

SARAWAK STATE ELECTION 2011: SURVEY OF MALAY VOTERS' BEHAVIOUR IN BN CRITICAL AREAS OF N24 BETING MARO AND N30 SARIBAS

Zalina Mohd. Desa¹, (Arenawati Sehat Omar²)

¹Lecturer, Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Sarawak, Malaysia
zalina@sarawak.uitm.edu.my

(² Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Sarawak, Malaysia)
arena481@sarawak.uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The 2011 Sarawak State Election (SSE 2011) has proved to be one of the most exciting and intense elections the country has seen throughout its almost 50 year history. Results from the state and general election have been alarming with the opposition parties increasing their seats in both the state and national level. Although Barisan Nasional (BN) managed to retain its two-thirds majority seats (55 out of 71) during SSE2011, it was still considered a major loss. The opposition managed to increase their seats in the state legislative assembly from two in 2001 and then nine in 2006 to 16 in 2011. This clearly indicates a change in voting behaviour among the voters in Sarawak. In GE 2008, five state governments fell to the hands of various parliamentary opposition parties. Thus, it gives some impacts to both the ruling government and the opposition political parties. The declining of seats and majority votes obtained in certain areas indicated a preliminary warning to BN. In view of that, this research will seek to examine the Sarawak Malay voters' behaviour in BN critical areas of N24 Beting Maro and N30 Saribas, Sarawak. Before state election in 2001, these two areas were under one constituency and considered as one of the few BN's stronghold. Several factors have been accredited to the reasons behind BN's significant drop in electoral seats. This paper focuses in determining the factors that contribute to the Malay voters' decision; the candidate's personality, ethnicity/race, and their experience. Furthermore, this paper looks into the level of acceptance of voters towards the political parties that originated from outside Sarawak. The findings reveal and signify a clear message to the BN that Malay voters were serious about making a change. Therefore, the upcoming General Election among the Malay voters of BN Sarawak will be facing its most challenging election.

Keywords: Malay voters; Sarawak; Election 2012; Beting Maro; Saribas.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Sarawak State Election (hereon after SSE2011) has proved to be one of the most exciting and intense elections the country has seen. Results from the 2006 Sarawak State Election (hereon after SSE 2006) and the 2008 12th General Elections (hereon after GE 2008) have been alarming with the opposition parties increasing their seats in both the state and national level.

Although the Barisan Nasional (BN) managed to retain its two-thirds majority seats (55 out of 71) during SSE2011 (Refer Table 1), it was still considered a major loss. This is evident when the opposition managed to increase their seats in the state legislative assembly from two in 2001 and then nine in 2006 to 16 in 2011. This clearly indicated a change in voting loyalty among the voters in Sarawak.

Table 1: Results of the 10th Sarawak State Election

Party	Candidates	Wins
Barisan Nasional (BN)	71	55
Opposition	101	15
Independent candidates	41	1

Source: Election Commission of Malaysia

Several factors have been accredited to the reason behind BN's significant drop in electoral seats; among of which are the issue of land lease (and renewal of land lease), corruption, equality, and rising cost of living standards. As a result of the shift in voting loyalty, it sends a clear signal to BN that Sarawak can no longer be considered a BN-stronghold state.

In General Election 2008, BN was denied the two-third majority in parliament that it had enjoyed since 1969. Five state governments fell to the hands of a variety of coalitions made up of various parliamentary opposition parties. Thus, it certainly gives some impacts to both the ruling government and the opposition political parties. The results of GE 2008 had increased the determination of PR to take over Sarawak. Since then all opposition parties, mostly from Peninsular Malaysia are participating actively in promoting their agendas to potential voters and supporters everywhere in the State. There are signs of feelings being threaten among politicians in Sarawak but they never openly admit it. Based on the results of GE 2008, a number of participants and political analysts have expressed their concerns that 'political tsunami' may happen in Sarawak if BN Sarawak just take things for granted.

The results of Sarawak State Election 2006 (before GE 2008) had shown the declining of seats and majority votes obtained in certain areas. For some people the results indicated a preliminary warning to BN. For example, SUPP had fielded 19 candidates and lost 8 seats. PRS and SPDP however, were performing moderately, where some of the voters may be influenced with promises made by the oppositions. PBB on the other hand, though it managed to win all the seats but some areas had shown tremendous decline in votes majority obtained (among the examples are N30 Saribas and N24 Beting Maro). Before the state election in 2001, these two areas were under one constituency and considered as one of the few BN's strongholds – wining the state seat once and the parliament seat twice without contest. In 2006 state election, both the constituencies have shown poor

performance whereby N30 Saribas only won by 94 vote's majority and N24 Beting Maro by 895 votes.

