

## Student Involvement In Radical Politics: A Study In Sultan Idris University Of Education (UPSI)

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### Abstract

*This study examines radical political involvement among students at Sultan Idris University of Education (UPSI). This is important to be studied because UPSI as an institution generates intellectuals who will educate the present and future generations. The main objective of this study was to examine the level of student involvement in politics and the factors that influenced radical politics. To obtain the required information, this study used quantitative and qualitative approaches. For the quantitative aspect, the data were collected through the survey research method. This study involved 405 respondents. For the qualitative aspect, in-depth interview techniques were used. Four informants were interviewed to answer in detail regarding the motivating factors for being involved in radical politics. The findings indicated that the political pursuits of students in UPSI were at a low level. In addition, the findings depicted that the highest factors driving students into radical politics were weak government administration, media influence, and dissatisfaction with existing policies. Finally, the study found that UPSI students had made a paradigm shift in terms of their views of radical politics, which would bring a positive impact on the country. 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)

### I. INTRODUCTION

Radicals come from the Latin word "radix", which means root or base. Thus, radicalism means a change from the root that represents a change in society or social aspect. This definition of radicalism finds parallels with the definition expressed by Moore (1925): "...an attitude favourable to sweeping changes in social institutions, especially changes along lines opposed to class interest." Based on the above statement, radicalism is understood to be an attitude that reflects the social change, especially the institutional change for groups opposed to it.

Social institution changes are usually carried out by minority groups in the community and against the existing government. Therefore, reform activities will be held to bring about such changes. This statement is in line with the radical definition by Rossiter (1962): "the radical is dissatisfied with the existing order, committed to a blueprint for thoroughgoing change, and thus willing to initiate deep-cutting reforms". Changes or reforms created through radicalism have the potential to bring about a comprehensive change of life in society (Bittner, 1968).

Similarly in Malaysia, radicalism has happened before its independence. Among the most notable acts of radicalism was the resistance of the *Malayan Union* in 1946. Resistance by *Malayan Union* was then carried out for the purpose of protecting the interests and privileges of the Malays that

prevented the launch of *jus soli* threatening the rights of local people. According to Ramlah (2004), *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (KMM) comprised of intellectual graduates of higher education institutions and was an association that marked the starting point of radicalism in Malaysia. Then, *Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* (PKMM) and *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf* (API) were established to drive the development of political radicalism.

After Malaysia's independence, radicalism such as the Anti-Malaysia Movement was held in conjunction with Singapore's separation from Malaysia (Ramlah, 2004). Furthermore, Malaysian political radicalism also recorded its climax on May 13, 1969, with the racial riots caused by various factors (Kua, 2008). In the next decade, the student movement began to show its strength parallel to the establishment of the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) in 1971. Anwar Ibrahim's leadership in ABIM had given him support among the people and made a significant impact during the Reformation era.

In general, it can be said that students have always been the catalyst for radicalism in Malaysia from the pre-independence period to the present time. However, student involvement in radicalism has shown a pattern of development and deterioration (Weiss, 2011). Students' associations with the activities of political radicalism are becoming weaker. This is due to the existence of the Colleges and Universities Act (AUKU), Section 15, which prevents students from engaging or participating in political parties (www.agc.gov.my, 2015). However, student involvement in political radicalism remains to this day, striving for a broad range of issues and goals. Some examples of political radicalism activities involving student participant were the 1999 "reform" rally due to Anwar Ibrahim's sacking, the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH) movement demanding a leadership reform, and the implementation Election Commission to display the problematic list of voter issues (Siti Noranizahhafizah & Jayum, 2013). Subsequently, the next series of rallies, BERSIH 2.0, BERSIH 3.0, and BERSIH 4.0 triggered student involvement in the demonstrations. Then, a series of political radicalism involving the rallies of "yellow" and "red" shirts in 2015 showed the involvement of students with different struggles and goals. Therefore, some phenomena have indicated the occurrence of political radicalism among students. This study thus seeks to investigate the involvement of UPSI students in politics and the factors that drive their involvement in radical politics.

