STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF RADICAL POLITICS: A STUDY AT SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY (UPSI)

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ABSTRACT: *The perception of the UPSI graduates towards politics is important to be studied because UPSI as an institution generates intellectuals who educate the present and future generations. Hence, this study is significant to investigate students' perceptions related to radical politics. The main objective of this study is to examine the perception of UPSI students towards radical politics. Besides, this article identifies the level of students' political knowledge and analyzes the chosen current issues and the priority and attention given by the students of UPSI. To obtain the required information, this study uses a quantitative approach and the data are collected through the survey research method. This study involves 405 respondents. The findings indicate that the political pursuits of students in UPSI are at a moderate level. Also, the findings depict that the students' main source of political information is social apps and websites. The social applications often used by respondents are Facebook followed by Whatsapp. The study also shows that priority is given by students to current educational issues and the cost of living. Finally, the study finds that UPSI students have a positive perception of radical politics and they argue that it can bring a positive impact on the country. The implication of this finding shows that UPSI students have a paradigm shift in their perceptions of radical politics. Thus, this will affect the democratic space in Malaysia. However, the students must possess a clear understanding of radical politics to ensure the sustainability of security and prosperity in Malaysia is not threatened.*

Keywords: Students; politics; radical politics; UPSI; youth

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of UPSI as an educational university and the facility has shown that this generation of educators will continue to influence society for the next 75 years or more. Therefore, given the university is close to reaching over a century in age, the continuity and the role of the university and students and influence on society, the nation, and the country are of prime importance. However, times have changed. The involvement of students in politics has been prohibited because students are subject to the Colleges and Universities Act (AUKU), Section 15, which prevents students from engaging or participating in political parties [1].

Nevertheless, students remain actively involved with other political radicalisms such as seen in 1999, surrounding the issue regarding the dismissal of Anwar Ibrahim [2]. It is said that students from various universities were involved, including Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, University of Malaya and also UPSI [2]. Together they used the same slogan, "reform".

Then, later in 2007, another form of political radicalism eventuated when the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH) movement held a massive demonstration demanding leadership reform and the manner in which the EC implemented the problem surrounding the registration of voters and particularly, the issue of ghost voters [3]. There were further examples such as BERSIH 2.0, BERSIH 3.0 and more recently, BERSIH 4.0, demonstrating student involvement in demanding certain agenda items outlined by the movement. Then, in 2011, the name UPSI was overwhelmed in the public eye, surrounding the issue regarding the radical acting student, Adam Adli who lowered the flag displaying the face of the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC)

[4]. This event indirectly impacted the good name and reputation of the UPSI as the nation's premier educational institution that produced intellectual Malay figures as mentioned earlier.

Notwithstanding, the latest series of political radicalism between 2015 and 2016, portrayed "yellow" shirts and "red" shirts. In this gathering, Adam Adli was one of the activists who were actively involved in giving speeches at the gathering. Therefore, this raises the question as to whether or not other UPSI students have or should be involved in these events. The importance of this question should not be underestimated given the impact on UPSI's reputation as an institution that produces intellectuals that continue to influence and educate today's generation of students and in the coming years. These born intellectuals and thinkers are future leaders of society. Hence, this area of study is important in investigating the perceptions of students in radica pollitics.

2. OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this article is to identify the level of political knowledge of students and their perceptions regarding radical politics. In achieving this objective, the study will analyze the current issues of choice that have become priorities and concerns of UPSI students.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Study on Youth and Student Involvement in Politics
Among the many scholars who have conducted studies on youth are Mazli, Abdul Razak & Abdul Rashid [5], where they examined the relationship between students and politics in the article titled '*The involvement of Malay university students in public politics in Malaysia'*. The study investigated student participation in political activities such as giving talks, discussions, forums, campaigns, and political

party meetings. The main findings of this study indicated that the involvement of Malay students in politics was at a low level. The authors also concluded by revealing some of the factors that created this situation. Among the main factors were the fears resulting from the AUKU.

