

# Intellectual Discourse

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Volume 26

Number 2

2018



**International Islamic University Malaysia**  
<http://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/islam>



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International Conference on Religion, Culture and Governance in the  
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(Wednesday-Thursday) 23-24 Muharram 1440.

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## **“How did we Choose?”: Understanding the Northern Female Voting Behaviour in Malaysia in the 14<sup>th</sup> General Election\***

**Ummu Atiyah Ahmad Zakuan\*\* , Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani\*\*\* , Norehan Abdullah\*\*\*\* and Zaireeni Azmi\*\*\*\*\***

**Abstract:** Pakatan Harapan (PH) won the 14th General Election (GE-14) held in May, 2018 in Malaysia. PH thus ended sixty-one years rule of Barisan Nasional (BN). While the slogan of Malaysia Bahru (New Malaysia), indicating changes to come in the country, became a popular slogan, one thing remained constant. This was the number of women contesting the GE-14 as candidates and the number of them who were elected was much less than the number of men contesting and getting elected in GE-14 although women represented slightly more than 50% of the total registered voters in that election. The main objective of this paper is to examine the main factors that influenced the female voters in GE-14. Two states in the northern Malaysia were selected with 200 eligible female voters. They were clustered and conveniently sampled and were given self-administered questionnaires. Demographic variables were

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\* The authors would like to thank the Ministry of Education (KPT), Government of Malaysia, for a FRGS Research Grant, which enabled them to conduct this study.

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cross-tabbed while asking the women which factors had influenced their votes. The findings show that majority of the female voters were influenced by the candidates' social background. Younger women were very concerned with the issues directly affecting them. Significantly, preference for political party was of least interest to them while voting. While the majority of women voters from the three main ethnic groups supported more women to be nominated as candidates in elections, the Malay women showed the highest level of disagreement on that matter as compared to the rest. The study also shows that majority of the female voters, whether young or old, rural or urban, use social media as the main and the most trusted source of news on election. These findings have concluded that, their demographic background interplayed with each other constructing their voting preferences. Female voters are crucial and each contesting parties need to pay closer attention to the women's concerns in order to secure their votes.

**Keywords:** Female voters, voting behaviour, Malaysia, election

**Abstrak:** Di Malaysia Pakatan Harapan (PH) telah memenangi Pilihan raya Umum ke 14 (PRU14) yang diadakan pada bulan Mei, 2018 dan mengakhiri 61 tahun pentadbiran Barisan Nasional (BN). Walaupun slogan Malaysia Bahru menjadi indikasi kepada perubahan yang berlaku dalam negara ini tetapi satu perkara masih tidak berubah. Bilangan wanita yang bertanding dalam PRU14 sebagai calon dan dipilih masih ketinggalan berbanding dengan bilangan lelaki walaupun bilangan pengundi wanita melebihi 50% daripada jumlah pengundi dalam pilihan raya. Objektif utama makalah ini adalah untuk mengkaji faktor utama yang mempengaruhi pengundian pengundi wanita dalam PRU14. Seramai 200 orang responden wanita yang layak mengundi telah dipilih daripada dua buah negeri di utara Malaysia. Mereka dipilih secara berkelompok dan persampelan mudah. Soal selidik diedarkan untuk dijawab. Pemboleh ubah demografi disilangkan dengan persoalan faktor utama yang mempengaruhi undi wanita. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa majoriti pengundi wanita dipengaruhi oleh latar belakang calon apabila mengundi. Wanita muda sangat prihatin dengan isu-isu yang memberi kesan secara langsung kepada mereka. Faktor parti politik bukanlah keutamaan yang signifikan. Walaupun majoriti wanita daripada ketiga-tiga kumpulan etnik utama menyokong lebih ramai wanita dicalonkan tetapi wanita Melayu menunjukkan tahap tidak bersetuju paling tinggi berbanding dengan wanita etnik lain. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan bahawa majoriti pengundi wanita, muda atau tua, di luar bandar atau bandar, menggunakan media sosial sebagai sumber berita utama dan paling dipercayai mengenai pilihan raya. Penemuan ini menyimpulkan bahawa, latar belakang demografi adalah saling berkait antara satu sama lain dan ia membentuk pilihan dan keutamaan dalam pengundian wanita. Pengundi wanita adalah penting dan



setiap parti yang bertanding perlu memberi perhatian yang lebih mendalam terhadap perkara yang dititikberatkan oleh wanita bagi meraih undi mereka.

**Kata kunci:** Pengundi wanita, tingkah laku pengundian, Malaysia, pilihan raya

## Introduction

It was the women's vote “that brought Hitler to triumph” (Evans, 1976: 2). It was the women who have made a businessman to run one of the most powerful country in the world. Trump won in the presidential election due 53% of white women voted for him whereas Hillary Clinton lost due to female voter did not support her (Jaffe, 2018). These examples have shown that women voters actually really matter.

