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## ETHNICITY, URBANITY AND POLITICAL TOLERANCE IN MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

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This article attempts to examine the political tolerance level among multi-ethnic in the parliament of Johor Bahru. Using survey approach as a research design, this article ascertains factors that define ethnic political tolerance attitude. It found that the Malays tend to be more ethnocentric attitude, while the Chinese do not believe in the multi-ethnic political party, while the Indian is more politically tolerant even though cooperation with another party will further harm their own party. It also found that the urban voters are more concerned with 'larger issue' rather than ethnicity and racial per se. This study may lead to a new possibility in understands ethnic and political tolerance and its significance in the study of voting behavior. It also positively provides the present form of tolerance and political knowledge. It is substantial where ethnic politics apparent as vital matter, and tolerance has fully-fledged into Malaysia national agenda in managing multi-ethnic society.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study contributes in the existing literatures of ethnic and political tolerance and its relations to voting behaviour. This study is one of very few studies which have investigated selected parliamentary area in Malaysia. The paper's primary contribution is that ethnic tolerance exists via heterogeneous composition of ethnics and urbanity.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Being regards as a up-and-coming nation and an exemplary for developing states (Lijphart, 1977; Shamsul, 2005) it is an enormous encounter to preserve Malaysia racial harmony and tolerance (Cheah, 2004). Its political atmosphere often discussed over ethnic boundaries (Jayum and Victor, 2004; Jayum and Yusoff, 2008) which points out that political tolerant is a quintessence and critical feature for Malaysia's political consistency. While people are divergent in nature, it is then important to study the social and political tolerance in ensuring the survival of Malaysia itself as a state. Historically, prejudice, biasness, conflict, and war occurred due to lack of tolerance attitude, but it also proved that tolerance exists in the continuum of difference and resemblances.

Tolerance signifies "the ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behavior that one dislikes or disagrees with" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2014). According to American Psychological Association (2007) tolerance

often denotes to acceptance of others whose belief, religions, customs, ethnicity, nationality, customs and physical capabilities diverge from oneself. It also outlines as a rational and unprejudiced attitude toward unalike outlook from oneself.

Therefore, this article investigates political tolerance level among ethnic in Johor Bahru parliamentary. It also identifies the significant difference of political tolerance behavior in researched area. It is important as political negotiation often involved ethnic interest which proves to be a delicate matter for Malaysia.

The modern study of tolerance that empirically began in the 1950s, which define tolerance as the willingness to encompass and regard displeasures or contrast opinion (Sullivan *et al.*, 1982). Tolerance also has been demarcated as a preparedness to give up unlikable thoughts or groups (Gibson, 2006) which also includes approving equal legal, social and political rights (Persell *et al.*, 2001; Triandafyllidou and The Accept Pluralism Project, 2013). Contemporary scholars outline tolerance as diversity esteem, openness, inclusiveness of all ethnicities, races, and walks of life and cultivating oneself to respect others (Florida, 2003; Corneo and Olivier, 2009; Ramadan, 2010). While this study describes tolerance as a manifestation of the attitude of giving and take, that being obliged for superior social, economic, and political benefits.

Tolerance correspondingly characterizes of balanced, which requires the consensual acts from both sides to guarantee the anticipated outcomes by mutual understanding (Ahmad *et al.*, 2013). Consequently, tolerance can be considered as vibrant quality or actions that are entrenching within democratic principles and participation that serve for specific social goals (Mohd *et al.*, 2015).

The above literature confirmed that tolerance is one of the vibrant character personae in the current world, where migration, integration, globalization and cross-cultural progressions occur, where it matters due to its relationship to a self-expression legitimacy and appropriateness (Gibson, 1992). Therefore, it evidenced that all agree that value (abstract), attitude and behavior defined tolerance. Hence, by given definition as above, tolerance in this study may be defined as a learned value, positive openness attitude toward others that translate into active behavior for greater political aims including exercising votes. These concerns of the addition of one's political rights.

