Youth Organisations as a Starting Point for Involvement in Formal Politics in Malaysia

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Civil society is an important stabilisation agent for development. It is capable of ensuring national stability and sovereignty to support progress and development. It is also referred to as a ‘shock absorber’, capable of lending a certain protection to the government. It corresponds to Putnam’s claim that “civil associations contribute to the effectiveness and stability of democratic government…, both because of their ‘internal’ effects on individual members and because of their ‘external’ effects on the wider polity” (Putnam 1993: 89).

However, studies of civil society including youth organisations in Malaysia are rare in comparison with other areas. Azimi Hamzah has claimed that the lack of youth-related research in Malaysia is “due to poor commitment in terms of expertise and budget”. The under-researched nature of this area strengthens the interest in examining youth organisations and their contribution to Malaysian political development.

This study investigates the values, practices and characteristics of civil society especially young people in Malaysian political development. Indeed, human beings have a close relationship with politics. Scholars such as Engster claimed that “human beings are political animals who depend upon community with others for their development and well-being” and Turiman explained that a political role is not merely joining political parties but includes civic roles as well. In Malaysia, politics is generally understood as formal politics (to do with political parties), although political involvement actually includes political interest, civic roles and the role of being good citizens, and the processes by which groups of people make decisions about the exercise of power and influence which involves both formal and informal politics.

The main proposition of the study is that youth organisations play significant roles in Malaysian political development. On the one hand, it focuses on formal youth organisations because they are major components of civil society or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (NGOs is a term accepted in Malaysia to represent any form of civil society organization). On the other hand, this paper reveals the emergence of a new political force including informal networks and social groups.

The main discussion of this paper focuses on the viability of Malaysian youth and youth organisations, both formal and informal, in national political development. It reveals that youth organisations contribute in a discernable way to political development. For example, it examines formal youth organisations as a starting point to an involvement in formal politics, the effects of youth organisations in the political field including the creation of awareness and interest among members concerning politics and the motivation for participation in formal politics. With the advancement of technology, this paper also compares the roles of young people within the formal and informal organisations and their political affiliations in the changing political landscape of Malaysia.

Its findings are also directed to policy-makers and practitioners to help improve their organisations and interactions with other stakeholders. The paper highlights the application of research findings and offers advice for nation-building, and discusses the level of (genuine and voluntary) tolerance and understanding that is significant to achieve the national development goals such as Vision 2020 and Malaysia in 2057. It is significant especially with
the increased-challenges posed by the democratization process and the growing pressure to make the government of Malaysia more transparent under the changing political environment in Malaysia.

The research employs a mixed-methods technique to address both the primary and secondary data. Both primary and secondary data are analysed through independent and integrative analyses as such triangulation enhances the reliability and validity of the findings. Besides contributing to the body of knowledge in this area of studies of civil society and youth, this paper is valuable for future research and comparative studies in other countries.

References:


