

Examining Factors Contributing Political Participation Among Youths in Kuching, Sarawak

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Abstract

Youth political participation has become an important issue in Malaysia following recent electoral reforms, particularly the implementation of Undi18. The reform lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 and introduced automatic voter registration. This policy added millions of young voters to the electorate. As a result, youth participation has become increasingly important in Malaysian elections. However, concerns remain regarding the level of political engagement among youths. Therefore, this study examines the factors contributing to political participation among youths in Kuching, Sarawak. This study focuses on three factors: political interest, political knowledge, and social media usage. The Civic Voluntarism Model was used as the theoretical foundation. A quantitative research design was applied as data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to youths aged 18 to 20 in Kuching, Sarawak. The respondents were selected from six parliamentary constituencies. A total of 390 responses from six parliamentary constituencies were successfully collected. The data were analysed using Multiple Regression through SPSS. The findings show social media usage significantly influence the youths' political participation ($\beta = 0.278$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, political interest and political knowledge do not show significant relationships with participation. The results suggest that digital platforms play an important role in encouraging youth engagement in politics. These findings provide useful insights for policymakers and political actors to improve youth political participation.

Keywords: contributing factors, political participation, youths, political interest, political knowledge, social media

INTRODUCTION

Received: 1 February 2026

Accepted: 1 March 2026

Published: 30 April 2026

The political scenario in Malaysia has evolved significantly in the past few years due to demographic shifts, legislative amendments, and restructuring political dynamics. From a historical perspective, Malaysia's political environment has been primarily influenced by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and

its coalition, Barisan Nasional (BN), which governed for more than sixty years until 2018. The longstanding power structure was contested in the 2018 GE, resulting in the victory of the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition, which marked a significant shift in Malaysian political dynamics. In the early months of 2020, this coalition disintegrated, resulting in the establishment of new coalitions and political instability. The political scenario has evolved into increasingly fragmented, particularly after the 2022 general election, which resulted in a divided parliament, where no party was able to secure a majority. The separation of opinions has created an environment that encourages the rise of new voices and parties, thereby reflecting a broader range of political beliefs and affiliations within the public (Stiftung, 2024).

The results of both general elections demonstrate that the public is actively involved in political participation, especially in the voting process. Various factors have influenced public engagement, particularly among youths. Approximately 50.48% registered voters in Malaysia are aged between 18 and 39 years old (SPR Malaysia, 2022), representing a substantial voting bloc. In 2019, the implementation of bill of Undi18 represent a significant turning point for Malaysian democracy, as it implemented automatic voter registration and reduced the minimum age to vote from 21 to 18. This change significantly reshapes the voting situation and promotes increased participation among youths in elections (Gibaja, 2022). The policy change aimed to enhance youth engagement in the voting process, leading to approximately 5.8 million new voters in the electorate (Ling & Puyok, 2024).

In November 2022, the first GE that was conducted under this new system saw notable participation from youths, including many first-time voters in the election. This modification increased voter participation and redirected the focus of political parties or coalitions towards attracting younger voters (Stiftung, 2024). The 15th general election revealed that out of 21,173,638 registered voters, 74.7% voted (SPR Malaysia, 2022). Within the total registered voters, 50.48% are individuals aged 18-39 (SPR Malaysia, 2022). In Sarawak, there were 1,943,074 registered voters, of which 61.63% participated in the voting process (SPR Malaysia, 2022). The political situation of Sarawak is distinct from that the Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah in that the state election is not held together with the general election. This scenario contrasts with another states where the voter will vote in both general election and the state election. Sarawak distinguishes itself from other states through its land area and associated electoral challenges, as well as its unique

practice of not holding concurrent state and general election, unlike the remainder of the country (Cheng, 2013).

The 2021 Sarawak state election marked a significant shift in the state's political landscape, with Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) securing a division victory by winning nearly 90% of the seats (Mersat, Puyok, & Zaini, 2024). During the 15th general election, GPS and opposition parties in Sarawak utilised a narrative of moderate autonomy, integrating regionalism with nationalism to sustain national relevance (Ngu, 2023). The tactic was in distinct contrast to the more extreme autonomous aspirations that were proved in the previous election. Oppositional parties performed well in regions with significant Chinese and Dayak populations, highlighting the difficulties associated with the narrative of Sarawak autonomy. Cultural pluralism serves as a fundamental aspect of Sarawak regionalism, suggesting that demands for autonomy may persist or intensify if the central government continues to endorse exclusive ethnoreligious nationalism (Ngu, 2023).

