

Predicting Efficacy and Dominance in Political Conversations: Impact of Demographic Characteristics

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ABSTRACT

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In modern democracy, political participation of citizens has liberating outcomes because it is a political system based on representative government. However, there is a widespread political apathy among youths. The study examined the influence of ethnicity and family background in shaping the efficacy and dominance in political conversations of university students. Survey data from 257 students in a Malaysian university were analysed. In the study, the students reported moderate efficacy and dominance in political conversations, of about 60 percent. The results showed that male students have higher efficacy and openness in political conversations than female students. The results also indicated differences by ethnic group in that the Malay and Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous students reported higher levels of efficacy and dominance in political conversations than other ethnic groups. Having family members who are actively involved in politics seem to have some impact on the dominance of the students in political conversations. The findings suggest the family background influences confidence and participation in political discourse.

Keywords:

Efficacy, political conversations,
democracy, political participation

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1. Introduction

In a democracy, political participation of citizens has liberating outcomes because modern democracy is rooted in the idea of involvement of citizens – regardless of status – in the affairs of the state. Democracy is a political system where citizens surrender their rights to rule through representation that they choose through an open election system (see [1] on fair election). A healthy democracy is constituted by three pillars which are the rule of law, competitive public opinion, and independent media. Because democracy is about the rule of people through representation, democracy can only be considered vibrant if it represents a wide spectrum of opinions. To have a wide spectrum of opinions, the political system needs to encourage people's voices through media, political parties and interest groups.

Relatedly, the concept of political participation is crucial in the realisation of a vibrant democracy. There are various forms of political participation, ranging from direct involvement in

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political oriented activities such as campaigning and advocacy to indirect involvement through talking and conversing about politics. Conversation about politics is an elementary form of political participation mainly because talking is a social engagement. Research has shown that the more citizens are engaged in political discussion the more likely they are to be involved in political action such as voting and voluntary activism. [2]

Political conversation also allows citizens to construct their identities and political beliefs. This is because “through everyday political talk, citizens construct their identities, achieve mutual understanding, produce public reason, form considered opinions, and produce rules and resources for deliberate democracy” [3]. It is through political talk that citizens and youth, especially, enlarge their perspectives about political matters and learn to make sound political judgements [4].

When studying about political conversation, researchers typically focused on two aspects: dominance in political discussion and perceived political efficacy. On political discussions, deliberative conversation is defined as “openness to conflict, no-dominance, the use of clear and logical argument, and mutual comprehension” [4]. The size of a social network does not influence deliberative conversation but the openness of political conversations depends on the network composition of peers [4]. Network heterogeneity is divided into discussions with like-minded individuals (“safe” discussion) and non-like-minded individuals (“dangerous” discussion) [5]. The like-mindedness of conversation partners on political issues influences the topics broached in the conversations and the openness in which issues are discussed. It is expected that individuals are more open in their political views when conversing with like-minded individuals. However, it is disagreements in political views which produce a better understanding of political affairs, but the sad outcome is that when participants feel that there will be conflicts, they avoid engaging in online political activities [6].

Another aspect of desirable political conversation is perceived political efficacy. Political efficacy or the confidence of participating in political discussions also depends on political expertise. Political expertise refers to the level of political knowledge, which encompasses knowledge of historical contexts and contemporary issues. Frequency of political discussion and network size are positively correlated with political knowledge and participation [5]. In sum, the literature shows that some factors which influence quality of deliberative conversations are network size, network heterogeneity and political expertise because all these add up to the efficacy that citizens have on their ability to engage in deliberative conversations. [4]