## II. OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this article is to identify the level of student involvement in politics and the factors that drive their involvement in radical politics.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Study on Youth and Student Involvement in Politics

Among many scholars who have conducted studies on youth, Weiss (2011) has published a book about student activism in Malaysia. According to Weiss (2011), student activism in Malaysia has experienced progress and deterioration because the contemporary university students are passive in activism activities. This is due to the pedagogical approach and existing academic institutions that have restricted the students and teaching staff from engaging in activism activities.

Besides, Riduan (2012) has studied the student movement history by dividing it into several levels according to the decades, which began in the 1960s to the new millennium. The findings indicated that activism activities had experienced glorious times in the 1960s, but the situation began to decline in the 1980s. He argues that the student movement in today's era has become lethargic and weak. This is the result of several factors, but the main factor is the introduction of the Universities and University Colleges Act (AUKU). The involvement of university students and staff in social movements has been limited since the reformation event as the government has taken decisive measures against those who are pro-opposition. However, the contribution of the student movement to the development of the country is undeniable.

Then, Mazli, Abdul Razak, and Abdul Rashid (2015) have examined the relationship between students and politics. The study investigated student participation in political activities, such as giving talks, discussions, forums, campaigns, and political party meetings. The main findings 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 fears resulting from the AUKU.

Student activism in conjunction with the 2012 General Election was also investigated in a study by Mohd Fauzi and Ku Hasnita (2015). This study focused on the role of student activism in conjunction with the 2012 General Election, whereby they pointed out that the main direction of the current student movement was to champion for human rights and equality amongst the people.

Another study that explored the political involvement of Public Higher Learning Institution (IPTA) students has been conducted by Umami Munirah Syuhada et al. (2016). The 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. (2016) have examined Generation Y's political involvement and social media in Malaysia. The main focus of the study is centred 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.

In a separate study, the relationship between the student movement and the democratic system has been examined by Idil (2016). The author explains that the student movement plays an important role as a social change agent in a democratic system. This is because the students are highly educated people who are capable of championing social issues that embrace the interests of the people.

Political socialisation among youths can also be traced to Ismi Arif et al. (2016). The study focuses on the socialisation of politics among Malaysian youths, the factors affecting the socialisation of youth politics, and its consequent impact. The findings suggested that the socialisation of Malaysian youth politics was low in line with youth political involvement. Among the factors that caused the situation included political literacy, political maturity and the political landscape.

Next, Siti Noranizahhafizah (2017) has conducted a study about student and campus election at UPSI. The main finding 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 and Mohd Rizal (2017), student democratisation at the higher education institution of 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 had much less influence on campus politics among students.

Siti Noranizahhafizah (2019) has also studied the political tendency among female youths in Perak. The findings showed that the level of participation of female youths in politics was low and their attitude towards political activity was passive. Female youths only engage themselves in formal political activity, such as voting during the election. The results of the analysis also showed that the involvement of female youths in Perak in political activities is due to their personal attitude. The implication of the tendency and involvement of female youths in politics is passive. Therefore, a shift should occur in the involvement of female youths in politics in Perak at par with present-day politics and a succession plan for future female leaders.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

The researchers used a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches in this study. For the quantitative approach, the survey form was used to obtain information related to the respondents' background to identify the level of involvement and factors driving political radicalism. Meanwhile, in-depth interview techniques were used in the qualitative approach to gain in-depth information on the factors driving political radicalism among students. Using the interview technique could identify the reasons for student involvement in political radicalism.