During the 15th general election, Sarawakians demonstrated notable political engagement, marked by shifting patterns of ethnic support. The GPS coalition maintained its control but experienced a decline in support from certain communities, while opposition parties like Sarawak DAP gained ground (Welsh, 2023). The election emphasised the significance of inclusive democratic institution in the integration of minority groups and the reduction of extreme regionalism. Despite these advancements, concerns regarding exclusion and demands for greater autonomy persist in Sarawak, highlighting ongoing tensions between regional and national identities (BTI Index, 2024). The political situation in Sarawak has evolved over the years. Prior to 2018, GPS was part of Barisan Nasional. Sarawak currently is classified as an oppositional state, however, due to support for Pakatan Harapan, GPS remains in the ruling government. Establishing a government with a simple majority is unlikely without the seat counts from GPS and other parties. Chin (2023) indicates that following BN's surrender of power in 2018, it underwent rebranding from the Sarawak chapter of BN to GPS. It represents state nationalism, often referred to as "Sarawak First". The primary focus is on the full rights of the Borneo state as outlined in the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63). Prior to 15th general election, it was anticipated that GPS would obtain more than 25 of 31 seats. In the short tenures of 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022, GPS was instrumental in achieving a parliamentary majority consisting of 19 members of Parliament. Onn (2023) reported that Abang Johari declared that GPS would endorse any Prime Minister candidate who

demonstrates fairness towards Sarawak and recognises and upholds the state's rights as outlined in the MA63.

The situation in Sarawak was examined by the voters, and their aspirations were reflected in the election outcomes. In the 15th general election, the discourse shifted from a call for autonomy to a focus on which leaders or coalitions most effectively represented public opinions (Welsh, 2023). The Sarawak results indicated that while GPS remains stable, it exhibited shortcomings in voting support from specific demographics. The political situation in Sarawak and Malaysia evolved due to changing alliances, voter expectations and increasing youth participation. With the electorate becoming increasingly younger and more diverse, it is essential to comprehend the factors that contributing political participation among youth. Examining political participation among youth in Kuching provided insights into emerging democratic trends, regional sentiments, and the effectiveness of recent electoral reforms, including Undi18.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The younger generation is a vital asset for the nation, expected to take over the responsibilities of the present leaders and shape the future flourishing of the country (Azeh, Yunus, & Yaakob, 2023). In 2019, the government agreed that youths, specifically aged as low as 18, had an interest in politics, a thorough knowledge of political issues, and the willingness to participate in political engagement with wisdom (Allam, Mustaffa, & Ali, 2024). This resulted the implementation of Undi18, which lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 and incorporated approximately 5.8 million new voters into the new voting population (Ling & Puyok, 2024).

Judgement vary on the political decisions of voters of aged 18, who may lack a comprehensive understanding of political issues, have limited understanding of complex issues, and may be shifted by trending topics on social media. However, their participation undeniably contributes to policy choices (Omar, Kasim, & Manap, 2024). In the 12th, 13th, and 14th general elections, youth appeared as a significant age group that impacted the election outcome (Saleh, et al., 2020). This illustrates why youth political participation is important, highlighting the need for an in-depth comprehension of the factors contributing the engagement. A comprehensive analysis of the contributing factors assist the formulation of policies aimed at enhancing political participation among

youths. The youths are pivotal in navigating changes in society (Azis, Pawito, & Setyawan, 2020) and their participation is proof of future involvement (Halim, Azizan, & Mohamad, 2022). The political participation remains a significant issue influenced by low engagement the election system.

In Sarawak, 31 parliamentary seats were challenged during the 15th general election, spanning P.192 to P.222. SPR Malaysia (2022) recorded that the total number of voters in Sarawak was 1,943,074, with 129,034 voters aged 18-20. Out of a total of 1,943,074 registered voters, 1,197,450 cast votes, resulting in a voter turnout of 61.63%. Although half of the total voters participated in the election, the figures for unreturned and rejected ballot papers, which were 4,214 and 14,369 respectively, are concerning.

A closer look of the factors contributing political engagement in Sarawak, specifically in Kuching, facilitates an in-depth review of political patterns and shifts. Voting turnout for all parliamentary seats in Kuching division, was recorded at 63.8% (SPR Malaysia, 2022). Despite over fifty percent of the total voters in Kuching voted, voting turnout for P.195 Bandar Kuching was only 58.4%, representing merely half of 109,710 voters. The largest figure in Sarawak was the 70,074 ballot papers that were issued in P.194 Petra Jaya, with 360 of them not returned. Subsequently, P.198 Puncak Borneo recorded 255 unreturned ballot papers, while P.193 Santubong had 254 unreturned ballots. Kuching division recorded a total of 1,403 unreturned ballots (SPR Malaysia, 2022). Meanwhile, the total number or rejected ballots across all parliamentary seats in Kuching amounts to 3,107 (SPR Malaysia, 2022). The reason is not clear, whether it was accidental or intentional. Rejected ballot refers to ballots that have been not marked correctly, whether unintentionally or deliberately, yet still enter the ballot box (Ismail M. S., 2022). The votes may lack validity for any party, however their counts persist mainly for data analysis.

