

NATIONAL YOUTH SURVEY 2007

Perspective toward social involvement, politics and views on current issues

Introduction

The survey was carried out by Merdeka Center for Opinion Research through telephone interviews on 1,508 randomly selected Malaysians aged between 20 and 35 years old from 8th August to 1st September 2007. The survey covers all of Malaysia, including Sabah and Sarawak. Sampling for the respondents were structured along the national population profile (specifically proportional to gender, ethnicity and state of residence) based.

The objectives of this survey was 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 governance and democracy.

In order to obtain further insight, six focus groups with youths and members of youth groups were conducted in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Kota Bharu, Kota Kinabalu and Kuching. The survey was made possible via funding support from the Asia Foundation and the Embassy of Netherlands.

Main findings

News and information access and consumption

Television was the most preferred source of information for youth as reported by 67% of respondents. Newspapers came second at 57%. They also admitted listening to radio programs but usually for entertainment purposes and percentages of youth accessing the internet for news remains minimal at 12%

Youth interviewed paid most attention on entertainment and the least on world politics. Findings from focus groups indicated that many of them perceive the latter as not having any connection to their daily lives.

While internet access is gradually increasing, 43% polled stated they still had no access to the web. The situation is more prevalent among those from the lower income groups. As for the uses of the internet, respondents with access used the Net to search for the latest information, checking emails, seeking job, and for entertainment and education purposes. The survey found that blogging is not as widespread as expected whereby a mere 5% stated they had blogs. A vast majority of these mainly blogged about personal matters.

Issues and interests

The personal concerns of youth resembled that of last year which mainly revolved around career, education, family and earning more money (Figure 1). However it should be noted that concerns pertaining to education have decreased from 32% in 2006 to 11% in 2007 possible due to the shift in age group from 18 – 32 years old in 2006 to 20 – 35 years old in 2007.

