

Proclivity of Political Participation among Wakaidesu (若いです) Japanese

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ABSTRACT

Wakaidesu (若いです) or Young Japanese have been seen as being indifferent to politics and do not seem to regard political parties as representing their concerns. This is a blow to the Japanese democracy as the great majority of youth are politically apathetic and they are distancing themselves from active participation in politics. This paper describes the growing political apathy among young Japanese citizens aged between 20 and 35 that needs to be changed. Policies of the state should advocate for issues of interest to younger voters. The engagement of Japanese youth is reflected in three major issues: the feminist movement, community service and environmental protection, all of which will be discussed in this paper. The country urgently needs more young Japanese to be engaged in issues concerning the relationship between the economic and political state of the nation. The paper argued that the political involvement of young Japanese is not being attended to seriously. Instead, political parties are busy securing votes from the largest group of voters, ignoring the young. This has led to the increase of political apathy among young voters, bringing the Japanese democracy into decline. Finally, the paper will also discuss a cultural ethnographic study on the use of the media among Malaysian youth as a comparative analysis to show how self-identity and social identity can be built.

Keywords: Political apathy, political participation, young Japanese, voter

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INTRODUCTION

Political participation reflects the way people with various attitudes utilise their opportunities. Civic involvement is indeed

necessary to reach the 'expectation' of democratic ideals. Among political activities which society is involved in are the conventional, which is limited to vote casting and political campaigning, and the unconventional such as protests and women's participation, and the recent civil activities such as volunteering and social engagement. These forms of participation are consistent with actual civic engagement practices.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2013, pp. 17–18) opportunities for youth to engage in governance and participate in political and decision-making processes depend largely on the political, socioeconomic and cultural contexts where social norms in many parts of the world result in multiple forms of discrimination against young women. Since the Arab awakening, many youth in the region have remained politically active through "political movements" instead of engaging with political parties. Young men and women are traditionally active politically in universities (when allowed) but very often disillusioned with political leadership and political institutions and excluded from policy development. This has resulted in political activism of youth not being organised according to formal groupings.

Furthermore, both formal and informal engagement can be understood as political participation, and both are beneficial for a vivid and resilient democracy and should be supported. There is strong evidence that the participation of young people in formal,

institutional political processes is relatively low when compared to older citizens across the globe. People under the age of 35 are rarely found in formal political leadership positions. This has led to discussion of political leadership in democratic Japan. Eligibility for service in Parliament starts at 25 years of age or older and it is common practice to refer to politicians as 'young' if they are below 35 to 40 years of age (UNDP, 2013, p. 13). Youth are not represented adequately in formal political institutions and processes such as Parliament, political parties, elections and public administration.

According to Takahashi and Hatano (1999, p.225–230), Japanese youth engagement has focused on three major issues: feminist movement, community service and environmental protection. The movements are indirectly political matters. The first began in the 1890s and involved protests against pollution from various sources, including mining. The second, antinuclear protests, began in 1954 and became one of the more active political movements in which youth participated. Takahashi and Hatano added that those involved in environmental protection generally are not directly political because they focus primarily on consumer concerns such as food additives, natural food and organic farming methods. They note that at least some young people regard environmental protection to be an economic and political issue. Takahashi and Hatano (1999, p.232) concluded that "a great majority of youth are indifferent to politics" and did not regard political parties as

representatives of their concerns. Their argument has been supported by Hayes (1995, p.144), who stated that “the great majority of students are politically apathetic and do not participate actively in politics.”

According to White (1994, p.11), youth are defined by marital and employment status rather than by age, and such institutional definitions have more weight than social and psychological identities. The regulatory and protective functions of institutions such as family and school still dominate the lives of Japanese youth into their 20s.

However, in Malaysia, media channels such as *Facebook* and the medium of television are popular among Malay youths, who make use of these outlets particularly for news content, entertainment and religious texts. Satellite television in particular plays a very important role in assisting the development of ideology, including social, political and cultural thought among youth. At the same time, the government frequently makes television its primary medium in highlighting political agenda and social and cultural rights on an ongoing basis. However, the popularity of new media has led the government to believe the idea that Malaysian youth today are not established or nurtured through any political statement in any traditional media like television and newspapers. They believe that Malaysian youth today tend to see and believe what is disseminated through new media such as *Facebook*, *Blog*, *YouTube*, *Twitter* and so on. At the same time, new media technology is considered popular and has become an

important alternative source of information for audiences.