Regardless of the sophistication of political tolerance, nonetheless it increases an extraordinary academic thoughtfulness ever since. Political tolerance can be understood as "a willingness to permit the expression of ideas or interests" (Sullivan *et al.*, 1982) that leaves for an expressive society. Avery (1988) on the other hands describes political tolerance as "the degree of extended socio-political ideas, beliefs, or interest tolerated or opposed". Political tolerance commonly refers as to permit political liberties to a different from one owns. Explicitly, political tolerance is to permit a disagreement attitude for residents, individually or in collectively for political influence competition (Dahl, 1970). Thus, this study offers a characterization of political tolerance as a comprehensive act individually or collectively to support or to oppose in political undertakings including electoral behavior that may diverge from one owns for superior political aims.

Scholars of political tolerance confirmed that the height of political tolerance contributed to enduring democratic value and decreasing ethnic struggle (Seligson and Dan, 1983; Arwine and Lawrence, 2012) although elections are more significant in most Muslim countries (Rohaizan, 2012). A recent study conducted by Widmalm and Sven (2013) proves a fascinating evidence on political tolerance. They argue that urbanites are more tolerant than rural voter which evidenced in previous studies. However, unexpectedly the heights of political tolerance between Congress Party (deemed secular) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of which perceived as Hindu nationalist party; contrast with the pattern predicted on the literature. Political tolerant determinant may not be significantly different of ethnic tolerance. For example, gender, religiosity, workplace, marital status, the level of education, geographical disposition, political party and social network reflected as a factor for ethnic political tolerance. Conversely, the inquiry of how can democracy flourish when voter undermine the compulsion of political tolerance may validate the investigation.

Political tolerant accumulative over the time in established democracies and federal states, that contributes to the ends of democratic elitism theory (Pateman, 2003; Peffley and Robert, 2003). The model echoed the Aristotelian and

John Stuart Mill's 1861 belief. The model suggests an active, engage, and participation is an affecting political tolerance rather than effect. Therefore, the ethnically pluralistic society indeed needs political tolerance, or otherwise, may hamper efforts of democratic establishments ([Gouws, 1996; World Public Opinion.Org, 2009](#)). So, what left to ponder is how ethnic and political tolerance and voting behavior are connected and correlationally affected.

Political and ethnic tolerance equally vital for Malaysia economics, politics, and social stability. Therefore, public maintenance for fundamental democratic values is compulsory. [Gibson et al. \(1992\)](#) characterizes a liberal democratic voter is "one who is considered an individual right and who is politically tolerant, and cares fundamental democratic foundations and practices", evidently become a regular measurement of the tolerant individual. This lead to a notion that citizens, who hold these norms in principle attitudinally, may relate it behaviourally. However, it paves to the question of what level citizens do apply political tolerance behaviourally? Can a belief in political tolerance explain voting behavior in the election? Obviously, not all citizens are ethnically and politically tolerant, but evidence confirms tolerant generally can be learned and taught ([McClosky and Brill, 1983; Finkel, 2000](#)). Even though tolerance often regards as a purely bourgeois idea and perceived as a necessary and ever important element of modern, multi-diversity, and complicated democratic societies ([Zholdsbekova, 2011](#)) there is still insignificant numbers of literature emphasizing on political tolerance behavior, especially in developing countries. Political behavior scholars disagree over the degree to which tenets stimulus political tolerant behaviourally, but how tolerant behavior substantial for political behavior rests as fundamental and unanswered concern in political science ([Finkel et al., 1999](#)).

