

# Unveiling the Dynamics of Changes in Voting Behavior in Malaysia: Insights from Psychological Perspectives

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## Abstract

Voting behavior is pivotal in democratic societies, reflecting citizens' preferences and shaping the course of governance. In Malaysia, the multifaceted influences on voting choices, including socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, and regional dynamics, underscore the complexity of electoral dynamics. Despite its significance, changes in Malaysian voting behavior remain understudied, particularly in understanding why and how voters switch allegiances between elections. This paper aims to address this gap by analyzing the literature on evolution of voting behavior in Malaysia and the driving factors behind these shifts. This research delves into the psychological dimensions of voting behavior, focusing on cognitive and information processing factors, emotional and affective factors, social and identity factors, and personal and motivational factors. Through a comprehensive analysis of the literature on these dimensions, this research seeks to provide deeper insights into the complexities of voting behavior in Malaysia and its implications for democratic processes. Understanding these factors is crucial for elucidating electoral dynamics, informing political strategies, and fostering a deeper appreciation of democratic governance in Malaysia.

**Keyword:** Voting Behavior, Voters In Malaysia, Psychological Perspective.

## Introduction

Voting is indeed fundamental to democracy, as it shapes the direction of governance and policies that affect citizens' lives. Similarly, in Malaysia, individuals' choices at the ballot box are influenced by a multitude of factors, such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, and regional dynamics. Understanding these factors is crucial for deciphering voter behavior and the dynamics of elections in Malaysia. By exploring the elements that influence voting choices within the Malaysian context, we can gain insights into the complexities of voter behavior, the strategies deployed by political parties and candidates, and the broader implications for democratic processes in Malaysia.

Voting behavior is a form of political behavior (Harrop & Miller, 1987) that has been studied since the 19th century (Laurison, Brown, & Rastogi, 2022). The study of voting in a geographical area has developed into understanding voting patterns and behavior at local and national levels and across different elections. This is particularly important as the change in voting behavior is receiving much attention (Dalmus, 2018). It is seen by many as a significant study in the field of political science as it could provide enduring knowledge that can inform our understanding of election results and the larger political process for decades. In Malaysia, since its first democratic election in 1955, the political landscape has been rapidly transformed from one side to another. However, the changes in the voting behavior of the nation have not been well studied. By the end of the recent general election in 2018, Malaysia has experienced five different types of ruling coalitions and it's truly worthwhile to study such changes (Moten, 2020). It has been discovered that in today's studies, changes in voting behavior are very important for many reasons. The first possible reason, or the most common reason, is that society is always changing their behavior and preferences day by day, and elections are something that we can measure the pulse of what's going on in society (Smith, 2022). Therefore, changes in voting behavior can provide deep insight into an enormous area of research that is focused on the significance of viability, legitimacy, and the health of democracy. Indeed, it is always a popular academic research topic in Malaysian elections when it comes to any studies and writings that provide an understanding of the Malaysian electoral system and election processes, but changes in voting behavior are constantly given less attention (Ufen, 2020; Tapsell, 2020).

Moreover, research that investigates and attempts to explain why and how Malaysians have switched their votes from one election to the next is relatively rare, especially in studies focusing on changes in voting behavior (Ufen, 2020; Tapsell, 2020). It is actually very important to understand how and what factors cause Malaysian voters to change, either from an existing political party to another or by embracing a new political vehicle. This is because changes in voting behavior can have significant and wide-ranging effects on the political landscape of Malaysia, from altering the balance of power between different factions to potentially determining the outcomes of individual elections. Moreover, the impact of sudden changes in voting behavior would definitely cause political analysts, observers, and scholars to consolidate new elements or factors that may modify the dynamics that shape the political maps of Malaysia for a period of time.

Last but not least, understanding-voting behavior is a complex and dynamic process of political actions, involving various social, economic, and psychological factors in place and time (Amin & Anuar, 2023). With the continuous knowledge in these factors, it will provide a predictive model with the ultimate goal of preventing such deleterious consequences due to abrupt exorability. Changes in voting behavior have only recently come to worldwide attention with technological advancements and the ability to analyze more data. With the explosive growth of data, political scientists have started to use many advanced data mining algorithms to better understand the changes in voting behavior, and there have been many different studies in this area introduced from many different countries.

Likewise, in recent days, there is a growing interest in studying elections and voting patterns in Malaysia. Much attention has been given to the analysis of recent general elections and the

last one, the 14th general election, has attracted the attention of many scholars (Syeikh, Sharifah et al. 2023). What makes this election even more interesting is that there is a dramatic increase in voters' turnout to 83% as compared to the 13th general election, which is 85%. But it is worth noting that the decreasing of voters' turnout in urban areas (Amin & Anuar, 2023; Syeikh, Sharifah et al. 2023). In order to understand this abnormality, the aim of this paper is to analyze how the voting behavior has changed in Malaysia and what were the key driving factors behind these changes.