An in-depth understanding of the political scenery and framework in Malaysia is essential for addressing the concern of youths' political participation. Comprehending the consequences of actions such as voting or spoiling a ballot on government formation and the success of political parties or coalitions will lead voters to approach this issue with significant seriousness. A study indicated that the Malaysian Election Commission should coordinate outreach programs in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Youths and Sports (Allam, Mustafa, & Ali, 2024). This program aims to concentrate on campaigns and efforts that strengthening

understanding of voting, strategically constructed to expand the involvement of youths in collaboration with government. Enhanced political knowledge may result in increased participation in the democratic process (Ismail & Besar, 2024). Understanding knowledge about politics, especially concerning the informational features of democracy, election detailed information, and political party records, is essential for encouraging youths to engage in political activities (Allam, Mustaffa, & Ali, 2024).

Although a possible solution exists for this issue, it remains a significant concern. The outreach program, although suggested as a potential solution, does not ensure participation from the intended participants. Youths find it more accessible to acquire political information through various platforms. Youths particularly first-time voters, utilise a range of platforms, both traditional and digital, to acquire political information (Allam, Mustaffa, & Ali, 2024).

The use of new media for knowledge acquisition is thought to enhance online political participation, leading media users, especially the youths, to cultivate media literacy skills (Allam, Mustaffa, & Ali, 2024). Social media functions as a medium for youths to access information and disseminate political opinions (Azis, Pawito, & Setyawan, 2020). Research indicates significant relationships among social media usage, perceived information quality, political interest, political literacy, and political participation among youths (Halim, Azizan, & Mohamad, 2022). However studies claim that excessive exposure negatively impacts the interests and political tendencies of the younger demographic (Feezell, 2019).

A study indicated that limited political literacy and insufficient information processing skills lead to new voters experiencing uncertainty in their voting decisions, political understanding, and comprehension of political issues (Yi, Moshidi, & Latif, 2023). Youth perceptions of information influence their participation voting. Information disseminated and shared via social media may be classified as misinformation. From the point that youths perceive inaccurate information, it can lead to significant consequences for politics. It functions as a medium for political engagement and information dissemination, however, it also facilitates the spread of misinformation and hinder the political participation (Yi, Moshidi, & Latif, 2023).

Thus, this study is developed aims to examine the factors contributing the youths' political participation in Kuching, Sarawak. Addressing these issues is crucial for

promoting a democratic procedure that is inclusive and participatory in Malaysia, particularly in Kuching, Sarawak. Determining the factors will provide insights into the youths' way of making decisions and how these factors determine political participation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Civic Voluntarism Model

Political participation is essential in democratic societies, allowing individuals to influence policy and governance. Understanding the factors that drive individuals to participate in politics presents significant challenges. The Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) addresses political participation by highlighting the importance of resources, engagement, and recruitment in influencing political decisions (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). The CVM, established by Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, proposes that political participation is influenced by three key factors which are resources, engagement, and recruitment.

Resources include time, financial assets, civic skills, all of which are essential for political participation (Ostrander, Kindler, & Bryan, 2021). Engagement refers to individual's connection to political issues or perspectives, which motivates participation (Brady, Lehman, & Verba, 2016). Recruitment refers to the process of being solicited or motivated to participate by others, often via social networks or organisations (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Verba et al. (1995) noted that although individuals have equal opportunities to influence government, participation remains optional, leading to considerable disparities in participation levels. The CVM defined the rationale behind the observed changes (Alhassan, Siakwa, Kumi-Kyereme, & Wombeogo, 2020). The CVM suggested that individuals with resources conducive to political participation, as well as those motivated to engage, are likely to demonstrate higher levels of participation in politics compared to those who lack such resources and motivation. Furthermore, individuals with motivation and necessary resources for political participation are expected to engage more frequently when they have access to political recruitment

networks, which facilitate citizen mobilisation through explicit campaigns for political action (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

This model was selected as the foundation of this study because it provided a comprehensive explanation of the differences in levels of political participation within society and the fundamental causes for these differences. The CVM indicated that the presence or absence of these characteristics can significantly influenced or hindered political participation. Individuals with insufficient knowledge may exhibit reduced willingness to engage in political activities, despite recruitment initiatives. This study utilised CVM to guide and provide insights, serving as a foundation for understanding the factors contributing to political participation in Kuching. Multiple studies have looked into the applicability of this theory in diverse contexts.

