# SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTIONS IN ASIA-PACIFIC

## - THE GROWING POWER OF THE YOUTH VOTE

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# FOREWORD

**T**he empowering and unrelenting growth of Internet across Asia-Pacific, coupled with a large number of elections in the region in 2012 and 2013 make of social media's impact on elections and young voters relevant and timely.

Consider the statistics first. In 2012 and 2013, a total of 42 elections will have been, or will be, held in Asia-Pacific. Not all are in democracies. They range from the state managed Chinese 18th National Congress of the Communist Party, through presidential elections in tiny Pacific Islands like Kiribati and the Marshal Islands to elections in Australia and New Zealand. In Asia, there have been gubernatorial elections in Bangkok, the fiery Pakistani and Malaysian elections and others, including in Bangladesh, Cambodia and Nepal.

Then consider the growth of the Internet. In 2013, the number of mobile phone subscriptions have reached a new peak. With 3.5 billion, Asia-Pacific accounts for more than a half of these subscriptions. In 2013, 2.7 billion people or 39 percent of the world's population, are using the Internet. Internet penetration is growing at 15 percent annually in Asia Pacific, the Arab States and China.

Break these statistics down into social media. For the first quarter of 2013, monthly active users on Facebook passed 1.1 billion for the first time; Twitter had a 44 percent growth from June 2012 to March 2013 (21 percent of the world's Internet population are now using Twitter every month); YouTube has 1 billion unique monthly visitors; Google has 359 million monthly active users and LinkedIn, the largest professional business network, has more than 200 million users, 64 percent of them outside of the USA.

The impact of this confluence of politics and the rapid growth of the Internet and social media is best manifested in the "Arab Spring", where new media was an integral part of campaigns to bring down regimes in the Arab world. There has been no "Asia Pacific Spring", but beneath the surface of political rhetoric the region is experiencing the gradual, if somewhat erratic, embracement of the power of social media in the electoral process.

The rejuvenation, or awakening, of the youth vote in a number of countries examined in this book follows a more benign path than the Arab Spring, but, nonetheless, as our contributors show in each of their well researched chapters, a sea change is happening that is inexorably altering the face of electoral politics in the Asia Pacific region forever.

The countries covered in this publication are Malaysia, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand (Australasia), South Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia and Taiwan.

In his analysis of the 5 May, 2013 Malaysian general election, "Social Media Utilization in the 2013 Malaysian General Election: Lessons Learned", Ibrahim Suffian, co-founder and Programme Director of Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research, Malaysia, found a dichotomy between rural and urban electoral constituencies and the fact, that social media campaigning had measurable limits, as traditional electoral communications are still holding a strong position. However, he finds that the prospect of social media serving as a tool to equalize this uneven electorate in Malaysia remains favorable as the Government has an imperative to keep investing in the Internet. He concludes that more perseverance will be required to convert this exponential growth of social media with tangible results.

The 2013 senatorial elections in the Philippines are examined by Vladymir Joseph Licudine and Christian Michael Entoma from Social Weather Stations a survey research institution based in the Philippines. Their detailed analysis of Filipinos' growing use of social media, including employment by politicians of gadgets and devices; a breakdown of demographics; a survey of social media habits; the use of social media for political purposes and how the senatorial candidates fared on Twitter and Facebook suggests that while social media is growing, it has not yet reached its full potential in the Philippines.

Dr Norman Abjorensen, former Visiting Professor of International Public Policy Graduate School of Law at Hitotsubashi University poses a question particularly relevant to Japan: "Digital Electioneering and Political Participation: What's Wrong with Japan?" The question arises, because Japan, with the fourth largest Internet user population, has strict election campaign laws. By forbidding the use of social media in campaigns, young people effectively loose their primary source of election information. The question of whether greater access to political information through digital media will attract a larger youth vote in the future currently remains unanswered in Japan, at this point of time.

The 2012 South Korean presidential election saw sharply targeted digital messaging toward young voters as Park Han-na and Yoon Min-sik from The Korea Herald observe in their chapter, "SNS and Korean Elections." The elections underscored the emergence of social network services (SNS) as a crucial political arena in a country where one in five Koreans uses SNS and the take up rate of people in their 20s is 61 percent. The chapter examines the use of social media political strategies for the presidential election and the 2011 Seoul mayoral by-election.

In 2014, Indonesia marks its 11th election since its independence in 1945. Primastuti Handavani, a managing editor at *The Jakarta Post*, examines "The Prospective Impact of the Youth Vote and Social Media on the 2014 Indonesian Elections." The various political parties have to consider the huge number of approximately 40 million first time voters in their election campaigns. This is especially relevant, as young voters are expected to only support candidates that reflect their aspirations, views, and priorities. In contrast to former generations, religion and gender does not influence the vote of Indonesian's youth. With the number of young voters reaching more than 20 percent of the total vote, candidates have already started using Facebook and Twitter to reach this group.

In Taiwan, Alan Fong, deputy managing editor of *The China Post*, looks at "Social Media as a Rallying Device." Analyzing the impact of young voters on the 2012 presidential election, Fong observes Taiwanese politicians emulating American President Barak Obama's successful campaign by pressing hard for first time supporters, devoting time and resources to youth targeted gimmicks and activities. However, subsequent surveys show the impact of the youth vote may have been overestimated. One political party's slogan of TAIWAN NEXT, aimed at young voters, was estimated to have misjudged the influence of this group.

In their analysis of the October, 2011 Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) elections, "When World's Collide: Do Youth Vote and Social Media Make a Difference in Colombo 2011?" Nalaka Gunawardene, a writer and blogger; and Chanuka Wattegama, a researcher; conclude there was no unequivocal evidence that social media alone, significantly changed the CMC election results. However, the extent of social media use in the political discourse was seen as a turning point in "electronic citizenship" engagement in Sri Lankan politics.

David Black and Arina Dafir of Blackbox Research, as well as Philip Behnke, an independent public relations consultant, examine "The Digital

heartland: Social Media and the Political Transformation in Singapore" which centers around the May, 2011 election where young people took to social media out of frustration at local television coverage. Singapore's very high digital penetration is comparable to the United States and the impact of social media "rewriting the campaign playbook" with its subsequent shaping of mainstream media's election coverage is analyzed in depth. Increasingly, Singapore voters are using social media to bypass mainstream media restrictions.

Further north, in Thailand, Noppadon Kannika, Director of the ABAC Poll Research Centre at Assumption University conducted research for his chapter "Is Voting Important for Young Thai Citizens?" His examination of the 2013 Bangkok governor election found that a low proportion of young respondents (24.5 percent) followed the election through then new media. Noppadon found young Thai's attachment to electoral politics is still weaker than their elders. He concludes that young voters are not necessarily less interested in politics than previous generations, but that the political arena has become disconnected from the lifestyle of these youths.

New Zealand faces an election in 2014 and Australia in September, 2013. Stephen Mills, owner and director of UMR Research in Wellington, New Zealand looks at the "Use of Social media in Politics by Young People in Australasia." He employs extensive research and concludes that political parties are using social media, although far less than in other jurisdictions, such as the United States, nonetheless, its has become an integral part of their daily, and planned, electoral process. In Australasia, Stephen concludes there was no "Australasian Spring" in the last elections in both countries. Political parties use social media to target party supporters rather than young voters per se.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the notion that social media is increasingly driving the youth vote at elections in Asia Pacific gets a mixed score. Undoubtedly, politicians have awoken to the political power of social media and it will be increasingly adopted as a mainstream means of information distribution and communications as voters and young people are becoming more politically active in a number of the jurisdictions surveyed in this book. But it is not a wholehearted embrace. On the side of the voters, the interest in the electoral process derives from personal considerations, such as ethnicity and location, rather than the desire to become politically active. On the

side of the candidates, the motivating factor behind their social media efforts is the desire to employ more cost effective communication methods that reach all relevant demographics. Still, the paradigm shift HAS begun, with varying degrees of impact in the region. A similar survey of voting habits and the impact of social media from years from now would almost certainly tell a different story. Judging by the trends outlined in this book, the same applies to potential electoral impact of social media which could be the major driving force of future elections in the region - along with the youth vote as young people realize the importance of social media to the political machines and, accordingly, flex their own fledgling political muscles across the electoral process.

# USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN POLITICS BY YOUNG PEOPLE IN AUSTRALASIA

*by Stephen Mills*

**T**he use of social media in politics by young people in Australasia is not as exciting as anywhere else in the world.

There was no Australasian spring. Social media is not a heavily used tool in youth-based protests. The Occupy movement barely flickered into life in Australia and New Zealand. Social media is far from being the "worst menace to society" as it was described by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan during protests in Turkey in early June.[1]

It is still almost certain that social media will play an even larger role in Australasian political communications and equally almost certain is the assumption that social media will be more heavily used by younger than older voters when it comes to politics. Australasian political parties appear to be mostly using social media to target party supporters rather than younger voters per se although younger voters are certainly expected to be heavier users of social media than older voters.

The reasons for social media to be increasingly utilised in Australasian political communications are obvious. The numbers using social media in Australia and New Zealand have risen sharply in the last few years. While that increase is across all age groups, usage of social media is still substantially higher amongst younger voters.

UMR Research online surveys show that membership of the social networking sites were higher amongst 18 to 29-year-olds than amongst those in older age groups, for all social media except LinkedIn. In New Zealand, declared membership of LinkedIn was higher amongst 30 to 44-year-olds (30%); 45 to 59-year-olds (30%) and only 1% lower amongst

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1    Stuff.co.nz 4/6/13.

over 60-year-olds (17%). The figures in Australia also show 30-44-year-olds as the most likely to use LinkedIn (20%), compared with 13% for under 30s, 15% for 45-59-year-olds and 10% for over 60-year-olds).[2]

**Facebook membership**



**Twitter membership**
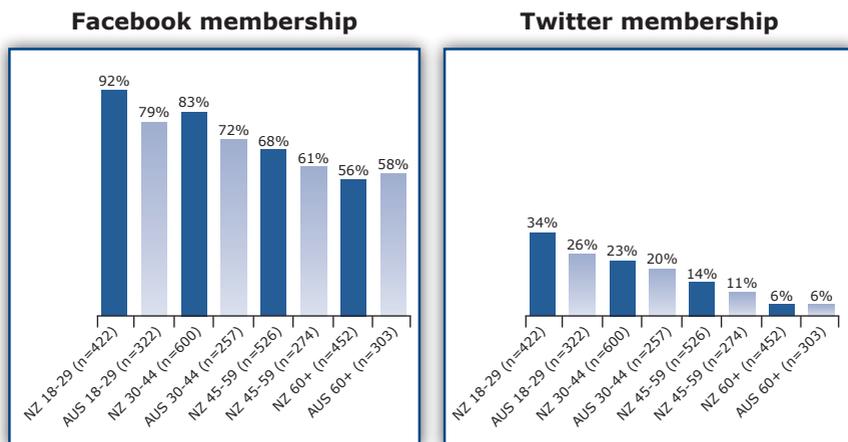


The underlying trends of voters, especially younger voters "going off the grid", are apparent. Fewer are watching live TV; more are accessing news and video content online or on smart phones. Smart phone ownership is rising. A July 2011 UMR survey showed that 32% of 18-29-year-olds claimed to read a newspaper in hard copy format every day, compared with 66% of those aged over 60. The same survey showed 56% of 18-29-year-olds claiming to get most of their news from the internet, compared with just 16% of over 60-year-olds.[3]

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2   New Zealand data, unless otherwise specified, is from the aggregated results of two monthly online surveys of a representative sample aged 18 years of age and over. Fieldwork was conducted on the first survey from 29 January 2013 to 11 February 2013 and the second survey from 22 February 2013 to 5 March 2013.  UMR Research New Zealand.
    Australian data, unless otherwise specified, for 18-29-year-olds is from two monthly online surveys of a representative sample.  Fieldwork was conducted in the first survey from 18th to 22nd February and in the second survey from 22 March 2013 to 25 March 2013. Data for 30 years of age and older is from the 18 January 2013 to 22 February 2013 online survey.  UMR Research Australia.

3   UMR telephone survey of nationally representative sample n=1200 18 years and older.

Skye Laris, Director, Digital Campaigning and Organising for the Australian Labor Party (ALP), noted that 20% of young Australian voters are not on landlines and "if we sit here on phones and call people we're going to miss a big chunk." Social media provides an opportunity to reach young people who would be expensive to contact via mobile phones and are likely to regard texts from a political party as intrusive.[4]

The UMR Research online surveys showed younger New Zealanders generally declaring higher levels of participation in social media than 18 to 29-year-old Australians. As outlined in the chart, more young New Zealanders declared membership of Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn and Pinterest. Young Australians declared higher levels of participation on Tumblr and the numbers were equal on Reddit.

**Usage of Social Media (18-29 year survey participants)**[5]



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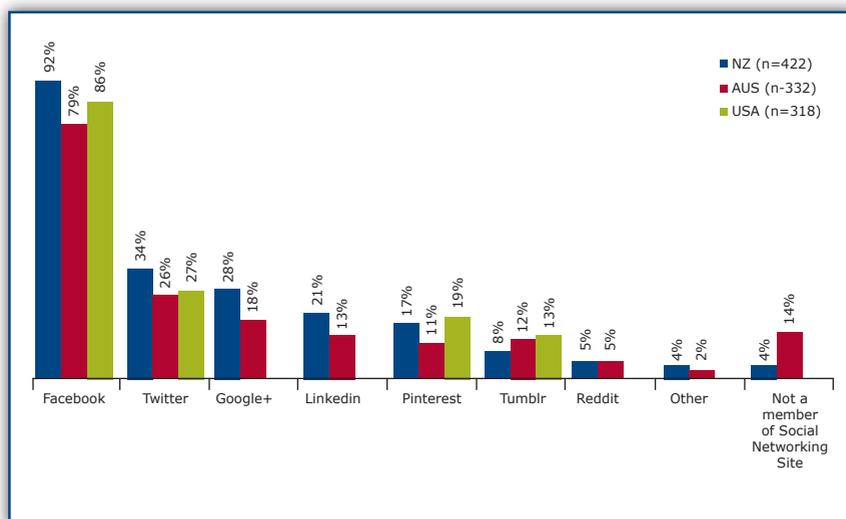
4    Interview 6/3/13.

5    USA data, unless otherwise specified, is from a telephone survey by Pew Research Centre. Fieldwork was conducted from 14 November 2012 to 9 December 2012. Care is needed in making comparisons between the online polls used in Australasia and telephone polls by Pew Research in the United States.

More time is also being spent on social media sites by younger voters. Amongst 18 to 29-year-old New Zealanders on Facebook, 55% used it at least several times a day; 31% updated their status or posted on their wall at least once a week. Sixty three percent of 18-29-year-old Australians on Facebook used it several times a day; 29% updated their status or posted on their wall at least once a week. Tegan Gilchrist, who led the ALP social media communications for the New South Wales State Branch of the ALP from 2006-2008 and then the Federal Labor Party to 2012, noted that two million Australians check Facebook daily for at least 20 minutes. She added that "very few television shows get that audience so even from an advertising platform let alone an engagement platform it is really, really very important."[6]

Research in the United States has shown younger voters "are more likely to post their own thoughts about issues, post links to political material, encourage others to take political action, belong to a political group on a social networking site, follow elected officials on social media and like or promote political material others have posted.[7] The same pattern was evident in New Zealand and Australia.

**Post your own thoughts or comments on political or social issues?**
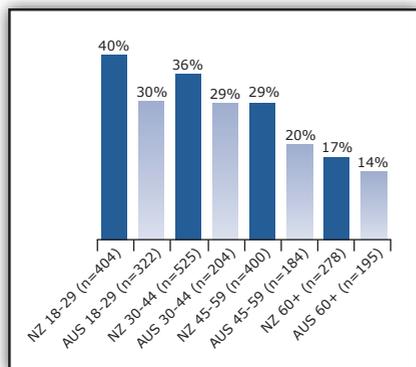
**Encourage other people to vote?**



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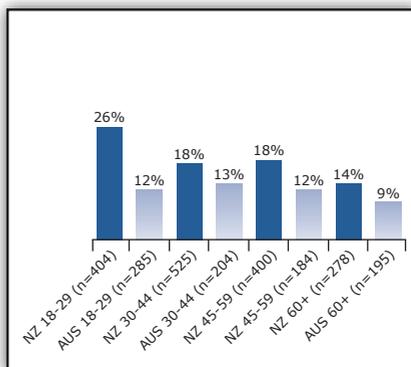
6  Interview 12/2/13.

7  Summary of Pew Research "Social media and political engagement" (www.pewinternet.org/reports/2012/political engagement).

As outlined in the chart below New Zealanders were more likely to declare they were involved in politics through social media than Australian 18 to 29-year-olds.
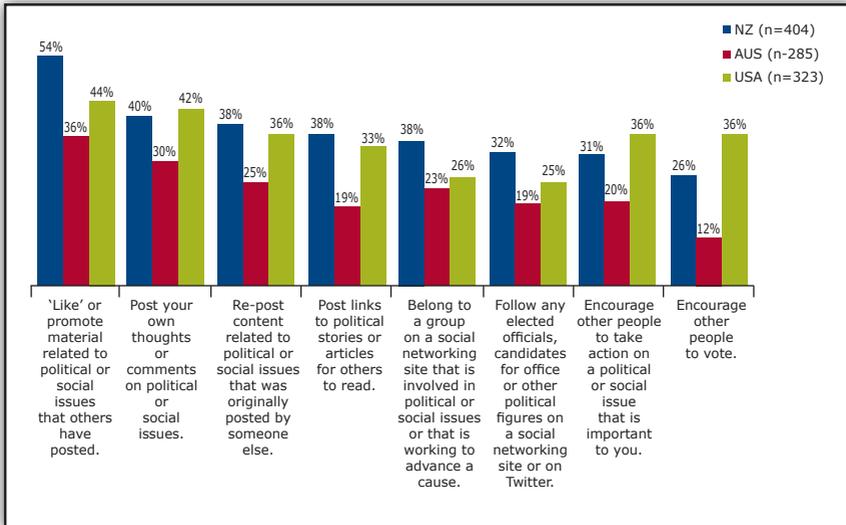


It is no surprise that Australasian politicians have noticed all this activity and have tried to come on board. Kevin Rudd, former leader of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and Prime Minister from 2007 to 2010, was the pacesetter. He first made his presence felt on Myspace, fuelled by ALP advertising on the site. He also made a very fast start on Twitter benefitting from being recommended as being a person to follow on the Twitter homepage. This propelled him to very high follower numbers. He currently has 2.25 million Twitter followers and more than 75,000 Facebook "likes".

The current Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, has over 380,000 Twitter followers and 162,000 Facebook "likes". Liberal Leader, Tony Abbott has 122,000 Twitter followers and 34,000 Facebook "likes". Leader of the Australian Greens, Christine Milne, has 19,000 Twitter followers and 5700 Facebook "likes". Her Twitter followers lag well behind previous leader Bob Brown who has 63,000.

In New Zealand National Prime Minister, John Key dominates the social media stakes with 82,000 Twitter followers and 40,000 Facebook

followers. Labour leader, David Shearer has 6200 Twitter followers and 6700 Facebook "likes".

The most prominent of the two Green party co-leaders, Russel Norman has 6000 Twitter followers, leader of the New Zealand First Party in New Zealand, Winston Peters has 2876 Twitter followers and 7780 Facebook likes.[8] Political parties in Australia and New Zealand are, nevertheless, still learning how to use social media. Social media is still far less in play than in the United States, where it is conventional wisdom that more adept and extensive use of social media was an important reason the Obama campaign won the youth vote in the 2008 and 2012 US Presidential elections.

Yet, social media is certainly taking a seat at the table in Australasia. Gilchrist and Laris both observed that increasing resources were being allocated by the ALP to social media campaigning and that social media is now much more integrated into campaign planning and management. Gilchrist outlined that leading into the 2010 Federal election she had an "intermittent assistant" whereas the current ALP digital team has 4.5 full time staff.

Primary attention in social media strategies appears to be directed at party supporters. It was a perhaps surprising finding from talking to most political staff involved in digital communication in Australasia that social media was being used more to communicate with, engage and mobilize supporters regardless of their age.

In the introduction to the ALP online campaigning guide, Skye Laris observes that "people who participate and engage with us online are usually already supporters. Our task is to build that support into a word of mouth army that can bypass traditional media and reach people with facts on the issues they care about most."

Laris added that as well as providing ALP supporters with information to communicate with others social media was used to increase engagement. Supporters are always being asked to do something to repost on Facebook; to sign an online petition; to attend a meeting; to door knock or to join a campaign. Laris notes that content "has to be good enough to enable them to use their own judgement. It raises the bar and gets supporters to be more responsive and attuned".

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8    All figures on likes and followers are from May 2013.

Francis Till, a social media adviser to the New Zealand National Party noted: "while young New Zealanders (under 24) are more likely than other age groups to populate social media platforms, our actual audience is much, much wider than that - and our supporters and potential supporters tend to be defined by characteristics other than age alone".[9]

Older voting audiences are certainly reachable through social media. Gilchrist noted that targets other than young people could also be reached online citing stay-at-home mums. She cited a massive pick up in Facebook "likes" from women, when Julia Gillard became Prime Minister in 2010. Thomas Tudehope, who had been social media advisor to former Australian Liberal leader Malcolm Turnbull, also noted that "women over 35' were heavy social media users.[10] A further example of older age groups using political social media provided by Gilchrist, were men over 45-years making up 60% of the viewers of Kevin Rudd's YouTube channel when he was Prime Minister. There was some downplaying by specialists of any outside perception that social media was some kind of magic pathway to younger voters. Tudehope considered that could easily be "wishful thinking". The young were "very selective what they digested and it was very hard for politicians to penetrate that and have a meaningful and long-term dialogue with young people online". He thought the better approach to just going online was "to seek out young people on issues that will resonate and get traction that way (but) that was also not easily done."

Skye Laris previewed some planned campaigns targeting younger voters on specific issues by the ALP in the 2013 election. "We're looking at issue based campaigns for people under 30, using Facebook primarily. Each of the campaigns will be started by a small group of young Labor activists supported by the party and our digital advertising agency. This small core will work on bringing in people with a relationship to the particular issue and with influence amongst their own peer group and ambassadors who may have influence through some level of celebrity. This larger group will in turn reach out on the issue to a wider, mainstream group".[11]

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9    Email 6/6/13.

10   Interview 28/5/13.

11   Email 5/5/13.

Political parties are not a natural choice for young people to engage with on social media. Tegan Gilchrist observed that the biggest Facebook pages on political issues were often not affiliated with a party. She cited the success of an anti-Australian Liberal leader Facebook page "Friends don't let friends vote for Tony Abbott" which was running at 159,000 likes in May 2013.

Tudehope argues that social media has to be part of an integrated political communications strategy. Social media should be seen as just another communications channel - "you can get obsessed with social media about young people and technology, when it is really just another means for communicating". He believes that the message should come first and then a strategy on how to reach audiences which will involve a choice of platforms which may include social media.

Amy Hodgkinson, who was a communications adviser with a focus on social media to the New Zealand Labour Party during the 2011 election campaign and now has a similar role for the New Zealand First Party, makes the identical point - "there is a danger that social media is seen as the be all and end all of communicating with young people. It's got to be used in conjunction with traditional campaigning".[12]

It has obviously been a tough slog to get Australasian politicians to use social media properly. The potential to use social media to engage with voters, to reveal something of their personality, to drive policy, to fundraise and to gather intelligence and information about voters in their electorates, is still far from being realised. Most Australasian politicians play it very safe with bland Facebook tweets and posts linking to press statements and speeches and observations and photos along the lines of happy to see smiling faces at whatever primary school they're visiting.

Kevin Rudd differs from that trend with chatty personal and sometimes provocative tweets. Malcolm Turnbull, former leader of the Australian Liberal Party, is also commended for providing eclectic links and engaging with his followers. Turnbull currently has 164,000 Twitter followers.

By no means are all MPs in both countries on Facebook and Twitter. Laris noted that most ALP MPs are on Facebook, but not all were on Twitter and that it was part of her task to "move them through". She noted the barrier

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12  Interview 1/3/13.

that "a lot still see Twitter as frivolous rather than a conduit". All working in the field emphasised the need for social media to be more than just another broadcast channel: "not just another megaphone".[13] A lot of effort had gone into educating politicians that being on social media is not just a matter of posting press statements, but talking about their community and building relationships.

Tudehope describes former Australian Prime Minister John Howard's 2007 debut on social media via YouTube as "nothing short of an abject failure. It was all monologue and no dialogue-a wooden looking Howard in shirt and tie simply reinforced the perception that he was out of touch with younger voters and change was needed".[14] It was hard work for staffers in both countries to convince politicians that voters do not necessarily want press statements and links to speeches delivered through social media.

Hodgkinson described "a struggle and it continues to be a struggle to get through to politicians who have not grown up with social media to understand how it can be used and why it should be used." Gilchrist outlined a parallel battle to reduce the centralised control of ALP social media with the degree of moderation gradually being relaxed. Till had a different line on this, declaring "during the last campaign, we used social media primarily as a broadcast tool to inform voters and potential voters of our platform, daily work and policies. Our reach was very good and our audience engagement levels were high - particularly when it came to things like driving traffic to core web destinations".[15]

Usually, social media demands a different style of communication from politicians. Advisers want MPs to loosen up, to be seen to have a bit of fun. Chris Elder, a communications adviser for New Zealand Labour from 2008 to 2011, talked about "getting the voice right not just being on message". He stressed the risk of politicians' social media failing to get past "authenticity filters". Politicians have to be at least a little "spontaneous, casual and conversational, they can't be too measured and safe just toeing the party line". Hodgkinson talked about the need to convince politicians to be "short and snappy and it should be from (them)".

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13  Greg Jericho The Rise of the Fifth Estate.  Pages 264-265.

14  The Drum on ABC News 24 - 12 February 2013.

15  Email 6/6/13.

Laris notes that expectations amongst young people are that social media should "not just be informative, not just push a message across but be entertaining." Hodgkinson noted that the value of social media was brought home to Phil Goff, New Zealand Labour leader from 2008 to 2011, during the Christchurch earthquake when he was in Christchurch and had access to the "Red Zone" (the central disaster area). He was able to post comments and photos on Facebook and Twitter. This led to "a profound shift - it got through to Phil about the importance of social media and how it could be used".

Gilchrist considers that the full potential of social media will not be realized in Australia until there is a major 'culture change" from a primary focus of communicating directly to swing voters in marginal seats to "taking on board (party) members are more important as they can deliver other voters".

She argues that there is a need to use social media to "break outside the concept that target seats and geography are the best way to divide people. Apart from some local issues, the hot buttons that push and motivate voters do not relate to whether they live in a particular seat. The rich amount of data we could be getting from online to really personalise that message and engage with people will drive a change from geography to issue-based campaigning". She adds politicians are not trusted by the swinging voter audience, but friends and family are and "how we engage our supporters to then engage those swinging voters is the key".

Social media has certainly been playing an increasing role in Australasian election campaigns. Campaign teams monitor and contribute to blogs, news sites, Twitter and Facebook. Videos are launched on YouTube with the hope they go viral via mainstream news. Leaders and candidates do short informal videos that are posted on YouTube; opposition gaffes will be seized on and amplified through social media. The level and sophistication of campaign activity has been well below what is now happening in the United States and will remain so through the next election cycle. There is still a clear sense that lessons are being learnt and more resources are being allocated.

Some of the campaign activity, especially edgy viral videos, are designed to reach younger voters. The Australian Labor Party had some success with an Addams Family spoof viral video in the 2010 election. This was eventually taken down for copyright issues, but not before attracting a lot of attention and coverage from mainstream media. The New South

Wales branch of the ALP also hit the mark with videos in the 2007 state election lampooning the state Liberal leader Peter Debnam.

Australian Liberals also had success with a "lemons" campaign targeting leading ALP politicians. This was run on television as well. Tudehope reported Liberal Party claims that this was "the most successful ad campaign ever". A clever feature of this campaign was an online game which required players to "like" the Liberal Facebook page. This drove "likes" from a modest 3000 to around 17,000.[16]

There was, however, some scepticism expressed on attempts to "go viral". There appear to be much more failures than successes. Tudehope observed "the more you obsess about going viral, the less likely you are to do so". He was also sceptical on whether viral success actually equated to many votes being decided as well. Trevor Mallard, campaign manager for the New Zealand Labour Party in the 2011 election, noted there were a number of attempts to get things going viral with YouTube videos and flash games, but "they were not as successful as hoped for."

Thomas Tudehope described the use of social media by the two main parties in the 2010 Australian Federal campaign as "not overly revolutionary." Some things had improved from the 2007 election, especially communications to grass root supporters and fundraising, but there was not any "real advancement" and social media communication was "not organised or cohesive or strategic."

Tudehope considers that both Julia Gillard, the ALP leader, and Tony Abbott, the Liberal leader, were "quite reticent to adopt social media" and "if the leaders are not driving change, candidates won't either". His observations on the two main party campaigns in 2010 were that the "Liberals were more active but less co-ordinated, and Labor was less active but more co-ordinated."

He thinks the Australian political parties remain "risk averse", because they are not yet sure of the value of the interactions that are supposed to trigger votes. They are not certain they are reaching a voting audience or how that audience will vote. Until the parties get a "quantifiable benefit there will be a reluctance to take it on". That benefit is likely, he believes' to come through proven success at fundraising via social media channels.

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16  Interview Tegan Gilchrist.

Tegan Gilchrist had a different take, outlining how Julia Gillard often tweeted herself from her iPad, sometimes surprising campaign staff, whereas Tony Abbott only tweeted twice in the campaign after a town hall meeting and on election eve.

Trevor Mallard conceded that "there was not a well thought out strategy for the (2011 New Zealand election) campaign around social media - "it was quite adhoc; an add-on; an adjunct to or even an afterthought to other forms of policy promotions." Hodgkinson considered that the 2011 social media campaign was a step up from 2008, but "still a trial run. We were finding out what works and what didn't work.  We were still trying to find our way."

Mallard noted that, apart from flash games, social media was aimed at a general, rather than a youth, audience. The campaign worked off MP and party Facebook and Twitter lists and these tended to be composed of older than average voters, which dictated a more conservative approach. Mallard thought the National Party social media campaigning was "pretty similar" to Labour, but with a higher online advertising spending. He thought they were quite conservative with social media messaging: "focussed on the leader, John Key, rather than anything more radical."

Hodgkinson had a similar verdict on the National social media campaign describing it as "tight on message, very controlled and co-ordinated", but "not authentic." Mallard and others acknowledged that the Greens had the best social media campaign in the 2011 New Zealand election.  According to Mallard "they had a better hold on it." Their material was "maybe creatively edgier" and "appealed more to people sharing stuff." Mallard thought the Greens social media "stuck tightly to main campaign points" and was more integrated into their campaign.

Till was less generous considering "during the last general election campaign, the Greens made good use of social-type tools to rally supporters around environment issues - but they did not get much real traction outside that sphere, despite the cleverness of the approaches. It's not the cleverness of the tool that matters, but the traction any outreach effort achieves. Sometimes the greatest traction comes from very pedestrian-seeming efforts."[17]

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17  Email 6/6/13.

