

## **NATIONAL YOUTH SURVEY 2008 PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT, POLITICS, LIFESTYLE AND VALUES**

### **Introduction**

The survey was conducted by Merdeka Center for Opinion Research through telephone interviews throughout Malaysia, including Sabah and Sarawak. A total of 2,518 respondents provided completed feedback using a structured questionnaire. Each respondent is defined as a youth aged 20 between 35 years old. The poll was conducted from 13<sup>th</sup> November to 9<sup>th</sup> December 2008. Sampling for the respondents was structured along the national population profile (specifically proportional to gender, ethnicity and state of residence).

The objectives of this survey were to get young adults in Malaysia to speak for themselves rather than others who speak on their behalf on issues pertaining to their participation in community activities and politics as well as their views towards lifestyle and values.

In addition, 8 focus groups conduct among youth and those attached to youth groups were conducted in the Klang Valley, Taiping, Kota Kinabalu and Kuching to give further clarification and insights to the focus of the questionnaire. Although the focus groups were conducted between 13<sup>th</sup> February and 5<sup>th</sup> April 2009, the insights provided did not differ much from the survey findings as a considerable section of the survey focused on lifestyle and values held by youth.

This is the third consecutive year Merdeka Center has been conducting the National Youth Survey with the support of the Asia Foundation.

### **Main Findings**

#### **Media Consumption**

The survey found that almost one-half of Malaysian youth, 49% of them, had the habit of reading newspapers more than four days in a week. A plurality however read only one newspaper, as 37% did not mention a second newspaper. News consumption from television also centered around four days or more in a week (53%). As for channels frequented for news, TV3 remains the most popular news channel (57%), followed by local news on Astro (9%). The series of focus groups conducted to complement the survey findings found that the Malay Astro Awani and Mandarin AEC Evening Edition were the two most popular news channels on Astro amongst the participants.

Comparing survey results from those held in 2007, we found that internet access increased from 57% to 70% in late 2008. Internet users were usually younger band of youth and highly educated (72% among those who were at least a diploma holder). On average, internet users reported that

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they spent 10 ½ to 15 ½ hours per week online. Among the internet users, 44% surfed the net for news. However, internet users preferred online versions of local mainstream press such as Berita Harian, Bernama and Utusan over alternative news portals. A mere 3% had the habit of reading alternative news portals such as Malaysiakini.com and Merdekareview.com.

In terms of trust towards mainstream media, the respondents were split as 49% expressed distrust and the other 46% expressed trust in mainstream news.

**Focus group sound bites on trust on mainstream media**

*“Reporters tend to exaggerate the news to enhance sales.”*  
 (Male, Chinese, Taiping)

*“When news is publicized, it must have certain level of truth.”*  
 (Female, Indian, Taiping)

Responses from focus groups showed that most youth felt that reported news were generally exaggerated whether to enhance sales or to further some political agenda. Nevertheless, most felt that when an incident is reported, it must have happened but admitted that slants in reporting were prevalent.

As for Sarawak, the level of trust in mainstream media mirrored that of the national trend. 47% of Sarawakian youth trusted the mainstream media while 46% of them did not. Sarawakian Bumiputra respondents, regardless of religion, held greater trust towards the mainstream media compared to Malay and Chinese respondents from the state (refer Chart 1).

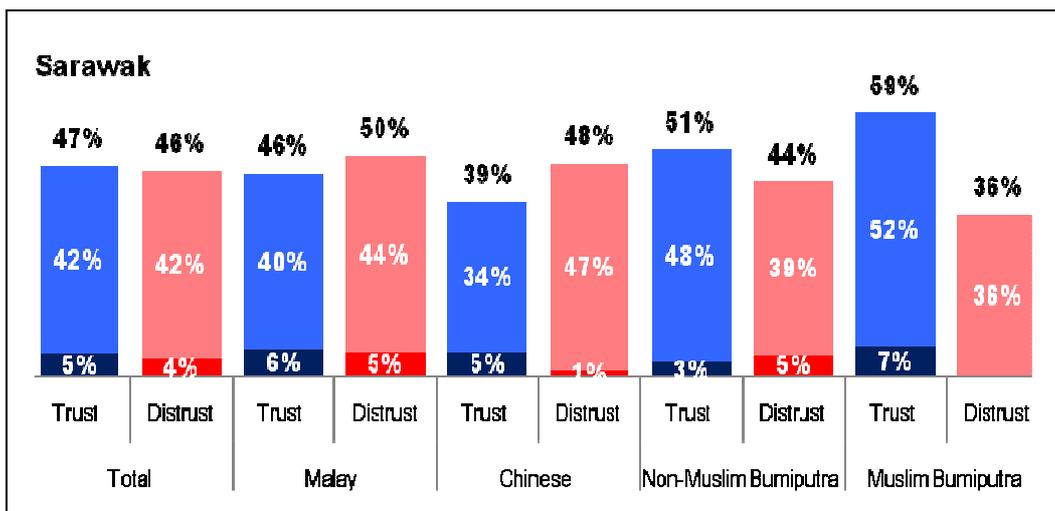


Chart 1

In Sabah, 52% expressed trust towards the mainstream media. Those who trusted in mainstream media were people who worked in the private sector (59%), business people (56%), homemakers (52%) and civil servants (51%). Students and unemployed were more skeptical towards the reporting of the mainstream media (as shown in Chart 2).

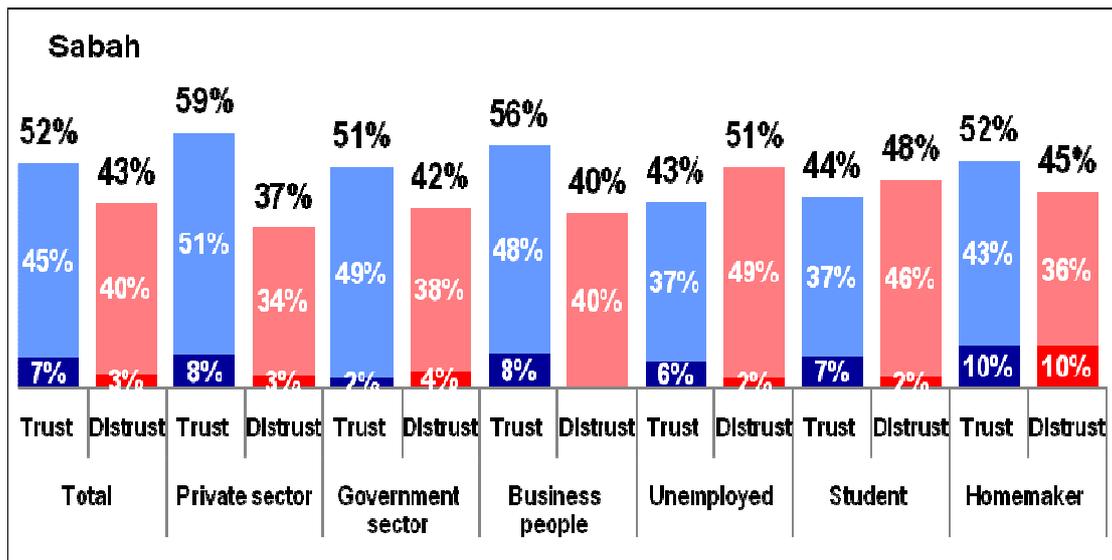


Chart 2

Lifestyle

**Sports**

Soccer or futsal were the most popular sports among youth (29%). Manchester United of the English Premier League was the most popular football club among soccer fans with 36% of soccer fans pledging their support to the Red Devils.