Ostrander, Kindler, & Bryan (2021) examine political participation among social workers in the United States and Switzerland. Their findings show that professional environments can encourage civic engagement when individuals receive institutional support and opportunities for mobilisation. A similar argument is presented by Hoefer (2006), who notes that social workers often become politically involved through professional organisations. These organisations help develop civic skills and provide recruitment channels. Both studies support the CVM assumption that institutional networks can increase political participation.

Despite this, some scholars highlight structural barriers that limit participation. Levin-Waldman (2012) argued that economic inequality reduces political participation. Individuals with fewer financial and educational resources often face difficulties in participating in political activities. This perspective supports the resource component of the CVM but also shows that structural inequality affects the distribution of those resources. In addition, McClendon, Lane, Ostrander, and Smith (2020) suggest that the effectiveness of the CVM may differ across contexts. Political institutions and social environments can influence how the model operates in practice.

Another important factor discussed in the literature is social capital. Maan (2011) finds that community trust and social networks increase participation in Dutch local politics. Strong community ties can encourage individuals to become involved in political processes. Similarly, Sandoval and Jennings (2012) show that civic organisations help mobilise Latino immigrants in the United States. These organisations provide

information, encouragement, and opportunities for engagement. Both studies reinforce the recruitment element of the CVM.

Demographic inequality is also discussed as an important issue. Fullerton and Stern (2013) identify differences in participation based on gender and race. Their study shows that structural and cultural barriers can limit participation among certain groups. These findings suggest that unequal access to civic resources and networks can create participation gaps.

Studies have also explored political participation in digital environments. Oni, Mbarka, & Ayo (2017) examine e-democracy participation using the Theory of Reasoned Action. They find that socioeconomic status and digital literacy influence online political engagement. Similarly, Fanea-Ivanovici & Barber (2023) apply the CVM to political crowdfunding. Their study shows that digital platforms can encourage civic participation through online communities and financial contributions. Overall, the literature shows that political participation is shaped by resources, networks, and recruitment mechanisms. Studies as Ostrander, Kindler, & Bryan (2021) and Hoefer (2006) support the explanatory strength of the CVM. However, scholars such as Levin-Waldman (2012) and Fullerton and Stern (2013) highlight the impact of structural inequality. Meanwhile, studies show that digital platforms are changing the ways individuals participate in politics. These findings suggest that the CVM remains a useful framework, but it must also consider broader social and technological changes.

Political Participation

Numerous studies have outlined the literature on political participation. This matter is not new and has been researched by numerous scholars globally. Political participation is essential for democratic societies, enabling individuals to engage in the political process and gain influence on decision-making. Political participation is defined differently by many scholars. Each scholar has categorized the participation into classification or model and consist of different types or levels.

Early scholars often viewed participation primarily through voting behaviour. Downs (1957) argued that voting is central democracy because it allows citizens to influence leadership and public policy. In this view, voting represents the core mechanism through which citizens exercise political power. However, later scholars argued that

political participation extends beyond voting alone. Verba and Nie (1972) broadened this understanding by identifying four levels of participation. These include voting, campaign activities, communal involvement, and contacting public officials. Their framework shows that participation can take different forms and levels of engagement. Similarly, Mibrath and Goel (1977) proposed a hierarchy of participation consisting of spectators, transitional participants, and gladiators. Spectators are passive citizens who only vote or follow political news. Transitional participants engage occasionally, such as attending meetings or contacting officials. Gladiators represent highly active individuals who campaign, protest, or run for office. This model highlights the unequal distribution of political activity among citizens.

Other scholars categorised participation based on the nature of political action. Barnes and Kaase (1979) distinguished between conventional and unconventional participation. Conventional participation includes voting and lawful protest, while unconventional participation involves actions such as civil disobedience and radical protest. This distinction suggests that political participation may occur both within and outside formal institutional channels. Several scholars also emphasised the collective dimension of participation. Dahl (1989) viewed voting as a form of collective decision-making within democratic systems. Correspondingly, Huntington (1991) argued that voting provides a formal and structured mechanism for citizens to express their preferences. Both perspectives highlight the institutional role of elections in maintaining democratic governance.

Later studies attempted to organise participation into hierarchy levels. Rush (1992) classified participation into passive, intermediate, and maximal levels. Passive participation includes activities such as voting or following political news. Intermediate participation involves campaigning or contacting representatives. Maximal participation refers to more intensive engagement such as activism or holding political office. Likewise, Lijphart (1997) categorised participation into minimal, moderate, and maximal forms, ranging from voting to leadership roles. These classifications show that political participation exists along a spectrum of engagement rather than a single activity.