Jackson Wood, who was heavily involved in the Greens social media campaigning in the 2011 New Zealand election, considered their big advantage over the two main parties was that they engaged more. He noted that the major parties put out material on social media although mostly it was "here is my press release" and there would be comments but no follow up. The Greens, in contrast, unless the person was "of doubtful sanity" tried to engage as much as possible. Francis Till, social media adviser to the National Party confirmed "we did not focus on actively interacting with our supporters or detractors on social media".[18]

Wood outlined how early in the election cycle they made a major effort to build a social media audience. Facebook was seen as the best social media medium to get content in front of voters and the party concentrated on building likes on their Facebook page. They rolled out tailored content daily, not just posting and recycling links. They made sure that the Greens' Facebook page was a "central hub" for all MPs and candidates. All candidates had a Facebook page which was used for special areas of interest and "to show they were human". All sitting MPs and most candidates were on Twitter and, again, it was used to interact and engage rather than just link to press releases.

Wood also cited the success of the "Green Machine" a Facebook-based campaigning tool that provided "stars" to motivate activists who undertook campaign activity and the "Green Room" a webcast at the same time as the televised debate between the two main National and Labour Party leaders where Greens and political commentators talked about the debate as it was happening and fielded questions coming in through Facebook and Twitter. The Greens also organised a website (heykiwi.org.nz) which was designed to encourage younger New Zealanders to enrol to vote, rewarding them with downloads of Kiwi music. This site, which linked to the Electoral Commission, was not branded as Green.

While growing, only a small proportion of campaign advertising budgets are allocated to social media. Most experts working in the social media field expect the weight of political advertising to follow commercial advertising from television to online. An American web entrepreneur, Marc Andreessen predicts "there is going to be a national election that is going to be about

18  Email 6/6/13.

the Internet the way that 1960 was about TV for the first time with the Kennedy/Nixon debate...when that happens, everything changes. The spending will tip, and the campaigning methods will change."[19]

This tipping point will be evident in the United States first, but there will be increasing social media political activity in the Australian Federal election in September 2013 and the New Zealand General election in 2014. Social media political communication techniques will become more effective as parties know much more about who uses the different social media channels, when they use them and how they use them.

Gilchrist saw her task in 2010 as laying the groundwork for "where online would sit in 2013". Her goal was to "set the infrastructure in place and ensuring culture change was underway for what was assumed to be the greater importance of online for mobilising and communicating with voters in the 2013 election."

Jackson Wood is certainly expecting a better effort from the bigger parties in the 2014 New Zealand election which he thinks will have learnt from the Obama campaign. He predicts the Greens, too, will improve further with "a very, very slick system in place to build on the success of 2011 and to capitalise on people talking to us through social media." This system, he suggested, would extend beyond MPs and candidates to supporters and "snowball out from there."

There was agreement that the parties in both Australia and New Zealand are getting much better at working out how best to use the different social media channels. Both Mallard and Tudehope made this point. According to Tudehope, in the 2013 election parties will be "comfortable with the different social media platforms and how they can be used by party and candidates". Laris provided an example of this, noting that an ALP campaign promoting payments for education expenses (#cashforyou) had backfired on Twitter. She considered it would have worked better on Facebook, but was more suited to the front page of the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* rather than online where "people expect to be given deeper levels of information."[20]

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19 News.cnet.com (6/11/12. See also Stephen Mills http://umr.co.nz/updates/future-campaign-advertising.

20 Email 4/6/13.

Parties can continually improve their social media offerings by testing what works and what does not. Social media is awash with metrics on click throughs, reposting, liking, fundraising, etc. How content is framed, what the subject line is, who sent it and the language and the tone can all be tested right down to the precise words. Parties can use Google Analytics to find out what search terms are driving people to their websites. Facebook also provides tools to allow users to track advertising performance and reach. The social media companies will also have more sophisticated tools to put in front of the parties. Facebook did not have the capacity to target advertising to electorates in the 2010 Australian federal campaign.[21]

## CONCLUSION

Social media is a rapidly changing field. Twitter was barely underway in the 2008 US Presidential election and 2012 has been labelled the "Twitter election". Gilchrist outlined when she started working on social media in 2006 (assigned the responsibility because "she was the youngest in the office") Myspace was seen to be the future and Facebook was only accessible to those with "edu" email addresses. Ten cents then paid for 1000 Facebook advertisements.

Jackson Wood is expecting Facebook to remain the backbone for social media campaigning by New Zealand politicians as it is still growing, albeit more slowly, and it enables messages "to stick for around two days", whereas on Twitter "you have an hour at the most." Neither Tudehope nor Wood expect extensive use of social media other than Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in the next election cycle, although Tudehope notes that there is "an advantage as the newer platforms will not have had the same degree of exposure. They will be green fields for politicians". He sees a first mover advantage for politicians who are the first to use the channel before "audiences get sick of it."

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21  Interview Tegan Gilchrist.

Tudehope expects there to be at least minor use of Instagram and Tumblr, where some tentative political activity has taken place, in the 2013 Australian Federal election. Wood allows that over the next 18 months "the next big thing might blow us all away." Whatever form it takes, social media will play an increasingly important role in Australasian political communications and those communications will be picked up more by younger voters.

# DIGITAL ELECTIONEERING AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: 'WHAT'S WRONG WITH JAPAN?'

*by Norman Abjorensen*

## INTRODUCTION: THE 2012 ELECTION

**V**oters went to the polls in Japan on 16 December 2012 in an election that saw the once-dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) returned to power after an unaccustomed spell in opposition. It also marked a return to office of Shinzo Abe, who was prime minister from 2006-07 - the seventh change of prime minister in just over six years. In a strictly formal sense, the result marked a return to orthodoxy in Japan with the restoration of LDP rule, with the party having held office almost continuously from 1955 to 2009.[1] But in a very real sense, the 2012 election highlighted a deepening crisis in Japanese democracy with the voter turnout the lowest on record and significant political disengagement, especially on the part of younger Japanese. Voter turnout was 59.31% - about 10% less than the turnout for the last general election in 2009, which means that some 10 million people who voted in 2009 did not bother in 2012. Even Mr Abe conceded that his large majority (in fact, a supermajority given his alliance with the smaller Komeito Party) owed more to loss of confidence in the formerly governing Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) than to any sudden resurgence in his own party's popularity.[2]

The centre-left DPJ took government in 2009, breaking the LDP stranglehold and promising a 'new era' that never eventuated. The government floundered under maladministration and inept responses to the devastating earthquake and tsunami of 2011 and the subsequent Fukushima nuclear plant disaster. One commentator wrote in the lead-up

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1   Phred Dvorak, "Japanese Election: Update on The No-Shows." *Wall Street Journal*, 17 December 2012.

2   Justin McCurry, "Japan's hawkish Abe claims the win, but not a mandate," *Christian Science Monitor,* 18 December 2012.

to the election of the stark and pathetic contrast between the DPJ's 'fumbling performance in power' and 'its bold pre-election agenda'.[3] According to one analysis, the election outcome was characterised by:

- an unenthusiastic electorate,
- a rejection of the DPJ experiment,
- a 'third pole' that shattered, and
- an LDP victory by default.[4]

The 2012 election was also the first one in which social media on its own became a platform for political communication platform for political communication, and herein lies a paradox: if social media demographics, which heavily favour younger people, were translated into political participation, why do all indications point to young people staying away from the ballot boxes in droves?

**Fig 1: Voting by age 1967-2009**



Source: Association for Promoting Fair Elections, http://www.akaruisenkyo.or.jp/070various/s45.html

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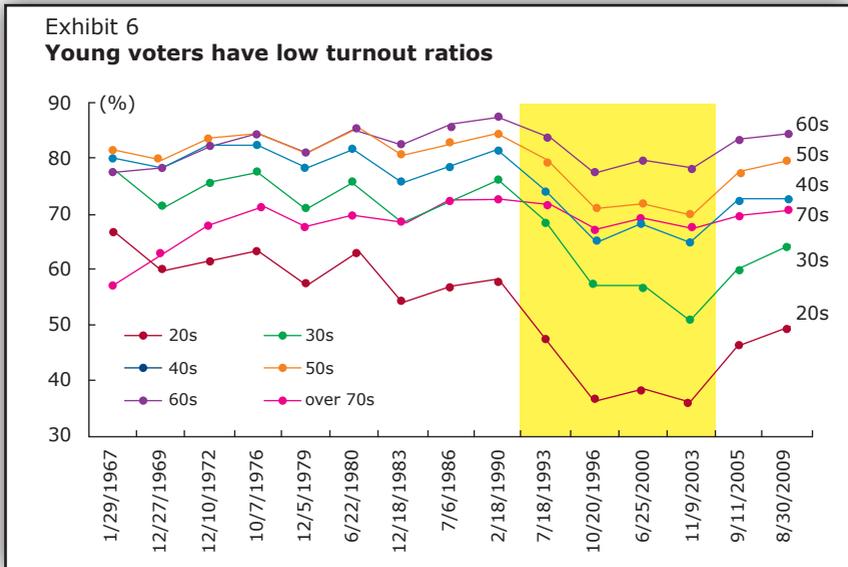
3    Michael Hoffman, "Who can we vote for to Avoid the Worst-Case Scenario?" *Japan Times*, 29 July 2012.

4    Mireya Solis, "LDP Landslide Victory with No Mandate: How Did It Happen and What Can We Expect Next?" Brookings Institution analysis, 17 December 2012, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2012/12/17-japan-solis

Unlike other developed countries, Japanese law forbids candidates from using the Internet during election campaigns, and that extends to simple things such as updating their websites or even tweeting their names. In effect, the current election laws prevent politicians from using online media once the election schedule is officially announced. In theory, the ban extends even to voters who are technically prohibited from commenting on candidates on media such as Twitter during the campaign.

While nearly all parties have deplored the law and its strict interpretation, attempts to revise it have stalled in Parliament, leaving Japanese electoral politics in a digital backwater in contrast to other countries where the Internet has become a vital tool in campaigning.[5]

## DEMOGRAPHICS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Japan's current population of 128 million is aging faster than that of any other industrialized nation. Japan's elderly as a percentage of the total population is expected to increase from 26.9% in 2015 to 39.6% in 2050 – far in excess of the rest of the developed world. According to the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, already in 2013 more than one-quarter of the country's population is aged 65 or older, and Japan is expected to reach a two-to-one ratio of its working age population (aged 15 to 64) to its elderly population (aged 65 or older) by 2015.[6] The demographic trajectory has profound implications for Japan, and not just in terms of a declining taxable workforce and a rising welfare dependency, but also in regard to political influence.

The elderly population as a proportion of Japan's eligible voters (that is, aged 20 or older) has increased from 21% in 1991, to more than 25% in 2013 and to a projected 33% in 2025 and 40% by 2050.[7] This demographic discrepancy is further exacerbated by voting patterns in Japan where voting is non-compulsory, and the elderly are far more likely to vote than those in the 20-29 age group, which in 2009 comprised just 9 % of the electorate.

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5    Alexander Martin and Yoree Koh:"Before Japan Votes, Mum's the Word, Twitterwise." *Wall Street Journal*, 13 December 2012.

6    Japan, National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, *Nihon no Shorai Suikei Jinko* [Japan's population projection for future dates], December 2006 (Tokyo: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2006), p. 5.

7    Japan, National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, *Ippan Jinko Tokei.*

Voter turnout rate among young voters is very low (between 30 and 40 % for voters under 30 in recent elections) while the turnout among voters in their 60s or above is high (70 to 80 %).[8] It is perhaps not surprising that politicians devote more time listening to their key constituency, the older Japanese, than they do to younger people.[9]

## RESTRICTIVE LAWS

Laws governing election campaigning in Japan have not kept pace with far reaching changes in political and public communication. Whereas television advertising has defined political campaigns and driven home key messages in most democracies for the past half century, Japanese politicians were not allowed to make political television commercials until 1996, with politicians limited to appearances in bland panel discussions. Electoral laws dating back to 1950, which were aimed at ensuring all candidates had equal opportunity to communicate with the electorate irrespective of resources, have been interpreted as making internet and social media campaigning illegal. The government restricts campaign advertising to specified formats such as letters and fliers, and also limits the number of leaflets that may be distributed. This is not to say Japan's politicians ignore social media – they do not. Increasingly, they have taken to Facebook and Twitter to establish a presence, but once the two-week election campaign begins, a virtual blanket descends under which websites must remain dormant and message such as tweets are strictly regulated as to what can (and cannot) be mentioned. The names of candidates, for example, must not be used. What this means is that for those whose primary sources of news and information are the Internet and social media – and this includes mostly younger people – they are effectively locked out, and in the fast-moving landscape of the 2012 campaign in Japan, with its plethora of new parties and shifting alliances, crucial information was not reaching them.

The laws were, however, sorely tested in the 2012 campaign for the Lower House election when a prominent political figure, Osaka's populist mayor, Toru Hashimoto, who formed a new political party, the Japan Restoration Party, challenged the ban and defied it. Pointing out that at

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8    Facts and Details (Japan) http://factsanddetails.com/japan.
     php?itemid=1783&catid=22&subcatid=146

9    Ayako Mie: "Youth, Politicos Find Common Ground: Beer." *Japan Times*, 21 April 2012.

the 2009 election, political parties spent some ¥35 billion (USD$420.3 million) on advertising, he asked why 'my petty election campaign tweets are banned?' In a December 5 tweet, the day after the election date was named, he asked: 'What's wrong with Japan?'[10]

Mr Hashimoto, alone among political leaders, continued to broadcast his messages on Twitter after the ban started, arguing that as he was not himself a candidate for election, he was exempt from the ban.[11] Long a critic of the law and its interpretation, Mr Hashimoto is at the forefront in establishing a powerful digital presence, where on Twitter he has almost 907,000 'followers', far ahead of any other politician in Japan. *Talenttwit*, a website that ranks politicians and other celebrities on the number of followers, access and publicity, rates Hashimoto just below uber-popular J-pop star, Atsuko Maeda.[12] Mr Hashimoto was scathing in his criticism, characteristically delivered via Twitter.

> **"What is this campaign exercise we are doing now – these stupid and formal rules based on ceremony, these meaningless and preposterously outdated activities like saying our names over and over again, and handing out a certain number of stamped fliers? Everything about it is absurd."**[13]

Other politicians have resorted to novel means to try to circumvent the restrictions. On the final day of the 2009 campaign period, for example, a communications adviser to the Social Democratic Party, Koei Aoto, streamed a video speech online by one of the party's candidates – but without actually showing the candidate. Instead, he pointed the camera at the listening crowd so visitors to the site could hear - but not see - the speaker, therefore technically complying with the 'no images' rule. Mr. Aoto

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10  "'Before Japan Votes, Mum's the Word, Twitterwise."

11  Yoree Koh: "Osaka Mayor Tweets Disapproval of Twitter Ban." *Wall Street Journal*, 6 December 2012.

12  Teppei Kasai and Antoni Slodkowski: "Conservatives Dominate Japan Social Media Ahead of Poll." Reuters, 5 December 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/12/06/japan-elections-socialmedia-idUSL4N09E2G120121206

13  "Osaka Mayor Tweets Disapproval of Twitter Ban."

thought about doing it again in 2012, but decided it did not draw enough viewers to be worthwhile.[14]

Not surprisingly, those most critical of the anti-digital laws are younger Japanese who argue that existing arrangements effectively shut them out from political campaigns. Advocates argue that use of the Internet cannot only increase the interaction between candidates and voters, but also reduce costs as the Japanese taxpayer currently shoulders some of the cost of Lower House election campaigns, including the cost of printing thousands of postcards, fliers and posters. Several pressure groups sprung up after the 2009 elections to try to force a change before the next election, but to no avail. One group calling itself the One Voice Campaign was launched in 2012 by a freelance writer, Shintaro Eguchi, who joined forces with another lobby group, the student-based iVote, which seeks to raise the voting turnout among younger Japanese. The campaign attracted publicity with some 30,000 online signatures and several politicians attended meetings, promising to support the cause, but the early election called in December saw the measure stalled yet again. Mr. Eguchi said young people were being excluded from the political process.

> **"I think the way politicians send out information through street oratory or posters and how we access that information are out of date. I always felt (young voters') voices don't reach politicians under the current system."**[15]

Despite sporadic pledges from all sides of politics to end the digital restriction, some observers have questioned whether there is any real political will to do so. Kazumasa Oguro, associate professor of economics at Hitotsubashi University, says the law is self-reinforcing: present-day parliamentarians got there without the Internet and have no interest in changing the rules which would disadvantage older policymakers.[16] By the same logic, perhaps, the non-voting tendency of the 20-29 age group

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14  "Before Japan Votes, Mum's the Word, Twitterwise."

15  Natsuko Fukue: "Group Seeks Web-based Campaigning." *Japan Times*, 25 May 2012.

16  Harumi Ozawa: "Japan's Alienated Youth Overlooked in Elections." AFP News, 14 December 2012, http://sg.news.yahoo.com/japans-alienated-youth-overlooked-elections-055257319.html

could also be seen as self-reinforcing in the sense that politicians could reason that to devote time and energy (and even policy) to a constituency with a poor voting turnout is a waste of time.

## SOCIAL MEDIA: FROM CURIOSITY TO LIFELINE

Restrictive laws notwithstanding, the 2012 election saw a remarkable surge in the use of the Internet and social media as political communication tools from that of the election in 2009. The disasters of 2011 – the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident – profoundly affected both the extent and type of social media usage in Japan, with Twitter, for example, going from a usage of 1 in 20 Japanese at the time of the 2009 election to 1 in 2, or 1 in 3 by the end of 2012, according to Daisuke Tsuda, a Twitter expert from the Movements for the Internet Active Users, a net user rights lobby.[17] In a crisis situation, with communication and power disruptions and fast-moving developments, social media became a 'go-to' point for information.

### Fig 2: Digital media use
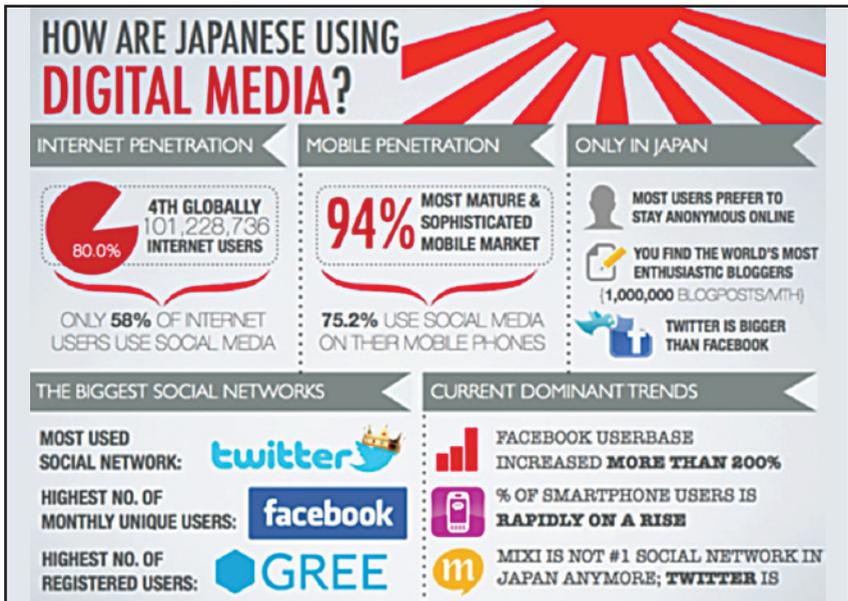


*Source: Singapore Management University*

17 "Conservatives dominate Japan social media ahead of poll."

As one commentator noted: 'Social media went from being a curiosity to a lifeline'.[18]

The take-up has seen online activity extended beyond the immediate crisis to fierce discussions in its wake as leftist activists and pundits have joined their right-leaning rivals in a robust online debate about the role of nuclear power in Japan following the Fukushima radiation disaster, the world's worst in a quarter century. A perceived lack of timely and credible information about radiation risks from officials and media generated a post-disaster Twitter clamour, which saw the number of its computer users spike by some 5 million to 17.5 million in March 2011. A breakdown of election-related tweets published by the Asahi newspaper showed comments about nuclear power far outstripped remarks about diplomacy and security, which was at odds with the focus of the two main political leaders, Shinzo Abe of the LDP and then DPJ prime minister Yoshihiko Noda, who largely concentrated on how to revive the moribund economy.[19] This again points to a significant disconnect: what people want to talk about, and are talking about among themselves, is markedly at odds with the mainstream campaign discourse.

## THE DIGITAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Japanese spend more time online than anyone else (2.9 hours a day).[20] Japan is the fourth largest population of Internet users in the world, according to a 2012 study by the Singapore Management University.[21] The study noted that Internet penetration had been gradually increasing, and current usage was up to 80% of the population. The penetration rate of social media in Japan stands at 19%. Japan accounts for the third most bloggers in the world with 4.9%. However, 81% of Japanese web users visit blogs monthly on average each month, making most Japanese fall under the 'spectators' category.

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18  Sandra Barron: "2011 Trends: Social Media in Japan Comes of Age." *Japan Times*, 4 January 2012

19  "Conservatives Dominate Japan Social Media Ahead of Poll."

20  International Guide to Social Media 2012, http://www.translatemedia.com/igsm.html

21  https://wiki.smu.edu.sg/digitalmediaasia/Digital_Media_in_Japan#Regulations

The Japanese have been described in the US media as 'blog wild', given their dominance of the blogosphere. Close to 31.3 million people in Japan blog. Interestingly, although English speakers outnumber Japanese speakers by more than 5:1, slightly more blog postings are written in Japanese than in English, according to Technorati, the Internet search engine that monitors the use of blogs. By some estimates, as much as 40% of Japanese blogging is done on mobile phones. Unlike many of their Western counterparts, many bloggers in Japan shy away from politics, controversy and barbed language.[22]

### Fig 3: Internet users and penetration 2002-2010



**Internet Users and Penetration In Japan, 2002-2010**
millions and % of population

| Year | Users (millions) | Penetration |
|------|------|------|
| 2002 | 69.4 | (57.8%) |
| 2003 | 77.3 | (64.3%) |
| 2004 | 79.5 | (66.0%) |
| 2005 | 85.3 | (70.8%) |
| 2006 | 87.5 | (72.6%) |
| 2007 | 88.1 | (73.0%) |
| 2008 | 90.9 | (75.3%) |
| 2009 | 94.1 | (78.0%) |
| 2010 | 94.6 | (78.2%) |

Note: ages 6+

129300                                                    www•**Marketer**.com
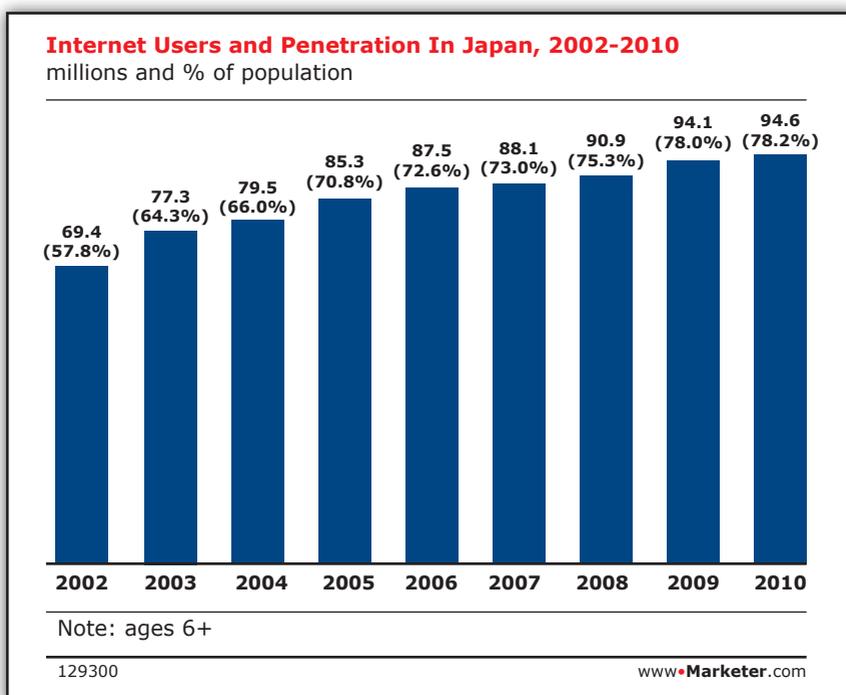
*Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) - Japan,*
*"Communications Usage Trend Survey," May 18, 2010*

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22  Ibid.

The huge popularity of online gaming, for example, suggests distraction and entertainment take higher priority over political discussion. Two of the largest social networks in Japan are mobile gaming sites, Gree and Mobage Town.[23] Many use in-game social features to keep up with friends. Japanese mobile social gaming publisher Gree has around 190 million subscribers (mostly via recently acquired platform OpenFeint) and around 29 million actual users – almost twice the number of Mixi, Japan's largest purely social network. Gree operates a gaming platform where users can play free games using manga style avatars to interact with each other.[24] A study by a social media academic in Japan, Professor Adam Acar of Kobe City University, reveals little taste for political engagement or discussion in the use of social media, the five main reasons given in order:

- to kill time,
- to have fun,
- get information about my interest area,
- contact with friends, and
- easily communicate with friends.[25]

Cultural traits constitute an important but, often overlooked, determinant in the use of social media and in this regard Japanese exhibit a discernible reticence in their embrace of social media. Facebook, for example, initially encountered resistance in its policy of insisting on real names of users. Japanese Internet users are very protective of their privacy and prefer to be anonymous online.[26]

Other cultural issues confronting Facebook and which shape social media behaviour in Japan are:

- **Risk Avoidance**: Japanese users are very conscious of social embarrassment, even to the extent of making a spelling mistake or factual error on their wall. Additionally, the idea that a friend could post a picture of you, tag you, and that complete strangers to

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23  '2011 Trends:" Social Media in Japan Comes of Age."

24  International Guide to Social Media 2012.

25  Adam Acar: "A Summary of the Latest Studies about Japan & Social Media." Asiajin, 2 April, 2012. http://asiajin.com/blog/2012/04/02/a-summary-of-the-latest-studies-about-japan-social-media/

26  International Guide to Social Media 2012.

**Fig 4: Japanese characteristics in comparison**



*Source: International Guide to Social Media*

you could be seeing your picture and name, is considered offensive. One survey result showed that 89 % of respondents did not wish to disclose their real names online.

- **Deference**: Japanese culture shows a reluctance to question authority. On a social networking level, if anyone you regarded as higher status than you tried to add you as a friend or contact you would feel obliged to accept – which in turn would make you more concerned about what you share. You would not want to be viewed poorly by a superior.

- **Harmony**: On Facebook, most Japanese are uncomfortable with the idea of rejecting or ignoring friend requests, even if they wanted to because it would be considered rude. People are more likely to use the most popular social network, the one that most of their friends are on. Facebook found it difficult attracting users until people were forced to use it during a crisis and it became a cultural force.

- **Manners**: Politeness is very important to the Japanese, and most users would rather post very few updates than risk looking self-important by cluttering up people's newsfeeds on Facebook, or appearing critical of others (especially someone considered superior to them).

- **Escapism**: Japanese web users place a high value on anonymity online, as many choose to use their online activities as a form of escapism. Privacy is a core value for the Japanese web user.[27]

Digital connectivity as such is not the key issue in seeking to encourage greater use of available technology to enhance both the extent and the quality of civic engagement. Connectivity, perversely, can, and does, work to facilitate social isolation and exclusion. A particular factor in Japan involving the alienation of young people is known as hikikomori - a form of acute social withdrawal, literally 'pulling inward, being confined'. The Japanese government, which views it as a serious health and social issue, defines hikikomori as 'people who refuse to leave their house and, thus, isolate themselves from society in their homes for a period exceeding six months'.[28] Estimates vary as to the number of people afflicted, with current official estimates at 700,000, but Tamaki Saito, the psychologist who coined the term, put the number at over one million, almost 1% of the total Japanese population.[29] Amid rising public concern at the phenomena, and in an attempt to classify and create guidelines for assessment and treatment of the disorder, the Japanese government in 2010 funded a study, which offered a definition:

> "A phenomenon in which persons become recluses in their own homes, avoiding various social situations (e.g. attending school, working, having social interactions outside of the home etc.) for at least six months. They may go out without any social contact with others. In principle, hikikomori is considered a non-psychotic condition distinguished from social withdrawal due to positive or

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27  International Guide to Social Media 2012.

28  Junichirou Itou, 2003, *Shakaiteki Hikikomori Wo Meguru Tiiki Seisin Hoken Katudou: "' No Guideline (Guideline on Mental Health Activities in Communities for Social Withdrawal)." Tokyo: Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. Itou, Junichirou, 2003. Shakaiteki Hikikomori Wo Meguru Tiiki Seisin Hoken Katudou: " No Guideline (Guideline on Mental Health Activities in Communities for Social Withdrawal)." Tokyo: Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare.*

29  Tamaki Saitō, Hikikomori kyūshutsu manyuaru ("How to Rescue Your Child from "Hikikomori"). Tokyo: 1998, PHP Kenkyūjo.

negative symptoms of schizophrenia. However, there is a possibility of underlying prodromal schizophrenia."[30]

A recurring theme in studies of *hikokomori* is heavy reliance on, or even addiction to, the Internet. A 2011 study, for example, noted the typical sufferer appeared to 'enjoy the virtual world of the Internet, video games'.[31] For them the Internet had superseded 'real' society. To what extent the condition is a culture-bound syndrome specific to Japan or a new form of maladjustment or psychiatric disorder, is a matter of current debate,[32] but there is no doubt that its roots in Japan are deeply embedded in social culture.

## MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR JAPANESE DEMOCRACY

The student group iVote has been active in arranging meetings between lawmakers and young people to try to break down what it sees as significant barriers between the young and the political process. Many of these meetings, accompanied by beer and pizza, involve frank exchanges between the two sides, and a recurring grievance is the way in which political communication takes place. A Japanese newspaper, which covered one such gathering in 2012, reported the following exchange between young people and an Upper House lawmaker from the Japan Communist Party (JCP), Yoshiki Yamashita:

> At one point, Yamashita sought their advice on the best way to reach out to the younger generation.
> 'The Internet,' several students shouted back.
> 'How about Twitter? Is that useful?' Yamashita asked.

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30  M. Tateno, T. W. Park, T. Kato, T.W. Umene-Nakano & T. Saito, (2012). "Hikikomori as a Possible Clinical Rerm in Psychiatry: a Questionnaire Survey." *BMC psychiatry*, 12(1), 169. doi:10.1186/1471-244X-12-169.

31  T. Kato, N. Shinfuku, N. Sartorius & S., Kanba: "Are Japanese *hikokomori* and Depression in Young People Spreading Abroad?" *The Lancet*, Vol. 378, Issue 9796, 17 September 2011

32  A. R. Teo, A. C. Gaw: "Hikikomori, a Japanese Culture-Bound Syndrome of Social Withdrawal? A Proposal for DSM-5." J Nerv Ment Dis ("The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease"), 2010; 198: 444-449.

'Of course,' Chuo University student Takuma Matushita, 19, replied. 'We don't listen to your stump speeches because we are too busy, but with Twitter, you would be able to interact with us more.'
'OK, then I'll give it a go,' Yamashita responded.[33]

According to data collected by the Association for Promoting Fair Elections,[34] when voter turnout was low in the Lower House elections of 1996 and 2003, the turnout for voters in their twenties averaged about 36%, in stark contrast with the turnout for voters in their sixties who averaged 78%. Meanwhile, when voter turnout was high in the Lower House elections of 2005 and 2009, the turnout for voters in their twenties increased to an average of around 48% whereas the turnout for voters in their sixties averaged 84%. At the time of writing, an age analysis of voting for 2012 was not available, but with one-tenth of voters who cast a vote in 2009 absent in 2012, the 20-29 group is expected to be well below the 48% recorded in 2009.

