



News Release

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Jobs and financial security top Malaysian youth's concerns

PETALING JAYA – Financial and employment issues were the two most critical problems faced by young Malaysians in a recent survey by the Merdeka Center.

In the survey conducted between 19th February and 20th March 2021, 29% said financial difficulties and constraints were the main problems they faced today while 13% mentioned getting jobs were their main problem. Others, particularly those still in schools and universities raised the issue of e-learning difficulties (8%) and access to internet (6% overall but over 9% among 18-22 years old) as most critical problems they presently face.

Reflecting the prevailing economic conditions, only 52% reported that they and their families were able to make ends meet while 44% felt that meeting financial obligations “is a struggle these days”. This is particularly prevalent with youths without university education where 55% reported facing adverse conditions – which appears in line with recently published government data¹.

On a more longer-term outlook, young people see having a good family and financial stability as almost equally importantly goals, at 29% and 25%, respectively. The vast majority (84%) hold confidence that they will be able to achieve their goals, 81% are optimistic about their future but we note some differences between the different age groups, with the youngest segment of 18-22 years old expressing higher optimism at 84%.

Vast majority (82%) hold the belief that “everyone has a chance to go as far as their talent and hard work will take” compared to only 15% who believed that social and family networks will be the determinant for future success.

In terms of civic participation, the survey found about two-thirds of youths were keen to take part in voluntary activities particularly those centered on community self-help initiatives (25%), charity (20%), welfare action (9%).

More than two-thirds expressed no interest to participate in politics, only about 30% expressed interest, notably higher among males, Malays and higher earning segments of the youths. On their exposure to politics, almost half of the youths get to know about politics through social media (46%).

The survey also found that 78% of young people felt that politics and government seem to be complicated and that they “can’t really understand what’s going on”. Reflecting the dim view they have towards politics, 66% of young people believed that public officials and politicians “don’t care what people like me think”.

¹ “Malaysia’s Youth in Peril”; <https://www.isis.org.my/2021/05/01/malaysias-youth-in-peril/>

On the matter of identity, 40% of youths see themselves as Malaysians or “more Malaysian than a member of particular ethnic group”, 46% saw themselves as equally Malaysian and a member of an ethnic group. A further 11% identified themselves either solely as a member of an ethnic community or more of an ethnicity compared to having a Malaysian identity.

Findings from the survey indicate a young population that has been directly impacted by the pandemic’s effect on the national economy, more marked among those without higher education. Yet they remain optimistic about their future prospects and achieving their goals. The findings here indicate the high expectations held by the youth on the government to turn the economy around. It also speaks of the difficulty that political actors will have in approaching and persuading this group as they are generally dismissive of politicians and politics.

This particular survey was carried out between 19th February and 20th March 2021 focused on young Malaysians views towards their aspirations and needs, perceptions of the economy, education system and politics. A total of 2,520 young Malaysians comprising 60% Malay, 20% Chinese, 7% Indian, 7% Muslim Bumiputra, 6% Non-Muslim Bumiputra, (from Sabah and Sarawak), reflective of the national population profile of those aged 18-22 years old, were interviewed via fixed line and mobile telephones.

Respondents were selected on the basis of random stratified sampling along age group, ethnicity, gender and state. The poll was funded by Merdeka Center’s internally generated financial resources and other donors.

About Merdeka Center for Opinion Research

Merdeka Center for Opinion Research was formally established in 2001 as an independent organization focused on public opinion research and socio-economic analysis. Merdeka’s mission is to act as a bridge between ordinary Malaysians and other stakeholders with the leading members of the nation – by collecting public opinion studies and expressing them through survey results, analysis and position papers. For details, visit: www.merdeka.org

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