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Election and Voting Behaviour of FELDA Settlers in Felda Chini Pahang, Malaysia

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Abstract- This study examines the reasons of FELDA settlers vote for a party and factors that influence the voting behavior of FELDA settlers in Felda Chini, Pahang. Chini (N23) is one of the FELDAs with majority Malay voters and most of the general elections in this area in the past were won by the Barisan Nasional (BN) including during the last general election in 2013. BN was also victorious in the three preceding elections in 1995, 2004 and 2008. FELDA Chini became a stronghold for BN. The study is learned upon questionnaires distributed to the FELDA settlers. Out of 507 questionnaires distributed only 348 were returned giving a return rate of 69% which is considered satisfactory. Overall, the FELDA settlers prefer to vote for the ruling party as a sense of gratitude in order to express their appreciation for the government's contribution. The study finds that Dato' Najib is not the leading factor for them to vote in the election.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has consistently conducted national elections since 1959 in order to decide the formation of the government (Khong Kim Hoong, 1991). The first election held in the Federation of Malaya was for the Municipal Council of George Town, Penang, on December 1, 1951. This was followed later by the Kuala Lumpur Municipal Council election of February, 1952. Moreover, the first national level election was held on July 27, 1955 (NSTP Research and Information Services, 1990). Apart from being described as a process for electing and choosing the government, election is the most essential process in a political community. In fact, the elections determine not only who should rule the government but also over what, and under what terms, they may rule (Rashid Rahman, 1994). It is important to determine the authority and political leaders. Thus, indirectly the election is necessary to identify the policy and administration of the country.

II. ELECTION IN MALAYSIA

Moreover, in Malaysia, elections are conducted under 'first-past-the post' system (Chin Ung- Ho, 1997). It is a simple procedure for translating votes into

seats since the party with the highest number of votes wins (NSTP Research and Information, 1990). This system emphasizes that vote percentages do not necessarily have to tally with seat percentages. In fact, there are certain features of this electoral system that can be emphasized for instance; disproportionality where the largest party receives a considerable seat bonus and the fragmentation of the party system which means a large number of parties contest, although the number is reduced by Barisan Nasional's single slate and the mixed record on inter-ethnic coalition (Mavis Puthucheary & Noraini Othman, 2005).

Election is also a good way of expressing people's political hopes and dissatisfactions (NSTP Research and Information, 1990). If they are satisfied with the government's administration, they will vote for the government. Otherwise, people tend to vote against the government as a symbol of dissatisfaction when the government does not perform. The elections give opportunities towards political participation (Palmer, N. D., 1975). Puthucheary argues that Malaysian election cannot be considered as free and fair elections because they do not fulfill the functions required of them in formal democratic theory (Mavis Puthucheary & Noraini Othman, 2005). Due to that, the opposition claims that this situation happens because those who vote for Barisan Nasional candidates are influenced by the promise of material rewards and are fearful of punishment if they vote for the opposition.

III. VOTING BEHAVIOR IN MALAYSIA

According to Rogers, Malaysians people were not involved in politics during the 1960s. They did not have much interest to participate, especially among villagers (Rogers, M. L., 1992). However, this situation has changed gradually throughout the years. Rogers adds, these changes happened because of a few factors, for instance, growing communal concerns, rising levels of education and exposure to the mass media, organization of the UMNO branch in the community, establishment of ties between kampung leaders and UMNO officials, receipt of numerous benefits under the government's rural development programme and increasing political awareness and concern during the election campaigns. Somjee states that campaigns by candidates as well as by members of a party is an exercise in periodic political accountability by sitting members, and an occasion for putting across

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the relative superiority of the policy proposal of one's party to those proposed by the contestant. Through such practices, more and more voters are politically socialized and inducted into the electoral process. Indirectly, it gives them some basic information and the opportunity to make a political choice. In fact, he also stresses that political parties also depend on businessmen during the election process. Political parties will approach them for funds and assistance in transport as well as materials for propaganda. In order to achieve their mission, the businessmen are promised various kinds of help especially in administrative matters.

Malaysian voters demonstrate an apparent psychological commitment to a political party on the basis of ethnic identity. Most Malays vote on party-based influence, especially in rural areas since they are inclined to vote for the party that they identify with (NSTP Research and Information Services, 1990). Therefore, political party is one of the factors which lead people's participation in politics. The stronger the political parties involved in the elections, the larger the voting turn out. The media has a strong social and cultural impact upon society especially during the election. Mustafa states that Barisan Nasional has controlled the media in order to ensure that people vote for its candidates (Mustafa K. Anuar, 2002). Mass media like television, radio and newspapers mostly has more coverage on Barisan Nasional policies, its contributions and campaigns, and give less exposure on the opposition parties' activities and agenda. Furthermore, Brown also argues that BN intends to control the media by using two methods which are legislative regulation and corporate ownership (Brown. G., 2005). Even though the government made regulatory control by implementing certain acts and introducing permits for the media to function, it is hard for the government to restrict the rise of internet usage among people. Interestingly, the internet was widely used in 1998 after Anwar Ibrahim was sacked from the government. Internet became the medium of information between Anwar's supporters and the broader public.