Some studies have been conducted on political efficacy and dominance in political conversations among university students in Malaysia. For example, a small-scale study among 47 linguistics students found uncertainty in political efficacy and avoidance of conflict in political conversations [7]. Efficacy and openness in political conversations were correlated in that university students with greater efficacy in forming considered political opinions tended to be more open in political discussions whereas those who were unsure of their views tended to abstain from engaging in political talk and become apolitical. In effect, the university students hardly engaged in deliberative conversations on political issues with their peers because the average network size for political conversations was five (range of 1 to 10). When they do engage in political talk, it was mostly with those from the same ethnic group – perhaps because they would share certain political views. The study also found that political efficacy was not influenced by media use, political knowledge of current issues and network size. Of all the media sources, online newspapers is the preferred source to obtain updates on national and community issues, evident in their greater familiarity with 1MDB and BR1M rather than Consumer Price Index (CPI) and gerrymandering in election because the newspapers hardly give attention to the latter. When the researchers conducted a larger scale study on 305 university students comprising largely social science

students, the reliance on online newspapers for news on community or national issues was confirmed [8]. Being in the social science discipline, most of the students knew the concepts of 1MDB and BR1M but admitted that they did not know their context in politics. Insofar as political efficacy and dominance are concerned, these studies have indicated moderate levels among the university students but little is known about the factors that influence political participation. The impetus for the study comes from an interest to investigate the extent to which young people talk about politics with their peers in Malaysia, and the factors that influence the activeness of their political participation.

The study examined the influence of demographic characteristics on perceived efficacy and dominance in political conversations of students in a Malaysian university. The term “politics” is used loosely here, but generally, it refers to a collective understanding that politics entails competition over power, prestige and resources. The term “politics” is not restricted to politicians and political parties and their competition for dominance in public spheres.

2. The Study

The survey of efficacy and dominance in political conversations was carried out in a Malaysian university. The respondents of the study were 257 social science students in their first to third year of their degree programme. The average age of the respondents was 22.3 years old (range of 21 to 27). A majority of them were female (81.32%). Their ethnic composition is as follows: Malay (46.30%), Chinese (26.46%), Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous (21.40%), Indian (1.17%), and others (4.67%). Their father’s highest education level was used to estimate the socio-economic status of the family. About 40% of the respondents’ fathers did not complete the full years of free education provided in Malaysia, which is up to Form 5: 23.73% had primary education up to Primary 6; and 17.12% had Form 3 qualifications. A total of 31.91% of the respondents had Form 5 education, 9.73% Form 6, Matriculation or Diploma qualification, and 14.40% had a degree qualification. There were a number of missing responses, which could be because the parent had passed away or had left the family.

Table 1
 Demographic characteristics of respondents (N=257)

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	209
	Male	48
Ethnic group	Malay	119
	Chinese	68
	Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous	55
	Indian	3
	Others	12
	Father’s education	Primary 6 or lower
	Form 3	44
	Form 5	82
	Form 6, Matriculation or Diploma	25
	Degree and above	37
	No information	8
Political involvement of family members	Yes	94
	No	163

The survey was conducted using an adapted questionnaire [4]. For the purpose of this study, data were obtained on the following demographic characteristics: age, gender, ethnic group, parents' educational qualifications, parents' job, and political involvement of family members. Respondents whose family members were actively involved in politics are expected to have higher political efficacy levels than those who did not have family members involved in politics.

The constructs focussed on in the questionnaire were perceived efficacy and dominance in participating in political conversations. Three questions were posed on efficacy in participating in political conversations. Respondents were asked whether they were capable of participating effectively in group discussions about important political issues, engaging in political action, and whether they could think clearly about politics. Eight questions were posed on dominance in participating in political conversations. Using conflict style measures [4, 9], respondents were asked to recall a recent conversation about a political issue that they have had with a friend. They were asked to try to remember the topic of the conversation, what was said, what the other person said, and what they thought and felt. Then they were asked to answer a number of questions based on how they interacted during this political conversation. Examples of questions were "I dominated the other person" (conversational dominance), "I expressed my positions clearly and directly" (clarity of opinions) and "I understood the reasons behind the other person's views" (comprehension of opposing views).

In the questionnaire, a five-point Likert scale was used for all the items (1 for Strongly Disagree, 2 for Disagree, 3 for Neutral, 4 for Agree, 5 for Strongly Agree). Since the university students were more proficient in Malay than English, the adapted questionnaire [4] was translated into Malay by a Malay language lecturer.

The survey was conducted in the first half of 2017. Students were informed of the purpose of the study, and requested to participate in the study. They were told that their participation was voluntary and those who did not wish to participate in the study either did not take the questionnaire or return it. The questionnaires were distributed during lectures and collected upon completion.

