

Ethnic Consciousness or Civic Consciousness: Re-examining Young Chinese Malaysians' Political Decisions and Attributes after the 13th Malaysian General Election

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Abstract

The 13th Malaysia General Election held on 5 May 2013 was concluded with the reinstatement of the ruling party, *Barisan Nasional* (BN) with only 47.38% votes won. The results of the election were then interpreted from multiple perspectives due to the fact that only approximately 24.4% of Chinese Malaysian voted for BN. Certain quarters interpreted the results as an outcome of ethnic politics while some interpreted it as an outcome of increasing civic consciousness. The former argued that the collective shift in Chinese Malaysians' voting decisions were responsible for the huge losses of BN. The latter claimed that the results were an outcome of higher civic awareness among urbanites who were dissatisfied with BN's poor governance. Nevertheless, such conclusions were made based only on election outcomes and might not reflect or took into consideration the rationale behind Chinese voters' collective actions. Recently, a sociological perspective was initiated to understand Chinese Malaysians' political behavior from the rational choice perspective. From this perspective, it is believed that both ethnic and civic consciousness play vital role in shaping Chinese Malaysians voting decision. This paper aims to re-examine the possibility that in a multi-ethnic society, young Chinese Malaysians' voting decision are made based on both ethnic and civic consciousness choices. Data collected after the 2013 general election were used to investigate inter-relationships between civic consciousness and ethnic consciousness and how they affected respondents' political decisions. Findings from this study show that political decisions in a multi-ethnic society are dynamic and rational. Both ethnic consciousness and civic consciousness play significant roles in shaping young Chinese respondents' political behavior.

Keywords: Ethnic consciousness, civic consciousness, Chinese Malaysian, election, political attribute.

Introduction

The 13th Malaysia General Election (MGE) held on 5 May 2013 was concluded with the reinstatement of *Barisan Nasional* (BN) with only 47.38% votes won. On the other hand, the opposition coalition, Pakatan Rakyat (PR), formed by Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) won 89 out of 222 parliamentary seats, 229 out of 505 state seats¹ and reinstated their power as the ruling coalition of Penang, Kelantan and Selangor governments.

The results of the 2013 MGE had been interpreted from multiple perspectives. Certain quarters interpreted the results as an outcome of ethnic politics while some interpreted it as an outcome of increasing civic consciousness. Claims such as the Chinese Malaysian had collectively voted against BN emerged. The perceived Chinese Malaysians' collective action was then referred to as the Chinese tsunami by many BN leaders and Malay mainstream newspaper (Ong, 2013) including the chairman of BN, Najib Tun Razak and some other UMNO leaders. Some Malaysian political commentators such as Calvin Sankaran (2013) argued that the success of PR was mainly due to the Chinese votes. According to him, there was a strong correlation between the percentage of Chinese voters and the percentage of votes PR received. Proponents of this perspective had also tried to justify their claim by referring it to the huge losses of Chinese based political parties within BN such as Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (*Gerakan*) and Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP). PR achieved victories in forty two out of the forty six or 95.65% of the parliamentary seats where Chinese Malaysian formed the largest group of voters. It was believed that only 24.4% of Chinese Malaysian voters voted for BN in the 2013 MGE, a fall of about 20% as compared to the 2008 MGE (Phoon, 2013).

Even so, certain political analysts claimed that the 2013 MGE results have nothing to do with ethnic politics. These analysts described the results as outcomes of BN inability to curtail problems that were caused by their poor governance. There were claims that problems faced by the *rakyat* (people) such as inflation, rising crime rates, corruption, environment and etcetera were not solved by BN government. This had caused the support for BN to dwindle in the 2013 MGE. As such, higher civic consciousness among urbanites was said to have caused BN losses in urban areas. Further analysis from this perspective indicated that most urbanites are middle-class and their economic position has allowed them to be more vocal. At the same time they have access to internet. The internet provided them alternative information. Consequently, proponents of this perspective relate BN losses to urban tsunami (Thock, 2013) (Leong, 2013).

Both interpretations have detrimental effect on Chinese based political parties in the BN coalition. If Chinese collectively voted against BN, it would also mean that they would not support these parties. Similarly, if the urbanites had collectively voted against BN, the position of Chinese based parties in BN would also be in the danger zone since

¹ The state elections for Sabah and Sarawak from East Malaysia were held separately from parliamentary election.

these parties' strongholds were in urban or semi-urban areas. As such, Phoon (2013) believed that there was paradigm shift in Chinese Malaysian voting patterns that might cause the Chinese based political parties in the BN coalition to lose more support in the future.

However, a study by Chin et al. (2015) provides a different thought on the recent voting behaviours among Chinese Malaysian voters. Based on the survey conducted in July 2013, Chin et al. (2015) concluded that Chinese Malaysians' political decisions are made rationally and is dynamic in nature. They will choose a party that can serve them best, either in the form of their ethnic rights and their hope to leave in a society that is well-governed (Chin, Chang, & Wu, Accepted 2015). Currently, Chinese Malaysian may appear to have rejected BN but such trend may change in the future as being rational individuals, their decisions are not static.

Based on the abovementioned background, this study was conducted to further examine the effect of young Chinese Malaysians' ethnic and civic consciousness on their political decisions and attributes. In order to study such effect, this research tries to find out whether there is any relationship between civic consciousness and ethnic consciousness and how far ethnic consciousness and civic consciousness play an important role in affecting young Chinese Malaysians' political attributes.