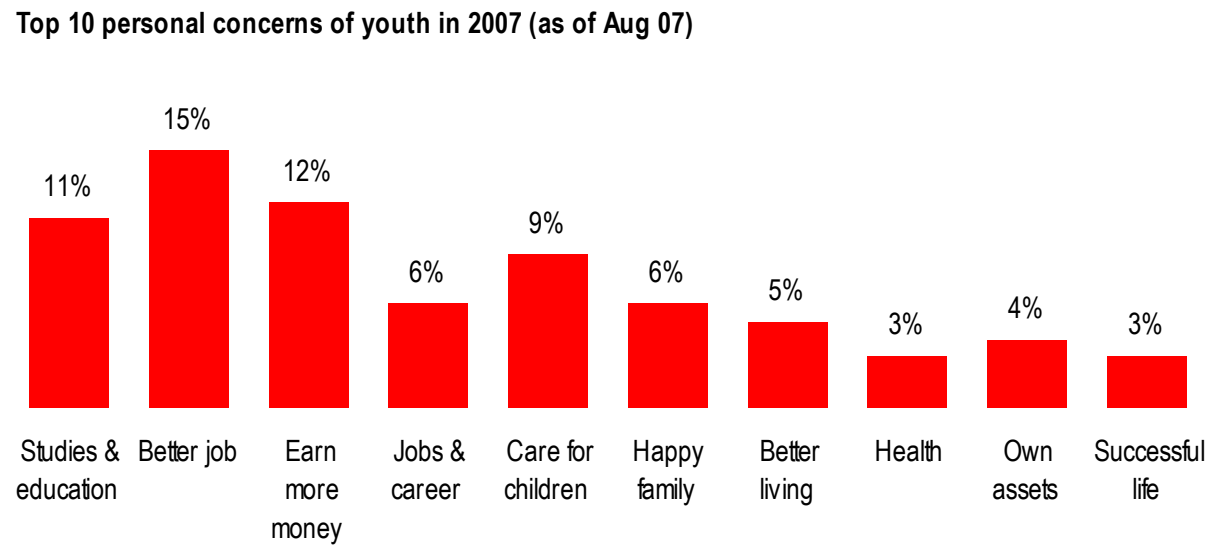
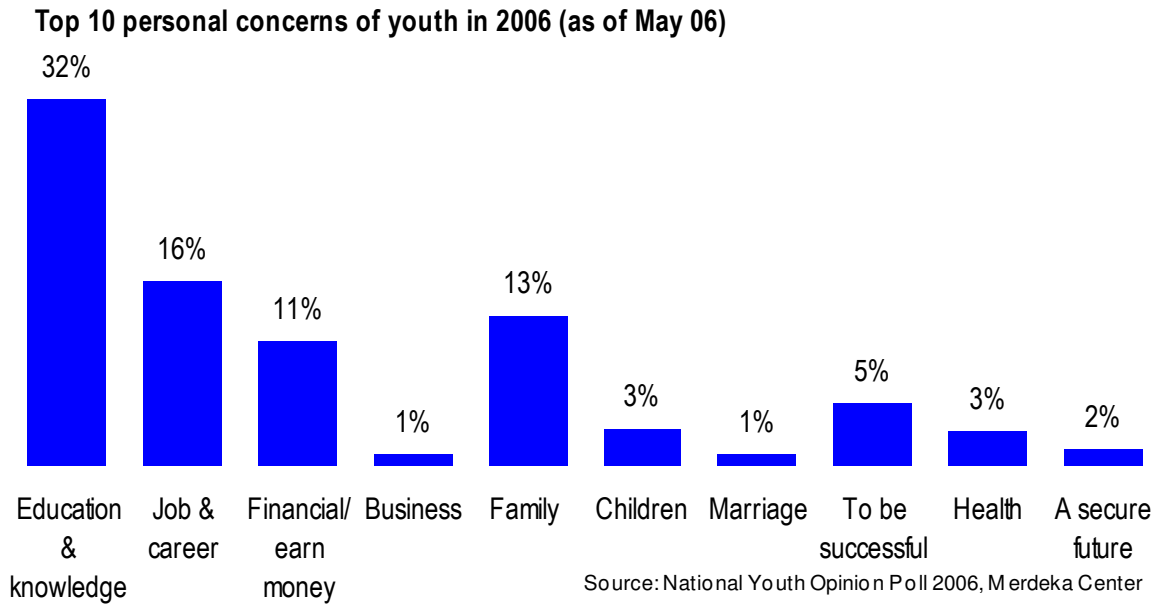
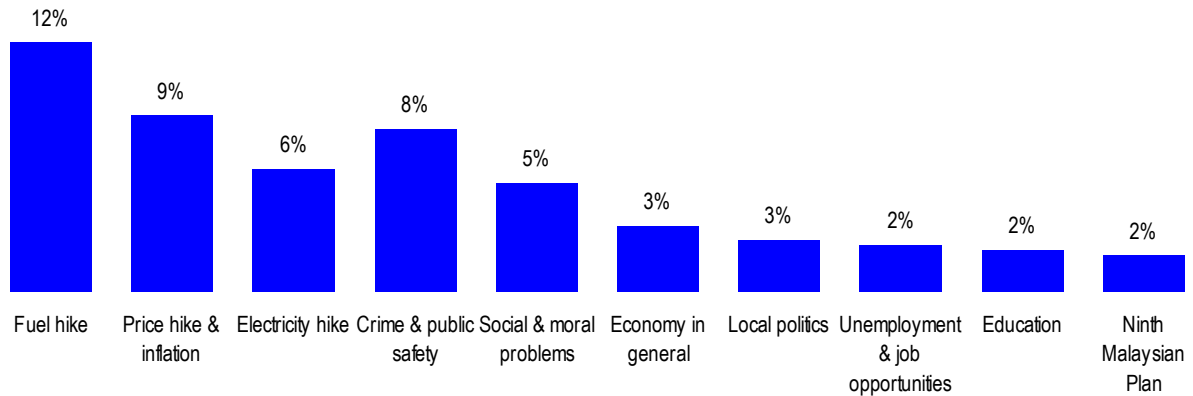


Figure 1

Crime and public safety seemed to be the primary concern of youth today compared to last year where more attention was given toward cost of living issues (Figure 2). In 2006, more youth were concerned with inflation as the country experienced various forms of price increases from increases in fuel cost to that of electricity tariffs. In 2007, crime and public safety became the main concern of many people including youth. Such worries were also reflected in other polls conducted by Merdeka Center as incidences of crime have been in the limelight since May 2007.

