

RESEARCH NOTE

**“IF THERE IS A DECLARATION OF WAR, WE WELCOME THE WAR”:
UNDI-18, TIKTOK ELECTION, AND NORMALISATION OF VIOLENCE[©] ^Σ**

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia's democracy has come under attack due to the radicalisation of young and first-time voters on social media platforms. The widespread usage of TikTok as a primary campaign battleground by the political parties during the 15th General Election (GE-15) marks the anomaly pattern of first-time youth voters. Moreover, having social media influencers courting youth voters as a pawn in the electoral war is considered an accentuation of provocation of hate speech, endangering the prospect of moderate democracy in Malaysia. This commentary studies such anomalies by interviewing youth from varying socio-economic standing and educational backgrounds across Malaysia. Our commentary highlights two crucial areas of unexplored terrain for future research. The first is the immediate need to invest in an emancipatory discourse of civic and political education and unabated expansions of democratic space and rights. Secondly, alarming concerns of electoral terrorism and hate speech via social media unravel the under-research angles or assumed organic political divisions between analogue generations of corrupted warlords versus digital politics of technocratic youth savvy. Inadvertently, our observation of the 15th GE has discerned an increasing political worrisome pattern of widespread manipulative tendency by politicians, including using Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR 4.0) technology to predict the voting pattern and understand the population sentiment through social media. We also conclude that tactics employed by the cyber troopers of political parties have significantly manipulated and poisoned the neutrality and perspectives of first-time youth voters.

Keywords: ge-15, TikTok election, Malaysian first-time youth voters, automated machine learning and social media intelligence,

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NOTA PENYELIDIKAN

“JIKA ADA YANG MENGISTIHARKAN PERANG, KAMI BERSEDIA UNTUK BERPERANG”: UNDI-18, PILIHANRAYA TIKTOK DAN NORMALISASI KEGANSAN

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ABSTRAK

Demokrasi sedang diserang kerana radikalisasi belia dan pengundi kali pertama di platform media sosial. Penggunaan secara meluas aplikasi TikTok and platform media sosial lain sebagai medan peperangan bagi parti politik semasa Pilihanraya Umum Ke-15 menandakan pola pengundian pengundi muda kali pertama yang tidak normal. Tambahan pula, peranan dan pengaruh media sosial yang mengendalikan pengundi muda sebagai buah catur sewaktu perang pilihanraya sebagai peningkatan provokasi ucapan kebencian, membahayakan prospek demokrasi sederhana di Malaysia. Kajian ~~Makalah~~ komentari ini mengkaji anomali tersebut dengan cara mewawancara belia dari pelbagai latarbelakang socio-ekonomi dan pendidikan di Malaysia. Ulasan kami mendapati keperluan meneroka dua aspek penyelidikan mendatang. Pertamanya adalah keperluan segera untuk meneroka wacana emansipasi sivik dan pendidikan politik serta perluasan ruang dan hak berdemokrasi yang tiada batas. Kedua, perkembangan yang membimbangkan mengenai keganasan pilihan raya dan ucapan kebencian melalui media sosial membongkar tentang kurangnya kajian yang menyelidik mengenai tanggapan perpecahan politik yang organik antara generasi analog panglima perang yang korup berbanding dengan belia yang teknokratik dan bijak berpolitik digital. Kajian ini mendapati di dalam PRU ke-15 terdapat corak politik yang membimbangkan di mana terdapat peningkatan yang ketara di kalangan ahli-ahli politik yang cenderung untuk memanipulasi golongan muda secara meluas termasuk penggunaan teknologi Revolusi Industri 4.0 (IR 4.0) bagi meramalkan corak pengundian dan memahami sentimen rakyat melalui media sosial. Kami juga membuat kesimpulan bahawa taktik yang digunakan oleh pasukan siber parti politik telah memanipulasi dan meracuni sikap berkecuali dan perspektif pengundi muda yang mengundi kali pertama.