In view of that, this research will seek to examine the factors contribute to the Malay voters' decision; the candidate's personality, ethnicity/race, and their experience and also their perception pertaining to the political parties from outside Sarawak in BN critical areas of N24 Beting Maro and N30 Saribas, Sarawak. The figure of these findings signify a clear message to the BN that Malay voters' were serious about making a change and that they were willing to take a risk with the opposition in order to get more attention from the BN component party. Therefore, the upcoming General Election among the Malay voters' in Sarawak will be facing its most challenging election.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia with the area of 124,386 km square (almost as big as Peninsular Malaysia). Features such as ethnicity and demography are considered to be important in shaping Sarawakian politics. There are more than 27 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups living in Sarawak (Iban 31%, Chinese 28%, Malays 21%, Bidayuh 10%, Melanau 7%, Other Bumiputeras 2.5%, and others 0.5%). The Ibans mostly live in rural areas of Sri Aman, Betong and Kapit. The Chinese are mostly found in major towns with the Malays and some other ethnic groups. Malays are also found in costal and rural areas like the Malanaus, in Samarahan, Sri Aman, Betong, Mukah and Limbang.

There are 1.4 million eligible voters in Sarawak, with 947,092 registered voters and almost 500,000 had yet to register (SPRM 2011). Since the independence, Sarawak had conducted 9 state elections; firstly from 10 May – 17 June 1969, secondly from 24 August –14 September 1974, thirdly from 15 September – 22 September 1979, fourthly from 28 December – 29 December 1983, fifthly from 15 April – 16 April 1987, sixthly from 27 September – 28 September 1991, seventhly from 7 September – 8 September 1996, eighthly on 27 September 2001, and lastly on 20 Mei 2006 (SPRM 2001, 2006).

In the state election held in 1996 and 2001 there were 62 seats contested, where BN won 57 and 60 seats respectively. The seats contested were increased from 62 to 71 in 2006 after the new constituency alignment was approved by the Parliament on 1 August 2005. The parliament seats were also increased from 28 to 31.

Elections are contests for the highest stakes in national politics and the electoral system is a set of predetermined rules for conducting elections and determining their outcome. Thus defined, the electoral system is distinguishable from the actual conduct of elections as well as from the wider conditions surrounding the electoral contest, such as the state of civil liberties, restraints on the opposition and access to the mass media. While all these aspects are of obvious importance to a free and fair election, the main interest of this study is the electoral system. In Malaysia, political mobilization follows ethnic divisions and the struggle for power is among political parties representing particular ethnic groups. It is therefore essential to begin with some basic information on the country's political system and plural society.

Over 80 per cent of Malaysia's population of over 25 million is found in Peninsular Malaysia, where the Malays form the largest ethnic group followed by the Chinese and Indians. Indian is a minority ethnic group in Sabah and Sarawak, where native ethnic groups other than the Malays make up about 65 percent of the population. Within Peninsular Malaysia, the Malay share of the population has increased from almost 50 percent during independence in 1957 to about 60 per cent presently. They form about 49 per cent of the population of the entire Federation, but when the Malays in Sabah and Sarawak (where they form 9 per cent and 22 per cent of the population, respectively) are added, the Malays form a slight majority, about 53 per cent, in the country. The Chinese and Indian populations in Peninsular Malaysia have decreased from 37 per cent and 11 per cent during independence to presently at 28 percent and 9 percent, respectively. The Chinese form 15 percent and 28 percent of the population in Sabah and Sarawak, respectively, and about 27 percent, the second largest ethnic group after the Malays, in the whole Federation. Indians form only 8 per cent of the population in the Federation. The various ethnic groups are also politically and officially classified as the *bumiputra* (sons of the soil, or indigenes), consisting of the Malays and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak, and non-*bumiputra*, consisting mainly of the Chinese and Indians who continue to be called the immigrant races. *Bumiputra* citizens are accorded a variety of constitutionally enshrined special rights or privileges.