### Conceptual Framework

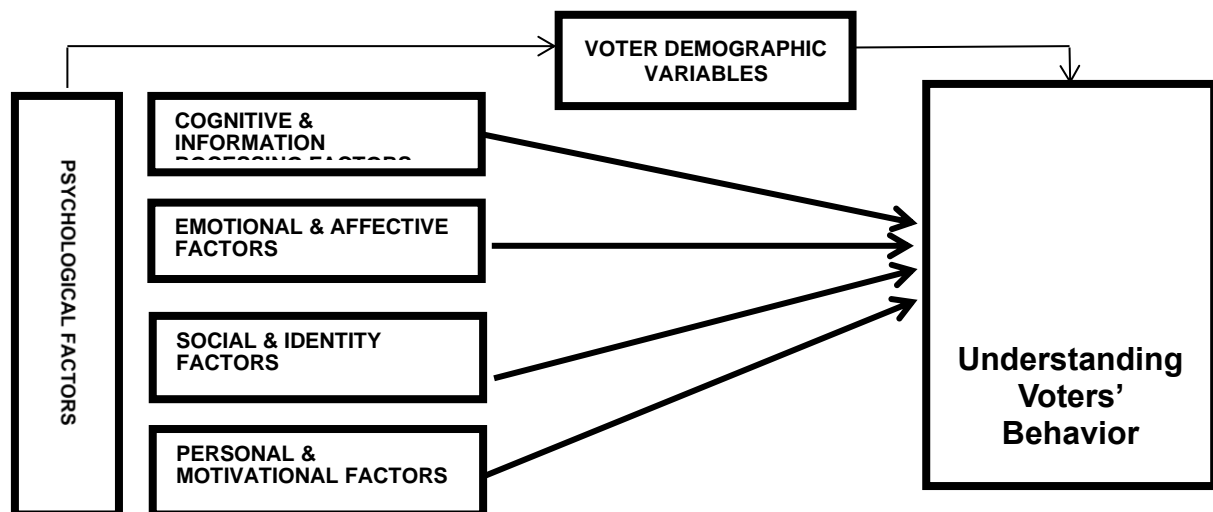


Figure 1: Research Framework

### Literature Review

#### *Exploring Voting Behavior: From Rational Choice To Empirical Analysis*

Voting, as described by Edlin, Gelman, and Kaplan (2007), involves expressing one's preference among options, often in selecting representatives or deciding on matters of public interest. Within the framework of "Voting as a Rational Choice," they argue that despite the statistical unlikelihood of individual votes significantly impacting election outcomes, individuals may still find it rational to vote due to their "social" preferences, prioritizing collective welfare over personal gain. Thus, voting is portrayed as a conscious choice made by those who believe in the broader societal benefits of democratic participation.

Nurmi (2010), emphasizes that voting is not solely sufficient for democratic governance but is an integral part of it, alongside bargaining, as a primary means of collective decision-making. This sentiment is echoed in various contexts, from political elections to informal gatherings, indicating the diverse forms in which voting occurs. Moreover, voting in national parliamentary elections, as highlighted by the OECD (2019), serves as a pivotal mechanism for citizens to actively participate in governance and policymaking processes. It represents direct involvement in shaping legislative bodies and influencing policies, underscoring citizens' commitment to democratic rights and responsibilities.

Considering oneself as a voter entails a complex interplay of physical, intellectual, and emotional factors, as articulated by (Coleman, 2022). Physically going to a polling station, intellectually assessing candidates or issues, and emotionally experiencing a range of feelings all contribute to the multifaceted nature of voting. However, the meaning of voting fluctuates across perspectives, from symbolizing freedom and citizenship to being perceived as futile or tainted by disillusionment, as noted by The (Guardian, 2011). This discrepancy in perception contributes to varying levels of engagement and disenchantment among voters. Overall, voting is a multifaceted phenomenon that reflects individual choices and broader societal attitudes towards democracy and civic participation. In light of this understanding, the study of voting behavior seeks to unravel the complex interplay of factors shaping individuals' decisions in the democratic process.

