

Understanding Party Realignment Dynamics: Insights from Malaysian Voters in The Batang Kali Context

Mat Nadzari Ahmad Dahlan^{1*}, Tunku Mohar Tunku Mohd. Mokhtar²

¹Abdulhamid Abu Sulayman Kulliyah Of Islamic Revealed Knowledge And Human Sciences, IIUM, Gombak

²Abdulhamid Abu Sulayman Kulliyah Of Islamic Revealed Knowledge And Human Sciences, IIUM, Gombak

ABSTRACT

Malaysian politics witnesses a remarkable phenomenon of frequent shifts in voter party preferences, indicating a high level of volatility in political allegiances during elections. This study uses the Theory of Reasoned Action as a framework to examine how voting intention influences party realignment among the Malaysian. It explores the impact of attitudes, subjective norms related to ethnic identity, and candidate image on party preferences. The research utilized a quantitative approach with proportionate stratified random sampling. A self-administered survey questionnaire was distributed to 450 participants, maintaining a ratio of 5:1:1 across race and voting districts. These participants represented diverse ethnic backgrounds within the Batang Kali State Constituency, Malaysia. Conducting the study in Batang Kali offers access to relevant populations and facilitates representative sampling, contextual insights, and comparative analysis. Findings suggest that voter attitudes and candidate image play significant roles in decision-making, outweighing subjective norms related to ethnic identity. Subjective norms are not the primary driver of party realignment in a multicultural context. Personal beliefs notably shape voter attitudes, with a candidate's image overshadowing the influence of voting attitude. These insights enhance our understanding of the interplay between subjective norms, attitudes, and candidate images within Malaysia's diverse social landscape, particularly in Batang Kali. The study highlights the importance of prioritizing candidate image and voters' egocentric attitudes in political campaigns over subjective norms associated with ethnic identity.

KEYWORDS: Voting Intention, Voting Attitude, Ethnic Identity, Candidate Image, Party Realignment

Contribution/Originality: This article examines party realignment dynamics in Malaysian politics, focusing on Batang Kali. Using the Theory of Reasoned Action, voters' egocentric attitudes and candidate image significantly influence party preferences, overriding ethnic identity norms. The study offers insights for political campaigns and policymakers.

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysian politics, there is a notable phenomenon characterized by frequent shifts in voter party preferences, illustrating a significant degree of volatility in political allegiances during elections. This trend was noticeable during the 12th federal election in 2008 and further pronounced during the subsequent 13th General Election (GE13). The pattern persisted and reached its pinnacle in the 14th General Election (GE14), where Pakatan

Harapan (PH), an opposition party, emerged victorious over Barisan Nasional (BN) to form a new federal government. The volatility in voting patterns during this period is evident in Table 1. However, subsequent by-elections (Table 1) and the recent state elections in Malacca and Johor, held on November 20, 2021, and March 12, 2022, respectively, showcased a reversal in this trend. These elections demonstrated the volatile behaviour of voters as the BN regained control, especially in both states, with a commanding two-thirds majority to form new state governments. Meanwhile, the recent 15th General Election (GE15) has further complicated the scenario, revealing significant shifts in voter support, with the newly formed political coalition, Pakatan Nasional (PN), overshadowing both BN and PH. In essence, there is a discernible pattern of cyclical shifts in voting behaviour in Malaysian elections, particularly concerning party realignment. This recurring phenomenon underscores the dynamic nature of Malaysian politics, where voters' allegiances undergo periodic changes, influencing electoral outcomes.

Despite its prominence, the underlying factors driving this phenomenon still need to be more adequately understood. Therefore, the research aims to investigate the socio-psychological factors, such as diminishing senses of obligation, compliance, and loyalty among Malaysian voters, and the influence of ethnic identity on voting intention. Additionally, the study explores the impact of candidate image and external manipulations, such as racial narratives, on voters' decisions during elections. By addressing these gaps in knowledge, the research aims to provide valuable insights into the complexities of voting behaviour and party realignment in Malaysia, contributing to a deeper understanding of the country's political dynamics.