However, this paper also argues that despite the fact that new media such as *Facebook* have a certain effect on the formation of identity and the ideology of Malaysian youth, this technology is not a determinant of the total. Traditional media, especially television, are still considered relevant and have an effect of its own. For example, the importance of television was realised by opposition political parties, who use the Internet now as a platform for disseminating their political and ideological agenda to avoid constraints placed on them by the police and the government. One example of is TV Selangor, an opposition news channel available online.

The main discussion of this paper focuses on the propensity or tendency of young Japanese to avoid involvement in political parties and how they react to political involvement, and includes a short analysis of the role of Malaysian youth as a comparative study on political participation of youth in both countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Experience

The historical period of Japanese development brought tremendous change to the political system. Utter (2011, p.108–109) found that Japan faced economic reversal in the 1990s as well as scandals involving government officials, bankers and industrialists. This brought a new paradigm to the Japanese economic sector, which

experienced tremendous change. He added that after Japan lost 3 million lives in World War II and suffered the atomic bombing of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it became a parliamentary democracy with a largely symbolic hereditary monarch, the Emperor.

After the death of Emperor Hirohito in 1989, the monarchy passed to his son, Akihito, who succeeded the throne. Immediately after the war, the Allied powers governed Japan through the US military commander, General Douglas MacArthur. A new constitution went into effect in May 1947, which established the structure of Japan's government, guaranteed certain rights, such as universal adult suffrage, and prohibited the development of a large military. The nation has a parliamentary form of government, with a two-house legislature, the Diet, consisting of a House of Representatives, whose representatives must be at least 25 years old, and a House of the Councillors (参議院, Sangiin), whose representatives must have reached the age of 30. Every four years, an election is held to fill all seats in the House of Representatives. The electorate choose half the members of the House of the Councillors every three years. In addition to parliamentary elections, there are also elections every four years for the 47 regional prefectures and for municipal governments. The minimum voting age is set at 20.

While Rosenbluth and Thies (2010, p.101) concluded that the 1994 electoral reform has led to a more consolidated, bipartisan political system, greater emphasis

has been placed on party platforms and party leaders, nationwide campaigns and more (but not completely) homogeneous parties and weakened factions. Factions, especially in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which represents special interests, previously played a dominant role in Japanese politics. They added that the campaigns are more issue-orientated, with parties seeking to attract "the mythical median voter" rather than depending on the support of particular segments of the population, such as farmers. Although the LDP and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) have become the two dominant political parties, the proportional representation aspect of elections allows third parties to gain representation in the Diet. The emergence of the DPJ as a rival to the LDP, which dominated the electoral scene for more than three decades, may provide young citizens greater incentives to participate in the electoral process. However, Hayes (1995, p.145) emphasised that campaign activities that are taken for granted in the United States are extensively restricted in Japan, which may tend to discourage citizens from engaging in the electoral process.

Political involvement of young people in Malaysia has long been discussed by local and international academics. Young leaders like Tun Dr. Ismail, who was appointed deputy president of his political party at the age of 36 years, are well known and respected for their leadership credibility. Even foreign leaders have acknowledged their caliber; for instance, the late Lee Kuan Yew, the first Prime Minister of Singapore,

praised Tun Dr. Ismail for his firm stance and courage in his book, *Singapore Story* (1998). Indeed, Malaysia has a long list of interesting young leaders like Tun Dr. Mahathir, Tun Musa Hitam, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Tan Sri Muhammad Muhd. Taib and Tan Sri Rahim Chik.

