

VOTERS' PREFERENCES: POSSIBLE CONSIDERATIONS ELECTING REPRESENTATIVE FOR DEVELOPMENT IN CONSTITUENCY

Glenn Achang Henry¹, Abdul Muzhaffar Adenan², Elizabeth Caroline Augustine³, & Nur Aida Kipli⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Sarawak, Malaysia

*E-mail: glennachanghenry99@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of a constituency relies on a representative elected in an election. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the possible considerations used by voters to elect their representatives to foster development in their constituencies. This paper was written based on an analysis of literature significantly related to voters' preferences in electing their representatives. This paper also attempts to find out the characteristics of representatives that might have influence voters' preferences to elect them. It also seeks to figure out if the attribute of representatives elected contributed to the development in the constituencies. The findings led to suggestions for the qualities that a representative should possess to bring major changes to the constituency that he or she is representing, as well as the types of changes that voters want to see in their area in the future. It is hoped that representatives can bring sustainable development within the communities and in the constituencies. This is consistent and following United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

2. METHODOLOGY

The results and discussion of this paper are based on a review of the literature from both local and abroad. Analysis of related literature on voters' preferences and related keywords was performed using articles from the year 2010 to 2021. Materials such as books, published articles, journal articles, dissertations papers, websites, and other relevant sources regarding voters' preferences in electing their representatives and constituencies' development were analyzed.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Voters commonly have their preferences and perceptions towards those candidates who compete in their constituencies. It happens because the community is trying to discuss among themselves who and why should they vote for their chosen candidates. Narani and Merican (2020) stated that candidates' preferences can be determined by their actions within the community which shows their true characters. Meaning to say, candidates who play his or her role well and are excellent will determine their guaranteed constituency. A representative of the constituency should show the people not only through speeches, but actions, contributions, and self-carriage. These are very important character to convince the community of voters that they are electing the right representative. It can be whether the age group of candidates, education attainment, family background or lineage, and political party that a candidate is representing. Wong (2000) regarded age as a common measure when voters electing a candidate.

One of the first things voters want to know about a candidate is his/her age. This is because age is synonym with maturity and experiences. Voters in some constituencies may prefer young representatives as they may think that young representative will have new fresh ideas, be more energetic, more creative, and more dynamic. Others may prefer older representatives as they may give weightage on experience compared to young fresh candidates. For instance, Syed Saddiq is a young representative of the Muar constituency (Cho, 2021). A few constituencies had also elected young representatives during the last election. The voter's decision may also be influenced by the level of education of the candidate (Narani & Merican, 2020). Candidate with higher education is seen to be capable to lead and commonly associated with better decision making. According to Davies (1965) family plays an important role and main source in forming an individual's political personality, Chin (2018) highlighted Musa who was the former chief minister of Sabah, and his brother, Anifah Aman, was Malaysia's foreign minister came from one of Sabah's most prominent political families. This also can be seen among some of the ministers where their family background secures their positions and offices. Ufen (2008) claimed that voters prefer a candidate from a political party that is stable and strongly associated with civil and/or religious organizations. In the hope that the elected representative will bring development to their areas, voters believe that such characteristics play a significant part in electing their representative.

Voters' perceptions are still there to judge candidates based on their demographic preferences. This is the dilemma that we see among voters, when a candidate's appraisal, prediction, thoughts, and views can be easily inferred merely by looking at their demographic preferences. It is a norm for political parties to place a candidate at a given constituency based on most of the population. Voters tend to vote for their candidates based on their race. This trend has been practiced for quite some time and Chin (2018) even highlighted this matter in his writings especially about the election in East Malaysia. It demonstrates that certain constituency representatives are elected on the ground that because they are of the same race. A great leader is a person who can understand people's motivations and involving people's participation with the intention of individual's or group of community's needs and interests. A representative needs to give chance for community involvement through community empowerment. Hence, great development can be contributed by representatives to the constituencies when they have great leadership skills. The basic goal is to win the hearts of the people. This is achieved by being one with the community and get involved with the community activities and programs. They can voice out the constituencies' issues to the authorities and then delegate their power to subordinates such as Head of Village or District Officer in providing basic infrastructure such as proper road access, treated, and cleaned water supplies, and reliable electricity supplies to the society. Other than that, it is also important for a representative to make and carrying out or implement decisions he or she made for his or her constituency (Sørensen, 2020).

Professionalism can be related to the practice of integrity. The practices of professionalism have a great impact in making a difference which led to the trustworthiness of the people (Schneider, 2019). It is the role of the representatives to act professionally and most importantly impartially. At the same time to exhibit and uphold equality in the community by treating all as one without bias. Communication skill is vital which everyone needs to have to communicate with each other. A representative of a constituency must possess the ability to talk to his people. People will easily understand, get the trust, and follow if a representative can understand the community at the first move or act. Kawa and Wojtasik (2013) explain that the function of communication creates contact among actors of the electoral process in which

non-intentional messages and communication channels will influence the decisions of voters. Interaction between a candidate and the voters must be established. Without communication, it is hard to deliver the message to the people and this may lead to less favorable votes during an election. Hence, a representative should adapt comprehensible speeches to their voters' linguistic skills as doing so make their speeches less complicated and this facilitates effective communication especially when their voters are relatively less educated (Lin & Osnabrügge, 2018). Most importantly, the candidate must 'walk his/her talk' after being elected.