Kata Kunci: *pru ke-15, pilihanraya TikTok, pengundi muda kali pertama di Malaysia, automasi kepintaran mesin dan perisikan media sosial*

Introduction

Towards midnight on the polling day of the 15th general election (15th GE), the quoted TikTok's viral as appeared in the title of this research note shocked many Malaysians. Prelude to the polling night verdict, it was indeed evident among the fragmented and undecided voters to punish the former *Barisan Nasional* BN for pushing this unneeded election reasons. The anticipated election during flood seasons was initiated by the former BN's Prime Minister Ismail Sabri. Thus, while it was expected for the BN to remain an unpopular choice, many were caught by surprise by the deeply communal divide along racial and urbanisation lines (Ong *et al.* 2022;). Many stayed out the entire Saturday's midnight and followed the election result since every intended registered voter travelled back to their voting address for the confused election reasons.

Furthermore, only a few of the pre-electoral polling predicted the popular performance of the PAS-Bersatu coalition of the *Perikatan Nasional* (PN) in recapturing many of the former UMNO's BN strongholds and *Pakatan Harapan* (PH) safe seats. However, as the result become clear with the likely hung parliamentary verdict and no single coalitional party able to meet the minimum threshold of a simple majority to form a federal government, the infamous hate speech (of the viral TikTok) of the alleged first-time youth supporters of the PN reignited the past carnage of the May 13th riot. By then, no doubt, 53% of below 40 years old first-time and repeated youth voters were the king makers of this election verdict but no one expected where the wild card would go when the youth votes split between ethno-religious lines (*Yusuf Ishak-ISEAS* 2022).

The blame should be on political factions of all sides and their extreme speeches and wealth resources in mobilising influential social media celebrities (see also Moten 2020; Muhamad *et. al* 2021). As such, it will be imprecise to propagate these elections as a battle between political reforms versus political protectionism (Wan Zainodin *et al.* 2022; Ting *et al.* 2022; Venkiteswaran 2020). Radicals from both sides of the alleged reform factions of the urban-based PH and the rest of communal-based supports pushed the rhetoric of hatred against one another (see also Weiss 2022). Worse, the use of social media technology further pushed the country into the apex of extremism and unleashed hate speeches against anyone, as it seemed that there was no longer moderation in this country (Jun 2022; Wilnat *et al.* 2013;).

In this commentary, we reflect on our qualitative fieldwork observations and research notes on youth, digital politics, and social media communicative technology in mobilising democracy in a communal society. It will be argued here that our current state of democracy is on trial by our subliminal anticipation to defeat our imagined enemy, only further encouraging our first-time youth voters to be disposed and subjugated to normalise violence, be it physical or digital. It is therefore too cliché if we wish to say that we were caught by surprise by the outcome of this 15th GE.

Rhizomorph Discursive? Not Entirely Correct Though!

In our respectful disagreement with fellow neighbouring intelligentsias, we think their fictionalisations seem louder in their mockery of our national politics but disciplinary silenced over their inorganic intellectual bravery to expose the paradox of progress and illusion of the republic (see Yin and Fei 2022). Let us be fair, that every single and everyone, be it reformist or conservative of society is an in-built subversive actor since we hold a sharp dagger to strike against anyone if we wish to be cast as evil (see also Welsh 2022; Weiss 2022, 2014; Pepinsky 2013; Mohd Sani 2015). Thus, to simplify the complex election equation, a division between minority versus majority communal clashes in which ethnopolitical patronage is constant systematic discrimination against minority of racial and reformist actors is a rather half-baked story. Managing plural societies was never straight forward and admitting our mistakes was never easy. The fact of the unity government is formed and “reconciles” friends and foes; it will be naive to expect all political challenges are now resolved (Abd Hamid and Che Hamdan 2022). Thus, we must be careful with democratic ritualisations openness if public reasoning against the enemy of the state is not scrutinised. Simultaneously, it will be imprudent to persuade of the veil of ignorance and endemic injustice is a fairly acceptable system. No one should be a proponent of either. Taming a digital leviathan is not different from noble insinuation to punish a premodern tyrant.