Furthermore, current research presents contradictory perspectives on the underlying factors driving the cyclical shifts in voting behavioural intentions. Staerke' (2015) linked the phenomenon to inconsistencies in political psychology influenced by various factors, including political beliefs and values, cognitive decision-making processes, political communication and media effects, racism and ethnic prejudice, ethnic identity, and collective action. In the context of Malaysian elections, the fluctuation in voters' political allegiance and the complex interplay between attitudes, subjective norms, and candidate image presents a perplexing puzzle.

While various theories like rational choice theory, affective intelligence theory, and expectancy disconfirmation theory are commonly used to understand voter behaviour, it is crucial to note that these theories mainly originate from a Western perspective (Arnett, 2008; Rozin, 2006; Staerke', 2015; Lago', 2019). More Malaysian studies in this area need to be conducted, highlighting the need for research considering the Malaysian context and cultural differences. Understanding political psychology within Malaysia requires considering its unique socio-political landscape.

Employing the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) as the guiding framework, the researcher explores two fundamental inquiries. First, the investigation seeks to elucidate whether a correlation exists between voting attitude, ethnic identity, and candidate image influencing voters' voting intentions. Second, the study aims to discern whether it is possible to distinguish the effects of candidate image on voting attitude and ethnic identity in shaping voters' voting intentions.

This theory comprises two core components: voting attitudes and subjective norms related to ethnic identity. The first aspect examines the formation of beliefs regarding feelings and thoughts about voting, while the second component evaluates the influence of societal expectations on voting behaviour. An additional variable, Candidate Image, has been introduced to provide a more robust explanatory framework for defining and predicting party realignment in Malaysia's diverse, multiracial society. The primary objective is to comprehensively examine the factors contributing to the volatility of voters' Voting Intentions during party realignment. This examination will explicitly concentrate on attitudinal aspects, subjective norms indicated by

Ethnic Identity, and the influence of Candidate Image. The overarching goal is to elucidate their combined impact on political behaviour and electoral choices within the context of Malaysia.

Therefore, this study would explore the factors influencing shifts in voting intentions between political parties ('A' and 'B') and the emergence of new political identities ('C').

Table 1 Voters' Allegiance Pattern

VOTE MOVEMENTS IN MALAYSIAN ELECTIONS				
	GE11 (2008)	GE12 (2008)	GE13 (2013)	GE14 (2018)
Registered Voters	9.8 mill	10.9 mill	13.3 mill	14.9 mill
Voters Turnout	73.9%	75.99%	84.84%	82.32%
Voters Turnout Growth	-	2.1%	8.85%	-2.252%
Non-attendance		24.01%	15.16%	17.68%
% Popular Votes				
BN	62.10%	50.30%	47.38%	33.80%
PR/PH	33.20%	46.50%	37.10%	47.92%
PAS (Gagasan Sejahtera)	-	-	14.10%	16.99%
Change of Votes				
BN	-	-11.80%	-2.92%	-13.58%
PR/PH	-	13.30%	-9.40%	10.82%
PAS (Gagasan Sejahtera)	-	-	-	2.89%

Source: Moten (2013), Moniruzzaman and Farzana (2018), and Suruhanjaya Pilihanraya Malaysia (January 2019)

Table 2 Vote Swing Fluidity

Period	Total Voters	Voters' Turnout		Pre GE14 v/s Post GE14			Turnout Gap	Shift of Votes		
		GE	Post GE	BN	PR/PH	PA		BN	PR/PH	PA
GE14 9 May,	The opposition PH wrested control of the Malaysian government for the first time									
Sg Kan Aug 4,	5080	86%	49%	1151	2399	75%	-37%	-19%	-85%	-
				/958	/154	-		-20%	-56%	
Seri Se Sept 9,	5265	84%	44%	987	2925	45%	-40%	-	-155%	51%
				/-	/137	/96			113%	53%
Balako Sept 9,	6165	82%	43%	587	4176	62%	39%	-18%	-192%	-
				/397	/225	/-		-48%	-86%	
Port Dic Oct 13,	7521	82%	58%	1851	3622	65%	-24%	-	-520%	86%
				/-	/310	/74			-17%	12%
Camer Highla Jan 26,	3204	76%	69%	1030	971	35%	-7%	17%	-91%	
				/120	/880	/-		14%	-10%	
Semen Mac 2,	5325	88%	73%	1446	2342	69%	-15%	53%	-55%	
				/197	/178	/-		27%	-31%	
Ranta	2047	-	79%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Aug 13				/103	/588	-				
Tanjung	5352	83	74	2073	2125	29	-9%	473	-108	
Nov 16				/254	/103	/-		19	-105	