The newspaper also reflects the qualitative change that has occurred in the electorate. There is a correlation between newspaper and vote-intention. Day after day all newspapers feed a maturing electorate with specific arguments, perspectives and a rationale for its proposed political choice (Somjee, A. H., 1979). In addition, Zaharom also discusses that most of the newspapers that exist in Malaysia are owned by the government. For instance, the News Straits Times, Malay Mail, Berita Harian and Berita Minggu are government-controlled newspapers and their content are released under the government's observation. Even during Anwar Ibrahim's stint in UMNO, he used the New Straits Times' newspaper as his campaign's medium in getting support from people to challenge Ghafar Baba in pursuit of the deputy president of UMNO post (Vatikiotis,

M., 1993). Money is also one of the important factors which influence people to vote. Money is used in order to minimize legislative majorities and form or topple ministries. Financial motives are attributed in public and no one sues anyone for libel (Ratnam, K. J., and Milne, R.S., 1967). Politicians will use money to ensure their success in elections. In addition to that, there are rumors relating to the defection of top-level leaders, of various deals that they had entered to cross the party line and the advent of big money from outside to buy votes. Basically, they use rumours in order to prepare the voters for a possible defeat of their side. They are also used as legitimate weapons in the electoral contest, for instance, using rumours to make the electorate much less influenced than is intended by either side. During the 1964 elections, certain issues became the dominant factors for voters to vote. It influenced voters to vote. Among the most important issues raised during that time were religion, Malay privileges and language. During the 1982 election, the government has introduced a slogan "Clean, Efficiency and Trustworthy" and this slogan captured the attention of electorate (Sankaran Ramanathan & Mohd. Hamdan Adnan, 1998). Barisan Nasional's practices of 3Ms which is known as money, media and machineries to ensure the electorates vote for them in the 2004 election (Tunku Mohar Mokhtar, 2008).

IV. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher used questionnaire and interview methods to evaluate the voting behavior among the settlers in FELDA Chini. This questionnaire is constructed in English, and then translated into Malay as it is the language of the respondents in FELDA Chini areas. This questionnaire consists of two types of questions, which are close and open-ended questions. The two pages questionnaire contained one open-ended question and 17 close-ended questions. Basically, the questionnaire is divided into three major parts. The first part of the questionnaire consists of six demographic questions, which are related to sex, age, marital status, level of education, occupation as well as monthly income. The second part of the questionnaire contains the questions regarding their involvement in politics and factors that lead them to participate in the elections. The third part of questionnaire is about their views on the development of FELDA Chini. This part is also important in order to measure their satisfaction of development in their settlements. Interview will also be conducted. This unstructured interview is an encounter between the researcher and respondents, where the respondents' answers will provide the raw data. 10 interviewees were selected from the sample by using random sampling method. As before, interviewees were selected to reflect age, gender and education proportionately. The unstructured interview was

conducted to support the findings of the questionnaire. In order to support the data, the researcher also analyzed relevant newspapers, journals, books and the internet.

V. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

In the 2008 General Election, there were 12,857 registered voters in DUN Chini and from this number; only 10,145 registered voters were from the FELDA Chini areas. Based on the Election Commission's data, there are 55 localities for Chini State Assembly Seats and it includes Kg Balak, Kg Batu Balik, Kg Arung, Kg Belukar Nangka, Kg Mentiga, Kg Paluh Hinai and others. However, this study is only focusing on the registered voters in FELDA Chini area. As mentioned before, the number of registered voters for this area is quite big. It is hard for the researcher to take all of these voters as respondents. Therefore, the researcher decided to choose only five percent (5%) out of this number through the simple random sampling method. Through this method, all units from the sampling frame have an equal chance to be drawn in the sample. Thus, the total numbers of respondents to answer these questionnaires

are 507 respondents, out of 10,145 registered voters. In order to do this research, 507 questionnaires had been distributed to the selected respondents. This number came from the five percent of the total number of registered voters; 10,145. After one month, the researcher got the feedbacks from the resident assistant. There were 364 responses, but 16 answers could not be accepted because they were not fully completed by the respondents. Thus, the researcher was just left with 348 duly filled questionnaires.