In the context of Malaysia, there were 12, 229, 514 voters had casted their votes on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2018 which led to a historic event where, *Barisan Nasional* (BN) had ceased to become the government of the day after 61 years in power, replaced by the then opposition front, *Pakatan Harapan* (PH). Of all these registered voters, slightly more than 50% are women (Election Commission, 2018). Based on this numbers, it can be claimed that women voters matter. Due to this fact, it is crucial to examine women voting behaviour, for example, what motivates or influences them to vote, or why they voted in such as way?. These questions are going to be discussed in this paper. It is important to understand the voting behavior by voters in order for the political parties to gauge which party will be the winner for an election (Junaidi Awang Besar et. al. 2016).

There are quite a number of studies which could reflect voting behaviour in Malaysia. In the context of this paper, previous studies relating to voting are categorized into two, namely “Voting behaviour in general”, and “Voting Behaviour in Malaysia”. It could be seen that there are less coverage on women voting behaviour in the country.

## Voting Behaviour in General

In any electoral democracy, the significance of political participation cannot be undermined. Though partisanship in politics encompasses different dimensions, voting in an election remains as one of the key constitutional mandates enjoys by the citizens. To Lindberg (2004), election is central to democracy and voting is a civic political right

that can be solely exercised by the citizens. This merit to qualify the democracy to be people's government since votes are translated into consent by the citizen. This places both men and women equal as stated in the principle of the universal adult suffrage.

Voting behaviour is a set of personal electoral activities including participation in electoral campaigns, turnout at the polls and choosing whom to vote (Bratton, 2013). Lazarfeld et al. (1994) mention that the act of voting is an individual act which affected mainly by the personality of the voter and his exposure to the media. This is consistent with several studies which stated that the mass media, particularly television, can influence voting behaviour since the general public tend to rely on it to get information about the political candidates (Javaid and Elahi, 2014; Hayes, 2009; Ladd, 2010). Beside media, other factors like social group identities or membership of a group or organization (Brooke et al, 2006), personality of the candidate ( Miller, Wattenberg and Malanchuk, 1986), and party membership (Kingdon, 1981) influence voting behaviour. A study by Tigue et al. (2012) mention that male candidates with the lower-pitched voice are more favourable in political elections than those with higher-pitched voice. Demographic factors such as race and gender have a strong influential role on voting behaviour (McDermott, 1998), socio politics and economic status, party affiliation, candidate's qualification, family affiliation and unemployment level have also contributed to the preferences of the voters in the elections (Asher and Weisberg, 1980; Hossian, Aktar and Islam, 2017).

### **Voting behaviour in Malaysia**

Mansor et al. (2016) focuses on the changing voting patterns in a plural society of Malaysia in which ethnicity dominated the election outcome. The authors found that development agenda could transform a plural society that ensured a peak of democratic culture in the nation. According to Nurul and Ilyas (2014) in their article titled "Election and Voting Behavior of FELDA Settlers in Felda Chini Pahang, Malaysia" mention that FELDA Chini became a stronghold for BN because of the settlers prefer the party as a sense of gratitude in order to express their appreciation for the government's contribution.

Furthermore in the study finds that, Dato' Najib is not the leading factor for them to vote in the election. Wan et al. (2013) focuses on political attitude and perceptions that may motivate citizens to vote

in general elections. The article compares political attitude into three categories of voters which are “occasional voters” or those who did not consistently come out for general elections, “non-voters” or respondents who never voted, and “frequent-voters” or those who reported that they voted in all general elections and regularly came out for elections. While, according to Haque and Sheppard (2015) mention that voter’s psychological dispositions are rarely examined in the Malaysian context.

### *Female Voting Behavior in Malaysia*

Malaysian women enjoy the liberty to vote and be voted in accordance to the country’s federal constitution. As stated in Article 119 (1) of the Constitution that

“every Malaysian citizen has attained the age of twenty-one years on the qualifying date; ... is entitled to vote...in that constituency in any election to the House of Representatives or the Legislative Assembly unless he is disqualified under Clause (3) or under any law relating to offences committed in connection with elections; but no person shall in the same election vote in more than one constituency” (Federal Consitution, 2010 :109-111).

UNESCO (1993) stated that majority of women voters in Malaysia voted for the candidates rather than the party although many added that they felt more reassured if the candidates was of a similar ethnicity and stood for the same issues they believed in. Furthermore, women were fiercely secretive about the candidate and party they voted for, even from their partners. The majority of women voters also formed their opinions through television reports, circulars, newspaper and rallies.