Commentators had long ridiculed the unilinear progress of press freedom and technological innovation of media and political knowledge (Jebriil *et al.* 2013). Many were fascinated by the critical role of the media as the fourth estate of democratic transition and youth empowerment (Jun 2022). Alleged claims of youth activism which sided with reforms only revered the danger of not understanding intricate and multiple characterisations of political expressions. Thus, it can be argued that democratic expansion and youth empowerment are meaningless if participation is not formed through dialogic consciousness or organic civic political literacy. Yet, to assume all youths are equal agents of transformation but ignore their socioeconomic and family traits is a devil traps to political misguidance (Knirsch and Kratzenstein 2010; Gomez and Mohamed Osman 2020). After all, it all begins with a post-14th General Election (GE) euphoria of assuming that a similar demographic proportion of younger voters can be mobilised and likely anti-1MDB sentiments can be repeated in encouraging waves of anti-establishment votes against whomever political campaigners wish to demonise as a delinquent to societal disunity, the economic cost of living, racial prejudice, stalled progressive reforms and alleged healthy political discourse (Abdul Manan *et al.* 2020; Jian *et al.* 2015; Leon 2015).

Many proponents of Undi-18 are aware that when all corners of political class overwhelmingly vote to support Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), politicians are counting the estimated percentage of predicted votes that may either swing for or against their chance of winning. It is therefore not surprising if analysis and comments over the

15th GE outcome overdose with popular depictions of Tik Tok election, polling opinions, and youth voters' so-called tell-tell signs of assuming organic first-class political civic mentality and the possibility of healthy political discourse to take place in our national electoral scene (see Jun 2022a; Jun 2022b; Lopez and Welsh 2022; Jalli 2016; Hutchinson and Zhang 2022). Recent election results have highlighted the polarisation of first-time youth vote patterns along the spatiotemporal developmental divide with mostly non-Bumiputera/Malay urban youth preference of PH and Bumiputera/Malay non-urban youth preference of PN. With the AVR implementation, the majority and kingmaker of this polarised election is the 53% of youth voters or those Gen-Y (40-25 years old) and Gen-Z (18-24 years old) (see also Mayberry 2022). As such, the blind spot to underestimate the mammoth task of painstaking time and the arduous process of more needed studies in understanding the right way to install healthy political and civic education cannot be ignored.

Past Studies on Youth Activism and Political Participation

Undoubtedly, the Malaysian political landscape and history are shaped by many socioeconomic and political transformations in which the youth involvement in various associations is divided along the expected demographic line of ethnic race, religion, languages, and level of education (Hua 2021). Literature on Malaysian youth and politics also highlights complex morphology and cross-segmentation of multiple spatiotemporal categories of political participation (Hassan *et al.* 2016). This includes urban and rural, intellectual, and locally based, cultural, sports, business, technological and political networks, illegal and criminal, patron-clientelism as well as political affiliation to mainstream political membership that is expectedly pervasive.

Nonetheless, youth participation in multi-levels of political involvement, of formal and informal affiliations are also determined by two other important variables: a) technological means of communication for expressions of ideals, and b) political issues that matter to the generation of the day (Halim *et al.* 2021). In the study of Malaysian elections and public relations, political change, 2008's phenomenon of civil society, new media and alternative means of accessing information with less regulatory control to suppress different political narratives are often cited as important landmarks (see Ibid 2012). Additionally, prior to the 15th GE, existing literature on the political participation of Malaysian youth relied heavily on the accessibility and utility of communication technology of social media and their attraction to social media influencers (Mohd Salleh 2022). Others may even argue as part of the 1990s of political confluent and convergent of internet politics and alternative discourse to challenge the state authority (see Yin and Fei 2022).