Top 10 issues of the nation for youth in 2006 (as of May 06)

Source: National Youth Opinion Poll 2006, Merdeka Center



Top 10 issues of the nation for youth in 2007 (as of Aug 07)

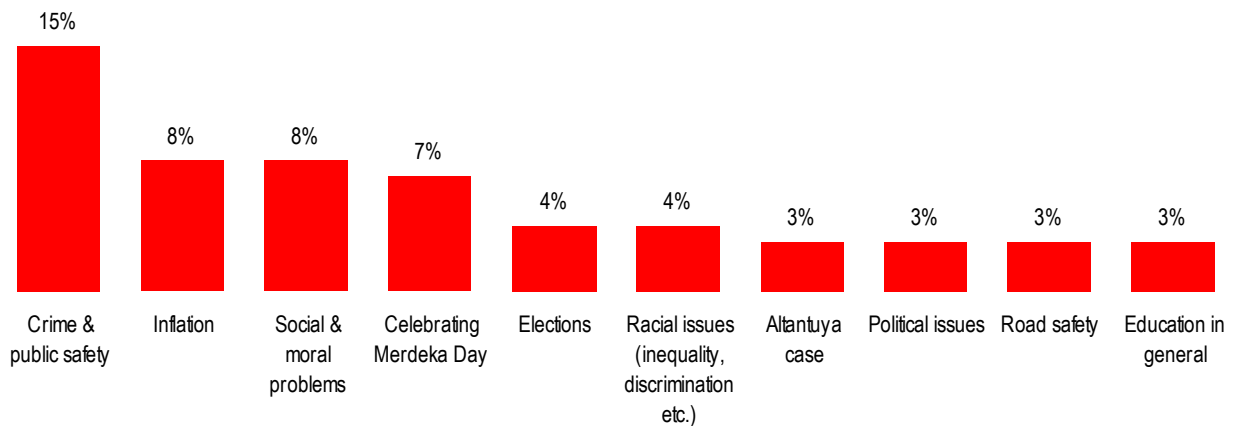


Figure 2

We arranged a list of issues and respondents were asked to pick issues that concerned them the most (Figure 3). In response, the economy came out as the primary concern, followed by social problems and the environment.

Issues youth concerned about

	Most concerned issue	Second most concerned issue
The economy	31%	6%
The environment	16%	10%
Social problem	25%	21%
Job opportunities	10%	14%
Ethnic & religious issues	4%	13%
Corruption	4%	10%
Performance of Malaysian sports	4%	7%
Celebrities and personalities	1%	3%
World politics	1%	2%
National politics	3%	9%

Figure 3

Surprisingly only 1% youth cited celebrity and personalities as the most concerned issue. This indicates that young Malaysians are generally aware about issues even if they don't necessarily follow them closely.

Participation in civil society and community development activities

The survey shows Malaysian youth generally lacked self efficacy as only 39% felt that they could make some difference in solving problems in their respective communities.

Looking at participation in civil society (Figure 4), only 23% claimed they join groups or organizations. Youth from the Muslim-Bumiputera community were most active in terms of participating in organizations with 29% cited membership in one or more organizations compared to 15% Chinese, 12% Indian and 15% Non-Muslim Bumiputera. Among those who join organizations, 21% claimed there are members of political parties, followed by major youth association 15% and resident association with 9%.