**Organization**

Participation of youth in organizations remained low. Nearly 80% did not join any organization. The remaining 20% mostly joined non-political organizations such as sports or recreational, religious, cultural or race-based groups or societies in education institutions such as St. John and scouts. However, 13% among youth who were active in organizations polled indicated they had joined a political party. Participation in political parties was divided along regional lines. 16% of active Peninsular youth were members of political parties whereas 10% of active Sabahan youth were party members while only 2% of active Sarawakian youth said they had joined a political party.

**Mobile phones**

Mobile phones have become a necessity in our daily lives nowadays. Almost all (96%) the youth interviewed owned a mobile phone. The survey showed that 71% of Malaysian youth preferred prepaid mobile services over postpaid ones. Unsurprisingly, the younger respondents preferred prepaid mobile services compared to older respondents (as shown in Chart 3).

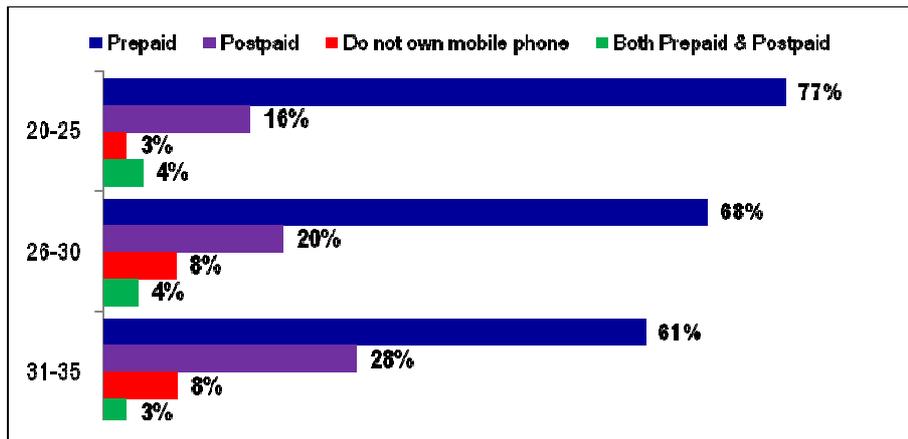


Chart 3

Maxis is the most popular (37%) provider among all mobile phone services in Malaysia, followed by Celcom (33%) and Digi (20%) among our survey respondents. Preference of provider was divided along geographical lines. Maxis was found to be the most popular provider in Peninsular Malaysia with 47% of users. 53% of Sarawakian youth subscribed to Celcom and the popularity of Celcom and Digi was equally divided in Sabah (38% and 36%).

**Financial obligations**

The survey also showed that almost one in three youth was obligated to a private or public financial institution. Those who were financially obligated tend to be those who received higher education or older respondents (31 – 35 years old).

**Mode of transport**

Private transport was the mode of choice for young people to move about. Public transport ranked the lowest (11%) among the types of transportation used by young people in Malaysia. A slight majority of 57% preferred driving while 27% used motorcycle. Reflecting industry data, Proton and Perodua were the two most preferred car choices among automobile users, at 39% and 33%, respectively.

**Living abroad**

There were 27% youth who had thought of leaving Malaysia and living in another country. Australia was at the top of the list (18%) among favored destinations, followed by United Kingdom (13%).

Issues

When asked about the direction of the country, 48% felt the country was moving in the right direction while 41% stated the opposite. 15% of respondents who were optimistic could not tell why they were feeling upbeat about the direction of the country. Surprisingly while 10% among those who said the country was moving in the right direction quoted political instability as a reason for them to feel optimistic – focus groups reveal that this sentiment reflects acceptance of the more open political discourse and debates while 36% among those who said the country was moving in the wrong direction quoted the same reason for making them feel pessimistic (refer Chart 4) – focus groups indicated a substantial level of dissatisfaction over the political bickering and maneuvering evident in the post-March 2008 political arena.

