

The Role of Personality and Self-Motivation in Political (Dis)Engagement

Daryl Loh Wei Meng* and Eliza Berezina

Department of Psychology, Sunway University, Selangor 47500, Malaysia

*E-mail: daryl.meng96@gmail.com

Abstract

Perceived loss of control of ones' political environment breeds cynicism and lowered self-motivation for future political action, all of which are marked indicators of learned helplessness. This leads to disengagement of a country's people in political activity, thus leaving the government unaccountable and unregulated, while allowing corruption and self-serving policies to plague the nation's well-being. Therefore, this study aimed to better understand the associations among political apathy, learned helplessness, age, and personality traits. It was hypothesized that learned helplessness, age, and personality traits would be significant predictors of political apathy. Participants were 200 Malaysian individuals (91 males, 109 females, $M = 32.93$, $SD = 13.91$) who completed questionnaires including the Mini-International Personality Item Pool, Self-Motivation Scale, and Voter Involvement Scale. Learned helplessness and Neuroticism were positively correlated with political apathy, whereas Extraversion and Intellect showed negative correlations with political apathy. Age, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness showed no significant relationships with political apathy. Extraversion was the most significant predictor of political apathy, followed by intellect. Thus, the insights yielded from this study may allow for its accumulated knowledge to be informedly applied to reach an artificial resurgence in political engagement.

Peranan Kepribadian dan Motivasi Sendiri dalam Penglibatan Politik

Abstrak

Kehilangan kontrol yang dipersepsikan pada lingkungan politik akan melahirkan sinisme dan menurunkan motivasi diri untuk melakukan tindakan politik di masa depan. Sebagai indikator dari konsep ketidakberdayaan yang dipelajari, kondisi ini mengarah pada ketidakterlibatan orang-orang di suatu negara untuk melakukan aktivitas politik. Dampak dari hal ini adalah pemerintahan dibiarkan tidak bertanggung jawab dan tidak teratur, sambil membiarkan korupsi terjadi dan membuat kebijakan yang mementingkan diri sendiri untuk mengganggu kesejahteraan bangsa. Oleh karena itu, studi ini berusaha untuk lebih memahami hubungan antara apatis politik, ketidakberdayaan yang dipelajari, usia, dan kepribadian. Kami berhipotesis bahwa ketidakberdayaan yang dipelajari, usia, dan trait kepribadian akan menjadi prediktor yang signifikan dari apatis politik. Sebanyak 200 partisipan Malaysia (91 laki-laki, 109 perempuan, $M = 32,93$, $SD = 13,91$) menyelesaikan serangkaian kuesioner yang mencakup kuesioner Kepribadian Mini-Internasional, skala motivasi diri, dan skala keterlibatan pemilih. Ketidakberdayaan yang dipelajari dan *neuroticism* berkorelasi positif dengan apatis politik, sedangkan dua dimensi kepribadian yang lain, *extraversion* dan *intellect* menunjukkan korelasi negatif dengan apatis politik. Usia, *agreeableness*, dan *conscientiousness* tidak menghasilkan hubungan yang signifikan dengan apatis politik. *Extraversion* adalah prediktor paling signifikan dari apatis politik diikuti oleh *intellect*. Dengan demikian, wawasan pengetahuan yang dihasilkan dari studi ini melalui akumulasi pengetahuan yang dapat diterapkan secara informal untuk mencapai keterlibatan politik yang dibangkitkan secara artifisial.

Keywords: age, learned helplessness, personality traits, political apathy

Citation:

Meng, D. L. W., & Berezina, E. (2020). The role of personality and self-motivation in political (dis)engagement. *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia*, 24(1), 87-98. doi:10.7454/hubs.asia.2070220

1. Introduction

Conflicts within the human race can be aptly boiled down to two factors: intolerable differences between people

(Wynn, 2016) and scarcity of resources/opportunities (Lujala, 2010). To address these conflicts in a practical manner, humans have developed a clever platform of negotiation and compromise. This platform is called

politics, and it has played an influential role in the development of our world today. The United States' Declaration of Independence utilized the formal structure of politics of its time to gain the country's current independence (Jefferson, Franklin, & Sherman, 2004). Mahatma Gandhi uses the political right to public assembly to assert his views, thus leading to India's independence (Moxham, 2001). Like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. took to the streets, and his actions paved the way to major reformations in civil and political rights for the minority communities of his time (Morris, 1986).

However, the people of the contemporary world are seemingly disengaging from politics, with disinterest and apathy increasing at significant rates. Lower rates of political participation for Generations X and Y and increased political apathy have been shown in the form of voting abstention, governmental disinterest, and avoidance of news media (Bennett, 2000). A decline in voter turnout for young adults has been reported in countries such as the United Kingdom (Phelps, 2011), Canada (Johnston, Matthews, & Bittner, 2007; Lindsay, 2018), and the United States (Lopez, Kirby, & Sagoff, 2005). The Brexit referendum resulted in the United Kingdom voting to leave the EU, and it was later revealed this was largely determined by a significant lack of voter turnout to represent votes against leaving the EU (Murdoch, 2016). These trends are not exclusive to Western nations, as Asia is experiencing similar issues. For example, Taiwan's voter turnout dropped from 80% to 66% in the span of 12 years (Achen & Wang, 2019). Interestingly, Malaysia shows the opposite trend, as voter turnout increased by 6.32% from 76% to 82.32% in the span of 15 years (Chinnasamy & Azmi, 2018; Gomez, 2013). This forms a thought-provoking topic for research regarding why Malaysians' voting behavior differs from that of other countries. Considerations the global indicators mentioned above it can be said that the people today are experiencing some degree of political apathy. Political apathy (PA) is the motivational inhibition toward a full range of political activity. The term was introduced by Rosenberg in 1954, and is still used by researchers today to explain political disengagement. For example, a study conducted using youth samples across eight different EU countries sought to identify PA or alienation was a better predictor of political engagement, and found it to be PA (Dahl et al., 2018). Apathy was shown to influence political participation when considering different socioeconomic factors (Ahmad, 2015), and a relationship was found between apathy and political engagement when linked with cynicism and external political efficacy (Yamamoto, Kushin, & Dalisy, 2017).

