

PREVALENT DETERMINANTS OF VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Tolerance has been regarded as an essential key element in the modern multi-diversity society culturally, ethnically, religiously and politically. Various empirical evidences confirmed that tolerance has a positive effect towards social stability and harmony. However, when it involves voting behaviour as rational on ethnic and political tolerance, there has not been a sufficient study to explain such phenomenon. This study adds to the existing literature on ethnic tolerance, political tolerance and voting behaviour in Malaysia. This study has been conducted to address these matters, specifically, exploring the factors of voting behaviour in Malaysia. This study scrutinised such phenomena in the context of multi-ethnic Malaysia, with specific reference to the Johor Bahru (P160), Shah Alam (P108) and Bukit Bendera (P48) parliamentary. This quantitative study approach uses survey method with the self-administered set of the questionnaire as a data collection technique. Data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). 600 respondents were engaged in the survey using multistage cluster and random sampling techniques. The findings revealed that ethnic tolerance had a significant negative relationship with voting behaviour, while political tolerance is not statistically significant. But both, ethnic tolerance and political tolerance had a significant positive correlational relationship. It also discovered that social status that is; level of education, party supported and ethnicity had a significant positive relationship with voting behaviour. Thus, it is evident that ethnic political tolerance has a considerable effect on the rationale of voting behaviour. However, the consequences vary, in which homogeneous and heterogeneous ethnicities act as intervention factors. The present study filled the gap to the current body of knowledge and bears great significance at a situation where ethnic politics are perceived as the most important matter, and tolerance has increasingly become Malaysia's national agenda in managing a multi-cultural society.

Keywords: rational choice, democratic learning, election, ethnic relations, urbanism, and moderation

1. INTRODUCTION

Tolerance exists in the space between difference and similarities. al Faruqi (1992, p. 47) defines tolerance epistemologically as the optimism of acceptance until its falsehood has been established, while ethically as accepting the desires until undesirableness is established or known as *yusr*. In other words, tolerance is an

idea, worldview and ethical approach of accepting all diversity as history with all its affecting factors, prejudices, its diverse conditions of space and time, passions and vested interests are counted for. James L Gibson (1992b) illustrates that tolerance is connected with political freedom, and thus, tolerance has since been viewed as a necessary precondition to achieve democratic goals (Wildmalm, Oskarsson, & Hulterstrom, 2010), and become a higher priority and indispensable for the working of free and democratic society (Caldwell, 2009; Furedi, 2012) though not sufficiently, especially when it is assessed from behavioural aspect (Inglehart & Welzel, 2003; Lipset, 1969; Mill, 1869).

In the context of Malaysia, studies of tolerance *per se* are rarely discussed and did not attract scholarly attention seriously as compared to studies of ethnic politics and conflict (Horowitz, 1989). With the premises of ethnic and cultural diversity, the level of tolerance is expected to be higher (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002) in Malaysia, even though there are some who are concerned about youth ethnic tolerance level (Fazilah, 2008). Empirical evidence suggests that tolerance is an importance in contributing to social stability and harmony (Almond & Verba, 1989; Cheah, 2004). Therefore, given the social and political necessity, the study of tolerance is important from various aspects, including political perspective, and behaviourally, in order to guarantee Malaysia peace and harmony.

In regards to Malaysia, few studies that compare between urban and non-urban ethnic tolerance have found that urban settlers somehow showed a higher level of ethnic tolerance. A classic study by Sanusi (1989) in Bandar Melaka on intermarriage found that religion is not a factor that hinders intermarriage, at least in the urban setting in Malaysia. He also found out that ethnic tolerance level is high due to no significant statistical differences between Malay, Chinese, India, and others on intermarriage. Sanusi's statistical result is, in fact, tantamount with Riaz (1974) study in Singapore. The work of Mansor Mohd Noor (1999) in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, and Penang also suggested that ethnic tolerance showed some positive social consequences on ethnic relations. In fact, ethnicity became secondary after societal goals. A recent study by Mohd Azmir & Paimah (2011) also demonstrated that urban settlers have a slightly higher level of ethnic tolerance as compared to the non-urban settlers, even though the respondents are temporarily settled in the researched area. It also confirmed that psychosocial factors contribute to the higher level of ethnic tolerance among ethnics in Malaysia. It is concluded that the ethnic tolerance level in an urban setting is higher than in rural setting. This finding is consistent with the non-local context, as reported previously in C. S. Fischer (1995) and Carter & Corra (2012) to cite a few.

