

Salient Factor of Voting Behaviour and its Relationship with Ethnic and Political Tolerance in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT: The study of tolerance become extremely important 60 years ago when Allport discusses the nature of prejudice due to the increasing multi-diversity society. Tolerance then has been observed as a critical key element in the multi-diversity society politically, ethnically, religiously and culturally ever since. The previous study demonstrated that tolerance has a constructive effect on social solidity and coherence. Nonetheless, it is found an insufficient amount of information on rational voting behavior when ethnic and political tolerance factors are involved. This study has been conducted to explore factors of rational voting behavior in Malaysia in regards to ethnic and political tolerance. A quantitative study uses a survey method with a questionnaire as a data collection technique involving three parliamentary areas is observed. Data then analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with 600 respondents were engaged in the study using multistage cluster and random sampling techniques. The result revealed that while political tolerance is not statistically significant with voting behaviour, but ethnic tolerance evidenced a substantial negative relationship. Ethnic tolerance and political tolerance both had a significant positive relationship. It also revealed that voting behaviour positively influenced by the level of education, a party supported and ethnic identity. Hence, it is clear that ethnic political tolerance has a considerable consequence on the rationale of voting behavior. However, the effects are diverse, in which identical and dissimilar ethnicities act as mediation elements. This study gratifies the aperture to the current body of knowledge and allows great connotation at a situation where ethnic politics are observed as the most important material and tolerance becomes a salient factor in managing Malaysia's society.

KEYWORDS: rational choice, democratic learning, election, ethnic relations, urbanism, and moderation

Introduction

Tolerance comes from Latin, *tolerantia* which means flexibility, the softness of the heart, broadmindedness, and volunteering. Tolerance also refers to the willingness to either accept behaviors and beliefs that are different from own, agree or disapprove of it. Tolerance also may consider as an idea, worldview, behavior, and ethics of accepting diversity. It exists in the space of similarities and differences. It also regarded as a indispensable requirement to achieve democratic and egalitarian aims (Widmalm, Oskarsson, and Hulterstrom 2010; Mohd Azmir Nizah Mohd 2017), and a higher priority and crucial for the working of a open and egalitarian society.

In the Malaysia context, studies of tolerance *per se* are infrequently equated to studies of ethnic politics and conflict (Horowitz 1989). Based on the premise of ethnic and cultural

diversity may increase tolerance (Korol 2017), the level of tolerance, politically and ethnically in Malaysia is expected to be high. Empirical evidence suggests that tolerance is important in contributing to social stability and harmony (Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah et al. 2018; Nazri Muslim and Mansor Mohd Noor 2014), even when it involved modernization and urbanization as push factor (Pepinsky 2015; J.W.J. Ng et al. 2015). But, unfortunately, there are some amount of concerns religiously, politically and ethnically (Khadijah Muda, Khairul Anwar Mastor, and Fazilah Idris 2018; Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah 2018). Furthermore, the theme of tolerance is very conspicuous and important especially when it involved Malaysia's national unity and integration agenda. Therefore, a study of ethnic and political tolerance is eminent in Malaysians.

As Malaysia consistently observed its democratic practice through elections, a thoughtful Malaysia's national voting behavior and various factors that influence the voters have been tremendously analyzed. A fair election system, voter influences, voter's ethnic politics, voting simulation models and voting pattern and trends were some of the areas of analyses that made (Fernando 2013; Mohammad Redzuan and Amer Saifude 2013; Rowden, Lloyd, and Gilbert 2014; Jason Wei Jian Ng, Vaithilingam, and Pillay 2015). Studies also substantiated that voters are likely to be more moderate in thriving times and traditionalists during difficult times (Ichino and Nathan 2013; Agomor and Adams 2014). In the case of Malaysia, where elite adaptation and consociationalism are adhered, the party politics itself, ethnic political issues, and the class affiliation that cuts across ethnic lines becomes salient as oppose to local ethnicity's favor. Therefore, because ethnic and political tolerance is very much important, and often it is measured with political behavior from the light of ethnicity, its relationship needs to establish then.

Thus, this study attempt to identify salient factors in voting behavior in Malaysia. It also attempts to establish a relationship between voting behavior and ethnic political tolerance. It is imperative because ethnic politics are perceived as the most important matter and tolerance becomes a significant factor in managing Malaysia's plural society.