Three main schools dominated social psychological research on voting. The first based at Columbia University and led by Paul Lazarsfeld, conducted research from the early 1940s to the late 1950s. Their work built upon Lazarsfeld's earlier studies and applied them to voting behavior. The second school, established at the University of Michigan in 1948, continues to the present day. Key figures included Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren Miller, and Donald Stokes. Influenced by Kurt Lewin's field theory and Rensis Likert's attitude measurement, this school produced influential research on voting behavior. The third school, known as the cognitive school, comprises scholars who have integrated insights from cognitive psychology into their voting research. Many of them emerged from the Michigan tradition and have contributed to understanding voting behavior from a cognitive perspective.

During the era when behaviorism rose to prominence in American psychology, the study of voting behavior remained largely unaffected by behavioral theories. This was due to the initial influence of social psychology, which, shaped by European psychologists like Paul Lazarsfeld and Kurt Lewin, retained a mentalist perspective. While behaviorists primarily focused on laboratory experiments with non-human subjects, social psychologists pursued empirical analyses of consumer actions and occupational choices, which later extended to voting behavior.

Despite the predominance of mentalist explanations in voting behavior studies, dissenting voices have occasionally emerged, challenging the validity of such approaches. Critics have pointed out the limitations of mentalist explanations, which often result in simplistic or circular statements, such as the observation that voters strongly aligned with a particular party tend to vote for that party. Wahlke (1979) further questioned the exclusive focus of political science on mental variables, suggesting that other factors may play a more significant role in shaping political behavior. These critiques, however, did not significantly alter the trajectory of political science research on voting behavior. While some efforts were made to integrate principles of social learning into political behavior research, particularly in political culture theory, computer simulations, and contextual voting analyses. In conclusion, researchers highlight the examination of voting both as a rational decision-making process and as a subject of empirical analysis within the context of democratic governance.

**Determinants of Voting Behaviour in Malaysia**

The term "determinants of voting behavior in Malaysia" refers to the various factors or influences that shape how individuals in Malaysia decide to vote in elections. These determinants can encompass a wide range of social, economic, cultural, and political factors that influence voters' choices at the ballot box. Understanding these determinants is essential for analyzing patterns of voting behavior, predicting election outcomes, and crafting effective political strategies. In light of this understanding, Azmir, Nizah (2017), indicated that tolerance has been regarded as an essential key element in the modern multi-diversity society culturally, ethnically, religiously and politically. Various empirical evidences confirmed that tolerance has a positive effect towards social stability and harmony. However, when it involves voting behavior as rational on ethnic and political tolerance, there has not been a sufficient study to explain such phenomenon.

Tolerance can be understood as the capacity or willingness to accept differences, whether they are differences in beliefs, opinions, practices, or identities, without necessarily agreeing with or endorsing them. It involves acknowledging and respecting the diversity of perspectives and behaviors that exist within society. Indeed, tolerance is described as existing between differences and similarities, encompassing both an epistemological and ethical dimension. Epistemologically, tolerance entails an optimistic acceptance of ideas until they are proven false, suggesting a willingness to engage with and consider viewpoints even if they challenge one's own beliefs. Ethically, tolerance involves accepting desires or preferences until they are proven undesirable, emphasizing a disposition of openness and acceptance towards others' choices and ways of life.

Moreover, tolerance, situated between differences and similarities, embodies both an epistemological and ethical stance. According to Al-Faruqi (1992, p. 47), epistemologically, it entails the optimistic acceptance of ideas until proven false, while ethically, it involves accepting desires until proven undesirable or known as *yusr*. In essence, tolerance encompasses an ideology, worldview, and ethical framework that embraces diversity in all its historical, contextual, and emotional dimensions, including biases, spatial and temporal conditions, emotions, and vested interests. Gibson (1992b) elucidates the connection between tolerance and political freedom, highlighting its role as a vital prerequisite for achieving democratic objectives (Wildmalm, Oskarsson, & Hulterstrom, 2010). Consequently, tolerance has been increasingly recognized as essential for the functioning of free and democratic societies (Caldwell, 2009; Furedi, 2012), although its behavioral manifestations are not adequately assessed (Inglehart & Welzel, 2003; Lipset, 1969).

In Malaysia, the discourse on tolerance has been notably scarce compared to the extensive attention given to studies on ethnic politics and conflict (Horowitz, 1989). However, given the nation's ethnic and cultural diversity, it is anticipated that tolerance levels would be relatively higher (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002), notwithstanding concerns regarding the tolerance levels among the youth (Fazilah, 2008). Research has shown that tolerance plays a crucial role in fostering social stability and harmony (Cheah, 2004). Thus, considering its significance for social and political cohesion, the examination of tolerance is imperative from both a political and behavioral standpoint to ensure the continued peace and harmony of Malaysia.

Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the degree of tolerance among ethnic groups and its influence on their voting behavior during elections. While factors such as education and social interaction have been shown to promote cultural integration, their impact on political integration is less clear, as noted by Nazri Muslim and Mansor Mohd Noor (2014). They argue that focusing on political dimensions is essential for analyzing group competitiveness effectively. In conclusion, researchers in this research discuss various factors and influences that shape voting behavior in Malaysia, including social, economic, cultural, and political aspects. It delves into the significance of understanding these determinants for analyzing voting behavior, predicting election outcomes, and devising effective political strategies. Additionally, the discussion on tolerance as a crucial determinant of voting behavior adds depth to the exploration of factors influencing elections in Malaysia.

### **Changes in Voting Behaviour of Malay Voters in Malaysia**

The outcome of the 2008 elections, wherein the ruling coalition, the Barisan Nasional (BN or National Front), lost its habitual two-thirds majority to a loosely combined opposition, is widely interpreted as an extension of the political shift that began in 1998. Numerous electoral studies suggest that the electoral change in 2008 bodes positively for the democratization of the country (Moten, 2009). The 1997–98 financial crises and the subsequent 1999 elections marked a turning point in Malaysian politics for many observers. While the opposition front, Barisan Alternatif (Alternative Front), did not prevent the BN from maintaining its two-thirds majority in the 1999 elections, it did secure enough seats to emerge as a robust opposition force. This shift in political dynamics reflected growing public discontent with the regime, which was accused of corruption, power abuse, and overall developmental failures. The replacement of the assertive Mahathir Mohamad with the mild-mannered Abdullah Badawi was initially well received by the public. Abdullah's promises to address civil society concerns resonated with voters, leading to a resounding electoral victory for the BN in 2004. However, Abdullah's inability to enact meaningful reforms, coupled with sluggish economic growth and rising prices of essential goods, fueled intensified factional rivalries and heightened dissatisfaction with the regime. These grievances found expression through revitalized civil societies, particularly through alternative media channels. As a result, traditional bonds of ethnicity and party loyalty began to weaken, and the once apolitical and passive culture evolved into a more politicized and participatory political culture (Moten, 2011).

Moreover, the outcome of the 14th General Election in Malaysia (GE14) came as a surprise to many Malaysians, particularly due to the victory of the left-wing party. This unexpected result garnered attention and concern from other countries, particularly in Asia. The shift in voting behavior, especially among young voters, played a significant role in the outcome of GE14. Voting behavior refers to the actions and decisions made by voters during the decision-making process, which can be influenced by various factors. According to Johan (2018), young voters constituted a substantial portion of the electorate in GE14. Dissatisfaction among Malaysia's young voters stemmed from various issues, including economic concerns, leadership, and government policies. Economic issues, in particular, were of paramount importance to voters.

Additionally, the (GE14) led to another changes in voting behavior among Malays; the results of the fifteenth general election on 19 November 2022 (GE15) concluded with a hung parliament, as anticipated. However, what caught the attention of Malaysians and observers alike was the unexpected surge of the National Alliance (Perikatan Nasional, PN), particularly its component, the conservative Islamist party, Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, PAS). In a historic first for Malaysia, PAS emerged as the largest party in parliament, not only securing strongholds in the northeastern states but also making significant inroads into central and western states. This phenomenon led to the widespread use of the term 'Green Wave,' borrowing from PAS's symbolic color, especially in the immediate aftermath of the election (Washida, 2023).

Different studies indicated that the shifts observed in voting behavior of Malaysian citizens can be attributed to various factors, including regime performance, the role of civil society, and the impact of alternative media. The failure of authoritarianism to address economic challenges, combat corruption, and reform the system prompted increased attention to issues of accountability, justice, equality, and democracy. Civil societies, empowered by alternative media platforms, allied with opposition forces to mobilize the masses and reshape the political landscape. While it is challenging to determine the precise influence of each factor, it is evident that regime performance, civil society activism, and media engagement collectively contributed to a transition in Malaysian political culture, moving from a subject-oriented approach to one characterized by greater participation and engagement (Moten, 2011).

In conclusion, this passage explores significant shifts in Malaysian voting behavior over time, particularly focusing on key elections such as the 2008, 2018 (GE14), and 2022 (GE15) general elections. It discusses the underlying factors contributing to these changes, including economic concerns, leadership issues, government policies, civil society activism, and media engagement.

### **Factor Influencing Voting Behavior**

Voting serves as a mechanism for individuals to express their approval or disapproval of governmental decisions, policies, and the agendas of various political parties and candidates vying to represent them. It is the fundamental function of electing representatives by casting votes in elections. According to Elderveld (1956), the concept of voting behavior extends beyond mere examination of voting statistics, records, and electoral shifts. It encompasses an analysis of individual psychological processes such as perception, emotion, and motivation, and how these factors relate to political action. Additionally, it involves studying institutional patterns such as communication processes and their influence on election outcomes.