However, there is a significant difference in the involvement of young people in politics today. Khairy Jamaludin, Mukhriz Mahathir, Razali Ibrahim, Reezal Merican Naina Merican, Rosnah Abdul Rashid, Wee Ka Siong, Mah Hang Soon, T. Mohan, Lim Guan Eng, Tony Pua Kiam Wee, Anthony Loke Siew Fook, Nurul Izzah, Teresa Kok, Mohamed Azmin Ali, Gobind Singh Deo, Gwo-Burne Loh Yeow Tseow Suan, Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, Mohd Yusmadi Mohd. Yusoff and Nasrudin Hassan were among politicians who started to join politics at young age. These high-spirited young leaders are working tirelessly for change and justice in Malaysian politics despite ideological differences among them. The younger generation as listed earlier has never stopped fighting for the political issues. Young Malaysians are interested in politics and are eager to lead. More and more young leaders are now in the forefront of Malaysian politics.

Cultural Politics/Political Participation

Post-war Japanese urban culture has featured a succession of highly visible but transient youth subcultures, often led by young women as mentioned by Ito (2005, p.131–138). Skov and Moeran (1995, p.1–

10) describe how young Japanese women's central posting in media imagery and cultures of consumption are an invasion of their weak position in the labour market. The research focuses on the consumption and style, particularly of youth street cultures, in which young Japanese women have taken the lead. Even though the research looks at the political culture of young women, it revealed that women's participation has brought an advantage to Japanese politics because of its marginal status.

Arai (2011) stated that in Japan and other countries that have adopted a parliamentary democracy, voters select representatives through election. The elected representatives then form a parliament and make political decisions. He focused on the marked political apathy among young voters. Data showed that the voter turnout for national elections after WWII decreased significantly in the 1990s for both the Lower House and Upper House of Parliament. In the 2000s, voter turnout increased and remained constant between approximately 60% and 80%. He agreed that voters in their 20s were fewer than those from any other group after examining voter turnout by age group in the 2010 national election. He stated that a low voter turnout among young people means that it is increasingly difficult to reflect the opinion of the youth in parliament. It is obvious that this situation requires reform.

This problem of lack of participation of young people in politics is not only apparent in Japan but also in South Korea. South Korea is now encouraging its young people to get

involved in politics especially as voters. The political alienation of youth has led to a new dilemma that requires re-examination of the popular political. The South Korean government has introduced many strategies, working through universities, high schools and youth organisations in the country to promote youth involvement. However, due to the country's education system, young South Koreans are more attached to study and tend not to be involved in politics.

Figure 1 shows the pattern of low voter turnout in Japan since 1967. As reported by Colin Jones in The Japan Times, December 10, 2014, “*Antei wa, kibō desu*” (“Stability ... is Hope”) (“Electoral dysfunction leaves Japan’s voters feeling impotent”). That is the vaguely Orwellian slogan of the conservative Komeito, Abe’s sometime-political ally. This simple message holds a certain appeal for those whose actuarial hope horizons do not extend beyond the next decade, and who may want nothing new from the 21st century other than perhaps a robotic exoskeleton for the caregiver to help lift them or their even older parent out of bed (www.japantimes.co.jp). He emphasised that to young people, dreaming of disruptive innovation or meaningful social change, however, this may sound like an exhortation to just give up.

Indeed, there does not seem to be much in Japan’s election for the young or even middle-aged. Abe brought up the question of economy and financial issues regarding taxes and the GDP-to-national-debt ratio. If Abe wins a suitable mandate from the status-quo crowd, he can presumably get on

with the important task of making it easier for companies to hire people like the young Japanese as well as fire them. He stated that for people who like job security, there would probably be plenty of opportunities to earn pocket money.