The Malays have been observed to be increasingly resentful at racial policies that have granted them a comparative advantage over other ethnic groups but meanwhile distorted markets, jeopardised efficiency, lowered competitiveness, and ultimately discredited successful Malays as mere beneficiaries of the affirmative action policies. The Prime Minister himself has repeatedly criticised the passiveness of the Malay community and their lack of drive to be more academically or entrepreneurially successful. One of the last occasions for this critique came in May 2001, when Ministry of Education reported 7,000 unfilled places in public universities, because there were not enough students to make up the 55 percent quota reserved for ethnic Malays and other Bumiputras. The universities had decided to leave these places vacant, instead of opening them for applicants of other ethnic groups. Subsequently, the Prime Minister threatened to have these quotas abolished. In his speech during the opening of the general assembly of UMNO on 21 June 2001, he openly criticised Malays for being lazy, greedy, and not worth the privileges of the Bumiputera policy.

Sarawak is the only state where UMNO has stayed out, the electoral system has benefited the predominantly Malay-Melanau Parti Pesaka Bumiputra Bersatu (PBB or United Bumiputra Pesaka Party), the leader of the Sarawak BN. The opposition to the BN in Sarawak is very weak. However the state's demographic structure has encouraged the main Dayak party, the Parti Bangsa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS or Sarawak Dayak Party) to challenge the PBB for leadership of the Sarawak BN. The PBDS made attempts to do so in both the 1987 and 1991 state elections, but failed (Jayum A.Jawan, 1991). The strengthening of the Malay- Melanau electoral strength by the 1995 re-delineation helped to bolster PBB and insulated it against future Dayak attempts to dislodge it from its state leadership position.

According to Neilson Ian Mersat (2009) and Crouch (1996), Malaysian politics in general revolve around issues linked to race. In the case of Sarawak, electoral politics is always interesting because it sets in motion both patronage and ethnic politics. Politicians often

drum up ethnic issues for securing political support and reward their supporters with handouts or tangible benefits in order to sustain their support.

In addition, party identification is another important factor whereby the voter who will vote for a candidate based on the party the candidate represents. Once party identification is formed, it is hard to change and such party identification will become stronger as the voter ages. In Namibia for example, the party choice was largely the result of party identification (loyalty) and ethnic affiliation (Keulder, 1998). A similar situation could be explained in the United States of America. A study conducted by Krosnik and Berent (1993) suggested that most Americans voters in the 1950s inherited a party affiliation from their parents, carried it intact throughout their lives, and used it extensively to evaluate political events and to make voting choices.

Meanwhile, candidates' personality can also be a deciding factor for voters. This refers to the candidate's charisma in attracting a following. According to a study conducted by Zaherawati et al. (2009) on candidates and leaders who were charismatic, it was indicated that voters were more inclined to support a candidate and leader and not the party as the basis of their voting. Charismatic candidates are those who are able to attract voters and support due to their ability to give fiery speeches as well as present a strong personality.

In another study by Sanchez and Manzano (2009), voters would evaluate candidates based on their personal traits as well as voters' perceptions on their political ability. In most cases, personal information about candidates and professional attributes is readily accessible and voters based part of their decision on this information. However, voting preferences may vary. To conclude, previous studies shows various factors that influence the voters' behaviour during an election. The factors were varied based on different issues, demographics, economic situation and others.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design for this study is quantitative. The study demands for information on the Malay voters' behaviour. This study is using cross sectional survey. The primary data were collected through the distribution of structured questionnaires to respective voters.

3.2 Unit of Analysis

Since the study addresses the Malay voters' behaviour, therefore the units of analysis for this study are the Malay voters' in areas of N24 Beting Maro and N30 Saribas, Sarawak.

3.3 Sample Size

The sample size of this study consists of 100 Malay voters' in both areas; N24 Beting Maro and N30 Saribas, Sarawak.

3.4 Sampling Technique

Sampling is the process of selecting a sufficient number of elements from the population so that a study of the sample and an understanding of its properties or characteristics would make it possible for to generalize such properties or characteristics to the population's elements. For the purpose of this study, simple random sampling is being used to each Malay voters' in the population who has equal chance to be selected as a sample.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, data collected has been presented through tables based on Likert Type Scale using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21.