Reported membership in groups

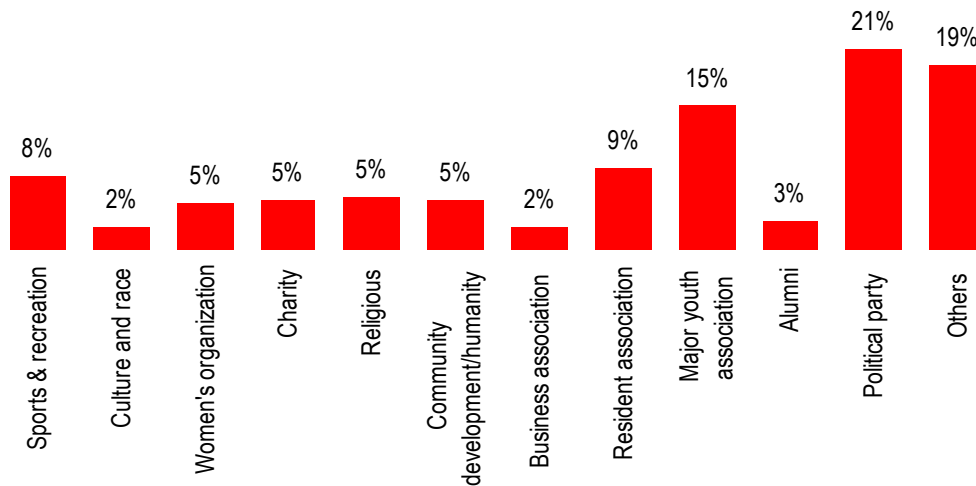


Figure 4

Despite lower level of participation in civil society and the low sense of self efficacy, majority of youth felt that the government does pay attention towards the concerns of youth today. Through focus groups conducted, many youth agreed that government showed concern toward youths especially when the authorities have taken actions to address unemployment among jobless graduates. However, respondents of focus groups which consist of youth who were members of at least one organization said that they felt there was a limit to what the government can achieve and bureaucracy was often an obstacle preventing the relevant authorities in carrying out effective solutions to aid youth causes. Having said that, majority of youth in the survey agreed that government decisions do have significant impact in their daily lives.

Attitudes towards voting and elections

On average, slightly more than half of the youth polled said they knew their MP. Across races, the non-Muslim Bumiputeras reported the highest level of awareness at 77%, followed by 64% Malays, 45% Indians and 37% Chinese.

On a more positive note, 36% youth claimed that they discuss about current issues and government policies “sometimes” and another 11% said they do so “often”. It is also noticed that more 31 – 35 years old showed greater concern about current issues and public policies as compared to their younger counterparts (Figure 5).

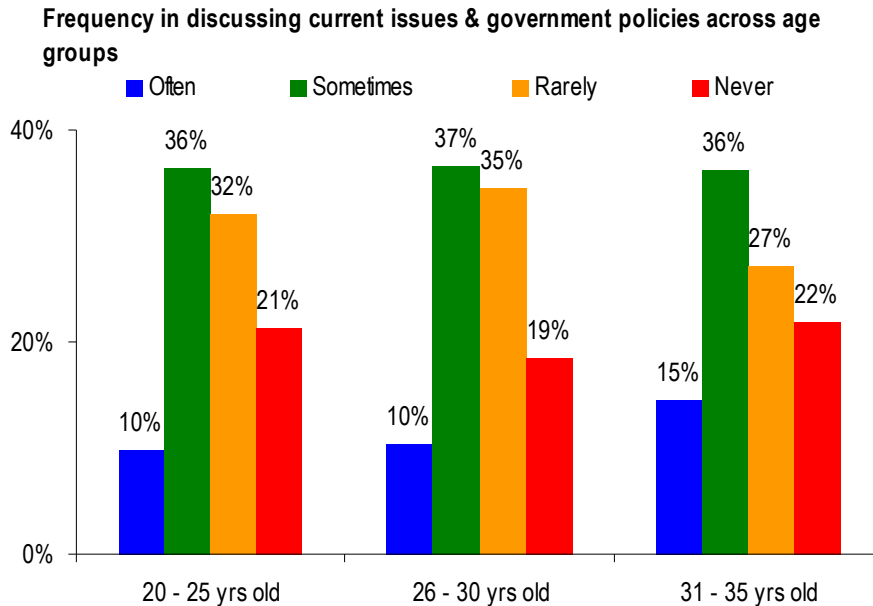


Figure 5

Looking at voter registration, 56% polled said they are registered while 44% have yet to register themselves. 29% cited they have no time to register. Among those who have not registered, only a small majority of 57% knew where to register as a voter.

