

# Propensity of Political Participation among Young Japanese

Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad, and Md Azalanshah Md Syed

**Abstract**—Young Japanese has been seen as indifferent to politics and political parties have not represented their concerns. This is a blow to the Japanese democracy when the great majority of youth are political apathetic and they are moving away from actively participate in politics. This paper describes the growing political apathy among young Japanese (citizens aged between 20-35) that need to be changed and concentrate on policies that advocate issues of interest to younger voters. The Japanese youth engagement reflected in three major issues: the feminist movement, community service and environmental protection which will be discussed in the paper to portray the more young Japanese engaged in issues involving the relationship between the economic and political matter. Finally, the paper argued that young Japanese political involvement is not being attended seriously but the political parties are securing votes from the largest group of voters, hence the increase of political apathy among young voters contributed to the Japanese democracy in declination.

**Keywords**—Political apathy, political participation, young Japanese, voter

## I. INTRODUCTION

**P**OLITICAL participation reflects the way people with various attitudes utilize their opportunities. Civic involvement is indeed necessary to reach the ‘expectation’ of democratic ideals. Among activities which the society involves in are the conventional, which is limited to vote casting and political campaign, the unconventional such as protests and women’s participation, and the recent civil activities such as volunteering and social engagement. These forms of participation are consistent with the actual civic engagement practices.

Takashi and Hatano (1999) [15] stated that the Japanese youth engagement focused on three major issues: feminist movement, community service and environmental protection. The movements are indirectly political matters.

Utter (2011) [7] explored the incident of March 11, 2011 which used to happen earthquake and followed by tsunami has brought into the shutdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

According to White (1994) [17], youth are defined by

Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad is with the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA (+60379675620; e-mail: sulastryyurni@um.edu.my

Md Azalanshah Md Syed is with the Department of Media Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA (e-mail:azalan@um.edu.my)

marital and employment status rather than by age, and “such institutional definitions have more weight than social and psychological identities. The regulatory and protective functions of institutions such as family and school still dominate the lives of Japanese youth into their twenties.

This paper is focusing on the propensity or tendency of the young Japanese towards their political parties and how they react towards the political involvements.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Historical Experience

The historical period of Japanese development brought tremendous changes in the political system. Utter (2011) [7] found that Japan has faced economic reversal in 1990s as well as scandals involving government officials, bankers and industrialists.

### B. Cultural Politics/Political participation

Postwar Japanese urban culture has featured a succession of highly visible but transient youth subcultures, often led by young women as mentioned by Ito (2003) [11]. Skov and Moeran (1995) [14] describe how young Japanese women’s central posting in media imagery and cultures of consumption are an invasion of their weak position in the labor market.

### C. Japanese Nationalism

Ishihara (2006) [10] offers a place to begin because he offers a paradigmatic example of a Japanese nationalism that begins with a kind of historical revisionism related to World War II. Ishihara blames the Allied Occupation Forces for distorting Japan’s educational system, and argues that now, 60 years later, is the time to revise the educational system to incorporate policies aimed at producing “patriotism” or *aikokushin* in Japan’s youth.

## III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Base on previous empirical studies, the conceptual framework has been developed on the discussion of historical experiences, cultural politics, political participation and Japanese nationalism. The issues that Takahashi and Hatano (1991) [15] have been discussed in looking at the political participation among young Japanese have coined the term of “political ignorance” to describe the expressive and socially inactive towards political engagement.

For socially engaged young Japanese, their decision to engage in politics may relate to desires for personal or national expression, or they may be constrained because of

concerns about the nature or structure of political system in Japan. However, to our knowledge, there are many empirical investigation of inactive socially or politically engaged youth research currently exists. Thus, I seek to answer the following questions which have been conducted through informal interviews: Q1: Do youth decline to be engaged politically and prefer to be socially engaged? Q2: What considerations influence young Japanese political involvement?

#### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to investigate the propensity of political participation among young Japanese and factors that contribute to their political engagement. This paper applies standardized open-ended interview format, most of the time a formally structured set of interview questions are used where the exact wording and sequence of questions are predetermined. This interview structure is useful because the researchers have limited amount of time available due to those to be interviewed are available only at certain or limited times.

Since this project aimed to explore ideas about political participation that may not fit with the current trend of freedom of political participation among youth in the global context, the interview was a logical, flexible choice to capture such ideas. Allowing participants to actively shape the interview conversation also demonstrated respect and value for their thoughts, and gave them a chance to tell their stories in meaningful ways.