Student activism in conjunction with the 2012 general election was also investigated in a study by Mohd Fauzi & Ku Hasnita [6]; '*in Student activism and the 13th Malaysian General Election: the second civil society wave after 1969'.* This study focused on the role of student activism in conjunction with the 2013 general election where they point out that the main direction of the current student movement is to champion human rights and equality amongst the people.

Another study that explored the political involvement of IPTA students was conducted by Ummi Munirah Syuhada et al. [7]; '*Political responsibility: a study among IPTA students'.* This writing focused on the level of political understanding and the factors affecting political responsibility among IPTA students. The main findings from the study found that the political responsibility of IPTA students had a direct relationship with their age, years of study, and the field of study.

Similarly, Norshuhada et al. [8] Examined 'Generation Y's' political involvement and social media in Malaysia. The main focus of the study was centered on the perception of the Y-generation on media and political engagement. The key to this research was that the Y-generation in Malaysia was confident that social media could be used as a tool to connect with the government so that their requests could be delivered and fulfilled. Same focus, Siti Noranizahhafizah et.al [9] examines trends in the preference for political information sources among young women in Perak. The results show that mainstream media played an important role as the main source of political information among young women in Perak as compared to alternative media. Television was the most important source of political information for them. In addition, respondents' confidence in the source of political information which they obtain from television was preceded by Astro Awani with the highest mean scores, followed by government-owned television stations, namely TV1 and TV2. In a separate study, the relationship between the student movement and the democratic system was examined by Idil [10], in '*Democracy and social movements, (How the student movement works towards the dynamics of social change)'.* The author in this study explains that the student movement plays an important role as a social change agent in a democratic system. This is because students are highly educated people who are capable of championing social issues that embrace the interests of the people.

Political socialization among youths can also be traced in '*Political socialization of Malaysian youth: the present state and the way forward'* by Ismi Arif et al., [11]. This study focuses on the socialization of politics among Malaysian youths, the factors affecting socialization of youth politics, and its consequent impact. The findings suggest that the socialization of Malaysian youth politics is low in line with youth political involvement. Among the factors that caused the situation included political literacy, political maturity, and the political landscape.

Siti Noranizahhafizah [12] conducted a study titled '*Students and Campus elections: A case study at Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia to study campus politics among students at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI)'.* The main finding from this study indicated that UPSI female students showed higher levels of campus political engagement compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, candidates manifests, and current issues were cited as the main factors affecting student choice.

In a study by Roslizawati & Mohd Rizal [13] student democratization at the Higher Education Institution at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia was investigated on the involvement of students in campus politics. The results of the study found that internal factors such as student welfare issues were the main factors that encouraged student participation in campus politics. On the other hand, external factors such as foreign politics enacted much less influence on campus politics among students.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research approach using survey methods to collect information related to political knowledge, perceptions relating to radical politics, and the choice of current issues that are considered the main priorities of students. This study was initiated by first analyzing documents and surveys. The study was conducted at UPSI, Tanjong Malim Perak. The University is located in Tanjung Malim, Perak, and comprises two campuses; the Sultan Azlan Shah campus and the Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah campus. The population of this study consisted of students at the Sultan Idris Education University. The current number of students at this university at the time of this study was estimated at around 12,589 [14]. Based on the sample size determination table by Krejcie And Morgan [15], the number of respondents needed for this study was 384 However, the researchers' of this study took steps to maximize the number of respondents so that the information and data obtained would be better and more reliable. In total, 405 respondents were involved in this study and were randomly selected, with different backgrounds and ideologies to ensure that the data obtained was more diverse.

The data collected from the participants were entered into the Statistical Software Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23 where it was then analyzed using descriptive statistics, namely frequency, percentage and mean obtained from survey questionnaire items. The researcher analyzed the data according to the stated objective of this study and the requirements.

5. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

5.1 Respondent Profile

The researchers first analyzed the profile of the 405 UPSI students. Table 1, shows that the larger majority of participants were aged 21 years or older with 359 participants representing 88.6 percent of all respondents. Also shown in the table, is that most respondents were Malays; 182 (44.9%). The ethnic distribution of respondents is also in line with the ethnic divisions in Malaysia to ensure that the findings address the opinions of various ethnic groups.