Politics and political engagement are vital for a nation's health. Politics are the means by which a nation's people regulate their government and hold it accountable. To

disengage from politics leaves our governing bodies unregulated, allowing personal intentions to run strife and corruption to proliferate (Tan, 2012). Thorough understanding of PA as a construct is necessary if we are to engage in applied interventions. Therefore, the current study took an explorative approach into understanding the functional relationships between PA and learned helplessness (LH), age, and personality traits.

Sociological approaches to PA see administrative registration barriers, demographics, sociopsychological factors, and election context as recurrently cited determinants of PA (Harder & Krosnick, 2008). Administrative barriers may induce strict and rigid systems that would increase the effort needed and inconvenience of engaging in politics, such as annual registrations, literacy tests, early cutoff registration dates (Katosh & Traugott, 1982), and physical inaccessibility to registration offices (Caldeira, Patterson, & Markko, 1985). Demographics include education and income levels. Appropriate education levels grant individuals the needed intellectual capacity to comprehend political processes, thus preventing disengagement (Tenn, 2005). Wealthier individuals are predicted to be more motivated to engage in politics, due to vested social and economic interests (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Sociopsychological factors include voter trust and perceived political efficacy. Voters who are distrustful or cynical toward politicians would often rather not participate in politics, compared to trustful voters (Cox, 2003). Perceived incompetence regarding personal ability to engage in politics effectively deters individuals from voting (Acock, Clarke, & Stewart, 1985). Election context describes the competitiveness of an election (Shachar & Nalebuff, 1999), and the more competitive an election, the more weight there is to individual votes, thus increasing motivation to vote. This is compared to a one-sided election, in which individual votes would not matter in the grand scheme of the election.

Contemporary approaches to PA have considered identity-based PA and developmental life cycles. Identity-based PA posits there is a need for congruency between politicians and voters in terms of internal value systems for voters to be politically motivated, as their value systems are affirmed by a potential authority figure (Caprara, Vecchione, & Schwartz, 2012). Developmental life cycles describe the characteristic life events at different stages of life influencing incivility and motivation toward political engagement (Fox, 2015), such as youths disengaging from politics because their lives are focused on education and relationships, or adults engaging in politics because entering the working-world means governmental economic policies play significant roles in their lives.

One factor that may impact political disengagement is LH. LH, a term coined by Seligman in 1972, is the experience of objectively noncontingent events interfering with instrumental learning, therefore producing maladaptive outcomes. The initial model of LH suggested that one's perception of future non-contingency is liable to lead to maladaptive deficits (Roth, 1980). This model was later revised to include attribution styles (e.g., internality, stability, globality) as explanatory elements for the development of LH. Internal attributions are causal outcomes attributed to an individual, stable attributions are outcomes viewed as consistent (Weiner, 1985), and global attributions are causal outcomes viewed as recurrent, despite differing contexts (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Fincham & Cain, 1986). Individuals who make internal, stable, and global attributions are more prone to having future expectations of non-contingency, which would eventually lead to LH deficits (Mikulincer & Nizan, 1988). Deficits associated with LH border the domains of cognition, affect, and behavior inducing frustration, forfeiture, and general depressed mood (McKean, 1994). Helplessness regarding one's political circumstances might induce maladaptive outcomes in the form of PA.

PA may possibly be linked with characterized dispositional traits, known as personality. Personality traits are formed from environmental adaptations and biological dispositions, creating organized systems of patterned behavior, thoughts, and emotions (Allik & McCrae, 2002). The current study used the Big Five Model of Personality, containing five major dimensions of personality (John & Srivastava, 1999): Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability (Neuroticism), and Intellect (Openness to Experience). Extraversion represents energetic, positive emotionality, assertiveness, sociability, increased activity, and talkativeness. Agreeableness represents communal orientation, tenderness, cooperativeness, pro-sociality, good-natured attitudes, trustfulness, altruism, and modesty. Conscientiousness represents impulse control, goal-directed behavior, suspended gratification, rule-orientation, planning, organizing, task prioritization, orderliness, responsibility, and reliability. Neuroticism represents the lower level relaxation, high anxiety, negative emotionality and tenseness. Openness to Experience (Intellect) represents imagination, complexity, intellectualism, open-mindedness, and originality.

LH and PA. Attribution theory states that we naturally make inferences regarding causes surrounding life circumstances, and it is these inferences that influence manifestation of individual behaviors, thoughts, and emotions (Liu, Kleiman, Nestor, & Cheek, 2015). Applying this narrative to the current study, it could be suggested that the means and methods we attribute to our political environment mediate our expectations of the control we have over it (Sahar, 2014). Internal

attributions may involve believing political outcomes are the result of personal political incompetence related to ability and knowledge (Bennett, 1997; Lindsay, 2018; Strate, Parrish, Elder, & Ford, 1989). External attributions involve individuals attributing political outcomes to an external political system that is indifferent, unresponsive, and rigged (Finifter, 1970; Foley, 2015; Lindsay, 2018). Stable attributions involve the belief that political outcomes will remain consistent, despite various actions toward change (Yazici & Güven, 2017). Summarizing the theoretical flow, specific attributions of non-contingency would mediate expectancies of control, loss expectancies of control would lead to development of LH deficits, and LH deficits within a political context would manifest as PA.