##### *Interview Questions*

- (1) Do you think young Japanese has given the freedom to express their ideas, voice and expressions towards the political system?
- (2) Do you participate in any movements?
- (3) What kinds of topics or issues seem political?
- (4) What kinds of actions seem political?
- (5) What kind of purposes or reasons for doing things seem political?

##### *Research Design*

###### *A. Participant Selection*

In order to explore young Japanese experiences with political participation, I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with a purposive convenience sample of 10 individuals. Interviewees were selected randomly from 30 among participants in a various background. All 10 interviewees in the sample were between the ages of 18 and 35, as these participants were able to participate in traditional political activities like voting, but also best fit the description of individuals who lacked a political voice and were most likely to engage in non-traditional forms of political participation (Bennett, 1998 [2]; Dalton, 2006 [5]; 2008 [6]; Harris, 2008[8]; Li & Marsh, 2008 [12]).

Interviewees were selected based on a number of criteria. Both male and female participants were selected, as the literature suggests that gender affects how people choose to

participate (e.g. Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2010 [4]). In addition, participants were included because they held a variety of political perspectives, since individuals with different ideologies may use technology for different political purposes (e.g. Benkler & Shaw, 2010 [1]; Best & Krueger, 2005 [3]).

###### *B. Research Analysis*

According to Taylor (2001) [16] language does not simply carry meaning, it creates and changes meaning as it is used. While Schiffin *et. al.*, (2001) [13] mentioned that generally, discourse analysis refers to the study of language as it is used to give meaning to concepts and ideas. Rather than focusing on grammar or the individual parts of a sentence, discourse analysis explores broader patterns of language use in order to analyze the data that are gathered, I used a form of discourse analysis.

Although the term can encompass a variety of different analysis techniques, approaches to discourse analysis generally assume that ideas and concepts are socially constructed rather than naturally occurring, meaning that the way individuals talk about a topic shapes their understandings and beliefs about that topic.

#### V. RESEARCH FINDINGS

##### *A. Patterns and pathways*

Participant A, a 20-year-old female, described herself as a politically inactive and she prefer to be associated with feminist movements especially activities organized by the student's society. She has never participated in the voting during the Election Day. During the interviews, she demonstrated that she was quite actively involved in addressing political issues informally. She defines "political" in broader views by looking at the role of the government and political parties in providing more opportunities for the youth.

Interviewee B is a 30-year-old female actively updated her information on the political environment. She has joined the voting system since at the age of 20 and plan to not to miss in voting in the future. She emphasizes on the importance of participating politically in the voting system due to voting rate for young people is incredibly low.

While participant C is a 19-year-old male participant, considers himself to be slightly liberal, but does not identify with any political party and has never voted. He is very interested in national elections, but not very interested in local elections.

D is 35 years old, very conservative, and interested in national elections, somewhat interested in local elections, and always votes. He used to discuss political issues among his friends to share ideas and he feels very satisfied in the political expressions among his colleagues.

Participant E is slightly reluctant to express her views on political issues and prefer to discuss on how the Japanese education system has shaped the way of thinking among the students ant any levels. E is 26 years old and currently pursuing her Masters in the local university. She has

participated in voting once and stopped from voting because of lack of interest on politics.

Participant F, 23 years old female is so interested to participate in the voting because she used to spoke with her professor and with her American friends who all have strong opinions about politics.

Interviewee G, 32 years old mentioned that he has been actively engaged in the politics since he was 21 years old. He said that participating in the voting is very important to express his opinions instead of just thinking.

While H is a 28 years old waitress felt that she has no time to participate in any political discussion due to her working schedule. She is a conservative person who chooses to vote and keep busy with her daily life to earn more money for living.

I is a 26 year old female who identifies as a slightly liberal independent. She is very interested in national elections, and not very interested in local ones.

The final male interviewee, J is 24 years old, moderate, and considers himself an open minded person because he said that if he waive his right to vote then he has no right to complain about politics or society. Therefore, he will be going to vote responsibly.

### B. Summary and Conclusion

Young Japanese between 18-35 years of age account who participated in the interviews haven't fully invested in politics but they have a sense of impending crisis and looking forward to participate in the political system.

Young people between 20 and 24 years of age account from six percent of the voting public as mentioned in the Link Asia News. This shows that young people has been considered as a minority. There was a huge gap between the young Japanese voters and politicians due to the political campaign and policies that has been carried out.

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