Source: Consolidated from MySPR Semak: Semakan Keputusan Pilihanraya by Suruhanjaya Pilihanraya Malaysia (MySPR Check: Election Result Check by Election Commission of Malaysia) (December 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The shifting desires and willingness of Malaysians to change their political allegiance, indicating high volatility in party preferences is apparent. This volatility leads to observable switches between parties, suggesting that preferences can change over time. The fluctuation and evolution of voters' behaviour implies attitudes can be subject to adjustment. The behaviour also reflects the voters' current state of mind and can serve as a reliable indicator of their ultimate voting choice.

This research posited there are three significant socio-psychological factors that would cause voting intention volatility among Malaysians. Noor and Ahmad (2011) highlighted a diminishing sense of obligation, compliance, and loyalty among Malaysian voters, emphasizing the influence of these attitudinal factors on the intention to act. Obligation, compliance, and loyalty among Malaysian voters can be considered attitudinal factors. These factors reflect the attitudes and predispositions of voters towards their civic responsibilities, adherence to norms or expectations, and loyalty to specific parties or candidates. These attitudes play a crucial role in shaping individuals' intentions and actions during elections, as Wan Asna et al. (2013) emphasised, indicating that they are malleable and subject to change based on context, time, and place within the milieu of voting behaviour.

Meanwhile, ethnicity plays a complex role in shaping voting intention, intertwining with cultural, historical, and social factors influencing individuals' political choices. Welsh (2020) linked ethnic identification to a longstanding trend in Malaysian politics, notably affecting the Malays and Chinese communities, with less impact on the Indian population (Soomo & Memon, 2014; Mohd Azmir et al., 2018). For instance, the Chinese are not happy with the Malays/Bumiputra special rights given by the Malaysian Constitution. They advocate for equal rights in equity share, religious freedom, education opportunities and welfare treatment to the poor across all races (Chin, 2018; Welsh 2020; Goh, 2023). While, the Malays/Bumiputra adamant with their right as son of the soil (Moten, 2013; Cangià, 2014).

These ethnic affiliations give rise to mental biases and prejudices, fueling racial sentiments that shape voting behaviour, a phenomenon readily observed during elections (Ostwald et al., 2018). Ethnic communities form close-knit groups, reinforcing cultural and religious boundaries and impeding the development of interracial relationships that may influence political opinions and voting decisions (Soomo & Memon, 2014; Welsh, 2020). In short, peer pressure or social norms within these networks can sway individuals' voting intentions. Past experiences, such as historical injustices or privileges associated with ethnicity, may influence voting behaviour. Ethnic groups may vote based on past grievances or aspirations for change. Voters may align their political preferences with their ethnic identity, voting for candidates or parties perceived as representing their ethnic group's interests. Their religious or cultural beliefs may influence their perceptions of political issues or candidates (Fee, 2010; Ostwald et al., 2018). To a certain extent, this ethnic-related predicament influences the candidacy, as shown in Tables 2, 3 and 4. Competing parties were seen employing a race-biased placement approach, placing a particular race candidate based on the racial ratio in the competing areas, for example, Malays in Malay-majority areas and Chinese in their respective areas.