According to Kulachai, Lerdtomornsakul, and Homyamyen (2023), in light of ongoing political, social, and technological transformations worldwide, there are several interesting areas ripe for research on voting decisions. One such compelling area is the examination of Psychological Factors. This involves a deeper exploration of the psychological foundations that underpin voting behavior, offering insight into how cognitive biases, emotions, and moral values influence political decision-making processes. By delving into these psychological intricacies,

researchers can unravel the complexities of voter behavior and its implications for democratic processes.

Hence, this research aims to examine the essential role played by psychological factors in shaping voter behavior. Specifically, it concentrates on four key dimensions: cognitive and information processing factors, emotional and affective factors, social and identity factors, and finally, personal and motivational factors. Through a comprehensive examination of these psychological dimensions, this study seeks to provide deeper insights into the complexities of voter behavior and its implications for democratic processes.

### **Let's Delve Into Each of these Dimensions in More Detail**

#### *Cognitive & Information Processing Factors*

To elucidate the decision-making process from a psychological research perspective, it's crucial to discern how voters utilize the information they receive, specifically their cognitive characteristics. The manner in which we process information can be delineated as a cognitive style, characterized by reflexivity and impulsivity, denoting the speed and potential error rate of the cognitive style (Kagan, 1966). A related concept, decision-making style, encompasses both cognitive and behavioral facets of the decision-making process (Scott & Bruce, 1995). Employing a decision-making style framework aids in exploring how individuals make decisions and the underlying motivations propelling these decisions. Indeed, cognitive function influences decision-making processes in relation to political matters, suggesting that understanding these processes is crucial, this is because how important is the issue that they are addressing. Some studies on multi-attribute decision making suggest that older adults tend to use simplifying strategies in the process of integrating information (Mata et al., 2007), sometimes even in the absence of significant age differences in search effort (Mata, von Helversen, & Rieskamp, 2010).

Examining the impact of cognitive function on individuals' interaction with misinformation reveals that higher cognitive ability and analytical thinking correlate with a heightened ability to detect and resist misinformation (Pennycook et al., 2020; Pennycook & Rand, 2019, 2020). This is because cognition according to Subedi (2022), encompasses the mental processes involved in acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses. It includes perception, attention, intelligence, memory, judgment, reasoning, problem-solving, decision-making, language comprehension and production. Imagination, a cognitive process, involves contemplating possibilities. In relation to voting, cognitive processing information about political candidates, diverse perspectives, and policy positions. Cognition also aids in staying informed about current political events and guides the decision-making process by analyzing and synthesizing relevant information. Overall, cognitive function implies the importance of considering diverse perspectives and information sources to make informed decisions.

Conversely, individuals with lower cognitive ability may encounter challenges in adjusting their judgment after discovering that vital information they relied upon was incorrect, rendering them more susceptible to false memories generated by exposure to fabricated news stories (De keersmaecker & Roets, 2017; Greene, Nash & Murphy, 2021). Empirical evidence from the Irish abortion referendum also suggests a connection between false



memories and cognition, with individuals more prone to recalling fabricated scandals aligning with their beliefs, particularly among those with lower cognitive ability (Murphy et al., 2019). Furthermore, cognitive function may indirectly shape voting behavior in referendums through a third variable, such as personality traits. Research indicates a link between cognitive ability and personality traits, particularly the Big Five traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism), and attitudes (Bakker & de Vreese, 2016; Nielsen, 2016). Lodge and Taber (2013), emphasize the intertwined nature of emotion and cognition in political thinking. Emotions can offer shortcuts or heuristics that influence how individuals evaluate political stimuli. For instance, a voter might experience fear when considering certain policies, prompting them to oppose those policies even if a logical evaluation might suggest otherwise. Concurrently, cognitive processes can also influence how one interprets and responds to emotional experiences, shaping the direction and intensity of political attitudes.

Party identification primarily functions as a cognitive shortcut rather than a social identity, allowing voters to handle the additional information required to assess all proposals, without necessarily indicating an emotional connection between voters and political parties (Antunes, 2010). Voters confront a plethora of information during elections, spanning candidates' policy platforms to their personal backgrounds and the broader political landscape. Amidst this deluge of information, party identification serves as a mental shortcut or heuristic, enabling individuals to align themselves with a particular party based on preexisting beliefs, values, or past experiences. By doing so, voters can streamline their decision-making process, circumventing the need to critically evaluate every candidate policy positions and issues that they encounter, including economic and social independently. According to Leong, Tan & Wong (1989), voters' cognitive beliefs and attitude are positively correlate with their affective evaluation of political candidates, influencing both their behavioral intentions to vote and the likelihood of voting, while critical attributes such as honesty, intelligence, and communicative ability significantly impact voting intentions.