Representative in a constituency who have been elected by the community is the voice of the community. It is whether through the good intention of establishing a "common good" to the community, clearing issues or problems, and protect the welfare and integrity of the people (Kurtbas, 2015). Being a representative, he or she must voluntarily take huge responsibilities to investigate the needs, welfare, and problems in the constituency. The representatives of constituencies must act as the voice for the people. The whole responsibility of representatives where they should uphold the right of the people to get better welfare and development in their constituencies. It is the responsibility of the representatives to their best to strive to serve the community in their constituencies, rather than accrue power or take control to them. A representative should possess principles that are following servant leadership principles. Representatives who have a better position with wide working experience in community involvement can be factors of a higher chance to win (Narani & Merican, 2020). A people's representative should uphold the people's welfare. They must involve themselves with the community and this should be their first move. A candidate should not only show himself or herself to the community during the election period when campaigning, but they should start from the beginning where first impression and gaining people's trust and heart is the first move. A candidate or representative must know the people or community which he or she is representing.

The development of constituency is a vital aspect that needs to be investigated and it is the most concern matter by most communities. Constituency development is a transformation of an area that is being led by the elected representative. The term 'development' refers to ways taken to enhance socio-economic, and environmental change in an area of a place (Abuiyada, 2018). Development does not happen in a short period, but it takes time to create the change through its process. Whereas an area or we call it the area of a district are places that were represented by each of its Members of Parliamentary (Federal Level) or in state-level it refers to the State Legislative Assembly, and this is referring to the constituency (UK Parliament, n.d.). Every constituency does have its representatives that are responsible for the constituency's development. Narani and Merican (2020) explain that positive feedback on development in constituencies has shown the community that their representatives are strongly applying the "heart of the people" principle. Development is most thirst by communities, especially in the rural areas. It is the most important factor that must be assessed. It may be a benchmark used by the communities to elect their representatives. Therefore, elected representatives need to start to create transformation in their constituencies, otherwise, they will not be elected in the next election due to a bad track record.

Besides, physical development is crucial to be provided in a rural area to ensure the accessibility to an urban standard (Omar, Omar, Kamaludin, Othman, & Yusoff, 2018) and not depriving the communities of among common infrastructures such as access roads, clean water supplies, reliable electric supply, schools, agriculture schemes, reliable internet connection and many other aspects consistent with United Nation Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

This is where the role of the representative comes in to think forward on parts that can and should be improved, enhanced, and acted promptly. It is good if representatives can meet all seventeen UN SDGs (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>) in the constituencies they are representing. It seems that there are about eight SDGs that are directly connected to the roles played by representatives in the constituencies. SDG No.1 is to end poverty in all of its forms, SDG No.3 is to promote healthy lives and well-being for all ages, SDG No.4 is to provide inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities, SDG No.6 is to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation, SDG No.7 is to provide everyone with affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy, SDG No. 9 promotes resilient infrastructure, inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and innovation; SDG No. 11 makes human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable; and SDG No. 16 promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provides access to justice, and builds effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. It would need worth electing a representative that can meet these SDGs in their constituencies. The community will be able to see and observe that they have elected the right representative for their constituency from this point on.

4. CONCLUSION

It is essential to conduct an empirical study to verify and determine should the considerations as discussed are the basis used by voters to elect their representatives to ensure development in the constituencies. It is good to conduct the study particularly in rural areas in East Malaysia because it is still lacking in terms of development as compared to West Malaysia. Then later to analyse the representative elected against the development in the constituency. Whether or if a representative helps in the development of the constituency for which he or she is elected.

5. REFERENCES

- Abuiyada, R. (2018). Traditional development theories have failed to address the needs of most people at grassroots levels concerning GAD. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 9(9), 115-119.
- Chin, J. (2018). Sabah and Sarawak in the 14th General Election 2018 (GE14): Local factors and state nationalism. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 37(3), 173-192.
- Davies, J. C. (1965). The family's role in political socialization. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 361(1), 10-19.
- Kurtbaşı, İ. (2015). The factors influencing voting preferences in local elections “An empirical study”. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*.
- Lin, N., & Osnabrügge, M. (2018). Making comprehensible speeches when your constituents need them. *Research & Politics*, 5(3), 2053168018795598.
- Narani, J. S. B., & Merican, F. H. M. B. W. (2020). *Voter's acceptance and preferences of candidates in Sarawak election 2016: A case study of Jemoreng and Daro constituencies*. Retrieved from <https://www.scitepress.org/Papers/2018/99308/99308.pdf>.
- Omar, D., Omar, K. A., Kamaludin, Z., Othman, S., & Yusoff, Z. M. (2018). Rural development and the level of public facilities provided for youth in Malaysia. *Planning Malaysia*, 16(7).
- Schneider, M. T. (2019). *Are less trustworthy candidates more likely to make it through to elected office?*

- Sørensen, E. (2020). *Interactive political leadership: The role of politicians in the age of governance*. Oxford University Press.
- Turska-Kawa, A., & Wojtasik, W. (2013). The communication function of elections. *Communication Today*, 1(2013), 36-47.
- Ufen, A. (2008). Political party and party system institutionalization in Southeast Asia: Lessons for democratic consolidation in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. *Pacific Review*, 21(3), 327-350.
- UK Parliament. (n.d.). Constituencies. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/constituencies/>
- United Nations. (n.d.). *Sustainable Development Goals*. Retrieved from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- Wong, J. S. (2000). The effects of age and political exposure on the development of party identification among Asian American and Latino immigrants in the United States. *Political Behavior*, 22(4), 341-371.