to narratives based on racial or religious concerns, they are still highly skeptical of the motivations of politicians who make such claims, just as younger voters are generally distrustful of most politicians. Politicians must also appeal to younger voters' desire for political inclusion to be viewed as credible.
- Deploying divisive racial and religious messaging on social media ahead of elections is a double-edged sword: while it is recognized as an effective motivation tool for some groups, it was viewed negatively by most FGD participants and may dampen their support.
- Candidates should emphasize practical solutions to the challenges facing Malaysia and demonstrate consistent and honest engagement on those issues. FGD participants overwhelmingly favored candidates who are hardworking and demonstrated results.
- Younger voters are highly attuned to politicians' representations of sincerity and performance and are most responsive to candidates who are approachable, relatable and meaningfully interact with communities most in need.

¹⁴ Campaigning by political parties on social media (TikTok in particular) during GE15 has been widely credited with encouraging high voter turnout among Malaysian youth.

Appendix A: Methodology

Nine focus group discussions were conducted between May 24 and June 4, 2023, among Malaysians aged 18-25 who voted in GE15 in Selangor, Kedah, and Negeri Sembilan. Three focus groups were conducted in each state, one each for Malay, Chinese, and Indian groups. The Kedah focus groups were conducted in Alor Setar and the Negeri Sembilan and Selangor focus groups were held at Central Force’s offices in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.

The purpose of the focus groups was to understand what motivated first-time voters in Selangor, Kedah, and Negeri Sembilan to vote in GE15 and to what extent, if any, they participated in non-voting election related activities like Get Out the Vote (GOTV) and/or volunteer activities. IRI focused discussion on motivation on three key areas: issues and beliefs; political party/coalition outreach; and the influence of family and friends.

Participants for each state’s focus groups were recruited via purposive sampling and selected based on a screening questionnaire with the following criteria: Participation in a focus group within the past 12 months (selected participants were prohibited if they participated in a focus group within the past 12 months), age (18-25), voter participation in GE15,¹⁵ state of voter participation, ethnicity, gender, level of comfort discussing experience around GE15, political party membership, and level of education attained. Participants selection was also based on ensuring gender parity.¹⁶ All focus group participants provided written and informed consent to participate in the discussions.

The Chinese focus groups were conducted in Mandarin, the Malay in Bahasa Malaysia, and the Indian in English and Bahasa Malaysia. The moderator for the Indian groups provided interpretation for the few instances in which Tamil was used by participants. The focus groups were recorded both in their original form as well as with simultaneous interpretation.

State	Date	Ethnicity	Age	Number of Participants
Selangor	May 24	Indian	18-25	4 Female
				4 Male
	May 25	Chinese	18-25	4 Female
				4 Male

¹⁵ Recruited participants were required to show a screenshot of their MySPR voter registration details to Central Force to verify their voter registration state. For privacy purposes, Central Force asked participants to black out the last four digits of their IC number before sending the screenshot.

¹⁶ Despite multiple recruitment attempts, gender parity was not achieved for the Kedah Indian group. Central Force attributed the inability to recruit sufficient eligible Indian females to the relatively small size of the Indian population in Kedah, the novelty of and skepticism with the study’s authenticity, and last-minute dropouts.

	May 26	Malay	18-25	4 Female
				4 Male
Kedah	June 2	Chinese	18-25	4 Female
				4 Male
		Malay	18-25	4 Female
				4 Male
		Indian	18-25	1 Female
				6 Male
Negeri Sembilan	June 4	Chinese	18-25	4 Female
				4 Male
		Malay	18-25	4 Female
				4 Male
		Indian	18-25	4 Female
				4 Male

Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Notes for Moderator:

The moderator should emphasize that it is important that the participants speak freely and openly. The participants should understand that their comments, both positive and negative, will be appreciated.

This discussion guide is not a script; rather, the main purpose of this guide is to familiarize the moderator with the questions and issues that we would like to see addressed during the focus groups and to recommend a general order and flow of the topics to be discussed.

The focus groups themselves should be as free and spontaneous as possible. So long as the moderator investigates the issues in this guide, he/she is free to combine questions, change questions, omit questions that do not seem to be working and add questions in response to interesting trends as they become apparent. The moderator may also prompt the participants if they need help getting started. However, the moderator should let the participants respond spontaneously initially.