The data were keyed in, and the dataset was checked for missing responses. One questionnaire was eliminated, leaving 257 respondents for the analysis. Frequencies, means and percentages were calculated for demographic characteristics, political dominance and perceived efficacy in participating in political conversations (shown in Tables 5 to 8). For the computation of the mean score for perceived efficacy in participating in political conversations, the scores for the third item was reversed before the mean score was calculated.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Frequency of Political Conversations

The results showed that the 257 respondents in the study did not have frequent discussions on political issues with friends. As much as 38.5% reported that they did not remember how often; this is closer to a nil answer rather than a high frequency (Table 2). Only 21% of the respondents had political conversations once a week or more. The others had infrequent political conversations, for example, 16.0% and 7.8% talked about political issues with their friends once every two and four months respectively.

The respondents did not have a big network for their conversations on politics, as shown by the results in Table 3. A majority of them (86.7%) had five or less friends to converse on political issues. The common number of friends was two to five. However, there was a small group (6.0%) who

frequently engaged in conversations on politics, as they had 10 or more conversation partners for talking about politics.

Table 2
 Frequency of discussions on political issues with friends

Frequency of political conversations	Frequency	Percentage
Don't know	99	38.5%
Less than once every 4 months	43	16.7%
Once every 4 months	20	7.8%
Once every 2 months	41	16.0%
Once a week	46	17.9%
Once a day	8	3.1%
More than once a day	0	0%
Total respondents	257	100%

Table 3
 Number of friends to have conversations on politics

Number of friends	Frequency	Percentage
1	17	6.9%
2	55	22.2%
3	58	23.4%
4	43	17.3%
5	42	16.9%
6	10	4.0%
7	6	2.4%
8	1	0.4%
9	1	0.4%
10 or more	15	6.0%
Total	248	99.9%

Notes:

1. The total percentage does not add up to exactly 100.0% due to rounding off
2. Some respondents did not answer this question and the N for the calculation of percentages is 248.

Table 4
 Mean score for network heterogeneity of respondents for political conversations

Ethnicity of respondents	Mean score
Malay respondents	2.81
Chinese respondents	3.25
Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous respondents	2.47
Others	3.82
Overall mean	2.85

Notes:

1. The mean was calculated using 1 for Strongly Disagree, 2 for Disagree, 3 for Neutral, 4 for Agree, 5 for Strongly Agree
2. The statement in the questionnaire was "I usually discuss politics with people of the same ethnic, social, and economic background as myself."

Most of their conversation partners were with people of the same ethnic, social and economic background as themselves (Table 4). The results show that the Chinese respondents reported marginal positive agreement with this statement in the questionnaire (3.25) but the Malay and Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous respondents marginally disagreed (2.81 and 2.47 respectively). This means that the Chinese respondents tended to talk about politics with Chinese people who were similar to them in their socio-economic background. The Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous respondents were the most likely to have a heterogeneous network for political conversations, more than the Malay respondents.

3.2 Perceived Efficacy in Engaging in Political Conversations

Table 5 shows the results on the respondents' perceived efficacy in engaging in political conversations. Interestingly, the respondents felt more capable of engaging in political action (3.68) than in participating effectively in discussions about important political issues (2.86). However, the participants marginally disagreed that they could not think straight about politics, regardless of how much they read or talked about the issues (mean score of 2.69). This indicates that they could think about politics to some extent but they would not consider themselves to be effective in expressing their views in conversations on political issues. What is more important is that while the respondents might not fully comprehend an issue or the context of the issue, they might get involved in political action. Their participation in political action could be prompted by the participation of their peers.