Past Chinese Malaysians' Political Voting Patterns

When analysing Chinese Malaysians' voting patterns, one of the approaches often used is to consider Chinese Malaysians' voting behaviour as a respond to Malay political hegemony or ethnic politics. Scholars such as Ho Khai Leong (Ho, 2003), K.J. Ratnam (Ratnam, 1967) and Heng Pek Koon (Heng, 1996) made such observation before. This approach relates Chinese Malaysian political decisions to ethnic politics. Ethnic politics is used tactfully and to some extent, it is a rational strategy to be employed by the community. Rational choice theory suggest that individuals select the course of action most likely to incur the greatest gain, while simultaneously minimizing any personal loss in their pursuit of goals and aims (Inglis & Thorpe, 2012). In other words, Chinese Malaysians, whether individually or collectively, is rational and will intentionally vote for different parties or any party that best protect their interest in Malaysia. It is part of their tactful manoeuvre to live in an *ethnicized* society.

One of the 'tactical' collective moves has generated the pendulum effect. Pendulum effect is one of the political phenomena often quoted by political analysts to analyse Chinese Malaysian voting patterns. It refers to collective votes from the Chinese voters that swing back and forth between the ruling BN coalition and oppositions. The pendulum effect was first referred by DAP veteran, Lim Kit Siang to summarize DAP performance in the past general elections (Koh, 2011). Proponents of pendulum effect showed that BN coalition had won more parliamentary seats and higher percentage of votes in the elections held in years 1955 (before independent of Malaya), 1964, 1974, 1982, 1995 and 2004 MGEs, while the percentages of seats and votes obtained by opposition parties were more in the subsequent MGEs- 1959, 1969, 1978, 1986, 1990 and 1999 (Cheah, 2008). The fluctuations of percentages of seats and votes for BN

coalition and opposition are depicted in Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively. The pendulum effect was also referred by some politicians or analysts to explain Chinese voters' pattern in Sabah (Shen, 2011) and Sarawak. The deputy secretary general of SUPP, for example, had optimistically predicted that Chinese votes would swing back to BN in 2011 Sarawak state election after their lost in Sibiu parliamentary by-election months ago (Wong, 2011).

However, some analysts argued that the pendulum effect has gradually declined in Chinese Malaysian voting pattern after the 1990 MGE (Koh, 2011) due to the fact that the percentage of seats won by BN coalition was continuously decreasing from 85.71% in 1982 to 83.26% in 1986, and further dropped to 70.56% in 1990. According to Phoon:

Chinese voters were in favour to opposition in two consecutive elections, while their support to opposition in 2013 was stronger than 2008, pendulum effect no longer happened...(Phoon, 2013)

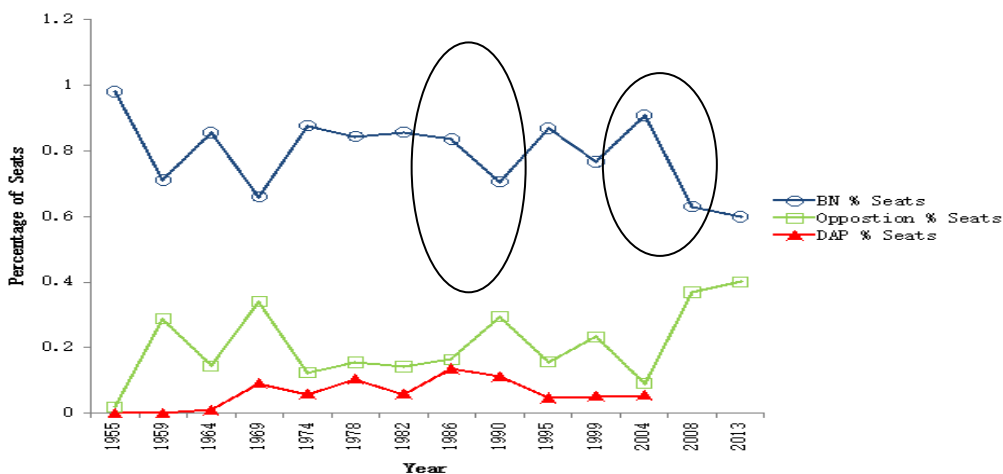


Figure 1. Percentage of seats won by BN coalition, opposition parties and DAP in different MGEs.

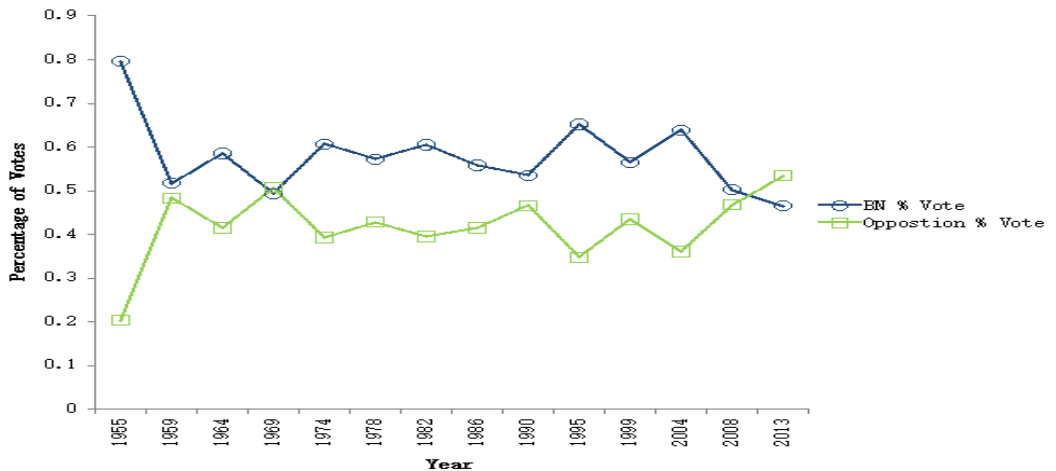


Figure 2. Percentage of votes casted for BN coalition and opposition parties in different MGEs.