Further debates also consider the institutional context of participation. Marien, Hooghe, and Quintelier (2010) emphasise that voting remains a fundamental act of political participation, although it represents only one dimension of civic engagement. Meanwhile, Deth (2014) distinguishes between institutionalised and non-institutionalised

participation. Institutionalised forms include voting, joining political parties, and contacting representatives. Non-institutionalised forms include protests, petitions, and boycotts. Also, Theocharis and Deth (2016) argue that non-institutional participation offers greater flexibility and often emerges in response to contemporary political issues. Generally, the literature shows that political participation has evolved from a narrow focus on voting to a broader understanding that includes various formal and informal activities. Therefore, this study will adopt Rush's (1992) definition of political participation, which is characterised by the level of voting.

Political Participation Among Youths

Research on youth political participation shows that young people engaged in politics through different channels. These include voting, activism, and digital participation. Earlier studies often portrayed youth as politically disengaged. However, more recent research challenges this assumption. Several studies highlight increasing youth participation in elections. Pew Research Centre (2021) reports that youth voter turnout in the United States surpassed 50 percent in 2020. This marked a significant increase compared with previous elections. The finding suggests that young voters remain politically interested when issues directly affect them. Similarly, Chu (2022) shows that Malaysia's Undi18 reform expanded youth participation by lowering the voting age to 18. The reform added about 5.8 million new voters. This institutional change demonstrates how electoral reforms can reshape youth political involvement.

Beyond voting, youth participation also occurs through social movements. CIRCLE (2020) and Wahlstrom et al. (2019) document youth mobilisation in climate protests such as Fridays for Future. These movements show that young people are willing to engage in collective action on global issues. In a similar context, Lim (2019) highlights the role of social media during the Hong Kong protests. Digital platforms enabled youth to organise and communicate rapidly. These studies suggest that youth participation increasingly takes place outside traditional political institutions.

Youth activism has also influenced political change in several contexts. Kausch (2013) argues that youth activism played an important role during Tunisia's 2011 revolution. Youth groups contributed to the transformation of the political system. Meanwhile, the British Youth Council (2020) emphasises the importance of youth representation in policymaking. Their study highlights the role of youth consultations and

advisory programmes. Together, these findings show that youth participation can extend from street mobilisation to formal governance processes. Several studies focus on youth political engagement after recent electoral reforms. Khosla (2019) observes the growth of youth-led political organisations in India, which offers a regional comparison. In Malaysia, Abdullah & Anuar (2018) and Jun (2022) highlight the importance of social media during GE14. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were widely used for political mobilisation and discussion. Similarly, Sarok & Azahar (2017) find that a significant proportion of Sarawak youth engage in political discussion online. This indicates that digital platforms have become key spaces for youth political discourse.

Research also points to geographical differences in participation. Welsh (2023) finds that urban youth generally show higher levels of participation compared with rural youth. However, the gap remains a challenge for political inclusivity. In Sarawak, Dzulkifly (2021) reports that although Undi18 expanded the voter base, logistical issues in areas such as Kuching still affected turnout. Earlier work by Bujang (2012) also shows that youth activism in Sarawak can influence local political debates, as seen in campaigns against the SAVE Rivers dam projects. More recent studies examine youth political behaviour after the implementation of Undi18. Zaidi (2021) and Hassim et al. (2020) argue that the new generation of voters is more politically aware. However, their voting behaviour may differ from older voters. Studies by Azmi & Chinnasamy (2019) and Azhar (2022) further show that youth participation during GE14 and GE15 became more fragmented and issue-based. This reflects the changing nature of youth political engagement.

Local political dynamics also shaped youth participation. Besar (2023) notes that voting patterns in Sarawak often reflect ethnic identity, development concerns, and trust in leadership. Similarly, Chin (2018) highlights political competition in Kuching, particularly between DAP and SUPP, which influences Chinese youth voting patterns. Finally, Yi et al. (2023) argue that political knowledge and peer influence are important factors affecting youth voting readiness.

In addition, Naim & Sani (2024) observe that political discourse among youth in Kuching increasingly takes place through social media. Thus, the literature shows that youth political participation is multi-dimensional. It includes voting, activism, and digital engagement. While electoral reforms such as Undi18 have expanded youth participation, other factors such as social media, political knowledge, and regional context also play

important roles. Previous studies indicate that political participation arises from multiple factors. These factors either influence or hinder political participation, with the outcomes evident in election results.

Factors Contributing Political Participation

Political participation is essential for a functioning democracy, as it enables society to actively engage in the political process and influence decisions that societies and country. Analysing the factors that influences participation is crucial for policymakers and researchers aiming to improve public engagement and uphold the democratic integrity of the political system. The review on previous studies of each of the contributing factors will be summarise under each point.