Table 5

Frequency and percentages of students' responses on efficacy in political conversations

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
1. I am capable of participating effectively in group discussions about important political issues.	16 (6.2%)	59 (23.0%)	132 (51.4%)	45 (17.5%)	5 (1.9%)	2.86
2. As an individual citizen, I am able to engage in political action.	4 (1.6%)	10 (3.9%)	90 (35.0%)	112 (43.6%)	41 (15.9%)	3.68
3. I can't think straight about politics, regardless of how much I read or talk about the issues.	18 (7.0%)	95 (37.0%)	94 (36.6%)	48 (18.7%)	2 (0.8%)	2.69

Notes:

1. The mean was calculated using 1 for Strongly Disagree, 2 for Disagree, 3 for Neutral, 4 for Agree, 5 for Strongly Agree
2. Some percentages do not add up to exactly 100.0% due to rounding off

The results were further analysed to find out the influence of demographic characteristics on perceived efficacy. T-tests, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and correlation tests were run accordingly. Table 6 shows that there were no significant differences in the perceived efficacy of the respondents in political conversations according to gender and political involvement of family members. There was also no correlation between perceived efficacy and their socio-economic status, estimated using their father's educational qualification. However, there were significant differences between group means as determined by a one-way ANOVA for ethnic group [$F(4,256)=2.46, p=.005$]. For this analysis, the Indian respondents and others were grouped together because the number was too small. A comparison of the average sum of scores for ethnic groups show that the Chinese respondents had the highest level of perceived efficacy (10.10),

followed by Malay (9.82), Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous (9.76), but the Others was the highest (11.42). When grouped together, the *Bumiputra* ethnic category (which encompasses the Malay and Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous) showed lower perceived efficacy than the Chinese and Others.

Table 6

Influence of demographic characteristics on respondents' perceived efficacy in participating in political conversations

Family background		Average sum of scores	Percentage of total score of 15	Statistical test results
Gender	Female (n=209)	9.67	64.47	t-test p=0.215
	Male (n=48)	10.58	70.53	
Ethnic group	Malay (n=119)	9.82	65.47	One-way ANOVA F=3.054*
	Chinese (n=68)	10.10	67.33	
	Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous (n=55)	9.76	65.51	
	Others (n=15)	11.42	76.13	
Father's educational qualification	Primary 6 and below (n=61)	9.87	65.80	Correlation r=-0.1
	Form 3 (n=44)	10.25	68.33	
	Form 5 (n=82)	9.70	64.67	
	Form 6, Diploma, Matriculation (n=25)	10.00	66.67	
	Degree and above (n=37)	9.32	62.13	
	Not stated (n=8)	10.88	72.53	
Political involvement of family	Involved (n=94)	9.87	65.80	t-test p=0.884
	Not involved (n=163)	9.83	65.53	

Notes:

- *Significant at $p < 0.05$
- ANOVA: The critical value for $F = 2.46$ for $p < .05$, $F = 3.51$ for $p < .01$
- The average sum of scores for political efficacy is calculated using this formula:

$$\frac{\text{Sum of responses for 3 items}}{\text{Total number of respondents in that category}} =$$
- The percentage of total score for political efficacy is calculated using this formula:

$$\frac{\text{Average sum of scores}}{15} \times 100\% =$$
 15 (which is 3 items multiplied by maximum of 5 for the Likert scale responses)

To present a more comprehensible result on the respondents' level of political efficacy, the average sum of scores were computed as a percentage of the maximum possible score (which is 15 obtained from a maximum of 5 points for each item). The political efficacy of the respondents was between 60 and 70 percent, which is moderate. The respondents felt that they were somewhat capable of participating in group discussions about political issues and engaging in political action. In fact, 35-50% of the respondents chose the neutral option for the three items (Table 5). To check whether the neutral responses were affecting the results, another set of analyses was conducted without the neutral options, but the results on the mean score showing agreement or disagreement with the items were similar to those reported in Table 5. However, the large number of respondents choosing the neutral option is a phenomenon which needs to be investigated in further studies through the use of interviews to find out their particular contexts and reasons for their undecided stance.

3.3 Dominance in Political Conversations

The construct is dominance in political conversations and the results show a continuum from openness to dominance. In the rest of this section, the term “openness” will be used if the mean scores are below three for clarity. Dominance in political discussions was measured using four constructs: conversational dominance, comprehension of opposing views, clarity of opinions, and logic/reason in political talk. Table 7 shows that the respondents were reasonable interactants in political conversations. They were not overbearing in political conversations, but presented clear opinions supported by logical reasoning, and they could see from political issues from their interactants’ perspectives.