Literature Reviews

Studies of tolerance and voting behaviour acknowledge that social status is one of the imperative variables, from the traditional partisanship theories (Dalton 2000; Lipset and Rokkan 1967). It signifies the growing importance of social across time (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2014, 111; Font and Cowell 2013). Social status or social-economic status or class cleavages is important for the commonality profiling of respondents. Social status cultivates a stable power and prestige order, which tension and conflict may occur, but disclosed individual differences in the group arrangement. It confirms that social status is just important as social economic indicators that defined environment (Oliver and Mendelberg 2000; Font and Cowell 2013). It evidenced the obligation of presence socio-economic statuses for further understand society affiliates deed and perform in their social setting.

The short passage on ethnic political tolerance is therefore push for a further investigation of its inadequacy, and to scrutinize the connections on voting behavior. Given the social and political necessity, the study of tolerance is paramount to Malaysia in safeguarding national interest, state survival, and modernity, urbanity, and prosperity. Studies by Mohd Azmir & Paimah (2012) evidenced that urbanites espoused more tolerance ethnically. A classic study suggests that ethnic tolerance exhibited certain progressive social magnitudes on ethnic relations. Ethnicity turn out to be subordinate after societal objectives. An analysis by Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah (2015), validate that urbanites showed a higher level of ethnic tolerance as compared to the non-urbanites. It also

established that psychosocial factors influenced ethnic tolerance level to a higher level among ethnics in Malaysia. It is consistent with the non-local context in various areas (Carter and Corra 2012; Carter, Carter, and Corra 2016; Sayan and Kalisch 2018; Li and Tong 2018) where urbanization does have an impact on ethnic politics and so does tolerance. Based on the recent statistic in 2019, almost 40% population of Malaysia that classified as Middle 40 (M40) and Below 40 (B40) are generally living in urban areas in Malaysia (The Star Online). By looking at the statistic and consider these two groups are the largest portion of the cake in Malaysia; their vibrant in politics are amicable. As what been mentioned by Aristotle in one of his famous statement of the roles and the size of middle class citizens in political community and public administration, which imbalance may contribute to an extreme disposition (Roskin 2014).

Political tolerance can be understood as a willingness to permit the expression of ideas or interest's one opposes that lays for an expressive society. The consequences of political tolerance have been explored on the determinants, nature, and level of tolerance attitudes. If the presence of political tolerance cannot be observed, the effort of building a democratic institution may be jeopardized. However, how and what ways ethnic political tolerance and voting behavior are affecting vice-versa remains opaque. This research is an attempt to examine the relationship between these two variables. Consequently, it is vigorous to study the level of tolerance among ethnic and its association towards their voting behavior in an electoral events. As Nazri Muslim & Mansor Mohd Noor (2014) suggests, education and social contact empirically improved cultural integration, but not in political integration. It is therefore revealed for the needs of political dimension analysis for scrutinizing group competitiveness. Ethnic tolerance from the perception and attitude components is the focal in this study. To date, a identical analysis of both ethnic tolerance perception and attitude is yet surfaced .

Ethnic political tolerance term surfaced in Cole (1977) works during the rising era of ethnic tolerance. Cole definition ethnic political tolerance as “an act to vote not in favor of a candidate of his ethnic background, but that he would also be sympathetic to similar claims of others” (Cole 1977). He argued that people act rationally in casting their votes regardless of ethnic identity. Two points can be withdraw; that is people think and behave according to their economic self-interest, and secondly ethnic political tolerance is influenced by urbanization and attitude. Ethnic politics in Malaysia often explains in terms of preferences, differences and ethnic factors in voting patterns (Lee Hock Guan 2013; Welsh 2016; Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah et al. 2015; Saravanamuttu, Lee Hock Guan, and Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman 2015; Pepinsky 2015; Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah et al. 2018). However, there are clear lacks on unity factors, such as tolerance (Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah, Hishomudin, et al. 2017; Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah, Ku Hasnita Ku Samsu, et al. 2017). Development and economy may affect the voting pattern, and there are other factors such as urbanization, modernization, and civic engagement, which may contribute to the voting pattern beyond ethnicity. As urbanism grows and so does the key condition for political tolerance.