Table 2: Likert Scale used in the Questionnaires

Likert Scale	Categories
1	Strongly disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly agree

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents briefly the profile of the respondents involved in this study. Descriptive statistics involve transformation of raw data into a form that would provide information to describe a set of factor in a situation. This is done through ordering and manipulation of the raw data collected (Sekaran, 2003). The descriptive statistics is used in this segment to derive the frequencies and to determine the mean.

Table 3: Profile of Respondents

No.	Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Gender of Respondent		
	Male	55	55.0
	Female	45	45.0
2.	Age		
	21- 30 years	27	27.0
	31 – 40 years	53	53.0
	41 – 50 years	16	16.0
	50 years and above	4	4.0
3.	Occupation		
	Farmer	33	33.0
	Fisherman	5	5.0
	Retailer	13	13.0
	Civil Servant	25	25.0
	Private	7	7.0

Others	17	17.0
4. Income (Monthly)		
RM1000 & Below	61	61.0
RM1001 – RM2000	28	28.0
RM2001 – RM3000	7	7.0
RM3001 – RM4000	2	2.0
RM4001 & Above	2	2.0

Table 3 above shows the total population of 100 respondents. There are 55% (male) and 45% (female). Majority of the respondents with the age 31 – 40 years (53%) while only 4% of them more than 50 years of age. Meanwhile, the respondents' occupation showed respondent as a farmer (33%), civil servant (25%), others (17%), retailer (13%), private (7%) and fisherman (5%). It indicated that most of the respondents for this study are among the farmers. This finding is supported by the income levels earned by the respondents of RM1, 000 and below (61%).

6. FINDINGS

The following sections outline the findings of this study in relations to the research objectives.

Objective 1: To Identify the Factors Contribute To Malay Voters' Decisions; the Candidates Personality, Ethnicity and Their Experience

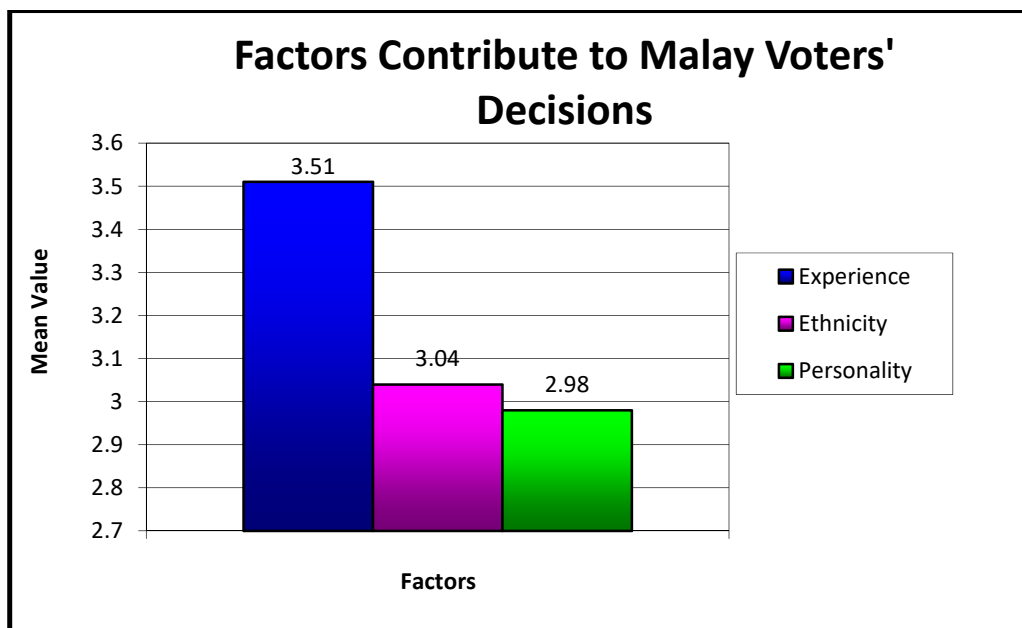


Figure 1: Factors contribute to Malay voters' decisions

Table 4: Factors contribute to Malay voters' decision

No	Item	Mean
1	Candidates' experience	3.51
2	Candidates' ethnicity/race	3.04
3	Candidates' personality	2.98

*5 is highest mean and 0 is lowest.

