# Malay Muslim Youths of Suburban Areas: Their Tendency in Electing Political Leaders

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## ABSTRACT

*Islamic culture and political thought play an important role in Malaysia, a country whose official religion is Islam. The main objective of this study was to examine the level of Islamic political views among the Malay Muslim youths living in Malaysian suburban areas in electing political leaders. A quantitative method, using questionnaires as the research instrument, was employed in this study, which involved a total of 455 respondents, aged between 15 and 39 years old, from various backgrounds. The location of this study was in the Marang district, Terengganu. The study showed that most of the respondents (85.3%) agreed that it is very important for Islamic political values or characteristics to be practiced by political leaders. The findings also revealed that the Malay Muslim youths want a government that empowers the Islamic religion and safeguards the sovereignty of Islam and the nation.*

**Keywords:** *Islam, Malay Muslim, Political Leaders, Suburban, Youth.*

The Islamic political system is to uphold the Islamic state, run the government and administration of the Islamic state by guaranteeing the well-being and security of the people, as well as organizing preaching activities, defending the purity of Islam as a system of life, and implementing universal justice, regardless of borders and establishing relations between nations (Shukeri 1997). Thus, national leaders play an important role in governing the country and have a pure nature in terms of morals, democracy, respect for the constitution, and getting the support of the people (Ris'an 2018). Besides, Islamic political thought plays an important role in the life of the people and of the nation (Prayudi 2013). Most Muslim scholars state that the Islamic political system will form a righteous society through the clarity of principles, the firmness of policies, and the authority of laws and leaders (Shukeri 1997).

The view of the authoritative scholars and their involvement in politics is mandatory, especially in choosing Islamic leaders. However, it has become the people's right to choose a party or leaders that are believed to be able to uphold the values of Islam and justice (Hamidah et. al 2018). This study is designed to investigate the political thinking of Malay-Muslim youths, especially in suburban areas in choosing political leaders.

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## Methodology

The design of this study is focused on evaluating the level of thinking and political understanding of the Muslim youths that drives political culture. The research question items asked the respondents are more about exploring the level of youth thinking of Islamic principles in government, the implementation of Islamic principles, the selection of political parties, the image of leaders, Islamic empowerment, and Islamic sovereignty. This study particularly focused on the suburban youth's selection of leaders believed to be able to uphold the teachings of Islam in this country. The findings of this field study can be used to evaluate the understanding of the political thinking of Muslim youths in the suburbs in choosing their leaders, as well as the aspirations of the youths in realizing Islamic rules in Malaysia.
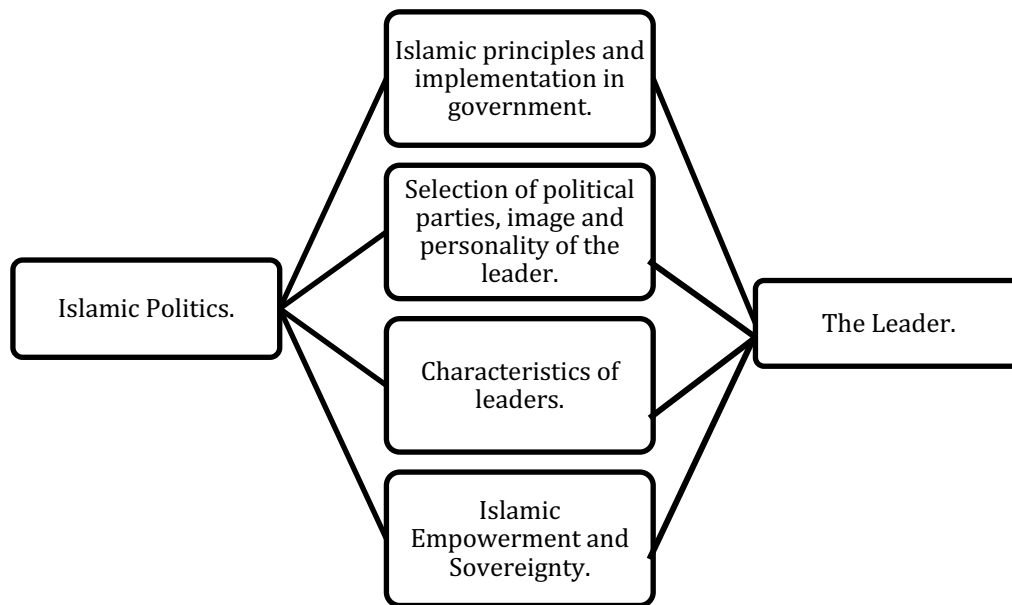
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**Figure 1: Study Design**