Age and PA. It is a common stereotype that youths lack wisdom and are disinterested in politics (Smets, 2016). There is a torrent of studies to support this narrative; specifically, early-aged individuals being the least engaged in politics and middle-aged individuals peaking in political engagement, followed by decline of political engagement in late-aged individuals (Achen & Wang, 2019; Fox, 2015; Lindsay, 2018; Mulgan & Wilkinson, 1995; Sears, Huddy, & Jervis, 2003; Smets, 2008, 2016; Turner, Shields, & Sharpe, 2001). Smets (2016) argued that significant events in different life stages, called life cycles, play significant roles in influencing varying degrees of political engagement throughout life. For example, younger individuals, due to their lower state of cognitive development, may lack the capacity needed to grasp political concepts/processes (Glenn, 2005), or may have more important life events to consider, such as advancing education, developing careers, or finding romantic partners (Fox, 2015; Strate, Parrish, Elder, & Ford, 1989). Additionally, politics may be too abstract and unappealing for younger individuals to find them engaging (Bennett, 1997). The life cycle for middle-age individuals peaks in political engagement, due to increases in free time, economic stakes, and political experience (Harder & Krosnick, 2008; Strate, Parrish, Elder, & Ford, 1989). The life cycle of late-age individuals declines in political engagement due to decreases in mobility, health, wealth, and time (Strate, Parrish, Elder, & Ford, 1989).

Personality and PA. The current study speculated that personality (and its dimensions) would predict PA, as a means of compiling a personality profile of an individual who experiences PA. Individuals with high levels of Extraversion display sociability and assertiveness; therefore, they may orientate themselves toward group-related political activity, such as campaigning, lectures, and voting to make a political stand (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, Raso, & Ha, 2011; Mondak & Halperin, 2008; Mondak, Hibbing, Canache, Seligson, & Anderson, 2010). Interestingly, individuals with high levels of Agreeableness show mixed results in terms of

political engagement and, depending on the conflictual nature of the political activity, political engagement would be influenced differently. High-conflict political activity, such as street protests, would show decreased engagement for an agreeable individual, while peaceful demonstrations would show increased engagement (Gerber et al., 2011; Mondak & Halperin, 2008). Due to their orientation toward social norms, individuals with high levels of Conscientiousness would display an increase in political engagement, as it would be perceived as a civic duty (Gerber et al., 2011; Mondak et al., 2010; Omoto, Snyder, & Hackett, 2010). Neuroticism, in relation to political engagement, has shown mixed results, with past literature often citing a lack of theoretical explanation as to how Neuroticism might be related to PA (Gerber et al., 2011; Omoto, et al., 2010; Vecchione & Caprara, 2009). However, it is possible that the aspect of negative emotionality associated with Neuroticism could play a role in influencing PA. Negative emotionality can influence individuals to make negative attributions toward political outcomes, by clouding their perceptions and judgments. High levels of Intellect often lead to a need to seek out new ideas, sensations, people, and information, and thus might lead an individual to be drawn toward political events and exhibit political engagement as a means to fulfill these needs (Gerber et al., 2011; Hambrick, Pink, Meinz, Pettibone, & Oswald, 2008).

The following hypotheses were tested in this study: (1) LH, age, and personality traits will have significant associations with PA, and (2) LH will be the most significant predictor of PA.

2. Methods

Sample. The study sample included 200 Malaysian participants, 91 males and 109 females, age range 21-70 years ($M = 32.93$, $SD = 13.91$). Data from a total of eight participants had to be removed, as seven did not fit inclusion criteria and one had an incomplete dataset. The inclusion criteria were being aged 21 and above and Malaysian nationality. The study utilized convenience and snowball sampling as means of recruiting participants. Ethnic groups in the sample included Chinese, Indian, Malay, and other: 149 Chinese (74.5%), 20 Indian (10%), 21 Malay (10.5%), and 10 other (5%). Estimated annual income included 97 (48.5%) participants in RM0-20,000, 18 (9%) in RM20,001-35,000, 20 (10%) in RM35,001-50,000, 34 (17%) in RM50,001-70,000, 17 (8.5%) in RM70,001-100,000, and 14 (7%) in RM100,001 and above.

Variables and Measures. *LH* was operationalized via the construct of self-motivation, and was measured using the Self-Motivation Scale (Dishman & Ickes,

1981). This scale utilizes several theoretical paradigms relevant in the research field of LH, including achievement motivation (De Castella, Byrne, & Covington, 2013), locus of control (Prihadi et al., 2018), and attribution theory (Harvey, Madison, Martinko, Crook, & Crook 2014). The scale includes 40 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very much unlike me, 5 = very much like me); reversing final score is necessary. Higher score represents higher levels of LH, and vice-versa. The scale's internal consistency has been shown to be 0.91. For viewing purposes, refer to Appendix 1.