According to Saliha Hassan (2004), rural women votes influenced by party of choice (party loyalties), local politics rivalries and conflicts, election incentives, party loyalties, promises of a better economic future, gratefulness for past favors and perceived fulfillment of life’s expectation, and some financial help to get to the polling stations. While, women in urban areas influenced by the personality of the candidate, what were the candidates’ parties’ positions on various issues close to the voters’ hearts, which party can ‘deliver’ certain development projects, which party would actually act as successful leverage to certain demands-the role of the party in meeting the voter’s needs. It shows that women in rural and urban areas did not vote base on gender bias perspective. Party

loyalty and candidate preferences were still the main influence among women voters. Khadijah and Halimah (2008), in their study about 2004 general election, shows that almost all Malays would prefer a Muslim to be the number one leader of this country, a small proportion of the Malay respondents were fearful about the possibilities of living in an Islamic State. Surprisingly, the study shows that women voters were less supportive of the idea of an Islamic State than men. This could be because of the fear of strict restrictions and losing some kind of freedom that would affect their lives. Abdul Rashid Moten (2009) stated that the women votes have contributed to BN losing the dominance in the parliament simultaneously changed the political landscape of the country. Both BN (the ruling party) and PR (the opposition party) have always canvassed for women votes which remain as powerful deciding factors in the political configuration of Malaysia.

Abdul Rashid Moten (2011) asserts that since 2004 general election, it has marked an improvement in women turnout including in the subsequent 2008 and 2013 elections. Abdul Rashid has related to women political culture as to be participatory. Arguing on the same line, Lynda (2013) also witnesses the trends of women partisanship in voting also gains momentum at every different spheres of electoral contest in Malaysia. However, she also notes that, despite of massive turn out of women voters during elections, the level of female representatives in government, elected or appointed, is still lower than 30 per cent as recommended by the International Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In fact, Malaysia is ranked among the lowest within the South East Asia region when it comes to women representation in the parliament (IPU, 2018). Kartini (2014) also argues that despite the number of women registered voters is higher than male from 1959 until 2013, the quantity of women's representatives in the parliament has been minimal compared to men in Malaysia. It shows that women are viewed as the supportive group and unfit to lead the society.

Pandian (2014) found that female students in universities in Malaysia in last the general elections were more positive about and supportive of Najib's leadership style as compared to male students. This may be due to the transformation program undertaken at the time by the BN administration. Zaireeni (2014) examined women's political participation in FELDA Ulu Tebrau, Johor, Malaysia and associate

the value of *budi* embedded in women's political behavior reflects in their unwavering support to the ruling party. They justified their party preference and loyalty is because the ruling party has provided their family with a piece of land and a house in FELDA scheme in which improved their livelihood as compared to other people in other traditional villages. Women in Felda Ulu Tebrau actively involved in activities conducted by UMNO although majority of young women in the third generation claimed they are not interested in politics. Party identification is strongly evident among FELDA women and they have a long-standing loyalty to the ruling party that affects their voting behaviour and obediently continue to vote for BN in every election.

Nevertheless, most of local studies on voting behaviour in Malaysia sidelined gender difference in vote choice, public opinion, party identification, and/or policy preferences. For example studies done by Mohd Azri dan Sity (2012; 2015), Mohd Azri (2013), Mohd Jalaluddin et al. (2013), Junaidi et al. (2014), Junaidi et al. (2015) Junaidi et al. (2016) on voting behaviour in general elections in Malaysia and selected constituents did not focus on female voters. Besides, the claimed made by Junaidi et al. (2016) in his studies that women supported BN because of emotional factor and they are easily influenced as compared to men who are more matured and thinking for a long term in voting is gendered and stereotypical. Thus it is imperative for a new study to examine the “new force” of female voters, constituting now at present, slightly more than half of the voters in Malaysia. This will enable basic a understanding of why women voted they way they did in order to project the dynamics of their voting.

## **THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study aims to understand the voting behaviour of women in Kedah and Perlis. In the context of this paper, questions relating to their voting preferences in the recent 14<sup>th</sup> General Election (GE14) were asked to the female voters and their stated preferences later were cross tabbed with five demographic variables, namely, age, ethnic group, marital status, place of residence and educational level.