What remains to be seen is how best can we explain the dyadic relationship between a) the type of political participation, b) youth along the line of main ethnopolitical race, and c) the age group divide between older and younger generations of Malaysia (Mohd Nizah and Abu Bakar 2019). Recent quantitative studies on explaining the degree of political participation among Malaysian youth have confirmed a strong and significant

Pearson correlation that suggests older (above 40 years old) generations are more politically conscious and clear in their political decision than the younger Malaysian (below 40 years old) generations (Mohd Hed and Grasson 2019). The study also confirms that across the main ethnopolitical lines in the Malaysian peninsular alone, the younger Malaysian generations which consist of our Gen-Y and Gen-Z are more inclined towards unconventional and indirect political participation including protests, riots, and demonstrations.

Nonetheless, overall literature highlights a lack of existing studies to understand better the relationship between the degree of political consciousness of Malaysian Gen-Y and Gen-Z and their prominent trends of undecided political decisions and unconventional/informal means of political participation (Welnat *et al.* 2013). As such, there is a need to study if the undecided patterns of 53% of younger Malaysian voters are related to their endemic condition of lack of political consciousness. We believe the hasty implementation of Undi-18 without a proper mechanism to ensure balanced information and healthy political education triggers the paradoxical outcome of the 15th GE. Worse, although youth are given constitutionally guaranteed rights to vote and participate in the election for the first time, they are incapable to facilitate their expected civic empowerment and therefore resulted in likely vulnerable political manipulations of their rights which prevent organic emancipatory of the political formation of Malaysian youth.

Though Imperfect and Lack of Aggregates of Generalization, We Let the Youth Speak

Adopting the Political Sociological approach of Scott (1985, 1992), and Scott (1986) every day or infra-political discourse and Feminist assumptions of interpretivist power Lilja and Vithagen (2018) of unstructured conversations with different levels of youth, we examine the conditions for first-time youth voters and the extent of their political consciousness (emancipatory politic). With the help of framing narratives over daily viral/trending political issues on Twitter, Tik Tok, Facebook, WhatsApp's link sharing, and Facebook, our unstructured fieldwork period covers the entire two months of October and November 2022. With the help of local contacts, we manage to rely on the snowball technique of informal conversation with 10 Malaysian youths between the age of 18-21 (see also Ting and Wan Ahmad 2022).

In this study, we focus on first-time youth voters and their underlying reasons for confusion and the inability to make early decisions when prompted by both national and local issues. Continued conversations with first-time voters enable us to uncover the missing links between political participation and political emancipation because political rights without civic political education prevent meaningful journeys and political processes to empower them with the actual value of exercising their rights. We have travelled to seven highly contested parliamentary seats and selected 10 unstructured interviews based on their actual location as registered voters in those areas. In the selection of seven contested seats, mixed and usual demographic factors of Malaysian voters are considered. We are even surprised by our qualitative findings in

which 9 of 10 first-time youth voters and their narratives confirm the actual outcomes of the election result of November 2022. To protect our network and the first-time youth voters' involvement in our fieldwork from future political repercussions, we explore ethical and pragmatic security considerations and decide to anonymise their identities. Pseudo labels between Y1 and Y10 will be identified in contextualising selected direct quotes in the analysis of this paper.

It is important to highlight that our research limitation may not depict a strong level of aggregate representation of overall Malaysian youth (see also Mohd Nizam and Abu Bakar 2019). However, through this irregular conversation with the 10 first-time youth voters, we can identify a common political theme of disempowerment and the meaningless ritual of voting in the November's election. Without having to contemplate the complex political theories of Habermas's communicative action, Chomsky's manufacturing consent, Foucault's discursive punishment, and Althusser's ideology, we are certainly well-versed in the consequence of political participation of our own youth and without political literacy.