Personality was assessed using the Mini-International Personality Item Pool (Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, & Lucas, 2006), which measures personality, following the Big Five model (Intellect, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism). This scale includes 20 items with four items for each dimension, measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very inaccurate, 5 = very accurate); reverse coding is necessary for certain items. High scores would indicate high levels of the respective dimension, and vice-versa. Internal consistency for each dimension is as follows: Intellect (0.70), Conscientiousness (0.75), Extraversion (0.82), Agreeableness (0.75), and Neuroticism (0.70; Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, & Lucas, 2006). Permission for use was granted. For viewing purposes, refer to Appendix 2.

PA was measured using the Voter Involvement Scale (Winchester, Hall, & Binney, 2014) that evaluates voters' political involvement. This scale includes five items measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = very much unlike me, 7 = very much like me); reversing final score is necessary. High scores represent high levels of PA, and vice-versa. The scale's internal consistency is .88. Permission for use was granted. For viewing purposes, refer to Appendix 3.

Procedure. The research proposal was approved by the appropriate ethics committee. A survey link was distributed across social media platforms using convenience and snowball sampling. Participants accessing the survey link were asked to provide informed consent before answering the set of questionnaires. The survey took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. No compensation was given for participation.

Analysis. Pearson correlations and hierarchical multiple regression were used to analyze data in this study.

3. Results

The current study sought to better understand the nature of the construct of PA by testing its relationship with the predictive variables LH, age, and personality traits.

The first hypothesis proposed that LH, age, and personality would be significantly associated with PA. LH and PA resulted in a weak significant positive correlation, $r = 0.15, p = 0.04$. Increased LH resulted in increased PA. Extraversion and PA had a weak significant negative correlation, $r = -0.28, p < 0.001$. Increased Extraversion resulted in decreased PA. Neuroticism and PA resulted in a weak significant positive correlation, $r = 0.18, p = 0.01$. Increased Neuroticism lead to increased PA. Intellect and PA were significantly negatively correlated, $r = -0.14, p = 0.04$. Increased Intellect resulted in decreased PA. The variables of age, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness had no significant correlations with PA. Thus, the first hypothesis was partially supported, as LH, Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Intellect were significantly correlated to PA, while age, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness were not (see Table 1).

To identify whether LH and age significantly impact PA, after taking personality into account, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to test three models. In Model 1, personality was entered to predict PA. Personality largely predicted PA (with the exception of Conscientiousness), $R=0.38, R^2=0.15, F(5,194) = 6.55, p < 0.001$. In Model 2, LH was included as an additional predictor, $R^2 \text{ change} = 0.01, F$

$\text{change} (1,193) = 2.44, p < 0.001, R = 0.39, R^2 = 0.16$. LH explained an additional 1% variability in the model, to 16% predicting PA. In Model 3, age was included to explore if the beta coefficients of other variables would be affected, $R^2 \text{ change} = 0.003, F \text{ change} (1,192) = 0.605, p < 0.001, R = 0.40, R^2 = 0.16$. Age explained an additional 0.3% variability in the model, to 16% predicting PA. Model 1, with only personality traits as predictors, indicated the most predictive power for PA, compared to Models 2 and 3 (see Table 2).

Extraversion had a beta value of $-0.28, t = -3.99, p < 0.001$; thus, as Extraversion increases by 1SD, PA decreases by -0.28 SD . Agreeableness had a beta value of $0.16, t = 2.16, p < 0.05$; thus, as Agreeableness increases by 1SD, PA increases by 0.16 SD . Neuroticism had a beta value of $0.15, t = 2.18, p < 0.05$; thus, as Neuroticism increases by 1SD, PA increases by 0.15 SD . Intellect had a beta value of $-0.17, t = -0.24, p < 0.05$; thus, as Intellect increases by 1SD, PA decreases by -0.17 SD . LH, age, and Conscientiousness did not significantly predict PA. Therefore, the second hypothesis was rejected, as LH was not the most significant predictor of PA. Instead, the personality trait Extraversion was the most significant predictor of PA.

Table 1. Pearson Correlations of Political Apathy, Learned Helplessness, Age, and Personality ($n = 200$)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Political Apathy	-							
2. Learned Helplessness	0.15*	-						
3. Age	-0.09	-0.23**	-					
4. Extraversion	-0.28**	-0.24**	0.01	-				
5. Agreeableness	0.04	-0.22**	-0.24**	0.28**	-			
6. Conscientiousness	0.04	-0.35**	0.15*	0.05	0.06	-		
7. Neuroticism	0.18*	0.21**	-0.14*	-0.07	-0.01	-0.13	-	
8. Intellect	-0.14*	-0.03	-0.22**	0.06	0.21**	-0.05	0.04	-

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression of Learned Helplessness, Age, and Personality on Political Apathy

Predictor	Political Apathy		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Extraversion	-0.30**	-0.28**	-0.28**
Agreeableness	0.16*	0.18*	0.16*
Conscientiousness	0.06	0.09	0.10
Neuroticism	0.17*	0.15*	0.15*
Intellect	-0.16*	-0.16*	-0.17*
Learned Helplessness		0.12	0.10
Age			-0.06

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

4. Discussion

Political engagement is an essential element for keeping the state and government accounted for and regulated. Conversely, political disengagement allows unregulated governments to run personal agendas and eventually corruption causes strife within a nation. A thorough understanding of the PA construct is necessary in order to make informed interventions to increase individuals' political motivation. Therefore, the current study sought to better understand the nature of PA by testing its functional relationships with the predictive variables of LH, age, and personality.