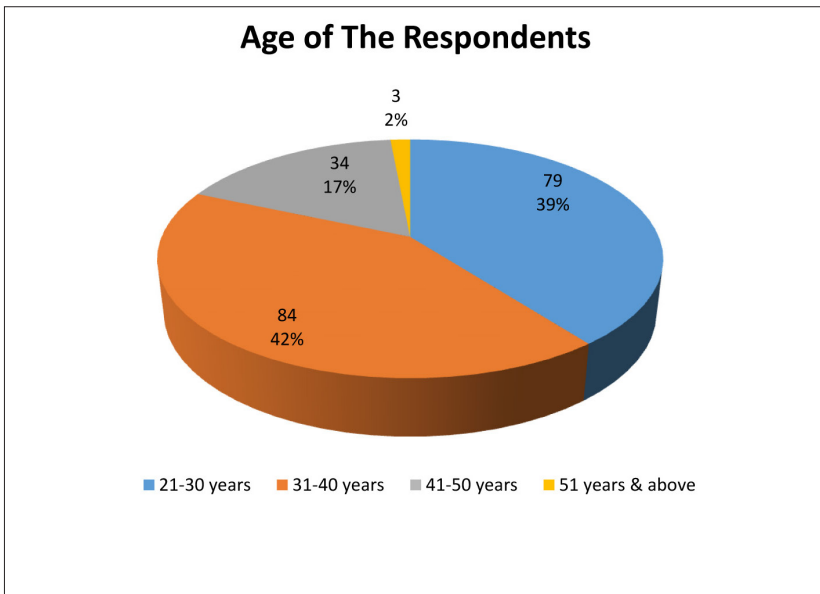
## **METHODOLOGY**

The targeted population of this study is female voters in the northern peninsular Malaysia, namely in the state of Kedah and Perlis. A

combined cluster and convenient sampling design is used. Firstly, for each states, the targeted population is divided into two clusters: rural and urban using the local authorities classifications to define urban as “Majlis Perbandaran”; and rural as “Majlis Daerah”(district council). To ensure participation of the non-Malays, all the respondents (female voters – aged 21 and above) in the chosen housing areas and shopping malls or market places are the targeted sample of this study. The researchers conveniently approach any women voters to invite her to participate in the survey. The participation in this survey is voluntary.

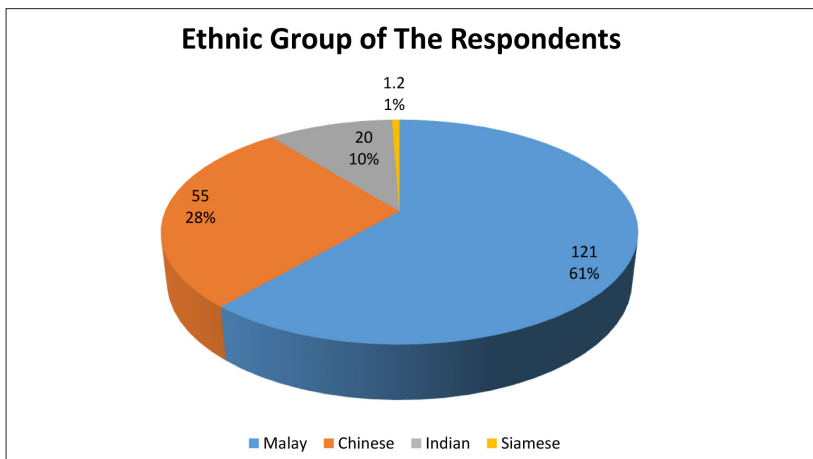
Face-to-face interview using structured questionnaire is the data collection method. The researchers pre-determined the targeted sample size and successfully obtained a sample of 200 respondents of both Kedah and Perlis. Numerical descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviations) with cross-tabulation are used to analysis the voting behavior of the females and its association with the individual characteristics.

*Table 1. Age of the respondents*



Nearly half of the respondents are in the category of 31-40 years old, comprising 42%, followed by those between 21 to 30 years representing 39%, 17% of the respondents aged between 41 until 50 years old and only 2% are 51 years old and above.

Table 2. Ethnic Group of the respondents



Malay is the main ethnic group in this study representing 61%, followed by 28% Chinese, 10% Indians and 1% Siamese. This may be due to both states are Malay heartland hence making the Malays majority.

Table 3. Marriage status of the Respondents

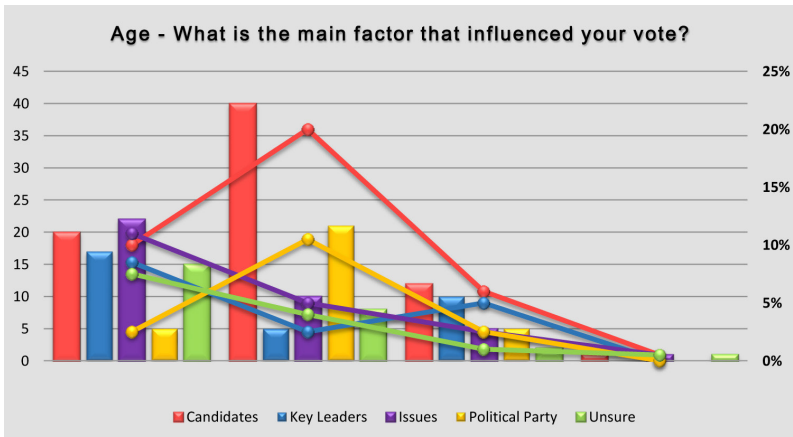
Marriage Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	73	36.5
Married	115	57.5
Divorcee/ Widower	12	6.0
Total	200	100