Table 7

Frequency and percentage of responses on political dominance in political conversations

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Conversational dominance						
1. I dominated the other person.	18 (7.0%)	97 (37.7%)	110 (42.8%)	27 (10.5%)	5 (2.0%)	2.63
2. I was a bit overbearing.	30 (11.7%)	122 (47.5%)	82 (31.9%)	22 (8.6%)	1 (0.4%)	2.39
Comprehension of opposing views						
3. I understood the reasons behind the other person’s views.	1 (0.4%)	13 (5.1%)	88 (34.2%)	130 (50.6%)	25 (9.7%)	3.64
4. I recognised the values underlying the other person’s point of view.	2 (0.8%)	11 (4.3%)	100 (38.9%)	130 (50.6%)	14 (5.4%)	3.56
Clarity of opinions						
5. I was very explicit about my opinions.	2 (0.8%)	32 (12.4%)	89 (34.6%)	117 (45.5%)	17 (6.6%)	3.45
6. I expressed my positions clearly and directly.	5 (2.0%)	21 (8.2%)	93 (36.2%)	118 (45.9%)	20 (7.8%)	3.49
Logic/reason in political talk						
7. I presented sensible arguments in support of my views.	3 (1.2%)	19 (7.4%)	97 (37.9%)	126 (49.2%)	11 (4.3%)	3.48
8. I backed up my arguments with evidence.	5 (1.9%)	24 (9.4%)	106 (41.4%)	105 (41.0%)	16 (6.3%)	3.40

Notes:

1. The mean was calculated using 1 for Strongly Disagree, 2 for Disagree, 3 for Neutral, 4 for Agree, 5 for Strongly Agree
2. Some percentages do not add up to exactly 100.0% due to rounding off
3. N for Items 7 and 8 is 256 due to one missing response

On conversational dominance, the respondents disagreed that they dominated the other person and were not overbearing in the political conversations. There is no doubt that a large proportion (31-43%) of respondents chose the neutral option but there was a large enough proportion who chose the “disagree” and “strongly disagree” options to show that the respondents did not dominate discussions on political issues or were open about it.

The results on conversational dominance concur with results on comprehension of opposing views, that is, the respondents could see the issue from the other person’s perspective even though it was contradicting their views. Although over one-third of the respondents took a neutral stance

for both items on comprehension of opposing views, a majority of the respondents reported that they understood the reasons behind the other person's views (3.64) and also recognised the values underlying the other person's point of view (3.56). This makes the respondents reasonable conversants on political issues.

In fact, their discussions were characterised by clarity and logical reasoning. Table 7 shows that although about one-third of the respondents took a neutral stance, much more of the respondents were in agreement with the items. A majority of the respondents reported that they were explicit about their opinions (3.45) and expressed their positions clearly and directly (3.49). The respondents felt that they were more capable of presenting sensible arguments in support of their views than backing up their arguments with evidence. The respondents probably did not have the facts to support their arguments because they hardly updated themselves with news on community and national issues [7, 8].

Next, dominance in political conversations was examined in relation to demographic characteristics to find out whether family background is an important influence. T-tests, ANOVA and correlation test results are shown in Table 8. The results show that there were no significant differences in the conversational dominance of respondents according to political involvement of family members and the socio-economic status of respondents (estimated using their father's educational qualifications). The assumption is that if family members are involved in politics (e.g., party member, party candidate), the others in the family are more informed about political issues, but this is not necessarily true. Similarly, another assumption is that those who have more highly educated parents might be more informed about political issues and therefore are more likely to dominate in political discussions, but the results proved otherwise. Instead, conversational dominance on political issues is linked to gender and ethnicity.

There was a significant difference in conversational dominance of female and male respondents ($p=0.009$). A comparison of the sum of scores indicates that the male respondents were more dominant in conversations on political issues than female respondents (male: 67.45%; female, 59.65%). This result was expected because men are more dominant in conversations, usually manifested as more frequent interruptions. [10].