The first hypothesis posited that LH, age, and personality would have significant associations with PA. This hypothesis was partially supported, as some variables were significant and some were not. LH, using its theoretical model, was suspected to play a psychological role in the development of PA, and was therefore tested against PA. Previous literature suggested that individuals who make dysfunctional attributions toward political outcomes would have similar expectations for the future, thus developing PA. Results indicated that LH was indeed a significant predictor of PA. This suggests that PA may follow similar attributional processing to the LH model in its politically related outcomes. Thus, making noncontingent attributions to specific outcomes causes the development of future expectation of non-contingency and maladaptive behaviors, thoughts, and emotions (Sahar, 2014). Moving forward, it would be interesting to note the predictive power each attributional style, in relation to each other, has toward PA.

PA was presumed to have significant developmental trends; therefore, age was correlated with PA. Literature has suggested that different life stages have their own life events that may motivate or demotivate individuals toward political engagement. Results indicated that age was not a significant predictor of PA, suggesting age is not related to PA. Interestingly, this also suggests the stereotype regarding youths being disengaged from politics as a result of lacking wisdom and being disinterested is not necessarily true. It is possible that this may be a result unique to the political landscape of Malaysia. The Malaysian government is commonly known for its authoritarian approach, maintaining strict control over mainstream media by censorship (George, 2005; Lim, 2013) and student activism by suppression (Tyson, Jeram, Sivapraasam, & Azlan, 2017; Weiss, 2005). In 1996, the Malaysian government approved the Multimedia Super Corridor Act (MSC), which is an official pledge by the government against Internet censorship, as a means to entice foreign investors and capitalize on the economic boom of the Internet. The government's heavy regulation and control in mainstream media's expression of politics led to an informational vacuum for alternative political media that was effectively

replaced by the Internet, coupled with the MSC, which served as a catalyst for the emergence of political blogs (Lim, 2013). Political blogs in Malaysia digest news surrounding Malaysian politics into simplified information that reduces the cognitive load needed for youths to comprehend it, and seamlessly distributes news on social media networks that are highly accessible for youths and represents a place where youths spend a significant amount of time (Lim, 2013). This could possibly explain why age and PA were not significant in this study. This also shows that political context may play a significant role in influencing PA.

In an effort to create a personality profile of an individual who experiences PA, personality variables were tested against PA for predictive significance. Results were mixed, as Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Intellect were significant, while Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were not. High Extraversion was associated with lowered PA, suggesting that high levels of sociability and assertiveness might play a role into how individuals become engaged in group-oriented political activities. Additionally, high Neuroticism was associated with increased PA. Although previous literature has not provided a theoretical explanation as to how Neuroticism and PA might be related, the current study provided its rationale that Neuroticism's aspect of negative emotionality negatively influences the way individuals make attributions regarding political outcomes, which should be clarified in future studies. High Intellect was associated with lowered PA, suggesting that individuals with a high need for new information/ideas might be more politically engaged (or less politically apathetic) in order to satiate this need for information. Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were not associated with PA. A possible explanation could be that Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are simply not relevant in the context of political engagement as a whole, or it may be an issue related to cultural context, where it is a Malaysian value to not find Agreeableness and Conscientiousness valuable in relation to politics.

The second hypothesis posited that LH would be the strongest predictor of PA. This was an additional hypothesis to assess predictability of the variables, relative to each other and PA, as well as to see which variable played the most significant role in predicting PA. This hypothesis was rejected, as LH was not the strongest predictor of PA. Extraversion being the most significant predictor of PA in this study may not be universally relevant as of yet; however, it may be an indicative aspect of the Malaysian people that high sociability and assertiveness breeds high levels of political engagement. Additionally, all personality variables, with the exception of Conscientiousness, were significant, while non-personality variables, such as LH and age were not. This may be indicative of personality constructs having a moderating role toward non-

personality constructs, yet future clarification will be necessary.

5. Conclusion

The strength of this study was represented in its timely occurrence toward data collection, as it was conducted soon after Malaysia's 14th General Elections. The study could potentially capture the psyche of a sample influenced by the election context. However, the study's design limited data collection to the post-election context, thus failing to consider data collection in a pre-election context. This oversight prevented an opportunity to analyze how an election context could potentially influence data in significant ways. Future studies could expand further into the nuances of the current study's predictive variables as to how they may specifically relate to PA. LH was found to be significantly associated with PA; thus, it would be interesting to see the relationship of attributional styles to PA using standard multiple regression—which attributional styles are significant to PA and which play a more significant role at predicting PA. Another interesting future direction to consider would be how age stratified to demographic factors (e.g., gender, ethnicity, education level, economic status) would relate to PA. Considering how the current study did not support stereotypes regarding youth and politics, it would be interesting to see under what circumstances those findings may differ. Lastly, future research should conduct multiple regression analysis on the facets of personality dimensions to PA to see specifically which personality trait plays the most significant role in predicting PA.

Acknowledgement

This work has been presented at the 7th ASEAN Regional Union of Psychological Societies (ARUPS) Congress and 3rd Malaysian International Psychology Conference on 2-4 August 2019.