Thus, it is imperative to study the level of tolerance among ethnic and its implication towards their voting behaviour in election, because factors like education and social interaction empirically enhanced cultural integration, but not in terms of political integration, as Nazri Muslim & Mansor Mohd Noor (2014) suggested, in which concentration on the political dimensions needs to be prioritized for analyzing group competitiveness. This study, on the other hand, will measure ethnic tolerance from the perception and attitude components that later on combined as a behavioural factor of ethnic tolerance. To date, a synonymous examination of both ethnic tolerance perception and attitude has yet to be found.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURES

Political tolerance can be understood as "a willingness to permit the expression of ideas or interests one opposes" (Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982) that lays for an expressive society. The consequences of political tolerance have been highlighted through significant numbers of literature investigated on the determinants, nature, and level of tolerance attitudes. Without political tolerance, the ethnically pluralistic society may lack necessary lubricant that would facilitate the working of democratic institutions (Gouws, 1996; Gouws & Gibson, 2001; World Public Opinion.Org, 2009). However, whether in what ways, and how ethnic political tolerance and voting behaviour are linked and thus affected, remains an open question in the literature. Thus, this research will try to examine and find the relationship between these two variables.

The term ethnic political tolerance surfaced in Cole (1977) works' entitled Blacks & Ethnic Political Tolerance where he examined the degree of political tolerance of white towards black candidates for political office during the rising era of ethnic tolerance. Cole defined ethnic political tolerance as an act to vote not in favour of a candidate of his own ethnic background, but that he would also be sympathetic to similar claims of others. His distinguished study of New Jersey citizens confirmed that people act rationally in casting their vote regardless of referenced ethnic. Cole study can be concluded in two points; first, people think and behave according to their economic self-interest, and two, ethnic political tolerance is influenced by urbanisation and attitude. This claim supported by the studies by Cole (1977); Lipset (1969); and Pettigrew (1997).

Studies on Malaysia ethnic politics often explained the preferences, differences and ethnic factors in voting patterns (Baharudin Ali Masrom, 1989; Ghazali Mahyudin, 1999; Goh Cheng Teik, 1994; Ismail Kassim, 1978), but less on unity factors, such as tolerance. As argued by Mohd. Fuad Mat Jali & Junaidi Awang Besar (2005), development and economy may affect voting pattern, and it also proves that there are other factors that may contribute to the voting pattern beyond ethnicity, as urbanisation, modernization and civic engagement come into plays. It also signifies the increasing recognition of Allport (1954) key condition (i.e. equal status, intergroup cooperation, authority support and common goals) as tolerance and urbanism remain consistent across time (Carter, Steelman, Mulkey, & Borch, 2005).

The inconclusive explanation on ethnic political tolerance subject evidences the limited exploration of the subject. This conclusion paves to an inquiry of why there is no further study on ethnic political tolerance? If there is, those studies are found to separate between both concept of ethnic and politics into different quantum. Empirically, both concepts can be and should be examined simultaneously for a comprehensive understanding of social life. Therefore, this study took the liberty of short passage on ethnic political tolerance to further explore its limitation, and to examine the linkages on voting behaviour.

Traditional theories of partisanship regard social status is one of the important variables in studies of tolerance and voting behaviour (Dalton, 2000; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Social status or social economic status or class cleavages (Forrest, 1988) is important for the commonality profiling of respondents. As Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch (1965) argues that social status tends to develop a stable power and prestige order, in which it may apparently create tension and conflict, but revealed the fact of individual differences in the societal structure. Studies of racial threat often neglected the impact of social status per se, but social economic indicators that characterised environment may just important as social status (Oliver & Mendelberg, 2000) which later defined social ranks. This statement evidenced the necessity of inclusion socio-economic statuses to better understand how and why society members act and behave in their social environment.

The above literature confirms that social status via level of education attainment, geographical, age, ethnicity, and religion, the level of income, gender and party preferences increasingly become an important socio-economic indicator that provides further information to the researcher to better understanding ethnic and political tolerance and rational for their voting behaviour.

Understanding Malaysia's national voting behaviour and various factors that influence the voters have been tremendously analysed in terms of fair election system, voter influences, voter's ethnic politics, voting simulation models and voting pattern and trends (Brown, 2005; Fernando, 2013; Maznah, 2008; Mohammad Redzuan & Amer Saifude, 2013; Rowden, Lloyd, & Gilbert, 2014).

A recent study in Ghana and Malaysia highlighted the imperfect correlation between ethnicity and voting behaviour, where a higher political tolerance attitude showed that due to local ethnicity favour's factor and economic business cycles condition, voters are likely to be more liberal in prosperous times and conservatives during hard times (Agomor & Adams, 2014; Ichino & Nathan, 2013; Rizal & Jumaat, 2002). However, in the case of Malaysia, where elite accommodation and consociationalism are put into practice, local ethnicity's favour is not the mere factor, but rather the party politics itself, ethnic political issues, and the class affiliation that cuts across ethnic lines (Bass, 1970; Maznah, 2008; McGee, 1962; Ratnam, 1965; Rudner, 1970; Vasil, 1971, 1965).

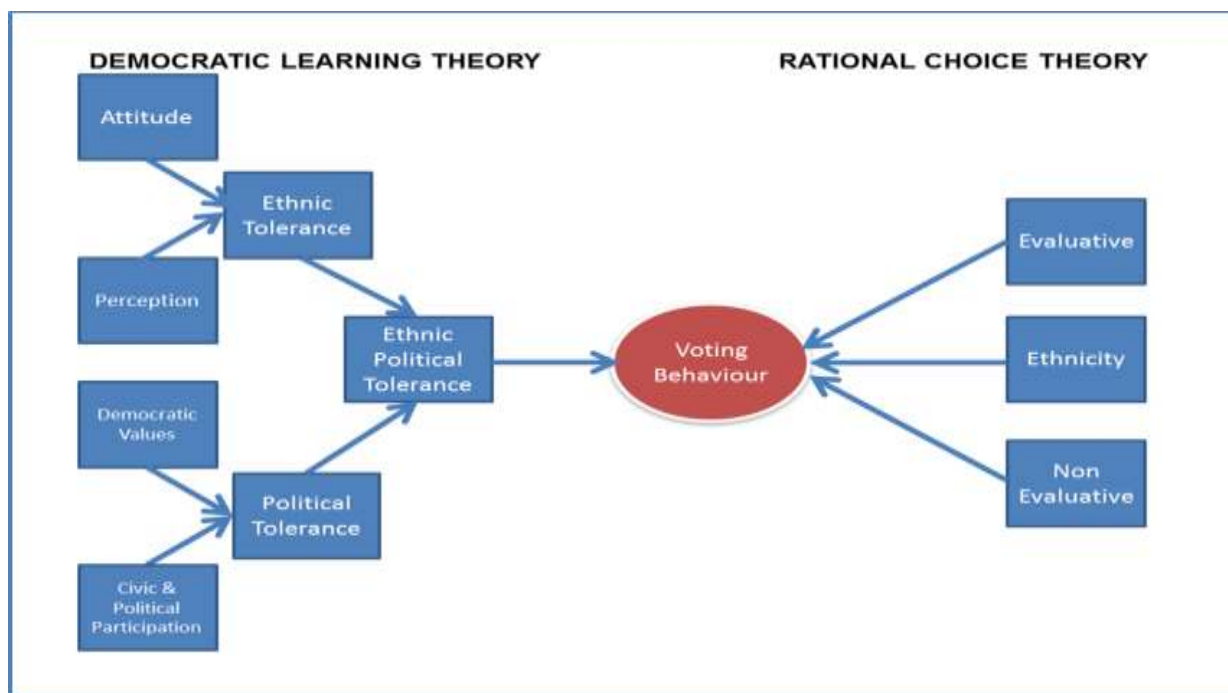
At least, three conclusions may be born from that literature. First, ethnic tolerance is an essential element in democratic countries, especially in pluralistic society. Thus, various studies were conducted in explaining such phenomenon, including factors and determinants of such perception (cognitive), attitude (willingness), and behaviour (manifestation) with the positive and mixed result.