Another Chinese Malaysian voting trend that shows that they are rational and knows how to optimize their votes is the split voting strategy. In the Chinese Malaysian context, split voting refers to their inconsistent voting decisions at the parliamentary and state levels (Phoon, 2013). There is a tendency among them to give their vote to a political party for the parliament seat and to another political party for the state seat. Split voting can be interpreted as a collective action by the Chinese voters to maintain their political both BN and the opposition parties. Usually, they would give their votes to opposition parties at national level and ruling BN at the state level. It is a common perception that opposition parties are more vocal and able to protect their interests at parliamentary level (Heng, 1996, pp. 514). Voting the opposition parties would keep BN in check at the federal level. At the state level, they would vote for BN since this coalition would have a higher chance of winning the state election. By supporting BN at the state level, BN would be able to serve them better. Henceforth, it is hoped that by splitting their votes, Chinese Malaysians are able to preserve their interests at both the national and local levels. However, split voting only happens in certain states that Chinese voters are relatively high, such as Penang, Sarawak and Selangor.

James (1996), for example, studied the Sarawak Chinese voting pattern at parliamentary and state levels from 1979 to 1995. The study concluded that Chinese voters in Sarawak had consistently voted for DAP in parliamentary elections, especially in Chinese-majority constituencies, but the same voters rejected DAP at the state level. For instance, DAP successfully won two constituencies in 1982 and 1990 parliamentary elections, and one constituency in 1986 and 1990 MGEs. Subsequently, all DAP candidates were defeated in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1991 state elections² by BN Chinese based party in Sarawak, SUPP candidates (see Table 1). The collective acts of Sarawak Chinese to split their votes for DAP at parliamentary level and for SUPP at state elections has a rational consideration explained by James (1996) as follows:

² Parliamentary election and state election in Sawarak are held separately.

On the one hand, being on the receiving end of discriminatory government policies, DAP's call for the eradication of the bumiputera/non-bumiputera categories is appealing and is what most Chinese demand. Supporting DAP would ensure that the grievances of the community would be heard. On the other hand, the Sarawak Chinese know that, unlike the Chinese-based BN parties in Peninsular Malaysia, which have been completely marginalized by UMNO, SUPP has successfully protected Chinese economic, social and cultural interests in Sarawak. They know that SUPP's strength within the Sarawak BN is dependent on its ability to hold on to the Chinese-majority state constituencies, which in turn give SUPP the role as a powerbroker. They also know that the bulk of economic resources and opportunities distribution is done at the state level, where SUPP is the most effective, and not at the federal level.

Table 1

Performance of DAP (Sarawak) at Parliamentary Elections and State Elections

State Election	No. of Candidates	Seats Won	Parliamentary Election	No. of Candidates	Seats Won
1979	11 (6)	0	1982	5 (4)	2 (2)
1983	7 (5)	0	1986	5 (4)	1 (1)
1987	11 (8)	0	1990	8 (5)	2 (2)
1991	18 (10)	0	1995	6 (4)	1

Source: (James, 1996)

Note. Figures in parentheses refer to candidates standing in Chinese-majority constituencies.

The pendulum and split voting decision are reflecting Chinese Malaysian collective rational voting decision. It is a way to exert their community political rights and power. In order to do so, they tried to balance the support they would provide to both BN and the opposition parties. By referring to the MGE results held from 1974 – 2004, in Peninsular Malaysia, Chinese Malaysians had also divided their votes to BN Chinese-based parties and DAP. Within this period, Chinese Malaysians engaged in the politics of balancing. They needed to support BN Chinese-based parties with the hope that these parties would continue to represent Chinese voices in the ruling consociation coalition. At the same time, they realized the importance of continuing their support to DAP to keep both MCA and *Gerakan* in check. The balancing strategy was practised by the Chinese Malaysians until the extent that they split their votes. They would give their vote to DAP for parliamentary seats and for state seats, they would give it to MCA or *Gerakan* (Wong, 2012).

However, the split voting strategy seems to be ended in the last two MGEs. In the enthusiasm of “Ubah”, Chinese Malaysia has undoubtedly casted their votes for PR, which resulted in the biggest setback of MCA, *Gerakan* and SUPP at the parliamentary and state levels. In 2013 MGE, MCA only succeeded in seven parliamentary constituencies and 11 state seats from 37 and 90 seats contested, respectively. *Gerakan*

won one parliamentary seat and three state seats, and SUPP one parliamentary seat in Sarawak.

Some scholars, such as Wang Gungwu (1981, p. 176) would argue that there was intra-ethnic political fragmentation among Chinese Malayan during pre-independence period. This intra-ethnic political fragmentation took a different form after 1974 MGE where Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia have divided their support to three Chinese-based political parties. The parties were MCA, *Gerakan* and DAP (Ho, 1995). Ho Khai Leong referred the political attitude of MCA as ethnic based consociational democracy, while *Gerakan* represents non-ethnic based consociational democracy within BN coalition. On the other hand, the political attitude of DAP is an example of non-ethnic based antagonism.