Table 1: Respondent Profile

Items		Frequency (n = 405)	Percentage (%)
Age	17 to 20	46	11.4
	21 above	359	88.6
Gender	Male	202	49.9
	Female	203	50.1
Ethnic	Malay	182	44.9
	Chinese	115	28.4
	Indian	72	17.8
	Others	36	8.9
Religion	Islam	200	49.4
	Buddhist	87	21.5
	Hindu	52	12.8
	Kristian	65	16.0
	Others	1	0.2
Status	Single	391	96.5
	Married	13	3.2
	Others	1	0.2
Education	Diploma	30	7.4
	Degree	364	89.9
	Master and above	11	2.7

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018.

5.2 Political Knowledge

Political knowledge amongst the UPSI students was identified from four main aspects; following political developments, discussion on political issues, and the influence of political choices and the source of political information. Analysis of the data included: frequency, percentage, and a mean score in order to determine the significant choice and the respondent's choice pattern.

5.2.1 Political Development

The frequency of the following political developments among UPSI students was also analyzed to determine the tendency of students to follow political developments. This aspect is significant to identify whether the unemployed group tended to know or otherwise follow political developments. The frequency of respondents following political developments was assessed using a five-level Likert scale. Based on Table 2, it was found that most respondents sometimes follow political developments. The "sometimes" option was mentioned by 175 respondents, (43.2%).

The mean score of the respondents' frequency following political developments was 3.1 suggesting that the frequency of UPSI students pursuing political developments is at low to moderate levels. This finding is in line with the findings of Abdul Hadi et al. (2013) that investigated the level of youth political engagement where the low level of youth involvement was due to the attitudes of youths who had abandoned recent politics.

Table 2: Following Political Development

Items	Frequency (n = 405)	Percentage (%)
Never	28	6.9
Rarely	76	18.8
Sometimes	175	43.2
Frequent	80	19.8
Always	45	11.4

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018.

5.2.2 DISCUSSION ON THE POLITICAL ISSUES

Discussion on the political issues was assessed through the preparation of individual priorities that dealt with political issues. The preparation of priorities was based using a scale between 1 and 3, referring to (1) important medium, (2) important (2), and (3) very important. Four options were given to respondents, namely family, peers, and lecturers as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Discussion On Political Issues

Items	Percentage (%)				Mean
	Very Important	Important	Medium	Not to Choose	
Family	54.8	29.9	15.1	0.2	2.39
Peers	36.3	49.6	13.8	0.2	2.22
Lecturer	8.1	19.5	68.9	3.5	1.32
Others	0.7	1.0	2.2	96.0	0.06

Source: Fieldwork Data, 2018.

The findings from Table 3 show that families are most involved when discussing political issues with the respondents represented by a total of 222 people (54.8%), and achieving the highest mean score of 2.39. This is because families are recognized as individuals having friendly relationships and with the same social background as the respondents. Accordingly, respondents tend to feel more comfortable in discussing political issues with their respective family members. Likewise, peers are also seen as an alternative to the family in discussing political issues. Here, a total of 147 people, (36.3%) was selected as primary individuals to discuss political issues with, achieving the second-highest score of 2.22. This is mainly due to the friendly relationships that exist between the respondents and their peers. Therefore, respondents are more likely to share political opinions and views with their peers.

5.2.3 Influence on Political Choice

The influence of political choice was identified through the preparation of priorities between individuals, such as self, family, peers, lecturers, and others. As shown in Table 4, 263 respondents (64.9%) chose themselves as the most important individual that affects their political choices, recording the highest mean score of 2.33. This suggests that others do not easily influence students in making political choices. However, it is shown that the family also has a strong influence on the choice concerning youth politics associated with women with a mean score of 1.93. This result was similar to a study of Abdul Hadi et al. [16] in that parents and family factors are significant factors in influencing political engagement among youths. However, political choices are made by the individual; considering the opinions given by others, such as their family, peers and lecturers.