1. Political Interest

Political interest is widely recognised as a key factor influencing political participation. Many scholars argue that individuals who are more interested in politics are more likely to engage in political activities. Carpini and Keeter (1996) show that individuals with higher political knowledge and interest are more likely to vote and participate in civic activities. Their study highlights the importance of informed citizenship in strengthening democratic participation. Similarly, Verba et al. (1995) emphasise the role of social interaction in shaping political interest. Discussions with peers and participation in social networks can increase political awareness and encourage engagement. Supporting this view, Galston (2001) links political interest with internal political efficacy. Individuals who feel capable of understanding politics are more likely to vote, campaign, or take part in civic activities.

Some scholars argue that political interest may be a stronger predictor of participation than structural factors. Prior (2010) finds that political interest predicts voting behaviour better than socioeconomic status or education. This challenges the assumption that participation mainly depends on demographic advantages. Similarly, Hooghe & Marien (2013) show that political interest is associated with both electoral and protest participation across Europe. Early political socialisation also shapes long-term engagement. Jennings & Niemi (1981) argue that political interest developed during youth often continues into adulthood through the influence of family and schools. In addition, Norris (2002) finds that in countries such as India and Brazil, strong political

interest can drive participation even when economic or educational barriers exist. This suggests that motivation and awareness may sometimes overcome structural limitations.

Recent studies highlight the growing influence of digital environments in shaping political interest. Rauf et al. (2016) identify a strong relationship between political interest and online participation among university students. Similarly, Halim et al. (2021) find that political interest strongly influences online political engagement among Malaysian youths. Ting & Ahmad also show that youths from lower-income backgrounds actively discuss political issues online with peers and educators, reflecting increasing political awareness.

Moreover, Halim et al. (2022) demonstrate that political interest significantly predicts participation among youths aged 18 to 35. Finally, Ong and Rahmad (2023) argue that strong public interest in political issues can mobilise civil society organisations and stimulate collective action. Generally, the literature shows that political interest functions as both a motivational and enabling factor in political participation.

2. Political Knowledge

Political knowledge is often identified as an important factor influencing political participation. Early studies show that individuals with higher political knowledge tend to participate more actively in political processes. Verba & Nie (1972) found that political knowledge is positively related to activities such as contacting public officials and engaging in political discussions. Likewise, Zaller (1992) argues that politically informed individuals often influence others within their social networks, which can increase participation at the community level. Carpini & Keeter (1996) further demonstrate that political knowledge strengthens political efficacy, promotes ideological stability, and encourages greater participation in civic and political activities.

However, scholars also highlight that political knowledge is unevenly distributed across society. Nie et al. (1996) show that knowledge gaps are often shaped by education, income, and access to resources. This suggests that structural inequalities can limit citizens' ability to acquire political information. At the same time, knowledge remains important for democratic decision-making. Lupia & McCubins (1998) argue that politically informed individuals are better able to evaluate candidates and policy issues when making voting decisions. Supporting this finding, Galston (2001) finds that political

knowledge strengthens both internal and external political efficacy. Dalton (2008) also demonstrates that in Europe, higher levels of political knowledge are associated with both voting and protest participation.

Recent research highlights the relevance of political knowledge in the digital era and among youth. Rauf et al. (2017) find that political knowledge moderates the relationship between access to online political information and youth participation on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, Abdullah et al. (2022) show that political knowledge influences political information-seeking behaviour among university students. Studies focusing on Malaysian youths also confirm this relationship. Halim et al. (2021) and Halim et al. (2022) find that political knowledge significantly predicts political participation among young people. However, Yi et al. (2023) observe that in Kuching, political knowledge mainly increases youth readiness to vote rather than actual turnout. This suggests that knowledge alone may not fully translate into participation without supportive political or institutional conditions.

3. Social Media Usage

Social media has become an important platform for political engagement, particularly among young people. Early studies show that digital platforms can increase political knowledge and participation. Boulianne (2015) finds that social media exposure is positively associated with political knowledge and civic engagement. Similarly, Vitak et al. (2011) report that social media users are more likely to participate in political activities such as signing petitions or joining demonstrations. Social media also enables political mobilisation by reducing traditional barriers. Flanagin et al. (2012) demonstrate how digital networks helped organise large-scale protests, including movements such as the Arab Spring and Black Lives Matter. These findings suggest that social media can function as a new channel for political mobilisation.