However, it should be noted that the intra-ethnic fragmentation occurred because the Chinese community needed consociation and antagonism to protect their interest. Ng (2003) highlighted that Chinese Malaysian had been utilizing one of the two approaches at different times, namely politics of negotiation attributed to the MCA and *Gerakan*, and politics of pressure attributed to the DAP and other opposition parties. For example, some members of *Dong Jiao Zong*³ (persistent critic of the ruling BN coalition) joined *Gerakan* before 1982 MGE to negotiate a better deal for the Chinese community is the best example of the Chinese adopting the negotiation approach. An example of pressure approach were twenty-seven Chinese activists and leaders joined the DAP before the 1990 MGE with the hope to form a two-coalition system. Prior to that, endorsement of the Malaysian Chinese Union Declaration (马来西亚全国华团联合宣言) in 1985 by more than 5000 Chinese groups and associations can be considered as one of the high points in politics of pressure by Chinese Malaysian community.

By referring to the above discussions, the notion that Chinese had voted collectively cannot be denied. Voting patterns such as pendulum voting and split voting reflect such phenomenon. Such voting trends reflect the Chinese mobilization of their collective political power to bargain for their political power. In this context they are rational. However, are their political considerations merely communal or they will consider other factors too? As mentioned, the objective of this study is to examine how far civic consciousness affects young Chinese Malaysian voting decisions too. Could the civic consciousness be an additional factor that is now playing an increasing important role in their voting decision?

Research Methodology

This study used the quantitative data collected by Chin, Chang & Wu (2015) after the 2013 MGE through Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman's online poll portal – MyPoll. This online poll portal has more than 12000 registered poll's participants with more than 90 per cent of them are Chinese and youth below 40 year-old. In the same study, Chin et al. (2015) conducted five focus group discussions to verify the quantitative

³ Dong Zong and Jiao Zong, or collectively called Dong Jiao Zong are two Chinese education NGOs that defend the rights of mother-tongue education in Malaysia.

data and to generate more details on the Chinese Malaysians' political decisions. The online survey was conducted in two stages; each stage took about two weeks within July and August 2013. The two-stage approach was administrated to reduce the memory retention of the respondents. Questions were designed to test respondent's ethnic consciousness in the first stage and focused on civic consciousness in the second stage. All questions related to ethnic consciousness and civic consciousness were measured by using a five point *Likert* scale and respondents were asked to state the level of their agreement on statements that were related to four dimensions of a person's ethnic or civic consciousness, namely identification, boundary, basis to form collective action and tendency to use them to form collective political action.

1913 respondents and 1229 respondents responded the first and second questionnaires, respectively. For validity purpose, only 820 valid Chinese respondents age 17 to 40 years old who attempted both sets of questionnaire and provided consistent demographic information were analysed. This age group was chosen because they will form the largest voter group in the next general election. The Cronbach's alpha for civic consciousness and ethnic consciousness are 0.761 and 0.748, respectively, an indication of good reliability of the questionnaires.

Since the earlier study (Chin, Chang, & Wu, 2015) used sociological approach to understand Chinese Malaysians' political decision as a matter of rational choice, this study employed confirmatory factor analysis to investigate further the inter-relationships between civic consciousness and ethnic consciousness and how they affected Chinese Malaysians' political decision. Further study was done through a two-step clustering technique to identify respondents' features that affect their political decision.

Findings and Discussion

Inter-relationship between Civic Consciousness and Ethnic Consciousness

In order to study the relationships between the consciousness, confirmatory factor analysis was used to portray the basic structure of political decision among Chinese Malaysian respondents based on thirteen factors that have been grouped according to the following categories;

- respondents' socio-demographic data- gender, origin of state, type of residential area, voter registration and age group,
- civic consciousness- civic identification, civic boundary, basis for civic collective action (civic collective action) and tendency to mobilize their civic consciousness to form collective political decision (civic political decision),
- ethnic consciousness- ethnic identification, ethnic boundary, basis to form ethnic collective action (ethnic collection action) and tendency to use their ethnic group to form collective political decision (ethnic political decision).

Varimax rotation resulted in eight significant factors where its KMO measure of sampling adequacy is 0.677 (p-value <0.005). These eight factors can be categorized into three latent components (see Table 2), namely Civic Consciousness, Ethnic Consciousness, and Respondent's Identity.

Analysis show that “Civic Consciousness” is the most important component that influenced the political decision of Chinese youth respondents which accounted for 32.55 % of the variance explained or the total information. The first component consists of factors such as civic consciousness, civic based collective action and civic based political decision. The second most important component represents “Ethnic Consciousness” accounted for 19.94% of the total information includes factors such as ethnic boundary, ethnic based collective action and ethnic based political decision. The third component represents “Respondent’s Identity” accounted for 16.88% of the total information includes factors like status of voter registration and age group. This result revealed that consciousness of a person, either from civic or ethnic play more important role than their physical characteristics in shaping voters’ political decision.