Malaysia has successfully implemented democracy and federalism over 56 years, as referring to [Peffley and Robert \(2003\)](#) this situation should increase Malaysia citizens' levels of ethnic and political tolerance. On the contrary, recent research found that Malaysia is in fact, has been affected by subcultural pluralism ([Robert, 1970](#)) that is the differences of religion, race, and language of its three major ethnic group, and it is indeed, contributes to strong group identities ([Gibson, 2006](#)) and social polarization ([Ramlee et al., 1999; Amir and Faridah, 2004; Balasubramaniam, 2006; Mohd, 2015](#)) which impede ethnic political tolerance attitude, and thus affected ethnic political tolerance behaviour. Therefore, ascertaining political tolerance behavior among ethnic is a salient feature in managing "unity in diversity" community especially in Johor Bahru parliamentary in specific, and in Malaysia at large.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The explanatory nature of this study with the quantitative design was engaged employing survey method with a set of self-administered questionnaire. Explanatory studies explain the nature of certain relationships and help enlighten or build upon preliminary quantitative results ([Creswell and Vicki, 2007](#)). As [Nargundkar \(2008\)](#) reaffirmed that conclusive or explanatory study is probably too involved larger sample size, the use statistical tests and advanced analytical techniques as compared to exploratory studies. A quantitative method is known for common recognition as logical, rational, scheduled and orderly. Even though it consists statistical intricacy, the quantitative technique is considered as direct, fact-filled, and 'hard news' ([Pierce, 2008](#)). In addition to that, the quantitative method exploits computer programs and other new technology that shorter time scale for collecting and analyzing data, and essentially it conforms to the present-day needs.

The sample frame for this research is cover all states constituencies within parliamentary constituencies in research area concerned, that is (N44) Tanjong Puteri and (N45) Stulang in (P160) Johor Bahru parliamentary, consisting 96,321 numbers of registered voters. Johor Bahru could be considered as mixed majority area, with Malays is the elected parliament member, and Johor Bahru itself is the capital for Johor states, which has been considering as urbanized area ([Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010](#)). Sampling technique employed the multistage clustered with simple random sampling, while sample populations consist of 214 respondents, 95 of which are males and 119 are females. 109 were Malays, 91 are Chinese, 12 are Indians, and 2 are Bumiputera of Sarawak. This may represent the demographic mixture of Malaysian society. In term of age, the sampling participants also showed the demographic representation of Malaysian society. The sample size is determined

following (Krejcie and Daryle, 1970) figure of given populations. Table 1 summarized the participants for this specific study.

**Table-1.** Respondents Demographic

Ethnic Group			Age				Total
			21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	
Malay	Gender	Male	17	14	14	5	50
		Female	15	21	16	7	59
	Total		32	35	30	12	109
Chinese	Gender	Male	13	17	6	4	40
		Female	8	20	19	4	51
	Total		21	37	25	8	91
Indian	Gender	Male	0	3	0		3
		Female	3	2	4		9
	Total		3	5	4		12
Others & Sarawak Bumiputera	Gender	Male			2		2
	Total						2
Total	Gender	Male	30	34	22	9	95
		Female	26	43	39	11	119
	<b>Total</b>		<b>56</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>214</b>

Source: Mohd (2015)

This study uses a self-developed and self-administered of the questionnaire, which includes demographic information, ethnic tolerance behavior dimension, political tolerance behavior concern questions, and voting behavior questions. The statement was in the form of Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally not agree) to 10 (absolutely agree). Cronbach Alpha value is at 0.78. Therefore, these questions are deemed appropriate to be used in this particular study. 15 questions were asked on the political tolerance behavior sphere, which 9 questions pertaining to democratic value behavior and 6 questions on civic participation behavior. However, four items were deleted due to lower correlational score when corrected, which has been considered appropriate (Coakes and Clara, 2011). Raw data then were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The descriptive analysis is present in following the mean response of the respondents based on their ethnicity. The 11 items were combined to form a single scale that measured political tolerance behavior between ethnic.

### 3. RESULTS

The discussion will be divided into a chapter that follows the objective. The first objective aimed to identify the significant difference of political tolerance behavior between ethnic. The mean analysis is applied to obtain the mean response constructed on the ethnicity of the respondents. The result is shown in the table below.