These literature confirms that social status via the ethnic identity, education level, environmental, age, gender, religion, income level, and party preferences (Heath and Johns 2016) become an important socio-economic indicator that provides further information to the researcher to investigate ethnic and political tolerance and rationale for their voting behavior. Furthermore, as a country of a plural society, Malaysia consists of numerous ethnics groups in which possess their language, traditions, and religious norms and value systems. This eventually led to the elites for each ethnic group to unite among themselves for the mutual benefit (Moten and Islam 2014) echoed Lijphart's model of consociationalism (Lijphart 1977).

Three assumptions may be drawn from literatures. First, ethnic tolerance is a fundamental element in democratic countries, especially in a multicultural society. It paves for various studies in explaining factors and determinants of such perception (cognitive), attitude (willingness), and behavior (manifestation) with variety outcome. Secondly, political tolerance about acknowledgment, not acceptance. Political tolerance is predicted to have connection with ethnic tolerance. The more tolerant individual or groups ethnically, the more tolerated politically they will be. Several studies were confirmed with premise above. Thirdly, ethnic political tolerance level may give a cue to voting behavior. Stimulatingly, as urban population progressively increases, Malaysian scholars are still understudying ethnic political tolerances and its relations with voting behavior.

Despite various studies examining ethnic tolerance, political tolerance, and its implication towards voting behavior, but there is no empirical evidence that comparatively examines ethnic tolerance and political tolerance in Malaysia. A comprehensive and structured analysis of ethnic political tolerance amongst Malaysians in Shah Alam, Johor Bahru, and Bukit Bendera constituencies is yet found. And, there is no indicator of ethnic group political tolerance on voting behavior. Uses two broad Democratic Learning Theory and Rational Choice Theory as a framework, with two main concepts that include tolerance and voting behavior may serve the purpose of this study. Figure 1 represents framework for this study.

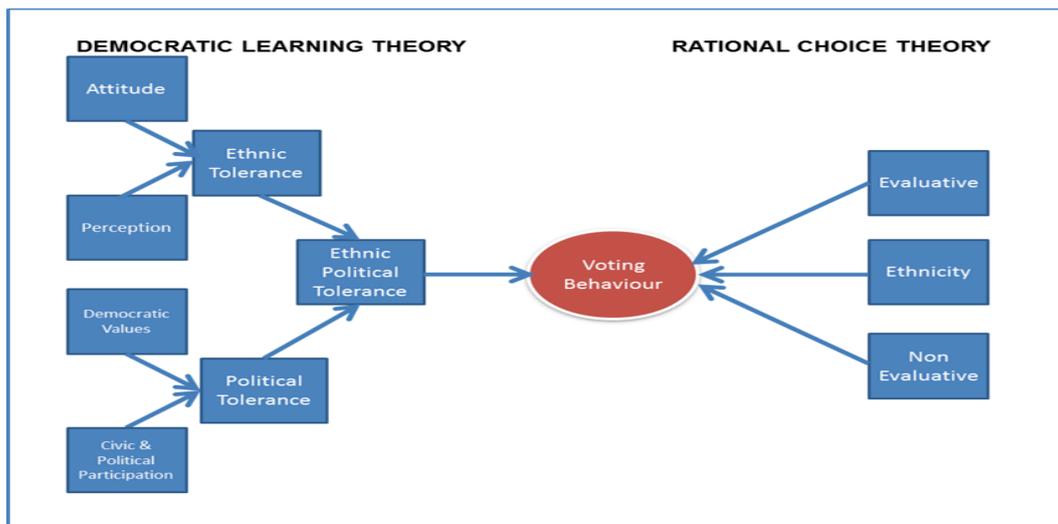


Figure 1. Proposed Framework

Methodology

This is a quantitative study, which involved data collection through a survey method, and then data were explored to attain commonsensical assumption through configuration relationship between variables. The survey was conducted for three months. Closed-ended with 10 Likert scales approach was used in the questionnaire. Four sections were created including demographic profiles, ethnic tolerance questions, political tolerance related questionnaires, and voting behavior elements. Data then aggregated to create a representative profile of the sample and cross-tabulated to explore the relationships between classifiable variables.