The normalized scores for latent components civic consciousness and ethnic consciousness were then estimated using the following linear models:

Table 2

Three components resulted from factor analysis with Varimax rotation

Factor	Latent Components		
	Component 1: Civic Consciousness	Component 2: Ethnic Consciousness	Component 3: Respondent’s Identity
Civic Collective Action	0.848	0.113	0.009
Civic Political Decision	0.830	0.169	0.059
Civic Identification	0.761	-0.013	0.003
Ethnic Political Decision	0.173	0.798	-0.063
Ethnic Boundary	-0.131	0.784	0.028
Ethnic Collective Action	0.434	0.689	-0.009
Voter’s Registration	0.050	-0.003	0.880
Age Group	0.002	-0.030	0.879
% of Variance Explained	32.55%	19.94%	16.88%

In order to examine the relationship between civic consciousness and ethnic consciousness, the paired samples test was conducted on respondents who acknowledged that they would support Non-Ethnic Based Party (NEBP) and Ethnic Based Party (EBP). Results indicated that the civic consciousness and ethnic consciousness among respondents who preferred NEBP is not significantly different. However, the ethnic consciousness among respondents who preferred EBP is significantly higher than their civic consciousness (see Figure 3). This finding can be visualized by using scatter plot between the normalized civic consciousness scores and normalized ethnic consciousness scores as shown in Figure 4. The plot indicates that the lower the score value, the lower the civic or ethnic consciousness of a respondent and vice versa. It is observed that respondents who supported NEBP generally scattered around the moderate levels of civic and ethnic consciousness with Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.334. On the other hand,

those respondents who preferred EBP showed positive relationship (Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.710) between their civic and ethnic consciousness. The results show that if a respondent supported EBP and has moderate ethnic consciousness, his civic consciousness will be either low or moderate. Their civic consciousness will increase as the ethnic consciousness increased.

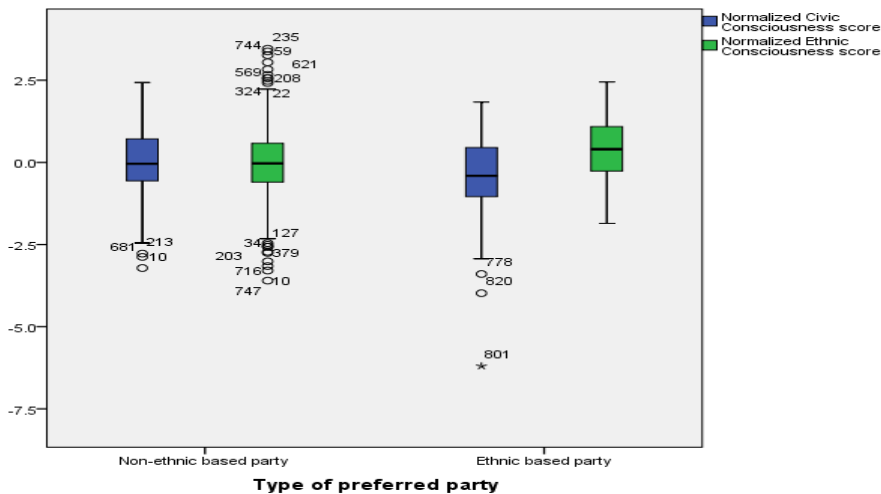


Figure 3. Boxplot for normalized civic consciousness scores and normalized ethnic consciousness scores.

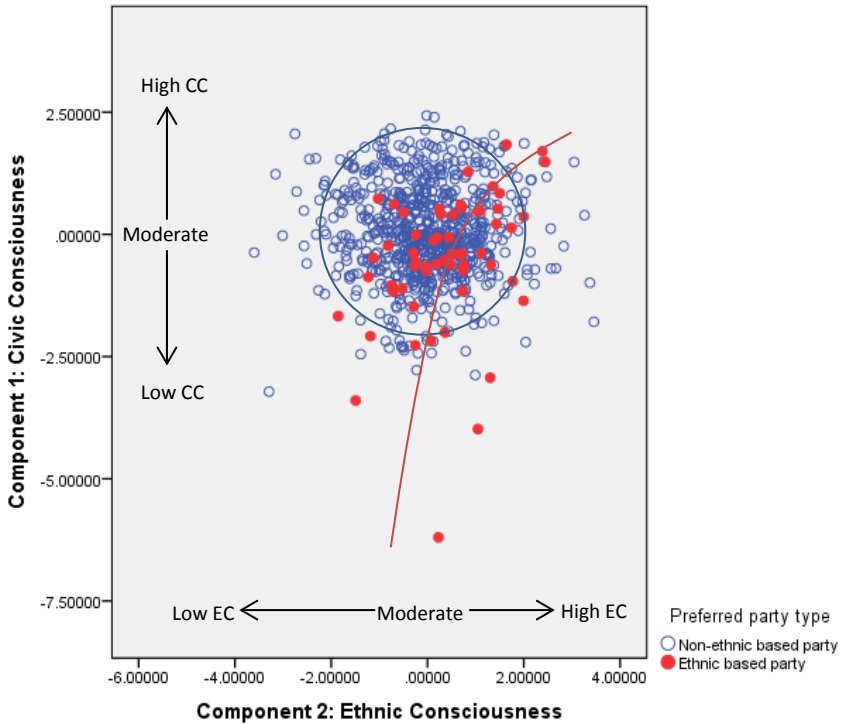


Figure 4. Scatter plot between normalized ethnic consciousness scores and normalized civic consciousness scores.

