

Youth and Patriotism Values for the Malaysian Nation-State

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Abstract

The decline in patriotic values among Malaysian youth is a growing concern. Thus, a qualitative case study was conducted using a semi-structured interview with seven selected experts in Malaysia to identify the role of youth in shaping Malaysian national patriotic values. The declining levels of patriotism among Malaysian youth are attributed to a lack of interest in political engagement, the inadequate role of leaders in nurturing these values, and the enduring influence of colonial policies. To counter this trend, the youth must fortify their identity, cultivate patriotism rooted in the Malaysian Constitution, and embrace local wisdom.

Keywords: Value of Patriotism; Youth; Malaysia; Experts' Perception

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1.0 Introduction

The erosion of patriotism among young people is a growing concern nowadays. Recent statistics presented by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi indicate that the Malaysian Youth Index (IBM) score declined to 58.64% in 2022 from 60.31% the previous year due to a decrease in youth awareness and commitment towards political activities, national affairs, and democracy following the 15th General Election (GE15) (Bernama, 2023). Even more worrying, the IBM score continued to decrease in 2023 to 58.63%, falling into the unsatisfactory category (score 50-59%). This dilemma of self-identity has adversely affected the national ethos necessary for realizing the goal of building a stable Malaysian nation in the future. Currently, the primary focus of youth is on survival, alongside the negative influence of social media, and the appreciation of patriotic values is only learned in history subjects at school (Nusi, 2022). Moreover, the political mindset of young people is challenging to understand and unclear (Ismail et al., 2023), which has led to extraordinary results in the 2018 and 2022 general elections. The youth also constitute the largest swing voters compared to other voter groups (Mohd Basori & Awang Besar, 2020), contributing to the government's imbalance and instability to this day (Mohamad Zan,

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2023). The lowering of the voting age to 18 is also viewed as detrimental, as these young voters are often unaware of the democratic process in Malaysia during GE, making their choices in leadership influenced by their desire to act as political observers, remain silent, and avoid involvement in national politics (Allam et al., 2025).

Furthermore, statistics from the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) also show that the pattern of involvement related to terrorist movements in Malaysia mainly involves young people aged between 20 and 30 years old (Nordin et al., 2024). This is supported by Ismail et al. (2021), who state that the psychosocial development of youth at this age is highly complex, characterized by a strong tendency towards novelty, a love for exploring life, and a desire to test societal boundaries and try new experiences. They are in a dilemma of searching for their own identity, thus emphasizing the importance of fostering a national ethos to build a Malaysian nation-state in the future. Youth need to be trained to become leaders capable of leading communities, institutions, or organizations, including state and federal governments, so that they can positively influence their followers in making decisions that embody leadership qualities (Abdullah et al., 2024). Every country in the world requires a strong sense of identity to ensure the nation's sustainability, stability, and progress. National identity encompasses noble values, culture, history, language, and the spirit of patriotism, which form the core of a country's identity (Khalid et al., 2021). Although countries differ in their religions, ethnicities, and cultures, the need to possess a sense of identity is a universal, shared necessity. Without a strong sense of identity, external elements can easily influence a country, cause it to lose direction, and pose threats to national unity. Therefore, each nation must strengthen its sense of identity through the education system, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the inculcation of nationalist values so that citizens can be proud of and defend their national identity. This shared sense of identity demonstrates that a strong national identity is fundamental in building a sovereign, competitive, and reputable country on the international stage (Abdullah et al., (Eds.), 2022). Thus, the spirit of patriotism must be instilled and nurtured within the youth to produce a stable and sustainable future leadership generation. Therefore, this study aims to explore expert perceptions of young people in shaping national patriotic values for Malaysia.

2.0 Literature Review

Youth are the architects of the country's future, playing a role as the backbone and pillar in building the Malaysian nation-state. The Youth Organizations and Youth Development (Amendment) Act 2019 (Act 688) has set the age range for youth in Malaysia from 15 to 30 years old. Within this age group, it is essential to emphasize the importance of national ethos in shaping Malaysia's future nation-state, with individual identity encompassing traits, character, attitude, ethics, personality, and confidence in particular issues that reflect the characteristics of a country's societal spirit (Ismail et al., 2021). Yusop et al. (2024) found that youths' understanding of identity and patriotism is at a reasonable level, and they hold positive perceptions of both concepts, which are relevant and helpful in maintaining national harmony. However, racial issues remain a significant challenge in their implementation among Malaysia's diverse youth population. This is acknowledged by Saiman (2023), who state that Malaysia's multi-ethnic society requires strong shared bonds to unite and reduce racial conflicts, ensuring harmonious relations within a complex society (Ramli et al., 2023).