**Right direction vs. wrong direction: The top 6 reasons**

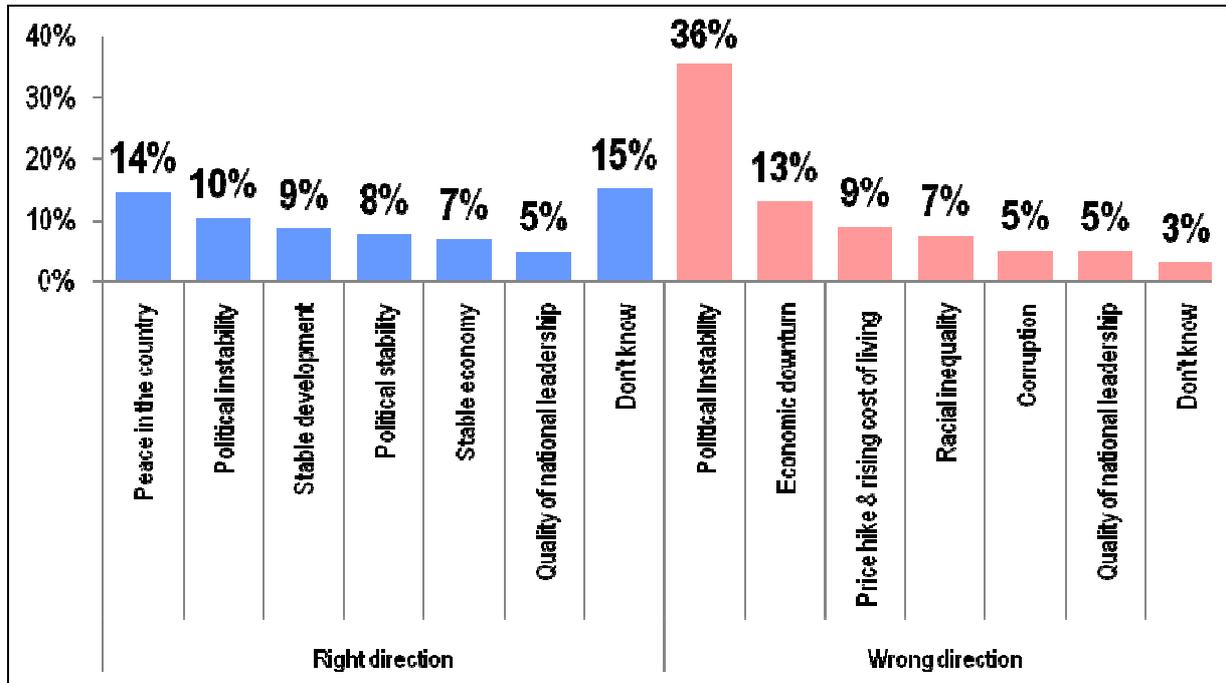


Chart 4

Sarawak respondents were found to be the most optimistic. A comfortable majority of 60% said the country was moving in the right direction. Sarawakian Chinese were the most pessimistic with 42% of them stated that the country was moving in the wrong direction and another 28% Sarawakian Chinese had no views on the question. Sarawakian Malays and Bumiputras (Muslim or non-Muslim) were generally optimistic. Chart 5 shows us the different views across ethnic groups in Sarawak.

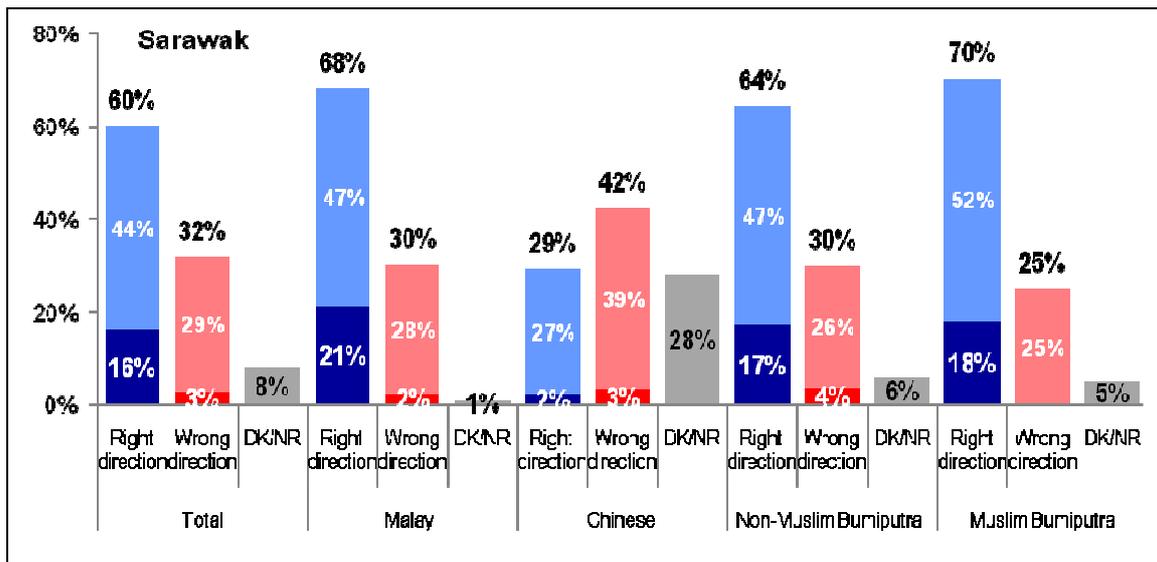


Chart 5

As for Sabah, 53% of Sabahan youth were optimistic about the direction of the country. However, only 29% of Sabahan Chinese said the country was moving in the right direction and 40% were pessimistic about it. (Refer chart 6)

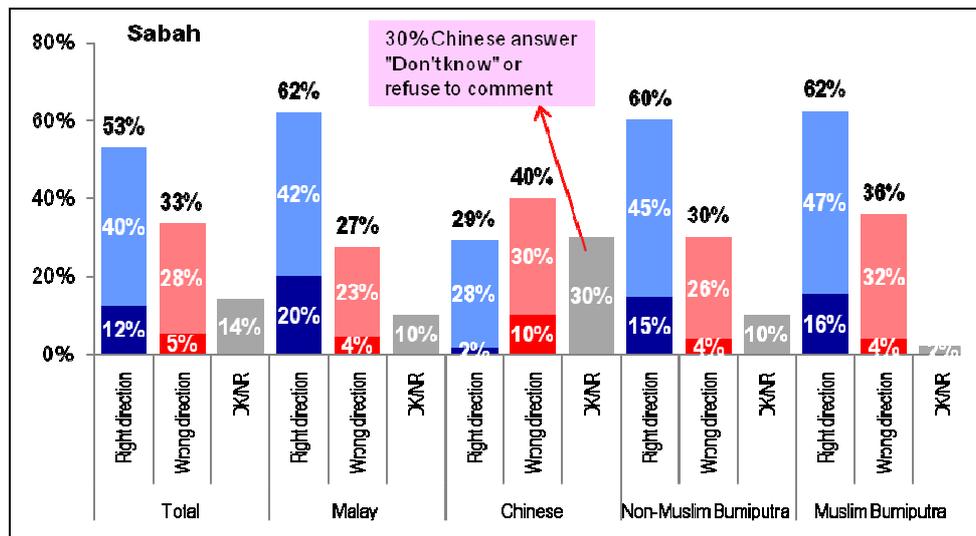


Chart 6

## Social Values

### Self Identities

The survey found that a plurality amounting to nearly one-half of Malaysian youth preferred to identify themselves first as Malaysians (48%). Religious identity was also very important to youth today. 38% would identify themselves as a follower of a certain religion. Identification as Muslim was very important to Malay respondents. Among the Malays, 62% chose to be identified as a Muslim but Muslim Bumiputras from East Malaysia preferred to be identified as Malaysians where three in five Muslim Bumiputras wanted to first call themselves Malaysians. Only 15% youth would identify themselves according to their respective ethnicity.

### Focus group sound bites on identity

*“Ethnic identification is mainly cultural-based and being politicized by politicians.”*  
 (Male, 28, Kuching)

*“There is no point being a Malay or Malaysian if we are not Muslim.”*  
 (Male, student, Kota Kinabalu)

Comparing across age groups, older respondents preferred to identify themselves as Malaysians (refer Chart 7).