Table 2 GE14 Distribution of Candidates for Parliament by Party in Peninsular Malaysia

GE14 DISTRIBUTION OF CANDIDATES													
Parliament	State	Candidate Composition			BN			PH			PAS		
		M	C	I	M	C	I	M	C	I	M	C	I
3	Perlis	9	0	0	3	0		3			3		
15	Kedah	39	3	1	13	2		13	1	1	13		
14	Kelantan	42	0	0	14	0		14			14		
8	Terengganu	24	0	0	8	0		8			8		
13	Pulau Pinang	15	11	6	5	6	2	5	5	3	5		1
24	Perak	50	17	5	13	10	1	14	7	3	23		1
14	Pahang	35	4	3	10	3	1	12	1	1	13		1
22	Selangor	44	14	8	9	9	4	13	5	4	22		
12	Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur	18	13	1	5	6	1	5	7		8		
8	Negeri Sembilan	19	4	1	5	2	1	6	2		8		
6	Melaka	14	3	0	4	2		5	1		5		
26	Johor	54	16	2	16	9	1	18	7	1	20		
Total		363	85	27	105	49	11	116	36	13	142		3

Source: Dahlan, 2024 and Suruhanjaya Pilihanraya Malaysia, 2019. Notes: M = Malays, C = Chinese, I = Indian

Table 3 Summary of Candidate Distribution by Party in Peninsular Malaysia

Summary of the Candidate Distribution in %			
	BN	PH	PAS
Malay	63.64%	70.30%	97.73%
Chinese	29.70%	21.82%	0
Indian	6.67%	7.88%	2.27%

Source: Dahlan, 2024

Table 4 GE14 Distribution of Candidates According to Race Majority Area

GE14 Distribution of Candidates (Note: M for Malay/NM for Non-Malay)				
	M in M Area	M in NM Area	NM in M Area	NM in NM Area
<i>Area by above 70%</i>				
BN	68/69	0	1/69	10/10
PH	69/69	0	0	10/10
<i>Area by below 70%</i>				
BN	26/33	0	7/33	4/4
PH	29/33	0	4/33	4/4

<i>Area by below 60%</i>				
<i>BN</i>	7/12	0	5/12	10/10
<i>PH</i>	7/12	0	5/12	10/10
<i>Area by below 50%</i>				
<i>BN</i>	4/14	0	10/14	9/9
<i>PH</i>	7/14	0	7/14	9/9
<i>Area by below 35%</i>				
<i>BN</i>	0	0	1/1	0
<i>PH</i>	0	0	1/1	0

Source: (Dahlan, 2024 & Suruhanjaya Pilihanraya Report, 2019)

Notes: M = Malays, C = Chinese, I = Indian.

NM Area = Non-Malays Area, M Area = Malays Area.

Additionally, politicians frequently appeal to racial narratives (Welsh, 2020). For instance, propaganda such as 'Malay loyalties versus Chinese loyalty' and 'voting Chinese means Christians will take over the country' (Teik, 2013). Conversely, Lim Kit Siang promoted the 'green wave' slogan to support PAS, a Malay-based party accused of playing racist extremist politics (Abdul Jamal, 2023).

Simultaneously, voters carefully evaluate a candidate's various attributes when choosing during elections (Welsh, 2018). Besides the racial narratives as discussed, Nadzri (2018) emphasized that a candidate's credibility significantly impacts voters' decisions and can be decisive. Hwang (2010) illustrated that when PAS moderated its rhetoric, it experienced significant gains in GE12. In contrast, BN, as the ruling party, suffered losses in GE14 when its leader, Mohammad Najib Bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak, was depicted as a kleptocrat with questionable morals, tarnishing his image (Welsh, 2018). Mahathir Muhamed continuously attacked on Abdullah Badawi in GE12 cost BN its two-third majority in parliament (Moten, 2013). Lim Kit Siang acknowledged when opponents depicted DAP negatively, portraying it as a pro-Chinese and anti-Islamic chauvinist party, it significantly impacted its candidates' performance among Malay voters. (Noh, 2016). In another instance, PAS garnered overwhelming support from Malays due to its Islamic image. This support persisted even when PAS joined forces with DAP, its long-time opponent, and PKR and moderated its rhetoric to form a new opposition coalition (Amer Saifude Ghazali et al., 2011; Hwang, 2010). In summary, candidate persona and issues position and external manipulation factors influence Malaysian voters.

In congruence with the above discussion, this study operationalizes each variable within the Malaysian context, including voting intention, voting attitude, subjective norms (ethnic identity), and candidate image.