As for ethnic group, there was a significant difference in conversational dominance of different ethnic groups [$F(4,256) = 14.888, p = .01$]. The sum of scores also indicates that the Malay (28.28) and Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous respondents (28.67) were more open in political discussions than Chinese (27.75) and Others (32.33). Conclusions were not drawn for the Others category because of the small number. As larger sum of scores indicate greater political dominance, the results show that the Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous respondents were the most open in political discussions, followed by the Malay respondents. The Chinese respondents were the least open. To understand these results, data on network size and heterogeneity were drawn upon. The results in Table 4 revealed that respondents who came from Malay and Sarawak and Sabah indigenous backgrounds are more likely to engage in political discussion with people of the different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds compared to Chinese respondents who tend to talk about politics with people who belonged to the same background. For the Chinese, network homogeneity allows safe discussions to take place with like-minded individuals but the other ethnic groups are more prepared for differences in political views in a more heterogeneous network.

When the two sets of results on political efficacy and dominance were put together, the results show that the male respondents were more dominant in political discussions. The results also suggest that the Chinese respondents had higher levels of perceived efficacy than other ethnic groups but were not as open in political discussions whereas the Malay and Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous respondents were more open in political conversations despite lower levels of

perceived efficacy. This is confirmed by the Pearson correlation test showing that there is a significant moderate relationship between perceived efficacy and dominance in political conversations ($r = 0.629$, $p < .05$). Respondents who are more confident to express their political views are more likely to be direct when talking about political matters and to support their stance with evidence and logical reasoning but they are reasonable enough to understand the reasons and values behind the opposing stance of their conversational partners.

The key finding from the present study is that ethnic group predicts perceived political efficacy and dominance in political conversations. Gender is also linked to dominance in political conversations, with male students being more forthright in their political views.

Table 8

Influence of demographic characteristics on respondents' dominance in political conversations

Demographic characteristics		Average sum of score	Percentage of total score for 8 items	Statistical test results
Gender	Female (n=209)	23.86	59.65	t-test $p=0.009^*$
	Male (n=48)	26.98	67.45	
Ethnic group	Malay (n=119)	28.28	80.00	One-way ANOVA $F=14.888^{**}$
	Chinese (n=68)	27.75	69.94	
	Sarawak and Sabah	28.67	71.68	
	Indigenous (n=55)			
	Others (n=16)	32.33	80.85	
Father's educational qualification	Primary 6 and below (n=61)	25.00	62.50	Correlation $r=-0.148$
	Form 3 (n=44)	25.02	62.63	
	Form 5 (n=82)	24.21	60.53	
	Form 6, Diploma, Matriculation (n=25)	24.40	61.00	
	Degree and above (n=37)	23.35	58.37	
	Not stated (n=8)	24.50	61.25	
Political involvement of family	Involved (n=94)	25.13	62.90	t-test $p=0.127$
	Not involved (n=163)	24.04	60.10	

Notes:

1. *Significant at $p < 0.05$, **Significant at $p < .01$
2. ANOVA: The critical value for $F = 2.46$ for $p < .05$, $F = 3.51$ for $p < .01$
3. The average sum of scores for political dominance is calculated using this formula:

$$\frac{\text{Sum of responses for 8 items}}{\text{Total number of respondents in that category}}$$
4. The percentage of total score for political dominance is calculated using this formula:

$$\frac{\text{Average sum of scores}}{40} \times 100\% =$$
 40 (which is 8 items multiplied by maximum of 5 for the Likert scale responses)

3.4 Discussion on Political Participation and Ethnicity

Literature on political participation cited earlier argued that there is a correlation between conversation about politics and action or beliefs related to politics [2]. The more people are engaged in political talk, the more likely they are to be involved in political activities. The underlying assumption here is that the exposure to political talks assists in the development and the maturity of citizens when it comes to political knowledge.