Year	Voter Turnout	Total seats	Reg. citizens	VAP Turnout	Voting age population	Population	Turnout ratio	Compulsory voting
2014	80.00%	312,241,447	312,241,447	81.50%	249,812,739	127,251,288	79%	No
2012	80.20%	312,400,472	312,400,472	80.67%	250,240,720	127,268,068	79%	No
2009	69.27%	320,033,038	320,033,038	69.54%	253,240,720	127,268,068	79%	No
2005	61.46%	45,553,106	105,067,864	66.62%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
2003	69.80%	41,182,288	102,208,884	69.07%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
2000	69.62%	68,082,471	108,420,782	69.02%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
1998	69.89%	66,240,000	97,680,782	69.27%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
1995	67.02%	15,724,018	74,866,010	66.20%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
1990	73.31%	66,218,008	96,822,808	74.89%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
1986	63.09%	61,703,794	96,405,685	71.50%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
1983	67.84%	51,280,000	84,250,000	67.60%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
1980	74.50%	63,258,439	88,920,024	74.79%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
1977	68.09%	54,633,025	80,800,024	68.89%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
1976	73.44%	57,221,883	77,650,000	73.55%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
1972	73.79%	52,020,000	72,900,000	73.88%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
1969	66.59%	47,442,401	69,240,424	66.07%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
1967	73.38%	46,091,468	62,792,776	73.38%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
1963	71.04%	41,088,048	58,281,678	68.67%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No
1960	72.09%	39,620,119	54,320,970	70.89%	168,833,813	137,618,679	79%	No

Figure 1. Voter turnout for Japan 1960–2004
 Source: <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=114>

For example, the 2008 Candlelight Protests of Korea was very significant in portraying the political environment among South Korean youth. Many challenges and advanced technologies have driven the youth community to be engaged in politics. Due to historical perspective with the people of North Korea, young South Koreans have embraced a different view of ethnic nationalism. The increase in usage of new media show that youth are using them as a platform to gain political information and this has brought a higher degree of sociopolitical interest among them (Ahmad & Eun, 2012, pp.208).

Research done by *Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien*, “Happiness in Japan:

Continuities and Discontinuities” (Figure 2) clearly identified one of the indicators of happiness in Japan as being political participation and happiness. In this research, the concept of political participation aimed at influencing decision-making in the political process and at controlling political elites. It can be understood as the participant’s contribution to take an active part in improving society or the individual’s own life. Political participation could, therefore, contribute substantially to subjective feelings of well-being and happiness. The concept of procedural utility (Frey, Benz, & Stutzer, 2004, p.387) supports this idea as it states that the results of decision-making and how decisions are reached matter for the well-being of the people concerned.

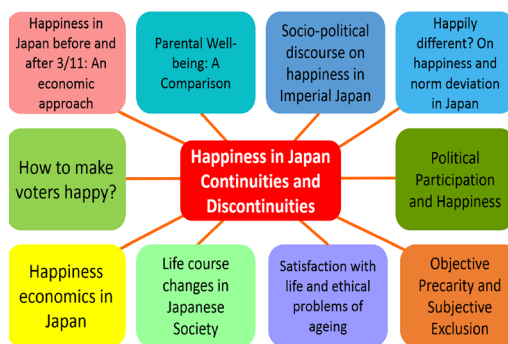


Figure 2. Happiness in Japan continuities and discontinuities

In Malaysia, the younger generation has not stepped into the political arena in real, to lead a political party, be elected as representatives of the people or stand for election. However, from an early age, they are exposed to political talk at home.

In this case, the family institution plays a very important role; the father as head of the family must show good leadership over all members of the family. Schools are also important; teachers are the best model for educating and shaping the younger generation into being useful individuals. Likewise, in universities, lecturers are responsible for helping to prepare students for leadership in society to avoid social imbalance and lack of knowledge and drive among citizens.

With the explosion of information technology, cyber politics is becoming increasingly popular among the younger generation in Malaysia, who are resorting to alternative media to seek answers to their questions about national politics. This has led to a drop in popularity for the ruling political party, *Barisan Nasional*. The opposition are making use of cyberspace to provide information and to interact with Internet users, especially the youth. This has allowed the opposition to overcome the political constraints laid on them by the government. The use of cyberspace for political activation has led to the formation of a group of people who are more open-minded and liberal as they are free and face no restrictions when reading information from a blog or website.

Most online users are youth of aged 21 to 40 years, and they come to alternative media for answers to political issues. Even though many mainstream media take the initiative to provide online newspapers, they have not been able to attract the younger generation. With one click, Internet users

are exposed to a variety of sources such as *Malaysiakini*, Malaysia Today and *Harakah Daily*.