Voting Intention

Scholars defined intention as a conscious plan of a person to exert effort to conduct a future behaviour (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Cheng et. al., 2006). According to Ajzen and Fishbein (2010), an individual's intention (voting intention) is to accomplish an assumed behaviour (change vote) that incorporates components of willingness, behavioural expectation and trying. In this study, voting intentions are the clues of how people are eager to try, by what means an effort they are planning to exert and to assume the behaviour to realign a party. Understanding and analyzing voting intention is critical for political parties, pollsters, and researchers as it provides insights

into electoral behaviour, allowing predictions of potential election outcomes and understanding the dynamics of voter decision-making. As Hill (2017) and Blais (2004) claimed, the tendency is unpredictable with the magnitude of change varies according to time and space. Factors influencing voting intention may include political ideology, candidate image, and cultural or demographic considerations (Dassonneville, 2015).

Voting Attitude

The attitude of Malaysians towards shifting parties during elections is characterized by high volatility in party preferences, indicating a willingness among voters to change their political allegiance over time. This volatility suggests that preferences are not fixed but subject to adjustment, with attitudes being malleable and changing based on various factors such as context, time, and place within the milieu of voting behaviour. The research identifies three significant socio-psychological factors contributing to voting intention volatility among Malaysians: a diminishing sense of obligation, compliance, and loyalty. These factors reflect voters' attitudes and predispositions toward civic responsibilities, adherence to norms or expectations, and loyalty to specific parties or candidates, highlighting their susceptibility to change.

Moreover, ethnicity plays a complex role in shaping voting intention, intertwined with cultural, historical, and social factors influencing individuals' political choices. Ethnic affiliations give rise to mental biases and prejudices, fueling racial sentiments that shape voting behaviour, as observed during elections. These ethnic-related attitudes may sway individuals' voting intentions, with past experiences and historical injustices associated with ethnicity influencing voting behaviour. Additionally, competing parties often employ a race-biased placement approach, reflecting the influence of ethnic identity on candidacy and electoral strategies.

The study seeks to understand the influence of attitude on one's intention to act, reflecting Wan Asna et al.'s (2013) assertion that attitude significantly shapes electoral behaviour, a phenomenon subject to change based on context, time, and place. Notably, Malaysian voters' sense of obligation, compliance, and loyalty has been observed to diminish, as stressed by Noor and Ahmad (2011). In this study, voting attitude refers to an individual's predisposition toward an object, event, or situation, particularly during elections, where voters are exposed to various stimuli and a deluge of information that can influence their mental state (Boninger et al., 1995). Furthermore, the role of personal prejudices and egocentric biases is notable, prioritizing emotional support, self-validation, and fulfilment, as highlighted by Kovun (2012). This trait of egocentrism often leads individuals to defend the consequences of their choices (De Groot & Steg, 2009). In essence, deeply ingrained beliefs significantly impact individual inflexibility of intention to act, leading to a strong belief in their worth, abilities, or qualities and a sense of superiority or inflated ego with self-reliance and detachment from others. This emphasis underscores the complexity of attitude and its impact on an individual's intention to act within the context of voting behaviour and party realignment.

Subjective Norms indicated by Ethnic Identity

According to Cialdini (2007) and Rimal and Lapinski (2015), subjective norms, particularly those related to ethnic identity, encompass values negotiated by others as references that either encourage or control one's behaviour. These norms may manifest as descriptive norms, reflecting what most people do, or as injunctive norms, indicating what most people agree or disagree with regarding values (Cialdini et al., 1991; Rimal & Real, 2003). Failure to acknowledge their influences may result in social pressure and potential sanctions (Interis, 2011). The present study conceptualizes these norms as individuals' perceptions of the prevalence of specific behaviours and the societal approval of these behaviours.