This poses real challenges to the vitality and relevance of Japanese democracy. The disengagement of young people from the political process does not augur well for Japan, which faces tough policy decisions in the years ahead. One observer of Japanese politics, political sociologist Professor Masaru Miyano, of Tokyo's Chuo University put it like this:

> "We expect politicians to stay focused on the future of Japan and care about the lives of young people. However, politicians must find a way to win elections and may be driven to prioritize policies aimed at the elderly when voter turnout among young people is low. Figuring out ways to get more young people to participate in elections seems to be a major challenge in Japanese politics."[35]

There is disturbing evidence that disengagement from the political process precedes even the legal voting age of 20. The Japan Youth Research Institute in 2009 polled high school-age students in Japan, South

33 "Youth, Politicos Find Common Ground: Beer."

34 ttp://www.akaruisenkyo.or.jp/070various/071syugi/693/

35 Masaru Miyano: "One Perspective on the Results of the 2012 Lower House Election." *Chuo Online*, http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/adv/chuo/dy/opinion/20130115.htm

Korea, China and the United States about their perceived ability to make a difference in government.[36] They were given two statements and asked whether or not they agreed: 'I can't influence governmental decisions as an individual,' and, 'I think I can change society by participating'. Interestingly, 40% of Japanese high school students agreed completely with the first statement, that they could not influence government's decisions. None of the other three countries had higher than 20% agreement. The same trend was evident for the second statement also. Only 6.5% of Japanese students polled, believed that they could change society by participating. All of the rest of the countries polled higher than 10% on the issue.

Looking at these responses, one writer on Japanese society, LinkAsia's Rei Toyoda, says there is a pervasive sense of helplessness among Japanese young people which has deep implications for the future of Japanese society.

> "The gap between young people and politics is growing bigger and bigger. If Japan doesn't do something to shrink it, there will be a breakdown in the democratic system. Japanese youth must become invested in politics for Japan to become a truly democratic country."

### CONCLUSION

A greater uptake of social media will not automatically translate into more effective and inclusive political communication and participation, even if the electoral laws are changed and bans are relaxed. Communication is just one aspect of political engagement, and is itself embedded in a complex matrix of political and social culture. Disengagement of younger Japanese from the political process is not a recent phenomenon, and whether greater access to political information in the digital media is a recipe for closer engagement, or merely a step along the way, is yet to be demonstrated.

*Note: A revision to the Public Offices Election Law to allow online election campaigning, including the use of social media, was made in 2013 to enable its use in time for the Upper House election campaign in July. It has yet to be used in a general election.*

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36  http://www1.odn.ne.jp/youth-study/reserch/2009/gaiyo.pdf

# SOCIAL NETWORKING SERVICES AND KOREAN ELECTIONS

*by Park Han-na and Yoon Min-sik*

**R**ecent South Korean elections underscored the emergence of social networking services (SNS) as a crucial tool in the political arena. Twitter, Facebook and Korean SNS, such as Kakao Talk, were widely used to mobilize voters in party campaigns and public debates. In 2012, one in five South Koreans used SNS.[1] Those in their 20s showed the highest SNS take-up rate at 61 percent, followed by the 30-somethings with 35.5 percent. The rates for those in their teens and 40s were 35.3 percent and 16.9 percent, respectively.

The survey showed that Koreans spent an average of 73 minutes and 12 seconds on SNS per day, longer than they spent on text messages or phone calls.

| Age | SNS usage rate |
|---|---|
| 0~9 | 1.3 |
| 10~19 | 35.3 |
| 20~29 | 61 |
| 30~29 | 35.5 |
| 40~49 | 16.9 |
| 50~ | 2.6 |

*Source: Korea Information Society Development Institute,*
*"Current status of SNS usage." 2013.4.25*

In this paper, we delve into how SNS have changed the nation's electoral landscape, focusing on the Seoul mayoral election in 2011 and the presidential election in 2012.

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1   Korea Information Society Development Institute. 2012.08

## 2011 SEOUL MAYORAL BY-ELECTION

On Oct. 26, 2011, Seoul citizens elected independent candidate Park Won-soon as their new mayor. Backed by the main opposition Democratic United Party, Park beat the ruling Saenuri Party's lawmaker Na Kyung-won in a two-horse race.

It was a vivid example of the effect of SNS on politics. The candidates were in sharp contrast: Na was an elite judge-turned-lawmaker who sailed easily through her academic and political career, while Park was a human rights lawyer and civic activist little known to the public.

Although Park gained key support from former software guru Ahn Cheol-soo, his win was far from guaranteed. Polls showed an airtight race with Park taking a lead of 2.5 percentage points, within the margin of error.[2]

But the actual result was an overwhelming win for Park, by 53.4 percent to 46.2 percent. The unexpected margin of victory was thought to be partly due to young voters' participation through Twitter, Facebook and other social networks.

**Political inclinations by age groups** (Unit: %)

○ Neutral   ○ Liberal   ○ Conservative

| | 20s | 30s | 40s | 50s | 60s |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Neutral | 44.1 | 59.3 | 51.2 | 46.8 | 34.4 |
| Liberal | 40 | 28.5 | 24.8 | 14.4 | 14.3 |
| Conservative | 16.6 | 12.1 | 24.1 | 38.8 | 51.3 |

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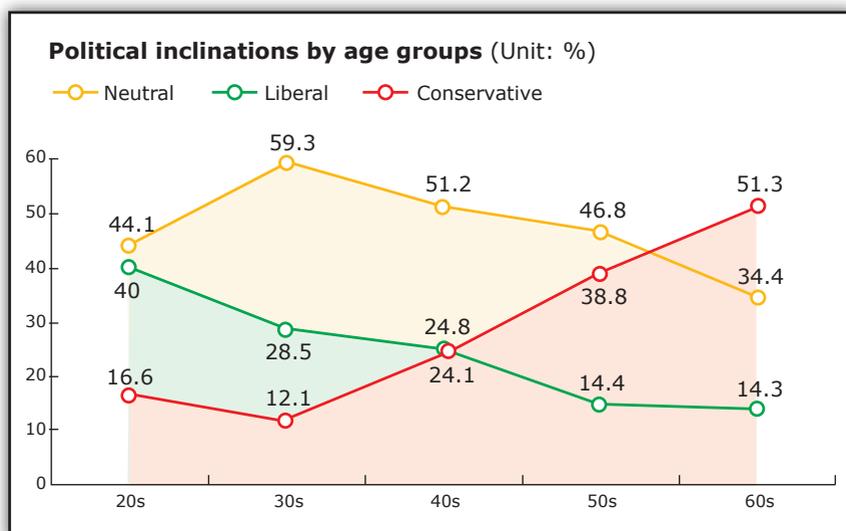
2   Lee Tae-hee (2011, 19 September) "Park in lead, Na right behind him,"
    The Hankyoreh. Retrieved from
    http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/politics_general/496719.html

In political terms, Twitter was an overwhelmingly liberal space. Around the election, all but one of the thirty most influential Twitter users in Korea had liberal tendencies, according to a joint survey by SAS Korea and the DongA Ilbo newspaper. Na was the only high-profile Twitter-user who was considered a conservative.[3]

This is unsurprising, considering that there are at least twice as many liberals as conservatives among those in their 20s and 30s, the most active group of Twitter users.

While Na garnered a strong Twitter following, the combined number of followers of the other 29 users exceeded it more than fivefold.

**Power Twitter-users from Oct. 3~ Oct.25**
(Titles listed as they were at the time of the election)

| Rank | Name and Title |
|------|----------------|
| 1 | Seoul mayoral candidate Na Kyung-won |
| 2 | DUP lawmaker Jung Bong-ju |
| 3 | Seoul mayoral candidate Park Won-soon |
| 4 | Seoul National University professor Cho guk |
| 5 | Hankyoreh reporter Huh Jae-hyun |
| 6 | Writer Gong Ji-young |
| 7 | DUP lawmaker Kim Jin-ae |
| 8 | Reporter Seo Yeong-seok |
| 9 | Democratic Labor Party leader Lee Jung-hee |
| 10 | Dongyang University professor Chin Jung-kwon |

*Source: SAS Korea*

Buoyed by contributions from high-profile Twitter users, pro-Park messages were shared considerably more than those in support of Na. Park had 10,294 retweets compared to Na's 4,915.[4] In addition, a larger portion of twitter messages concerning Na were negative.

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3   Jeong Se-jin and Dong Jeong-min (2011, 29 October) "Analysis of top 30 Twitter users," DongA Ilbo. Retrived from http://news.donga.com/3/all/20111027/41452891/1

4   Kim Sang-man (2011, 28 October) "100,000 tweets during election change dynamics of election," Media Today. Retrieved from http://www.mediatoday.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=98155

According to Gruter, a social media analysis company, the most frequent word associated with Na was "handicapped," which was mentioned 11,628 times. This appears to be referring to an incident when Na posted a picture of her bathing a mentally handicapped boy. The picture revealing the naked body of the boy triggered criticism from the public, leading to a petition with the National Human Rights Commission of Korea.[5]

Park, on the other hand, was most frequently mentioned in relation to Ahn Cheol-soo. An analysis by the company User story Lab shows that Park had nearly three times as many followers as Na by polling day. Despite the overwhelming lead online, the liberal bloc was far from optimistic given the traditionally low turnout among younger voters.

People in their 20s and 30s have been the least active demographics in elections in Korea. Until 2010, the voting rates of younger people were at least 11 percentage points lower than the average rates.

Widespread disillusionment in politics may have been behind their inactivity. When asked in a 2010 survey why their voter participation was so low, 47 percent of those in their 20s answered that they had no faith in politics and that there were no candidates they wanted to vote for. Another 35 percent replied that even if they voted, nothing would change.[6]

The voting rates of the 20-somethings have been consistently lower than the overall voting rate in elections since 2000. The gap has ranged from 14.3 percent to 22 percent.

The Park camp stepped up its game. Although official SNS campaigning was forbidden at the time, his supporters tweeted messages and urged people to vote.

Professor Cho Guk of SNU wrote, "Only by voting can you change the world," "Every single vote counts." Comedian Kim Je-dong, well-known for his liberal views, said he would post a picture of himself without his shirt if the voting rate exceeded 50 percent. "Jeez, but is that going to help? I don't know," he jokingly added.

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5   Han Mi-hee (2011, 28 September) "Organization sues Na Kyung-won for 'bath volunteer work'," Yonhap News Agency. Retrieved from http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=100&oid=001&aid=0005289860

6   Kim Mi-young (2010, 6 April) "Distrust in politics, 'lack' of candidates...voting rates of 20-something low," Newsis. Retrieved from http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=102&oid=003&aid=0003172351

The respective camps used SNS to communicate with supporters, and the sentiments online was reflected in offline trends. In the election itself 44.1 percent of 20-somethings voted. This was just 4.8 percentage points lower than the overall rate of 45.9 percent, by far the smallest difference in over a decade.[7]

As expected, the surge in young voter participation translated into a comfortable lead for Park. Joint exit polls by three major Korean broadcasters, SBS, MBC and KBS, showed that 69.3 percent of 20-somethings supported Park, opposed to 30.1 who rooted for Na. People in their 30s and 40s supported Park as well, while people who were 50 years or older leaned toward Na.

## NAGGOMSU FEVER

Nothing could show how SNS can play a pivotal role in shaping public sentiment more dramatically than the rise of the podcast "Naneun Ggomsuda (I'm a Trickster)."

Due to the worldwide economic slump, South Koreans take longer to get their first job. In 2011, it took college graduates an average of 11.4 months to find employment.[8]

In addition, the younger generation can be regarded as outsiders in terms of political participation. The podcast "Naneun Ggomsuda," better known as "Naggomsu," was one of the alternative media outlets to speak for the marginalised generation.

Launched in April 2011, "Naggomsu" dealt with sensitive subjects the mainstream media were reluctant to cover, namely suspicion of favoritism practiced by powerful political figures such as former President Lee Myung-bak and Saenuri candidate Na Kyung-won.

"Naggomsu" rode on the anti-Lee sentiment rampant among youngsters. Combining humor, political satire, and sometimes far-fetched allegations against Lee Myung-bak and his aides, the wildly popular show claimed to have garnered over 10 million listeners at one point. "Naggomsu"

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7    Kim Hyeong-jun (2011, 28 October) "The fury and retribution of '2040 generation'," The Women News. Retrieved from http://www.womennews.co.kr/news/51233

8    Lee Yeong-gyeong "College graduates take 11.4 months to get first job," The Kyunghyang Shinmun. Retrieved from http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201304102146235&code=920507

enjoyed support from people in their 20s through 50s, with 47.8 percent of 30-somethings answering that they had listened to it at least once.[9]

A large portion of its listeners were liberals, which is unsurprising given that its main targets for attack were conservatives and its explicit purpose was to propel the liberal bloc to power.

Analysts say the show helped Park Won-soon win the Seoul mayoral election as it worked as a rallying point for liberals and induced the highest voter turnout among 20-somethings in recent history.

**Which political parties do Naggomsu listeners support?**

| Party | Percentage of supporters among Naggomsu listeners |
|---|---|
| Saenuri Party | 76.2% |
| United Progressive Party | 39.9% |
| Democratic United Party (Currently Democratic Party) | 16.3% 16.3% |
| Liberty Forward Party (Currently Advancement and Unification Party) | 6.6% |

*Source: Polling Agency Realmeter. 2012.02*

Armed with its catchphrase "Fuxx, don't be Intimidated (by the Government)," the show's four hosts discussed issues seldom covered in the mainstream media.

"The 'Naggomsu phenomenon' reflected the dearth of communication in Korean society that is filled with anxiety and rebelliousness," Lee Gi-hyung, a professor of media studies at Kyung Hee University, told The Korea Herald.

"It provided a catharsis, a sense of connection and exchange of awareness of ongoing problems to the masses that are fuming in despair

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9    Kim Do-hyeong (2012, 6 February) "Poll: Freedom of expression by Naggomsu should be recognized, but show needs to apologize," The Hankyoreh. The data was provided by Polling agency Realmeter Retrieved from http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/517699.html

and frustration over the face of incompetence and inadequacy of political parties and major media outlets."

It appears fewer people trust traditional media now than in the past. More than 40 percent of South Koreans say they do not read newspapers or that they have no preference.[10]

"Naggomsu" had its critics, with some calling its allegations far-fetched and groundless, but it showed that issues not dealt with by the mainstream media could be brought to public attention by alternate means.

The combined power of the podcast and SNS helped bring issues to the surface that would have otherwise been forgotten. One such example was the Distributed Denial of Service attack on the National Election Committee during the 2011 mayoral by-election. After the attack, the "Naggomsu" team raised questions about who the culprit was, and even suggested that the attack was conducted by an official from within the committee.

The accusation was carried by its millions of followers on SNS, and became a central issue despite being minimally covered by the country's biggest newspapers and broadcasters. Opposition lawmakers pressured police to conduct a thorough investigation into the case.

The rising power of SNS increases the influence of younger people, who have already claimed the Internet as their territory. The average Twitter user was aged 28 in a 2011 survey by Chang Duk-jin, a professor of sociology at Seoul National University. Nearly 48 percent of users were in their 20s.

## POLITICAL ACTION BECOMES FASHIONABLE

One of the reasons "Naggomsu" was so successful was because it demonstrated that talking about politics can be fun. In the past, there were very few political talk shows that people with no deep knowledge of politics could easily follow. Most showed lawmakers and analysts talking solemnly about policies and strategies few could understand.

In contrast, "Naggomsu" described power struggles within the National Assembly and speculation about political figures in plain language. But more than anything, it was fun. The show's four hosts refused to be serious and mocked everyone, including themselves.

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10  "Comparative study on the thinking and behavior of the digital generation and the older generation" Korea Information Society Development Institute. 2013.03

Presenter Kim Yong-min was often referred to as "Son of a reverend, the pig," and former lawmaker Chung Bong-ju was constantly ridiculed by others for his blatant bragging. Their leader Kim Ou-joon and reporter Choo Chin-woo blurted out expletives while cackling at each other's jokes about the "dear president." Talking about politics had never been so popular; 10 million listeners equaled one in five South Koreans. "Naggomsu" proved politics could be fun and trendy.

An example of youth culture taking on a political edge is the "voting injeung shot." "Injeung shot" is a Korean term for a photo that proves the taker has completed an activity. The trend began in the regional elections on June 2, 2010. Two days before the election, a Twitter user suggested that voters upload pictures of themselves voting onto SNS with the "#62vote" hashtag as part of an "injeung game."

The idea spread like wildfire, and well-known people joined in. Poet An Do-hyeon said he would give away 30 of his new books to people posting 'injeung shots', and professional "baduk" (go) player Lee Se-dol offered signed photographs to 100 voters in their 20s. Writer Park Bum-shin offered signed copies of his novel "Eun-gyo" and actors Ahn Suk-hwan and Gwon Hae-hyo provided tickets to their plays.

On the day of the vote, thousands of voting 'injeung' shots filled SNS. From a college student voting for the first time to a pregnant woman who claimed to have given birth moments after voting, citizens eagerly participated.

After actress Park Jin-hee took part in the injeung game, comedians Kim Je-dong, Jeong Jong-cheol, and singer Im Yoo-na of K-pop group Girl's Generation joined in. Even writer Lee Oi-soo, a "power tweeter" with over 1.6 million followers, uploaded his 'injeung' shot.

The injeung game encouraged young people to vote. Voting rates of people in their 20s and 30s rose from the previous election in 2006, while those of people over the age of 40 fell.[11]

Buoyed by the successful campaign during the election, 'injeung' games became popular in following elections.

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11 From 2012 book "Social-lo jungchi-hara (Do politics with SNS)" by Gong Hun-ui and Kim Haing. Gong and Kim are founding members of social network news service "Wikitree."

## 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Election fever among young voters continued in the 18th presidential election. Young people emerged as a key demographic that could determine the country's president. Not surprisingly, parties went aggressively after voters in their 20s and 30s with customized pledges.

According to a survey of 1,350 people aged 19-39 conducted ahead of the December presidential election[12], respondents choose youth job creation as their top election priority, increasing workers' pay and reduced university tuition fees. All main presidential contenders introduced pledges addressing these issues.

## LEADING PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

Moon Jae-in, the former chief of staff to the late President Roh Moo-hyun, was first to announce his bid for the presidency in July, followed by Park Geun-hye, the daughter of late authoritarian President Park Chung-hee and long-time presidential hopeful a month later.

Political rookie Ahn Cheol-soo announced his bid in September, after pondering the issue for months. These three leading contenders created an interesting election landscape.

Park emphasized that she would be the first female president if elected, with the slogan "Prepared Female President," targeting female swing voters who wanted to see a fresh wind in the male-dominated political scene.

Her father's legacy often stood at the center of attacks against Park, leading her to offer an official apology to the victims of the 1961-1979 dictatorship. But at the same time, much for her support was based on the belief that she would revive the nation's economy, as her father did.

Moon's slogan "People First" highlighted his supposed connection to the common people and his commitment to improving the welfare of poor and marginalized people.

Moon promised to set up the presidential office in the central government complex and return Cheong Wa Dae to the citizens. However, he was dogged by his links to the late President Roh, with whom he worked at the Blue House.

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12 Digital news team (2012, 26 September) "90 percent of youth in their 20s and 30s says "I will vote in presidential election'," The Kyunghyang Shinmun. The data in the article was provided by Korean Youth Solidarity. Retrieved from http://news.khan. co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201209261451291&code=940100

Ahn called for new politics and a clean campaign with the slogan "A New Change Chosen by the People Begins." As much as the slogans, the SNS strategies of each election camp were calculated to collect votes that they couldn't reach with street campaigns.

## SNS STRATEGIES

Campaigning on SNS had been considered the preserve of progressive parties after the 2010 local elections. The Saenuri Party, had struggled to gain a footing in cyberspace, but set up a SNS department under the central election committee for the first time. Park's presence on Facebook or Twitter was much smaller than that of the other two candidates, but she focused instead on Kakao Talk, Korea's biggest mobile messaging application service, garnering 689,000 followers while Moon Jae-in had 538,000 as of Dec. 21.

Park Geun-hye posted pictures from her youth to attract young voters. "Young people only know of Park's life after her 40s. We will pursue the young by sharing the images of her childhood and young days," said Kim Chul-kyun, a ruling party' director of a SNS support team.

But experts said that the 18th presidential election followed a different pattern, as supporters of the conservative party actively participated in SNS campaigning. "As over 30 million smartphones have been distributed in Korea, the age of SNS users has diversified," KAIST professor Lee Won-jae said.

Pundits identified the phenomenon of voters in their 40s and over belatedly adopting high-tech gadgets and online platforms to engage in politics. "Recently the number of Twitter users surpassed seven million in Korea. The (SNS) industry estimates that majority of the newcomers are people over 40 who have a strong inclination toward conservatism," said Lee Jong-dae, the CEO of Social intelligence company TREUM.[13]

"It's hard to put aside the fact that President-elect Park's political messages were well-delivered to young conservative voters as well as to the relatively older voters." The Democratic United Party expressed confidence

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13 Song Ok-jin (2012, 21 December) "SNS no longer reserved for young people," Hankook Ilbo. Retrieved from http://news.hankooki.com/lpage/politics/201212/h20121221023553129750.htm

in its SNS campaign, as it had succeeded with "Internet politician" Roh in the 2002 presidential election.

"When you see Moon's Facebook postings, the number of likes and replies nearly double those of other candidates,'" said Cho Han-ki, Moon's social media chief, in an interview with Nocut News in November.

"Moon makes all-out efforts to take care of his Facebook and Twitter by himself." One notable SNS promotion of the DUP was an online video streaming service called "Moon Jae-in TV" that broadcasted a live video of Moon's campaign appearances and speeches through the online video-sharing service Afreeca TV.

Moon's camp mapped out a SNS strategy that prioritized Kakao Talk, followed by Facebook and Twitter. The camp reasoned that Kakao Talk was a key platform where the candidate could closely approach voters, whereas Twitter users were already fed up of political messages.

IT entrepreneur-turned-politician Ahn Cheol-soo's SNS campaign was highly anticipated. Expectations were raised by his unique career path from a medical doctor to the CEO of the country's largest anti-virus software provider, AhnLab, and also by his running as an independent candidate. Social media was considered a way for him to garner support from swing voters. With no political party, Ahn's SNS team consisted of volunteers.

Ahn, the last contender to join the race, tried an unconventional approach to target office workers in their 30s and 40s by holding a lunch meeting at a market. He called people who wanted to join the meeting together through his Facebook page "Ahn's Speakers."

During the lunch, Ahn talked about parental leave, day care centers and private education expenses, the primary concerns of his target group. Amid voters' demands for real-time news on the election, SNS and portal sites launched special pages devoted to the event.

Two weeks ahead of the election, Twitter covered the newly opened page with tweets from the candidates and their camps along with comments from critics and media.

One of the country's most visited websites, Daum.net, launched a "candidates' map" service, providing the daily schedule of each presidential hopeful. Naver.com, the biggest portal in Korea with a market share of almost 70 percent in terms of search inquiries, launched a mobile and online page at the same time and provided info graphics showing opinion polls and the number of mentions on SNS.

Traffic for websites and SNS with special election pages increased 50 percent above usual levels in the same period. The election result showed the generational divide between progressive-leaning voters in their 20s and 30s and conservative-leaning ones in their 50s and 60s. The turnout was highest for voters in their 50s, at 82 percent, compared to 68.5 percent among 20-something voters.[14]

Young voter turnout was lower than for the elderly, but showed a 21.4 percent increase among voters in their 20s and 15.1 percent rise among voters in their 30s, compared to the presidential election in 2008.

"The synergistic effect was created by the rise of senior voters and the young voters' election fever," said Yoon Hee-woong, a researcher at the Korea Society Opinion Institute.

## LIMITS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION THROUGH SNS

Online participation has its limits. Due to its nature, users are able to selectively listen to opinions they favor. This can lead people of similar viewpoints to form a closed bloc that is intolerant of outside opinions, causing division in society. Furthermore, the benefits of technology are not equally distributed, with some less represented online than others.

## VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

Digital communication has seen the formation of cliquish communities online, befitting of their desire for recognition and homogeneity. Young people, who had difficulties having their voices heard, are allowed to discuss their thoughts freely online regardless of their age or social status.

The term "imagined communities" was coined by Benedict Anderson to refer to socially constructed communities, such as nations, that are held together by an imaginary bond. Anderson said, "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."

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14  Kim Hyung-sub (2013, 15 February) "Voters in their 50s show highest turnout, 20s lowest in 18th presidential election" Newsis. Retrieved from http://news.naver.com/main/read nhn?mode=LS2D&mid=sec&sid1=100&sid2=269&oid=003&aid=0004980997

Such a concept can also be applied in some of today's virtual communities, in which members show exclusive adherence toward the group's values. This tendency has led to a form of ideological war.

## IDEOLOGICAL WARS

One such quarrel between the left and right took place between "Today's Humor" (Oneului humor, O-you) and "Daily Best" (Ilgan Best, Ilbe). The two sites grew based on their political slants, with the former being liberal and the latter conservative. During the 2012 presidential election campaign, the two relentlessly bashed the candidate the other side was rooting for.

While most members are interested in politics, hardly any constructive discussion takes place on the sites. Instead, the two sites' members openly express their animosity toward each other, fueling liberal-conservative and regional feuds.

On Daily Best, words such as "Jeolladian, (a word used to disparage people from the Jeolla provinces)" and "leftist zombie" are freely used. On Today's Humor, members use terms such as "Gyeongsangdian (referring to people from the Gyeongsang provinces)" and "Gae-sangdo (a combination of dog and Gyeongsang)."

The Jeolla provinces traditionally support liberal politicians while people from Gyeongsang province are generally conservative. Recent data showed that over 10,000 postings and 830,000 comments contained derogatory words toward people from Jeolla or left-wing supporters on the Daily Best.[15]

The offensive comments on the two sites are seldom challenged by the sites' own members, because most of them share similar ideas, and minority voices are often drowned out by ridicule. "Some websites are so 'liberal' that they don't even listen to the conservatives' side, which makes us at Daily Best united and even closer," said Kim, a college student and long-time member of the Daily Best.

Some say the reason such conflict is presenting itself online is that Internet users are increasingly conservative. In 2004, only 14.4 percent of Internet users said they were conservatives but that number jumped

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15  Jeong Rak-in. (2013. 13 March) "Cyber ghosts that set off regionalism." Sisa Press. Retrieved from http://www.sisapress.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=60025

to 21.2 percent in 2012. The Internet and the SNS are still predominantly liberal territory but conservatives have gradually expanded their influence.[16]

In some ways, online feuding can be even more damaging than offline conflicts. "Online, people can just 'block' others that they don't like, making it difficult for them to establish trust," Korea University political science professor Lee Myoung-jin said. Because of the distinct characteristics of SNS, forming blocs with "allies" online can widen the division between groups.

To overcome divisions, people need to meet each other and discuss important issues in person, Lee says. "People that have different ideas and are from different generations and social classes need to meet up and share experiences with one another," he said.

### LIMITED INFLUENCE?

Hong Won-sik, a mass communications professor at Dongduk Women's University, said SNS showed a powerful impact on the 2012 presidential election, although the high turnout of elderly voters stole the spotlight. "SNS did not receive much attention this time as it was hidden by a record turnout of voters over 50 but it still showed a strong influence. The impact of SNS on politics is varied, but the most noticeable thing is the expanded political participation of SNS users."

SNS was found to reinforce voters' support for their favored candidates, as they were more frequently exposed to people they agreed with. The opposition bloc and supporters of Moon were perplexed by the election result. The race was expected to be very close, but Park Geun-hye won comfortably.

Korean media, which had forecast that SNS would play a pivotal role, began to doubt its influence on politics. A clue can be found in a 1940s study conducted by Paul Lazarsfeld, who researched the influence of media messages in "The People's Choice," which focused on the process of decision-making during presidential elections.

The researcher expected to find empirical support for the direct influence of media messages on voting intentions, but he discovered that informal

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16  Won Ho-yeon and Seo Ji-hye (2013, 18 January) "SNS, network between generations severed" The Herald Business. Retrieved from http://news.heraldcorp.com/view1.php?ud=20130118000286&md=20130121003547_AT

and personal contacts were cited far more frequently than exposure to radio or newspapers as sources of influence.

## CONCLUSION

Young voters' rise to prominence in 2011 showed how popular opinion on SNS can affect the real world. The ascent of "Naggomsu" showed that key trends on social media are not solely governed by traditional media, and that trendy and fun interactions can be influential.

The remarkable impact of SNS on the 2011 poll prompted candidates in later elections to pursue SNS strategies, including conservatives, who traditionally did not enjoy strong support in online domains.

But the impact of SNS has boundaries. Being predominantly concentrated on young and urban users, the general opinion on SNS by nature cannot represent the whole population. Furthermore, SNS has exacerbated Korea's conservative-liberal division. Rather than encourage broader debate and interaction, traditional political divisions have spread online and become more tribal there.

Despite the limits and side effects, SNS is still a must-watch area for politicians. Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon, one of the biggest beneficiaries of SNS campaigning, still tweets his thoughts almost daily and listens to the citizens. Presidential office Cheong Wa Dae said it opened a Kakao Story page called "Cheong Wa Dae Story" in order to communicate with people.

In a country where more than 30 million people carry smartphones, using SNS to interact with the public is now essential. It is likely that future political campaigning will revolve around social media. It is therefore worth watching how the political role of the younger generations, who have grown up using the Internet, will develop.

Will they maximize their advantage and become the new leaders of South Korea's political landscape? Or will they retreat into minority status after their moment of glory?

# SPRING OF CIVIL PARTICIPATION

*by Alan Fong*

## PROLOGUE– SOCIAL MEDIA AS A RALLYING DEVICE

**I**n the run up to the 2012 Presidential Election, James Soong, founder of the People First Party, returned from self-imposed retirement and announced his plans in a political talk show to collect one million signatures in a petition to take part in the race.

Soong was a former heavyweight of the ruling Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) who is seen by many Taiwanese residents as a capable administrator for his tenure as the Governor of Taiwan Province from 1994 to 1998. He is famous for being one of the few local political figures who has been to every one of Taiwan's 309 towns and villages (before the streamlining of the government). His presidential bid has been regarded as a substantial threat to the re-election chances of the incumbent President Ma Ying-jeou by some local pundits.

In the end, it took Soong a month and a half to collect 445,864 valid signatures, less than half of his ambitious target but well above the legally required 257,695, or 1.5% of the total electorate.[1]

On April 13, a person under the Internet name Eason A1 posted on his Facebook page petitioning for "likes". Eason A1, who claimed to be a man from Changhua City, said he was asked by his prospective father-in-law to collect 500,000 "likes" in order to earn his blessing for the marriage. As a token of faith, Eason A1 posted a screen grab of his dialogue with his girlfriend's father via the instant messaging app Line on his Facebook page, adding that "without the 500,000 likes I will surely be dead."

Eason A1, it turned out, was worrying too much. His plea was frantically shared through Facebook and reposted in the popular Taiwanese bulletin board system (BBS) forum PTT. As a result he hit the seemingly impossible target in less than a day. Inevitably, the 500,000 likes attracted mainstream

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1   Petition result; Central Election Committee; http://web.cec.gov.tw/ezfiles/0/1000/attach/14/pta_11719_7159122_43686.pdf

media and turned Eason A1 into an instant celebrity, so much so that his prospective father-in-law changed his demand to simply "keep a low profile".