Secondly, political tolerance demands acknowledgement, not acceptance. Political tolerance may have a relationship with the level of ethnic tolerance. The more ethnically tolerant individual or groups, the more politically tolerated they will be. Few researchers have found to be in line with the above-mentioned statement. Thirdly, the level of ethnic political tolerance may affect voting behaviour. Interestingly, with the growing number of urban population, scholars, particularly in Malaysia, are still understudying voting behaviour that relates between ethnic political tolerances.

Previous literature has explained ethnic tolerance, political tolerance, and its implication towards voting behaviour within various nation states. However, there is no empirical evidence that comparatively examines the ethnic tolerance and political tolerance in Malaysia. Secondly, there has yet to be a structurally comprehensive analysis that establishes the relationship between ethnic political tolerance amongst

Malaysians in Shah Alam, Johor Bahru, and Bukit Bendera constituencies, specifically with their voting behaviour. Thirdly, there is no existence of indicator of ethnic group political tolerance on voting behaviour.

Therefore, the research framework on this study will benefit from two broad Democratic Learning Theory and Rational Choice Theory, with two main concepts that include tolerance and voting behaviours. In elaborating precisely on tolerance, researchers will specifically use the term 'ethnic political tolerance', that is a combination of both; ethnic tolerance, which is mainly from the social aspect of tolerance, and political tolerance (for more elaboration on the subdivision of tolerance, see Weldon (2006). Figure 2.1 depicts the research framework for this particular study in six constructs including; attitude and perception of ethnic tolerance, democratic values and civic political participation of political tolerance, and evaluative and non-evaluative of voting behaviour.



3. METHODOLOGY

The research designs for this study are in the form of quantitative. It will utilise a survey as a method. This study involved data collection, and thus, therefore, data was analysed to obtain logical conclusion through pattern identification between variables (Johnson & Christensen, 2013, p. 37). A survey technique was used as it considered a better source of primary data in social and behavioural science as compared to observation (Babbie, 2011). The survey was conducted for a period of three months, which is from January 2015-March 2015. A set of questionnaire was shown in the form of closed-ended questions, which is determined by the researcher (Carlson & Hyde, 2003). The data then aggregated to create a representative profile of the sample and cross-tabulated to explore the relationships between classifiable variables (Pierce, 2008, p. 140). A questionnaire is used to measure and compare attitudes and behaviours. There are four divisions, namely: demographic profiles, ethnic tolerance questions, political tolerance related questionnaires, and voting behaviour elements.

Since this study will be using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), and there are two ways in determining sample size, that is the ratio of the number of cases to the parameters being estimated, and from power calculations being used to generate minimum sample size estimates (Tonidandel, Williams, & LeBreton, 2015). Considering all the above factors, and both approaches to determine sample size, thus, 600 respondents is deemed appropriate for this study and able to generalise the findings.

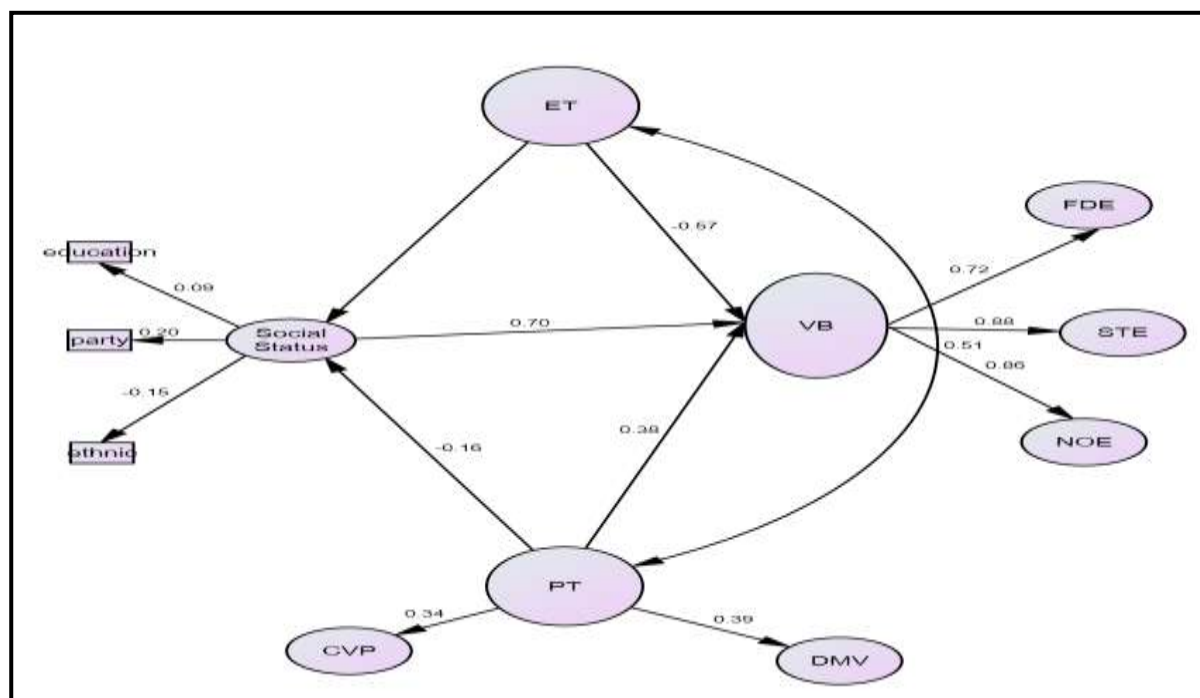
Table 4.44 below shows the value of each construct pertaining the value of reliability, convergence validity and discriminant validity (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Based on Gaskin (2012) Statistical Tools Package, there are no validity and reliability concerns for the measured constructs. This serves as an initial test of the research hypotheses.