The study was conducted at UPSI, Tanjung Malim Perak. The University is located in Tanjung Malim, Perak and comprises two campuses, namely the Sultan Azlan Shah campus and the Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah campus. The population of this study consisted of students enrolled in UPSI. The current number of students at the university at the time of the study was estimated at around 12,589

(SAD, 2015). Based on the sample size determination table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the number of respondents needed for this study was 384. However, the researchers took steps to maximise 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 randomly selected, with different backgrounds and ideologies to ensure that the data obtained were more diverse. For the qualitative data, this research interviewed informants consisting of a total of four researchers, who studied politics, and radical students who were directly involved in radical activities.

The data collected from the participants were entered into the Statistical Software Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23, whereby they were then analysed using descriptive statistics, namely frequency, percentage, and mean obtained from survey questionnaire items. The qualitative data were analysed using Nvivo software to facilitate data management. The researcher analysed the data according to the stated objective of this study and the requirements.

## V. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### A. Respondent Profile

The researchers first analysed the profile of 405 UPSI students. Table 1 shows that the majority of participants (359 participants) are aged 21 years or older, representing 88.6 per cent of all respondents. Also shown in the table is that most respondents were Malays; 182 (44.9%). The ethnic distribution of respondents was in line with the ethnic divisions in Malaysia to ensure that the findings would 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
	Buddhism	87	21.5
	Hinduism	52	12.8
	Christianity	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.

### B. Level of Political Involvement

The level of political involvement among students was assessed through voter registration, electoral experience, and involvement in political activities. Table 2 shows voter registration among UPSI students. A total of 211 respondents (52.1 per cent) were registered as voters. Meanwhile, almost half of the respondents (194, 47.9 per cent) had not registered as voters.

TABLE 2: VOTER REGISTRATION

Items	Frequency(n=405)	Percentage (%)
Yes	211	52.1
No	194	47.9

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018.

Based on Table 3, UPSI students who are eligible to be registered as voters are 359 (88.6 per cent). However, only 211 (58.8 per cent) out of 359 eligible voters were registered. Students who did not register as voters were 148 (41.2 per cent). These findings demonstrate that UPSI students lack the awareness of their responsibilities as the citizens in the electoral process. This is because the right to vote in elections is important to determine the country's leaders and the direction of the nation. However, there were still a large number of UPSI students who lacked this awareness.

TABLE 3: VOTER REGISTRATION BY AGE

Age	Frequency(n=405)		Total
	Yes	No	
17 to 20 years	0	46	46
21 and above	211	148	359

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018.

Table 4 shows the voter registration by faculty. Based on the results, the Faculty of Human Sciences recorded the highest number of registered voters compared with other faculties, namely 36 (80 per cent) out of 45 people to register as voters. Meanwhile, students from the Faculty of Science and Mathematics registered the lowest number of voter registrations, namely 15 (33.33 per cent) out of 45. This situation is due to the background of each student programmes, such as students of the Faculty of Human Sciences focusing more on social sciences and showing a higher interest in politics. These results are consistent with the study of Umami Munirah Syuhada (2015), whereby the political responsibility of university students is directly related to the field of study. Therefore, it can be concluded that the students of the Faculty of Human Sciences gradually enhance their political responsibility higher compared to other faculties students who are not majoring in the social sciences.

TABLE 4: VOTER REGISTRATION BY FACULTY

Faculty	Frequency (n=405)	
	Yes	No
Language and Communication	22	23
Music and Performing Arts	16	29
Human Development	24	21
Science and Math	15	30
Management and Economics	23	22
Sports Science and Coaching	29	16
<b>Human Science</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>9</b>
Arts, Computers and Creative Industries	21	24

Technical and Vocational Education	25	20
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Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018.

Table 5 shows the experience of voting among UPSI students. The analysis showed that only one person voted in the 2008 General Election (GE) and eight in the 2013 GE. This was because only 11 respondents were in the study of the masters and above. However, 140 out of 211 eligible voters voted in the 2018 general election, as there were more than 359 respondents aged 21 and over.

TABLE 5: VOTER'S EXPERIENCE

Year	Frequency (n=405)	Percentage (%)
2008	1	0.4
2013	8	3.7
2018	140	66.4

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018.