The respondents involved in this study comprised a total of 455 young people, aged between 15 and 39 years old. They were randomly selected from among those living in the suburban district of Marang, Terengganu. This research used a quantitative method and questionnaires, prepared in Google Forms. Several departments and agencies were approached for their assistance to help to distribute the questionnaires and ensuring that, only relevant participants took part. These included Terengganu State Youth Council, Marang Industrial Training Institute, Wakaf Tapai National Youth Development Institute, and Terengganu State Education Department. The Terengganu Youth Council also helped in selecting and distributing the questionnaires to the excellent youth clubs. Meanwhile, the Terengganu State Education Department gave their approval for this study to be carried out in two secondary schools, namely Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Bukit Sawa and Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tengku Lela Segara.

Referring to the information obtained by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, Terengganu, there are 48,6000 Malay youths in the Marang district. Based on sample size determination table, for a population of 50,000 people, the required sample size is 381 people. The distribution of the questionnaire in this study received a good response from the respondents, with a total of 455 people answering them.

SPSS 26.0 software was used for data analysis purposes. An ordinal scale was used in this study, using the statements strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree, and strongly agree.

Frequency analysis was used in this study to examine the thinking and understanding of Islamic politics among the youth to choose the leaders.

This study focused on questions related to Islamic principles in a government, the method of implementing Islamic principles, the selection of political parties, the image of leaders, Islamic empowerment, and Islamic sovereignty. This study also focused on the selection of leaders by the youth, whom they believed could uphold Islam in the administration of the country. The questions of this research revolved around two important principles, namely, to uphold peace and justice in the administration of the country and to implement values prescribed by Islam (Mohd Izhar Ariff et. al 2012).

## Respondents' Profile

The respondents in this study comprised young people, aged between 15 and 39 years old, living in the Marang district only. There was a total of 232 male respondents (51%) and a total of 223 female respondents (49%), approximately the same number for both genders. Meanwhile, the breakdown by age level showed that there were 139 respondents aged 15-19 years old (30.5%), 85 respondents aged 20-24 years old (18.7%), 70 respondents (15.4%) aged 25-29 years old, 81 respondents aged 30-34 years (17.8%) and 80 respondents aged 35-39 years old (17.6%).

## Principles of Islamic Administration in the Government of the Country

This study examined the youth's views on the principles of Islamic administration in the national government. Respondents were asked about the ruling government, and whether it should put the principles of Islam to be fought for, without compromise. Frequency analysis shows that 193 respondents (42.4%) agreed, and 195 respondents (42.95%) strongly agreed with the proposed statement. This shows that about 85.3% of the respondents agreed that the government implements Islamic principles in the administration of the country.

Since Malaysia is largely a plural society with various races and religions, respondents were also asked about the ruling government, and whether it should put Islamic principles that are relevant to be implemented and accepted by the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The frequency analysis of this study found that 211 respondents (46.4%) agreed with this statement, while 171 respondents (37.6%) strongly agreed with it. This study found that 84% of the respondents were in the agree and strongly agree with category.

The analysis of this study found two groups among the youth who have Islamic political thinking, one whose thinking is very extreme by insisting that, this Islamic principle should be implemented without compromise and the other who has a very open and simple Islamic political thought, by ensuring that Islamic principles should be implemented simply and accepted by every community, both Muslim and non-Muslim. The latter is in accordance with the view of Lukman Thaib (2013) who states that Malaysia is better known as a country synonymous with simplicity, tolerance, inclusiveness, and honoring differences. Table 1 shows the findings of the study on the principles of Islamic administration and the national government. Based on the findings of this study, the Malay-Muslim youth group in the suburbs strongly emphasized the government's implementation of the country's administration, according to the teachings of Islam. This shows that, for the Malay-Muslim youths, it is very important for the Islamic political system to be practiced in this country.

**Table 1: Principles of Islamic Administration in the national government**

| No | Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Not Sure | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|----|-----------|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | Islamic principles are implemented without compromise. | 10 (2.2%) | 17 (3.7%) | 40 (8.8%) | 193 (42.4%) | 195 (42.9%) |
| 2 | Islamic principles that are relevant and able to be implemented and accepted by Muslim and non-Muslim communities. | 13 (2.9%) | 22 (4.8%) | 38 (8.4%) | 211 (46.4%) | 171 (37.6%) |

## Selection of Political Parties, Image, and Personality of the Leader

Leadership is very important, and every individual should have leadership skills. The characteristics of leadership need to be applied to produce a society that is authoritative and systematic. The leadership power possessed by everyone allows that person to be respected by others (Romzi et. al 2021). A sovereign government in a democratic system must have a strong political party, an influential leader's image, and a personality. The existence of political parties in Islam is not against Sharia. The establishment of the Islamic party should be used for the benefit of religion and society (Lukman 2000).

This study examined in detail the youth with views related to the party's image and principles. Analysis of the frequency data of this study found that most of the youths emphasized the party's image and principles. This study found that there were 227 respondents (49.9%) who agreed and 112 respondents (24.6%) who strongly agreed with this statement. This shows that the youth will see the party's image and symbol as well as the party's principles of struggle, which convince them to fight for the aspirations of the people, including implementing Islamic governance. The youths also emphasized the image of leaders, such as the way they dress, communicate, and approach people. This study found that 214 (47.0%) respondents agreed, while 149 (32.7%) respondents strongly agreed with the given statement, making 79.7% of them agree with the statement.

The respondents were also asked about the leader's personality. It seemed that the youth were very careful in choosing leaders. It was found that 228 (50.1%) respondents agreed to choose leaders with good personalities and 139 (30.5%) of them strongly agreed with the given statement. About 80.6% of them emphasized the leader's personality, apart from the image (50.1%) and the political party (30.5%). It was also found that parties that have clear principles became the choice of the youth. The frequency analysis of the survey found 122 (26.8%) of them agree with this statement and 286 (62.9%) strongly agree with it, indicating their confidence that, principled parties can fight for the fate of the people, the nation, and the Islamic religion. Table 2 shows the data collection related to the selection of political parties and the image and personality of the leaders preferred by the youth.

Generally, the image and personality of the leaders are important, regardless of their gender. Leaders should have a good image and personality and be more friendly to people. Their image and personality can also show them whether they are authoritative or otherwise. Authoritative leaders are trusted by the youth to be appointed as their leaders.

**Table 2: Selection of Political Parties, Image, and Personality of the Leaders**

| No | Statement | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Not Sure | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Party image and principles. | 19 (4.2%) | 29 (6.4%) | 67(14.7%) | 227 (49.9%) | 112 (24.6%) |
| 2 | Image of political leaders. | 14(3.1%) | 20 (4.4%) | 58(12.7%) | 214(47.0%) | 149 (32.7%) |
| 3 | Personality of the leaders. | 12 (2.6%) | 19 (4.2%) | 56(12.3%) | 228(50.1%) | 139(30.5%) |
| 4 | A principled party. | 9(2.0%) | 11 (2.4%) | 27 (5.9%) | 122(26.8%) | 286 (62.9%) |

## Characteristics of Muslim Leaders

Leadership and the characteristics of the leader are necessary elements in the Islamic theory of political leadership (Indra & Nidzam 2019). There are nine characteristics of a leader outlined by the sunnah, namely the elected leader must be Muslim, fair, trustworthy, ready to facilitate people-related matters, friendly to the people, ever ready to attend to the needs of the people, generous, not corrupt, and ready to wholeheartedly serve the people (Siti Syahira et. al 2022). The frequency analysis of this study found that most of the suburban youth rejected corrupt leaders, where 115 (25.3%) of them agreed to the statement of rejecting corrupt leaders and 311 (68.4%) strongly agreed to the statement. The youth group also chose leaders who put the people first. It was found that 127 (27.9%) respondents agreed with the statement, while 292 (64.2%) strongly agreed with it. Honest leaders also get the support of most of the respondents, where 115 (25.3%) of them agreed with the given statement, and 307 (67.5%) strongly agreed with it. This shows that honest leaders are the main choice of the youth.