Majority of the respondents are married and they are the biggest block constituting 57.5%, followed by single women with 36.5% and only 6% are divorcee or widower.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As stated earlier in this paper, it aims to investigate the voting behaviour of women in the Northern region, and two states are selected, Kedah and Perlis. The first question asked to the women was - factors that influenced their voting in the recent GE14. Then, to enlighten us further, their demographic variables; age, ethnic group and marital status, place of residence and educational level are cross tabbed with the earlier question.

Table 4. Age and the Main Factor that Influenced Women Votes



There are five choices to the question [what factor influenced you to vote in the election?]; “candidate”, “key leaders”, “Issues”, “Political Party” and “Unsure”. From the table above, it can be seen that, in general, majority women in all three age groups (31-40; 41-50 and 51 years old and above) have opted for “candidate” as their choice to vote in the recent GE14 while as for the youngest group (21-30 years old), majority of them chose “issues” as the main factor in casting their votes.

As for the youngest group, 27.8% of them chose “issue” to determine their voting, 25.3% selected “candidate” as the main factor to cast their vote and followed by “key leaders in a political party” which constitute 17%. “Political party” was the least favoured factor by the young female voters which influenced their voting. Only 5 out of 79 young women picked that factor.

For slightly older group, the 31-40 years old women, almost half of them banked on “candidate” (47.6%), and 25% of them chose “political party” when casting their votes. “Issues” also appeared as significant, slightly more than 10% chose that factor.

For 41-50 year old women, majority of them chose “candidate” (35.2%) and 29.4% selected “key leaders of a political party” as the main factor determining their votes. Equal number of women in this group chose “issue” and “political party” which represent 14.7% respectively. Due to a very small number of women in the 51 years and above group, we have decided not to discuss it in this paper.



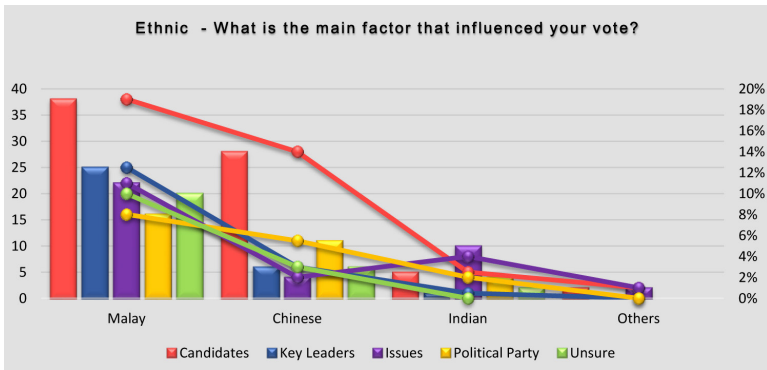
From the findings, it can be argued that, overall, the female voters are concern with who is the candidate contested in the election, rather than other factors like political party and issues. However, a closer observation reveals different perspectives, that, young women are more alert with what happens around them and what affect their lives, hence making them chose “issues” as the main consideration when voting. Candidate and key leaders are another consideration, suggesting that they believe in good representatives who can bring up their voices and concerns rather than the political party. It can be argued that as young persons, perhaps, as first time voters, or someone who just entered employment, or someone who are seeking employment after college graduation, an involvement in any political party is not within their interest and they are more comfortable as non-members and observers, yet highly alert with their surroundings and its impact on their lives.

In addition, we could also see that, a slightly older women whose aged between 31-40 years old, while majority chose “candidate”, quite a number of them also voted based on political party. It is most likely that, they are members of political parties, and hence, the latter has become the primary factor in influencing their voting. For these women, their decision how to vote come down to party loyalty. Unlike the subsequent much older age group (41 -50 years), political party is not a favourite factor but human factors - “candidate” and “key leaders” , are the top picks. Thus, overall conclusion is that, women voters paid attention on who are contested in the election, rather than looking at the political party. They made their choice by assessing the candidates’s potential, their capability to govern well and attentiveness to people’s problems. To the women,the candidate’s educational level, or activism in social media were not their main concerns when they weigh up the candidate contesting in the election. In fact the women voters also were not concern with the sexes of the candidates contested. Refer to Table 5 below.