Collecting 445,864 valid signatures for presidential election candidacy, of course, requires much more effort than getting 500,000 likes on Facebook. A valid signature requires the signatory to fill in a hand-written form with information such as his/her name, date of birth, registered household address, ID number and an ID card photocopy. A signature is costly in a sense that the voter has to visit either a signature collecting station in person or spend money to submit his signature to the party's headquarter. These requirements for signature, paperwork and logistics present a daunting and expensive challenge for the petitioner.

A Facebook "like", on the other hand, requires much less. All a person needs is a Facebook account, a link to the original post and a click.The huge gap in cost and speed between political rallying and social media mobilization is illustrated by the millions in New Taiwanese dollars and hundreds of man-hours it took for a well-established public figure to collect signatures and the lack of effort for a regular citizen to muster similar support (at least in numbers) in virtually no time at all.

Such a gaphas led to a new political trend in Taiwan where Internet-savvy young people are not necessarily participating in higher numbers in elections but are gaining clout in driving the political discourse.

## MARCH 9 ANTI-NUCLEAR RALLY – A WATERSHED IN TAIWANESE CIVIL MOVEMENTS

On March 9, 2013 tens of thousands of protestors rallied in Taipei, Taichung, Kaohsiung in Taitung calling for the end of nuclear energy in Taiwan. The organizers' estimated attendance of 200,000 people was on the front page of most local newspapers (the police put the number at nearly 70,000). What sets the campaign, known as the 309 Nuclear Free National Rally, apart from the other demonstrations in a nation famous for its noisy democracy is its lack of political influence. Before the March 9 demonstration, almost all major rallies in Taiwan were hosted by either one of the nation's two major parties, Kuomintang (KMT)and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Even the exceptions, such as the 2006 mass campaign led by former DPP leader Shih Ming-te calling for the resignation of then President Chen Shui-bian to due to corruption allegations, were political in nature.

Gone from the limelight at the March 9 demonstrations, however, were the political rallying-cries and politicians' speeches. Instead, the main stages were occupied by student dancers in gas masks and anti-nuke banners written in Taiwanese netspeak. While prominent figures from the opposition DPP attended the protests, the party was much less the banner bearer but one of the more than 400 organized groups at the campaign. Among the DPP heavyweights was the party's former chairwoman and 2012 Presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen. Tsai advocated for a "Nuclear Free Taiwan" on the campaign trail. However, she did not come across as the demonstration's founder or leader. It can be safely argued that the people have taken the issue from politicians and turn it to their own.

Local Chinese language daily *The China Times* observed that at the anti-nuke protests "mothers were holding anti-nuke banners while carrying their kids, college students were wearing head banners that read 'I'm human, I'm anti-nuke'."

"It was a demonstration with little political atmosphere but with a strong sense of unprompted participation among the protestors," the newspaper reported.The March anti-nuclear campaign is a watershed in Taiwan where the people, powered by social media, began to lead politicians in setting topics for social discourse. But before going further, one must first consider the caveats.[2]

First of all, Taiwan's recent waves of anti-nuclear sentiments are mainly triggered by an historic event. The Tsunami caused by the devastating earthquake in Japan in 2011 overwhelmed the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, resulting in the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl. The world was stunned by the meltdown at Fukushima, not at least because Japan is famous for its safety measures and is widely seen as the best-prepared country in the world to deal with earthquakes. The disaster led to a global rethinking of nuclear safety.

According to the Japanese Red Cross Society, as of the end of 2012 Taiwan donated 2.9 billion yen to Japan for 2011 earthquake relief, making it a close second to the biggest donor, which is the U.S. Taiwan's disproportionally generous contribution (the U.S. is the biggest economy in the world, Taiwan the 27th) is mostly seen by the local media as a sign

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2 "Antinuke Protest Draws 200,000"; The China Times; March 10, 2013.

of the nation's goodwill to Japan. Japan seemed to hold a special bond for a substantial number of people in its former colony. The nostalgia is not unlike that manifested by some in Hong Kong toward the city's days as a British colony.

An overlooked key factor of Taiwan's extraordinary generosity, however, is the similarity of challenges shared by Taiwan and Japan. Both countries are island nations with limited natural resources. Both are constantly threatened by natural disasters such as typhoons and earthquakes and both lack the land buffer important in reducing the impact of nuclear disasters. One of the questions Taiwanese people asked themselves when witnessing the tragedy of Fukushima is: "what if that happens to us?"The similarities that make Taiwanese people more sympathetic to the victims also makes them more sensitive to nuclear safety issues in Taiwan.

Secondly, the government's hemorrhage of public support in the past year contributed to the popularity of the anti-nuclear campaign. Nuclear safety is as much an issue of the people's trust on the operators and regulators of nuclear power facilities as on nuclear technology itself. Soon after his re-election, President Ma Ying-jeou saw his approval ratings plummet to be stuck in the mid-teens. Among his most unpopular policies was the proposal for electricity price hikes. Fairly or not, the new energy-pricing plan was seen by many as exploitation of the people to pay for the abundant benefits enjoyed by "fat cats"and employees of the state-run Taiwan Power Company (Taipower). Taipower, the operator of Taiwan's three running nuclear plants and the fourth that is under construction, once again provides a convenient target of public discontent in the anti-nuclear campaign.

Last but not least, the prevalence of a broader anti-establishment sentiment and of the environmental movement in recent years also lends fuel to the campaign. Despite the fact that nuclear power is widely regarded as a green alternative to fossil fuels, the nuclear free movement in Taiwan is accepted as an environmental cause in the sense that it keeps the island from nuclear contamination and potential disasters. In its defense of nuclear power, the Government highlights the importance of stable power supply and reasonable energy cost to Taiwan's economy. To protestors, especially those from the younger generations who are naturally more prone to anti-establishment ideas, such argument further underscores the Government's preference for big businesses compared to the environment

and the wellbeing of everyday people. In other words, the government's nuclear policy is seen as another manifestation of what is wrong with policymakers in developed nations since the financial meltdown in 2008.

Given all these contributors to the cause, it is arguable that any form of protest against nuclear power in Taiwan will receive substantial support from the people. The pivotal role of the Internet within this successfull campaign demonstrates precisely the rising influence of Internet-savvy, social-media-connected youth in shaping social debates in the nation.

Youth in the developed world has long recognized and learnt to tap into the Internet's power for mobilization but they mostly utilize it at a personal or subcultural (even farcical) level. The Chinese-speaking world has the "human flesh search" (a form of crowdsource identification of individuals often linked to online vigils)and "like" harvesting. In the UK, there is the social media phenomenon known as the "Ed Balls Day." Balls, a senior British politician, accidentally sent a tweet containing nothing but his own name (he was reportedly Googling himself on Twitter but mistook the "tweet" button as the "search" button) on April 28, 2011. His message "Ed Balls" was re-tweeted by thousands of Twitter users while some doctored photos to imposed the politician's name, banner-like, on every object. Instead of dying down as an amusing mistake by an embarrassed politician, the "Ed Balls Day" lives on and receives mainstream media coverage. On April 28, 2013, people again re-tweeted the now-famous message in celebration of the day, among them Ed Balls himself.

The significance of the March 9 anti-nuclear demonstration is that it is the first convergence of online youth mobilization with a major mainstream campaign in Taiwan. It marks the first time people in Taiwan realized that social media can do more than rally for amusing, harmless causes or helping in name-and-shame target practices. While the Internet might not have yet given youth the bona fide political influence as voters, it has given them the ability to set the agenda.

## 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION - MORE HEAT THAN LIGHT FOR THE RALLIES FOR YOUNG VOTERS

"First time voters"(or "Shou Tou Zu" in Mandarin) was one of the buzz terms in the 2012 Presidential Election. Local media outlets varied in their gauge of the group of potential voters aged between 20 and 24 (the number ranged from 1.2 million to 770,000). The government pointed out that

since its demographic statistics only tally the total number of people born in a particular year but do not include dynamic information such as death and emigration, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of first time voters. What most pundits agreed upon was the group's decisive influence on the tight race between Ma Ying-jeou and Tsai Ing-wen, the two major contenders for the top job. The most optimistic estimation put the number of voting first timers at 1 million (1.2 million possible voters in a nation with voting rate of around 80%). Despite the estimate's implausibility (youth vote rates are mostly gauged at around 30%), the term "1 million first time voters" caught on. Pundits generally regarded a high first time voter turnout as an advantage for Tsai. Tsai's party, the DPP, has long been seen as the more appealing one to the new generation. Tsai's image as a political novice also endeared her to the younger voters who are generally more critical of the political establishment.

Witnessing the successful "Web 2.0" campaign ran by U.S. President Barack Obama to mobilize young voters in his two presidential elections, most Taiwanese politicians attempted to use  social media as a vehicle to reach out to young electorates. According to the Taiwan Network Information Center, some 17.53 million, or 75% of Taiwanese people, accessed the Internet in 2012. A majority of them visited social media websites. Both Ma and Tsai own accounts at popular social media websites including Facebook, Google+, Twitter and Plurk to maximize their social media exposure. Both candidates campaigned hard for first-timers' support, devoting valuable time and resources to youth-targeting gimmicks and activities such as campaign street dance troupes and pop music concerts. The highlight of Ma's successful 2008 campaign was the "Home Stay" tour where he stayed overnight in the homes of local residents in Taiwan (mostly in the southern and central regions) to reach out and to gain the trust of people in regions generally in support of the DPP. In his 2012 campaign, however, the KMT candidate focused on a national tour of another kind. Since the end of 2010, Ma began visiting the nation's universities to shore up college students' support. The college tour is similar in nature to the "Home Stay" – it is both aimed at eliminating (or at least reducing) the candidate's biggest perceived weakness.

Policy-wise, both Ma and Tsai threw out several proposals tailor-made for young adults, including a social housing rental project (Tsai), subsidies for first time homebuyers (Ma), second professional skill training (Ma)

and lowering the voting age to 18 (Tsai), etc. (James Soong, the third candidate, based a substantial part of his campaign on youth-appealing policies such as education reform to address voters who might feel let down by the nation's two-party political system.)

However, the result of the election and its record low voter turnout (74.38% in comparison to the norm of around 80%) shows that the candidates and commentators may have overestimated the first time voters' willingness to politically participate and thereby the group's importance.[3] While official statistics did not include voter distribution based on age and local polls did not mention first time voter turnout, local pundits generally see the turnout rate to remain roughly the same at 30%. The fact that one pollster, the cable news channel TVBS, tallied younger (aged 20-29) voters' willingness to vote in its 2008 post-election poll report but excluded the category in its 2012 report probably implied the change to be negligible. Tsai's loss to Ma by some 800,000 was partly seen as a result of less-than-expected first time votes.

In her "Ten Thousand Word Letter" review[4] of the DPP's campaign, senior DPP leader and former Vice President Annette Lu pointed out that the Tsai campaign had misjudged the influence of young voters. "Tsai Ing-wen's campaign slogan, TAIWAN NEXT, obviously targeted Taiwanese youth, especially the first time voters, who generally understand some English instead of farmers, workers and older people," Lu wrote. "In this way Tsai cut herself off from (the party's) senior comrades and kept her policies as vague and empty as possible.

"In a presidential election that a party might not win, even if all generations of support joint forces and cooperate, she decided to separate herself (from the party) and to ingratiate herself with the first time voters. The whole campaign became a complete "one man show" (Lu's own words), as if even the DPP is no longer important, not to mention other party leaders who have more experience than her."

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3   Information on the 13th Presidential Election Results; Central Election Committee; http://db.cec.gov.tw/histQuery.jsp?voteCode=20120101P1A1&qryType=prof

4   "Ten Thousand Word Letter"; Annette Lu; http://www.my-formosa.com/article.aspx?cid=5&id=22480

However, the fact is that even though there were 770,000 first time voters, voting day coincided with final examinations and college students could not manage (to visit their hometowns to vote). The unemployed or recently employed young adults, on the other hand, found it difficult to afford two trips from north to south in just one week, and were highly likely to give up voting in preference to returning home for Chinese New Year. (Author: the voting day fell one week ahead of the Chinese New Year holiday.) "This is possibly one of the reasons behind the record-low voter turnout rate in this presidential election," Lu observed.

But as established earlier, Tsai's misjudgment on first voters was shared by other candidates as well as the media. While conspiracy theorists might suggest that the KMT's youth-appealing strategy was a trap to misguide Tsai in the first place, it is reasonable to believe that politicians and commentators did overestimate the political impact of young social media users.

Indeed, such misjudgment serves as an indication of the ability of social media users to punch above their weight. In a media culture increasingly dominated by smart devices and Web 2.0, those controlling the discourses within online forums and social media found themselves at the center of social debate. The low cost of online comments and "like" clicks enable young adults (who are otherwise outmatched by their elders in terms of social influence) to spread their ideas rapidly and widely. As a result, traditional media pick up their opinions with increasing frequency and that frequency translates into cultural impact, misread as political numbers. The "like" harvester Eason A1 might be able to collect more than 500,000 "likes" overnight but that feat does not necessarily guarantee his ability to mobilize in real terms.

To give an example, a bride-to-be in Hong Kong became the target of criticism in early 2013 after she suggested on her Facebook page that guests who give money gifts less than HK$500 might as well not come to her wedding banquet (in Chinese culture it is customary for guests to present money as gift, which is used to pay for the wedding banquets). Her comment was reposted and shared widely and with a number of netizens vowing to crash the banquet to protest as they regarded here as a snob. Despite the fact that the number (HK$500) given by the unfortunate woman actually represents a generally accepted low figure for banquet gifts (the woman claimed she would lose HK$300 in banquet cost for every guest giving HK$500), the woman was slammed by netizens and finally

identified by online "human flesh searches". The netizens' ire was directed not at the figure but at the woman's "arrogance" to announce that number so matter-of-factly. The incident was widely reported by Hong Kong media, to a point where the woman's fiancé had to apologize publicly for her (the woman later also apologized in a magazine interview). At the fateful day, however, only one netizen turned up at the banquet. Embarrassed partly by being the only "protester" at the scene and partly by his own naiveté, the man left soon after failed attempts to mobilize his online comrades.[5]

In her research on the impact of social media on political participation in the 2012 presidential election, Wang Tai-li, a professor of journalism at the National Taiwan University, pointed out that positive correlation is found only between the usage rate of the potential voters' personal social media websites and the users' possibility to vote while viewing rates of candidates' social media sites had no relation to voting likelihood.[6] In other words, it was only through social media users' "words of mouth" and relaying of campaign information.

Wang's research showed that a social media user's "befriending behavior" – such as subscribing to a political figures' social media page and "liking" posts by politicians –has a positive impact on his willingness to vote. Wang pointed out that such results might be seen as proof that in the social media age, fan's expressions of approval through cultural text collecting has influenced voting behavior.

Many local politicians, including President Ma, however, failed to understand the nature of social media and treated their social media sites as just another platform for policy announcements, public agenda updates and photo albums. The president's Facebook page, for example, is populated by lengthy status updates probably penned and keyboarded by the same staff that writes his official press releases. The site shows no attempt to create a personal bond with the "fans." Worse still, the comment section is not kept up to date on Ma's Facebook page. Every status update is followed by angry and derogatory comments. Judging by the comments alone, one could be excused for mistaking the Facebook site as an anti-Ma page.

5   "'HK$500 Hong Kong Lady' Wedding Goes on Smoothly", Ming Pao, Dec 31, 2012.

6   "'Facebook Election'? The impact of Social Media on Voters Behavior
    on the 2012 Taiwanese President Election"; Wang Tai-li;
    http://www2.scu.edu.tw/politics/journal/doc/j311/1.pdf

Tsai Ing-wen fared much better with her Facebook page, partly because her site posted more personal messages, partly because of the DPP's larger youth support base and partly because she had the benefit of being in the opposition. Tsai's site, however, still has the similar "press release" platform approach to it.

In light of this, even without the Chinese New Year logistic problems described by DPP's Lu, it is doubtful that Taiwanese politicians properly harnessed the mobilizing power of social media in their "get out the votes" campaigns in the 2012 election.

## SPRING OF CIVIL PARTICIPATION - YOUTH TAKING THE LEAD IN SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICS

The younger generation's social media influence has yet to translate into voting power in Taiwan. That, however, does not mean that social media-savvy young people are not mounted with substantial political power.

The March 9, 2013 anti-nuclear campaign is not the only example of the impact of social media on political issues. On May 9, 2013 a Taiwanese fisherman onboard the fishing boat Kuang Ta Hsin No. 28 died after the boat was shot by a Philippine Coast Guard vessel in the overlapping exclusive economic zone between Taiwan and the Philippines. The incident led to tensions between Taiwan and the Philippines. On May 11, 2013 Taiwan issued a formal condemnation of what it saw as an unjustified attack on the Taiwanese fishing boat by the Philippine Coast Guard. After the Taiwanese government failed to obtain a demanded formal apology from its Filipino counterpart the next day, Taipei issued a series of sanctions and authorized a naval exercise at the overlapping exclusive economic zone.

Taiwan's tough response was widely seen as a result of the public outrage over the incident. Social media did not only help spread public opinion. It also enabled Taiwanese youths to take matters into their own hands. Dissatisfied with the slow progress of the negotiations and worried about the international media's portrayal of Taiwan's position people shared videos explaining in English the Taiwanese version of the event through social media and video streaming sites. A petition to the White House for the U.S. to "provide necessary assistance to prevent Taiwanese people from being murdered by Philippines and rebuild friendship" was also widely shared by Taiwanese social media users. These online actions were designed to supersede the government's perceived slow response. King

Pu-tsung, Taiwan's de facto ambassador to the U.S., spoke for the first time on the fishing boat incident on May 18, stressing he had explained Taiwan's position to Washington from when the incident occurred. King's comment came three days after the much-shared petition was created and was seen as a clarification of the perception that the government had been slow to react. The incident highlighted again that Taiwanese people are increasingly engaged in the policy setting process, sometimes even trying to take the driver's seat.

## CONCLUSION

More observations are needed to determine whether this new wave of social media-fueled civil participationre presents a specific response to the low approval ratings of the current government or a genuine new trend. Either way, the social media has proved to be a potent enabler of public dialogue and activism to the Taiwanese youth.

# SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE 2013 PHILIPPINE SENATORIAL ELECTIONS

*by Vladymir Joseph Licudine and Christian Michael Entoma*

## INTRODUCTION

**E**lections in the Philippines, as some political observers would like to put it, are like a big fiesta, or party. Especially during the official campaign period. Political campaigning has evolved - from the long speeches and debates of candidates in the early years to a more party-like atmosphere since the downfall of former President Ferdinand Marcos.

Nowadays, a typical campaign of major political parties would normally start with big proclamation rallies of their candidates vying for either national or local positions. These proclamation rallies are like noon time variety shows wherein one can catch a glimpse of candidates in between their political speeches, dancing or singing to the tune of the most popular local or foreign songs. In the case of the recently concluded mid-term elections, Psy's Gangnam Style was a staple of most political rallies. Candidates also have streamers and posters of their faces that flood the streets along with the playing of their political jingles. National candidates, on the other hand, also use political advertisements that they place on television, radio and newspaper to relay their political messages across different parts of the country. Political strategists believe that this type of campaign is necessary to sustain the interest of the voters, particularly the youth[1], to listen to the platforms of candidates.

However, in the recent past two elections of 2010 and 2013, local campaigners of major political parties have used another type of political campaigning that was successful in the previous campaigns of U.S.

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[1] Based on the SWS Final Pre-Election survey conducted last 2-3 May, 2013. The youth or voters aged 18-34 comprised 33% (or an estimated 17.3 million) of the 52 million Filipino registered voters.

President Barack Obama – social media. Local campaigners have used this to explore the possibility that they could replicate the success of the U.S. campaigns.

In order to understand the effect of social media among Filipino voters, this paper will examine the current Philippine digital landscape. In particular, it will discuss the Filipino's access to the Internet through the years and the type of gadgets that they use. This paper will also delve into the social media habits of Filipinos in terms of how they use, and what they access, in social media. Finally, it will also tackle recent candidates' usage of this medium and gauge its effect using the pre-election surveys done by Social Weather Stations (SWS).

## PHILIPPINE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE
### Internet Access
Unfortunately, there are no official statistics concerning the reach of the Internet among Filipinos. The available statistics are the non-commissioned polls that were done by private research institutions like Social Weather Stations (SWS). In the surveys done by SWS since November 2006, proportions of Filipino adults (or registered voters, in the case of pre-election surveys) who access the Internet have risen steadily, from a tenth to about a fourth of the population. The SWS Pre-Election Survey of April 13-15, 2013 showed about a fourth (24% or 12.6 million) of Filipino registered voters access the Internet. Through time, proportions of those who access the Internet are consistently greater among the younger age groups (18-24, 25-34) and among those with higher educational attainment (college graduates, high school graduates).

The increase in Internet access can be attributed to the increase of Internet connections in residential areas and commercial establishments, as well as mobile Internet access among telephone subscribers, although the rate of increase in the Philippines may be slower compared to other countries in Asia.

## GADGETS USED TO ACCESS THE INTERNET
In the past, Filipinos used to access the Internet mainly via personal computers or laptops but with the advent of new technologies, accessing the Internet has greatly evolved in recent years. It has now become more accessible to Filipinos just like in any other country. Nowadays, several devices can access the Internet – whether it is via lightweight cellular

**Proportion of Filipino Adults/Registered Voters
Who Access the Internet, Nov. 2006-April 2013**

| Survey Period/ Respondents | PH % | Survey Period/ Respondents | PH % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nov 2006 Adults | 11 | Mar 2011 Adults | 19 |
| Sep 2007 Adults | 12 | Jun 2011 Adults | 17 |
| Jun 2008 Adults | 11 | Sep 2011 Adults | 15 |
| Sep 2008 Adults | 11 | Dec 2011 Adults | 14 |
| Dec 2008 Adults | 12 | Mar 2012 Adults | 23 |
| Feb 2009 Adults | 14 | May 2012 Adults | 27 |
| Jun 2009 Adults | 12 | Dec 2012 Adults | 25 |
| Sep 2009 Adults | 11 | Jan 2013 RVs | 27 |
| Dec 2009 Adults | 14 | Feb 2013 RVs | 27 |
| Mar 2010 RVs | 13 | Mar 2013 RVs | 26 |
| Sep 2010 Adults | 13 | Mar 2013 Adults | 27 |
| Nov 2010 Adults | 18 | Apr 2013 RVs | 24 |

phones, tablets, or a phablet, which combines the features of both phones and tablets in one gadget.

SWS, in its April 2013 pre-election survey, included a question on the type of gadget one uses in accessing the Internet. Among registered voters who are Internet users (24% or 12.6 million), three out of five (62% or 7.8 million) use personal computers, or PCs, to go online, a third (33% or 4.1 million) use cellular phones, a third (33% or 4.1 million) use laptops and 6% (or about 767,000) use tablets.

It should be noted that this does not necessarily mean ownership of gadgets or devices, i.e. gadget-sharing, is a possibility.

Across sex and age groups, personal computers are the most common gadgets used to go online. More voters among the younger age groups (18-24 and 25-34) use cellular phones in addition to PCs when going online, while lesser proportions use laptops and tablets. Among voters in older age groups (35-44, 45-54 and 55 and above), more of them use laptops, aside from PCs; while lesser proportions use cellular phones and tablets. Among voters with higher education (high school graduates and college graduates), more of them use cellular phones and laptops, aside from PCs, to access the internet.

**Gadgets/Devices Used to Access the Internet, April 2013.
Base: Registered Voters Who are Internet Users
(24%, or 12.6 million RVS)**

|  | Personal Computers % | Cellular Phones % | Laptops % | Tablets % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Philippines | 62 | 33 | 33 | 6 |
| Male | 67 | 31 | 32 | 6 |
| Female | 57 | 34 | 34 | 6 |
| 18-24 | 65 | 41 | 27 | 7 |
| 25-34 | 62 | 30 | 26 | 5 |
| 35-44 | 52 | 31 | 49 | 5 |
| 45-54 | 71 | 28 | 43 | 13 |
| 55 and Above | 79 | 10 | 21 | 0 |
| Up to Some Elementary School. | 36 | 0 | 44 | 0 |
| Up to Some High School. | 86 | 14 | 2 | 0 |
| Up to Some College. | 58 | 36 | 30 | 7 |
| Coll. Graduate+ | 63 | 34 | 47 | 5 |

## SOCIAL MEDIA HABITS

Among registered voters who use the Internet (24% or 12.6 million), about nine out of 10 (89% or 11.2 million) are using online social networking sites like Facebook; half (50% or 6.2 million) are sharing creations online like own artwork, photos, stories or videos; two-fifths (43% or 5.4 million) are looking online for information on health, dieting or physical fitness; a third (33% or 4.2 million) is playing online games; another third (33% or 4.1 million) are getting news or information about current events or politics; three out of 10 (30% or 3.8 million) are looking for information about a health topic that's hard to talk about, like drug use, sexual health or depression; more than a tenth (14% or 1.8 million) are using Twitter; a tenth (10% or 1.3 million) are buying things online such as books, clothing or music; and even less (4% or 486,000) are creating or working on their own online journal or blog.

*Using online social networking sites like Facebook* is more common among female voters (91% or about 6.0 million), those aged 25-34 (94% or 3.9 million), 18-24 (93% or 3.6 million) and 35-44 (87% or 2.6 million); among high school graduates (91% or 7.0 million) and college graduates (87% or 3.2 million).

*Sharing one's creations online like own artwork, photos, stories or videos* is more common among female voters (51% or 3.3 million), those aged 18-24 (55% or 2.1 million), 25-34 (50% or 2.1 million) and 35-44 (47% or 1.4 million); among high school graduates (51% or 3.9 million) and college graduates (49% or 1.8 million).

*Looking online for information on health*, dieting or physical fitness is more common among female voters (44% or 2.9 million), those aged 25-34 (45% or 1.9 million), among college graduates (57% or 2.1 million) and high school graduates (42% or 3.2 million).

*Playing online games is more common among male voters* (42% or 2.5 million), those aged 25-34 (43% or 1.8 million), 18-24 (35% or 1.4 million) and among high school graduates (37% or 2.8 million).

*Getting news or information about current events or politics* is more common among male voters (36% or 2.2 million), those aged 18-24 (34% or 1.3 million) and 25-34 (33% or 1.4 million), among college graduates (47% or 1.7 million) and high school graduates (30% or 2.3 million).

*Looking for information about a health topic that's hard to talk about, like drug use, sexual health or depression* is more common among females (34% or 2.3 million), those aged 55 and above (33% or 202,000), 18-24 (32% or 1.2 million) and 25-34 (28% or 1.1 million), among college graduates (41% or 1.5 million) and high school graduates (29% or 2.2 million).

*Using Twitter* is similar among females (14% or 942,000) and males (14% or 857,000), and is more common among those aged 18-24 (18% or 682,000), 25-34 (16% or 660,000), among college graduates (19% or 680,000) and high school graduates (14% or 1.1 million).

Buying things online such as books, clothing or music is more common among males (13% or 762,000), those aged 25-34 (12% or 485,000), 18-24 (11% or 429,000), among college graduates (16% or 583,000) and high school graduates (8% or 623,000).

Creating or working on their own online journal or blog is more common among males (5% or 299,000), those aged 25-34 (5% or 227,000), 18-24 (4% or 143,000), among college graduates (5% or 176,000) and high school graduates (4% or 271,000).

**Voters' Internet Activities, April 2013. Base: Registered Voters Who Are Internet Users (24% or 12.6 million RVS)**

| | % |
| --- | --- |
| Using online social networking sites like Facebook | 89 |
| Sharing one's creations online like own artwork, photos, stories or videos | 50 |
| Looking online for information on health, dieting or physical fitness | 43 |
| Playing online games | 33 |
| Getting news or information about current events or politics | 33 |
| Looking for information about a health topic that's hard to talk about, like drug use, sexual health or depression | 30 |
| Using Twitter | 14 |
| Buying things online such as books, clothing or music | 10 |
| Creating or working on own online journal or blog | 4 |

## USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES

The SWS April 2013 pre-election survey also looked into the use of social media sites like Facebook, Youtube, Multiply and Twitter among registered voters. Nearly a tenth (8% or 4.2 million) of the projected 50 million registered voters belong to social networking sites involved in political or social issues and 3% (1.3 million) follow any elected officials/political candidates/political figures on any social networking site. Slightly smaller percentages use social networking sites to post their own thoughts/comments on political or social issues (2% or 1.2 million), promote material related to political/social issues posted by others (2% or 840,000), post links to political stories or articles for others to read (2% or 794,000), encourage other people to vote (1% or 751,000), encourage other people to take action on important political/social issues (1% or 749,000), and re-post content related to political/social issues originally posted by others (1% or 664,000).

Belonging to social networking sites involved in political or social issues is more common among female voters (9% or 2.2 million), those aged 18-24 (21% or 1.3 million), 25-34 (12% or 1.4 million), among college graduates (22% or 1.4 million) and high school graduates (11% or 2.5 million).

*Following any elected officials/political candidates/political figures on any social networking site* is more common among male voters (3% or

764,000), those aged 18-24 (8% or 444,000), 25-34 (3% or 394,000) and 35-44 (3% or 366,000), among college graduates (7% or 417,000) and high school graduates (4% or 902,000). Posting their own thoughts/comments on political or social issues is similar among males (2% or 616,000) and females (2% or 580,000), and is more common among those aged 18-24 (7% or 440,000), 25-34 (4% or 496,000), among college graduates (5% or 312,000) and high school graduates (4% or 858,000).

*Promoting material related to political/social issues posted by* others is more common among female voters (2% or 555,000), those aged 18-24 (4% or 230,000), 35-44 (2% or 262,000) and 25-34 (2% or 250,000), among college graduates (5% or 340,000) and high school graduates (2% or 408,000).

*Posting links to political stories or articles for others to read* is more common among male voters (2% or 425,000), those aged 18-24 (5% or 304,000), 25-34 (2% or 250,000), among college graduates (6% or 365,000) and high school graduates (2% or 429,000).

*Encouraging other people to vote* is more common among female voters (2% or 424,000), those aged 18-24 (5% or 295,000) and 35-44 (2% or 253,000), among college graduates (4% or 229,000) and high school graduates (2% or 429,000).

**Use of social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Multiply or Twitter for political purposes, April 2013.**

| | % |
|---|---|
| Belongs to social networking sites involved in political or social issues | 8 |
| Follows any elected officials/political candidates/ political figures on any social networking site | 3 |
| Uses social networking sites to post own thoughts/ comments on political or social issues | 2 |
| Uses social networking sites to promote material related to political/social issues posted by others | 2 |
| Uses social networking sites to post links to political stories or articles for others to read | 2 |
| Uses social networking sites to encourage other people to vote | 1 |
| Uses social networking sites to encourage other people to take action on important political/social issues | 1 |
| Uses social networking sites to repost content related to political/social issues originally posted by others | 1 |

*Encouraging other people to take action on important political/social issues* is more common among females (2% or 410,000), those aged 18-24 (6% or 362,000) and 25-34 (2% or 231,000), among college graduates (3% or 175,000) and high school graduates (2% or 547,000).

*Re-posting content related to political/social issues originally posted by others* is more common among female voters (2% or 396,000), those aged 18-24 (3% or 202,000), 25-34 (2% or 239,000) and 35-44 (2% or 203,000), among college graduates (4% or 242,000) and high school graduates (2% or 396,000).

## POLITICIANS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Technologically-savvy candidates have been using Twitter and Facebook to relay their campaign messages to a broad spectrum of Filipino voters. Candidates use Twitter to deliver snippets of their speeches, update the voters of their campaign schedules or even talk to them while on the campaign trail. Facebook, on the other hand, is more informative since they can post their full speeches, videos of their political advertisements and pictures of their platforms or programs.