Anticipated discussions about fake social media accounts and cybertrooper activisms are dominant expressions of the youth we approached. The fabricated portrayal of youth profiles in social media and the alleged involvement of popular religious social media influencers have led to giving unreasonable importance to democratic rituals which eventually will deter youth from casting their future votes. Fahmi Reza's free political lecture via social media and the resistance of the university authority are clear missing elements of political education. Reza's controversy has certainly informed and mobilised many and most first-time voters to vote along mainstream political polarisation narratives. As a result, the intoxicated sacred task of casting a vote become poison and youth voters feel vindictive and regretful. The remaining parts of this note highlight two important unexplored topic areas for future research. The first is the need for political education and technology is not a replacement for our electoral rituals. Thus, the youth must be guided and nurtured.

Political Rights without Political Education

Why do I need to care about morality when my voting choice gives me instant popularity and fast money. (Y1, October 5, 2022).

This is a powerful yet controversial statement of 18 years old Maria (not a real name). Her sentiment typifies the many reasons that have caught Malaysians by surprise with a swung result for urban-based parliament Titiwangsa. It also illustrates how the verdict reverses and defies predictive analysis of many mainstream polling opinions that believe this is the safest seat for a popular heavyweight candidate of the PH. Our conversations in several sessions have confirmed youth voters' eagerness in relating instant monetary rewards with voting and the need to follow informed family decisions within an expected religious duty of many families who reside in the constituency.

A healthy political engagement is not about assuming casual relations between political participation with emancipation or even empowerment. It must be performed with in-placed mechanisms and institutionalised cultivation of civic political education. In the words of 19 years-old Siva from Sungai Buloh (not a real name):

Nearly every day, my dad and relatives told me to never vote for the alternate darker blue flag and vote instead for the traditional blue colour. My dad even told me that this corrupted Malay candidate was a better choice because he would protect our underprivileged Indian community since independence. I wonder why I must limit my vote based on the racial preference of our family choice, (Y5, October 22, 2022).

Siva's narrative is very rare since conventional readings of the Malaysian political spectrum assume that most Indian votes are shifted to a non-Malay-based PH. In his indecisive dilemma and questioning his family's traditional choice, he hopes that his voting choice and the candidate's personality are not reduced to a single racial preference. Thus, it is evident that a discourse of rights without responsibility and moral consciousness undermines the prevailing wisdom and autonomy of the one who wishes to exercise rights without fear of political judgement. Consequently, the latest electoral outcome untangles the dark side of designing procedural democratic reforms and rights only to be undermined and it further polarises our youth voices into existing cleavages of hatred and disposessions of meaningful empowerment. 18-years old Ali (not a real name), a school drop-out and a casual illegal racer in Kota Bahrū, surprises us:

You don't need [bachelor] a degree to understand politics but money. You could instantly tell that this educated white man [foreigner] is telling us why we are on the wrong side [since voting for PN]. After all, you don't need to tell Malaysians that the election is coming soon because we knew better than most of the experts. (Y6, October 7, 2022)

Furthermore, whenever an unfamiliar overseas academic doyen preaches democratic ideals in the local media and tweets about it, the youth feel annoyed and feel they are told to do so. In the words of 19-year-old Lisa whom we met in a fisherman's village of Terengganu:

You must be kidding right to believe in what these experts are twitting? Why should I care to continue my study, and only to be scammed by expensive fees and further deceived by privileged Malaysian experts with overseas education? (Y2, October 22, 2022).

Nevertheless, these young Malaysians can easily pick up the rest of the pieces and understand why these foreign Malaysian elections experts and pundits try to sell their stories with graphic visualisation when their appearance on Twitter's link clearly indicates the political views of urban youths and other ethnic groups. For many youth voters, they know that the election season is brewing, and they do not feel uncomfortable being different from their family's expectations:

It is not that I do not even care about the future of this country. But I don't want to be seen as disobedient to my family. A family choice is the best, after all. (Y6, October 12, 2022).