The moderator should aim to get specific and detailed answers through probing and follow-up questions, and by encouraging a true exchange of views among the participants. It is important that the moderator conduct a group discussion, not a group interview.

Please keep the following study objectives in mind throughout the group discussions:

- What motivated eligible youth voters aged 18-25 to participate in November 2022's general election, following three lines of inquiry:
 - Issues and beliefs,
 - Party outreach/engagement, and
 - Peers/social network influence
- To what extent voters aged 18-25 who participated in November's general election participated in non-voting political practices during the election, including but not limited to campaign volunteer work, GOTV efforts, etc. Why did they engage in these activities?

I. Introduction (5 minutes)

Introduction of moderator and participants

- Consent: My colleagues have already gone over the consent form with you. Do you still have any questions for me?
- Explanation of purpose of group: We wish to learn about what your experience with the November 2022 elections.
- Explanation of the "rules" of the discussion:
 - Speak freely and openly.

- Be critically-minded – constructive criticism and negative assessments are as important as positive comments and praise.
- Try not to talk all at once.
- Be as specific as possible with concrete examples whenever possible.
- Mobile phones: Turn off

II. Warm-Up (approx. 5 minutes)

Objective: To open the discussion

- To start this off, please tell me a bit about your life. What is the best and worst part about being a young person in Malaysia?

III. Motivation to vote in November 2022 general election (approx. 60 minutes)

Objective: Understand if and how issues and beliefs, party outreach, and peers/social networks impacted participants' voting decisions.

- When did you make up your mind to cast your vote? What motivated you to participate in the election? (*Moderator, look for: specific trigger event—if so, what? Long-held motivation? Extrinsic motivation? etc.*)
- For those of you who were not yet 21 last November, what did it mean to you to have the voting age lowered to 18? Was this very important or not so important to you, and why?
- What made you decide to cast your vote for a certain party/coalition in GE15? Can you tell me? (*Moderator, allow for open discussion, then continue with:*)
- Most people say that their decision on who to vote for comes from one of three areas:
 1. What the issues are or what they believe in
 2. How parties reach out to them
 3. What their friends, family, and social networks think

Would you say that your own decision on who to vote for was influenced by any of those three? If yes, which (you can name more than one)? If not, what else impacted your decision instead?

- Talking now only about **issues and beliefs**. What issues impacted which coalition you voted for? Can you name them and also tell us which party/coalition you believed could best address these and why?
 - Prompts if no responses:
 - Anti-corruption/integrity
 - Youth empowerment
 - Malay rights/Islam
 - National harmony/unity

- Climate change/Environment
 - Economic growth
 - Political stability
- Some coalitions are associated with certain beliefs and values. Can you tell me what each of the following parties is associated with?
 - Barisan Nasional (BN)
 - Pakatan Harapan (PH)
 - Perikatan Nasional (PN)
 - Gerakan Tanah Air (GTA)
- Did it matter to you which beliefs and values a party/coalition is associated with when you decided who to vote for? How?
- Of all the different things that impacted for which party/coalition someone cast their vote, which was the most important for you personally, and why?
- Did it matter to you which candidate a party/coalition put forward as their prime minister candidate?
- Talking now only about **party/coalition outreach** ahead of the elections. Did you see any parties making voter outreach efforts in your area? If yes, which parties and what efforts?

Definition of “outreach”: Party-sponsored interventions intended specifically to influence potential voters to support their coalition or candidate in advance of Election Day

 - Prompts if no responses:
 - Ceramahs
 - Door-to-door campaigning
 - Aid distribution
 - “Walk-about” or Warung/Kopitam visits
 - Social media campaigning advertising
 - Posters/Mailing
- In your opinion, were these efforts **effective** in mobilizing **young** voters or not? If not, why not?
- What specific actions, if any, did the party/coalition take that made you decide to vote for them?
- What specific actions, if any, did the party/coalition take that made you decide not to vote for them?
- In your opinion, what is the **most meaningful way** parties/coalitions could engage with youth voters in your area?