### **Social & Identity Factors**

Social identity theory posits that individuals gain symbolic benefits by affiliating with social groups (Tajfel, 1981). These benefits, such as respect and perceived status, are central to the theory (Huddy, 2003). Social identity theory shares similarities with group-rule-utilitarian and social pressures theories, as all three emphasize that individuals prioritize the welfare of others in their political behavior, rather than monetary gains. However, unlike the broader concepts of group-rule-utilitarianism or social pressure, the motivation for political action within social identity theory specifically revolves around attributes like honor and social prestige. Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell (1987), have described this motivation as a need among group members "to differentiate their own groups positively from others to achieve a positive social identity." Individuals derive psychological benefits from affiliating themselves with social groups, such as status, honor, prestige, or increased self-esteem (e.g., Akerlof & Kranton, 2000).

Additionally, social identity plays a significant role in shaping individuals' voting decisions. Research has shown that people's identification with certain social groups can influence their political preferences and voting behavior. Studies have highlighted the impact of social

identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, and social class on voting decisions (Huddy 2013; Plutzer and Zipp 1996). Individuals often align their voting choices with the interests and perspectives associated with their racial and ethnic identities. Minority voters may support candidates or parties that they perceive as more attentive to their concerns regarding racial or ethnic equality and social justice (Hajnal et al. 2017).

Social identity theory predicts that individuals who strongly identify with a particular group are more inclined to engage in political activities such as voting (Fowler & Kam, 2007). This theory suggests that people's sense of belongingness and attachment to a social group fosters a sense of collective identity, which, in turn, motivates them to participate in activities that benefit the group, including political participation. The stronger the sense of identification with the group, the greater the likelihood of active involvement in electoral processes. This insight underscores the significance of social identity in shaping political behavior and emphasizes the role of group membership in influencing individuals' political engagement.

Lazarsfeld et al (1944), proposed that voting behavior is primarily influenced by individual personality traits and media exposure. However, their findings contradicted their hypothesis, indicating that media had minimal impact on electoral decisions, with social group affiliation being the decisive factor. Moreover, another study indicated that the political homogeneity of social groups and social characteristics determine political preference (Lazarsfeld et al., 1968, p. 69). Additionally, Antunes (2010), indicated that voters are swayed to support a candidate not due to an analysis of candidates' proposals or campaign issues, but rather due to influence from their community members. While changes in social factors may lead to enduring shifts in partisanship, short-term factors are perceived as capable of merely influencing subjects' choices in a particular election, without altering their overall partisanship (Campbell et al., 1960; Green & Palmquist, 1990).

Similarly, gender identity can influence voting decisions, with women often supporting candidates or policies that address issues of gender equality and reproductive rights (Dolan 2014). Furthermore, group identity and socialization processes within social networks can shape individuals' political choices. Families, communities, and peer groups can transmit political values and beliefs that influence voting decisions (Mondak et al. 2010). In essence, social identity significantly influences voting behavior, as individuals' belongingness to social groups such as race, ethnicity, gender, and social class informs their political preferences and guides their voting choices in alignment with their social identities.

Moreover, family and friends also play a crucial role in influencing voting decisions. Individuals often discuss political matters and candidates with their family members and friends, seeking their opinions and perspectives. These discussions can shape individuals' perceptions of political issues and candidates, leading them to adopt similar viewpoints to those held by their close social circles. Additionally, family and friends may share similar political values and beliefs, which can further reinforce individuals' political preferences and influence their voting behavior. Social interactions within family and friend networks can thus serve as a significant source of political influence, shaping individuals' attitudes and decisions regarding elections.

**Emotional & Affective Factors**

Contemporary political psychology acknowledges the significant role of affect and emotion in political judgment (Marcus et al., 2005; Nosek, Hawkins, Frazier, 2010). The interplay between cognition and emotions is crucial in shaping electoral behavior and decision-making (Redlawsk, 2006), with emotions influencing every stage of the electoral decision-making process. However, within our current psychological research landscape, many facets remain unexplored. Recognizing electoral decision-making as a multifaceted process involving various factors such as culture, society, sociology, and economics, however, this paper focuses primarily on individual psychological aspects. Emotions are generally an integral part of human experience which play a significant role in decision-making processes, including decisions about political choices. Cognitive processes can be influenced by emotions through three basic mechanisms (Bonansinga, 2020) - directing the attention, acting as behavioral motives, and influencing judgment formation.