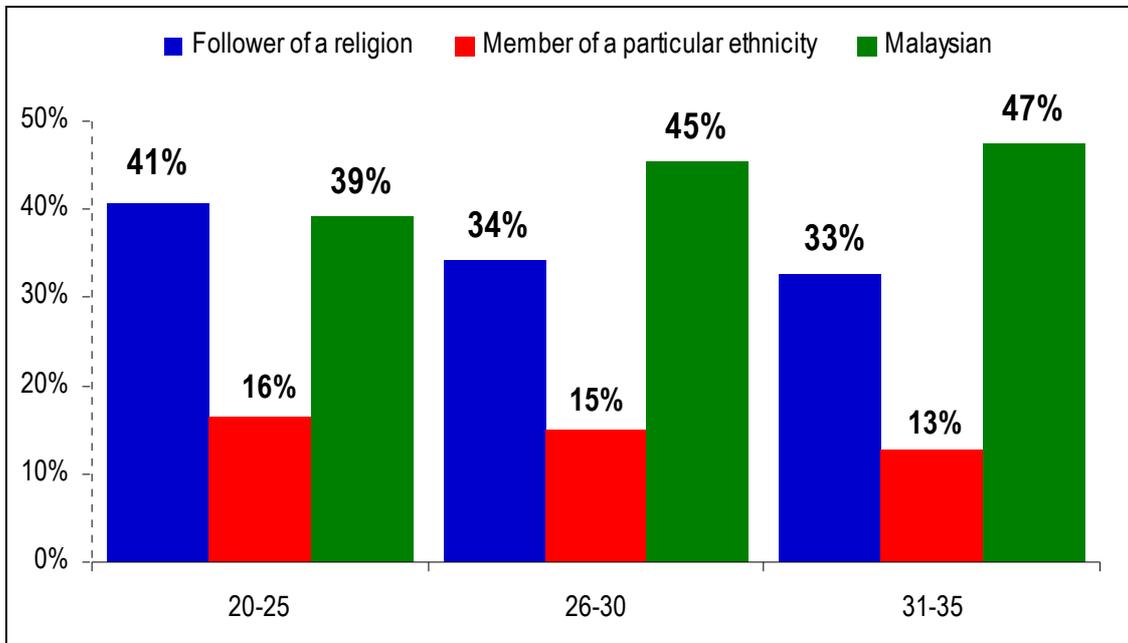


Chart 7

### Political outlook

#### **Views on women and minorities in political leadership**

The survey was conducted after the US presidential election and like most countries in the world, Malaysian youth were excited about Barack Obama being elected as the first African-American President. When asked about the favorability of Barack Obama, 68% favored Obama and a comfortable 65% of Indian respondents stated “very favorable”.

Followed by that, the youth were asked of their views on the acceptance of having ethnic minorities lead Malaysia. Overall the responses were divided along region and ethnicity. Overall, 52% agreed that minorities can be accepted to lead the country but acceptance of minority leadership was lower in Peninsular Malaysia but a majority of more than 60% among East Malaysians respondents agreed to the notion.

The results also reflected the level of acceptance for minorities as political leaders. 56% of youth could accept a woman as Prime Minister and 57% could accept a non-Malay Muslim Prime Minister. However, religion seems to be the defining factor in determining acceptance. 53% youth did not accept a non-Muslim as Prime Minister (with 42% showing stronger disfavor). (Refer chart 8)

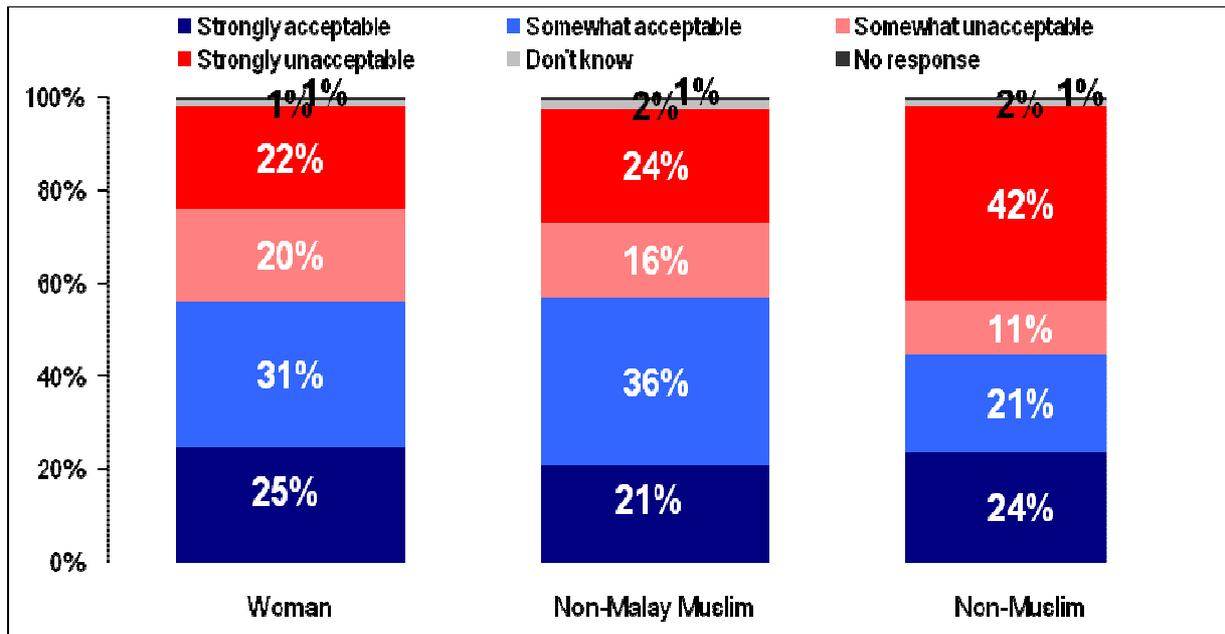


Chart 8

Malays and Muslim Bumiputeras shared very much the same view – lower level of acceptance towards having a women, non-Malay or non-Muslim as Prime Minister. However, the Chinese, Indian and non-Muslim Bumiputera respondents shared the opposite views almost equally. Focus groups responses gave some insight into these diametrically opposite views.