Table 4.44: Validity and Reliability

Variable	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
CVP	0.864	0.683	0.032	0.013
NOE	0.895	0.587	0.531	0.237
FDE	0.902	0.606	0.398	0.159
PRC	0.825	0.542	0.196	0.087
DMV	0.877	0.641	0.196	0.068
STE	0.899	0.640	0.531	0.207

Notes: CR= Composite Reliability ($p>0.7$); AVE= Average Variance Extracted ($p>0.5$); MSV= Maximum Shared Variance ($<AVE$); ASV= Average Shared Variance ($<AVE$).

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION



Hypothesis 1 predicts the relationship between ethnic tolerance and voting behaviour. The result showed a moderate negative relationship between ethnic tolerance perception and voting behaviour with coefficient -0.57 . The result revealed that ethnic tolerance has moderate relations with voting behaviour negatively. It assumes that as ethnic tolerance, specifically on perception aspect increases; their voting behaviour on evaluative and non-evaluative decreases. In other words, the more negative the perception of voters on ethnic tolerance, the less they participate on determining electoral decisions. This study also faced a complex situation. Negative perceptions on ethnic tolerance may affect their conduct of voting, with threat and conflict may cloud their judgement. Thus, for Malaysian situation where ethnicity has long served as a determinant factor in electoral activities that clearly benefits the contested political party, but negatively impedes the societies, in the end, it seems that the zero sum game plays a major part in Malaysia at large. The evidence on this study is contrary to the findings on Arwine & Mayer (2012), where they suggest the increase of tolerance level, either individual or state, produces the increment of respects of human right, support for the democratic government, and interest in politics. But they also argued that it is impossible to set a precise threshold for tolerance level. This account revealed that more studies need to be carried out to measure the consequence of ethnic tolerance on voting behaviour in Malaysia, specifically as current body of literature are more in western point of view, which certainly reflect a different culture factor. However, ultimately, ethnic tolerance is very much important for Malaysia's stability (Cheah, 2004), and study linkages between ethnic tolerance and voting behaviour should be further explored.

Hypothesis 2 predicts the relationship between political tolerance and voting behaviour. The standardise estimates resulted in $.38$, showing weak positive relations between political tolerance and voting behaviour.

This result, borrowing two terms from Weber (2003) of "social butterflies" and "rugged individuals", which defined as a citizen who is more likely to expose themselves and potentially challenge different views to the former, and citizens who are less likely to the latter. In other words, people in the researched areas may directly influence political tolerance, but it does not influence in voting behaviour. Furthermore, this result is also best explained by findings of Sokhey & McClurg (2012) that individual in a more diverse network is less likely to vote "correctly" for giving a weaker cue to vote. In addition to that, perhaps, more logical explanation is that people in researched constituencies are more socially participate rather than individual participation. This finding is synonymous with previous studies on social and individual contribution towards political tolerance (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Weber, 2003). Even though these studies has been conducted for quite some time, but the current situation in three research areas better explained the situation, particularly in Malaysia. Another possible explanation of the insignificant relationship between political tolerance and voting behaviour is that the measurement of political tolerance is rather sociotropic, socially contacted rather than individually measured. Meanwhile, voting behaviour, although sounds socially participative; it's rather individual participation. Because citizens actively engaged in electoral activities, such as campaigning, meeting and discussing, voting is rather considered an individual contribution. Thus, political tolerance significantly related to social participation but does not signify on individual participation, i.e. voting. The existence of perceived threat may decrease levels of political tolerance, and decreased the participation in electoral activities, as Weber (2003) argued, tolerance is a consequence rather than a cause for participation, and so does political tolerance is a consequence of voting behaviour.