It is also interesting to note that 53% of young voters admitted that their voting choices resemble that of their parents. While different age groups showed similar patterns in voting choice, we noticed more Chinese and Indian respondents claimed they did not vote in the same way as their parents with 49% and 70% respectively as opposed to 24% Muslim Bumiputeras and 16% non-Muslim Bumiputeras.

It is universally acknowledged that voting in elections is important and 80% youth felt that their votes could make a difference in influencing the government. As found out in focus groups, respondents felt that their potential as voters increased near election time as politicians seemed more eager in helping their electorates.

Majority of young registered voters see themselves as mere voters come election time while another 20% would vote and observe elections, and 14% would do more during elections such as campaigning for the candidate of their choice or join a monitoring body.

Perception towards political parties

56% of youth thought the parliament needed more opposition. While 44% - 64% youth from all races felt the need for more opposition, more Malay/ Muslim Bumiputera and non-Muslim Bumiputera disagreed with the notion compared to their Chinese and

Indian counterparts. While most youth may want to see more opposition, 62% youth wanted the opposition to provide check and balance to the government.

Attitude and perception towards democracy

Political conservatism

Overall the survey found that respondents' views on democratic concepts reflected the brand of "Asian values" that is being promoted by the government where the youth were split in deciding whether open criticism among political leaders is harmful to the society. Participants of focus groups overall felt that open criticism was a good thing to keep politicians on their toes but some respondents also indicated there were types of criticism that should not be made public, such as the fiasco over the sexist remarks made sometime in May 2007, which was deemed detrimental to public image of MPs.

Generally, 64% youth believed that an individual should sacrifice their personal interests for the country. However, such sentiment was not equally distributed across races.

Across the board, majority of youth agreed that the most important thing for political leaders was to accomplish their goals but not at the expense of ignoring laws and procedures.

53% of youth polled were unwilling to involve themselves in politics. Looking closer at the different races, political reluctance was higher among Chinese, Indian and non-Muslim Bumiputeras. However, majority Malay/ Muslim Bumiputera were more inclined to participate in politics.

Quality of governance

Finally, the survey found that young Malaysians were split in their views of the government. Reflecting the longstanding cultural and socio-political viewpoints of Malaysian society, young Malaysians were divided across cultural and heritage lines on matters pertaining to governance.

52% agreed that there was little the people could do to hold government responsible between elections. However, Malay/ Muslim Bumiputera youth differed from other respondents when majority of them felt that there were ways to hold the government responsible between elections as more of them knew who their representative and local authorities were. Respondents of focus groups also indicated that elections were the only time to hold government responsible for their actions.

51% felt the government treated everybody equally. Majority of Malays and Bumiputeras agreed that the government is fair towards everyone while non-Bumiputeras begged to differ.

61% agreed that Malaysians were free to speak their mind without fear and such sentiment is more prevalent among Bumiputeras but half of Chinese youth polled did not agree.

Majority youth believed government officials only abide by the law “sometimes” and this trait is shared among all races.

Majority of the youth polled believed that corruption was prevalent in government but views differed on the degree of graft. The sentiment was not equally distributed across races. A majority of Malay, Bumiputera and Indian respondents believed only a few government officials were corrupt, while a majority Chinese youth thought that most of them are corrupt.

Conclusion

Ethnic background continues to color perception and attitudes

Respondents’ ethnic background seems to play role in many factors such as interests in politics, civil society participation and governance. Malays were more incline to political activities while Chinese appeared more indifferent.

Concerned but disconnected

Majority of young people were concerned about local issues such as the economy, crime and social problems. 72% perceived government decisions as having some impact on their daily lives, but only 39% feel that they can make some difference in solving problems in their community. Only 23% polled indicated they have joined at least a group or organization and most of them tended to be political parties or government supported mass organizations.

Quality of government

Malay, Bumiputera and Indian youth seemed content with the way the government works but Chinese youth have higher expectations on matters such as quality of governance and leadership.