**Focus group sound bites on minorities as PM**

*“National leadership should be given to whomever that has caliber. The ability to lead is of utmost importance.” (Clerk, female, Chinese, Taiping)*

*“The official religion of the country is Islam and the majority of this country are Muslim. Therefore, a non-Muslim will not be able to address certain issues concerning Muslim well-being.” (Male, Dusun Muslim, KK)*

A closer look at Sarawak showed that 84% Sarawakian Chinese, 77% Sarawakian non-Muslim Bumiputera and even 55% Sarawakian Muslim Bumiputera expressed their acceptance for a woman Prime Minister. 54% Sarawakian Malays indicated it was unacceptable. When asked if they were able to accept a non-Muslim as Prime Minister, 53% of Sarawakian respondents expressed acceptance. In short, acceptance of minorities as Prime Minister was largely ethnic based whereby Sarawakian Malay and Sarawakian Muslim Bumiputera respondents generally did not accept a non-Muslim Prime Minister but non-Malay (Chinese and Indian) and non-Muslim Bumiputera respondents from Sarawak overwhelmingly supported the idea. (Refer chart 9)

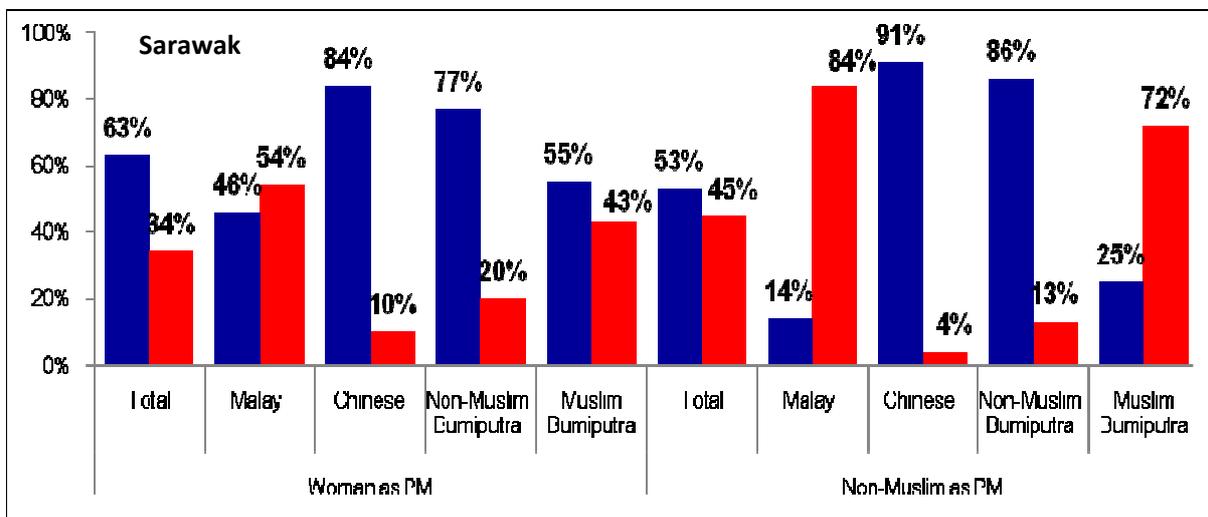


Chart 9

Looking into Sabah, the survey found that among those polled, the idea of a woman becoming the Prime Minister was widely accepted by the Chinese and Indian youth in Sabah. However, Sabahan Malay and Muslim Bumiputera respondents were split in this respect. When asked about a non-Muslim becoming the Prime Minister, 76% Sabahan Malays and Sabahan Muslim Bumiputras respectively expressed disapproval to the idea. (Refer chart 10)

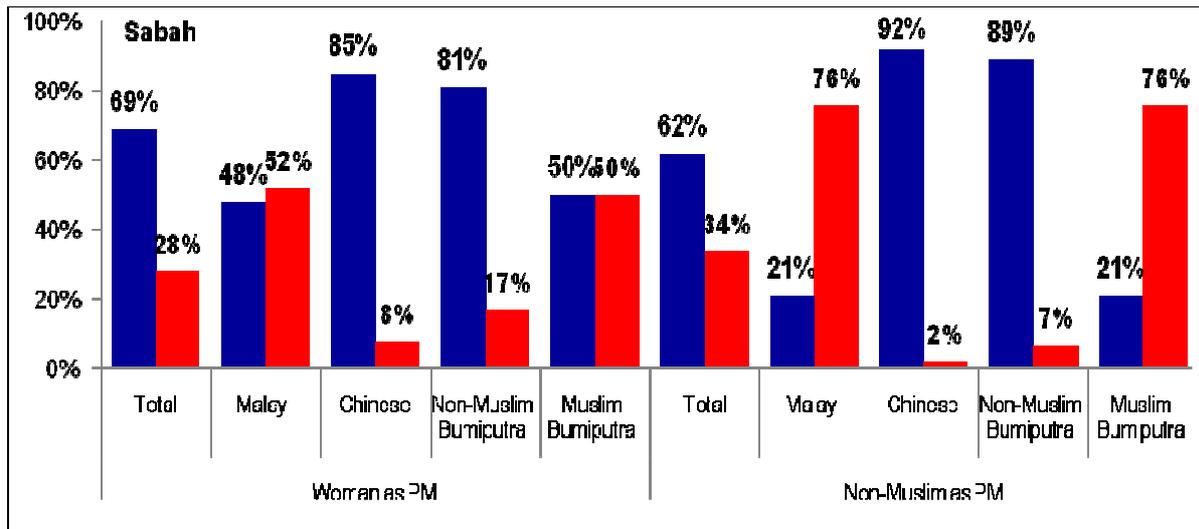


Chart 10

It is observed that religion was the most important factor when comes to choosing the top leadership for the country despite geographical differences. Malay or Muslim respondents tend to favor a Muslim as top leader while non-Malay or non-Muslim respondent generally were able to accept leaders, disregarding his or her ethnicity, gender or religion, as long as the leader is proved capable.

Civic participation

**Lower self-efficacy**

Malaysian youth generally have had very low level of self-efficacy as found in our previous series of surveys and this one is no different. 42% felt that there was little they could do to effect change in their community and 20% felt that they can do nothing at all. There is a decline of 3% among those who think they can make a great deal of difference and some difference in their community compare to 39% in 2007. In general youth across the ethnic divide felt helpless when it comes to politics, Indian respondents seemed to hold a different view. 40% Indian youth claimed they can make some difference in the community while 24% think they can make a great deal of difference do in the community.

When asked how much impact government decisions had on their daily lives, 50% polled stated there were some impact. 27% thought that government decisions gave a lot of impact. Low level of self-efficacy was also portrayed when asked how much influence they think they could have on the government. 29% said they have no influence at all and 24% that said only a little influence. Chinese respondents were most pessimistic with 43% saying that they had no influence at all.