The first objective is to identify the factors contributed to the Malay voter's decision, namely; the candidate's personality, ethnicity and their experience. Figure 1 and Table 4 show the finding for objective 1 of the study. The findings are presented in the form of mean. With the highest mean value of 3.51 among the Malay voters' in the area of N24 Beting Maro and N30 Saribas, Sarawak, it clearly shows that they are more concerned on the factors of candidates' experience as compared to the candidates' ethnicity/race and personality.

Objective 2: To Identify the Level of Malay Voters' Acceptance towards the Political Parties That Originated From Outside Sarawak

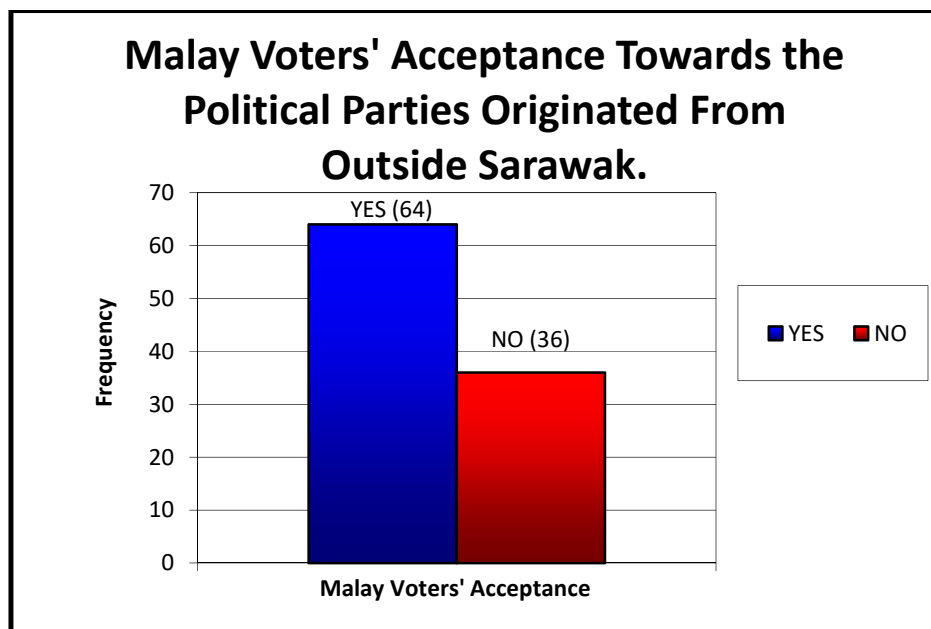


Figure 2: Malay voters' acceptance towards the political parties originated from outside Sarawak

Table 5: Malay voters' acceptance towards the political parties that originated from outside Sarawak

No.	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	The level of acceptance towards the political parties from outside Sarawak	64 (Yes) 36 (No)	64 36

The second objective is to identify the level of Malay voters' acceptance towards the political parties that originated from outside Sarawak. Figure 2 and Table 5 shows that 64 percent of respondents believed that the presence of outside political parties can influence Malay voters' decision in N24 Beting Maro and N30 Saribas. This is due to their high acceptance towards the propaganda of the political parties outside Sarawak.

7. LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations that can be drawn from the current study research findings. The sample size of this study does not reflect the whole opinion of Sarawak Malay voters'. Therefore, as a recommendation for future study, the researchers may expand the study to a bigger scope that will involve a bigger number of sample sizes among the Malay voters' population. Apart from that, the researchers are only concerned with three factors that contribute towards voters' decision during the election period in 2011. For the purpose of future research, the researchers suggest to discover the specific preferences among the Malays voters' towards which political parties that originated outside of Sarawak, namely, Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) and other independent parties that are going to be accepted by them. Besides, apart from analyzing on the three major factors that contributed to the Malay voters' decision in election, the researchers can explore at others additional factors, namely; the background of the candidates, the manifesto, education level of the candidates and others.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the research findings, most of the respondents participated in this study are among the Malay males within the age of 31 – 40 years. They are among the farmers with a monthly income of RM1000 and below. They are the Malay voters' in three areas N24 Beting Maro and N30 Saribas, Sarawak who had a great influence towards electing the candidates experience (in the political arena and always listen to the people voice) as their major concern compared to the candidates' ethnicity/race and personality, in electing the representative during SE2011. Besides, the Malay voters' in that area do accept the candidates from others political parties who are nota Sarawakian. This is due to their high acceptance of 64 percent towards the respondents' level of acceptance of the propaganda of the political parties outside Sarawak.

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