*Table 5. Criteria of a candidate which preferred by women voters*

Criteria of a candidate	Sex of the candidate	Interesting personality	Alert with people’s problem	Education level	Active in social media	Religious	Governance ability
Count	3	3	87	5	2	8	92
Percentage	1.5%	1.5%	43.5%	2.5%	1.0%	4.0%	46.0%

Table 6. Ethnic and the Main Factors Influenced Women Votes

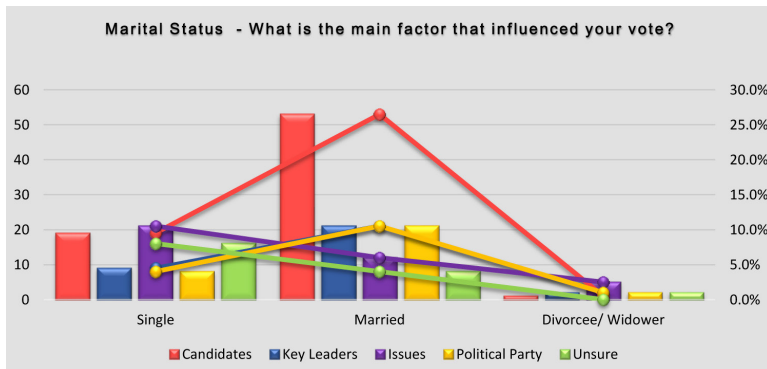


Next, the same five choices to the question [what factor influenced you to vote in the election?]; “candidate”, “key leaders”, “Issues”, “Political Party” and “Unsure”, were cross tabbed with ethnic group variable. This demographic variable is considered significant as Malaysian political context is heavily shaped by ethnic politics. Political parties are formed mainly based on ethnic identities, among the major ones are the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) for the Malays, Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) for the Chinese while Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) for Indians and the United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation (UPKO), which cater to advance the rights and development of the people of Kadazan-Dusun in Sabah (Tunku Mohar Mokhar, 2018). The findings suggest that majority of the Malay women (31.4%) opted for “candidate” when voting and followed by “key leaders of a political party” (20.7%). Whereas half of the Chinese respondents chose “candidates” (50.9%) and 20% of them chose political party. As for the Indian women, half of them were influenced by “issues” when they marked their preferences in the election and 25% of them selected “candidate” as the main factor influencing their decision. It can be argued why “issues” had become the main factor in casting their vote is might be due to the limited representation of Indians as candidates in the recent election. As for the Malays, they have adequate candidates and several political parties which claim to fight for the Malays rights and well-being. Similarly, the Chinese also have few alternatives which could provide enough representation for them to choose in the election. However, for the Indians, there is no political party that represent the Indian strongly other than the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), an Indian based

political party and Indians do not constitute as majority voters in any constituency in Malaysia. Hence, we argue that, due to lack of a strong representation of Indians, the majority of the Indian women chose “issue” when casting their votes. This way enable their needs and problems being taken care via issue-based approach by any candidate.

Marital status was cross tabbed with the same questions with five choices to the question [what factor influenced you to vote in the election?]; “candidate”, “key leaders”, “Issues”, “Political Party” and “Unsure”. This demographic variable is also considered significant as women’s roles and functions are defined by their identities in the communities like “ a wife” or “a divorcee” or a widower” as well as “single lady”. These identities not only functions as labelling or naming, but also attached to it is societal expectation. Therefore, it is crucial to see whether marital status poses any influence on factors to cast their votes.

Table 8. Marital Status and The Main Factor that Influenced Women Votes



From the table, it can be seen that, slightly more women in the single women category as well as divorcee and widower, have chosen “issues” when considering their votes, while an overwhelmed majority of married women picked “candidate” as the main factor in the recent voting. It can be argued that, due to their independency, these two women groups are more alert on what surroundings them, affecting them directly or indirectly in their daily lives. Hence, they have to think what is best for them leading these women to choose “issues”. If they choose “candidate”, it might be that candidate does not champion the issue that these women were facing or dealing with, hence, might putting them in much more distress situation. Thus, by considering “issues” , there is a

chance of it being taken into attention and action since it is part of the party's manifesto or the candidate's own mission. As for the married women, perhaps they are more informed and interested in politics thus rather than stick to a particular political party they made their choice based on the best candidate who can deliver dan fulfill their needs.