#### **Focus group sound bites on government influence on daily life**

*“Petrol prices had great impact on poorer people. Prices for consumer goods have also increased. The people have no chance to voice out their views on such policies.”*  
(Malay, Petaling Jaya)

32% of youth interviewed said that there was a great deal of difference that their vote can make in influencing the government and another 32% said there were some difference.

#### **Local election**

Youth interviewed generally agreed to having local elections (64%). However, there are many who couldn't comment on the issue of having local elections with 15% answered “Don't know” and non-response.

**Level of self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy is the belief that one is capable of performing in a certain manner to attain certain goals. The survey identified three groups of youth with varying degree of self-efficacy – low, moderate and high. Four specific questions aimed to measure the level of self-efficacy were identified from the survey. Each response for every question was then given a score between zero and four. A response with a lower score indicates lower self-efficacy. In other words, the higher the score, the higher sense of self-efficacy. A non-response is given a score of zero as shown in Table 1.

		Lower self-efficacy ←————→ Higher self-efficacy				
Score		0	1	2	3	4
<b>Questions</b>	Thinking about the problems you see in your community, how much difference do you think you can make in solving the problem?	Don't know / No response	No difference at all	A little difference	Some difference	A great deal of difference
	How much of an impact would you say government decisions have on your daily life?	Don't know / No response	None	A little	Some	A lot
	And how much influence could you have on what the government does?	Don't know / No response	None	A little	Some	A lot
	How much of a difference do you think your vote makes in influencing the government?	Don't know / No response	No difference at all	A little difference	Some difference	A great deal of difference

Table 1

The scores for each question were then summed up and the total score ranges from 0 to 16 points. Based on the scores, three levels of self-efficacy were determined. The results are as shown in Table 2.

	Low	Moderate	High
Score	0 - 8	9 - 12	13 - 16
Characteristic	<p>Mostly Chinese, attended Chinese primary school, Mandarin speaking and primary school leavers. Some are English speakers.</p> <p>*From the survey, we found out that there is a sharp decline in self-efficacy as household income increases.</p> <p>Among this group, 43% would first identify themselves as Malaysians.</p>	<p>Mostly Malays and Bumiputras, from rural areas and attended national school.</p>	<p>Mostly Indians, attended Tamil primary school, speak Tamil or Tamil dialects, lower income group, and a believer of Hinduism.</p> <p>Those who said they joined an organizations (31%). Among this group, 45% identified themselves as follower of a religion first and 42% said they are Malaysians.</p>
<p>* Those who are high in household income but low in self-efficacy are identified as younger, urban, white collar or students (from well-to-do family) Malay and Chinese who are contented or ignorant towards politics. A closer breakdown showed the group consisted 44% Malay, 36% Chinese, 72% urban, 71% Peninsular Malaysians, 64% aged 20 – 25 years old, 35% with degree and 31% diploma holders (31%), 55% work in private sector (55%) and 18% students.</p>			

Table 2

The group with the highest sense of self-efficacy mostly consisted Indian respondents, who attended Tamil primary school, speak Tamil or Tamil dialects, originated from lower income group, and a Hindu. The Hindu Rights Action Task Force (Hindraf) was a hotly discussed issue at the point when the survey was being carried out. In October 2008, Hindraf was banned and declared as an illegal organization by the then Home Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and five Hindraf leaders were still held under ISA one year after the Hindraf rally (and at the time the survey was conducted). The time when the survey was carried out also coincided with the 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Hindraf movement. Throughout the month of October to end of December, Jaringan Rakyat Tertindas (Jerit) had been holding cycling project nationwide which saw some police action upon this group. At that point of time, the Indian respondents may have been energized due to spate of issues related to the affairs of their community.

**Electoral participation**

55% of youth have registered themselves as voters and another 44% have yet to register. Among the non-voters, 52% of them were not of voting age or ineligible at the point of survey.

59% Sarawakian respondents who have reached voting age (21 years old and above) have registered as voter. Among those who are eligible, Sarawakian Chinese youth had the lowest registration rate with only 30% registered voters whereas Sarawakian non-Muslim Bumiputras had the highest number of registered voters at 49% as shown in Chart 11.

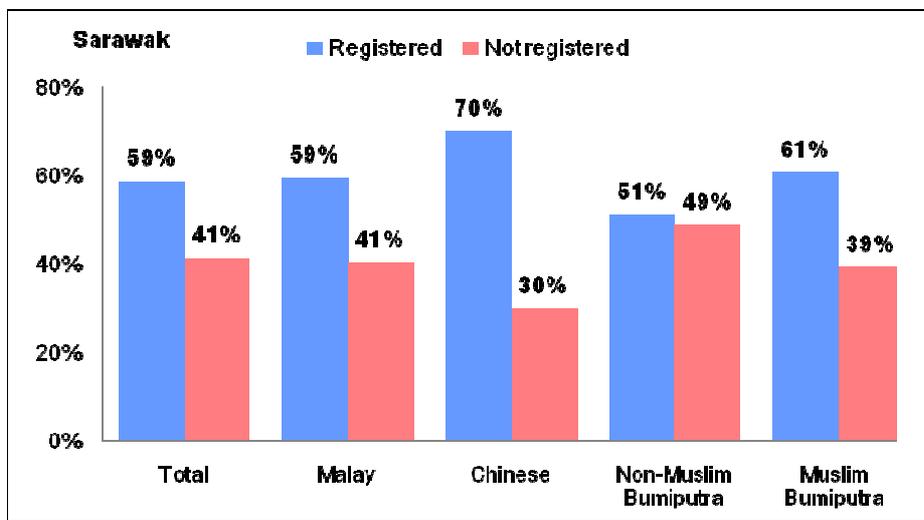


Chart 11

In Sabah, among the eligible respondents, 76% are registered voters. Voting tendency was proportionate to age where only 56% youth aged 20 – 25 years old had registered while as high as 95% of those aged 31 – 35 years old reported that they had registered as voters in Sabah. Ironically, those with degree qualification have the lowest registration rate (64%) compared to secondary school leavers (80%). (Refer chart 12)