Using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) method, 600 respondents were involved thus confirming with determining sample size, that is the ratio of the number of cases to the parameters being estimated, and from power, calculations being used to

generate minimum sample size estimates (Tonidandel, Williams, and LeBreton 2015). Table 1 below illustrates the value of each construct on the value of reliability, convergence validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al. 2010). Based on Gaskin's (2012) Statistical Tools Package, there are no validity and reliability concerns for the measured constructs. This serves as an initial test of the research hypotheses.

Table 1: Validity and Reliability

Variable	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
CVP	0.864	0.683	0.032	0.013
NOE	0.895	0.587	0.531	0.237
FDE	0.902	0.606	0.398	0.159
PRC	0.825	0.542	0.196	0.087
DMV	0.877	0.641	0.196	0.068
STE	0.899	0.640	0.531	0.207

Notes: CR= Composite Reliability ($p > 0.7$); AVE= Average Variance Extracted ($p > 0.5$); MSV= Maximum Shared Variance ($< AVE$); ASV= Average Shared Variance ($< AVE$).

Source: Researchers Data

Result and Discussion

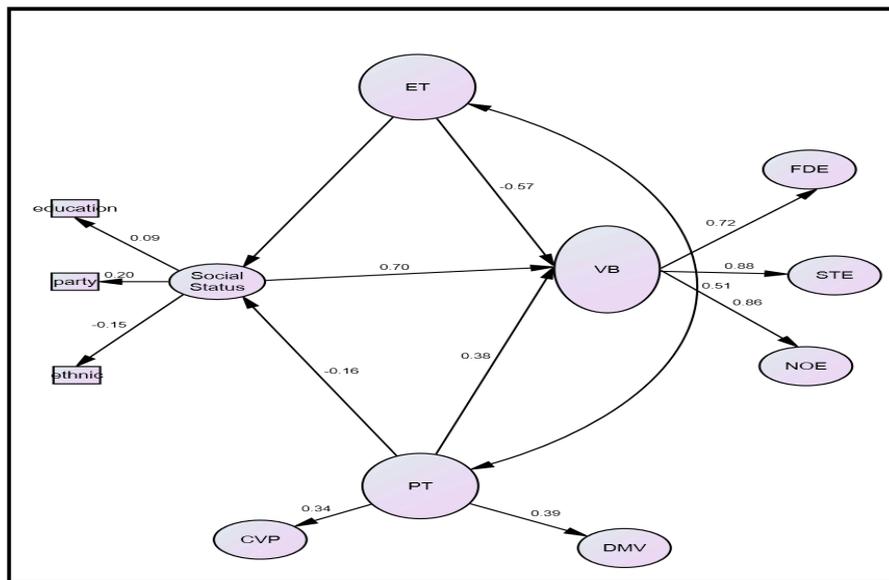


Figure 2: Ethnic Political Tolerance Model

The result showed a moderate negative relationship between ethnic tolerance perception and voting behavior with coefficient -0.57 . The result divulged that ethnic tolerance moderate negatively with voting behavior. It simulates that perception ethnic tolerance increases, their evaluative and non-evaluative voting behavior decreases. In plain, negative perception on ethnic tolerance, will results in less participatory in elections. A more complex situation occurred. Threat and conflict may induced negative perceptions on ethnic tolerance, which in turn effect the quality of votes. For Malaysia, this is zero-sum game as ethnic identity serves at best for party politics, but spiral effects may impede the society at large. It is somewhat contrary to Arwine & Mayer (2012) analysis, where increment of tolerance level, produces the augmentation of respects of human rights, support for the democratic government, and interest in politics. Nonetheless, to set a precise threshold for tolerance level is likely impossible due different cultures and society exposures. Thus, more studies need to be carried out to

measure the consequence of ethnic tolerance on voting behavior in Malaysia, where majority of literature is more from the western point of view, which certainly reflects a different culture factor. Ethnic tolerance is very much important for Malaysia's stability (Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah et al. 2018), and study relationships between ethnic tolerance and voting behavior should be further explored ultimately.