The place of residence were divided between urban and rural areas. This variable is equally significant as previous literatures show that rural area voters are likely to be loyal to political party as they feel indebted to various benefits that they have received. In the context of this study, contrary to the previous studies, most of the rural female voters in these two states considered key leaders (24%) and followed by issues (24%) when voting. It means that certain personalities in political parties are able to attract the female rural voters to vote for their parties though they were not contested in that area. That personalities locked the voters to vote for the parties which they belong too What issues are women voters prioritizing in voting? Perhaps rural women are concern with issues close to their daily survival such as cost of living, GST, employment and/or issues related to religion and race relations. Thus political party that would offer the best solution to their predicament situation would get their vote. In contrast to previous studies, political party was the least factor to be considered by the rural female voters when voting in the last election. However, majority of the female voters in the rural areas were also unsure what exactly influenced their preferences in the recent GE14. As for the urban female voters, as consistent with the previous studies, majority of them decided their votes based on the candidates. The urban female voters are concerned about who represent them the best. Unlike their rural counterpart, political party appeared as the another factor which influence their preference, followed by issues and lastly the key leaders of political parties. The level of uncertainty among urban female voters is lower than those in the rural areas.

**Table 9. Place Of Residence and the Main Factors Influenced Women Votes**

	Candidate	Key leaders	Issues	Political party	Unsure	Total
Urban	65	20	23	27	15	150
Percentage	43.33	13.33	15.33	18	10	

Rural	8	12	12	4	14	50
Percentage	16	24	24	8	28	

The finding of this study shows that educational level does not influence much the preference of the female voters in voting in the recent GE14. Majority of the female voters, which represent 36.5% of women of different educational levels, except one with a PhD, had chosen candidate as the main consideration when voting. Other three factors like issues, political party and key leaders, are another factors to be considered with slightly varying degree depending on the educational level. Issues appear to be the second highest factor to be considered when voting by female voters who have higher educational level starting from diploma until master level. Whereas political party is the second favoured factor to vote by female voters who have secondary school education and a PhD. Refer to Table 10 below.

*Table 10 Educational level and the Main Factors Influenced Women Votes*

Educational Level	Candidate	Key leaders	Issues	Political Party	Unsure	Total
Primary	1	1	0	0	1	3
Secondary	21	15	12	19	18	85
Matriculation	7	6	4	2	2	21
Diploma	11	6	9	1	1	28
Undergraduate degree	28	3	10	6	3	50
Master degree	5	2	3	2	0	12
PhD	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total	73	33	38	31	25	200

The female voters also were asked whether more women needed to be nominated in the election. Majority of the female voters in each age group agreed that more women need to be nominated. However, among of all age categories, female voters whose age between 21 until 30 years old also showed the highest rate of objection and uncertainty on the needs of more women to be nominated as election candidates,

illustrated in Table 11a. The same question was crosstabbed with ethnic group variable, and it was revealed that the Malay female voters do not only displayed the highest level of uncertainty as compared to other ethnic groups but also the highest number who disagreed on more women nomination as candidates, as can be seen in Table 11b. This could be associated with their interpretation or understanding of Islam on women activism in politics, or to conform to societal expectation in fulfilling the roles of good mothers and wives, hence, politics is not appropriate to women. These two factors are known as hindrance to women active and meaningful participation in politics which exist until present time (Salbiah Ahmad, 1994; Jamilah Ariffin, 1995; Zaireeni Azmi, 2001; Rashila Ramli & Saliha Hassan, 2009).

*Table 11a. Age and More Women Should be Nominated to be Election Candidate*

Age group	Agreed	Not agreed	Not sure	Total
21-30	36	16	27 (34.17%)	79
31-40	58	6	20 (23.80%)	84
41-50	20	4	10 (29.41%)	34
51 years and above	1	1	1 (33.33%)	3

*Table 11b. Ethnic Group and More Women Should be Nominated to be Election Candidate*

Ethnic group	Agreed	Not agreed	Not sure	Total
Malay	54	23 (19%)	44 (36.36%)	121
Chinese	43	3 (5.45%)	9 (16.36%)	55
Indian	14	1	5 (25%)	20
Others	4	0	0	4

In the context of source of information, majority of the female voters in these two states had opted for social media as the most trusted source of information. Nearly half of the women chose social media, followed by news paper (32.5%), television (13%) and *ceramah* (4%). Female voters, in the urban or the rural areas, both regarded social media as the most trusted source of information. Refer to Table 12.

Table 12. The Most Trusted Source of Information Relating to GE14

Area	News paper	Television	Social Media	Radio	Magazine	Ceramah	Total
Urban	57	13	72	0	1	7	150
Rural	8	13	27	1	0	1	50
Total	65 (32.5%)	26 (13%)	99 (49.5%)	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)	8 (4%)	200

Table 13 explains about the main issues of concerns by the female voters in the GE14. Economic appears as the main issues of concerns among the female voters in these states, representing 42.5%, followed by employment which is 38%, women and social issues constituting 6.5% respectively. Health and religious issues as well as main government personalities are the least concerned issues among the female voters in the recent GE14.