The study aims to investigate the influence of ethnicity on voting intention, aligning with Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) perspective that ethnic identity is a normative belief affecting an individual's intention to act. Horowitz (1985) characterizes ethnic identity as a group distinguished by attributes such as colour, language, and religion, encompassing tribes, races, nationalities, and castes, with an emphasis on the connections of loyalty and kinship among them (Evans et al., 2010; Butt & Awang, 2017; Chandra, 2012; Varshney, 2003). Therefore, Oppong (2013) and Mol (1978) said that role models and different social environments can shape identity. Moreover, according to Park (2000), these identities may exhibit self-fulfilling traits, leading individuals to attribute responsibility for outcomes to their actions, as De Groot and Steg (2009) observed. This intricate relationship between ethnic identity and an individual's intention to act underscores the importance of understanding how ethnicity influences voting intention within party realignment.

Candidate Image

The study delves into candidate images, defined as "clusters of voter perceptions of candidates," highlighting their focus on personality traits (Hacker, 2004, p. 4). Hacker emphasizes that individuals' judgments of candidate images are shaped by cognitive representations developed through their awareness of candidate communications. Moreover, the research highlights that a candidate's image is not an inherent characteristic but rather a result of campaign communication. Shanks and Miller (1990) further elaborate that a candidate's image embodies an attribute that resonates with voters, significantly influencing their choices, and is not static but subject to change and potential manipulation (Hacker et al., 2000; Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987).

Within the context of this study, image functions as a form of political communication, strategically positioning the candidate as the preferred choice for voters. Balmas and Sheafer (2010) underscore that the prominence of this image impacts public opinion and has the potential to reshape voting predispositions.

METHODOLOGY

The study developed a model based on the theory of reasoned action (TRA) to examine the factors contributing to this volatility of voters' voting intentions on party realignment by explicitly focusing on voter's voting attitude, social normative beliefs indicated by ethnic identity, and candidate image factors to understand the impact on political behaviour and electoral choices in Malaysia. The theory of reasoned action posited subjective norms indicated by ethnic identity is the compelling determinant of voting intention, voting attitude as a contributory factor while candidate image as an additional variable to explain party realignment in a multiracial society. The study was conducted on 450 respondents composed of Malay/Bumiputra, Chinese and Indians in the Batang Kali State Constituency, Selangor, Malaysia using a proportion-stratified data-collection sampling method. Considering its experiences regarding location and population characteristics during elections, conducting a study in Batang Kali related to voters' propensity for party realignment seems sensible and ideal. It allows access to relevant populations, facilitates obtaining representative samples, provides contextual understanding, and enables comparative analysis.

Meanwhile, SmartPLS-SEM is employed to investigate the core theoretical assumptions that voting attitude and ethnic identity significantly affected voters to realign parties during elections. It also measures the effect of candidate image. The process involves the assessment of (1) the measurement model and (2) the structural model. The core objective is to measure the inter-construct relationships.

After clearly understanding the research focus and objectives, the study formulates specific hypotheses that serve as testable predictions or proposed explanations for the phenomena under study. Six hypotheses were then drafted, positing significant relationships between voting attitude and voting intention, voting attitude and ethnic

identity, voting attitude and candidate image, candidate image and voting intention, ethnic identity and voting intention, as well as ethnic identity and candidate image.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

SmartPLS-SEM application was used to analyse the relationship and the value exerted on the voting intention (dependent variable) by each of the independent variables like voting attitude, ethnic identity and candidate image. Before conducting data analysis, the study screened the data for suitability. The findings revealed no missing values, and all items exhibited a normal and adequate distribution, with estimated skewness < 1.03 and kurtosis < 1.42.

It is essential to assess the measurement model to ensure the validity and reliability of the measures before testing the hypothesized relationships through structural model assessment.

The results of the measurement model assessment reveal that Cronbach's alpha for voting intention is 0, with outer loadings ranging from 0.879 to 0.914. The average variance extracted (AVE) is 0.800, and the construct reliability (CR) is 0.941. For voting attitude, Cronbach's alpha is 0, with outer loadings spanning from 0.884 to 0.940. The AVE is 0.937, and the CR is 0.950. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha for ethnic identity is 0.593, with outer loadings ranging from 0.561 to 0.833. The AVE is 0.593, and the CR is 0.945. Meanwhile, Cronbach's alpha for the candidate image is 0.5, with the outer loading ranging from 0.561 to 0.867. The AVE is 0.627, and the CR is 0.977.