In terms of human rights, the youth stated that their rights must not be neglected by the leaders. It was found that 120 (26.4%) of them agreed and 296 (65.1%) of them strongly agreed with this statement. Therefore, leaders should give freedom to the youth to speak. The views and ideas of the youth should be given priority. The problems raised by the youth should be listened to and they must do their best to overcome them. Generally, most of youths reject selfish leaders. The data analysis shows that there were 104 (22.9%) respondents who agreed and 322 (70.8%) who strongly agreed to reject self-centered leaders. Respondents were also asked about the duty of leaders to fulfill their responsibilities to the people. Table 3 shows that there were 118 (25.9%) agreed and 306 (67.3%) strongly agreed with the statement.

The findings of this study show that, although there were two different political thoughts, they both commonly agreed in choosing leaders who are Muslims. Besides, the chosen leaders must be of high integrity, honest, trustworthy, and responsible, as well as honor human rights and are very responsive to the people. Leaders who are corrupted, and prioritize self-interest are rejected by the youth. The youths understand the characteristics of Islamic leaders.

### Table 3: Characteristics of Islamic Leaders

| No | Statement | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Not sure | Agree | Strongly agree |
|----|-----------|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | Reject corrupt leaders. | 9 (2.0%) | 10 (2.2%%) | 10(2.2%) | 115(25.3%) | 311 (68.4%) |
| 2 | Put the people first. | 8(1.8%) | 15 (3.3%) | 13(27.9%) | 127(27.9%) | 292 (64.2%) |
| 3 | Honest leaders. | 6 (1.3%) | 12 (2.6%) | 15(3.3%) | 115(25.3%) | 307(67.5%) |
| 4 | Human Rights. | 9 (2.0%) | 13 (2.9%) | 17(3.7%) | 120 (26.4%) | 296 (65.1%) |
| 5 | Reject self-centered leaders. | 9(2.0%) | 12 (2.6%) | 8 (1.8%) | 104 (22.9%) | 322 (70.8%) |
| 6 | Fulfill responsibilities to the people. | 7(1.5%) | 10(2.2%) | 14(3.1%) | 118 (25.9%) | 306 (67.3%) |

### Empowerment and Sovereignty of Islam and the Nation

This study also made a detailed investigation of the empowerment and sovereignty of Islam and the nation. Respondents were asked about the empowerment of Islam, more than empowering the nation. Analysis of the frequency data found that there were 197 (49.3%) respondents who responded in agreement with this statement and 201 (44.2%) respondents strongly agreed with it. When asked about Islamic sovereignty and the nation being empowered simultaneously, it was found that 187(41.1%) respondents agreed, and 223 (49.0%) respondents strongly agreed with the given statement. Following this, the respondents were also asked about Islamic principles that are relevant and able to be implemented and accepted by Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The frequency analysis shows that there were 211(46.4%) respondents who agreed and 171(37.6%) who strongly agreed with this statement. The findings of this study show that the Muslim-Malay youth want a government that empowers the Islamic religion and safeguards the sovereignty of Islam and the nation. Therefore, national leaders should emphasize empowering religion and preserving Islamic sovereignty.