Next, new media is seen to have a positive impact on Malaysian youth by creating communication networks for disseminating national information (Zainal et al., 2021) through social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok (Nazri & Mustafa, 2024). Allam et al. (2025) also discussed the issue of 18-year-old voters and automatic voter registration as a step toward more mature, fair, and equitable democratization to enhance the nation's social and political development. This is based on the implementation of the 2019 Amendment to Article 119 of the Bill, which has transformed the conventional political landscape into a modern one (Roslan & Tan, 2024). Zullaile et al. (2023) noted that there is a need to develop guidelines for selecting election candidates for youth, enabling the democratization process to run more effectively and transparently. This is supported by Abd Rahman et al. (2024), who state that youth political involvement among students can foster a sense of patriotism, strengthening youth identity and maturity in Malaysia (Muda, 2024). Furthermore, the *Rukun Negara* philosophy, which has been the foundation of Malaysia since its inception, can enhance patriotic values in Malaysia's diverse society, especially among the youth (Muslim et al., 2023). It is concluded that the spirit and values of patriotism are crucial to cultivate and instill in every Malaysian youth so that their sense of identity and national ethos remain strong, enabling them to defend their religion, race, and country in the future.

Table 1. The *Rukun Negara* Philosophy

Principles	Descriptions
Belief in God	This principle emphasizes the importance of religion and spirituality in shaping individuals and promoting ethical behavior.
Loyalty to the King and Country	This principle underscores the significance of allegiance to the Malaysian monarchy and the nation, fostering a sense of patriotism and national identity.
Supremacy of the Constitution	This principle highlights the paramount importance of the Federal Constitution as the supreme law of the land, ensuring a just and fair society.
Rule of Law	This principle emphasizes the importance of upholding the law and ensuring that all citizens are treated equally under the legal system.
Courtesy and Morality	This principle promotes ethical conduct, respect for others, and the development of a gracious and moral society.

(Source: Hamid et al., 2021)

Youth, patriotism, and *Rukun Negara* are closely linked in the effort to build a united and progressive Malaysia. Youth are the foundation of the nation's future, and their mindset, values, and actions will shape the country's direction. Instilling patriotism in young people is essential to nurturing a generation that is proud of its heritage, loyal to its nation, and willing to contribute positively to society. The *Rukun Negara*, Malaysia's national philosophy, plays a crucial role in guiding young people toward these ideals. Its five principles — Belief in God, Loyalty to King and Country, Supremacy of the Constitution, Rule of Law, and Courtesy and Morality — provide a

strong moral and civic framework (Anuar et al., 2025). These principles encourage youth to appreciate Malaysia's diversity, uphold democratic values, and respect national institutions. Through education, national events, and community engagement, the principles of the *Rukun Negara* are introduced and reinforced among youth. This cultivates a sense of national identity and pride, which strengthens patriotic values. When youth understand and internalize the *Rukun Negara*, they become more responsible, respectful, and committed citizens. Thus, the integration of *Rukun Negara* into youth development is essential for fostering patriotism and ensuring long-term national unity and harmony.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study design, with the primary research instrument being a semi-structured interview conducted with seven distinguished experts from public universities (PUs) and selected institutions across Malaysia (refer to Table 2), utilizing purposive sampling. The sampling technique used in this study included five participants (Darusalam & Hussin, 2018). The interview data were meticulously analyzed through thematic analysis, facilitated by ATLAS.ti9 software, revealing two overarching themes: (i) Youth and national development and (ii) The patriotic values embodied by Malaysian youth. The identified themes, meticulously established by the research team, fully align with the study's objectives.

Table 2. Participant's Coding of the Study

Institutions	Codes
Institute of Ethnic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)	P1
Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya (UM)	P2
Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)	P3
Faculty of Islamic Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA)	P4
Malaysia Youth Council (MYC)	P5
MADANI Research Centre (MRC)	P6
National Sports Institute (NSI)	P7

(Source: Study Sampling)

4.0 Findings

This section presents the results of the semi-structured interview.

4.1 Youth and National Development

Table 3 below summarizes the study's results. Based on the feedback from P1-P7, it is concluded that youth are an asset to a nation and have the potential to become future leaders, playing a role as agents of socialization in terms of ethnicity, politics, and economics. However, economic stability is currently a priority for youth in ensuring daily survival through active involvement in the e-commerce and gig economy sectors, which subsequently influences their sense of patriotism.