Thirty of the 33 Senatorial candidates in the recently-concluded elections had Twitter accounts. The top five candidates with the most number of Twitter followers were led by Chiz Escudero (130,218), followed by Risa Hontiveros (65,739), Sonny Angara (37,266), Loren Legarda (36,615) and JV Estrada (21,307).

### Senatorial candidates by the number of Twitter followers (as of May 31, 2013).

| | | Twitter Followers | | | Twitter Followers |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Escudero | 130,218 | 11 | Honasan | 8,874 |
| 2 | Hontiveros | 65,739 | 12 | Zubiri | 8,591 |
| 3 | Angara | 37,266 | 13 | M. Magsaysay | 8,299 |
| 4 | Legarda | 36,615 | 14 | Poe | 7,606 |
| 5 | Ejercito | 21,307 | 15 | Gordon | 7,285 |
| 6 | Aquino | 16,861 | 16 | Binay | 7,192 |
| 7 | Casiño | 16,449 | 17 | Villar | 4,941 |
| 8 | Villanueva | 14,313 | 18 | Maceda | 3,943 |
| 9 | Trillanes | 11,525 | 19 | J. Magsaysay | 2,175 |
| 10 | Pimentel | 10,276 | 20 | Enrile | 2,120 |

The next five were Bam Aquino (16,861), Teddy Casiño (16,449), Brother Eddie Villanueva (14,313), Sonny Trillanes (11,525) and Koko Pimentel (10,276).

31 out of the 33 candidates maintain official Facebook pages. Among these official Facebook pages, the page of Loren Legarda had the highest number of likes (229,391), followed by Richard Gordon (186,589), Alan Peter Cayetano (169,289), Brother Eddie Villanueva (144,937) and Bam Aquino (144,661).

Completing the top 10 were Chiz Escudero (136,020), Sonny Angara (127,337), Koko Pimentel (106,873), JV Ejercito (103,135) and Sonny Trillanes (81,761).

## Senatorial Candidates by the number of Facebook followers (as of May 31, 2013).

| | | Facebook Followers | | | Facebook Followers |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Legarda | 229,391 | 11 | Poe | 55,321 |
| 2 | Gordon | 186,589 | 12 | Villar | 39,182 |
| 3 | Cayetano | 169,289 | 13 | J. Magsaysay | 36,054 |
| 4 | Villanueva | 144,937 | 14 | Hontiveros | 35,551 |
| 5 | Aquino | 144,661 | 15 | Zubiri | 23,767 |
| 6 | Escudero | 136,020 | 16 | Casiño | 21,603 |
| 7 | Angara | 127,337 | 17 | Hagedorn | 15,499 |
| 8 | Pimentel | 106,873 | 18 | Cojuangco | 10,275 |
| 9 | Ejercito | 103,135 | 19 | Binay | 6,273 |
| 10 | Trillanes | 81,761 | 20 | Señeres | 5,430 |

## TECHIE VOTERS

Techie voters are defined by SWS as registered voters who use the Internet for various online social media platforms and for any political purpose. The SWS April 2013 pre-election survey showed that 3% (1.3 million) of the projected 52 million registered voters were techie voters. Proportions of techie voters are higher among females (3% or 730,000), those aged 18-24 (8% or 494,000), 25-34 (4% or 453,000) and 35-44 (3% or 340,000), among college graduates (7% or 451,000) and high school graduates (4% or 841,000).

A similar proportion was obtained in the SWS final pre-election survey of May 2-3, 2013 (3% or 1.4 million are techie voters). Proportions of techie voters are higher among males (3% or 895,000, those aged 18-24 (7% or 441,000), 25-34 (4% or 476,000) and 35-44 (2% or 291,000), among college graduates (9% or 694,000) and high school graduates (3% or 667,000).

The SWS April 2013 pre-election survey had seven administration coalition (Team PNoy) candidates and two opposition coalition (United Nationalist Alliance [UNA]) candidates in statistical position to take the top nine seats in the May 2013 senatorial elections.[2] Among the top 12, seven were Team PNoy candidates (1st Legarda, 2nd Cayetano, 3rd-4th Villar, 5th Escudero, 6th Aquino, 7th-8th Pimentel, 9th Angara) and two were UNA candidates (3rd-4th Binay, 7th-8th Ejercito). Six candidates were competing for the last three seats at that time: Team PNoy's Poe and Trillanes (tied for 10th-11th), UNA's Enrile and Honasan (tied for 12th-13th), and UNA's Zubiri and Team PNoy's J. Magsaysay (tied for 14th-15th).

Compared to national standings, rankings varied among techie voters in April 2013. The top nine seats also had seven Team PNoy candidates (1st Escudero, 2nd Cayetano, 3rd Legarda, 4th-5th Poe and Trillanes, 6th Pimentel, 9th Hontiveros) and two UNA candidates (7th Ejercito, 8th Enrile). Seven candidates were competing for the last three seats: Team PNoy's Aquino and Angara (tied for 10th-11th), independent Hagedorn and Team PNoy's Villar (tied for 12th-13th), Team PNoy's Madrigal (14th) and UNA's Binay and Honasan (tied for 15th-16th). Those with higher rankings compared to their national standings were: Hontiveros (up 8 places from 17th), Poe and Trillanes (up six places from tied 10th-11th), Hagedorn (up seven places from 19th), Escudero (up four places from 5th), Enrile (up four places from tied 12th-13th), Madrigal (up two places from 16th), and Pimentel (up one place from tied 7th-8th). Those with lower rankings compared to their national standings were: Angara (down one place from 9th), Legarda (down two places from 1st), Honasan (down three places from tied 12th-13th), Aquino (down four places from 6th), Villar (down nine places from tied 3rd-4th), and Binay (down 12 places from tied 3rd-4th).

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2   Senate score at seven Team PNoy, two UNA in the top nine; three Team PNoy, three UNA compete for last three seats http://www.sws.org.ph/pr20130423.htm

The SWS Final Pre-Election Survey of May 2013 reported nine Team PNoy candidates and three UNA candidates leading the Senate race.[3] Among the top 12, seven Team PNoy candidates (1st Legarda, 2nd Cayetano, 3rd-4th Escudero, 5th Poe, 6th-7th Villar, 8th Pimentel, 9th Aquino) and two UNA candidates (3rd-4th Binay, 6th-7th Ejercito) appeared safe to win. Six candidates were still in the running at that time: Team PNoy's Angara and Trillanes (tied for 10th-11th), UNA's Honasan (12th), UNA's Enrile (13th), and Team PNoy's J. Magsaysay and UNA's Zubiri (tied for 14th-15th).

Rankings also varied among techie voters compared to national standings in May 2013. The top nine seats had eight Team PNoy candidates (1st-2nd Cayetano and Poe, 3rd Legarda, 4th Pimentel, 5th Escudero, 6th-7th Hontiveros, 8th Angara, 9th Aquino) and one UNA candidate (6th-7th Ejercito). Six candidates were competing for the last three seats: Team PNoy's Trillanes (10th), Team PNoy's J. Magsaysay (11th), Team PNoy's Villar (12th), and UNA's Binay, Honasan and Zubiri (tied for 13th-15th). Those with higher rankings compared to their national standings were: Hontiveros (up 10 places from 16th), Poe (up four places from 5th), Pimentel (up four places from 8th), J. Magsaysay (up three places from tied 14th-15th), Angara (up two places from tied 10th-11th), Cayetano (up one place from 2nd), and Zubiri (up one place from tied 14th-15th). Those with lower rankings compared to their national standings were: Honasan (down one place from 12th), Legarda (down two places from 1st), Escudero (down two places from tied 3rd-4th), Villar (down sixplaces from tied 6th-7th) and Binay (down 10 places from tied 3rd-4th).

Based on the results of the SWS final pre-election survey of May 2013, which correctly predicted all proclaimed Senators[4]; four candidates who were not in the top 12 in terms of Twitter followers (Poe, Binay, Villar and Cayetano) made it to the winning circle of 12. On the other hand, four candidates who were in the top 12 in terms of Twitter followers (Hontiveros, Casiño, Villanueva and Zubiri) failed to win Senate seats. Two candidates who were not in the top 12 in terms of Facebook followers (Binay and Honasan) still won Senate seats. On the other hand, two candidates who are in the top 12 (Gordon and Villanueva) failed to win Senate seats.

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3   Nine Team PNoy, three UNA In Top 12; seven Team PNoy, two UNA Safe
     http://www.sws.org.ph/pr20130509.htm

4   http://2013electionresults.comelec.gov.ph/

## Senatorial preferences for the 2013 Elections, April and May 2013

| | April 13-15, 2013 Philippines | | April 13-15, 2013 Techie Voters | | May 2-3, 2013 Philippines | | May 2-3, 2013 Techie Voters | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Rank | % | Rank | % | Rank | % | Rank | % |
| Legarda | 1 | 59 | 3 | 69 | 1 | 57 | 3 | 64 |
| Cayetano | 2 | 52 | 2 | 72 | 2 | 50 | 1-2 | 65 |
| Binay | 3-4 | 49 | 15-16 | 39 | 3-4 | 48 | 13-15 | 36 |
| Escudero | 5 | 47 | 1 | 74 | 3-4 | 48 | 5 | 55 |
| Poe | 10-11 | 39 | 4-5 | 58 | 5 | 45 | 1-2 | 65 |
| Ejercito | 7-8 | 43 | 7 | 51 | 6-7 | 44 | 6-7 | 51 |
| Villar | 3-4 | 49 | 12-13 | 42 | 6-7 | 44 | 12 | 37 |
| Pimentel | 7-8 | 43 | 6 | 55 | 8 | 43 | 4 | 56 |
| Aquino | 6 | 44 | 10-11 | 46 | 9 | 41 | 9 | 44 |
| Angara | 9 | 42 | 10-11 | 46 | 10-11 | 38 | 8 | 50 |
| Trillanes | 10-11 | 39 | 4-5 | 58 | 10-11 | 38 | 10 | 43 |
| Honasan | 12-13 | 37 | 15-16 | 39 | 12 | 37 | 13-15 | 36 |
| Enrile | 12-13 | 37 | 8 | 48 | 13 | 35 | 19 | 23 |
| J. Magsaysay | 14-15 | 35 | 18 | 29 | 14-15 | 33 | 11 | 40 |
| Zubiri | 14-15 | 35 | 17 | 35 | 14-15 | 33 | 13-15 | 36 |
| Hontiveros | 17 | 29 | 9 | 47 | 16 | 29 | 6-7 | 51 |
| Gordon | 18 | 27 | 19 | 26 | 17 | 27 | 16-17 | 30 |
| Madrigal | 16 | 30 | 14 | 41 | 18 | 25 | 16-17 | 30 |
| Hagedorn | 19 | 17 | 12-13 | 42 | 19 | 16 | 18 | 24 |
| Villanueva | 23 | 13 | 23 | 8 | 20 | 15 | 21 | 14 |
| Maceda | 20 | 16 | 22 | 12 | 21 | 14 | 23 | 9 |
| M. Magsaysay | 21 | 15 | 24 | 6 | 22 | 13 | 24 | 7 |
| Cojuangco | 22 | 14 | 21 | 13 | 23 | 11 | 22 | 10 |
| Casiño | 24 | 7 | 20 | 16 | 24 | 9 | 20 | 17 |
| Montaño | 25 | 5 | 29-33 | 0 | 25 | 4 | 25 | 4 |
| Alcantara | 27-29 | 3 | 28 | 1 | 26-28 | 3 | 26-28 | 3 |
| Delos Reyes | 27-29 | 3 | 25-27 | 3 | 26-28 | 3 | 33 | 0 |
| David | 26 | 4 | 29-33 | 0 | 26-28 | 3 | 29-30 | 2 |
| Penson | 27-29 | 3 | 29-33 | 0 | 29-32 | 2 | 31-32 | 1 |
| Falcone | 30-33 | 2 | 25-27 | 3 | 29-32 | 2 | 26-28 | 3 |
| Llasos | 30-33 | 2 | 29-33 | 0 | 29-32 | 2 | 31-32 | 1 |
| Belgica | 30-33 | 2 | 29-33 | 0 | 29-32 | 2 | 29-30 | 2 |
| Señeres | 30-33 | 2 | 25-27 | 3 | 33 | 1 | 26-28 | 3 |

## CONCLUSION

Social media as an election campaign tool has not yet reached its full potential in the Philippines, unlike in the United States where it was used extensively in the successful campaigns of U.S. President Barack Obama, simply because the number of Filipino online users is still small compared to the U.S. or in other developed countries.

It cannot be discounted that, through the use of social media, Filipinos are now more empowered and are able to participate in political and social discourse. It has given Filipinos direct access to politicians with whom they can engage in political discourse or even criticize for their actions. This is the reason why politicians have become sensitive to the rumblings of the online community. They know they will be taking considerable political risk if they ignore the sentiments of these citizens. A good example of this is the *Anti-Epal*[5] campaign on Facebook which garnered 40,371 "likes" and even made it into mainstream media. This online campaign resulted in the immediate compliance of several politicians who were the subject of complaints.

Therefore, it is inevitable that the political influence of social media will grow as the number of Filipino online users also expands. This, combined with the further advancement of technology and widened access to online discourse, will eventually affect Filipino voting behavior more significantly in future elections.

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5   " Reclaiming public property from the clutches of traditional politicians" - this page is a venue for the public to share photos of public servants who have displayed their names or images in public places in furtherance of their careers.

# SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN THE 2013 MALAYSIAN GENERAL ELECTION: LESSONS LEARNED

*by Ibrahim Suffian*

The 13th Malaysian General Election on 5 May, 2013 was dubbed the toughest election in the country's political history. There was an expectation that the election would settle long standing issues – such as the question whether the country's politics should continue with the race-based status quo or if it should it move into a new arrangement based on class or topics? Should it remain as a kind of 'guided democracy' or enter a more liberal arrangement where the strong hand of government in the private lives of citizens is lessened?

Travellers to Malaysia will be familiar with the tourism promotion jingle "Truly Asia." But a closer listen reveals the lyrics then claim it to be a place where "so many races live in harmony". That single word "race" has been the lynchpin of the country's politics since Independence in 1957. The ability to accommodate the political compromises of the different ethnic and cultures that make up Malaysia has been the strength contributing to the longevity of the National Front (NF) ruling coalition. In this election, the National Front was for the first time challenged by the opposition People's Alliance (PA) led by Anwar Ibrahim, which promotes class-based policies.

Core of the campaign was the battle for the hearts and minds of new voters who make up over 25% of the electorate and voters under 40-years-old possessing greater access to the Internet – thus bringing the overall total to over 52% of the electorate. Herein lies the question: how did the country's youth, for once making up the largest bloc of voters, choose? What influenced them and how did it lead to the results of May 5?

## INTERNET PENETRATION

The arena for political battle in recent Malaysian political history has largely been the Internet. This is mainly because of the curtailment of media

opportunity for opposition parties and dissidents to access mainstream media.[1] As in other spheres of life, Malaysian media is segmented along languages and class. While Chinese and Indian language newspapers have largely remained in the control of private companies or family owned conglomerates, Malay and English newspapers have been controlled by companies closely related to the ruling coalition since the late 1960s. The same is true for electronic media (all television and most, but not all, radio stations). They are operated by either the government or two media firms closely linked to the ruling parties.

This constricted media landscape and severe restrictions imposed on political party newsletters, means that the Internet is often the only space available for the opposition, dissidents or social activists that are working on issues critical of the Malaysian government.

At the time of the 1997 Asian financial crisis and the subsequent internal political fallout in Malaysia between then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed and Anwar Ibrahim, there were an  estimated half a million Internet subscribers, mostly within the Klang Valley and a smaller number in the major state capitals along the western coast of the Malay Peninsula.

Internet access increased to approximately 66% at the time of the May 2013 general election, based on government data. Of interest is that the expansion of Internet penetration was, as expected, largely centred in urban areas. Take up, or utilization, has mainly been with people under 40. Access also reflects some peculiar patterns. For example, while access for Malaysians of Malay or Chinese ethnicity reflects a correlation between age and Internet access, the same is less true for ethnic Indians or Borneo indigenous populations. Economics and location are both reasons: there is high income inequality within the ethnic Indian community while the Borneo indigenous population remain mostly located in the rural hinterland. Despite these differences, the space afforded by the Internet certainly meant that the Opposition had better access to the younger electorate as compared to the older, rural based ones.

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1   Political parties are allowed to publish newsletters for their membership subject to annual permit renewals. Such newsletters are typically allowed only for bi-monthly issues and are occasionally subjected to suspension or confiscations. Mainstream media, particularly English and Malay language newspapers and most electronic media channels (free-to-air and cable television as well as radio stations) are operated by corporations linked to individuals close to the ruling coalition.

## Chart 1: Internet access
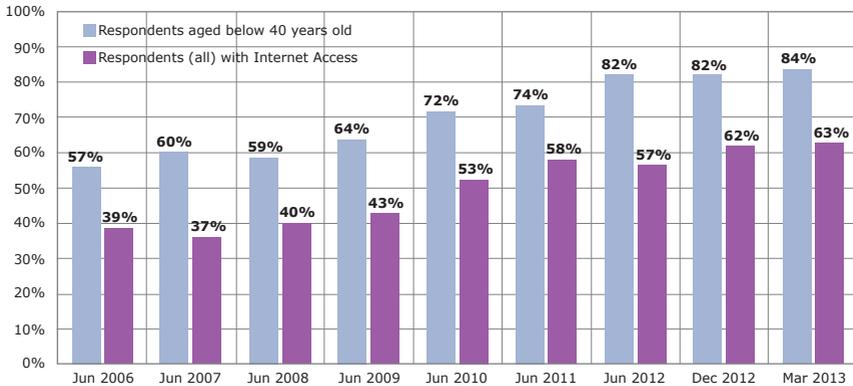


*Source: Merdeka Center for Opinion Research*

## SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE IN POLITICS

Political debate in the 2008 Malaysian general elections was driven by blogs. The May 2013 general election was propelled by social media. The May 2013 election was different in many ways: usage of the Internet as a medium for accessing political information had expanded among the electorate; the opposition was generally stronger and better equipped compared to previous elections; the ruling coalition had accepted the Internet and social media as a key area to contest and thus invested accordingly. But, more significantly, the high numbers of younger voters meant that their issues were principle topics of debate.

As in past elections, the mainstream media, particularly the Malay and English newspapers, as well as television channels (both free to air and cable) remained strongly in favour of the ruling coalition. Preliminary analysis by the local free media advocate Centre for Independent Journalism found that almost 90% of the news content in these outlets was in favour of the National Front while over 80% of any reports on the Opposition were negative.

That left two communication areas to be fought over: the traditional campaigning methods of public speeches, door to door visits, leaflet and newsletter distribution - and utilization of the Internet based social media.

Prior to the election, Malaysia already had already had a high base of Facebook and Twitter users, plus pre-existing users of blogs and websites.

It was estimated that nearly eight out of every 10 Internet users were on Facebook while one in five accessed Twitter (see table below). This high level of participation meant that there was a ready base for consumers of information awaiting content from the contesting political parties.

**Table 1: Internet penetration in ASEAN Countries**

| # | ASEAN | Population (2012 Est.) | Internet Users (Year 2000) | Internet Users (30 June 2012) | Penetration (as a % Population) | Growth of Internet Penetration |
|---|-------|----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Brunei Darussalam | 408,786 | 30,000 | 318,900 | 78.0% | 80.25% |
| 2 | Cambodia | 14,952,665 | 6,000 | 662,840 | 4.4% | 912.28% |
| 3 | Indonesia | 248,645,008 | 2,000,000 | 55,000,000 | 22.1% | 220.83% |
| 4 | Laos | 6,586,266 | 6,000 | 592,764 | 9.0% | 814.95% |
| 5 | Malaysia | 29,179,952 | 3,700,000 | 17,723,000 | 60.7% | 31.58% |
| 6 | Myanmar | 54,584,650 | 1,000 | 534,930 | 1.0% | 4449.42% |
| 7 | Philippines | 103,775,002 | 2,000,000 | 33,600,000 | 32.4% | 131.67% |
| 8 | Singapore | 5,353,494 | 1,200,000 | 4,015,121 | 75.0% | 19.55% |
| 9 | Thailand | 67,091,089 | 2,300,000 | 20,100,000 | 30.0% | 64.49% |
| 10 | Vietnam | 91,519,289 | 200,000 | 31,034,900 | 33.9% | 1284.79% |
| | Total | 622,096,201 | 11,443,000 | 163,582,455 | 26.3% | 110.80% |

*NOTES: (1) The Asian Internet Statistics were updated for 30 June,, 2012. (2) The Facebook subscriber data was updated for 30 September, 2012. (3) CLICK on each country name to see detailed data for individual countries and regions. (4) The demographic (population) numbers are based mainly on data contained in Census Bureau. (5) The usage numbers come from various sources, mainly from data published by Nielsen Online, ITU, and other trustworthy sources. (6) Data may be cited, giving due credit and establishing an active link to Internet World Stats. (7) For navigation help, definitions and methodology, see the site surfing guide. (\*) China figures do not include SAR Hong Kong, SAR Macao nor Taiwan, which are reported separately for statistical purposes. Copyright©2012, Miniwatts Marketing Group. All rights reserved worldwide.*

*Source: http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm*

**Table 2: Facebook and Twitter users in ASEAN Countries**

| # | ASEAN | Internet Users 30 June 2012 ('000) | Facebook 30 Sept 2012 ('000) | Twitter 2012 ('000) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Brunei Darussalam | 319 | 253 | n/a |
| 2 | Cambodia | 663 | 663 | n/a |
| 3 | Indonesia | 55,000 | 47,539 | 5,616 |
| 4 | Laos | 593 | 225 | n/a |
| 5 | Malaysia | 17,723 | 13,078 | 1,128 |
| 6 | Myanmar | 535 | n/a | n/a |
| 7 | Philippines | 33,600 | 29,658 | 2,040 |
| 8 | Singapore | 4,015 | 2,869 | 2,112 |
| 9 | Thailand | 20,100 | 16,834 | 720 |
| 10 | Vietnam | 31,035 | 7,876 | 5,000 |
| | Total | 163,583 | 118,996 | 16,616 |

*Source: http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm*
*http://www.forest-interactive.com/twitter-users/*

Due to their exclusion from access to mainstream media, opposition and social activists in Malaysia had already carved a strong foothold in the online arena. Since 1999, the scene was enriched by the emergence of online news portals such as Malaysiakini that consistently provided critical content and coverage of events ignored by the mainstream. Other news portals emerged, some being online versions of the mainstream newspapers, others being news portals in their own right such as The Malaysian Insider which emerged prior to the 2008 general election, mostly operated by former mainstream news journalists.

## NATIONAL FRONT ADDRESSES SHORTCOMINGS

Leading up to the 2008 election, Internet usage as a source of political news and current developments amounted to only 6.8% of the electorate.[2] By the May 2013 election, this utilization of the Internet had increased to 33%. Although Internet-driven news was mainly amongst young consumers, access remained predominantly urban and centred on ethnic Chinese and Malay users. The vast majority of the rural and older electorate remained tied to the government controlled mainstream media.

The situation with political parties and their use of the Internet had changed after 2008 so that by 2013, the Opposition no longer enjoyed domination of the online and social media arena. After their near disastrous outing in 2008, the National Front coalition under the leadership of Prime Minister Najib Razak began to address its online shortcomings.

Recovering this initiative after the shock of losing their customary two-thirds supermajority took place in several stages. Initially, developments occurred offline: various non-government organizations and associations were formed at local and state level in states where the National Front lost state governments such as Kedah, Penang, Perak and Selangor. These groups, populated mostly by members of the senior party in the ruling coalition, UMNO, organized public meetings and protests against policies of the People's Alliance state governments. These organizations quickly became allied to individual pro-National Front bloggers residing in their respective states, providing a platform for news and reports on activities to be shared online.

At a national level, National Front's weak Internet presence was also being systematically addressed. At least four specific themes, or fronts, were created: expansion of ruling party affiliated news portals, mostly written in Malay; blogs run by affiliated individuals predominantly targeting opposition leadership, mostly written in Malay and organized by party institutions such as UMNO's New Media Unit and others, mostly centred around particular party leaders and, finally, organized recruitment and mobilization of sympathizers as content providers or comment contributors that were typically termed as 'cyber troopers'. Beyond these activities, organized quietly and without much public knowledge, ruling party leaders,

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2    Based on Merkeda Center for Opinion Research voter opinion survey conducted one week after the election; 13-17 March 2008.

most notably Prime Minister Najib Razak himself began a sustained social media campaign, first by starting the 1Malaysia blog and later by creating a presence on Facebook and Twitter.

**Illustration 1: Website and Facebook page of Najib Razak**



Source: http://www.1malaysia.com.my/my/



Source: https://www.facebook.com/najibrazak

*Source:https://twitter.com/NajibRazak*

Succeeding Abdullah Badawi, ousted in a party coup in 2009, Najib utilized his new position as Prime Minister to rapidly build political capital. By releasing political prisoners and then subsequently wresting back the opposition controlled state of Perak, Najib regained lost support from the minority Indian community and shored up his credentials among conservative Malays. These actions, and other proposed initiatives to address areas of public concern caused by the 2008 election loss in support - such as the rising cost of living, crime and corruption - boosted Najib's popularity and allowed him to rapidly build a fan base on Facebook and Twitter. He soon surpassed Anwar Ibrahim's number of fans and reached one million by early 2012. The social media campaign for Najib and the ruling parties were typically part of a comprehensive public relations campaign using print and electronic media. For example, Najib's 2013 Chinese New Year greetings were widely aired in the form of television ads and radio spots featuring his Mandarin-speaking son and followed up on Facebook.

Subsidiary fan pages, aimed at the ethnic Chinese electorate, did not succeed due to that community's dissatisfaction with the ruling coalition over a number of issues, including Najib's tacit support for right wing

SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN THE 2013 MALAYSIAN GENERAL ELECTION: LESSONS LEARNED

Malay organizations such as PERKASA. Other affiliated social media based campaigns such as one called "I Choose Malaysia" which recruited support of various local artistes, generated only 13,600 followers on Facebook despite the large sums of money spent to promote the campaign via television and full page newspaper advertisements.

Despite the Prime Minister's early foray into establishing a social media presence, the ruling coalition depended more on blogs and web portals before establishing a more concerted effort on Facebook in the form of the "Friends of Barisan National" fan page which appeared in the final weeks of the election campaign. The ruling coalition began to seriously contest opposition content by leveraging off the prime ministers' large fan base.

**Illustration 2: Screenshots of "I Choose Malaysia" and "Friends of Barisan Nasional"**



*Source: https://www.facebook.com/frensofbn*
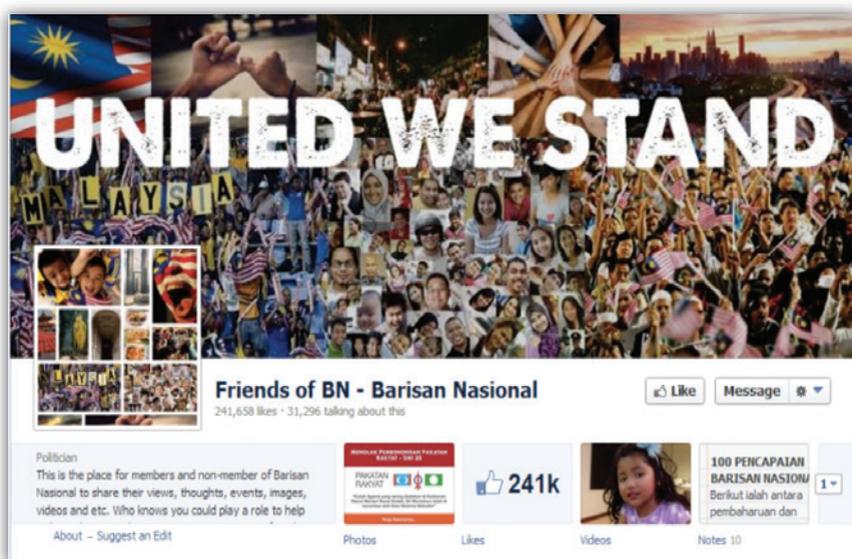
The ruling coalition and Prime Minister Najib's presence on social media was part of an elaborate and costly program. Efforts to garner voter support extended beyond media messaging and became an integral part of the ruling government's programming. The federal government is estimated to have spent more than Ringgit (RM) 57.7 billion (US$19.02 billion)[3] between 2009 to 2013 to maintain and expand popular support. This included direct cash handouts to the public which began in 2012 and cash payouts amounting to RM15,000 for each settler in federal land development schemes.[4] By election time this had expanded to include voters under the age of 30, providing them with cash as well as cash and book vouchers and coupons worth RM250 towards the purchase of smart phones.

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3   "Buying support - Najib's 'commercialisation' of GE13," Malaysiakini, 23 April, 2013 by Bridget Welsh, an associate professor of political science at Singapore Management University.

4   Settlers in these schemes were given RM15,000 (US$5000) in three payments as part of their compensation in permitting the public listing of the state owned corporation administering the land settlement areas.

The opposition, which is the People Alliance, relied on its party newsletters which, together, had an approximate bi-monthly circulation of 300,000 copies; a large following of the party web and news portals; fans of leading politicians and followers of leading bloggers. For the latter, many had made the transition from blogs to Facebook early, allowing them to build a large base of support and maintenance.

**Table 3: Facebook fan base of leading Malaysian political party leaders**

| | Politicians | Affiliation | Number of Fans |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Najib Razak | National Front/Prime Minister | 1, 740, 671 |
| 2 | Nik Abdul Aziz | Islamic Party/Chief Minister Kelantan | 987, 094 |
| 3 | Anwar Ibrahim | People's Justice Party/Opposition Leader | 873, 941 |
| 4 | Lim Kit Siang | Democratic Action Party/Founder | 192, 582 |
| 5 | Chua Soi Lek | National Front/Party Leader | 168, 218 |
| 6 | Palanivel | National Front/Party Leader | 5,826 |

In addition, the People's Alliance state government of Selangor began producing a Malay language bi-monthly newsletter in 2010, called "*Selangorkini*" (Selangor Today), starting with 100,000 copies and reaching a peak of 300,000 copies weekly by May 2013. In 2012, versions in Tamil began to appear along with an English language newsletter called "*Selangor Times*." This newsletter was widely distributed in Malay constituencies within the state as well as neighbouring Kuala Lumpur. In addition, People's Alliance was aided by the state government of Penang which began producing a state newsletter in 2011 in various languages.

Non-ruling party news coverage was for the most part anchored in the news portals of the political parties such as *Harakahdaily.net*, operated by the Islamic Party *Suara Keadilan* and the *Rocket*. These partisan sites were complemented by independent web news portals such as *Malaysiakini*, *The Malaysian Insider* and *Sinar Harian Online* which generally covered both opposition and ruling party politicians and events.

In addition to these formal portals were a large number of individually operated blogs and Facebook fan pages that provided political commentary and cross posting of news articles and writings of politicians and critical columnists. Some of these blogs and fan pages include "Tukar Tiub" operated by long time dissident playwright Hishammuddin Rais, as well as "*Milo Suam*" and "*King Jason*" which were operated by various individuals affiliated with the Opposition that along with others had a following of several hundred thousand other Facebook users.

Content on these pages varied from commentaries, the occasional poetry from former national laureate Abdul Samad Said, info graphics or cartoon/bubble text strips explaining issues and policies of the opposition or running satirical pieces of ruling party content. Adaptations of popular music videos and music were also utilized such as Korean artist PSY's viral "Gangnam Style" videos.