Other scholars emphasise the role of social media in shaping political discussion and public opinion. Zúñiga et al. (2012) argue that online discussions encourage political debate and increase participation among minority groups. Political actors have also adapted to this environment. Vergeer et al. (2013) show that political campaigns increasingly use social media for outreach, targeted communication, and voter mobilisation. At the same time, peer influence plays a role in shaping political behaviour. Bond et al. (2012) demonstrate that politically shared content on social media can

influence voting decisions through social networks. Zulkifly et al. (2018) find that political satire on social media attracts public attention because of its accessibility and freedom of expression.

Recent research highlights the growing influence of social media on youth political participation in Malaysia. Akmal & Salman (2015) report that new media usage is significantly associated with both online and offline political participation among urban youth. Likewise, Allam et al. (2024) find that social media helps young Malaysian voters gain political knowledge, particularly those with initially low political interest. Halim et al. (2022) also confirm a significant relationship between social media usage and political participation among Malaysian youths. Despite these positive effects, the literature suggests that social media mainly facilitates access to information and mobilisation. Participation still depends on other factors such as political interest, knowledge, and institutional opportunities.

METHODOLOGY

The study implemented the Onion Model (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007), comprising six layers which are philosophy, approach, strategies, choices, time horizon, and techniques and procedures. This study element began with the layer of research philosophy. This study employed positivism, utilizing statistical analysis to test hypotheses and measure variables (Shannon-Baker, 2023).

The second layer is the approach of this study. This study employed deductive reasoning in the formulation of questions, objectives, and hypotheses. The subsequent layer encompassed the employed strategies. An online form utilised as a strategy for the questionnaire that distributed to the youths in Kuching, Sarawak. This fourth layer employed mono method research for this study. Quantitative data was collected, facilitating statistical analysis as its primary source.

The fifth layer is the time horizon and this study employed cross-sectional time horizon. The data was collected at a specific time, allowing for simultaneous analysis of variables to identify trends within a defined group (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The final layer is the techniques and procedures. This study utilised a questionnaire for data

collection and the data collected was examined by using Multiple Regression in the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software.

This study analysed youth aged 18-20 in Kuching, Sarawak alligning with the voter age classification by the Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya Malaysia. Kuching was chosen because it has the highest number of registered youth voters (35,052) in Sarawak, thus offering a valuable data source. The inclusion of both urban (P.194 Petra Jaya) and suburban (P.198 Puncak Borneo) constituencies facilitates the collection of diverse and representative data.

This study required a sample size of 381, as determined by Krejcie and Morgan's Table (1970), from a total population of 35,052 youth voters aged 18-20 in Kuching, Sarawak. the population comprised individuals from six parliamentary constituencies which are Mas Gading, Santubong, Petra Jaya, Bandar Kuching, Stampin, and Puncak Borneo. The data originated from the 15th general election, indicated that individuals aged 18-20 constituted 6.58% of Malaysia's 21.17 million registered voters.

A stratified random sampling method was employed, which ensured that generalisations drawn from the sample to the population are statistically valid (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). This study utilised stratified random sampling, a method that segments the population into strata dan randomly selects samples from each stratum (Stephen & Lanre, 2018). This method ensured representation of all subgroups and minimising sampling bias. Proportional allocation distributed a sample size of 381 among

six parliamentary constituencies in Kuching according to their respective population sizes. The allocation was using formula as follow:

$$n_{ss} = (N_{sp} / N) \times n$$

The figure from each constituency was inserted into the formula, resulting in the following proportional allocation:

Table 1:
Summary of Proportional Allocation

Parliamentary Constituency	Allocation
P.192 Mas Gading	33
P.193 Santubong	71
P. 194 Petra Jaya	89
P. 195 Bandar Kuching	42
P. 196 Stampin	89
P. 198 Puncak Borneo	57
Total	381

FINDINGS

The targeted sample size for this study was 381 respondents. Upon collection data, a total of 390 respondents able to be collected from the questionnaire distributed among six parliamentary constituencies. This number exceeded the targeted sample size. Therefore, the data were suitable for statistical analysis. Multiple Regression was then used to examine the contributing factors of political participation among youths in Kuching, Sarawak. The analysis was computed through SPSS and the results are as follow:

Table 2:
Multiple Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of Estimate
1	0.654	0.428	0.419	0.19003

The model explains 42.8% of the variance in political participation among youth in Kuching, Sarawak. This means that the contributing factors collectively have a

moderately strong impact on the political participation. The model is statistically significant, $F(6, 383) = 47.729$, $p < 0.001$, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.419. which indicates the approximately 42% of the variances.

Table 3:
ANOVA Table

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significant
1	Regression	10.341	6	1.724	47.729	0.000
	Residual	13.831	383	0.036		
	Total	24.172	389			

The regression model is statistically significant, conforming that at least one independent variable influences political participation.