VI. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

For the purpose of this study, all respondents have to answer the questionnaires given. These questions were asked regarding factors that influenced FELDA settlers to vote for a particular political party. As shown in Table 4.10, the following factors explain the reasons for people to be involved in politics;

a) Party Achievement b) Family Influence
c) Dato' Najib's Influence d) Religious Influence e) Interest in Politics f) Appreciation towards the Government g) Candidates' Personality.

Table 4.10: Factors that Influence FELDA Settlers to be involved in Politics

Item	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Not Sure (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	N
1. Party Achievement	23.0	49.7	14.9	1.7	10.6	100
2. Family Influence	9.2	35.6	21.3	19.0	14.9	100
3. Dato' Najib's Influence	19.0	42.0	18.1	7.5	13.5	100
4. Religious Influence	10.3	45.4	23.9	6.6	13.8	100
5. Interest in Politics	9.8	37.6	31.0	8.0	13.5	100
6. Appreciation towards the Government	27	47.1	15.5	2.3	8.0	100
7. Candidate's Personality	14.7	41.1	22.7	7.2	14.4	100

Question 13: "Why did you vote for a particular party and not the other party?"

a) Party Achievement

Item no.1 shows almost 72.7% of the respondents agreed that party achievement is a big influence factor for them to vote for a party in the election. For them, the government is the one responsible to help reduce the number of poverty among them, instead of providing them with good infrastructure and developing many rural areas. The stronger the political parties involved in the elections, the larger the voting turn out. Whereas, 12.3% respondents disagreed that party achievement affects their vote in the election. However, almost 15% of respondents were not sure party achievement may affect their vote in the previous elections.

b) Family

According to item no.2, only 44.8% agreed that family may influence them to cast their votes in election. For the second generation of FELDA settlers, they tend to vote the party that had been voted by their parents. Based on the interview that had been done with young voters, their parents always discussed and advised them to vote for party that they voted for. For them, it is a traditional culture that should be obeyed by them. They should take the responsibility to continue voting for that particular party as they think they are indebted to the ruling party. For them, the amount of agreement between parents and sons varied according to the parents own choice (Himmelweit H.T, Humphreys. P., & Jaeger.M., 1985). However, 33.9% totally disagreed with

this statement. For them, family cannot influence them to vote for a party, but it is their decision to vote for any parties they like. No one including their family could influence and force them to vote for a party they dislike.

c) *Dato' Najib*

The first impression of the researcher was that Dato' Najib is the most influential factor for voters to vote. However, the table shows that only 61% agreed with this. Thus, it can be said that Dato' Najib is not a significant factor to the FELDA settlers' vote in the elections. 18.1% of respondents were not sure whether Dato' Najib might affect their vote and 21% disagreed with this factor. It can be concluded that, the settlers do not really care who they voted for, but take more consideration on the party they vote for. Therefore, as long as the candidate is from the ruling party, they will vote for them. Surprisingly, religion is not the most important factor that influence voters turn out for voting.

d) *Religion*

Based on item no.4, only 55.7% agreed religion is the reason they vote for a party. However, 20.4% of the respondents did not support this statement, while 23.9% were not sure either religion really gives big impact or not to them to cast their vote in the election.

e) *Interested in Politics*

Besides that, according to item no.5, not everyone who voted during the election were interested in politics. This can be proven when 21.55% disagreed with this factor. However, 47.4% agreed that they voted for a party because they were really interested in it. For them, voting was the best way to get involved in politics. 31% of the respondents did not sure whether they vote because they were interested in politics or it was their responsibility to vote in the election.

f) *Express Appreciation towards the Government*

Regarding to the item no.6, there is no doubt for the FELDA settlers to express their appreciation towards the government. Almost 74% respondents agreed with the government's efforts to eradicate poverty among the FELDA settlers through financial aids, plantation and others in order to benefit the FELDA settlers. In fact, they believed that the government is concerned about their needs by providing them with a gift for Hari Raya known as duit hari raya to reduce their burden to prepare for the celebration. Usually, the government provides an amount of RM200- RM400 per person. In 2010, almost 112, 635 of FELDA settlers received RM200- RM400 per person which came up to RM41.82 million (FELDA, 2011). In fact, FELDA settlers are also involved in investment through Koperasi Permodalan FELDA Berhad known as KPF and they received almost 14.2% dividend and bonus annually. Thus, people believe that they are indebted towards the government. Moreover, the government has worked hard to bring FELDA to be a more competitive company for the better future of

FELDA settlers. The good explanation for this statement is the government has successfully brought the country to become one of the developing countries which continuously goes along with the past policy proposed by the five former Prime Ministers before Najib Tun Razak. Only 36 respondents disagreed to express their appreciation to the government.

g) *Candidate*

Candidate's personality is another influential factor for voters to vote. As shown in item no.7, 55.8% respondents agreed that they would consider the candidate's personality before voting for them in the election. This shows that the respondents would evaluate the candidates and chose the best candidate as their representative in their area. In fact, they will vote for someone whom they can trust and fulfill their promises before the elections. However, 79 feedbacks were not sure of the importance of the candidates' personality to cast their vote. They simply voted for those who represented their party at that time. Based on the interview that had been done, many people said that they would look at the personality of the candidate first. They searched for the one who would be a good leader and at the same time cared for their welfare and needs. If the candidates did not possess a good quality as a leader for instance, appear to be unapproachable who just appear during the elections, who did not have good relationship with them and did not care about them, then it would be hard for them to vote for this candidate.