Further analysis through ANOVA tests (Table 3) indicated that Chinese respondents who supported NEBP were generally having higher level of civic identification than EBP supporter. Therefore, they were more committed to civic based collective action and political decision than EBP supporter. Contrarily, those who supported EBP indicated that they might have similar level of ethnic identification and ethnic collective action to NEBP supporter, but their ethnic boundary and commitment to take political decision based on ethnic priority is stronger than those who supported NEBP.

Table 3

One way ANOVA test for items related to effect of respondents' civic consciousness and ethnic consciousness on their political decisions

	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	p-value	Statistical decision
Civic Identification	72.6	75	14.0	0.000	NEBP>EBP
Civic Boundary	63.1	65	15.7	0.104	NEBP=EBP
Civic Collective Action	77.9	75	13.7	0.003	NEBP>EBP
Civic Political Decision	78.0	75	13.7	0.027	NEBP>EBP
Ethnic Identification	71.0	75	16.4	0.868	NEBP=EBP

Ethnic Boundary	50.6	50	15.1	0.030	NEBP<EBP
Ethnic Collective Action	71.5	70	14.6	0.901	NEBP=EBP
Ethnic Political Decision	62.7	65	16.2	0.006	NEBP<EBP

Dependency on Civic Issues and Ethnic Issues

Dependency between party preferences and some civic and ethnic issues were also investigated to determine whether both issues would affect the respondents' voting decision. Civic issues listed were economy, security, human rights, environmental issue, education, integrity and costs of living. The following hypotheses were set at 0.05 levels of significance.

H_0 : Type of party supported and the given civic factor are independent.

H_1 : Type of party supported and the given civic factor are dependent.

The Chi-Squares test results indicated that there is no statistical difference between respondents' party preference and their perception whether the economy, security, human rights, environment, education and costs of living have been compromised (see Table 4). This means that the both ethnic based party supporter and non-ethnic based party supporter had similar perception on these civic issues. There were 71.7% and 70.7% of the non-ethnic based supporter and ethnic based supporters; respectively felt that our country's economy performance had been compromised. Similarly, 80.1% and 70.7% of the non-ethnic based party supporter and ethnic based party supporter respectively, were not satisfied with the national security issue. Civic issues that the two types of Chinese respondents had no significant difference in their perception were human rights (NEBP 71.3%, EBP 67.2%), environment (NEBP 61.7%, EBP 53.5%), education and costs of living (refer to Figure 5).

The only issue that ethnic based party supporter and non-ethnic based party supporters have significant different perception is the "integrity" issue. As high as 76.8% of the non-ethnic based party supporter felt that national integrity had been compromised while only 63.8% of the ethnic based party supporter expressed the same perception.

Table 4

Chi-squares test between ethnic based party supporter and non-ethnic based party supporter for different civic issues

Civic Factor	% of EBP supporter	% of NEBP supporter	p-value	Decision
Economy	70.7%	71.7%	0.875	EBP=NEBP
Security	70.7%	80.1%	0.089	EBP=NEBP
Human Rights	67.2%	71.3%	0.516	EBP=NEBP
Environment	53.4%	61.7%	0.215	EBP=NEBP
Education	70.7%	74.9%	0.474	EBP=NEBP
Integrity	63.8%	76.8%	0.026	EBP<NEBP
Costs of Living	63.8%	65.7%	0.768	EBP=NEBP

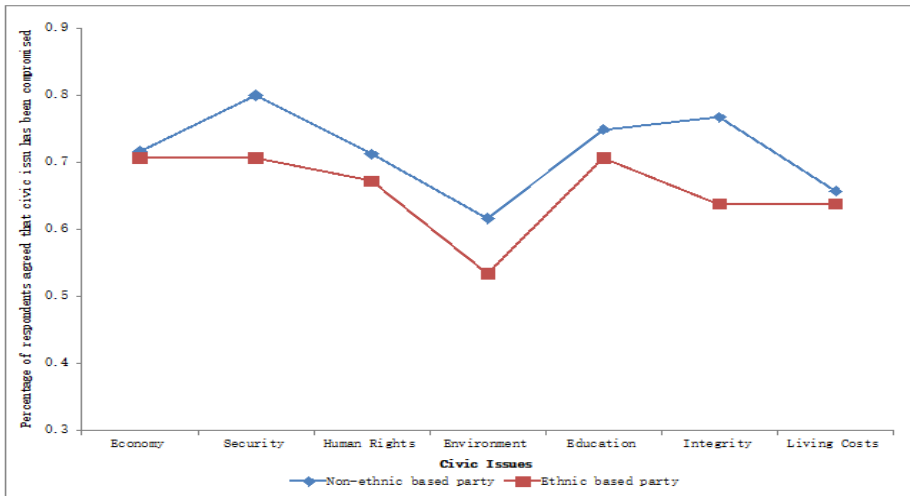


Figure 5. Percentage of respondents agreed that particular civic issue has been compromised.

On the other hand, dependency between type of party preferences and some ethnic issues were also investigated. These ethnic issues are religion, language, culture, economy, political rights, and Chinese education. The formulated hypotheses at 0.05 levels of significance are

H_0 : Type of party supported and the given ethnic issue are independent.

H_1 : Type of party supported and the given ethnic issue are dependent.