One interesting feature of the campaign was the large number of video material produced and shared on social media via YouTube. Videos of political events, such as public speeches of leading politicians or demonstrations have been a mainstay of opposition material, originally on cassette tapes in the 1980s, then on CD-ROMs in the 1990s and later transferred to YouTube and other video sharing sites.

The lead up to the 2013 general election saw a fundamental shift in the types of video materials produced. In addition to edited clips of speeches, political parties in the 2011 Sarawak state election began producing purpose-made campaign videos that showcased candidates or coverage of issues. The long lead up to the general election allowed time and resources to be found to develop materials. These materials consisted of crowd or fan developed materials that were criticizing the ruling coalition or encouraging voters to "vote for change." In the weeks leading to May 2013, more videos were produced directly by the People's Alliance parties as they were promoting their proposed policies. Aggregated, these videos attracted millions of views only among Internet users.

**Illustration 3: Illustration 3. Some examples of
sympathizer produced materials**



*Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRaZK-sLVIk*



*Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mVhv6Y4wgw*

Some examples of party produced video materials:

UBAH Rocket Style (Malaysian Gangnam Parody) English Version

manifesto pakatan rakyat- Turunkan Harga Kereta
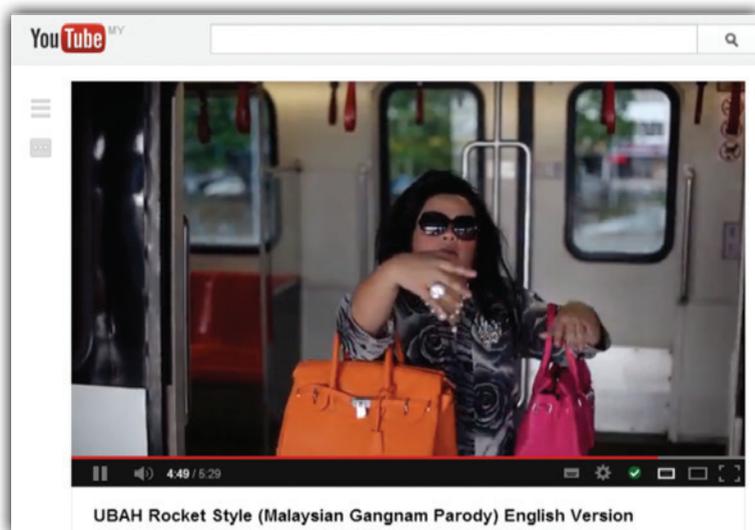
## CAMPAIGN THEMES AND IMPACT

Having discussed from which communication channels the contesting parties make use of, we now examine the main themes of political discourse prior to the 2013 election. Campaign communications comprised distinct above and below the line messaging, and thereby reflected the realities of Malaysian public life. After the 2008 election, the Opposition proclaimed their doctrine of Ketuanan Rakyat (Supremacy of the People) in contrast to the senior ruling party, UMNO's doctrine of Ketuanan Melayu (Malay Supremacy). While the move away from race-based politics is not new, this attempt was made more credible by the fact that the Opposition controlled several state governments and had the opportunity to demonstrate it actively.

While the National Front countered the Opposition's non-racial approach towards politics via its "1Malaysia" concept, results of the 2013 general election proved that it generally failed to stem the decline in non-Malay support. Findings from Merdeka Center's opinion surveys conducted in 2012 indicated that most ethnic Chinese voters did not support the "1Malaysia" concept while ethnic Indians appeared split along urban-rural and socio-economic lines. Nonetheless, the vagueness of the concept, along with incessant media coverage, enabled people to shape their own interpretation of "1Malaysia". Merdeka's survey in December 2012 found that a majority of Malays thought it meant a continuation of the status quo, while other communities may have felt that their issues would be given due attention by the government.

The Opposition, on the other hand, developed a campaign message centered socio-economics, fighting corruption and extolling the positives of their respective state administrations. In part, this responded to a practical need to carve a message that was inclusive enough to suit for Malaysians of all ethnicities, but in reality it was also to move away from the customary discourse focused on the balance of power between the races. Policies such as promising free tertiary education, the removal of excise taxes on automobiles and the lowering of fuel prices presented by the Opposition, appeared to target working and lower middle class Malaysians whose incomes have been stagnant and squeezed by rising cost of living. Issues around corruption and how it affects ordinary Malaysians were also part of the messaging. Of these policies none gained more traction than the scandal involving a national cattle farming project implicating the family of a government minister. These issues, along with a discussion of how

**Illustration 4: Examples of video materials produced by the Selangor state government**



*Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnObouqhF6I*



*Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=dn5x6Ta5H0k&NR=1*

the Opposition controlled states were run, formed the campaign planks for People's Alliance. Some of them were promotional, such as to indicate how the state government was able to resolve the need for affordable housing or to institute open tenders for government procurement. Others were rebuttals such as the Selangor state government's efforts to acquire water supply concessions privatized by the previous state administration.

The election result, however, indicated that how voters responded greatly depended upon how much access they had to balanced information. In this respect, there were significant differences between voters, not only along ethnic lines, but also generational ones.

Within the largely urbanized ethnic Chinese community, access to Internet was comparable to that of the Malay community, but here the opposition coalition component party "Democratic Action Party (DAP)" was able to galvanize support in unprecedented ways. Through purposeful organization of their online supporters and working with a community that already possessed a highly developed sense of organization and political awareness, the party was able to achieve tight coordination between their regular press statements and supporter generated materials. More importantly, social media was effectively used to rapidly mobilize support. For example, when the governing body for political parties, the Registrar of Societies, decided to disqualify the DAP's entire central executive committee over issues during the party election process, social media was utilized to communicate and mobilize support when the party's leadership argued under the logo of the Islamic Party and the National Justice Party.

Polling data from late 2012 indicated that although economic worries and concerns over practical problems such as housing and corruption topped issues that concerned voters, it could not supplant the emotive issues centered on race and religion. Throughout the period prior to the election, Malaysians had seen a continuous stream of controversies concerning race and religion being sparked and played out in mainstream media.

An example of how the ruling coalition was able to effectively harness voters' fears relating to ethnic groups, a statement by opposition Penang chief minister, Lim Guan Eng, which expressed his hope that Christians in the country would be permitted to read the Christian bible in Malay at Christmas 2012, was taken out of context by commentators and then spun into a long drawn out controversy by the Malay language newspapers. This topic, which had already been played out in 2010, allowed pro-ruling party campaigners to demand that the position of Islam as the official

religion of Malaysia would be set aside, should the People's Alliance win government. The issue also placed the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), one of the three political parties that make up the opposition coalition, in a predicament. Failure to respond in defence of Islam would weaken its appeal among its base support of Islamist oriented Muslims, but acting in agreement with the ruling party would lose support it had worked hard to cultivate among non-Muslim Malaysians. This particular illustration of how ethnic or religious issues are utilized, underlines how the ruling coalition, notably UMNO, was able to cultivate the notion that supporting the opposition was detrimental to the interest of the Muslim Malay community.

Although regional and ethnic trends were strong, the election result also showed significant generational differences. Generally, younger voters (aged in the twenties and thirties) showed less support for the National Front. The proportion of young voter support for the ruling coalition tended to coincide with the relative strength of the party, its political capital and the geographical location. In some Malay rural locations where the National Front was strong (e.g. providing credible candidates and a performing state government), support level among younger people actually increased compared to middle age groups. In rural Malay support levels decreased among younger voters in the very locations, where people had problems with the state leadership. Some urban areas, namely in the National Front stronghold state of Johor, support levels for the National Front actually declined among Malay voters (the National Front's traditional support base), when the Opposition placed strong and popular candidates. The preliminary assessment of the results indicates that while the ethnic voting pattern was present, it did not figure so strongly among younger voters and tended to coincide with local situations.

Voting patterns also showed how ethnic and local factors played a critical role. In the Perak state, the ruling coalition was able to retain its hold on government on the back of ethnic related issues. Preliminary results indicated that the ruling coalition gained slightly more ethnic Malay support but lost massively among the Chinese. Thanks to gerrymandering, the ruling coalition was able to form a government by winning a two-seat majority in the state assembly with only 45% of the popular vote. In the predominantly Malay state of Terengganu, the opposition Islamic Party made impressive gains, largely among younger voters, trimming the National Front to only a two seat majority in the state assembly. The National Front was able to capitalize on dissatisfaction of voters in

Kedah state and win the state from the opposition, largely on the back of broad based Malay support. In the Selangor state, the opposition People's Alliance successfully trumped the National Front on broad-based multi-ethnic support and gained a supermajority with over 60% of the popular vote.

Despite these problems and strong contesting by the ruling party, the Opposition's long standing presence in social media and the Internet resulted in it sweeping nearly all of the urban parliamentary seats, even in ruling party strongholds, such as the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak, as well as the southern state of Johor which borders Singapore, where the ruling coalition was able to retain its position with wafer thin majorities.

Ultimately, the general election showed that the increase in the number of new voters and their access to the Internet could not overturn the ruling parties' hold on the hearts and minds of the older generation and the rural electorate. The power of incumbency and massive infusions of cash won the day for the National Front, which was voted back into power with 133 parliamentary seats, seven less than 2008. Analysing this further, it should be noted that most of the seats won by the National Front were rural, while Opposition gains were nearly all made across urban seats. Thanks to malapportionment (resulting in the gross imbalance between the number of votes from rural and urban seats) of voters and the way parliamentary seats are delineated in Malaysia, the National Front was able to continue its uninterrupted rule despite earning only 47% of the popular vote.

## CONCLUDING ON THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Examining the results of the election, some factors stand out when charting how social media played its role in aiding electoral success (and failure):

1. Ground work and preparation. Results showed that electoral success generally followed where contestants prepared early. First, in organizing local groups that talked up and brought local issues to attention - thus creating a platform for bloggers and the media to provide coverage. More critically, the better organized or coordinated online supporters, the more likely it translated into "likes" on Facebook and real activism on the ground. Case in point was the rapidity and effectiveness of the DAP's mobilization of support, when it was harassed by the Malaysian authorities just days before nomination day.

2. Supported by complementary communications. Online media cannot operate alone especially in a hostile political environment that prevents

equal access to the media. Contesting opposition parties and social activists were required to develop appropriate strategies to supplement their communication channels. Internet access, while increasing, appeared to be confined to certain segments of society, therefore activists cannot simply rely on social media alone to carry the intended messages. In the context of political persuasion, lessons from events in the lead up to, and during the election, showed that a campaign supported by an adequate network of activists or workers along with a small, but practical portfolio of channels such as leaflets, newsletters or regular public events can help expand the reach of social media.

3. <u>Content needs to be believable and truthful.</u> Social media platforms are just that – conduits of persuasion. To be effective, the message or information must have the requisite communication qualities for it to be attractive and remembered by the audience. Creatively conceived, or downright untruthful, stories appear when not contested or when the audience is prevented from accessing countervailing versions. The May 2013 election showed that in situations where the National Front enjoyed almost total domination of the information flow, particularly in the rural hinterlands of Borneo, the Muslim areas of Sabah and the Iban areas of Sarawak, support levels, regardless of generation, increased. This situation was in direct correlation with the relative weakness of the Opposition in those areas. On the other hand, in rural areas were the Opposition or non-National Front forces had established presences, such as the Kadazan areas in Sabah or the Bidayuh and Orang Ulu areas in Sarawak, the National Front found gaining traction for its communications tough going, despite cash inducements and total mainstream media domination.

Resources alone do not guarantee success. The strength of messaging via social media was largely seen in the urban areas. As noted above, high levels of investment in cyber troopers, cultivation of issues and long standing cooperation between the mainstream media and the National Front, designed to win over support in the states of Selangor and Penang, failed, when confronted by a wired electorate amply provided with countervailing information and a strong, tangible ground campaign. The experience in Selangor and Penang showed that an Internet accessible electorate, a credible long term 'off-line'

communications program, along with a relatively controversy-free political line up, could thwart an opponent with vast resources and total control over the mainstream media.

4. <u>Contestation is key.</u> Working in a hostile and illiberal environment means that opposition and social activists need to work much harder than average. Not only do they have to compete against their opponents, but they also have do so in an uneven, or downright unfair, regulatory environment. This could mean not being given the right to reply to damaging accusations, frequently orchestrated trials by media and even selective harassment or persecution by regulatory authorities. At the core of working in such a difficult environment is the ability to muster the perseverance and intellectual investment to contest the dominating discourse. The May 2013 Malaysian general election showed that in states where the dominant political discourse is contested via both social media and offline methods, the results tended to nullify the impact of adverse campaigning by one's opponents.

5. <u>Cannot compensate for poor judgment and/or weak politicians.</u> Social media and other communication strategies and tactics cannot overcome mistakes made by poor leadership or judgement. As noted earlier, two mirror image events occurred in this particular election to support this conclusion. In Selangor state, the National Front's massive investment in social media and group campaign programming, coupled with favourable mainstream media coverage, failed to compensate for the lack of a credible state leader candidate and a convincing plan to address integrity issues. In the northern state of Kedah, the Opposition lost its hold on power despite utilizing the powers of incumbency, strong grassroots activities and social media campaigning to mobilize voter support. Although social media and spending were lower than the typical National Front campaign, the Opposition there could not overcome the public perception of weak leadership and competency issues.

Ultimately, the election results generally reflect the dichotomy between rural and urban electoral contestation and that social media based campaigning has practical and measurable limits – the fibre optic cable ends, the need for offline strategies to compensate for the lack of

communications rises exponentially. In rural or semi-rural settings, the non-incumbent or oppositions' age-old problems come to the fore: their inability to access the mainstream media - at least from being allowed to reply to allegations and presenting its arguments - means that at least one half of Malaysians had no access to information to balance the views propounded by the ruling coalition. Despite its strong presence, and admittedly increasingly challenged position on the Internet, the Opposition remained relatively unseen and unheard in the rural heartlands of the country which comprises the majority of parliamentary seats. This remains the principal lesson learned from this electoral adventure: social media is a tool, but the successful adventurer must keep many different items in his/her tool box if they are to be successful.

The prospects for social media to serve as a tool to equalize an uneven electoral, remain favourable as governments still need to invest in broadening the availability of the Internet. The net effect will first be seen among younger voters, but that alone will not guarantee success as for voters, migrating from traditional from traditional sources of information takes time and persuasion. Perseverance in planning and adhering to such plans, as well as implementing other tangible strategies, are needed before real tangible results become evident.

# THE DIGITAL HEARTLAND: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION IN SINGAPORE

*by David Black, Arina Dafir and Philip Behnke*

## INTRODUCTION

**A**s Singaporeans tuned in to watch the General Election results on the evening of 7 May 2011, there was a sense that things were somehow going to be different. But expectations quickly gave way to frustration as local TV election coverage failed to offer viewers any insight as to how the vote was progressing or to report what was happening on the ground.

In contrast, the thousands of Singaporeans following Twitter hash tag #sgelections were receiving up to the second voting information, much of it fairly accurate. Many Singaporeans also took to Twitter to express their anger at the poor media coverage, especially on *Channel News Asia*, which some labeled '*Channel News After*'. The marked contrast between TV and social media coverage came under criticism from a government appointed panel after the election.[1]

The fact that social media took the lead on election night should not have come as a surprise. Throughout the 2011 election, social media played a big part in driving the campaign narrative. Social media was also arguably a key contributor to the record vote recorded against the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) which was just shy of 40%.

Since the 2011 general election, Singapore's ruling party has decisively lost two by-elections and had to face the ignominy of nearly losing the presidential election (65% of Singaporeans voted against the PAP's candidate). In all of these campaigns, social media played a significant role not only in providing a platform for candidates and parties, but also in

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1    Programme Advisory Committee for English Programmes (2011, 9 September) "Pace Urges Broadcasters to Protect the Young from Inappropriate Content, and to Develop More Quality Local Content to Attract and Engage Viewers." [Press Release]

counter-balancing advantages the ruling party enjoys in the mainstream media. Social media has also been instrumental in driving public discourse since the election on key community issues, ranging from public transport breakdowns to the more recent controversy surrounding population policy.

### THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SINGAPORE

Singapore is among one of the most technologically progressive countries in the world, with more than 80% of Singaporeans enjoying Internet access. Unsurprisingly, Singaporeans are also one of the biggest users of social media in the world, surpassing even the U.S. (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Social media usage - Singapore vs. United States**[2]
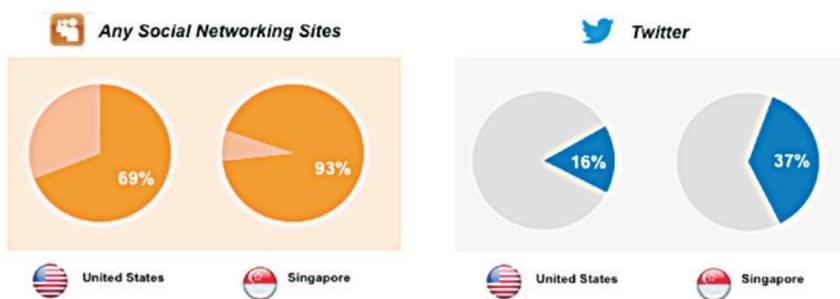


*Base: Internet Users in the US (Pew) and Singapore (Blackbox Research)*

Today, nearly three in four Singaporeans have a Facebook account and they are ranked as the top Facebook users in the world in terms of time spent per session.[3] Other data shows that nearly one in five (18%) Internet users in Singapore write a personal blog while nearly half say that they read blogs.[4]

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2   U.S. Figures: "Pew Internet Social Media and Political Engagement Study," 2012. SG Figures: Blackbox Research Social Media Usage Study, 2013

3   Lee, Willis (2012, 14 February). "Experian Hitwise Says Singaporeans are Facebook, Apple, and Groupon Lovers." Tech In Asia. Retrieved from http://www.techinasia.com/singapore-loves-facebook-apple-groupon/

4   "Blackbox Research Social Media Usage Study,  April," 2013.

But Singaporeans favor social media more for casual usage rather than to engage in political activity. While two thirds use social media to stay in touch with friends/family and almost half use it to follow celebrities and entertainment topics, only one in five (19%) use it to follow a political party/figure. Singaporeans are also somewhat shy about engaging in political activity online, preferring to share political content rather than express their own beliefs. Figure 2 below shows a comparison between social media political engagement in Singapore compared to the U.S.

**Figure 2:  Political engagement on social media - U.S. vs. Singapore[5]**
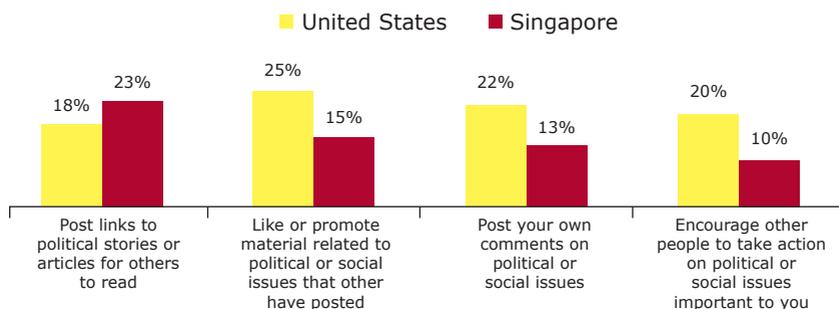


Despite this, many political observers have noted that the political landscape in Singapore has transformed in recent years and social media is viewed as having played a big part in this. Online socio-political bloggers provided alternative political commentary with a singular, often characteristic, voice. Even within such a small domain, there is a wide spectrum of commentary style, with some adopting a more satirical tone (e.g. Mr. Brown, profiled as "one of the nation's first socio-political bloggers")[6], while others are often blatantly critical of the political establishment (e.g. Alex Au of Yawning Bread who has been threatened

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5    U.S. Figures: "Pew Internet Social Media and Political Engagement Study," 2012.
     SG Figures: "Blackbox Research Social Media Usage Study," 2013.

6    Leow, Diane (2012, 26 June ) "Meet Mr. Brown, Singapore's Blogfather."
     Meld Magazine. Retrieved from
     www.meldmagazine.com.au/2012/06/meet-mr-brown-singapores-blogfather/

with legal action twice in the last two years).[7] More recently, other socio-political websites *The Online Citizen and Temasek Review Emeritus* have also become more prominent.

## GENERAL ELECTION 2011: EVALUATING THE ROLE PLAYED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Many point to the 2011 general election as a defining moment for social media in Singapore, presenting the first real opportunity to gauge its impact on Singapore's political landscape. Even before the country went to the polls, the 2011 general election generated international buzz. The loosening of political campaigning rules on new media coupled with an energized opposition resulted in the most intense electoral battle for a generation.

As polling day drew nearer, political commentators speculated how the fervor of online debate, much of which appeared critical of the ruling party, would translate into actual votes. As it turned out, the Opposition yielded their best ever showing, with the PAP losing six out of 87 contested parliamentary seats. More tellingly, the PAP won only 60.1% of the overall vote (down from 66.6% in 2006 and 75.3% in 2001). Still, others noted that the results did not quite match the fervor of anti-PAP hostility witnessed on social media. How much had social media *really* impacted voters?

In the immediate aftermath of the 2011 elections, commentators clamored to answer this question. The broader consensus was that something was different this time; a switch had been flicked and Singapore had changed forever.

However, the only post-election study of note to be released publicly appeared to pour cold water on all the excitement. The study conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), a think-tank within the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, raised eyebrows when it concluded that GE 2011 election was not an "Internet election".

The study found that only 41.1% of respondents relied on online sources for election news, compared to 86.3% who followed election news

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7   Koh, Hui Theng (2012, Jul 15). "Will careless blogs 'spoil market?"
    The New Paper. Retrieved from  http://www.asiaone.com/print/News/
    Latest%2BNews/Science%2Band%2BTech/Story/A1Story20120714-359089.html

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via traditional offline sources. The IPS study also concluded that social media rated much lower on key metrics such as importance and trust when compared to mainstream media. Its influence, Tan Tarn How, senior research fellow at IPS concluded, was "not as much as people thought".[8]

But this interpretation is short sighted and maybe misses the point. The study itself highlights the difference in behavior between voter groups and the much bigger impact social media exerted amongst younger voters. Indeed, another IPS researcher later noted that there was a 60% jump in social media activity in Singapore between March-April 2011 and this, in all likelihood, was driven by the election.[9]

Other political analysts were also quick to disagree, noting that social media's influence on the elections carried more in the way of 'soft power', highlighting the more far-ranging transformational effects that social media campaign coverage had on Singapore politics as a whole.

Mark Cenite, an associate professor of communication and information at Nanyang Technological University, observed: "Social media has lowered the barriers of entry into political discourse everywhere… (and) the effect has been electric".[10] Bridget Welsh, a political science professor at Singapore Management University, noted: "There were spillover effects from social media raised around the country… (it) has definitely become an agenda setting device. It's not just a numbers thing."[11]

## HEROES AND VILLAINS: SOCIAL MEDIA REWRITES THE CAMPAIGN PLAYBOOK

Local news coverage throughout the campaign frequently focused on how many Facebook 'likes' and Twitter followers various politicians enjoyed.

8    Mahtani, Shibani (2011, 6 October ) "Poll Questions Social Media's Influence in Singapore Politics." *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from http://blogs.wsj.com/searealtime/2011/10/06/poll-questions-social-medias-influence-in-singapore-politics/

9    Soo, Nikki (2011, September) Tweet Tweet: "A Personal View of Social Media in GE 2011." *IPS Update*.

10   Mydans, Seth. (2011, 5 May ). "In Singapore, Political Campaigning Goes Viral." *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/06/world/asia/06iht-singapore06.html?_r=0

11   Mahtani, Shibani (2011, 6 October) "Poll Questions Social Media's Influence in Singapore Politics." *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from http://blogs.wsj.com/searealtime/2011/10/06/poll-questions-social-medias-influence-in-singapore-politics/

But it was two new young female candidates who would dominate public discussion through the campaign and who, in tandem, would come to symbolize both the extent and limitations to which social media can be used as a political tool.

The undoubted star personality of the campaign was 24-year-old Nicole Seah, a National Solidarity Party (NSP) candidate running in the Marine Parade Group representation constituency (GRC), the political home of former Prime Minister, and now Emeritus Senior Minister, Goh Chok Tong.

Her candidacy sparked interest from the get go. In addition to it being the first time since 1992 that an opposition party had challenged in Marine Parade, the PAP itself had earlier selected a young female candidate as part of its Marine Parade team - Tin Pei Ling, a Young PAP stalwart and senior associate at Ernst and Young. The question immediately arose - which of these two would be the biggest hit with young voters?

Both women relied on social media, but Seah proved to be the savviest by far. Within a week, her Facebook profile had become the second most popular amongst Singapore politicians, after Lee Kuan Yew's. She made news throughout the campaign with headlines such as "Nicole Seah – the hottest sensation of GE 2011"[12], and "Nicole Seah and the social media effect".[13]

Although she was part of a losing team, Nicole Seah single-handedly changed the rules of the game during a Singapore election. For the first time, social media was used to create a profile and presence. Seah and the NSP shared all their speeches and interviews on Facebook and YouTube and she particularly captured the attention of young voters.

Speaking at an international conference in June 2012, Seah said: "In the 2011 General Election, opposition parties took to Facebook and Twitter to get around government control of campaigns. Photographers and writers documented the campaigns online, while activists created Internet memes and hash tags on Twitter to spread their views."[14]

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12 Ng, E-Jay (2011, 1 May ) "Nicole Seah — the hottest sensation of GE 2011." Retrieved from www.sgpolitics.net/?p=6689

13 Russell, Jon, (2011, April  27) "Singapore elections: Nicole Seah and the Social Media." *The Asian Correspondent*. Retrieved from http://asiancorrespondent. com/53134/singapore-elections-nicole-seah-and-the-social-media-effect

14 EWC International Media Conference, Seoul, June 2012 (www.eastwestcenter.org/ events/2012-international-media-conference-seoul)

In contrast, Tin Pei Ling offers up a textbook case of how social media assets can easily be mismanaged. Most famously, a Facebook photo of Tin posing with a Kate Spade bag (purchased by her husband, who at the time was working as a private secretary to the Prime Minister) became one of the most circulated images of the campaign. Tin became a lightning rod for those angry with the PAP, as she was seen to symbolize what the PAP had become to many – arrogant, out of touch and acting with a sense of entitlement.

Seah's popularity has held up since the 2011 election and she is widely regarded as an emerging political figure and someone who is in it for the long haul. As of April 2013, Nicole Seah enjoyed 105,000 followers on Facebook compared to 10,100 for Tin Pei Ling. Regardless of that, Tin Pei Ling failed to shake the tag of someone who was put into the position simply because of her youth, and by a party trying desperately to project a sense of renewal and contemporary relevance.

## IMPACT ON MAINSTREAM MEDIA

The Seah/Tin head to head also led to the mainstream media changing tack and shifting its coverage in response to popular interest in the two personalities. It became obvious through the campaign that local media was very much tuned in what was going on in social media and shaped its coverage accordingly.

The mainstream media also found itself under much greater scrutiny than in previous elections. Its coverage of election rallies, for example, failed to fully represent the true nature of these events. Other issues such as the rising cost of living and housing policy were also topics of debate in social media. As one commentator has noted, online and social media sources may not always have been first in "actually transmitting new information, but rather in facilitating the search for corroborating facts and information and also signifying that there can be an alternative (or alternatives)."[15]

The rise of social media in GE 2011 did not pass unnoticed by the political elites. A month after the election, the 'Tony Tan for President' campaign invited a number of popular bloggers and social media commentators

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15  Lee, Terence (2011, September) "Recalibrating Government Communication in Singapore: A Post-Election Analysis." *Asia Research Centre*

to the announcement of his candidacy, to sit alongside mainstream journalists. This signaled a real change and was something no one could have even envisaged a year before. As one of Singapore's shrewdest media commentators noted at the time: "Online media were obviously influential, and sections of the establishment may have decided that they have no choice but to do business with them."[16]

With the continued rise of social media and alternative online news websites in Singapore, the mainstream media now finds itself playing catch up. In 2012, Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) launched a new website called "Singapolitics," which aims to "widen the conversation" and serve as "a platform for discussion about national issues of the day."[17] The site regularly features commentators from outside the press, purportedly to "represent various points of view" and is edited by the deputy chief editor of the *Straits Times*, signaling a real shift in *SPH's* priorities and strategies in contending with the new social and political landscape.

## SINGAPORE POST 2011: THE NEW NORMAL

If there remain questions about the precise role played by social media in the 2011 election results, there is no denying of its growing relevance in Singapore's civic society today. This is clearly illustrated in several high-profile incidents that have played out on social media in the last two years. More often than not, the Government has been taken by surprise and sometimes struggled to respond quickly and decisively to the noise arising from social media. Some examples:

### SMRT Train Breakdowns (2011-2012)

The SMRT train breakdowns appeared to be the first real "national crisis" to be played out on social media. On 13 December, 2011 Singapore's rail network was hit by one of the worst breakdowns in its history at evening

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16  George, Cherian (2011, 23 June ) "Tony Tan Engages The Blogs: New Era in Relations with Alternative Media?" Retrieved from http://journalism.sg/2011/06/23/tony-tan-engages-the-blogs-new-era-in-relations-with-alternative-media/

17  Retrieved from http://www.singapolitics.sg/content/about-us

peak-hour, affecting about 127, 000 commuters.[18] In the next few days, multiple breakdowns continued to plague the country's rail network.

Images of commuters packed in overcrowded MRT stations and of a train window smashed out by stranded commuters, circulated on social media and fuelled public anger towards SMRT and the Transport Ministry. Local social media sentiment analysts JamiQ recorded an estimated 2500% increase in online chatter on SMRT services.[19]

## Population Paper/ Immigration Policy [2013]

After the train breakdowns, key election issues continued to attract discussion on social media, including the cost of living, wages and housing prices. Until recently, however, sceptics of social media's influence on Singapore's political landscape pointed to the lack of any real galvanizing action. Many cautioned against placing too much importance on the role of so called "keyboard warriors" on wider Singapore society.

This changed dramatically on 16 February, 2013, when a public demonstration was held against the *Population White Paper*. The paper had recently been endorsed by Parliament, despite being the subject of widespread criticism due to its forecast that the Singapore population will rise to 6.9 million by 2030, with the expectation that Singaporeans will only comprise half (55%) of the future population. Given longstanding sensitivities about 'foreign talent', the forecast was a "red rag to a bull."

Thousands of Singaporeans gathered in the biggest protest in living memory, prompting one prominent local academic to comment that "(the protest was) a big red flag and they cannot go on with business as usual with their old way of doing things; of letting it blow over. This is not an emotional hump. I won't be surprised if significant changes happen at the ballot box in 2016".[20]

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18  Mahtani, Shibani & Chun, Han Wong. (2011, 16 November) "Singapore Subway Breakdowns Raise Ire." *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from http://blogs.wsj.com/searealtime/2011/12/16/singapore-subway-breakdowns-raise-ire/

19  JamiQ Research Report Series (Issue 1, 2012) "Analysis on Singapore Public Transit Breakdowns Crisis."

20  Adam, Shamim (2013, 18 Feb ) "Singapore Protest Exposes Voter Worries About Immigration." *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-02-16/singaporeans-protest-plan-to-increase-population-by-immigration.html

The fact that the protest organizer used Facebook to send out event invitations and his blog (Transitioning.org) to communicate his messages is a clear signal to the Government of the galvanizing power of social media in an evolving electorate.