In the words of a 25-year-old urban's female youth who works as part of a cyber trooper and Tik Tok team of a powerful former government minister:

I was born in Sungai Besar and our parents are active members of this popular Malay-based party. It's just that I cannot relate to my parent's choice. I feel more comfortable with the idea of a clean [not corrupt] Malay candidate. My Ustaz told me it is haram to vote for a non-Muslim candidate. I haven't made my decision yet, but it is most likely between two Malay candidates. Ultimately, I might pick the most attractive and good-looking one, right? (Y4, October 27, 2022)

Whenever people are reluctant to even talk about the latest news gossip and outcries do not take them with a pinch of salt. We must give credit to many who refuse to talk and remain a silent majority. They feel wiser not to be consumed with a complex subject on an unproven record of public service of their local member of parliament while they understand the narcissistic tendency of every political chameleon and chimera. One must ponder why our instant communicative reaction is so often paradoxical to our constant internal monologue and ideals.

In political communication, that seemingly natural assumption of what is normal and considered accepted views of the family is powerful and persuasive. This is considered an act to divert and keep any survey enumerator in a state of misleading in their political assumptions. Many youth voters refuse to be associated with popular candidates on both sides of political divides. Inadvertently short-lived PH of twenty-two months administration, post-Langkah Sheraton in a hasty change of prime minister have led this 18-year-old Chua Lai (not a real name) in Ipoh Timur to regret casting his vote:

Yes, I made more money than usual. The manager of Party B paid extra for all shirts with printed logos in red and white colour, as he wanted more supplies. My only regret is not following more on World Cup. Don't know why we must go out to vote." (Y3, November 16, 2022)

In our search for a foreign electoral model and digitally savvy solution to ameliorate our communal endemic and political cleavage, it will be victimised to encourage people to exercise their rights if the encouragement is not supported with voter education and rights to choose is sacred. In fact, it will be wronged to suggest that merely reading heavy texts like the *Communist Manifesto* and expected Marxist precepts of 18th-century English society is the end game of expected accentuation of the progress of every Malaysian household. Learning complex ideals is a journey but the true value in the process to empower youth political literacy is the encourage them to build their opinion and not be dictated to. A 19-years old Zara (not a real name) who lives in the FELDA settlement in Kota Tinggi:

that at the end of the day it is you who feel misguided and think your instinct wish to differ from your traditional family's choice, you don't see any clear alternative and persuasive candidate. (Y8, November 3, 2022)

Certainly, our political culture and cleavage are more convoluted than an assigned label of conservative versus reform in our national political spectrum. Explaining and understanding the antecedent condition that propels Malaysia's oxymoron politics to the current state of disarray and societal disillusionment is more multifaceted than persuading our youth with a binary voting choice between Taliban style of Islamic Leviathan versus Centrist Reformed of clean politics. Evil intentions of prejudice and pride of extremism appear on both sides of political divides and chaotic instruments of despotic virtues of every political elite. While alternative virtual discussion seems a plausible answer to empower youth voters through alternative narratives, not every youth agrees with this suggestion.

Technology is Not a Democracy

A shift from old to new media and wider engagement of politicians in manipulating social media, especially WhatsApp, Twitter, and Tik Tok should not be underestimated because a shift to the digital platform and wider engagement with new youth and first-time voters does seemingly translate into a healthy democratic discourse and balanced political literacy. But this is not the case with internet politics and a new media advantage of opposition to challenge the elite model of gatekeeper control of media and narrative. In comparison to 2008's new media, alternative sources of political news magnified similar and predictable tactics of cyber and social media warfare, be it black or white media propaganda. Only this time, it wasn't 2018 of unexpected government change, but familiar political faces on all corners and part of the maneuverer for frequent change of coalitional government and alignment of MPs to reach a simple majority since *Langkah Sheraton*.