Again, the Chi-Squares test results indicated that there is statistically no difference between respondents' party preference and their perception whether their mother tongue, culture, economy opportunity, political rights and education have been compromised (see Table 5). This indicates that both ethnic based party supporter and non-ethnic based party supporter have similar perception on most of the ethnic issues. 35.2% and 31.0% of the non-ethnic based supporter and ethnic based supporter, respectively feel that their ethnic culture has been compromised. Similarly, 44.4% and 44.8% of the non-ethnic based party supporter and ethnic based party supporter respectively, believed that Chinese economy has been compromised as well. Other ethnic related issues that non-ethnic based party supporter and ethnic based party supporter have about the same perception are language (NEBP 48.3%, EBP 55.2%), political rights (NEBP 44.6%, EBP 53.4%) and education (54.6%, 53.4%) (see Figure 6).

The only issue that both ethnic based party supporter and non-ethnic based party supporter have significant difference perception is religion. More than half (63.8%) of the non-ethnic based party supporters felt that their belief and religion had been compromised while only 41.5% of the ethnic based party supporters expressed the same feeling.

Table 5

Chi-squares test between ethnic based party supporter and non-ethnic based party supporter for different ethnic issues

Ethnic Issue	% of EBP supporter	% of NEBP supporter	p-value	Decision
Religion	63.8%	41.5%	0.001	EBP>NEBP
Language	55.2%	48.3%	0.362	EBP=NEBP
Culture	31.0%	35.2%	0.262	EBP=NEBP
Economy	44.8%	44.4%	0.617	EBP=NEBP
Political Rights	53.4%	44.6%	0.389	EBP=NEBP
Chinese Education	53.4%	54.6%	0.330	EBP=NEBP

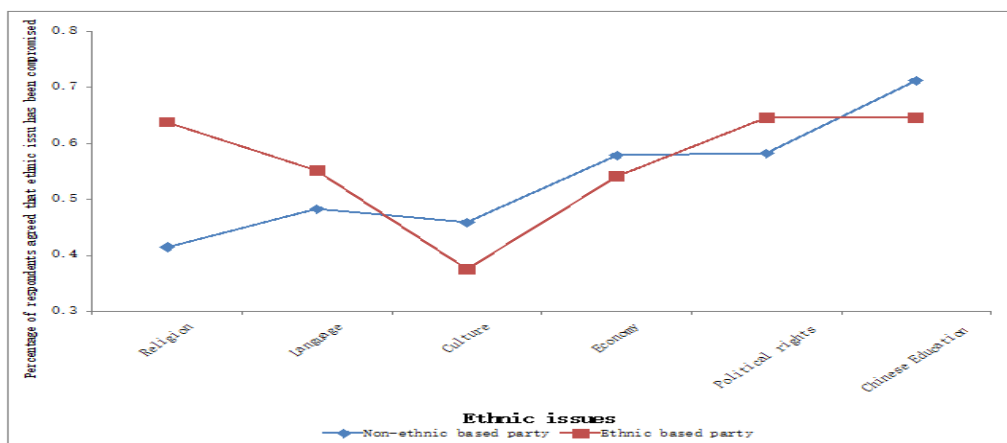


Figure 6. Percentage of respondents agreed that a given ethnic issue has been compromised.

The percentages of ethnic-based party supporter and non-ethnic-based party supporter who agreed that the given issues had been compromised were quite similar, except for issues related religion and integrity. For the religion issue, the number of ethnic-based party supporters who were not satisfied with the current status was significantly higher than the number of non-ethnic-based party supporters. For integrity issue, more non-ethnic-based party supporters are not satisfied with the problems than their counterpart.

There were little differences in term of how both groups of respondents prioritized ethnic issues. EBP supporters prioritized education followed by political rights, religion, language, and economy, while the NEBP supporters prioritized education, political rights economy. For civic related issues, EBP supporters prioritized security which was followed by, education, economy, human rights, integrity, costs of living and environment. NEBP supporters' prioritized the issues more or less the same way except for integrity. It was their second most concerned issue.

Young Chinese Malaysian Political Attributes

One key interest for many political leaders is to know who their potential supporter is. By knowing the potential supporter, it enables the political parties to go back to their drawing board to study their position before attempting to move forward. In order to do so, a two-step clustering technique to classify all respondents into two types of political supporters, namely ethnic based party supporter and non-ethnic based party supporter was used. The clustering results will be able to identify physical characteristics that differentiate political preferences of a respondent.

Figure 7 summarizes the two clusters, with the first cluster consists of 69.5% of the total respondents, and the second cluster consists of 30.5%. Within the first cluster, 70.2% of the respondent indicated that they preferred non-ethnic based party and the remaining would support ethnic based party. All respondents in the second cluster indicated that they would support ethnic based party. The classification of respondents is fairly reliable with average Silhouette measure of cohesion and separation equals to 0.4. Clustering of respondents is based on four physical characteristics of the respondents; in the order of importance are status of voter's registration, age group, gender and type of area stay, i.e. urban area, suburban area and rural area.