The initiatives taken by the younger generation to follow the political development of the country is a paradigm shift that is positive but it needs to be monitored over time. With advances in technology, they are exposed to a variety of information that is often misinterpreted. Here, political education is very important; it is mandatory for them to learn the chronology of political education before venturing into the political arena. National history should not be ignored and needs to be explored for implicit and explicit narration. They should appreciate the struggle of other countries around the world that have been able to build respect for themselves.

Japanese Nationalism

Ishihara (2007, pp.110–117) offered a place to begin with his paradigmatic example of Japanese nationalism. It begins as a kind of historical revisionism related to World War II. Ishihara blamed the Allied Occupation Forces for distorting Japan's educational system and argued that now, 60 years later, is the time to revise the educational system to incorporate policies aimed at producing "patriotism" or *aikokushin* in Japan's youth.

Reviews done by Honda (2007, pp. 281–286) focused on contemporary Japan's youth nationalism; he pointed out that since the turn of the century, the shift of Japan's youth towards the political right and the upsurge of nationalism, in particular, has become the subject of much debate. The

fanatical support for the national team in World Cup Soccer tournaments, the singing of the national anthem '*Kimi ga yo*' in unison, the 'Japanese language boom', the increase in young people worshipping at Yasukuni Shrine and the popularity of the comic book *Ken-Kanryu* (Hating the Korean Wave) are but some of the examples cited as evidence of this trend.

The research focused on the results of opinion surveys with high-school students as the object of the study. It substantiated the points made in Kayama Rika's "*Puchi Nashorizumu Shokogun: Wakamono-tachi no Nipponshugi*" (Petit Nationalism Syndrome: Young People's Japan Doctrine), where Kayama correlated the categories of nationalism and social status. Kayama referred to Ono Michio's (2003, pp.45–49) idea of 'soft' nationalism involving a 'disposition of mutuality' (*sogosei shiko*) where one enjoys both Japan and foreign countries. This, according to him, can be observed among high-school students in Japan's elite stratum.

In addition to critically arguing petit nationalism, Asaba Michiaki (2004, p. 275) referred to Kayama's point about young people's shift to the right as being "further evidence of nationalism's attrition," which is like giving "the impression of crying wolf when startled by the withering pampas grass." Kayama Rika and Kitada Akihiro's comments convey the principal arguments concerning youth nationalism in contemporary Japan.

The spirit of Malaysian nationalism or patriotism among the younger generation

must be nurtured and cultivated starting from the family institution. The institution is capable of instilling love for family and love for country. These steps look easy to implement but without support, encouragement and awareness, the mission will fail.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The conceptual framework was developed based on previous research and discussion of historical experiences, cultural politics, political participation and Japanese nationalism. The issues that Takahashi and Hatano (1991, p.240) discussed regarding political participation among young Japanese led to the use of the term 'political ignorance' in describing social inaction in politics.

For socially engaged young Japanese and Malaysians, the decision to engage in politics may relate to the desire for personal or national expression. They may be constrained because of concerns about the nature or structure of the political system in Japan and Malaysia. However, to our knowledge, there are many empirical investigative studies of socially inactive or politically engaged youth. Thus, this paper sought to answer the following questions through interviews with the subjects:

- Q1: Do youth decline to be engaged politically and prefer to be socially engaged?
- Q2: What considerations influence political involvement among young Japanese and Malaysians?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to investigate the propensity of political participation among young Japanese and Malaysians and the factors that contribute to their political engagement. This paper applies the standardised open-ended interview format. Most of the time, a formally structured set of interview questions were used, where the exact wording and sequence of questions were predetermined. This interview structure was useful because the researchers had a limited amount of time as the subjects were available only at certain times or for limited periods.

Since this project aimed to explore ideas about political participation that may not fit the current trend of freedom of political participation among youth in the global context, the interview was a logical, flexible choice to capture such ideas. Allowing participants to actively shape the interview conversation also demonstrated respect and value for their thoughts and gave them a chance to tell their stories in meaningful ways.

The research expanded the communication log to include activities of the young Japanese and their participation in political organisations. Participants were asked to identify their interest in political issues spontaneously to capture their awareness about Japan's political situation, especially that involving the young people. The study involved three high-school students (aged 16-18), two college students (aged 18-21) and 11 university students (aged 21-35). The gender split was equal,

with eight males and eight females. The majority of the participants were from Tokyo and Osaka. Seven were recruited from Osaka, central Japan to provide some geographic variation for the research study.