It is for this exact pattern of political behaviour, casual observers of Malaysian elections have predicted a hung parliamentary outcome and, regression of participatory democratic quality and lower values in the voting reasons. Our recent election is not just about youth participation and a closed and safe space for political expression. Knowing the fact that every Malaysian generation and their footprint of social media realms provide powerful political data and are ready to be manipulated by cyber troopers of every political party. A 19-years old Benjamin (not a real name) from a popular opposition Chinese-based party confessed:

I don't feel regret not following my parent's expectation to pursue a degree in medicine I have always been interested in software engineering though my father thought it is a qualification for a jobless technician when you cannot recover your computer data. The reality of learning coding and programming language is a powerful weapon. I can make instant money if I can stream various data from various APIs into a single data visualisation dashboard because politicians want me to brief them on the differences between Facebook and Tik Tok generation of voters. (Y8, November 1, 2022).

It certainly makes sense if we can capture data about Malaysian online lifestyles. Thus, big data politics is transforming the way we transform online data into valuable information and patterns that unravel our political behaviour and subconscious mind.

So, when Mahathir's PH administration explains the futuristic capability of a machine to disrupt our human life and replace human jobs, most Malaysians reduce their optic of machines to factory and remote-control air-conditioners.

The digital realm of social media data and elections is about big data analytics. The 2017's Facebook fiasco of Cambridge Analytics' infiltration of our social media data exhibited Artificial intelligence (AI) politics. The last November's election brought AI and automated machine learning capability to capture our digital and algorithm footprints. A 21-year-old Radha (not a real name) from Pekan who chooses to rely on the passive income of YouTube Vlogs says that:

I just realise I make more money than my parents. My annual combined income of my mum and day is my expected payment over 6 months. It was strange when my dad scolded me and thought I was spending unproductive time online chatting and had no skills. Why pick up traditional means of acquiring skills with expensive fees when you can get them for free on YouTube? (Y8, November 1, 2022)

Understanding how the fourth industrial revolution is about the complex interaction of human activity with technology where the metaverse of complex information about voters is always there. Digital politics is about social media intelligence in which politicians that are capable to understand our algorithm pattern would be keen to pay any Malaysian youths and social media influencers to work for them so they could integrate the soft-sell approach of political marketing and white propaganda to guide your voter's choice. Thus, knowing the expected currency of 53% of the first-time youth voters and their social media preference for popular platforms of Tik Tok and Instagram certainly transforms the entire present and future ways of looking at politics.

Conclusion

Thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic and prolonged period of lockdown where we relied on strong internet signals to conduct our daily activity. Digitalisation of lifestyle is possible when the entire country is in the state of online webinars and WhatsApp video calls during the lockdown. The genesis of our truly political metaverse is two years of lockdown. Investing in a programmer and WhatsApp call-blaster to capture and analyse the potential data of prospective voters should not be underestimated. It is not surprising if data about the sentiments of younger voters via manipulative knowledge of targeted political algorithms and auto-machine intel of social media can be pursued. In fact, in the prelude to the 15th GE, the anticipated election season was caught amid public confusion and unsure of voter expectations and whom to vote but that was not the reason behind the higher voter turnout in the last November's democratic process. It was regarded as more peaceful, only people were confused about whom to vote for this time.

Nevertheless, the opportunistic political rhetoric of lowering the age for voting highlights a naïve assumption that Undi 18 is about widening and extending democratic political participation space and voting opportunities to the youngest and early adult group – gen y and gen z. While it is theoretically correct to encourage younger political

participation in the electoral process, Malaysian liberal democratic proponents and pro-protest activism of youth have failed to understand the political context of civil political space, freedom of speech, and youth political activism which are critical to healthy and balanced democratic discourse and forum. It is a fact that there are many iconic political changes in the global political landscape. Technology does not replace democratic competition and structural inequality but is capable to understand our choice.

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