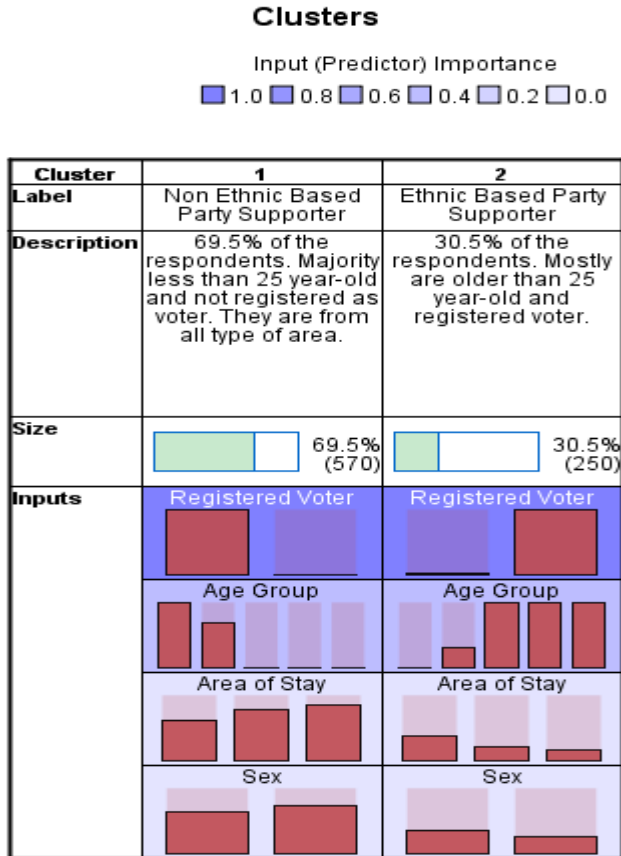


Figure 7. Results from two-step clustering based on respondents' age group, type of area stay, gender, and voter's registration.

Among the physical characteristics selected, only age group and voter's registration are useful in identifying respondent's political decision. Within the non-ethnic based party supporters, most of the respondents are currently less than 25 year-old; 69.2% of respondents aged 21-25 group are in favour to non-ethnic based party and it increased to 100% among respondents below 21 year-old. 98.6% of them are currently not registered as a voter, possibly due to the fact that they have not reached the age to register as voter.

This proves that the younger a respondent is, the stronger their support to non-ethnic based party. This could be an alarming sign to Chinese ethnic based parties in both BN and PR coalitions. As the younger respondents grow and become the largest group of registered voter, political parties such as MCA, *Gerakan*, SUPP and even DAP may not be able to attract young voters' support if they fail to transform to non-ethnic based party.

Contrarily, all respondents who were above 25 year-old were in favour of ethnic based party. Their political awareness was high as all of them are registered voters. Even though many political analysts commented that this age group of voters is the stronghold of PR and they are more concern about issues related to good governance such as corruption, rising crime rates, inflation, environment and etcetera. Chin, Chang & Wu (2015) argued that ethnic consciousness still play an important role in shaping Chinese Malaysians' voting decision. DAP has been perceived as a Chinese based party that can better safeguard their *Chineseness* (Lee, 2010, p. 16). This explains why DAP was able to gain a significant victory in the 2013 MGE even though most of the young Chinese voters preferred ethnic based party.

Conclusion

As the second largest ethnic group in Malaysia, the Chinese Malaysian has always been regarded as the main contender of the dominant Malay in political and economic aspects. In this *ethnicized* political climate, various analytical tools have been used to understand the political attributes of Chinese Malaysian in the past. However, the paradigm shift on political culture occurred in the post 2008 MGE has caused some of these analytical tools to be re-examined.

In such, Chin et al. (2015) together with this paper provide a new analysis framework to understand the post 2008 MGE Chinese Malaysian political attributes. This new approach combined ethnic factor and voters' civic consciousness under the framework of rational choice. Unlike other approaches that emphasized on the analysis of election outcomes, the new approach attempts to understand the social-psycho aspects of Chinese Malaysian.

From the above account, four broad conclusions can be drawn:

1. The respondents have similar ethnic consciousness regardless of their political party preferences, but the level of civic consciousness will determine their political decision.
2. Supporters for non-ethnic based party have higher sense of civic responsibility, whereas supporters for ethnic based party are more obvious on their ethnic boundary.
3. Supporters for ethnic based party and non-ethnic based party have different perceptions on issues related to integrity and religious.
4. Younger respondents are more in favour to non-ethnic based party, while elder respondents tend to support political party that is able to protect their ethnic and civic interests.

Therefore, Chinese Malaysians' political decisions are not fragmented although it appeared to be so in pre-2008 MGE. What appeared to be fragmented voting decision was merely their collective strategy to respond to Malaysia's ethnic politics. The tactical moves caused the fragmentation of their political support. In times (2008 and 2013 MGE) where the ruling political party (BN) was perceived as unable to manage the country well, civic consciousness became prominent and had to a large extent shaped their voting decision. They became aware of the fact that the pendulum and split voting strategies

might not work anymore since they perceived that there were pressing issues in the governance of this country. As a result, being rational voters they opted to support the opposition coalition in the 2008 and 2013 MGE. This would mean that although largely, Malaysia's politics are still ethnic based, there are signs that show civic issues are beginning to dominate Malaysia's political scenario, especially among Chinese community. It is now a major component in the Chinese Malaysian's rational voting equation. Such development could be the effect of an increased in Chinese Malaysian's attachment to Malaysia. Although most of them are descendants of immigrants from China, they do not claim or even associate themselves as China Chinese anymore. Eventually, they would expect that this country is well-governed and this is when civic consciousness will become important. As a result of such rationalization and as mentioned earlier, Chinese's support for certain political party will change according to time. Therefore, Chinese based political parties in Malaysia, either within the BN coalition or PR component parties should reconsider their current strategies. The Chinese Malaysians' voting decisions are not as predictable as before when ethnic factor was prominent.

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