In addition to ethnographic work, the study based the analysis on Japanese popular political discourse and research literature on voter turnout and issues in elections that were of major concern among young Japanese voters.

Interview Questions

The interview questions are given below.

- (1) Do you think young Japanese are given the freedom to express their ideas, voice and opinions of the political system?
- (2) Do you participate in any political movements?
- (3) What topics or issues seem political to you?
- (4) What actions seem political to you?
- (5) What purposes or reasons for doing things seem political to you?

These questions were asked and applied to get an overall picture of the young Japanese people in the political environment rather than their daily lifestyle of school, college, work, family and others. The questions were developed for an in-depth interview based on the ease and moderate questions were asked. They were approached in public areas such as shopping malls, university fields, parks and tourist attractions in both Tokyo

and Osaka. The study also observed their activities at weekends.

Research Design

Participant Selection. In order to explore the experiences of young Japanese in political participation, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with a purposive convenience sample of 10 individuals. Interviewees were selected randomly from 30 among participants from various backgrounds. All 10 interviewees were between the ages of 18 and 35, as young people from this age group may participate in traditional political activities like voting, and they also best fit the description of individuals who lacked a political voice and were most likely to engage in non-traditional forms of political participation (Bennett, 1998, p.741).

The interviewees were selected based on a number of criteria. Both male and female participants were selected as the literature suggested that gender affects how people choose to participate (e.g. Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2010, p.318). In addition, participants who held a variety of political perspectives were included, as individuals with different ideologies may use technology for different political purposes (e.g. Benkler & Shaw, 2010, p. 377; Best & Krueger, 2005, p.183).

Research Analysis. According to Taylor (2001, p.5–10) language does not simply carry meaning; it creates and changes meaning as it is used. Schiffin and Hamilton

(2001, p.1–10) mentioned that generally, discourse analysis referred to the study of language as it is used to give meaning to concepts and ideas. Rather than focussing on grammar or the individual parts of a sentence, discourse analysis explores broader patterns of language use in order to analyse the data that are gathered. As such we used a form of discourse analysis.

Although the term can encompass a variety of different analysis techniques, approaches to discourse analysis generally assume that ideas and concepts are socially constructed rather than naturally occurring, meaning that the way individuals talk about a topic shapes their understandings and beliefs about that topic.

FINDINGS

Patterns and Pathways

Participant A, a 20-year-old female, described herself as being politically inactive and she preferred to be associated with feminist movements, especially activities organised by the students' society. She had never participated in voting during Election Day. During the interviews, she demonstrated that she was quite actively involved in addressing political issues informally. She defined "political" in broader terms by looking at the role of the government and political parties in providing more opportunities for youth.

Interviewee B was a 30-year-old female who actively updated herself with information on the political environment. She had been taking part in the election

voting system since the age of 20 and planned to not to miss any voting. She emphasised the importance of participating politically in the voting system as the voting rate for young people was incredibly low.

Participant C was a 19-year-old male participant who considered himself to be slightly liberal, but did not identify with any political party and has never voted. He was very interested in national elections, but not very interested in local elections.

D was 35 years old, very conservative and interested in national elections, somewhat interested in local elections and always voted. He discussed political issues with his friends to share ideas and he felt very satisfied with the political expression among his colleagues.

Participant E was slightly reluctant to express her views on political issues and preferred to discuss how the Japanese education system had shaped the way of thinking among students at all levels. E was 26 years old and currently pursuing her Masters in a local university. She had participated in voting once and not after that because of lack of interest in politics.

Participant F, a 23-year-old female, was keen to participate in voting because she was used to speaking with her professor and with her American friends, who all have strong opinions about politics.

Interviewee G, 32 years old, mentioned that he had been actively engaged in politics since he was 21 years old. He said that participating in the voting process was very important for express his opinions instead of just thinking.

He was a 28-year-old waitress who felt that she had no time to participate in any political discussion due to her work schedule. She was a conservative person who chose to vote and keep busy with her daily life to earn a better income for her living expenses.