Table 4:
Multiple Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardised B	Coefficients Standard Error	Standardised Coefficients Beta	t	Significant
1	(Constant)	3.680	0.391		9.421	0.000
	Political Interest	-0.027	0.052	-0.025	-0.511	0.610
	Political Knowledge	0.068	0.052	0.061	1.296	0.196
	Social Media Usage	0.291	0.052	0.278	5.592	0.000

The multiple regression results show different effects of the three predictors on political participation. Political interest does not have a significant relationship with political participation ($\beta = -0.25$, $p = 0.610$) The coefficient is small and negative, indicating that political interest alone does not influence participation in this model. Political knowledge is also not a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.061$, $p = 0.196$). Although the relationship is positive, the significance level is above 0.05. This suggests that having political knowledge does not necessarily lead to active political participation among respondents. In contrast, social media usage shows a significant positive effect on political participation ($\beta = 0.278$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that higher use of social media increases the likelihood of political engagement.

DISCUSSION

This study examined three factors that may influence youth political participation in Kuching, Sarawak. These factors are political interest, political knowledge, and social media usage. The results show that social media usage significantly influences political participation. However, political interest and political knowledge do not show a significant relationship with political participation.

The findings show that political interest does not significantly influence political participation. This result contrasts with several previous studies. For example, Carpini & Keeter (1996) found that individuals with higher political interest are more likely to participate in civic activities. Prior (2010) also reported that political interest strongly predicts voting behaviour. In addition, Hooghe and Marien (2013) found that political interest encourages both voting and protest participation. However, the result of this study suggests that interest alone may not lead to real participation. Youth may be interested in politics but still choose not to participate actively. This may be influenced by other factors such as political trust, motivation, or access to political opportunities.

Similarly, political knowledge was not found to significantly influence political participation. This finding differs from several earlier studies. Verba & Nie (1972) and Carpini & Keeter (1996) argued that political knowledge increases civic engagement and political involvement. Galston (2001) also stated that political knowledge strengthens political efficacy and participation. However, the result of this study suggests that knowledge alone may not be enough to motivate participation. Youth may understand political issues but remain passive in political activities. This finding is somewhat consistent with Yi et al. (2023), who found that political knowledge mainly increases youth readiness to vote rather than actual participation.

In contrast, social media usage shows a significant positive relationship with political participation. This finding supports many previous studies. Boulianne (2015) found that social media exposure is positively associated with civic engagement. Vitak et al. (2011) also reported that social media users are more likely to take part in political activities. Similarly, Akmal and Salman (2015) found that new media usage increases political participation among Malaysian youths. Social media allows young people to access political information easily. It also provides a platform for discussion and

mobilisation. This may explain why social media plays a stronger role in influencing youth participation compared to political interest and knowledge.

Generally, the findings suggest that digital platforms play an important role in shaping youth political participation. While political interest and knowledge remain important elements, they may not directly lead to participation without suitable channels. Social media provides these channels by making political information more accessible and interactive. Therefore, social media may act as an important bridge between political awareness and actual participation among youths in Kuching.

CONCLUSION

This study is significant due to its diverse contributions to multiple stakeholders, including academia, youths, policymakers, and political parties. This study contributes to the field of political science by filling gaps in the literature regarding youth political participation, specifically within the Kuching parliamentary constituencies. This study either supports or disagrees with existing theories by presenting empirical evidence regarding the factors that contributing youth engagement, thereby establishing a basis for future studies. This study provides valuable insights through real life data and perspective from the youths, enhancing the understanding of how political interest, knowledge and social media usage contributing electoral behaviour.

This study is crucial for youths as it discusses the primary factors that contributing political participation. Recognizing the patterns will enhance youth's understanding and enable them to make significant contributions to democracy. This study offered empirical insights for policymakers to develop and execute effective initiatives, including voter education programs and digital public engagement campaign. This study further assists in pinpointing essential legal or policy measures to enhance participation, especially through platforms that engaged youths. The findings informed policies that address the challenges, ensuring the strategies to increase voter turnout is practical.

Ultimately, political parties can gain insights from this study to enhance the engagement with youths. Identifying effective outreach platforms such as social media and analysing trends enables parties to develop targeted campaigns that address specific concerns and enhance voter turnout. This study provided insights that assist parties in

refining their messaging, engagement strategies, and grassroots initiatives. This study also provided a solid ground for understanding and improving youths' political participation, serving as a significant resource for various sectors.

Acknowledgements

The authors express gratitude to the respondents who willingly completed the questionnaire, which will contribute significantly to the successful completion of this study.

Funding

This paper has no funding.

Author contributions

All authors in this article contributed significantly to the report writings.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest associated to this publication.

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