Our study discovered that ethnicity does play a key role in shaping the way political conversation is conducted. The results show that Malay and Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous respondents were more open in talking about politics within their community and across, in

contrast to ethnic Chinese who were more inclined to talk about politics within their own group even though they were not as open compared to the other two ethnic groups mentioned. Nevertheless, when the researchers tried to find an explanation by looking at results pertaining to the frequency of conversation and the efficacy of the respondents, we discovered that 30-40% responses pointed to 'Neutral' outcomes irrespective of ethnicity. This is an aspect that we would like to draw attention to.

Contemporary public discourse on political participation among the youth today – or known in a catchphrase “Generation Y” – has concurred on the widespread apathy when it comes to politics. The Generation Y group is said to be uninterested in the political process and, therefore, choose not to vote and are unresponsive to issues around them. This trend was reversed during the previous general election in Britain in 2017 when 70% of voters in the 18-34 age category went out to vote in the election. [11] Commentators started to pay attention to the sudden surge of politicised youth and attributed this behaviour to the ability of politicians (viz. Labour Party) to send messages that resonates with the needs and interests of the young people in education, housing and employment.

The situation in Britain is useful if we are to explain the political apathy that is found among the university students today for two reasons. Firstly, political disinterestedness is a global phenomenon and one that is particularly shaped by the changing relationship between political agents (such as the state, political party and interest groups) and the market forces. In Malaysian universities, the pressures imposed by the industry to produce workforce through strategies such as graduate employability and soft-skills (i-CGPA) have pushed the students towards a more technically oriented discipline and skills as opposed to a critical learning and thinking orientation. This does not help in the creation of an environment where open discussion and debate is encouraged as demanded in a modern democracy. Secondly, political apathy among Malaysian university students may have originated from the disengagement of the youth from a mainstream political discourse. Politicians on both divides in the country rarely address issues that beleaguer the generation such as employability and insolvency. As a result, the youth felt disenfranchised and, therefore, keep away from talking or even participating actively in politics. In the present study, the topics of the political conversations were not investigated as a survey was conducted using a questionnaire. However, future studies should examine the topics of political discussions to find out the concerns and interests of the youth.

4. Conclusion

The study examined the perceived efficacy and dominance in political conversations of university students. The results showed moderate levels of perceived efficacy and dominance in political conversations. The respondents, particularly male respondents, felt more confident about engaging in political action than in participating effectively in group discussions about political issues. Nevertheless, the respondents were generally able to present sensible arguments to support their political stance in a clear and reasonable manner without being overbearing in political discussions. The Chinese respondents had higher levels of perceived efficacy to participate in political discussions compared to other ethnic groups but they are less likely to be open in political discussions. The Chinese respondents may be knowledgeable on political issues but they do not want to talk about it because they feel vulnerable as a minority group with immigrant origins. Malay and Sarawak and Sabah Indigenous respondents are more open in political conversations although their efficacy level is lower. They feel secure in expressing their political views because they are accorded special *Bumiputra* privileges and some quarters feel that they are “masters in the

land" [12]. These findings linking perceived political efficacy and dominance in expression of political views to ethnicity is important to authorities interested in the civic education of citizens.

The present study examined the influence of the family on expression of political views, and found that the political involvement of family members did not influence their dominance in political conversations. The results do not affirm the all-important role of the family in transmitting political values to their children and socialising them to be members of a democratic and civil society. In fact some researchers have argued that the political socialisation in immigrant family contexts may be a bi-directional process in that children are the ones influencing their parents [13, 14]. The role of other political socialisation agents such as peers also needs to be considered but the study revealed that they hardly talked about politics with their peers. An important agent in civic education whose significance may have escaped the attention of researchers is the educational institution. "For youths in divided societies [in Croatia], education is pivotal to political socialization, serving as a forum for fostering or diminishing intergroup tension". [15] In Malaysia, schools provide citizenship education within a neutral environment, teaching the symbols and workings of the government systems. Students are taught how to participate as citizens in a multi-ethnic country and to support the government's efforts to achieve and maintain the value of "unity in diversity". The formal instruction on citizenship usually does not touch on contemporary incidents and this is when other agents play a role in influencing political views, including the family and the larger ethnic community. It fares well for community projects to be included in school citizenship instruction as this provides a platform for differences in perspectives on contemporary community issues to be negotiated.

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