- Did you observe any of the parties/coalition doing this?
- If social media, which platforms and what **kind of content**?
- Talking now only about your **friends and social networks**. Is voting something you discussed among your friends **and family**? If not, why not? If yes, do you recall what kinds of issues you discussed?
- Does it matter to you whether who you vote for is the same as who your **friends or family** vote for? If yes, why?
- Did you see any discussions or recommendations on who to vote for from friends or family on social media ahead of the election? Can you describe those in some detail for me please?
- Would you say most of your friends your age voted? If not, why do you think they did not vote?
- As a [Malay/Chinese/Indian—*use term according to group*], how—if at all-- did your background impact your decision to go vote? And how—if at all--did it impact your decision on who to vote for?

IV. Participation in non-voting political practices during the election (approx. 20 minutes)

Objectives: Understand if and how and why participants engaged in non-voting political practices during the election, including but not limited to campaign volunteer work, GOTV efforts, etc.

- Did you participate in any Get Out the Vote efforts? By this I mean efforts that motivate people to vote in an election, and NOT who to vote for. If yes, what did you do and why did you volunteer?
 - Prompts if no answer:
 - Volunteering as a poll worker
 - A seminar/workshop/discussion on voting and/or the political process
 - Volunteering to transport voters/postal ballots to voting centers
 - Donating to public-led efforts to bring voters home to vote
 - Persuading people in your network to vote
- Did you participate in any other election related activities? If yes, what?
- From what you've observed, how did other young people here in [Selangor/ Negeri Sembilan/Kedah—*use term according to group*] engage with the November 2022 elections, besides voting, if at all?

- As a [Malay/Chinese/Indian—*use term according to group*], do you think it is important to get involved in elections beyond casting one's vote? Why or why not?

V. Wrap-up (approx. 5 minutes)

Objective: To elicit open feedback to potentially raise points of importance for participants that were not addressed earlier in the discussion

Today's discussion was meant to look young people's participation in the November 2022 elections. I have given you many different aspects of this topic to discuss. But there may be other aspects that I did not think about that may also play a role. Is there anything else that someone who wants to fully understand this topic should know?

Appendix C: Participant Selection Criteria/Screening Questionnaire

Groups:

Group #	Location	Who (all groups mixed gender, ages 18-25)
1	Selangor	Malay Selangor voters in the November 2022 general election
2	Selangor	Chinese Selangor voters in the November 2022 general election
3	Selangor	Indian Selangor voters in the November 2022 general election
4	Negeri Sembilan	Malay Negeri Sembilan voters in the November 2022 general election
5	Negeri Sembilan	Chinese Negeri Sembilan voters in the November 2022 general election
6	Negeri Sembilan	Indian Negeri Sembilan voters in the November 2022 general election
7	Kedah	Malay Kedah voters in the November 2022 general election
8	Kedah	Chinese Kedah voters in the November 2022 general election
9	Kedah	Indian Kedah voters in the November 2022 general election

Introductory Statement for Interviewers

Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is _____. I am an interviewer from Central Force Malaysia, an independent market research company. We are currently looking for people to participate in a research study to understand the motivation for young voters in Malaysia in voting during the general election last November 2022. This study is conducted by a nonprofit organization, and it will take about 1.5 hours to 2 hours for focus group discussion along with 8 participants in a group.

Kindly be assured that your participation and responses will be strictly confidential in accordance with our professional standards, and we will not disclose any of your personal information to any 3rd party.

It would be great if you can answer some of our questions before we proceed with our invitation with you. We thank you in advance for your participation.

1. Have you participated in a focus group study in the past 12 months?		
Yes	1	<i>Terminate</i>
No	2	<i>Continue</i>

2. How old are you? WRITE DOWN THE EXACT AGE: _____

Under 18	1	<i>Terminate</i>
18-21	2	<i>Continue</i>
22-25	3	<i>Continue</i>
26 and older	4	<i>Terminate</i>

3. Did you vote in the November 2022 general election?		
Yes	1	<i>Continue</i>
No	2	<i>Terminate</i>

4. Which state did you vote in in the November 2022 general election?		
Selangor	1	<i>Keep for groups 1, 2, and 3</i>
Negeri Sembilan	2	<i>Keep for groups 4, 5, and 6</i>
Kedah	3	<i>Keep for groups 7, 8, and 9</i>
Elsewhere	4	<i>Terminate</i>