VII. SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Based on the study, the factor that affects the settlers' voting behavior is mostly as an appreciation towards the government since the government has provided them with the development in terms of facilities, health care, education and others. Nowadays, the level of awareness about politics is increasing among the FELDA settlers. It can be inferred that since the FELDA settlers receive direct aid from federal government, they are politically indebted to the ruling party. This is supported by a previous study by Rashila Ramli, who confirms that FELDA is the stronghold of Barisan Nasional. In fact, the settlers are obsessed with this party since they believe that Barisan Nasional has contributed much in their life. The development that has been provided by the government in these areas like facilities and infrastructures, education and economy affect their vote during the election. As a symbol of appreciation towards the government, the settlers have decided to support the government till the end (Rashila Ramli, 2003). Similar to a study by Rashila Ramli in FELDA Jengka 8, FELDA settlers in Chini believe that voting for the government is the best way for them to show their appreciation towards the government that have provided good facilities to them. Interestingly, like other Malaysian voters, most of the respondents in

FELDA Chini voted for a party on the basis of ethnic identity. The party achievement is also the main reason they vote for one party over the others. Just like a study by Marvin, voting is significant for people as it is a way of expressing communal solidarity in which they reaffirm loyalty to the Malay community, to UMNO and to prominent politicians. Moreover, Dato' Najib's influence, the candidate's personality, religion and family influence are also the factors that can be considered to affect their voting behavior. Just like the Rogers' study, FELDA settlers are so much attached to the agent of political socialization. Some of them get involved in politics because of social pressure or desire to be with friends. Discussing political issues with their friends in coffee shop, indirectly gives impact to the way they think and behave in the politics. In fact, for the middle-class parents they are more interested in delivering political topics to their children and they spend some time in doing so (Dawson. K.S., 1980). They tend to discuss politics generally with their children in order to foster their children's participation. Thus, discussing about politics with friends and family members also contribute to voting behaviour. Therefore, the three main factors that affect voting behavior among the settlers in FELDA Chini are; the candidates' personality, the party achievement and their votes represent an appreciation towards the government. These people strongly believe that the government helps them a lot in their lives and they are responsible to pay back by giving fully support to the government or ruling party. Based on the result, the rank of factors that affect voting behavior is; a) Appreciation towards the government (74%) b) The party achievement (72%) c) Dato' Najib's influence (61%) d) Candidate personality (58%) e) Religious influence (55.7%) f) Interest in politics (47.4%) and Family influence (44.8%).

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study suggests that FELDA settlers realized their responsibility as citizens by voting in the elections. Due to that, almost 84.2% of FELDA settlers in FELDA Chini turned out for voting during the 2008 General Election. For them, election is significant because it may draw the future of their children. Moreover, they recognized election as a medium for them to choose a good government to the country at the same time it is the best way to practice their right as citizen by voting the best candidate as their representatives in order to fulfil their needs. Furthermore, they believed that politics is highly significant in their daily life. Therefore, they prefer to vote for a certain party as a sense of gratitude in order to express their appreciation for the government's contribution. Even though they earn a small income, not more than RM1,500 per month; it does not restrict their involvement in the political arena because they think that, they are

politically indebted to the ruling party which encourages most of them to vote for them in the general elections. The second generation of FELDA settlers are highly influenced to vote for the party that are voted by their parents. Some parents who are fanatic with certain political party forced their children to vote for the party that they support. On the other hand, some of them do not really know what the election is all about. They do not know the reason and the significance of voting to them. This situation leads them to vote for the party, not for the candidates that can satisfy their needs. Based on the study, there are three main factors that affect the voting behaviour in FELDA Chini area; the candidates' personality, party achievement and voting as a symbol of appreciation towards the government. Dato' Najib probably is one of the factors, but it does not give a significant impact that may influence people to vote. Thus, Dato' Najib is not the leading factor for them to vote in the election. However, the new technology recently succeeded to attract new generation to participate in political issues. The people today do not only depend on the news on television or newspaper which is deemed to favour the government party but the existence of new technology such as blog and internet access rejuvenate the interest among FELDA settlers to take part in politics.

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