**Table-2.** The mean responses on Political Tolerance variables

Ethnic Group	P01D	P04D	P07D	P08D	P13D	P14D	P15D	P03C	P09C	P11C	P12C
Malay	M	4.13	3.65	4.69	5.46	9.27	9.28	9.29	3.42	5.64	9.14
	N	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109
	SD	2.087	1.641	1.544	1.398	0.789	0.768	0.724	1.547	1.323	0.995
Chinese	M	4.45	3.92	5.22	5.93	8.85	8.96	9.02	3.38	6.37	8.66
	N	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91
	SD	2.659	2.141	2.133	1.873	1.164	1.144	1.043	2.48	1.161	1.432
Indian	M	4.33	4.58	5.67	5.83	8.83	9.17	9.17	4.42	4.42	7.42
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
	SD	2.06	1.443	1.303	1.267	1.528	1.193	1.193	2.021	2.275	2.746
Sarawak Bumiputera	M	3.5	3.5	2.5	4.5	8.5	8.5	8.5	3	6	8.5
	N	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
	SD	0.707	0.707	0.707	0.707	0.707	0.707	0.707	0	1.414	0.707
Total	M	4.27	3.82	4.95	5.67	9.06	9.13	9.16	3.46	5.89	8.83
	N	214	214	214	214	214	214	214	214	214	214
	SD	2.334	1.861	1.837	1.62	1.029	0.978	0.907	2.02	1.41	1.391

Source: Mohd (2015)

Table 2 of the above showed the response means of the respondents according to the ethnicity for the examined variables.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

On the sphere of democratic value behavior, item P01D (*have a problem with another individual of the different political party*) showed that the Malays score lowest of the mean as compared to other ethnic. This can interpret that the Malays are more ethnic party-centric as compare to other ethnic in Johor Bahru parliamentary. This is not new since Johor has been categorically treated as "fixed deposit" for United Malays National Organization (UMNO) since 1946. But, observing from the attitude of political tolerance context, this score may inquiry researcher for more deep examination on political tolerance attitude with the different political party.

On the item P04D (*acceptance of liberal political party*) and item P07D (*belief in freedom of speech disregard of its nature*), the Indian scored higher than the other two ethnics. Being the minority, acceptance of more liberal (and not an ethnic-centered party) and believe in the freedom of speech proved that the Indian is less ethnic-centred and adopt the more liberal approach. This result is identical with the previous study that the minority tends to be more tolerant as opposite to majority (Bettelheim and Morris, 1949; Massey et al., 1999; Ahmad et al., 2013). It also witnessed that the Malays in Johor Bahru are reluctant to accept liberal political party and believed in controlled freedom of speech due to its lowest score of mean. This score is synonymous with the previous result of question P01D.

The Chinese respondents scored quite high on item P08D (rights to have a protection by law disregard of his political belief) where they assumed in the "rule of law", as an alternative to the rule of ethnicity and political attachment, which also showed the Malays score is the lowest among three majorities ethnic in Malaysia. Quoted in Yee et al. (2015) that Malaysian being 'situationists' and ethicizes, this statement shows the reality of the strong-arm rule and utilization of group forming. However, on the other hand, the Malay respondents score quite high on item P13D (become an election candidate disregard of his ethnic background), item P14D (freedom of speech through demonstration) and item P15D (freedom of critical speech through media) exposed a great political tolerance behaviour on electoral candidate, political rally opportunity and media use for critical comments. This situation can be witnessed with the optimum multi-ethnic consensus within Barisan Nasional in fielding candidates for three types of seat group as categorized in Balasubramaniam (2006) works; a number of demonstration participants in BERSIH 1.0 (2007), BERSIH 2.0 (2011) and BERSIH 3.0 (2012) that witnessed the increasing amount of participants; and various cases involved critical speech through media, with defamatory and political target are 10% lower than Australia, but it suggests the importance of civil society and political participation (Kenyon, 2010).

While in item P03C (cooperation with other political party has no benefit to the preferred political party), the Indian respondent score slightly high as compared to other ethnics. Being minority apart from Malays and Chinese, in line with the previous literature of minority-majority tolerance (Bettelheim and Morris, 1949; Massey et al., 1999; Ahmad et al., 2013) this result is considered opposite with previous literature. However, this situation may be referred to the leadership crisis in contemporary Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), where it may possibly translate to diminishing grass root support for MIC among Indian ethnic in Johor Bahru from a civic participation perspectives.