A standardized estimates at .38 exhibit a weak positive relations between political tolerance and voting behaviour. Borrowing Weber (2003) terms of "social butterflies" and "rugged individuals", that defined striking disposition of citizen who is more likely to expose themselves and potentially challenge different views to the former, and citizens who are less likely to the latter. In plains, respondents may influence political tolerance directly, but not influence in voting behavior. Sokhey & McClurg (2012) describes a less likely correct vote exist due to weaker cue phenomenon among diverse network individual. Perhaps, logical explanation to that is respondents were more socially participate rather than individual. It is synonymous with studies of Weber (2003) and Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) on social and individual contributions to political tolerance. The results of the 14th Malaysia General Election may explain it further. Additional towards that, the inconsequential relationship between political tolerance and voting behavior is of political tolerance is rather sociotropic, socially contacted fairly compared to individual. But, voting behavior, sounds socially participative, but in fact is individual participation in nature. Active engagement in campaigning, meeting, and discussing, is rather considered an individual contribution. Therefore, political tolerance significantly related to social participation, but it does not signify voting. The existence of perceived threat may decrease levels of political tolerance, decreased participation in electoral activities, as tolerance is a consequence rather than a cause for participation, and so does political tolerance is a consequence of voting behavior.

Relationships between social status and voting behavior showed a strong positive relationship (.70). It is indispensable to assess the relationship due to social statuses segregate society structurally from, either form the elites to the masses, from the rich to the poor, and from the majority to the minority (Streb 2008, 4). This is the society's reality fabrics. Thus, by acknowledging the relationship, noticing electoral behavior may provide some ideas for political scientists to understand a phenomenon involving voting behavior and beyond. Tolerance is greatly influence by social status (Arwine and Mayer 2012), and explanation on voting behavior is eminent. Therefore, $F(1,597) = 5.773$, $p < 0.05$ explains that social status has a relationship with voting behavior significantly. It parallel with several works that reported the explanatory power of social status towards voting behavior (Segawa 2015; Maznah 2008; Osman 2013). But, it also shows a diminishing influence of ethnicity and party in the electorate's decision (Segawa 2015; Osman 2013). Hypothetically, other factors such as issues, employment, economic stability, and national security also contribute to electorate decision.

A supplementary empirical study should be beyond votes as civic participation, democratic values, and perceptions intercept between tolerance and voting behavior. It is not mere direct influence between tolerance and voting behavior, but it can evidently witnessed through ballot activities and the election results. Researchers have recognized a variety of factors that affect ethnic tolerance, political tolerance, and voting behavior including perceptions, attitudes, democratic values, civic and political participation, evaluative and non-evaluative, and other demographic items as earlier discussion. Kasara (2013), Nazri Muslim & Mansor Mohd Noor (2014), and Muslim et al. (2012) have recommended the necessity for advance investigation on the political dimension of ethnic tolerance particularly with voting as electoral contest.

Conclusion

This study stipulated a dimension of ethnic tolerance, where the perception of ethnic-influenced tolerance plays major contribution, and due to low factor loading, attitude dimension was eliminated. However, one may not disregard the attitude dimension due to the statistical approach. Structural equation modeling was adopted in this study, perhaps attitude dimension may benefit researcher from other techniques such as multilevel models.

Civic, political participation and democratic values factors elucidated well the construct of political tolerance. Conversely, when it involved voting behavior, a weak positive relationship is founded, but it is not substantial enough. Although some literature highly considered political tolerance on the democratic system, it also proved that political tolerance might provide the wrong indication for voting. It worth noted that political tolerance is rather sociotropic, while voting is more to individuals, while electorate activities are social. Social status is consistent with the majority of ethnic tolerance, political tolerance, and voting behavior literatures. However, this particular study is only able to examine three factors, namely education, party, and ethnicity. Still, more significantly, the influence of ethnicity and party affiliation are diminishing over education. This outcome is identical with previous tolerance literature of the factors of education, manipulating ethnic and political tolerance. Yet, another factor that may subsidize to ethnic tolerance, political tolerance, and voting behavior.

It is hoped that this study will encompass our understanding of factors that influence ethnic and political tolerance and the magnitudes of ethnic political tolerance on voting behavior. From rational choice and democratic learning theoretic standpoints, these factors are salient and should be deliberated in determining ethnic political tolerance and its significance on voting behavior.

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