****Kindly provide a screenshot of your voting details at <https://mysprsemak.spr.gov.my/semakan>, for verification purposes and kindly hide the last 4 digits of your IC before sending it to us. Example:**

The screenshot displays the following information:

MAKLUMAT PERIBADI PEMILIH	
Nama Penuh	[REDACTED]
No. Kad Pengenalan	940 [REDACTED]
Tarikh Lahir	4 MAC 1994
Jantina	PEREMPUAN

DAFTAR PEMILIH YANG TELAH DISAHKAN	
Lokaliti	104 / 30 / 03 / 002 [REDACTED]
Daerah Mengundi	104 / 30 / 03 - KINRARA SEKSYEN 1
DUN	104 / 30 - KINRARA
Parlimen	104 - SUBANG
Negeri	SELANGOR

Maklumat semakan adalah sehingga Daftar Pemilih Tambahan Bulan Mac Tahun 2023 yang diwartakan pada 19 April 2023

CETAK

Sebarang pertanyaan berkaitan daftar pemilih, sila hubungi SPR di talian +603-88927218
08 MEI 2023

5. What is your ethnicity?

Malay	1	<i>Keep for groups 1, 4, or 7</i>
Chinese	2	<i>Keep for groups 2, 5, or 8</i>
Indian	3	<i>Keep for groups 3, 6, or 9</i>
Bumiputera (Non Malay)	4	<i>Terminate</i>
Others	5	<i>Terminate</i>

6. Gender (code by observation)		
Male	1	<i>Recruit for mixed gender</i>
Female	2	

7. How comfortable are you discussing your experience around the November 2022's general election?		
Very comfortable	1	Keep for all groups
Somewhat comfortable	2	
Somewhat uncomfortable	3	Terminate
Very uncomfortable	4	

8. Are you a member of a political party?		
No	1	Keep for all groups
Yes	2	Terminate
Unsure	3	

9. What is the highest level of education you have attained?		
Primary school	1	Terminate
Lower secondary school (Form 1-Form 3)	2	Terminate
Upper Secondary school (Form 4- Form 5)	3	Keep for all groups
Vocational training	4	Keep for all groups
Pre-university	5	Keep for all groups
Tertiary/university	6	Keep for all groups
Post graduate (Master)	7	Keep for all groups

Post graduate (PHD)	8	Keep for all groups
---------------------	---	---------------------

10. What is your occupation and which industry are you currently working in? (Open-ended)		
Occupation: _____		
Industry: _____		

11. Which of the following best describes your monthly household income?		
Less than RM1,000	1	
RM1,001 – 2,000	2	
RM2,001 – 4,000	3	
RM4,001 – 7,000	4	
RM7,001 – 12,000	5	
RM12,001 or above	6	

12. Did you participate in any Get Out the Vote efforts? By this I mean efforts that motivate people to vote in an election, and NOT who to vote for. If yes, what did you do?		
Yes, <i>Please specify:</i> _____	1	Up to 3 per group (Best effort basis)
No	2	

13. Could you briefly describe your voting experience during the last November 2022 general election?		

Conclusion: Thank you very much for answering my questions. I would now like to collect your name and contact information. If you are a match for our research project, we will get in touch with you. In case you qualify, we anticipate that the discussion will be held on [DATE/TIME]. Would you be available then?

1	Criteria & Quota Met	Yes	1
		No	2

	Highest + Education Level	1	SPM completed									
		2	STPM									
		3	Certificate or Diploma									
		4	Degree or above									
	English/Mandarin/Malay Speaking (Self-Rating)		Poor							Excellent		
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	FE Comments											
	2.1 Respondent English/Mandarin/Malay speaking fluency)											
	Poor										Excellent	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	2.2 Respondent creativity											
	Poor										Excellent	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	2.3 Respondent Qualification (Overall)											
		Fit for IDI (Rate 8-10)									1	
		Not fit for IDI (Rate 6 and below)									2	
		KIV (Rate 7)									3	
3	FE Overall Remarks:	_____										



International Republican Institute
IRI.org | @IRI_Polls