The Chinese respondents again score slightly high on item P09C (*a political party that tolerates with multi-ethnic is not viable for a long run*). This statement echoes the civic participation on the survival of a multi-ethnic political party. It proves that while they support for differences of political party, the Chinese ethnic community does not keen on the multi ethnic party. Statistically, using Friedman test and Pearson Correlation test showed significant differences between two statement ( $p=0.000 < 0.05$ ) but in weak correlation. It is then confirmed that the Chinese community is more preferably a mono-ethnic party, but there is a higher probability that they may have no problem

with differences in the political party.

On item *P11C* (*Government utmost responsibility is to govern and provide security to its citizens*) and item *P12C* (*Government utmost responsibility is to honor individual freedom of its citizens*) the Malay respondents score is high as compared to other ethnic. Statistically, *Pearson Correlation* test showed significant differences between two statement ( $p=0.000<0.05$ ) in a strong relationship. It also confirmed that there is significant min score for both statements. It means the Malays believed that government must be more thoughtful about civil security and civil liberty. It may be echoed with amassed apprehensive with civic involvement and good governance consciousness among the Malays. Perhaps, due to various external factors such as economic stability, issues pertaining good governance and government transparency, and national security contributes to higher score as compared with other ethnic.

A conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis above, is (1) in mixed constituency, the Malays tend to behave ethnic-centric though the Chinese perceived multi-ethnic party is not viable for a long run; (2) the minority Indian tend to be more political tolerant even though they believed cooperation with another political party may harm their own party; (3) urban voters are much concern with 'larger issue' such as security, civil liberties, civic participation and good governance rather than on the issue of ethnicity or racial per se (Mohd *et al.*, 2017).

## 2. The level of political tolerance among ethnic in Johor Bahru parliamentary.

11 items were combined to form a single scale that measured political tolerance behavior between ethnic ( $\alpha=.78$ ) with mean score 6.7. The score may be inferred as the political tolerance level of respondents in Johor Bahru parliamentary is in medium-good scale. Table 3 and Table 4 represent the data.

**Table-3. Political Tolerance Level**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.783	0.808	11

Source: Mohd (2015)

**Table-4. Calculated Merge Scale**

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum/Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Item Means	6.655	3.458	9.164	5.706	2.65	5.671	11

Source: Mohd (2015)

The interpretation of mean score as showed in Table 5 below.

**Table-5. Interpretations of Mean Score**

Mean Score	Mean Score Interpretation
1.00-2.50	Low
2.51-4.00	Medium-Low
4.01-5.50	Medium
5.51-7.00	Medium-Good
7.01-8.50	Good
8.51-10.00	Excellent

Source: Mohd (2015)

A medium-good score for an urban, mixed ethnicity area should be considered as the average level of political tolerance. As referring to Rabushka (1971) " no guarantee that increasing cultural integration produces increases in political integration. On the contrary, recent election result (referring to 1969 general election) suggests a common development towards political disintegration" which could be interpreted as an early alarm to Malaysian political tolerances. In addition to that, there is none literature that actually examined the ethnic political tolerance behaviour and voting behaviour simultaneously although its essentiality has been expressed as Ezhar *et al.* (2006) highlighted that behavioural aspect became more imperative than cognitive and attitudinal in ethnic and political tolerance studies. This scale is evidence that proved that Malaysia political tolerances are moving away from its right path. Being a multi-ethnic society, political tolerance should be regarded as a mediator for a better democratic practice, thus enhances civil liberty. At the moment, burdened with ethnic polarization (Mohamad, 2006; Yee *et al.*,

2015) there is more effort needed, but this time let rest on bottom-up approaches as suggested by Yee *et al.* (2015).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

From the above findings and discussion, the people of Johor Bahru can be characterized as medium political tolerance observers, as civil liberties and civic participation more important than the party politics and ethnicity. Although the level of political tolerance may be considered as average, the result may be synonymous with a variety of findings in prior literature (Mohammad and Ghazali, 2013; Jali *et al.*, 2014; Mohd *et al.*, 2017) but changes are expected due to new media use for political campaigning, new politic agenda and new civic and participation issues. Urban voters are not entrapped with ethnicity and racial issue as they used to. Tolerance remains the main concept for future voters in the urban area. Governing bodies should plan new approaches for the approaching election.

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