Table 4: The Influence On Political Choice

Items	Percentage (%)				Mean
	Very Important	Important	Medium	Not to Choose	
Ownself	64.9	14.6	9.1	11.4	2.33
Family	22.7	53.8	17.3	6.2	1.93
Peers	9.4	22.2	55.3	13.1	1.28
Lecturer	2.7	8.4	17.8	71.1	0.43
Others	0.2	1.0	0.5	98.3	0.03

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018.

5.2.5   Political Information Sources

Political information sources are important in understanding how students obtain or receive their political information. The researchers' identified the most important sources of political information from amongst students considering various information sources such as newspapers, radio, television, political talks, blogs, websites, social applications, and so forth. The main source of political information of respondents as shown in Table 5 was through using social applications with the highest mean score of 1.50. The website was also identified as the main source of information with a mean score of 1.34. Accordingly, this shows that Internet media plays an important role as a major source of political information among UPSI students as opposed to traditional media. This is mainly because social applications nowadays are used as the most important source of political information shared among students. This finding is also in line with that of Junaidi et al., [17] and Farideh et al., [18] where internet media is used as the main platform for obtaining political information. Furthermore, this finding also showed similarities with a study by Lalitha & Balakrishnan [19] where social media is increasingly used among Malaysians as a means of communication with one another. Interestingly, here blogs do not serve as a source of political information found among UPSI students given they are less popular. Although blogs are used increasingly in conjunction with the reform movement.

Table 5: Sources Of Political Information

Items	Percentage (%)				Mean
	Very Important	Important	Medium	Not to Choose	
Newspaper	15.8	23.0	20.2	41.0	1.14
Radio	1.7	7.7	10.6	80.0	0.31
Television	14.8	21.7	24.9	38.5	1.13
Political talk	5.7	5.7	8.1	80.5	0.37
Blog	1.0	5.4	7.2	86.4	0.21
Website	23.7	24.7	13.1	38.5	1.34
Social apps	36.8	13.1	13.8	36.3	1.50
Others	0.2	0	1.2	98.5	0.02

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018.

Table 6 shows the social applications most frequently used by respondents. Not surprisingly, Facebook had the highest mean score of 2.10 followed by WhatsApp which recorded a mean score of 1.85. The social apps mentioned above are seen as alternate media that can be used to share and obtain information. Also, the use of social applications is seen as a means of establishing relationships with the government to voice their demands and other concerns [8].

Table 6: Social Application Preferences

Items	Percentage (%)				Mean
	Very Important	Important	Medium	Not to Choose	
Twitter	9.6	8.6	13.1	68.6	0.59
Facebook	47.9	25.7	15.1	11.4	2.10
WhatsApp	30.4	36.3	21.5	11.9	1.85
Instagram	8.6	23.2	37.3	30.9	1.10
WeChat	3.0	5.7	11.6	79.8	0.32
Others	0.5	0.5	1.5	97.5	0.04

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018.

While the legitimacy of information obtained through these applications was low compared to mainstream media, most respondents tend to re-evaluate the information obtained. As shown in Table 7, 271 respondents (66.9%), reassessed information from a total of 405 respondents. The score for the revaluation of information among UPSI students was 1.52.

This also demonstrates that UPSI students have a very high level of awareness in reassessing political information.

Table 7: Reassessment Of Information

Items	Frequency (n = 405)	Percentage (%)
Yes	271	66.9
No	66	16.3
No time	60	14.8
No need	8	2.0

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018

5.3   Perceptions of Radical Politics

The perceptions of radical politics were assessed by employing a five-level Likert scale. Table 8, shows the students' perceptions with respect to radical politics. Overall, the respondents, most agree that public gatherings can be held to express dissatisfaction which recorded the highest mean score of 3.76. This is due to the organization of several large-scale public assemblies such as the BERSIH rally that portrayed the dissatisfaction of people with the country's administrative system. Also, the UPSI students also showed a high level of agreement regarding the statement of radical political activity to widen the democratic space with the second-highest score recorded of 3.51.

However, the UPSI students disagreed with the negative statements about radical politics. Among the statements that recorded the lowest mean score were the negative traits of radicals with a score of 2.98. The second-lowest statement with a score of 3.17 was for the radical element emphasizing their opposition against the government. This shows that UPSI students are of the opinion that radical politics can have a positive effect on the negative effects. Additionally, UPSI students demonstrated confidence in radical politics to bring about change and to champion public interest.