Table 13. The Most Important Issues in the GE14

Issues	Employment	Women	Health	Social	Economy	Religion	Government personalities	Total
Numbers of female voters	76	13	7	13	85	4	2	100
Percentage	38%	6.5%	3.5%	6.5%	42.5%	2%	1%	100%

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the context of Malaysian politics, studies on voter behavior or voting preference can be examined through three approaches namely sociological approaches, party identification approaches and rational choice approaches (Ghazali, 2006). The three approaches are relevant with each other and in the context of elections in Malaysia. The model that helps to explain voters behaviour when an individual cast their

votes depending on the benefits that they believed they will get by voting such candidate or political party is known as rational choice approach. The approach find its roots from The Rational Choice Theory which is identifying electoral behaviour as a rational choice among the electorates. The theory suggests that, economic indicators, resources allocation as well as goods and services distribution are related with the outcome of political choice in an election (Downs, 1957 and Arrow, 1986) and voters will choose a party and candidate based on the profit obtained as a result of the choice (Down, 1957; Colomer, 1991). The data obtained in this study is perceived as best explained by this approach.

This study has revealed that women as voters, have multiple identities which influence their voting preferences. According to Mohd Fuad (2013), women's party's identification is higher and they are the most loyal to the party. They are seldom to change party thus their votes normally goes to the party that they most identified with. But the findings of this study reveals that the vote choice of the respondents in this study is influenced by their demographic background such as marital status, age, ethnic group, the place they stayed and educational level, in varying degree. Although women voters are loyal but their votes are also influenced by the information they gathered from various sources on the candidates. A similar finding concluded by Fatimi Hanafi (2017) that women voted for eligible candidates to be elected. Age has appeared as one of the most pronounced factor in determining their choice in the recent general election. Younger female voters are more concerned with the issues instead of other factors like political party, when casting their votes. Political party was the least considered when they vote. Unlike those who are olders, their primary determinant in voting is candidates or key leaders in the political party. Possible explanation is as they aged, they have been exposed to and participated in the political life and activities which construct their values, perceptions and principles. Hence, this has made the older female voters are likely to choose candidates or key leaders in political parties. Ethnic group, is another strong factor which influence the voting preference, in particular, the Indian female voters prefer issue over other factors, whereas, the Malay and Chinese female voters are incline towards choosing candidates or political parties over other factors. It could be argued that since Indians have less effective representation of their voices through political



parties as compared to the Malays and the Chinese, opting for issues can be seen as the best strategy to ensure the Indians' voices are heard. Furthermore, although majority of female voters from the three major ethnic groups supported the idea of having more women as candidates, the Malays show some reservation to have more women contesting in the election. The reservation are reflected through a high number of disagreement and a high level of uncertainty. It can be argued that female Malay voters are still tied up with the interpretation of religion and societal norms that eventually making women activism in politics is inappropriate.

Marital status do not influence voting greatly, but married female voters have shown the tendency to consider candidate over other factors when voting. The place of residence do not influence much of the voting preferences as the findings show both rural and urban female voters considered candidature factor when voting. Educational level also does not influence much. For young educated urban Malay women voters who are very independent, has a distinctive career and exposed to new media such as social media, they are not bound by the choice of the husband and are very sensitive with women's issues. Thus their vote choice is no longer constrained by political parties but determined by the candidate. But it would be different for women in rural area who are not exposed to or less susceptible to political developments and political news or tend to gain biased views and difficult to obtain alternative information. These women voters would normally opt for the ruling party. The female voters, majority of them, used social media as their main and reliable source of information. Economic issues are the most important issue of concerns among the female voters in these states. It is one of the major issue that lead to defeat of Barisan Nasional (BN) in the recent GE. It is justified to claim that young educated Malay in urban area look beyond the political party in voting and chooses which party she feels best represents her interests. These women are rational because they evaluate the various alternatives that are available to them in terms of cost and benefits before making a choice.

It can be seen that multiple identities and the context surrounding them have interplayed with each other shaping the voting preferences of the women. Beyond gender, voter choices are determined by other attributes such marital status, age, race and political party. But in this study for some respondents, gender is not a strong pull on the vote. The

rationalization of the voting preferences have taken their dynamics and they are inter-related with each other, such as a young urban female voter may have similar preference with the young rural voter . In Malaysia context, party and incumbency have been the most significant influenced in the voting calculus of women voters but this study has proven differently. The female voters have rationalized things surround their lives which might benefit them or disadvantaged them, and later construct their decisions. Hence, this make women as unique voters, at the same time are difficult to predict. Understanding their rich diversities enable candidates or political parties to secure their votes. They are the force to be reckoned because they have the numbers!.

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ISSN 0128-4878 (Print)

ISSN 2289-5639 (Online)