Table 3. Participant's Feedback

P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
- Youth challenges: issues of identity and lack of unity in thinking. - Dependence on the short-term and flexible gig economy. - Economic stability is a priority for young people to ensure their survival.	- Youth are a key component of the nation, energetic, physically capable, and sharp-minded. - Youth challenges: loss of focus on main priorities and digitalization issues. - Active on social media as an influencer, active involvement in e-commerce, and quick access to the latest information. - Swift in assisting in community welfare aspects.	- Youth as the future generation of national leadership. - Youth face challenges in participating in national development. - Challenges include economic instability, limited career prospects, and the impact of globalization. - The role of the media needs to be strengthened to empower young people to contribute to national development.	- Youth challenges: issues of identity and socialization. - Prominent in the field of IT. - Possess leadership values that need to be translated into practical applications. - Significant influence in shaping national policies.	- Youth are an asset to a developed nation. - They need to be given space and opportunities in national development. - They play a role as agents of socialization in terms of ethnicity, politics, and economics.	- Drivers of national development, particularly in socio-politics and economics. - Determinants of the country's future leadership. - Youth strength: openness to new ideas and technology. - Challenges: exposed to external influences, both positive and negative.	- Malaysian youth are consistently competitive every year, as measured by the Malaysian Youth Index. - Challenges: economic, social, political, and technological. - All ministries play a crucial role in the development of youth.

P= Participant

(Source: Study Interview)

Malaysian youth are recognized as vital assets and future leaders of the nation, known for their energy, technological proficiency, and openness to innovation. However, they encounter significant challenges, including identity crises, lack of unity, economic instability, globalization, and overreliance on the gig economy. While they are active on social media and capable of influencing communities, they often lose sight of national priorities. To address this, they need more substantial support through leadership opportunities, unity

initiatives, and media empowerment. Ultimately, youth development requires coordinated efforts across ministries to ensure their effective contribution to socio-political, economic, and national progress.

4.2 The Patriotic Values Embodied by Malaysian Youth

Patriotism refers to the willingness to sacrifice for the country, advance the homeland, feel a sense of belonging, appreciate citizenship, safeguard national sovereignty, and ensure the welfare and rights of the people are protected. A lack of interest in politics contributes to the declining level of patriotism among young people each year, as leaders fail to play an active role in fostering these values, and the lingering effects of colonial policies persist. Therefore, young people need to strengthen their religious, ethnic, and national identities, foster patriotism based on the Malaysian Constitution, and adopt local wisdom.

"Patriotism refers to the willingness to sacrifice for the country. It involves internal aspects (soul and spirit) and external aspects (practical). Economic stability influences patriotism" (P1)

"The value of patriotism is fading among youth. This means playing a role in advancing our country. When we talk about the nation and its people, one important aspect is advancing the country" (P2)

"I see the implementation of patriotism has not yet reached a commendable level. Their understanding of leadership and patriotism in Malaysia is very weak. Not every leader plays their role" (P3)

"For me, this is very weak. As young people in this era, we need to have a sense of identity in terms of religion, ethnicity, and nationality. For the author, it goes back to the Constitution. Patriotism is local wisdom. Patriotism is a sense of belonging to the dimensions we have" (P4)

"Patriotism is an important aspect of youth development. The foundation of patriotism needs to be translated through practical programs" (P5)

"We inherited the effects of the British divide-and-rule policy, which led to the separation of the major ethnic groups in this country. After 1969, we realized that our problem was building a national identity. We do not expect all youth to have the same mindset, but at least it should be dominant. Unity programs should be based on the principles of the Rukun Negara from a young age, appreciating the value of citizenship that we have... ensuring the rights of the people are protected" (P6)

"...It touches on patriotism and the spirit of unity... we find that the comparison between 2022 and 2023 shows a decline... I think one important aspect is the element of morality and ethics, based on values" (P7)

Experts emphasize that youth patriotism is rooted in inner values such as identity, morality, and spirituality, as well as external actions like unity, leadership, and civic engagement. However, it is being undermined by economic pressures, inadequate leadership, and colonial legacies. To strengthen it, there is a need for guidance from the constitution and Rukun Negara, practical programs, and ethical education to foster unity and a sense of national responsibility.