Referring to Table 6, it shows the involvement of students in politics. According to the table, almost all respondents or 396 (97.8%) were not involved in politics. A total of 9 respondents were involved in politics. Among them, 8 were regular members of a political party, while one held office as a committee member. These were students who were restricted by the University and University Colleges Act (AUKU), which prohibited student involvement in politics. In addition, UPSI students were also less interested in politics.

TABLE 6: INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

Involment	Frequency (n=405)	Percentage (%)
Yes	9	2.2
No	396	97.8

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018.

Table 7 shows the involvement of political activity among students. According to the table above, most respondents were mostly aware of political issues, with a mean score of 3.22. In addition, students also tend to be aware of local issues or problems, with a mean score of 3.00. Overall, the involvement of political activity among UPSI students is just about knowing. Therefore, the level of political involvement among UPSI students is only at the first stage, which is attention. This indicates that the level of political involvement of UPSI students is low and students' attitudes towards political activities are very passive. Moreover, this finding is consistent with the studies of Nga et al. (2014) that youths show high levels of involvement in informal political activities.

TABLE 7: INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Items		Frequency (n=405)					Mean Score
		N	S	ST	F	C	
a.	Vote in elections	199	36	51	51	68	2.39
<b>b.</b>	<b>Browse political websites</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>2.85</b>
c.	Participate in political party activities	215	74	74	33	9	1.88
d.	Meet with the people's representatives	169	90	98	32	16	2.10
e.	Campaign in elections	267	39	58	27	14	1.72

<b>f.</b>	<b>Get to know political issues</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>3.22</b>
g.	Participate in political gatherings	248	55	53	35	14	1.80
h.	Appellant	283	34	55	24	9	1.62
i.	Attend political talk	226	68	65	32	14	1.86
j.	Give a political talk	305	27	47	18	8	1.51
k.	Involved with the political program	243	62	63	27	10	1.76
l.	Get to know the issue of youth in politics	82	77	124	76	46	2.82
m.	Provide recommendations in the national budget	260	54	51	28	12	1.71
<b>n.</b>	<b>Get to know local issues / problems</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>3.00</b>

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018.

Indicator: N – Never, S – Seldom, ST – Sometime, F – Frequent, C – Constantly

### C. Factors Driving Involvement in Radical Politics

This section will explain the factors that drive students into radical politics. The analysis of this section will include survey data and in-depth interviews. Table 8 shows the factors that drove students into political radicalism. Overall, respondents strongly agree that radical politics is due to the weakness of the country's administration, with the highest mean score, 3.91. This finding is consistent with the opinion of study B informants:

*“If they look at the discussion of society in particular injustice, especially abuse, abuse of power, oppression in terms of administrative practices for example. This causes students to feel overwhelmed or depressed that way they are trying to highlight.”*

Informant B said that community issues caused by the government's weaknesses were a major factor in students' involvement in radical politics reflected a change in addressing these issues.

TABLE 8: FACTORS DRIVING INVOLVEMENT IN RADICAL POLITICS

Perkara		Kekerapan (n=405)					Skor Min
		SD	D	NS	A	SA	
a.	Religious fundamentalism	10	54	155	177	39	3.51
b.	Racial issues	12	25	112	206	50	3.63
c.	Poverty	14	38	149	153	51	3.47
d.	Overseas military action	22	51	197	110	25	3.16
e.	Human rights oppression	4	27	119	170	85	3.75
<b>f.</b>	<b>Weaknesses of state administration</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>3.91</b>
<b>g.</b>	<b>Dissatisfaction with the existing policy</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>3.76</b>
h.	The well-being of the living is at stake	6	20	118	198	63	3.72
<b>i.</b>	<b>The influence of the media</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>3.86</b>

Sources: Fieldwork Data, 2018

Indicator: SD - Strongly Disagree; D - Disagree; NS - Not Sure; A - Agree; SA - Strongly Agree.