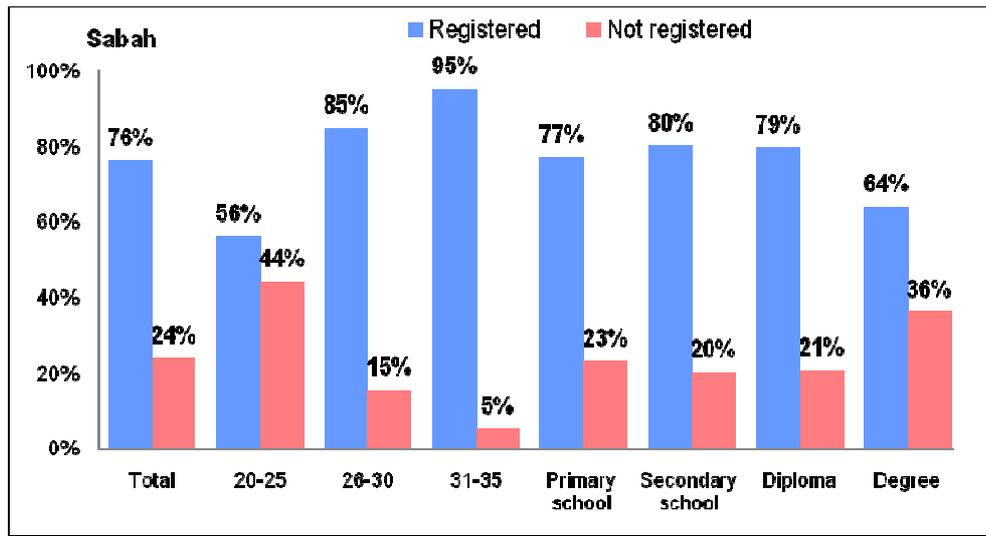


Chart 12

### Eligible non-voters

Among the eligible non-voters, the primary reason of not registering was because they had no time or they had other commitments (49%). It is interesting to note that there were still 8% of youth who did not know where to register as voters.

21% eligible respondents who are aged 21 years old and above but had not registered to vote. This group of eligible non-voters were identified as mostly the young and unmarried. Among the pool of eligible non-voters, 32% of them were from Sarawak.

The survey also saw that primary school leavers and degree holders had the lowest level of electoral participation. As far as we could understand, primary school leavers were less educated and thus having a lower sense of self-efficacy. Degree holders, however, made up of youth who were “still studying” and disconnected politically. Many of the eligible non-voters appeared to be less active in organizations and if they do join any organizations, they were more likely to be involved in sports, cultural, alumni organizations and societies in schools. The non-voters were also less likely to join political parties or residential organizations. This may indicate that they were less politically conscious.

Eligible non-voters generally had a lower sense of self-efficacy. They did not think their votes would have much influence in the political process. However, the survey findings

showed these eligible non-voters had stronger preference for multiracial parties which included multiracial coalitions such as the Barisan Nasional.

80% among the registered voters reported that they had voted in the 2008 March 8<sup>th</sup> general election. 52% of those who voted were motivated to fulfill their duty and responsibility as a citizen.

Political values

**Attitudes towards race-based politics**

The survey found that 77 % of the youth showed stronger preference for a multiracial party that is able to represent the interests of Malaysians regardless of ethnicity or religion.

Views on political diversity with different parties representing the interests of their community or unity under BN were split along regional lines. More Peninsular youth (51%) favored political diversity, whereas 63% Sarawakian and 56% Sabahan respondents favored the idea to be united under Barisan Nasional. (Refer chart 13)

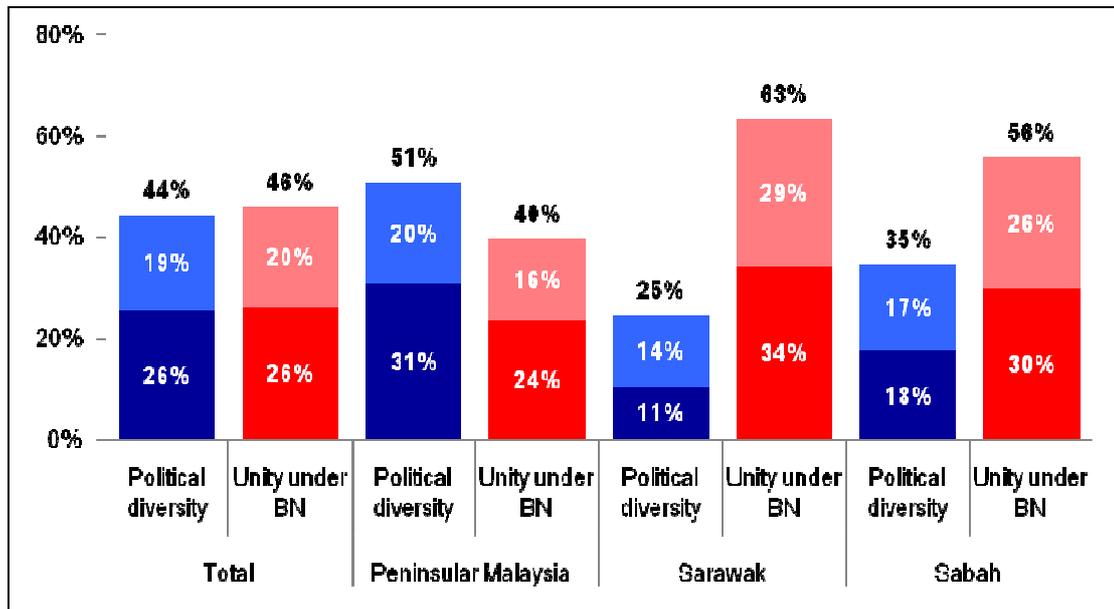


Chart 13

Specifically for Sarawak, 63% of Sarawakian respondents wanted to be united under BN and only 25% Sarawakian respondents supported political diversity. Surprisingly, those who were younger favored the idea to be united under Barisan Nasional. 67% from the 20 – 35 year olds in Sarawak favored being united under BN but the percentage decreased to 53% among 31 – 35 year olds. (Refer chart 14)