5.0 Discussions

Youths are a key component of a nation and an asset to a developed country. As the future generation of national leadership, their energetic characteristics, high physical abilities, and sharp thinking make them suitable for active involvement in national development, especially in socio-political and economic fields. However, today's youth face various challenges in social, political, financial, and technological areas. Issues such as identity, socialization, digitalization, and globalization expose them to external influences, both positive and negative. This is supported by Ismail et al. (2021), who state that youth tend to be highly attracted to new things, enjoy exploring life, and have a desire to test societal boundaries. Additionally, youth excel in IT and modern technology, which is their strength in quickly and efficiently spreading national information (Zainal et al., 2021). Furthermore, economic stability is a priority for youth to ensure their survival through active involvement in e-commerce and the gig economy. This situation has affected their sense of patriotism, creating a dilemma in finding a national identity as hoped for by the Malaysian government.

Patriotism refers to the attitude and feeling of love, loyalty, and pride for the country, expressed through actions that contribute to the nation's well-being and progress. It is crucial in shaping responsible, ethical, and united citizens in advancing the country. In the Malaysian context, the level of patriotism among youth is declining each year, despite their good understanding of identity and patriotism, as stated by Yusop et al. (2024). This is supported by P1, who states that patriotism involves two main aspects: internal aspects related to the soul and spirit, and external aspects focused on practical actions. The foundation of patriotism should be translated into physical programs (P5), such as unity programs based on the principles of the Rukun Negara from a young age (P6) within Malaysia's diverse society (Muslim et al., 2023). Youth are also encouraged to build their identity in terms of religion, ethnicity, and nationality, foster patriotism based on ethics, civilization, the Malaysian Constitution, and local wisdom, with a sense of belonging to the existing national dimensions (P4). Therefore, it is believed that this approach can help young people appreciate the value of citizenship, ensure the protection of people's rights, and produce patriotic, civilized youth who will guarantee sustainable and stable national leadership in the future.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

In sum, the role of youth in fostering and sustaining patriotic values is pivotal to the development and cohesion of the Malaysian nation-state. As Malaysia continues to navigate the complexities of a multicultural society within an increasingly globalized world, the inculcation

of patriotism among its younger generation emerges as a critical national imperative. This entails not only a deep appreciation of the country's historical trajectory and constitutional foundations but also an active engagement with national ideals such as unity, civic responsibility, and social justice. Educational institutions, governmental policies, and civil society must work collaboratively to create environments that nurture informed, critical, and committed citizens. Ultimately, empowering youth with a strong sense of national identity and belonging is essential to ensuring the resilience and integrity of Malaysia's democratic and pluralistic framework in the years to come. This study offers a novel perspective by exploring how Malaysian youth perceive and embody patriotism in the context of current sociopolitical realities, digital influence, and globalization. Unlike previous studies that may focus on historical or traditional conceptions of patriotism, this research investigates how new generations redefine national loyalty and civic responsibility. This study contributes to the development of a localized theoretical framework of patriotism among youth, grounded in the Malaysian socio-cultural and political context. It enhances existing models of civic nationalism with culturally nuanced dimensions relevant to Southeast Asia.

To strengthen patriotism among Malaysian youth, it is recommended that policymakers, educators, and community leaders adopt a holistic and inclusive approach that integrates patriotic education across formal and informal learning environments. Educational curricula should be revised to include more interactive and experiential civic learning that emphasizes national history, democratic values, and multicultural understanding. Furthermore, youth engagement programs—such as national service, community volunteering, and leadership development initiatives—should be expanded and made more accessible to cultivate a stronger sense of national identity and civic responsibility. Media and digital platforms, which significantly influence youth attitudes and perceptions, should also be strategically utilized to promote positive narratives of patriotism that are inclusive, relevant, and reflective of Malaysia's plural society. These efforts must be underpinned by consistent evaluation and research to ensure their effectiveness in nurturing a generation that is not only proud of its national heritage but also actively committed to the nation's future.

The current study recognizes several limitations. Firstly, the small sample size of seven experts restricts the generalizability of the findings, as the perspectives may not fully represent the diverse experiences of Malaysian youth across various socio-economic, cultural, and regional contexts. Secondly, the qualitative case study approach, while offering depth, limits the ability to conduct broader statistical analysis that could enhance the study's empirical basis. Thirdly, the reliance on expert perceptions rather than direct engagement with youth participants creates potential gaps in understanding how young people themselves internalize patriotic values.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct larger-scale studies that combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of youth patriotism in Malaysia. Surveys and focus groups with youth from different states and ethnic groups could offer more profound insights into their lived experiences, identity formation, and socio-political engagement. Comparative studies with other multicultural nations could also highlight best practices in fostering patriotism within diverse societies. Additionally, longitudinal research could track changes in youth patriotism over time, particularly in relation to the evolving digital landscape, political developments, and the impact of global cultural trends.

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Paper Contribution to the Related Field of Study

Children / Youth Environment

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