The proponents of the discrete approach (Marcus et al., 2000) contend that specific individual emotions connections effects on voting behaviors, although the extent to which these emotions should be examined remains debated in existing research, ranging from five (Ekman, 1992) to seventeen or more (Roseman, 1996; Redlawsk & Pierce, 2017). Certain emotions, like enthusiasm, prompt voters to turn out and vote, while others, such as anxiety, prompt heightened attention to campaign information. This approach finds particular relevance in the study of protest voting, where emotions like anger and fear are strategically leveraged by extreme-right parties to tap into societal anxieties (Brader et al., 2008; Vasilopoulos et al., 2018). Consequently, scholars have investigated the role of anger, anxiety, and fear in protest behavior, offering fresh insights into the nexus between emotions and voting choices (Rico et al., 2017; Vasilopoulou and Wagner, 2017; Valentino et al., 2018; Vasilopoulos et al., 2019).

In addition to the decision-making styles used in political choice, aspirations and hopes play a crucial role in voting behavior, influencing how individuals perceive and believe on the political candidates, parties, and issues. These factors encompass a range of emotions, including excitement, enthusiasm, fear, anger, satisfaction, and disappointment, among others. According to Iyengar & Kinder (1987), the emotional resonance and framing of campaign messages can significantly impact voters' perceptions; how do they perceive their personality and shape their preferences. However, it's essential to recognize that campaign strategies do not operate in isolation; they interact with other factors such as candidate characteristics, policy positions, and voters' biased beliefs. Moreover, voters' prior party identification, social networks, rumors, and exposure to media can mediate the impact of campaign strategies on voting decisions (Holbrook & McClurg, 2005). Understanding how campaign strategies influence voting decisions provides valuable insights into the dynamics of elections and voter behavior. Effective campaign strategies have the potential to reshape the political landscape, mobilize support, and influence the outcomes of elections.

**Personal & Motivational Factors**

Individuals may find motivation to vote based on their personal needs and interests, which encompass a wide spectrum from economic concerns to issues of social justice. For instance, voters might prioritize candidates or policies that pledge to enhance their financial stability,

provide better access to healthcare, or address environmental issues directly affecting their daily lives. According to Kulachai, Lerdtomornsakul, & Homyamyen, (2023) the examination of policy positions will shed light on how voters evaluate candidates' stances on key issues and how those positions resonate with their own values and aspirations. Moreover, socioeconomic factors, such as economic conditions and demographic characteristics, have been found to shape voting decisions. Indeed, the decision-making process for voters may involve multiple considerations, including alignment with candidates' or parties' policy stances, occasional self-interest, and retrospective evaluations of incumbents' performance, particularly during reelection campaigns. In candidate-centered electoral systems, the personal qualities and integrity of competing politicians often wield significant influence. Additionally, unconscious biases, stereotypes, and social identifications, particularly with political parties, can substantially mold voting decisions.

Understanding voting behavior as a complex and dynamic process of political actions involves considering various personal factors alongside social, economic, and psychological influences (Amin & Anuar, 2023). Meanwhile, Kulachai, Lerdtomornsakul, and Homyamyen (2023), delve into the psychological underpinnings of voting behavior, shedding light on the impact of cognitive biases, emotions, and moral values on political decision-making processes.

Singh (2020) highlights the diverse motivational factors that shape voter behavior, emphasizing that an individual's likelihood of casting their vote on election day is often influenced by their level of motivation, ability, and perception of the voting process's difficulty. It's important to recognize that these factors interact multiplicatively, meaning that deficiencies in any area could potentially diminish voter turnout. Motivation to vote can arise from diverse sources, such as a strong preference for one candidate, a sense of civic duty, influence from friends or family, or other external pressures. Ability to vote refers to individuals' capability to comprehend political information, form preferences for candidates, and navigate the requirements for voting eligibility and the voting process itself. Difficulty, meanwhile, pertains to external conditions, including the simplicity of voter registration, accessibility of polling locations, and availability of candidate information.

Studies indicate that voting behavior can become habitual, with habitual voters more inclined to continue voting regardless of specific candidates. Moreover, social cues from one's surroundings, like neighbors discussing politics or displaying yard signs, can also shape voting habits. Furthermore, neighborhood dynamics can influence political party affiliation, as seen in lower Republican turnout in heavily Democratic areas, possibly due to a perceived lack of social support for their views. Interestingly, the turnout among Democrats seems less affected by the party affiliations of their neighbors.

From the above literature, the researcher introduces a framework on a Factor Influencing Voting Behavior In Malaysia as shown in Figure 2.