Hypothesis 3 predicts relationships between social status and voting behaviour, and the result showed a strong positive relationship (.70) between social status and voting behaviour. It is essential to test the relationship because social statuses segregate society structurally from the elites to the masses, from the rich to the poor, and from the majority to the minority (Streb, 2008, p. 4). This is the reality fabric of society. Thus, by acknowledging the relationship, noticing electoral behaviour may provide some ideas for political scientist understand a phenomenon involving voting behaviour and beyond. Social status does explain highly on tolerance (Arwine & Mayer, 2012), and it should also explain on voting behaviour. Therefore, result revealed that it is statistically significant that social status has a relationship with voting behaviour, $F(1,597) = 5.773$, $p < 0.05$. A cursory glance notes that there is nothing new on the hypothesis because quite a number of literature has reported the explanatory power of social status in influencing voting behaviour (Maznah, 2008; McAllister & Kelly, 1982; Osman, 2013; Segawa, 2015). However, in a nutshell, it also shows a diminishing influence of ethnicity and party in determining electorate's decision (Osman, 2013; Segawa, 2015). Supposedly, other factors contribute to electorate decision, such as issues, employment, economic stability, and national security.

A further empirical study should be beyond votes (Weber, 2003) as civic participation, democratic values and perceptions intercept between tolerance and voting behaviour. Influence of tolerance on voting behaviour is not direct, but its effect can be seen through ballot activities (Weber, 2003) and the election results. Further research is necessary to determine the stability of this assumption. It is, perhaps, that education, party and ethnicity of social status in this study account of the report presented here. The discussion of ethnic tolerance, political tolerance and voting behaviour in the literature has generally been focused on establishing a relationship between those constructs and how they affect one another, particularly in Malaysia. Researchers have identified a range of factors that affect ethnic tolerance, political tolerance and voting behaviour including perceptions, attitudes, democratic values, civic and political participation, evaluative and non-evaluative, and others demographic items as discussed earlier. Researchers such as Kasara (2013) and Nazri Muslim & Mansor Mohd Noor (2014) have suggested the need for further research investigate the political dimension of ethnic tolerance especially with relation to voting as political competition. This study also provides a better perspective in understanding ethnic tolerance and voting behaviour.

5. CONCLUSION

This study also provided a dimension of ethnic tolerance, where the perception of ethnic influenced tolerance the most, while attitude dimension produces low factor loading, and thus eliminated. However, one's may not disregard attitude dimension due to statistical approach. This study used structural equations modelling, while attitude dimension may benefit the researcher from other technique such as multilevel models.

On the political tolerance, civic and political participation and democratic values dimensions explained well the construct of political tolerance. However, when it involved voting behaviour, a weak positive relation is established, but it is not significant enough. While some literature highly regarded political tolerance on the

democratic system, it also proved that political tolerance may provide “the wrong cue” for voting. It also noted that political tolerance is rather sociotropic, while voting is more to individuals, although electorate activities are social in nature. Social status is consistent with the majority of ethnic tolerance, political tolerance and voting behaviour literature. However, this particular study is only able to examine three factors, namely education, party and ethnicity. But more importantly, the influence of ethnicity and party affiliation are diminishing over education. This finding is synonymous with previous tolerance literature of the factors of education, influencing ethnic and political tolerance. However, there also another factor that may contribute to the ethnic tolerance, political tolerance and voting behaviour.

It is hoped that this study will extend our understanding of factors that influence ethnic and political tolerance and the consequences of ethnic political tolerance on voting behaviour. From rational choice and democratic learning theoretical perspectives, these factors should be considered in measuring ethnic political tolerance and its consequence on voting behaviour.

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