### Table 4: Empowerment and Sovereignty of Islam and Nation

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | The empowerment of Islam exceeds the empowerment of the nation. | 7 (1.5%) | 16 (3.5%) | 34 (7.5%) | 197 (43.3%) | 201 (44.2%) |
| 2 | Islamic sovereignty and the nation simultaneously. | 8 (1.8%) | 15 (3.3%) | 22 (4.8%) | 187 (41.1%) | 223 (49.0%) |
| 3 | The government puts Islamic principles that are relevant and able to be implemented and accepted by the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. | 13 (2.9%) | 22 (4.8%) | 38 (8.4%) | 211 (46.4%) | 171 (37.6%) |

### Discussion

Based on the frequency analysis, this study found that there were two groups among the suburban youth, with different political cultures and Islamic political thinking. One of the groups was very extreme by insisting that, Islamic principles should be implemented without compromise, and the other have a very open and simple Islamic political thought, ensuring that Islamic principles should be implemented simply and accepted by every community, both Muslim and non-Muslim. It was also revealed that the youth strongly emphasized the ruling government's implementation of Islamic administrative principles in the governance of the country. According to Ahmad & Hamid (2010), Malays and Islam are seen as a united and inseparable component, where the Malay ethnicity is indirectly synonymous with Islamic life. It is found that, when asking about the Malay and Islamic party politics, as the Marang Parliament is under the control of the PAS (Partai Islam Semalaysia, Malaysian Islamic Party), the people of the constituency claimed

that it (PAS) is the only Islamic party in Malaysia. Generally, the principles and political struggle of PAS will be the inspiration for the youth group that gives solid support to the party.

The second group of Islamic political thought was found to be more open and moderate. It realizes that Malaysia has a multi-racial society, so it is certain to be simple and it requires a long preaching process to be accepted by the whole society. According to Sukring (2019), Islam teaches its people to always interact with fellow Muslims and non-Muslims, requiring them to deal with fellow human beings with gentleness and love. Therefore, moderation is very important to maintain harmony in society. The finding in this study is in line with the study by Marzudi Md Yunus et. al (2020), who explained that the suburban community, as a whole, focuses on Malay-Muslim issues and will attract their acceptance in the general election.

This study found that the youth also prioritized the selection of political parties, based on the leader's image and personality. The understanding of party politics helps voters determine their choice during the election (Wan Noor Intan Sofea & Junaidi 2022). Therefore, the political party, the party image, and the personality of the leader in the party according to Islam are very important in influencing the political thinking of the suburban youth. This is in line with Junaidi's study (2021), which found that the criteria for political parties to have candidates who put the people first, generate people's development and eradicate people's poverty and uphold justice are the people's choices. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, the establishment of a political party that fights for Islam is very important in Malay society. This finding is in line with the view of Lukman (2000) who stated that the existence of political parties in Islam does not conflict with sharia, as long as it is used for the benefit of the religion and the people.

This study also revealed that the political thinking of the Malay youths in the suburbs strongly emphasizes the empowerment of Islam and the Malay nation. This finding is in line with the views of Zakaria et. al (2012) who asserted that Islam is the main basis for the formation of the identity of the Malay nation, in addition to upholding the old Malay culture and customs that do not conflict with Islamic laws.

The youth have high confidence, choosing charismatic and high-caliber leaders with the best leadership characteristics, such as honesty, trust, responsibility, and putting the people first, which will bring great benefits to the people and the country. Leaders who have a high level of integrity will ensure that there is no corruption or abuse of power. This research found that the youth of the studied area strongly rejected corrupt leaders. The findings of this study are also in line with that of the research by Junaidi (2021), which found that the personality characteristics of leaders who are chosen by the people, are honest, free from corruption, and put the people first.

To conclude**,** there were two groups of Islamic political thought among the Malay youth in the Marang suburb, Terengganu, one extreme and the other moderate. Based on the findings of this study, the position of these two thoughts is quite balanced. However, their goal is the same, to uphold Islamic principles in the administration of the State. It was found that simplicity is important, for the policies to be implemented in Malaysia and accepted by the entire community, both the Muslim and Non-Muslim communities.

This study also found that the Malay youth are very serious about upholding Islam and the Malay nation itself. Therefore, the Malay political parties must be clear in their struggle. Upholding the sovereignty of Islam and the Malay nation cannot be marginalized in the manifesto to get voter support. The image of the party and the personality of the party leader must be in line with the cause of the party's struggle. As revealed in this study also, the Malay-Muslim youths strongly emphasized the qualities of the leaders. The findings of this study found that the Islamic political thinking of the youth is very clear. The youths understood their responsibility as Muslims to choose the best leaders.

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