Simultaneously, the study presents a correlation matrix (see Table 5) derived from the structural model assessment, outlining the intricate interrelationships among the variables. This analysis elucidates the factors influencing voters' decisions to realign their party preferences during elections.

Table 5 Correlation Matrix (Using SmartPLS-SEM)

Constructs	1	2	3	4
Voting Attitude		0.394	0.080	0.182
Ethnic Identity	0.394		0.315	0.059
Candidate Image	0.080	0.315		0.441
Voting Intention	0.182	0.059	0.441	

Table 1.3 reflects the correlation between voting attitudes, ethnic identity, candidate image and voting intention. The outcomes highlight the following insights:

1. Voting attitude notably correlates with subjective norms (ethnic identity) at 0.394, signifying a moderately positive relationship.
2. Voting attitude has a significant but relatively weaker relationship with candidate image at 0.080.
3. A significant relationship exists between voting attitude and intention at 0.182, suggesting a moderately positive correlation.
4. Ethnic identity is substantially associated with candidate image at 0.315, indicating a moderately positive relationship.
5. However, ethnic identity exhibits an insignificant relationship with voting intention at 0.059, implying a lack of substantial correlation.
6. Candidate image exhibits a significant relationship with voting intention, evidenced by a correlation coefficient 0.441. Furthermore, it exerts a more substantial influence on explaining voting intention than

voting attitude, indicating that perceptions of candidates wield a more significant influence on voter behaviour than general attitudes towards voting.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the overriding significance of candidate image, ethnicity and attitude in shaping intention to perform (to align a party). The researcher addresses two pivotal inquiries: Firstly, does a nexus exist between Voting Attitude, Ethnic Identity, and Candidate Image, thereby influencing voters' Voting Intentions? Secondly, can we discern the distinct influence of a candidate's image on voting attitude and ethnic identity concerning voters' voting intentions? This research seeks to illuminate their primacy in guiding voters' decisions through a comprehensive analysis of the Theory of Reasoned Action framework.

In essence, the findings align with the research questions and objectives. It effectively wraps up the discussion, reinforcing the coherence and relevance of the study's outcomes.

1. Does a nexus exist between Voting Attitude, Ethnic Identity, and Candidate Image, thereby influencing voters' Voting Intentions?" This question aligns with the text's discussion of the significant influence of a candidate's image on voters' preferences, particularly in comparison to ethnic identity. It prompts an investigation into the relationship between these factors and their impact on voting intentions.
2. "Secondly, can we discern the distinct influence of a Candidate's Image on Voting Attitude and Ethnic Identity concerning voters' Voting Intentions?" This question directly relates to the exploration of the role of a candidate's image in shaping voting intention and its potential to surpass individual attitudes. It seeks to understand how a candidate's image influences voting attitude and ethnic identity and how these factors collectively affect voters' intentions.

The findings highlight the pivotal role of a candidate's image in moulding voters' preferences, particularly in comparison to ethnic identity. A candidate's image strongly influences voting intention, behaviour, and attitude, often outweighing the impact of ethnic identity. Despite this robust correlation, a candidate's image frequently supersedes individual attitudes in explaining intention, underscoring its potential to shape voter attitudes and preferences, overriding preexisting beliefs. Without meticulous decision-making, future political discourse may lean towards personality-driven politics, straying from essential issues.

In the analogy of democracy as a marketplace, voters are the primary consumers facing a dilemma when political vendors offer flawed goods or undesirable candidates. This compromises democracy by undermining sound decision-making and disconnecting political priorities from genuine community needs, ultimately hindering the intelligent decision-making necessary for overall community progress.

The substantial influence of a candidate's image on voters' party preferences, often surpassing the influence of attitudes and community pressure, raises practical implications. Focusing on superficial aspects may result in decisions made on incomplete or biased information, jeopardizing the integrity of political choices, and raising ethical concerns about transparency and fairness in the electoral process. Voters may need to be fully informed when making their choices.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Conflict of Interest

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