5.4 Current Issues

The choice of priorities for current issues was next assessed via a five-level Likert scale. Based on Table 9, the issue of education was the most current issue highlighted by UPSI students. The statement concerning educational issues recorded the highest mean score of 4.51, followed by the cost of living which recorded the second-highest mean score of 4.44.

Table 8: Perceptions Of Political Radicals

Items		Frequency (n = 405)					Mean
		SA	D	NS	A	SA	
a.	Radical politics is politically opposed to the mainstream	19	34	217	113	22	3.21
b.	Radicals are the attitude to bring change	7	27	166	169	36	3.49
c.	Radicals are negative traits	18	92	197	78	20	2.98
d.	Radical elements emphasize opposition to the government	18	51	206	105	25	3.17
e.	Radicals can lead to extreme	10	18	196	140	41	3.45
f.	The radical activity has the potential to have a positive effect	9	40	208	122	26	3.29
g.	A peaceful assembly can be held to express dissatisfaction	3	21	128	171	82	3.76
h.	Radical politics can lead to public disorder	16	33	204	118	34	3.30
i.	Radical politics is fighting for public interest	9	16	198	145	37	3.45
j.	Radical political activity expands democracy	8	19	202	129	47	3.51

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018.
Indicator: SD - Strongly Disagree; D - Disagree; NS - Not Sure; A - Agree; SA - Strongly Agree.

The focus of UPSI students on current issues related to their daily lives and their rights. This finding was in line with the findings of Roslizawati & Mohd Rizal (2017) where students are more concerned with the issues of rights and issues related to their interests and paying more attention to current state issues.

Table 9: Current Issues

Items		Frequency (n = 405)					Mean
		VU	NI	NS	I	VI	
a.	Cost of living	4	3	36	128	234	4.44
b.	Criminals	4	6	59	159	177	4.23
c.	Car price	6	16	112	147	124	3.91
d.	House price	3	12	74	141	175	4.17
e.	Oil price	4	8	60	128	205	4.29
f.	Education	2	5	36	103	259	4.51
g.	Toll	4	16	105	139	141	3.98
h.	ISA, Sedition Act, AUKU, Assembly and Print Act	3	27	132	114	129	3.84
i.	Leader's personal	9	37	122	112	125	3.76
j.	Land	3	19	105	142	136	3.96
k.	Water	2	13	88	147	155	4.09
l.	Corruption or abuse of power	2	6	52	128	217	4.36
m.	Bumiputera privilege	7	17	76	110	195	4.16
n.	Demonstration	10	26	115	128	126	3.82
o.	Unemployment	5	8	65	112	215	4.29
p.	Religious	6	10	69	121	199	4.23
q.	Ethnic	5	7	68	127	198	4.25

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018

Indicator: VU - Very unimportant; NI - Not Important; NS - Not Sure; I - Important; VI - Very Important.

6.   CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights a number of important findings. Firstly UPSI students at moderate levels, follow political developments. Although, in this case, it appears that students are not easily influenced by others. Secondly, the source of political information. Here, the study found that the main source of the respondent's political information was through using social applications, mainly using Facebook followed by WhatsApp. This study also found that UPSI students had a positive perception of radical politics.

Notwithstanding, from the findings in this study, it was found that UPSI students are of the opinion that radical politics can have a positive impact on the country. This is mainly due to the weakness of the country's administration and dissatisfaction with national policies, voiced through radical politics. Finally, this study found that education issues are the most current if not prominent issues and priorities amongst UPSI students. This finding shows that UPSI students have made a paradigm shift in terms of their perceptions of radical politics, which will undoubtedly affect the democratic space in Malaysia. However, students must clearly understand and comprehend right from wrong, so that any unforeseen or radical acts do not threaten the security and prosperity that exists in Malaysia. Not only that, but it also enhances the sense of responsibility and affection for the nation as a whole, bringing together innovative ideas that ultimately contribute to the well-being of Malaysia.

8.   REFERENCES

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