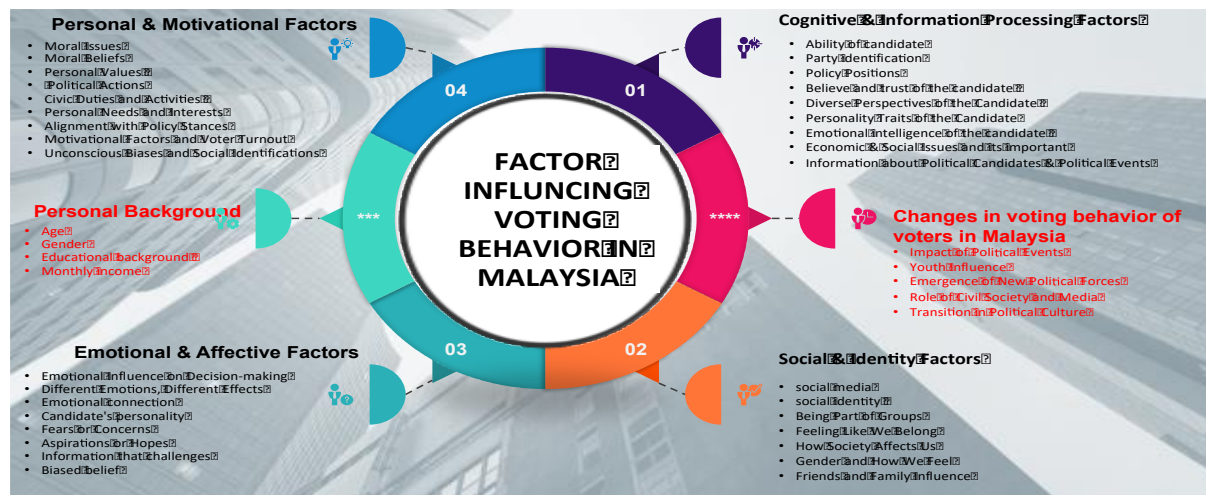


Fig. 2. Factor Influencing Voting Behavior In Malaysia

## Conclusion

Voting is fundamental to democracy, directly influencing governance and policies. In Malaysia, voter behavior is shaped by socio-economic status, ethnicity, and regional issues. Understanding these factors is essential to grasping how Malaysians vote and why patterns shift over time.

Since Malaysia's first democratic election in 1955, the political landscape has undergone significant changes. Recent elections, including those in 2008, 2018 (GE14), and 2022 (GE15), have seen notable shifts in ruling coalitions and voter preferences. These shifts reflect growing public engagement and evolving political dynamics, influenced by economic challenges, leadership changes, and increasing civil society involvement.

Studying voting behavior reveals insights into public sentiment and the health of democracy. The rise of new political forces and changes in voter turnout, particularly in urban areas, highlight the impact of factors such as economic concerns, government performance, and media influence on electoral decisions. Understanding the interplay of psychological, social, emotional, and personal factors is crucial for analyzing voter behavior comprehensively. Cognitive factors affect how people process information and make decisions, impacting their ability to discern misinformation. Social identities, including race, gender, and social class, heavily influence voting preferences, as do social networks like family and friends. Emotional states, such as fear or excitement, drive voter turnout and decision-making. Personal motivations, driven by economic and social concerns, further shape voting behavior. Overall, examining these dimensions provides a nuanced understanding of voter behavior, offering valuable insights into electoral dynamics and helping to tailor strategies for engaging voters effectively. Understanding the complex interplay of these factors is key to navigating Malaysia's evolving democratic landscape.

## Contribution of the Study

This study significantly advances our understanding of Malaysian voting behavior by analyzing the complex factors influencing electoral decisions. It examines how socio-economic status, ethnicity, and regional issues shape voter preferences, providing insight into the motivations behind voting patterns.

The research highlights key political shifts, notably in the 2008, 2018 (GE14), and 2022 (GE15) elections, revealing how changes in ruling coalitions and voter behavior reflect Malaysia's evolving political landscape. This historical context helps us understand current trends and their implications for future elections.

Additionally, the study explores the growing impact of civil society and alternative media on voter engagement and political discourse. It underscores the importance of public participation and media influence in shaping electoral outcomes. Furthermore, the research delves into cognitive, social, emotional, and personal factors affecting voting behavior. By examining how these elements influence electoral choices, the study offers a comprehensive view of voter motivations and decision-making processes. Overall, the study provides valuable insights into Malaysian electoral dynamics, highlighting factors that drive voter behavior and their broader implications for democracy.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The authors hereby declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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