## THE NEW NORMAL: GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Following the 2011 elections, the growing criticism that PAP ministers were "out of touch" with ordinary Singaporean, resulted in a revamp of government communications and engagement, with social media featuring prominently.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in the launch of his Facebook page in 2012, noted that "governments all over the world will not be the same again" due to the changes in the way people connect through social media.[21] Singapore government agencies were also progressively adopting a greater social media presence. These efforts were co-ordinated in late 2011 with the launch of the Government Social Media Directory.

The Government also launched its "National Conversation" in October 2012 in an effort to establish a fresh dialogue with Singaporeans in order to create "a home with hope and heart." The initiative has a Facebook page and a YouTube channel. However, as of April 2013, the Facebook page had less than 5800 'likes' and the YouTube channel only 54 subscribers, suggesting the social media portion of the "national conversation" has failed to take off.

So far it would appear that Government efforts in social media are producing mixed results. A Blackbox Research survey conducted in April 2013 showed that although 53% of all Singaporeans currently think the Government is using social media effectively, one in three people under 40 think government efforts are ineffective vs. only 19% amongst over 40s.[22]

The Government's efforts to strengthen its social media appearance are hardly surprising as the ruling party's greatest challenge is attracting younger voters.

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21  Yahoo! Newsroom (2012, 20 April) "PM Lee launches own Facebook, Twitter accounts." *Yahoo! News*. Retrieved from http://sg.news.yahoo.com/pm-lee-launches-own-facebook--twitter-accounts-20120420.html

22  Blackbox Research Social Media Usage Study," April 2013.

When the Punggol East by-election was taking place in early 2013, political observers flagged it as a bellwether for the 2016 elections, because of a disproportionately young base.[23] A survey of swinging voters conducted by Blackbox Research just after the by-election showed that 42%of swinging voters (those who had switched since 2011) were under 40-years-old and nearly one in five of them identified social media as their most important source of information about the by-election.[24] This finding suggests that social media may also be growing as a credible/trustworthy source of information.

## PREDICTING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SINGAPORE'S FUTURE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

With few signs of any major shifts in the mainstream media coverage of local politics in Singapore, there is a good chance that social media will continue to fill in gaps and fulfill unmet information needs.

As to whether attempts will be made to place tighter controls on online and social media, it is uncertain how far the Singapore Government is willing to restrict political expression. The arrest in 2013 of cartoonist, Leslie Chew, on sedition charges[25] shows that political sensitivities are alive and well in Singapore. The Government certainly takes a dim view towards certain online agitators. The Singapore government has recently taken steps to rein in local online media. From 1 June, 2013, 'online news sites that report regularly on issues relating to Singapore and have significant reach among readers will require an individual license from the Media Development Authority (MDA).'[26] Such sites also have to put up a performance bond of $SGD50.000.

MDA's announcement, which was made only three days prior to the new regulations coming into effect, attracted immediate criticism amongst Singapore's online community and several opposition parties. Some

23  Teo, Elgin & Lim, Leonard. (2013, Jan 12) "Younger, More Middle Class Demographic." *The Straits Times.*

24  Blackbox Research Punggol East By-Election: "What Factors Influenced Voters?" 2013 Retrieved from:http://www.blackbox.com.sg/punggol-east-by-election/ (n=150)

25  (2013, 30 April ) "Bail Extended for Cartoonist Leslie Chew." *Today*. Retrieved from http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/bail-extended-cartoonist-leslie-chew

26  http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2013/Pages/28052013.aspx

labeled the new regulations as 'censorship pure and simple,'[27] while others noted that the changes appeared to specifically take aim at Yahoo! Singapore which regularly attracts over a million readers to its news site and is the biggest competitor to SPH and Mediacorp with respect to local news coverage. MDA's decision was also criticized by the international non-governmental organization (NGO) Human Rights Watch[28].

Opponents of the new regulation have formed a group called *#FreeMyInternet* which organized a rally, reportedly attended by 1500 people on June 8.

The fact that much of the recent hot button debates have been conducted via social and new media channels rather than traditional media also suggests that Singaporeans are becoming more comfortable turning to alternative sources for news and information. About 35% of Singaporean internet users currently say that the information they read on social media plays a role in shaping their views and opinions on political and social issues. But this figure rises to over half (51%) amongst Singaporeans under 40-years-old versus 23% amongst those over 40. Men also say social media helps shaping their political views/opinions to a greater extend (41% to 29% of women).[29]

There is also the likelihood that political parties and candidates will become more astute and increasingly versatile in their use of social media as it becomes more familiar. With restrictions on political marketing and advertising likely to remain in place in Singapore, the ruling party itself may choose to use social media platforms more aggressively in countering opposition arguments.

The use of social media as a negative campaigning tool has already been seen elsewhere. Media reporting from the national election held in neighboring Malaysia showed how quickly Governments can learn to utilize social media. Khairy Jamaluddin, leader of Barisan's youth wing

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27  Tan, Heather (2013, 29 May ) "Singapore Too Require News Websites to be Licensed. *AP*. Retrieved from http://bigstory.ap.org/article/singapore-news-websites-require-licenses

28  (2013, 7 June ) Singapore:" Licensing Regime Chills News Climate." *Human Rights Watch*. http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/07/singapore-licensing-regime-chills-news-climate

29  Blackbox Research Social Media Usage Study,  April 2013

in Malaysia, was quoted as saying that his organization alone has 6000 volunteers working to get the Barisan message out online.'[30]

## CONCLUSIONS

A number of commentators have indicated that social media proved to be a game changer at the 2011 Singapore election. There is no doubt it contributed to shifts in the political landscape that are potentially enduring. The post-election climate has been a challenging one for the ruling party. It has suffered two electoral losses and a poor result in the presidential election. Again, although social media was not a decisive factor in these results, it was successfully used by opponents to bypass mainstream media restrictions.

It remains to be seen how the ruling party in Singapore chooses to address these challenges in the future. At present, although it is trying to educate itself in the ways of social media, it is going to do it publicly with mixed results. Arguably, it is still coming to grips with the finer skills in using social media. One local commentator argues that the PAP is, maybe, still more focused on the key performance indicators (KPIs) of social media (in true Singapore style) than genuine "engagement and interaction.".

In all likelihood, however, the new breed of politicians globally are learning to use and manipulate social media in the same way that generations of politicians have done alike with other media. The challenge for the new generation of political leaders in Singapore, however, is whether they are capable of making this leap without having had much experience "in the ring" sparring with a more assertive mainstream media. Social media may prove itself to be the true training ground for successful Singapore leaders of the future.

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30  Zappei, Julia. (2013, 25 Apr )  "Malaysian Youth Pivotal in 'Social Media' Election' *AFP.*

# YOUNG VOTERS' EXPECTATIONS FOR THE 2014 INDONESIAN ELECTIONS

*by Primastuti Handavani*

## INTRODUCTION

**A**n estimated 196 million Indonesians will cast their votes in the country's third direct elections next year. Following an amendment of the Constitution in 2002, voters in the most populous Muslim country have been able to directly cast their votes to elect politicians in their electoral districts and to elect their president.

The 2004 and 2009 elections, which saw Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono rise to power, went smoothly although it was a new experience for the citizens.

Previously, voters only selected parties – there had been only three contesting parties – at the election. These parties selected their politicians to sit at the House of Representatives. These lawmakers would then elect the president. For more than three decades, former president Suharto had always been elected by the House members without any opposition. The direct elections changed everything.

## HISTORY

Next year will mark Indonesia's 11th election since the country's independence on 17 August, 1945. The first elections took place in 1955 and were held every six years. But starting with the third election in 1977, the government decided to make it a five-year event, except in 1999.

The 1999 election was historical for the country, because it was the first election held following the downfall of then President Suharto, who ran the country for 32 years; marred by bloody riots in May 1998 and the last with the participation of then East Timor (now an independent country, Timor Leste).

A total of 48 political parties – 16 times the number of contestants during Suharto's era – took part in the elections. The Indonesian Democratic

Party of Struggle (PDIP), which had served as an "opposition" during the "New Order" regime, won the election with 35% of the votes. However, lawmakers in the House of Representatives decided that Abdurrahman Wahid of the National Awakening Party (PKB) would become the president instead of PDIP chairman Megawati Soekarnoputri, who only served as his vice president. Megawati claimed power following the House's impeachment of Wahid in 2001.

Since 2004, Indonesians have cast their votes in the legislative election – where they chose their representatives in the 550-seat House of Representatives, 128-seat Regional Representatives Council (DPD), Provincial Legislative Council and Regental/Municipal Legislative Council – and elected the president.

24 political parties participated in the 2004 legislative election. The Golkar Party emerged as the winner with 21.58% of votes, followed by the PDIP with 18.53% and the PKB with 10.57%.

Of the registered 148 million voters, 84.06% of them exercised their right to vote. The two-round presidential election saw the victory of Yudhoyono and former partner Jusuf Kalla. The duo won the first round with 22.15% of votes from the 122.3 million turn-outs of voters. The second round saw the Yudhoyono-Kalla duet convincingly defeating former president Megawati and Hasyim Muzadi with 60.62% against 39.38%, respectively.

Since it was the first direct elections held by Indonesia, there were many flaws and flops that saw a total of 273 cases brought to the Constitutional Court. The 2009 legislative elections saw 38 political parties competing for the 560-seat House of Representatives, 132-seat Regional Representatives Council (DPD), Provincial Legislative Council and Regental/Municipal Legislative Council.

The elections saw the newly-established Democratic Party win with 20.85% of the 104.1 million of voters, followed by the Golkar Party with 14.45% and the PDIP with 14.03%.

The presidential elections saw 121.5 million out of 171 million registered voters. Yudhoyono and vice president candidate Boediono won with a landslide victory of 60.8% of the votes followed by Megawati and Prabowo with 26.79% and Kalla and Wiranto with 12.41%.

Next year's elections will have 12 political parties fighting for votes. They have been following familiar methods, including recruiting celebrities (such as actors and singers) to garner votes instead of describing their programs for their constituents.

The 12 parties are:

1.    National Mandate Party (PAN)

2.    Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP)

3.    Democratic Party

4.    Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra)

5.    Golkar Party

6.    Peoples Conscience Party (Hanura)

7.    Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)

8.    National Awakening Party (PKB)

9.    United Development Party (PPP)

10.    National Democratic (Nasdem) Party

11.    Crescent Star Party (PBB)

12.    Indonesian Justice and Unity Party (PKPI)

## DEMOGRAPHY

As an archipelago of over 17,000 islands, holding an election is a tough task for the General Elections Commission (KPU). With a population of 237.6 million people[1], based on the 2010 national census by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), 49.79% of them, or 118.3 million, live in urban areas while the rest is situated rural areas.

The problem with Indonesia is that over half of its population, or 57.5%, is concentrated on Java Island which is only 6.8% of the country's total area. 21.8% of the total area, is only inhibited by 1.5% of the population. Therefore, during elections, the distribution of ballot votes, ballot boxes and other equipment has always been a problem, especially in remote areas.

According to the BPS, there are an estimated 196 million voters in all of Indonesia. The figure is an increase from the 136 million turn-out of voters

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1    2010 National census; Central Statistics Agency (BPS). http://sp2010.bps.go.id/index.php/site/topik?kid=1&kategori=Jumlah-dan-Distribusi-Penduduk

in 2009 and 147 million in 2004. However, there is a rising concern that the number of turn-out voters, including first-time voters, will decline next year. The trend has shown that the number of voters keeps declining from 92.6% voters in the 1999 elections to 84.1% in 2004 and 70.9% in 2009.[2]

## YOUNG VOTERS

There are different figures on the estimated number of young voters for next year's elections. The BPS states that from the estimated 196 million voters, around 40 million will be first-time voters in the 2014 elections. The number is an increase from 27 million in the 2004 elections and 36 million in the 2009 polls. These first-time voters will be the main target for political parties.[3]

The figures, however, are different from data supplied by the Center for Elections and Political Parties (CEPP) at the University of Indonesia. According to the CEPP, over 50 million young people will be eligible to cast their votes next year.[4]

Meanwhile, the University of Indonesia's Demography Institute chairman, Sonny Harry B. Harmadi, projected that there would be 30.2 million young voters, or 17 percent of the estimated registered voters nationwide.

Sonny explained that 54% of the first-time voters live in urban areas while the rest are in rural areas. They are raised in relatively small families, usually technology savvy and are strongly influenced by television.[5]

With the number of young voters reaching over 20% of all votes, some candidates have started to use social media such as Facebook and Twitter, to reach this group. However, this effort has yet to be fruitful.

The number of Facebook users in Indonesia is 43.8 million of the total 240 million population. Eight percent are Twitter users. Internet penetration is only 18% of the population, but half of them are accessing the Internet through their mobile devices.

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2  "Pemilu 2014 dan Harapan Warga." Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (Demos); 4 March, 2013; http://www.demosindonesia.org/laporan-utama/4809-pemilu-2014-dan-harapan-warga.html

3  2010 National census; Central Statistics Agency (BPS).

4  "Golkar plans victory in 2014." The Jakarta Post, April 8, 2013. http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/04/08/golkar-plans-victory-2014.html

5  "Meraih Pemilih Pemula." Kompas; 29 January,  2013

The University of Indonesia (UI)'s Center for Political Studies Research Manager, Irwansyah, said that the lower-than-expected young voters turn out – such as in the case of the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election – was because of the candidates' inability to mobilize youth voters to go to the polling booths.

"Even candidates such as (governor-elect) Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo, who tried to appeal to young people, failed to do so," he said, "voting is rarely an individual decision, but is more related to social networks. This is why it is hard for them to penetrate the young voter base."[6]

Irwansyah also attributed this year's low turnout to young peoples' apathy towards politics in general. "Young people see politics as an area dominated by older people, so they don't see it as their responsibility," he said.

There will be 10 political parties to participate in next year's elections and all of them are eying the young voters. Take the Golkar Party, for example. Golkar – the second largest party in the House in terms of seats – will also focus on young and first-time voters in the upcoming elections.

Golkar executive Hadjriyanto Tohari said: "Young voters are very important to us and we will initiate programs that will draw them in."[7] The party is aiming to win at least 30% of the votes in the 2014 legislative election, which would roughly translate into 35% of seats in the House. It is very understandable that Golkar has high hopes to win next year's election. A survey by the Political Weather Station put the party in the top three along with Yudhoyono's Democratic Party and former president Megawati Soekarnoputri's Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP).

The survey, whose results were revealed in October 2012, said that based on the popularity, acceptability and electability, a total of 98% of respondents picked Golkar, followed by the PDIP and the Democratic Party.

"Golkar's popularity remains high because the party is sensitive to what the public wants, such as conducting the small- and medium-enterprises (UMKM) program which easily generates support from the society," PWS research director, Marsedes Marbun, said.[8]

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6  "Candidates failed to connect with young voters: Analyst." The Jakarta Post, 2012.

7  "Golkar plans victory." The Jakarta Post, 8 April, 2013. http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/04/08/golkar-plans-victory-2014.html

8  "Ini Tiga Parpol Terpopuler Versi Survei PWS"; Kompas.com. http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2012/10/21/15453996/Ini.Tiga.Parpol.Terpopuler.Versi.Survei.PWS

According to the Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (Demos) there are reasons for the spiraling down of the number of turnout voters, including frequent elections, rampant corruption cases involving state officials and lack of young politicians who are expected to be able to make changes than less qualified politicians.

## EXPECTATIONS

What do the young people expect from their future leaders? A survey by the Indonesian Youth Alliance for Change (API Perubahan) – conducted in the country's 10 major cities last November with a total number of 450 respondents aged between 17 and 45 years old – found that 47.2% of the respondents said they could accept a non-Muslim candidate as the country's president. Another 47 percent of the respondents said Indonesia must have a Muslim president while 5.6% were undecided.

The survey also showed that 52.3% of the respondents rejected the notion that the country's president had to be male. To further challenge the conventional wisdom that the country's president must be a Javanese, 89.5% of respondents said the next leader could come from any other ethnic group. "Our respondents have shown that they no longer care about such factors when they select leaders," API secretary general Dendy Susianto said.[9]

These findings can be considered a sign that ethnicity and religion are no longer the main considerations in selecting the country's leaders. Indonesia has been struggling with religious tolerance lately. News over attacks on churches or Ahmadiyah mosques have been prominent in the media.

One potential young voter, Firdha Amalia Nurdiwanti, a 19-year-old student at the University of Indonesia's School of Japanese Literature, said that she would be eager to cast her vote for the first time. However, she was quick to say that she would mainly look at the presidential candidates instead of the political parties that support them. "I will vote for the candidate who is deemed honest, down-to-earth, transparent and courageous about taking action," she said. "I will carefully select the best candidates because I don't want to vote for the wrong figure." Another

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9   "Faith, ethnicity matter less for young voters, says survey." The Jakarta Post, Page 4 December, 2012

young voter, Susanto, said the wide access to information from the media about the credibility and track records of politicians would help make a decision prior to the elections.

Political analyst with the Indonesian Institute of Science (LIPI), Siti Zuhro, said the survey had validated the notion that voters today no longer responded to issues of faith and ethnicity. She said the most recent example was the election of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, an Indonesian of Chinese descent, as Jakarta deputy governor. Firdha further explained that anti corruption campaigns would still be the top priority for the next leader.

"I personally think that the corruption cases in the provincial level or in cities/regencies are more rampant than in Jakarta. A lot of corruption practices have been gone unnoticed due to lack of supervision from the central government. The media and the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) should focus on those regions," she said.

Meanwhile, the Pol-Tracking Institute revealed in mid-April that Governor Jokowi has become the most popular presidential hope due to the negative media coverage of most established political parties, despite his public assertion that he would not run in the presidential election next year.

"People want new figures rather than to focus on those who have been officially nominated by political parties. Jokowi's performance as Jakarta's Governor has managed to grab the media's attention, which constantly runs stories about him. As a result, the public wants him to be president even though he has never declared himself a presidential candidate," Pol-Tracking Institute Executive Director, Hanta Yudha said.[10] From 15 media outlets – five each in the print, online and television categories – 86 news stories were run by these media outlets discussing a potential run by Jokowi in 2014.

Lt. Gen. (ret.) Prabowo Subianto, the presidential candidate from the Great Indonesia Movement (Gerindra) Party, only received coverage in 55 news stories. The Golkar Party's Aburizal Bakrie, who has also been named his party's presidential candidate, came third with 52 stories in spite of a massive media campaign aimed at polishing his image. Jokowi has been popular for his "blusukan" (impromptu visit) method in order to monitor

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10  "Jokowi most talked-about candidate for presidential poll." The Jakarta Post, 15 April, 2013

the performance of his subordinates and to directly listen to complaints from his people since he was Surakarta Mayor. His "blusukan" method has been quickly followed by other state officials, trying to capture the people's hearts.

Jokowi's popularity apparently has helped sustain the popularity of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) that nominated him for Jakarta gubernatorial election. The party is now seen as the most electable political party in the country, according to the National Survey Institute (LSN).[11]

The survey found that 20.5% of respondents – LSN interviewed 1230 people from 33 provinces between 26 February and 15 March, 2013 – would vote for the PDI-P if a legislative election was held in this period. "Basically, this is not about his performance, but more about the perception of his performance which has been built by the media," LSN executive director Umar Bakry said.

## CONCLUSION

Young voters need candidates who can reflect their aspirations, views and priorities. Indonesia's rampant corruption that involves politicians may make the young voters avoid politics. Surveys show candidates' religion and gender are no longer the main considerations of voters.

Voters are searching for fresh faces, such as Jokowi, whom they consider as able to establish a role model on how to be a determined leader whose main purpose is to serve his people. The trend of the declining number of young turn-out voters in the past three elections should be a wake-up call for the KPU to work harder and make young voters go to the polling stations and cast their votes.

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11 'Jokowi effect' lifts PDI-P, graft drags Dems down to the depths." The Jakarta Post; 25 March 25, 2013

# WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE: DID YOUTH VOTE AND SOCIAL MEDIA MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN COLOMBO 2011?

*by Nalaka Gunawardene[1] and Chanuka Wattegama[2]*

## SUMMARY

The Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) is the local government body that administers Sri Lanka's largest city and its commercial capital. Its last election, held in October 2011, saw the nation's ruling coalition losing this key municipality while winning all other municipalities as well as many of the smaller local government bodies.

What made the CMC election outcome different? This election saw some apolitical activists and researchers engaging the mayoral candidates on social media, questioning and critiquing their election manifestos and trying to hold them accountable. Did these online activities influence voter behaviour? What lesson does this hold for other elections and the overall political landscape in Sri Lanka?

## INTRODUCTION

CMC is the oldest and largest local government body in Sri Lanka. It manages Colombo, a modest sized city (by South Asian standards) covering 37 square km and home to 550,000 residents. It has a floating population of another 400,000 who enter daily for work, trade or schooling. Although the administrative capital was moved to nearby Sri Jayawardenapura Kotte in the 1980s, Colombo firmly remains the hub for business, international trade, diplomacy and media.

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The British made Colombo their capital in 1815, and set up the CMC in 1865 for local self governance.[3] Colombo's mayor and the council of 53 members are elected through local government elections held once in four years. It manages a budget of LKR 9 billion (approximately USD 70.5 million at mid 2013 exchange rate) and a staff of 12,000.

For over half a century since 1956, the CMC had been ruled by the United National Party (UNP), Sri Lanka's conservative party that is currently in Parliamentary opposition.[4] During this time, there have been many changes of government at national level. The executive presidency has been held by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) since 1994, which has formed governments with coalition partners for much of that period (excepting 2001-2004). The SLFP-led United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) won the general election in 2004 and was re-elected in 2010.[5]

### CMC ELECTION 2011

The last election for CMC, held on 8 October 2011, was contested by several political parties, alliances and independent groups. While the UPFA won most other local bodies, the UNP secured the largest number of votes and seats in the CMC and formed an administration headed by their mayoral candidate, A. J. M. Muzammil.

The official election result was as follows[6]:

**Local Authorities Elections: 8 October, 2011: Colombo District; Colombo Municipal Council**

| PARTY NAME | VOTES OBTAINED | PERCENTAGE | SEATS |
|---|---|---|---|
| United National Party (UNP) | 101,920 | 43.01% | 24 |
| United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) | 77,089 | 32.53% | 16 |
| Democratic Peoples Front (DPF) | 26,229 | 11.07% | 6 |

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3   CMC official website,
    http://www.cmc.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=84&Itemid=70

4   CMC official website:
    http://www.cmc.lk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=182&Itemid=147

5   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections_in_Sri_Lanka

6   *Source: Department of Elections, Sri Lanka*
    http://www.slelections.gov.lk/3local_authorities2011_3/Colombo_MC.html

| PARTY NAME | VOTES OBTAINED | PERCENTAGE | SEATS |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) | 9,979 | 4.21% | 2 |
| Democratic Unity Alliance | 7,830 | 3.30% | 2 |
| Independent Group 2 | 4,085 | 1.72% | 1 |
| People's Liberation Front | 3,162 | 1.33% | 1 |
| Independent Group 1 | 2,962 | 1.25% | 1 |
| Independent Group 9 | 1,968 | 0.83% | - |
| Independent Group 8 | 1,133 | 0.48% | |
| Jana Setha Peramuna | 384 | 0.16% | |
| Independent Group 10 | 46 | 0.02% | |
| Patriotic National Front | 42 | 0.02% | |
| Independent Group 4 | 33 | 0.01% | |
| Ceylon Democratic Unity Alliance | 32 | 0.01% | |
| Independent Group 7 | 27 | 0.01% | |
| Independent Group 6 | 22 | 0.01% | |
| Independent Group 3 | 17 | 0.01% | |
| Independent Group 5 | 16 | 0.01% | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Valid Votes | 236,976 | 95.85% |
| Rejected Votes | 10,270 | 4.15% |
| Total Polled | 247,246 | % |
| Registered Electors | 393,085 | |

The CMC election result was significant, because the national level opposition retained control over this important local government body while the nationally ruling coalition swept most others. For this reason, the electoral campaigns, as well as the outcome, have been the subject of much commentary.

As an analyst on *World Socialist* website noted: "The UPFA's defeat is a distorted expression of the widespread opposition to the Rajapakse government's policies. The pro-business, right-wing UNP has no fundamental differences with the government, but capitalized on a protest vote. The central issue in the election campaign was the Government's

plan to evict more than 70,000 families from shanties in Colombo as part of its program to transform the city into a major commercial hub for South Asia."[7]

Dr Dayan Jayatilleka, a leading political analyst and one time diplomat, interpreted the result very differently — as evidence of democracy in action. "The results of the local authorities election proves that Sri Lankan society will not allow itself to be straitjacketed into conformity," he wrote.

He added: "It is widely known that almost 60% of Colombo consists of ethno-linguistic minorities, and while this does not mean that the winning candidate must be from one of the minorities, it does mean that in order to win, a candidate from a majority community must have a multi-ethnic base and appeal, or his/her party must have such a profile. (UPFA mayoral candidate) Milinda Moragoda probably failed because the governing coalition has been unable to cultivate a multi-ethnic image. The visible tendency, or drive, towards cultural homogenization and conformity, if not domination, was bound to be rejected by a multicultural, cosmopolitan Colombo citizenry."[8]

Besides the more obvious factors of party politics and demographics, did any other considerations play a significant part in the CMC election outcome? For example, how did the youth vote and new media factors influence the process?

These questions are briefly explored here, underlining the need for further study.

## SRI LANKA: RISING INCOMES, GROWING CONNECTIVITY

The CMC election took place 2.5 years after Sri Lanka's long drawn out civil war ended in May 2009, and when the economy was resurging. In 2010, the IMF recognized Sri Lanka as a middle income, emerging market, signifying a transformation taking place in the country.[9]

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7    "Sri Lankan Ruling Party Defeated in Colombo Local Election. *World Socialist* website. 11 October, 2011. http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2011/10/sril-o12.html

8    "Reading the Results of the Municipal Elections in Sri Lanka," Groundviews.org, 10 October, 2011 http://groundviews.org/2011/10/10/reading-the-results-of-the-municipal-elections-in-sri-lanka/

9    http://www.centralbanking.com/central-banking/news/1588110/imf-upgrades-sri-lanka-emerging-market

Colombo is at the epicenter of this change. Metropolitan Colombo, which covers the city of Colombo as well as its more populous suburbs, is economically more advantaged than the rest of the island. Colombo is in the Western Province, which occupies only 5.7% of the land, but accounts for around 44% of the gross domestic product (GDP). Its per capita income ratio was 1.6 times the national per capita income in 2011.[10]

Residents of metro Colombo have better access to media and telecommunication services. Probably recognizing this, CMC election candidates from major parties made extensive use of broadcast and web-based media, alongside the more traditional outdoor political rallies and door-to-door campaigning, to reach out to voters.

While this is not the first Lankan election where new media was used, it marks a turning point in how main candidates used web-based platforms and social media. They encountered both support and dissent in that process.
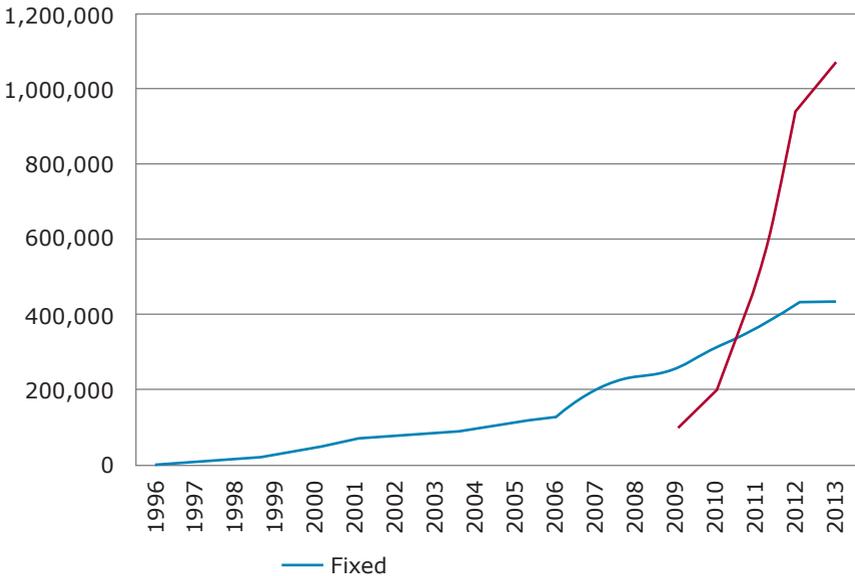


*Growth in Internet subscriptions in Sri Lanka: 1996-2013*
*TRCSL, March 2013: http://www.trc.gov.lk/information/statistics.html*

10 http://www.ft.lk/2012/08/10/city-folks-got-richer-in-2011-north-gdp-grew-fastest/

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According to the Telecommunication Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka (TRCSL), the official collector of telecom industry data, Sri Lanka had a total of 2,832,464 fixed phones (39% in the Western Province), and 19,335,733 mobile phone subscriptions by March 2013. Thus, when fixed and mobile are taken together, there are now more phone connections than people (total population was 20,277,597 in the last national census of March 2012).

The number of Internet users is harder to ascertain. In March 2013, TRCSL reported a total of 435,758 fixed Internet subscriptions and 1,068,482 mobile Internet subscriptions (the latter used via mobile devices such as laptops, smart phones and iPads, etc).[11] When added together, this came to slightly over 1.5 million Internet subscriptions.

Determining the number of Internet users is open to interpretation: many fixed subscriptions - in offices, homes and cybercafés - have multiple users while mobile Internet accounts are less widely shared. Assuming an average two users per subscription, whether fixed or mobile, the number of Internet users could be in the range of 3 million (or 15% of total population). This may be a conservative estimate.

The latest number given by the Internet World Stats website for Sri Lanka is 3,222,200 Internet users in June 2012. The country's total number of Facebook accounts was 1,515,720 as of December 2012.[12] According to the social media analytical tool website, *socialbakers*, the largest age group among Lankan users of Facebook is 18 - 24 years, followed by those aged 25 - 34.[13]

These raw numbers represent only one part of a much larger and dynamic picture. The telecom services market, user types and profiles as well as socio-cultural and economic impacts of Internet use have evolved since commercial Internet connectivity was introduced in 1995. While connectivity and affordability constraints have eased off, and Internet is no longer an urban or elite service, some urban-rural disparities exist.

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11  Latest available industry data, accessed on TRCSL website on 5 June 2013, at: http://www.trc.gov.lk/information/statistics.html

12  http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#lk and http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/lk.htm

13  http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/sri-lanka

## SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE CMC ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

The two leading mayoral candidates - Milinda Moragoda of UPFA and A. J. M. Muzammil of UNP - mobilized social media as part of their campaigns. The main platforms they used were Facebook and Twitter; their official websites were also used.

The specific online locations were as follows:

| | Moragoda Campaign (UPFA) | Muzammil Campaign (UNP) |
|---|---|---|
| Official website/s | http://www.ourcmb.com (now offline) http://www.milinda.org | http://www.muzammil.org |
| Facebook | www.facebook.com/mmoragoda?sk=wall | www.facebook.com/A.J.M.Muzammil |
| Twitter hashtag[14] | @milindamoragoda | @AJMMuzammil |
| YouTube account | www.youtube.com/user/MilindaMoragoda | Not known |

Following are brief surveys of the two campaigns as they engaged citizens on the above platforms. These observations are offered with the caveat that an overview of this nature cannot comprehensively cover the broader issues of governance and politics that shaped such engagements.