I was a 26-year-old female who identified as being slightly liberal and independent. She was very interested in national elections, but not very interested in local elections.

The final male interviewee, J, was 24 years old, moderate and considered himself to be an open-minded person because he said that if he waived his right to vote then he had no right to complain about politics or society. Therefore, he would be participating in voting responsibly.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Young Japanese between 18 and 35 years of age who participated in the interviews had not fully invested in politics but had a sense of impending crisis and were looking forward to participating in the political system.

Young people between 20 and 24 years of age account for 6% of the voting public as mentioned in Link Asia News. This shows that young people are considered a minority. There was a huge gap between the young Japanese voters and politicians due to the political campaigning and policies that targeted other groups.

There have been some effort to motivate Japanese youth to participate in politics. One is *YouthCreate*, a Japanese non-profit

company that was established because of the lack of interest in politics from Japanese youth. In addition, the owner of the company, Kensuke Harada, also founded the student group, *ivote*. Harada also established the Voters Bar, which is a bar where politicians and youth can come together to discuss anything related to politics. Figure 3 shows the Voter's Bar website set up to encourage interactive participation among youth in Japan. The youth are able to discuss interactively online with other visitors and Harada actively responds to questions and posts updates on programmes.

Many gatherings have been held since the campaign was started. Four local participants and 28 participants ranging from high school students to young adults participated in the 18th gathering. They held gathering at the same place when they had once worked on reinvigorating of community in their college days. Harada, who witnessed the positive effects of interaction between the youth and politicians, sent a message to the younger generation. He stated, "What we need to show politicians is, more than voter numbers, how much more engaged and influential these young voters can be."

Harada added, "It is a mistake to believe that voting changes nothing. If you vote, something will change. You may have believed that the relatively smaller population of younger voters cannot influence politics, but if the voting rate among young people increases, or if politicians notice the increasing number of young supporters, then things may change." Harada regretted not having started this

initiative a long time ago as voting is important.

Harada also used *Facebook* as a medium of communication to encourage and promote participation in the programmes and activities. Voter's Bar is not limited to discussing the role of youth in politics but Harada provides support, guidance, networking, volunteerism and many more opportunities to young Japanese. Figure 4

is an example of interactive communication on *Facebook* between participants and members.

In Japan, the young people are expected to focus on education rather than on social matters and are expected to not criticise their elders. According to Hiroki (2014), there is very strong emphasis on supporting young people who are reclusive but promotion of political participation of youth is weak.

Figures 5, 6 and 7 shown below are the webpage of *YouthCreate* and Voter's Bar created by Harada, which explain the origins of the initiatives. The objective of the webpage was to give a clear picture of the reason for the establishment of Voter's Bar. Harada pledged to help Japanese



Figure 3. Voter's Bar website



Figure 4. Voter's Bar Facebook

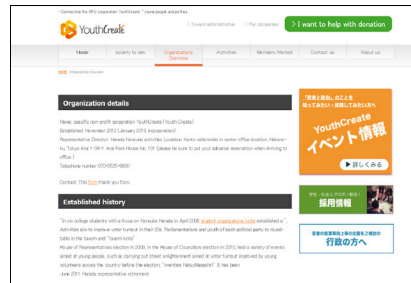


Figure 5. Example of YouthCreate



Figure 6. Harada's profile

youth to understand and be educated on the importance of political education and awareness. Although he is a lawyer, he wants to inject awareness of the need for political participation among young Japanese.

the implementation and acceptance of the communities involved and how they want to be approached. There is no doubt that the young generation today need to be continuously nurtured to produce a harmonious such as envisioned in the concept of 1Malaysia.



Figure 7. The programmes held by Voter’s Bar posted in the webpage of YouthCreate

The effort of Voter’s Bar in promoting political awareness and political participation should be applauded. The recognition of young Japanese voices and ideas on political issues should be heightened and many other platforms should be provided for them to participate in political discussion.

CONCLUSION

This discussion highlighted the introduction and implementation of efforts taken by the Malaysian and Japan governments towards greater participation of youth in politics. The success of a programme is based on

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