References

- Abramson, L. Y., Seligman, M. E., & Teasdale, J. D. (1978). Learned helplessness in humans: Critique and reformulation. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 87*(1), 49. doi: 10.1037/0021-843x.87.1.49
- Achen, C. H., & Wang, T. Y. (2019). Declining voter turnout in Taiwan: A generational effect? *Electoral Studies, 58*, 113–124. doi: 10.1016/j.electstud.2018.12.011
- Acock, A., Clarke, H. D., & Stewart, M. C. (1985). A new model for old measures: A covariance structure analysis of political efficacy. *Journal of Politics, 47*(4), 1062-1084. doi: 10.2307/2130807
- Ahmad, S. (2015). Role of socioeconomic status and political participation in construction of apathy among youth. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 25*(8), 801-809. doi: 10.1080/10911359.2015.1021065
- Allik, J., & McCrae, R. R. (2002). *A five-factor theory perspective: In the five-factor model of personality across cultures*. Boston, MA, Springer.
- Bennett, S. E. (1997). Why young Americans hate politics, and what we should do about it. *Political Science & Politics, 30*(1), 47-53. doi: 10.2307/420669
- Bennett, S. E. (2000). Political apathy and avoidance of news media among generations X and Y: America's continuing problem. *Education for Civic Engagement in Democracy: Service Learning and other Promising Practices, 9-28*.
- Caldeira, G. A., Patterson, S. C., & Markko, G. A. (1985). The mobilization of voters in congressional elections. *The Journal of Politics, 47*(2), 490-509. doi: 10.2307/2130893
- Caprara, G. V., Vecchione, M., & Schwartz, S. H. (2012). Why people do not vote. *European Psychologist, 17*(4), 266–278. doi:10.1027/1016-9040/a000099
- Chinnasamy, S., & Azmi, N. M. (2018). Malaysian 14th general election: Young voters & rising political participation. *The Journal of Social Sciences Research, 125-138*. doi: 10.32861/jssr.spi4.125.138
- Cox, M. (2003). When trust matters: Explaining differences in voter turnout. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 41*(4), 757-770. doi: 10.1111/1468-5965.00444
- Dahl, V., Amnå, E., Banaji, S., Landberg, M., Šerek, J., Ribeiro, N., ... & Zani, B. (2018). Apathy or alienation? Political passivity among youths across eight European Union countries. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology, 15*(3), 284-301. doi: 10.4324/9780429281037-4
- De Castella, K., Byrne, D., & Covington, M. (2013). Unmotivated or motivated to fail? A cross-cultural study of achievement motivation, fear of failure, and student disengagement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 105*(3), 861-880. doi: 10.1037/a0032464
- Dishman, R. K., & Ickes, W. (1981). Self-motivation and adherence to therapeutic exercise. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 4*(4), 421-438. doi: 10.1007/bf00846151

- Donnellan, M. B., Oswald, F. L., Baird, B. M., & Lucas, R. E. (2006). The mini-IPIP scales: Tiny-yet-effective measures of the Big Five factors of personality. *Psychological Assessment, 18*(2), 192-203. doi: 10.1037/1040-3590.18.2.192
- Fincham, F. D., & Cain, K. M. (1986). Learned helplessness in humans: A developmental analysis. *Developmental Review, 6*(4), 301-333. doi: 10.1016/0273-2297(86)90016-x
- Finifter, A. W. (1970). Dimensions of political alienation. *American Political Science Review, 64*(2), 389-410. doi: 10.2307/1953840
- Foley, J. (2015). *Political Cynicism: A critical re-examination* (Doctoral dissertation, Wake Forest University).
- Fox, S. (2015). *Apathy, alienation and young people: The political engagement of British millennials* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nottingham).
- George, C. (2005). The internet's political impact and the penetration/participation paradox in Malaysia and Singapore. *Media, Culture & Society, 27*(6), 903-920. doi: 10.1177/0163443705057678
- Gerber, A. S., Huber, G. A., Doherty, D., Dowling, C. M., Raso, C., & Ha, S. E. (2011). Personality traits and participation in political processes. *The Journal of Politics, 73*(3), 692-706. doi: 10.1017/s0022381611000399.
- Glenn, N. D. (2005). *Cohort analysis (Vol. 5)*. NY: Sage.
- Gomez, J. (2013). *Malaysia's 13th General Election: Social media and its political impact*. Retrieved from http://mediamalaysia.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/GE13_Social_Media_James_Gomez-090913.pdf.
- Hambrick, D. Z., Pink, J. E., Meinz, E. J., Pettibone, J. C., & Oswald, F. L. (2008). The roles of ability, personality, and interests in acquiring current events knowledge: A longitudinal study. *Intelligence, 36*(3), 261-278. doi: 10.1016/j.intell.2007.06.004
- Harder, J., & Krosnick, J. A. (2008). Why do people vote? A psychological analysis of the causes of voter turnout. *Journal of Social Issues, 64*(3), 525-549. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.00576.x
- Harvey, P., Madison, K., Martinko, M., Crook, T. R., & Crook, T. A. (2014). Attribution theory in the organizational sciences: The road traveled and the path ahead. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 28*(2), 128-146. doi: 10.5465/amp.2012.0175
- Jefferson, J. A., Franklin, B., & Sherman, R. (2004). Thomas Jefferson and the declaration of independence. *Thomas Jefferson: A Free Mind, 79*. doi: 10.7551/mitpress/6824.003.0022
- John, O. P., & Srivastava, S. (1999). The Big Five trait taxonomy: History, measurement, and theoretical perspectives. In L. A. Pervin & O. P. John (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (2nd ed., pp. 102-138). New York: Guilford Press
- Johnston, R., Matthews, J. S., & Bittner, A. (2007). Turnout and the party system in Canada, 1988-2004. *Electoral Studies, 26*(4), 735-745. doi: 10.1016/j.electstud.2007.08.002
- Katosh, J. P., & Traugott, M. W. (1982). Costs and values in the calculus of voting. *American Journal of Political Science, 26*(2), 361-376. doi:10.2307/2111044
- Lim, J. B. (2013). Video blogging and youth activism in Malaysia. *International Communication Gazette, 75*(3), 300-321. doi: 10.1177/1748048512472947
- Lindsay, A. (2018). Senior undergraduate students' experiences of cynicism and helplessness in civic and political engagement. *Metamorphosis*.
- Liu, R. T., Kleiman, E. M., Nestor, B. A., & Cheek, S. M. (2015). The hopelessness theory of depression: A quarter-century in review. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 22*(4), 345-365. doi: 10.1111/cpsp.12125
- Lopez, M. H., Kirby, E., & Sagoff, J. (2005). The youth vote 2004. *Fact Sheet*. University of Maryland: Center for Information & Research on Civic Engagement.
- Lujala, P. (2010). The spoils of nature: Armed civil conflict and rebel access to natural resources. *Journal of Peace Research, 47*(1), 15-28. doi: 10.1177/0022343309350015
- McKean, K. J. (1994). Using multiple risk factors to assess the behavioral, cognitive, and affective effects of learned helplessness. *The Journal of Psychology, 128*(2), 177-183. doi: 10.1080/00223980.1994.9712721
- Mikulincer, M., & Nizan, B. (1988). Causal attribution, cognitive interference, and the generalization of learned helplessness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 55*(3), 470. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.55.3.470
- Mondak, J. J., & Halperin, K. D. (2008). A framework for the study of personality and political behaviour. *British Journal of Political Science, 38*(02), 335-362. doi: 10.1017/s0007123408000173