## MORAGODA CAMPAIGN

Moragoda's campaign had a strong new media component which became contentious after a while when it attracted some critical and vocal cyber activists. The most innovative feature in the campaign was the campaign website, located at http://www.ourcmb.com. His policy platform promised both a citizens' charter (CC) and right to information (RTI) at CMC level.

ICT policy researcher Dr Rohan Samarajiva, who served as policy advisor to the Moragoda campaign, called it an attempt in "open-source policy formulation". He explained midway through the process: "A draft policy platform was presented early in the campaign. Comments and suggestions are being actively solicited through face-to-face meetings and through new

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14  Twitter accounts are not officially verified by the platform, but are generally known to be owned and operated by these individuals or their authorised staff.

media. A revised document reflecting the process will be published a week or so before the election."[15]

The website received and published many public comments on a wide array of topics and concerns ranging from urban transport and housing to open spaces and rights of slum dwellers. Calling elections as "engageable moments," Dr Samarajiva noted it was only during elections that public affairs rise on busy people's agendas. "Yet, effective policy formulation and implementation requires active citizen engagement."

Moragoda launched an official Facebook page on 3 September, 2011, five weeks before the election.[16] In that respect, he was not much different from most other South Asian politicians, who is engaging with the public only when an election is imminent. Thanks largely to innovative strategies by his web media team, the number of 'likes' grew to 13,000+ just before the election. The page advanced gradually, giving prominence to photographs of the candidate visiting potential voters.[17]

The rate of visitor commenting was slow at early stages, but improved with time. Readers questioned him on different topics. One question that repeatedly came up was about his non-declaration of assets prior to the election, while being a promoter of the public's right for information.

Within days, it seemed as if Moragoda was becoming exasperated by dissenting viewpoints. On 15 September, 2011 he wrote on his Facebook: "I have watched today's proceedings in this space with some disappointment and sadness. I will only have a dialogue with those who desire to engage constructively and conduct themselves in a civilized manner. In this space, that is my right and privilege. I will devote as much time and energy as I can to communicate through this new media, although it is not available to the majority of our society. However, due to competing demands, it is not humanly possible for me to respond to each and every question."

As the campaign progressed, it appeared that some critical Facebook comments were deleted. Notwithstanding this, it gathered around 10,000

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15  "Open-Source Policy Formulation for Sri Lanka's Capital." *Lanka Business Online*. 12 September, 2011. http://www.lankabusinessonline.com/news/Open-source_policy_formulation_for_Sri_Lankas_capital/1804290644

16  https://www.facebook.com/mmoragoda

17  Located at http://www.ourcmb.com, but no longer accessible online as at 5 June, 2013.

users within a month. Commenting on this milestone, Moragoda wrote: "Social media is starting to reach all sectors of society and it has vast potential to empower citizens and to create efficiencies and openness in government. It is only a tool though, and can be misused or used constructively. My hope is that social media will be a positive catalyst in creating a community of shared values and bringing about effective government rather than a tool to create further divisions and polarization."

Others, while commending the strategies used, questioned the sincerity and efficacy of this process. Most vocal was Sanjana Hattotuwa, a new media researcher and activist, who tried to engage Moragoda on Facebook and Twitter - with limited success.

In a critique published on 14 September, 2011, Hattotuwa noted: "The (Moragoda) campaign's central website, http://www.ourcmb.com, is leagues ahead of what any candidate at any election in Sri Lanka has produced. Aimed to elicit public feedback on a 12 point, 100 day plan for Colombo, the website is a model for how politicians can use the web to co-create policy in what is promised is an open, transparent manner. Milinda's Facebook group, growing apace in the number of fans, is something other candidates have done in the past, but not to this degree of curatorial prowess. He also has a presence on YouTube and Twitter."[18]

Hattotuwa argued how, despite these sophisticated trappings, the campaign was not as participatory, consultative or engaging as it appeared at first glance. He described in detail, with screen grabs of relevant exchanges, how he had questioned the Moragoda campaign on several contentious issues:

- relocation of slum dwellers in Colombo without the due process and compensation;

- religious tolerance (seen as coming under pressure from extremist elements);

- right to information (promised by the campaign at local government level when no laws exist at national level – see Box 1);

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18  Milinda Moragoda: "The Gap Between Promise and Reality." *Groundviews.org* 14 September, 2011. http://groundviews.org/2011/09/14/milinda-moragoda-the-gap-between-promise-and-reality/

- the candidate's non declaration of assets prior to seeking public office; and

- the overall "inability of the campaign to deal with hard questions".

Hattotuwa also critiqued Moragoda's intermittent engagement with the public using social media. A case point was his use of Twitter. Moragoda had originally created a Twitter account in 2010 (when he contested and lost in the general election in April 2010) which lay abandoned from 7 April, 2010 until 6 September, 2011 without any public engagement.

It was suddenly activated when he decided to run for mayor. "Not a single tweet, not a single word about what he was doing to champion what he stood for even out of power," Hattotuwa noted sardonically.

Placing these individual concerns against the prevailing political reality, Hattotuwa argued:

"*Sans* any real democracy in Sri Lanka, http://www.ourcmb.com is actually not a framework for public engagement. Rather, it is essentially a platform (arguably a rather parasitical one) to get the best ideas from amongst us and make them hostage to the parochialism of a single ruling family that circumscribes in turn what Moragoda - if he should win - can and should do as Mayor."[19]

### MUZAMMIL CAMPAIGN

The winning party's (UNP) online campaign, was less colorful, but seems to have been effective in its own way.

During the early stages of his campaign, A. J. M. Muzammil focused more on traditional methods of engagement as compared to new media. He probably looked at his constituency's demographics: despite metro Colombo having higher than average incomes, the percentage of urban poor within the CMC area is high. Social media did not offer pathways to these voters. However, as the campaign evolved, Muzammil warmed up to social media.

Having had no previous presence on Facebook, Muzammil launched an account for campaigning.[20] There are disadvantages in this approach: a

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19  Op cit 18

20  https://www.facebook.com/A.J.M.Muzammil

## Right to Information - at Local Level?

Despite many years of advocacy, Sri Lanka has no Right to Information (RTI) law. Two attempts by the Parliamentary opposition to introduce RTI laws in recent years were defeated by the Government.

RTI became a topic of much debate during the CMC election campaign, when the ruling coalition's (UPFA) mayoral candidate Milinda Moragoda pledged to recognise RTI at CMC if he won.

Dr Rohan Samarajiva, policy advisor to the Moragoda campaign, called it 'pragmatic RTI'. In an op-ed published during the campaign, he wrote: "One could of course try it at the national level and tweak until it is right. Alternatively, one could try it out at a lower level of government on a small scale as a pilot; learn the lessons of what works and what needs fine tuning and scale up."

Pointing out how Moragoda had long advocated RTI, Dr Samarajiva added: "Crafting a good piece of RTI legislation for the city level will require help. The draft developed while Milinda was minister of justice and law reforms will be our starting point. We'd be happy to adapt it for the city level in a participatory way, starting even before the election." (See: http://tiny.cc/RTIMM)

Moragoda's detractors were not quite convinced. Economist and opposition Member of Parliament, Dr Harsha de Silva, argued that the ruling coalition had consistently resisted and ridiculed attempts to legislate RTI at a national level. He wrote: "In fact the President is on record having said there is no need for people to have the right to information. So, in this background no right thinking person would ever believe the promise of the UPFA mayoral candidate about ensuring right to information in the CMC. This regime will never allow it." (See: http://tiny.cc/RTIHdS)

Cyber activists repeatedly asked Moragoda to practise RTI by declaring his own assets. The candidate remained silent on this point and his campaign team said he would do so if and when elected, as strictly required by election laws. Activists decried it as Moragoda's failure to 'walk the talk.'

Meanwhile, the UNP also included an RTI pledge in its campaign for the neighbouring Sri Jayawardenapura Kotte Municipal Council. In the event, UNP lost that council while UPFA lost the CMC.

It seems unlikely that RTI would be legislated anytime soon in Sri Lanka. In July 2012, secretary to the Ministry of Mass Media and Information declared that the Government will not be introducing any RTI laws "because it would compromise the country's national security". See http://tiny.cc/RTICH

Facebook account can have only 5000 friends. On the other hand, an open page can gather any number of 'likes.'

Yet Muzammil chose a Facebook account, probably wanting to build closer and tighter relationships with cyber-savvy sections of his constituency rather than mechanically approaching a large, but non-customized, audience. While Muzammil's number of 'friends' was less than that of his rival, his Facebook campaign was just as engaging. This was possible because others could 'tag' him as an account-holder.

The Facebook activity was sustained by Muzammil's campaign staff and supporters. Muzammil himself was never seen directly engaging via Facebook or any other social media. While he had a standard website, he did not maintain a personal or official blog. His Twitter account followed a few hundred people, but never gathered a significant following. He tweeted only once in the entire campaign. Cyber activists' tweeted questions went unanswered (but then, Muzammil never attracted that many questions, as Moragoda did).

Muzammil's social media relied heavily on his campaign photos. He had plenty of photos showing him talking in a relaxed manner with slum dwellers, professionals, businessmen and many others. While his main opponent's spouse was never photographed during the campaign, Muzammil's wife was often shown mingling among crowds. The imagery seemed to convey a simple message: "I am one of you. Vote for me. I will look after you."

Muzammil's campaign manifesto did not dabble much in policy matters, for which the scope at local government is rather limited. Instead, it addressed practical problems faced by the residents of Colombo such as adequate housing; proper water supply and sanitation; satisfactory waste disposal; improved public transport; livelihood support for the poor; development of sports and enhancing a range of other services.

Muzammil pledged that, if elected mayor of Colombo, he would be accessible to every citizen. Coming from a man of the people, this sounded both sincere and credible.

The manifesto also relied heavily on graphics. The document was so brief that it was printed double-sided on an A5 sheet. Multilingual online versions were shared via social media and were also distributed through email with the help of volunteers.

*UNP Muzammil Campaign Manifesto for CMC Election Oct 2011*

## POLITICIANS ENGAGING CITIZENS USING ONLINE PLATFORMS

Sri Lanka's is a politically engaged society where voter turnout at elections is high and there is widespread interest in all matters political. For much of the 20th Century, political discourse happened at small group level through political rallies, or through newspapers.

The advent of broadcast television in 1982 provided another platform, but political talk shows became a mainstream genre of programming only at the turn of the century. As Sri Lanka's first television generation rises in society and economy[21], it has finally produced a few politicians skilled in the art of TV debating. Most others failed to adapt their platform oratory to suit the more nuanced and demanding audio-visual medium.

The web presents its own set of challenges to political players and analysts, and some innovative Sri Lankan politicians will eventually master the art of harnessing the web-based media. For now, however, not a

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21  http://collidecolumn.wordpress.com/2012/02/12/when-worlds-collide-2-get-used-to-the-idiot-box-folks/

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single Lankan political figure seems to have grasped the full complexity or potential of web 2.0 platforms and social media.

Still, the CMC election 2011 can be seen as a watershed event where new campaign strategies and new forms of political engagement were tested. The Moragoda campaign went further than any previous attempt at national, provincial or local government level. The ultimately victorious Muzammil campaign, on the other hand, was characterized by an average new media strategy.

**Where new media is concerned, one interesting development was how independent activists without any political party affiliation tried to engage the leading candidates through social media platforms.**

It was not just the residents of Colombo - strictly speaking, the only ones registered to vote for or against candidates - who took part in online debates during the CMC 2011 election campaigns. Given Colombo's strategic significance in Sri Lanka's policy, law and economic spheres, many non-residents also joined. Discussions often transcended the strict purview of local government bodies – apparently, to the chagrin of some campaign managers.

Most attention was directed at the Moragoda campaign – for understandable reasons. A former minister of science and technology, Milinda Moragoda, projects himself as a liberal, tech-savvy and modern politician. As noted above, his media campaign was superior in design and style - largely thanks to his new media campaign manager Indi Samarajiva, one of Sri Lanka's leading bloggers.[22]

Yet the slick campaign could not easily gloss over some fundamental issues raised by activists. Such debates were also framed and shaped by larger factors of national level politics and governance, as well as the candidate's own past track record of sporadic engagement with the electorate. The gap between Moragoda's words and deeds was brought into sharp focus.

Perhaps Moragoda also became the 'lightning rod' for middle class and minority discontent within the UPFA government that is completely dominating national politics in the absence of a united and coherent opposition.

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22  http://indi.ca/2011/10/unp-wins-colombo-municipal-council/

Cyber activists, including the present writers who tried to engage the Moragoda campaign on core issues on social media platforms, were frustrated by how the campaign sidestepped to discuss certain "inconvenient truths". Moragoda campaign managers sometimes used a convoluted logic or technocratic arguments in defending their candidate.

As opposition parliamentarian and public intellectual, Dr Harsha de Silva, noted in an op-ed essay published during the campaign: "Neither the Secretary (to the Ministry of) Defense (and Urban Development) nor the UPFA mayoral candidate has answered the repeated question as to why the National Involuntary Resettlement Policy was not followed when hundreds of poor families were evicted from their homes."[23]

On 20 September, 2011, Dr de Silva also raised in Parliament the matter of Moragoda's assets declaration, citing Sri Lanka's first citizen journalism website, Groundviews.org, by name – probably the first time that social media led calls for transparency found expression in parliament. It is now part of the official record.[24] Unlike Moragoda, Muzammil did not project himself as a tech-savvy policy wonk. So the Muzammil campaign was not challenged by activists with the same intensity or frequency.

It was not just young activists who used online platforms for discussing and debating issues of urban governance during and after the CMC election. Concerned senior citizens also did.

For example, on the day of the election, retired civil servant Austin Fernando (a former secretary to the ministry of defence) published an open letter on Groundviews.org website addressed to the two leading mayoral candidates. In it, he focused on the two candidates' different approaches to 'under served settlements' (USSs) in the CMC area, and drew their

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23  Local government elections: "Military Puppeteers, Elected Puppets, Right to Information and People's Liberties." *Groundviews.org* 20 September, 2011. http://groundviews.org/2011/09/20/local-government-elections-military-puppeteers-elected-puppets-right-to-information-and-peoples-liberties/

24  Milinda Moragoda's 'Right to Information': "A Sordid Record of its Real Nature and Limits." *Groundviews.org*, 26 September, 2011. http://groundviews.org/2011/09/26/milinda-moragodas-right-to-information-a-sordid-record-of-its-real-nature-and-limits/

attention to the UN-Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons (Pinheiro Principles).[25]

## POST-ELECTION CYBER GAPS

Social media use during the CMC election 2011 is a case of the glass being half full. It raised the benchmark higher, but at the same time, there were gaps and missed opportunities.

Two weeks prior to the election date, Moragoda's new media manager Indi Samarajiva wrote on his own blog: "Personally, I think it's good when anyone gets onto social networks, especially politicians and elected officials. I think politicians should be thus encouraged, whatever party they're from and however they choose to engage. It's encouraging that so many candidates for the Colombo Municipal Council elections are making use of Facebook. I hope in the future there will be more, and that elected officials will continue to stay engaged through as many channels as possible."[26]

Unfortunately, such continuing engagement did not happen. Neither the winner nor others sustained their social media presence with the same intensity or frequency. Admittedly, doing so entails much time and effort – something in which mainstream political parties or politicians in Sri Lanka are not yet willing to invest. One common drawback in many web-based discussions is the lack of proper content curation (the collection and archiving of digital assets) and the absence of content archiving. Both were evident in the aftermath of the CMC 2011 election.

All the crowdsourced ideas, interesting debates and other user-generated content in the Moragoda campaign's 'Our Colombo' website are no longer accessible online. Researcher Sanjana Hattotuwa says it is a travesty that the site was not archived. In his view, this suggests that new media is still deeply partisan in design and deployment. He noted in a tweet in early April 2013: "Value of content beyond campaign and party, for citizens, for posterity, is unrecognized. SM of candidates as partisan as parties."[27]

Research for this paper located only one partial attempt to capture

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25  "Developing the 'Under Served Settlements' in Colombo: An Open Letter". *Groundviews.org*, 8 October, 2011. http://groundviews.org/2011/10/08/developing-the-under-served-settlements-in-colombo-an-open-letter/

26  http://indi.ca/2011/09/facebook-and-the-colombo-election/

27  https://twitter.com/groundviews/statuses/318905297328553984

some interesting debates appearing on news websites, Twitter and Facebook on the right to information during the CMC campaign. It was collated by a citizen journalist using the American based information network website *Storify*,.[28]

## CONCLUSION

There is no unequivocal evidence to prove that the use of social media, on its own, significantly changed CMC election results in 2011. As with all election campaigns, the influences were many, varied and nuanced.

Nevertheless, social media enabled urban, tech savvy individuals - young and old - from different social and cultural backgrounds to engage in the political discourse. This is noteworthy, when the overall trend among many young people is political apathy. To that extent, this election may one day be seen as a turning point in electronic citizenship engagement in Sri Lanka's governance and politics.

For the moment, however, 'offline' factors dominate politics and economics in Colombo and elsewhere in Sri Lanka, as the contest between centralization and decentralization unfolds in the national parliament, provincial councils and local government bodies. The CMC election has given out a signal that excessive political centralization and monocultures would not be favored by Sri Lanka's growing urban middle class citizens.

Political analyst Dayan Jayatilleka summed this up best: "The country's rulers and foreign critics have similar lessons to learn from the election results. The foreign critics must know that Colombo and Jaffna are not the country at large, and that the country at large has gone overwhelmingly one way. The rulers must know that the world outside, from Seattle to Singapore, is more like Colombo and Jaffna, only far more so, than it is like any other part of Sri Lanka."[29]

**Declaration:**
**Both writers were among the cyber activists and citizen journalists**

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28  http://tiny.cc/R2ICMC

29  Reading the results of the municipal elections in Sri Lanka, Groundviews.org, 10 Oct 2011 http://groundviews.org/2011/10/10/reading-the-results-of-the-municipal-elections-in-sri-lanka/

**who tried to engage leading mayoral candidates on social media during the CMC election 2011. Neither has any political party affiliation; all their comments were made under own names.**

### Mind Your Language!

Heated online debates at times descended to name calling, veiled threats and other insults – often posted anonymously or pseudonymously.

The Moragoda campaign belatedly offered to moderate comments when cyber activist Sanjana Hattotuwa drew their attention to such hateful remarks. Vilification of candidates themselves, as well as their supporters, continued in various blogs and other online platforms not officially affiliated with any candidate. These highlighted the need for respectful online communications – not widely appreciated or practised in Sri Lanka.

# RESEARCH FINDINGS: IS VOTING IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG THAI CITIZENS?

*by Noppadon Kannika*

## INTRODUCTION

Walzer defined a citizen by referring to prerogatives and responsibilities as part of being a member in a political community.[1] Further, Van defined the concept of citizenship by referring to the sense of duty towards public administration.[2] In Thailand, the Royal Institute's Thai dictionary defines the word citizen as people.[3] Some scholars in Thailand refer to the concept of a citizen as someone who votes and actively participates in politics.[4] Before considering the data analysis in this chapter, it is important to understand why people's voting is a major concern; who is eligible to vote and who is not. Voting is one of a few political phenomena in the democratic process that citizens can engage in.[5]

Thai teenagers under the age of 18 years are not eligible to vote.[6] Young people studied in this chapter range from 18 to 24. However, some people in Thailand say Thai youths have so many activities in their everyday life which has led to neglect them to vote on Election Days.[7] However, the

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1   Michael Walzer, "Citizenship, in Political Innovation and Conceptual Change;" ed. T. Ball, J. Farr, and R.L. Hanson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2011.

2   Van Deth, J.W. (2009). "Norms of Citizenship," in R.J. Dalton and H.D. Klingemann (eds). Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior, New York: Oxford University Press.

3   http://rirs3.royin.go.th/new-search/word-search-all-x.asp

4   http://www.thaiciviceducation.org/index.php/aboutus/common-principle/characteristics

5   Dalton, R.J. and Weldon, S. (2005) "Is the Party Over? Spreading Antipathy Towards Political Parties," Public Opinion Pros: 1-5.

6   http://www2.ect.go.th/about.php?Province=mp54&SiteMenuID=7624

7   http://www.thaipost.net/node/41032

public is usually interested in the number of citizens voting on election days. Political scientists study why people vote. They have stated that people's civic duty and engagement in community volunteer work are the main reasons. There is significant evidence that engaging in community service in one's youth is effectively linked to community and civic involvement in adulthood. The engagement in community volunteer work may act as a substitute in the minds of many young people for committing to political activities.[8] In Thai society, some scholars say that common values have widely shown that Thai voters have a responsibility to vote. As a result, the size of the turnout is representative of the country's citizens.[9] Some people believe that voting is a civic responsibility and some people define it as a civic obligation. The common value of a civic obligation and responsibility for voting increases as people grow older. If they are much more attached to their community, they would think about duty toward their community. However, it can be argued that Thai youth may not agree with these views. In this chapter, the question is posed whether Thai youths are less likely to vote compared to older Thai citizens. To answer this question, four cross-sectional survey research projects during the Bangkok-governor election campaign in 2013 were investigated.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Survey datasets were drawn from four public opinion polls on voting for the Bangkok governor election candidates. The polls were conducted during January and February 2013 prior to the Bangkok governor election day on 3 March, 2013. Stratified-Cluster probability selection was applied for sampling eligible young voters. The target population of these survey research projects was 18 to 24 years. There were 2091 respondents. The survey measurement was a survey questionnaire asking about various voter intentions among eligible young voters in Bangkok. SAS statistical software was used to analyze survey data obtaining the research objectives and the particular research question.

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8    Flanagan, C., A. (2013). "Teenage Citizens: the Political Theories of the Young." Harvard University Press.

9    http://nucha.chs.ac.th/1.1.htm# **การปฏิบัติตนเป็นพลเมืองดี**

RESEARCH FINDINGS: IS VOTING IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG THAI CITIZENS?

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The results of the first of the four previous opinion polls concerning the Bangkok governor election of 2013, which was conducted from 31 January to 5 February 5, indicate that only 24.5% of the young respondents followed the news media coverage of the Bangkok governor election every day, or most of the time during the week, compared with 46.7% of total respondents aged 25 and older. When asked about public policies on the environment and providing them with a list of various items, the majority of total young voters, or 57.0%, picked only one item compared to 62.5% of the total of older voters who picked two or more items. After asking them in the first poll for their intention to vote, 58.4% of total young respondents expressed their intention to vote for their favorite candidates. However, the proportion of young respondents was lower than the older respondents' proportion which was 75.4%. The second poll, which was conducted February 10-13, found that 67.3% of elders and 58.8% of young respondents already made up their mind on who to vote for on Election Day.

**Table 1: Comparison of key findings in the first poll between young voters and elders**

| | The First Poll (From January 31 to February 5, 2013) | Young Voters (18 – 24 years old) % | Elders (aged 25 and older) % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Respondents followed the news on Bangkok governor election every day or most of the time per week. | 24.5 | 46.7 |
| 2 | Respondents only picked one item from environmental-related public policies after providing them with a list of various choices. | 57.0 | 43.0 |
| 3 | Respondents picked two or more items from environmental-related public policies. | 62.5 | 37.5 |
| 4 | Respondents who intended to vote for their favorite candidates. | 58.4 | 75.4 |

According to the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, the Governor of Bangkok is the head of the local government of Bangkok. The Governor is also the chief executive of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. The power and role of the office of the Governor of Bangkok, in accordance with the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration Act, BE 2528 (1985), is defined as follows:

(1) Formulate and implement policies for the Bangkok
    Metropolitan area.

(2) Be the head of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration.

(3) Appoint and remove deputy governors, advisors,
    board members, city officials and servants.

(4) Coordinate and carry out the orders of the Cabinet of Thailand,
    the Prime Minister of Thailand, and the Ministry of Interior.

(5) Oversee the smooth running of the various agencies and
    services of Bangkok Metropolitan.

(6) Draw up legislation and bills for the city, to be considered
    in the Bangkok Metropolitan Council.[10]

**Table 2: Comparison of key findings in the second poll
between young voters and elders**

| The Second Poll (From during 10 February to 13, 2013) | | Young Voters (18 – 24 years old) % | Elders (aged 25 and older) % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Respondents said that their decision on which candidate to vote for on election day is made. | 58.8 | 67.3 |
| 2 | Respondents stated that they find the Governor's capacity/scope of responsibilities to be sufficient. | 30.3 | 34.8 |
| 3 | Respondents said that they had no idea about the Governor's power. | 50.6 | 45.9 |

10  http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangkok_Metropolitan_Administration

However, the Governor of Bangkok does not have any power of control over the Royal Thai Police Bureau. The Governor has no absolute power in making decisions, since he has to cooperate with state agencies.[11] Because of such limited power, a survey question was asked on whether respondents agree or disagree with the Governor's scope of responsibilities. In the second poll conducted during the Bangkok governor election of 2013, 30.3% of young respondents stated that they find the Governor's capacity/scope of responsibilities to be sufficient, which was relatively lower than the 34.8% of elders who responded. However, 50.6% of young respondents said that they had no idea about the Governor's power, which was relatively higher than the elders (45.9%) as presented in Table 2. This demonstrates that young voters might not have enough political information to answer the survey questions on the Governor's public administration.

**Table 3: Comparison of key findings between the second poll and the third poll classified by age groups (youths = 18 – 24-years-old; elders = aged 25 and older)**

| Statement | Second Poll | | Third Poll | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Youths | Elders | Youths | Elders |
| Respondents said that their decision on which candidate to vote for on election day is made. | 58.8 | 67.3 | 69.0 | 75.8 |

In Table 3, the results compare key findings between the second poll and the third poll after asking respondents whether their decision on which candidate to vote for on Election Day has been made. The proportion of young respondents increased from 58.8% in the second poll to 69.0% in the third poll, while the proportion of elders also increased from 67.3% in the second poll to 75.8% in the third poll.

After reviewing some of the previous research, it was shown that corruption is one of the most critical problems in Thailand as it is fairly common and accepted in Thai society. The ultimate goal of Anti-Corruption

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11  http://www.nationmultimedia.com/business/TCT-urges-next-governor-to-strengthen-Bangkoks-tou-30200295.html

of Thailand (ACT) is to raise awareness that corruption is unacceptable.[12] Another data analysis takes into account that some scholars believed that a new generation of Thai voters had  stronger views against corruption and this group of voters would not vote for corrupt politicians. However, a recent ABAC poll reported that most Thai people, or 63.4% of total respondents, believed that corruption in government was acceptable, provided that it was beneficial to the respondents personally. This attitude occurs widely among Thai youth.  This explains why corrupt politicians keep returning to power in Thailand. Given this phenomena, the poll findings might support the view that young voters do not have different political behavior from older voters. This is because the third poll, asking voters about the 2013 Bangkok governor election, implies that 51.1% of total young voters who answered the poll clicked "LIKE" for the Pheu Thai party, which is one of the major parties, and 51.6% of the same group of young voters also clicked "LIKE" for the Democrats which is another major party. These poll results show an overlap of political preferences among these voters, which might reduce the chances to change corrupt governments since the country would still have the same groups of politicians as they have had in the past.

On the other side of the ABAC poll data analysis, a hypothesis could be drawn concerning the difference of voting behavior between young voters and elders. In the fourth poll's findings, the null hypothesis stating that there was no mean difference between age groups was rejected. The number of voter intentions among young voters ranged from 0 to 10 with a mean of 6.53 (S.D. = 2.000), compared to the number of voting intentions among elders that ranged from 0 to 10 with a mean of 7.09 (S.D. = 1.896). The difference was significant at a p-value of 0.000. The p-value describes that if a thousand samples were drawn in a poll how many times it supported the alternative hypothesis, even if the null hypothesis was true. This poll had a significant value of 0.000. So if the number of times was one out of one thousand or less, then the difference is significant at this time.

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12  http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/The-fight-has-begun-30196955.html

RESEARCH FINDINGS: IS VOTING IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG THAI CITIZENS?

**Table 4: Showing the tests of difference in means of voting intentions between Thai young voters and elders**

| Age Groups | Mean Response of Voting Intentions | Std. Dev. | F-Stat (p-value) | t (p-value) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Young Voters (18 – 24 Years Old) | 6.53 | 2.000 | 2.710 (0.100) | 4.283 (0.000) |
| Elders (25+) | 7.09 | 1.896 | | |

In conclusion, among Thais, young people's attachment to electoral politics is somewhat weaker than the political participation of elders by a statistically significant difference. Political activities among youths can be explained by personal experiences that would be different depending on the debate over current political issues and social networks that influence individuals and the age groups to which they belong.

Many scholars mention young people's lack of political involvement. However, the research findings described above, show that young people are not necessarily any less interested in politics than previous generations. A new alternative hypothesis is found when the researcher examines whether young people have disengaged from politics, as many critics commonly lament, and finds the political arena has become disconnected from the lifestyle of young people. Further research on similar topics related to young voters' political engagement should focus on the concerns associated with contemporary youth culture and other social factors such as social classes, institutional affiliation and civic education. One of the most common recommendations people often provide is that improving civic education should be a top priority on the national agenda.

A school curriculum with an emphasis on civic participation should be suggested so that students realize the importance of government and politics. Even though the potentially dangerous attitude of accepting a corrupt government is found widely among Thai youths, they should be informed that politics are still important in Thailand as it is a democratic country. A school curriculum that informs Thai youths about why politics matter to all people as well as to their personal lives could benefit students greatly. The public political participation and citizens' engagement in a society can measure the well-being of a democratic body. The future health of democracy depends on how young citizens are involved in political activities today.

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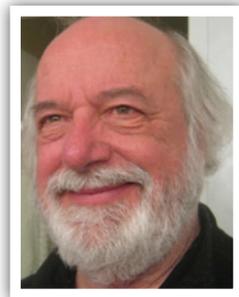
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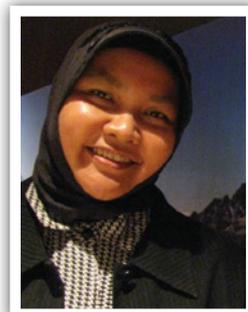
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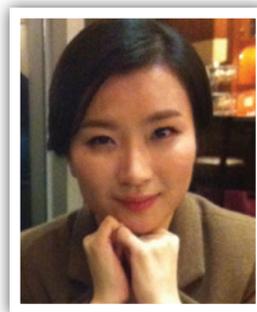
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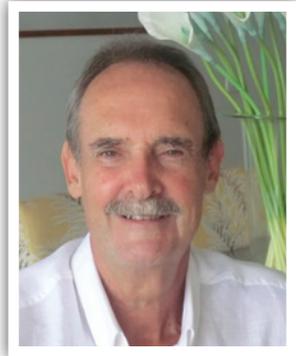
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*"Young Voters. There're Back! The Impact of the Youth Vote and Social Media on Elections in Asia/Pacific?"* is a compilation of 10 chapters covering eleven nations in which our contributors from Malaysia, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand (Australasia), South Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia and Taiwan examine trends and outcomes surrounding recent elections in these countries.

Contributions by: Ibrahim Suffian (Malaysia), Dr Norman Abjorensen (Australia); David Black, Arina Dafir, Philip Behnke (Singapore); Primastuti Handavani (Indonesia), Noppadon Kannika (Thailand); Park Han-na, Yoon Min-sik (South Korea); Alan Fong (Taiwan), Stephen Mills (New Zealand); Vladymir Licudine, Christian Michael Entoma (Philippines); Nalaka Gunawardene, Chanuka Wattegama (Sri Lanka).

Topics include:
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- Digital electioneering
- How social media can make a difference
- How important is voting to young people?
- Detailed polling of political trends