In addition, informant C had the same views as informant B on that community issues such as lack of employment opportunities can drive student-student involvement in radical politics.

At the same time, informant C also agreed that social media was an important medium for influencing radical political involvement among students as it was a radical propaganda piece from the western world. Statement from informant C is as follows:

*“...saya boleh simpulkan antara faktor yang menyebabkan mereka ini masih lagi berfahaman radikal adalah disebabkan oleh, satu, adalah, yang paling utama adalah faktor media lah... orang kata dipengaruhi oleh faktor-faktor yang berlaku di negara lain...Mereka bawa budaya negara barat tadi, apa yang mereka lihat melalui sosial media tadi, so dibawa ke Malaysia...Yang kedua saya rasa selain daripada sosial media, mungkin persekitaran sekarang. Macam saya kata ini, keadaan sekeliling. Kalau mahasiswa sendiri, kita kekurangan kerja. Maksudnya mahasiswa menuntut keadaan sosioekonomi yang lebih baik...Jadi itu antaranya faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan mereka ini terpaksa menggunakan platform radikal tadi...”*

According to informant C, social media plays an important role as a major factor in student engagement in radical politics. The findings of this study also showed a pattern consistent with the statement of informant C. The survey respondents had a high level of agreement with the media influencing radicalism among students by recording the second-highest mean score of 3.86. In addition, the factor of dissatisfaction with the existing policy had a mean score of 3.76 and was also the second-factor causing radicalism among students. This was found to be consistent with the statement of informant D as follows:

*“...I think it is about, it is about improvement. Students want improvement, students want better... better facilities. So that does not err... Students would have to expect that. I think we might not see student demand for better services whether it be better classes, better foster, better food service as something very positive. It is not about radicalism but it is about improvement...”*

Meanwhile, informant D argued that student involvement in radical politics was not only to express dissatisfaction but also to demand rights for the interests of students involved in their daily lives. Informant D also emphasised that the university should not impede student involvement in the human rights agenda. The statement of informant D is as follows:

*“...It is a right of a student to express what they want as an adult, a member of the... as a member of the society. Just because they are students, they must not be prevented from participating and also expressing their rights. it is their rights, in human rights actually...”*

The results of the study also found that respondents did not agree that the influence of foreign countries on radicalism among students. For informant A, student involvement in radical politics is diverse and varied. In his view, the major factor driving student involvement in radical politics such as public gatherings was curiosity. In addition, the demands of the public assembly are also one of the factors contributing to the involvement of informant A in public gatherings.

*“Sebab tu dia sebab...sebelumnya tak pernah join apa benda macam ni. Lepas tu nak tahu macam mana... Nak tahu betul kah demonstrasi ini ah...aman... Selain daripada tu, tuntutan himpunan tu sendiri.”*

According to the statement above, the involvement of informant A in public gatherings is driven by curiosity. This is because the informants A attended the public gathering to determine whether public gatherings were conducted in a peaceful manner. Moreover, the demands brought by such gatherings such as the weak administrative system and the implementation of Goods and Service Tax (GST) have fueled dissatisfaction among the people and close to the hearts of the students. At the



same time, the BERSIH and Anti-GST assemblies that list the demands of the assembly on the good governance system and against the implementation of the GST have met the needs of the people. This, in turn, has led to student participation in public gatherings.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The results of this study found that the level of involvement in political activity among UPSI students are just about knowing. This indicates that the level of political involvement of UPSI students is low and that students' attitudes towards political activities are very passive. Second, the highest factors driving students into radical politics are weak government administration, media influence, and dissatisfaction with existing policies. In addition, UPSI students argue that radical politics can have a positive effect on the country because of the weaknesses of the country's administration and dissatisfaction with the country's policies can be expressed through radical politics. This finding also shows that UPSI students have made a paradigm shift in terms of their views 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, which ultimately contribute to the well-being of Malaysia.

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