- Mondak, J. J., Hibbing, M. V., Canache, D., Seligson, M. A., & Anderson, M. R. (2010). Personality and civic engagement: An integrative framework for the study of trait effects on political behavior. *American Political Science Review*, 104(1), 85-110. doi: 10.1017/s0003055409990359
- Morris, A. D. (1986). The origins of the civil rights movement. *Simon and Schuster*.
- Moxham, R. (2001). Salt starvation in British India: Consequences of high salt taxation in Bengal presidency, 1765 to 1878. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2270-2274.
- Mulgan, G., & Wilkinson, H. (1995). Freedom's children: Work, relationships and politics for 18-34-Year-olds in Britain Today. *Demos*.
- Murdoch, J. B. (2016). Brexit: voter turnout by age. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ft.com/content/1ce1a720-ce94-3c32-a689-8d2356388a1f>
- Omoto, A. M., Snyder, M., & Hackett, J. D. (2010). Personality and motivational antecedents of activism and civic engagement. *Journal of Personality*, 78(6), 1703-1734. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6494.2010.00667.x
- Phelps, E. (2011). Understanding electoral turnout among British young people: A review of the literature. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 65(1), 281-299. doi: 10.1093/pa/gsr056
- Prihadi, K., Tan, C. Y., Tan, R. T., Yong, P. L., Yong, J. H., Tinagaran, S., ... & Tee, Y. J. (2018). Mediation role of locus of control on the relationship of learned-helplessness and academic procrastination. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, 7(2), 87-93. doi: 10.11591/ijere.v7i2.12597
- Rosenberg, M. (1954). Some determinants of political apathy. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 18(4), 349-366. doi: 10.1086/266528
- Rosenstone, S. J., & Hansen, J. (1993). *Mobilization, participation, and democracy in America*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Roth, S. (1980). A revised model of learned helplessness in humans. *Journal of Personality*, 48(1), 103-133. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6494.1980.tb00969.x
- Sahar, G. (2014). On the importance of attribution theory in political psychology. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 8(5), 229-249. doi: 10.1111/spc3.12102
- Sears, D. O., Huddy, L., & Jervis, R. (2003). The psychologies underlying political psychology. In D. O. Sears, L. Huddy, & R. Jervis (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of political psychology* (p. 3-16). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Seligman, M. E. (1972). Learned helplessness. *Annual review of medicine*, 23(1), 407-412. doi: 10.1146/annurev.me.23.020172.002203
- Shachar, R., & Nalebuff, B. (1999). Follow the leader: Theory and evidence on political participation. *American Economic Review*, 89(3), 525-547. doi: 10.1257/aer.89.3.525
- Smets, K. (2008). In need of an update or overdue? Re-evaluating the political life-cycle model. *Youth and Politics: Strange Bedfellows? Comparative Perspectives on Political Socialization*, 1-38.
- Smets, K. (2016). Revisiting the political life-cycle model: Later maturation and turnout decline among young adults. *European Political Science Review*, 8(2), 225-249. doi: 10.1017/s1755773914000460
- Strate, J. M., Parrish, C. J., Elder, C. D., & Ford, C. (1989). Life span civic development and voting participation. *American Political Science Review*, 83(2), 443-464. doi: 10.2307/1962399
- Tan, K. (2012). Political apathy is harmful. *The Oracle*. Retrieved from: <https://gunnoracle.com/2748/forum/political-apaty-is-harmful/>
- Tenn, S. (2005). An alternative measure of relative education to explain voter turnout. *The Journal of Politics*, 67(1), 271-282. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2508.2005.00317.x
- Turner, M. J., Shields, T. G., & Sharp, D. (2001). Changes and continuities in the determinants of older adults' voter turnout 1952-1996. *The Gerontologist*, 41(6), 805-818. doi: 10.1093/geront/41.6.805
- Tyson, A. D., Jeram, D., Sivapragasam, V., & Azlan, H. N. (2017). Ethnicity, education and the economics of brain drain in Malaysia: Youth perspectives. *Malaysian Journal of Economic Studies*, 48(2), 175-184. Retrieved from <https://mjes.um.edu.my/article/view/2850>
- Vecchione, M., & Caprara, G. V. (2009). Personality determinants of political participation: The contribution of traits and self-efficacy beliefs. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 46(4), 487-492. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2008.11.021

Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychological Review*, 92(4), 548-573. doi: 10.1037/0033-295x.92.4.548

Weiss, M. L. (2005). Still with the people? The chequered path of student activism in Malaysia. *South East Asia Research*, 13(3), 287-332. doi: 10.5367/000000005775179694

Winchester, T. M., Hall, J., & Binney, W. (2014). Young adult voting decision-making: Studying the effect of usage from a consumer behaviour perspective. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 22(2), 144-154. doi: 10.1016/j.ausmj.2014.01.001

Wynn, K. (2016). Origins of value conflict: Babies do not agree to disagree. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 20(1), 3-5. doi: 10.1016/j.tics.2015.08.018

Yamamoto, M., Kushin, M. J., & Dalisay, F. (2017). Social media and political disengagement among young adults: A moderated mediation model of cynicism, efficacy, and social media use on apathy. *Mass Communication and Society*, 20(2), 149-168. doi: 10.1080/15205436.2016.1224352

Yazici, S., & Güven, S. (2017). Development and validation of a citizenship attributional style questionnaire. *The Social Science Journal*, 54(4), 403-410. doi: 10.1016/j.sosci.2017.06.002

Appendix

Appendix 1. Self-Motivation Inventory (SMI)

Read each of the following statements and write by each item the letter of the alternative which describes how characteristic the statement is when applied to you. The alternatives are

- (a) Extremely uncharacteristic of me
- (b) Somewhat uncharacteristic of me
- (c) Neither characteristic uncharacteristic of me
- (d) Somewhat characteristic of me
- (e) Extremely characteristic of me

Please be sure to answer every item and try to be as honest and accurate as possible in your responses. Your answers will be kept in the strictest confidence.

-
1. I'm not very good at committing myself to do thing
 2. Whenever I get bored with project I start, I drop them to do something else
 3. I can persevere at stressful tasks, even when they are physically tiring or painful
 4. If something gets to be too much of an effort to do, I'm likely to just forget it
 5. I'm really concerned about developing and maintaining self-discipline.
 6. I'm good at keeping promise, especially the ones I make to myself
 7. I don't work any harder than I have to
 8. I seldom work to my full capacity
 9. I'm just not the goal-setting type
 10. When I take on a difficult job, I make a point of sticking with it until it's completed
 11. I'm willing to work for things I want as long as it's not a bog hassle for me
 12. I have a lot of self-motivation
 13. I'm good at making decisions and standing by them
 14. I generally take the path of least resistance
 15. I get discouraged easily
 16. If I tell somebody I'll do something, you can depend on it being done.
 17. I don't like to overextend myself
 18. I'm basically lazy
 19. I have a hard hard-driving, aggressive personality
 20. I work harder than most of the friends
 21. I can persist in spite of pain or discomfort
 22. I like to set goals and work toward them
 23. Sometimes I push myself harder than I should
 24. I tend to be overly apathetic
 25. I seldom, if ever, let myself down
 26. I'm not very reliable
 27. I like to take on jobs that challenge me
 28. I change my mind about things quite easily
 29. I have a lot of willpower
 30. I'm not likely to put myself out if I don't have to
 31. Things just don't matter much to me
 32. I avoid stressful situations
 33. I often work to the point of exhaustion
 34. I don't impose much structure on my activities
 35. I never force myself to do things I don't feel like doing
 36. It takes a lot to get me going
 37. Whenever I reach a goal, I set a higher one
 38. I can persist in spite of failure
 39. I have a strong desire to achieve
 40. I don't have much self-discipline
-

Appendix 2. Mini-International Personality Item Pool (IPIP)

Item	Factor	Text	Original item number
1	E	Am the life of the party.	1
2	A	Sympathize with others' feelings	17
3	C	Get chores done right away.	23
4	N	Have frequent mood swings.	39
5	I	Have a vivid imagination	15
6	E	Don't talk a lot. (R)	6
7	A	Am not interested in other people's problems. (R)	22
8	C	Often forget to put things back in their proper place. (R)	28
9	N	Am relaxed most of the time. (R)	9
10	I	Am not interested in abstract ideas. (R)	20
11	E	Talk to a lot of different people at parties	31
12	A	Feel others' emotions	42
13	C	Like order	33
14	N	Get upset easily	29
15	I	Have difficulty understanding abstract ideas. (R)	10
16	E	Keep in the background. (R)	16
17	A	Am not really interested in others. (R)	32
18	C	Make a mess of things. (R)	18
19	N	Seldom feel blue. (R)	19
20	I	Do not have a good imagination. (R)	30

Note. E = Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; N = Neuroticism; I = Intellect/Imagination; (R) = Reverse Scored Item. Original 50-item IPIP-FFM available at <http://ipip.ori.org/newQform50b5.htm>

Appendix 3. Voter (Political) Involvement Scale

Items:

Involvement:

1. Politics is a relevant part of my life
 2. Politics is significant to me
 3. I am involved in politics
 4. I am interested in politics
 5. Politics means a lot to me
-

Note. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale.

Received date: 10 December 2019
 Revised date: 28 January 2020
 Accepted date: 07 February 2020