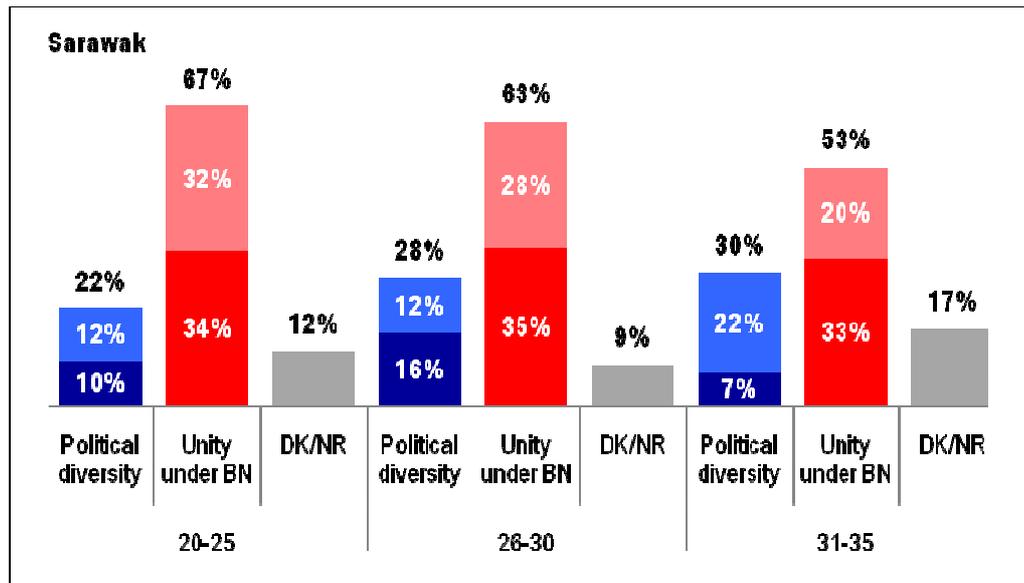


Chart 14

**Attitudes towards rule of law and freedom**

An overwhelming 87% of youth agreed that no matter what the wrongdoing, those accused must have a right to fair trial in court. The Indian youth were split when asked if the harmony of community will be disrupted when people establish too many groups to champion their interests where another 52% Indian respondents begged to differ.

Overall, 59% youth agreed that coverage of racial conflicts should be censored while 38% disagreed to censoring racial conflicts. Interestingly, the survey found that the Indian youth were spilt in this respect. Across the nation, 48% Indian respondents agreed to censorship on racial conflict and another 48% disagreed to it.

52% youth interviewed felt that the University and University College Act (UUCA), or better known by its Malay acronym AUKU, is needed. Among the students polled, 51% agreed that UUCA is needed to ensure students staying focused on their studies. Some sound bites harvested from the focus groups seemed to prove this point.

**Focus group sound bites on University and University College Act**

*“Student should be concerned only with studies and should not get involved in politics.”*  
 (Indian, Taiping)

*“Government action truly has created psychological effect on students”*  
 (Student, male, Kota Kinabalu)

In Sarawak, as we can see in Chart 15, 56% of Sarawakian Chinese were unable to respond to the question about UUCA. This showed a lower level of awareness among Sarawakian Chinese youth on some of the government policies. 86% of Sarawakian Muslim Bumiputra mentioned that UUCA is necessary. (Refer chart 15)

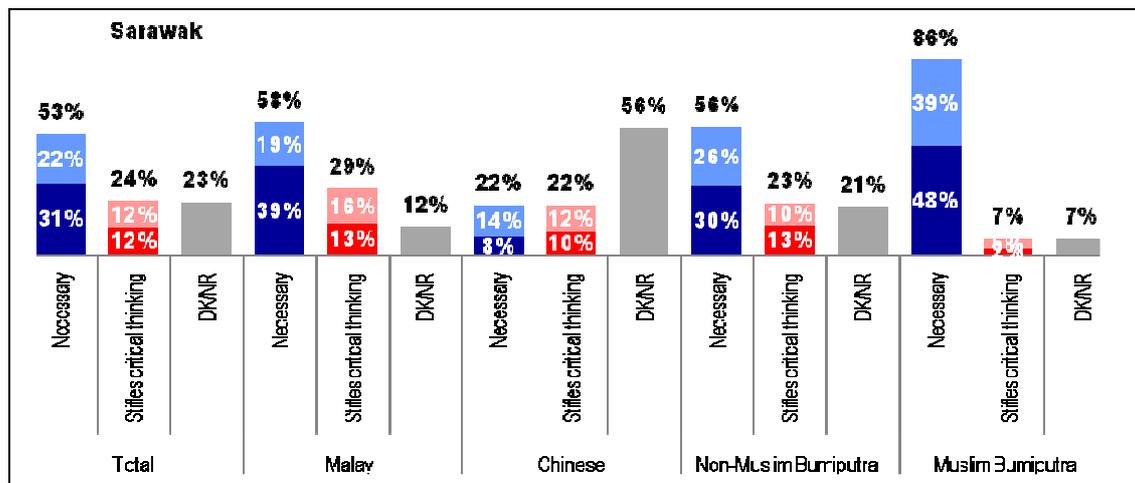


Chart 15

**Attitudes towards political parties**

What do youth really want? Above all, they wanted to be heard as 60% youth polled wanted political parties to listen to them. Among other requests youth demanded from political parties were bringing development to the community (27%) and taking care of the interests of respective ethnic groups (9%).

On the national level, the economy was identified as a key concern of youth and 46% hoped that political parties will concentrate on managing the economy, another 29% wanted

political parties to fight corruption, and 19% wanted the politicians to work on handling inter-ethnic relations.

### **Conclusion**

Almost nine months after March 8<sup>th</sup> general election touted as electoral tsunami which denied the ruling coalition Barisan Nasional of its two-thirds majority in the Parliament, the youth remained politically disconnected.

#### **Youth are politically disconnected**

Political efficacy has not improved since 2007. Malaysian youth generally have low self-efficacy since 40% of youth are categorized as having moderate level of self-efficacy and 34% with low level of self-efficacy. There was also a sharp drop of 16% in the sense of influencing the government with their votes.

The number of people who joined any organization remained low. Only a handful of 20% of youth joined an organization and most of the groups that they joined are non-political like sports or recreational, religious, cultural or race-based or societies in education institution such as St. John and scout. Political participation was at a moderate level. Among people who had voted during March 8<sup>th</sup> general election, 82% were merely voters. The youth were not keen to commit in volunteering at polling station or observing election.

#### **Mixed views on political pluralism**

There were instances where the youth appeared to be conservative and other times open to some pluralistic idea. They were conservative because acceptance of woman and ethnic minority as the Prime Minister were moderate. The survey found out that the level of acceptance was still very much divided along ethno-religious lines. Non-Muslim respondents were more ready to accept minorities as top leaders but not so with the Muslim respondents.

However, Malaysian youth preferred multiracial parties compared to a political parties that only represent interest of a particular race or community.

#### **Well-informed and usage of internet**

The survey found out that Malaysian youth were well-informed. 49% of the youth read newspaper at least 4 days in a week or more and 53% polled said that they watch news on television at least 4 days in a week or more.

Comparing with the 2007 National Youth Survey, internet usage has increased rapidly within the span of a year. It increased from 53% in 2007 to 70% in 2008. The survey also found out that the youth averagely spend 45 minutes to 2 hours every day surfing the net. Internet was identified as one of the most important form of communication for the youth and current trends observed indicated that the growth of internet usage will continue to flourish. As almost half of the internet users actively surf the internet for news (despite a majority frequented online versions of mainstream press), it is believed that the digital age will play a very vital role in shaping the future of Malaysian youth.