

Background

Global Bersih (GB) has worked to enfranchise overseas voters effectively for many years. In 2019, GB compiled all the needed reforms in a document and has advocated these recommendations in recent years. Some of GB's recommendations that have been implemented in recent times have resulted in a significant increase in the numbers of overseas voters and made it easier for overseas Malaysians to exercise their right to vote and, at the same time, improved the efficiency of the system. The recommendations that have been implemented are :

- The implementation of Automatic Voters Registration (AVR)
- Lowering of voting age to 18 (Undi 18)
- The introduction of online registration for overseas voters on the Election Commission(EC) platform
- Inclusion of Malaysians living in Singapore, South Thailand, Brunei, and Kalimantan in the overseas postal voting system.
- Removal of the requirement for overseas Malaysians to have been in Malaysia for 30 days in the last five years before the registration date.

The implementation of Undi18 and Automatic Voters Registration (AVR) alone has caused a growth of 42% from 14.9 million in GE14 to 21.1 million voters in the previous electoral roll in Malaysia¹. Many of these "new" voters qualify as overseas voters.

Thanks to the above reforms and other factors influencing this increase, it is undeniable that the number of overseas Malaysians entitled to vote will increase further. There were 7979² registered overseas postal voters for GE14, and in GE15, the numbers jumped to 48 109³ registered overseas voters, which indicated a drastic increase of 603%.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the population of the Malaysian diaspora already stood at 1,860,037 as of 2020⁴.

The recent GE15 again showed that even after implementing these recommendations, there is still a need to improve the existing system and find a short way to navigate the most significant limitation of not having enough time for the ballots to be received and sent back; the short campaign period.

Below are the crucial changes needed to ensure an effective overseas postal voting process for the upcoming elections. These recommendations are based on

- Overseas Voting Reform Proposal (Global Bersih, 2019).⁵
- Discussions with stakeholders such as overseas voters, Election Commission, political parties, Wisma Putra, and other NGOs.

¹ <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/index.php/s/364145>

² <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/index.php/s/364145>

³ <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2022/11/15/ge15-ec-issues-365686-postal-ballot-papers/>

⁴ https://www.un.org/en/file/105459/download?token=oh_ySkJg

⁵ <https://www.globalbersih.org/resources/overseas-voting-reform-proposal/>

- Observation and data collection from GE14 and GE15

Recommendations for the Election Commission

1. We strongly recommend extending the campaign period to at least 21- 25 days to accommodate overseas postal voting logistics. Currently, the seven days minimum requirement of campaign days under Regulation 3(1) Elections (Conduct of Elections) Regulations 1981⁶ does not reflect the reality of the overseas postal voting timeline, which is impossible to accommodate within the eleven days minimum period.
2. Instead of the current narrow time frame, allow overseas Malaysians to register as overseas postal voters six months before the projected election dates, to remove the time pressure on EC and the applicants.
3. Open verification of the voter's identity in Form 2 to non-Malaysians and not limited to Malaysian citizens.
4. Standardise and communicate the process of overseas ballot dispatch from the Pusat Pengeluaran Undi to overseas Malaysians.
5. Permanently entrench the status of Malaysians residing overseas as voters in legislation instead of having to gazette them as postal voters for each election.
6. More effective overseas voter education and mobilisation by distributing accurate and updated information using all possible channels, especially the Malaysian Foreign Mission and agencies responsible for students, whose assistance should be explicitly solicited by the EC.
7. Shorten the ballot timeline, from when the ballots are printed to when they are returned to the Returning Officers, by introducing more electronic elements in the postal voting process, such as printable PDF voting documents.

For more information on the recommendations above, please click here.

Recommendations for Wisma Putra and Malaysian Foreign Missions

1. Even though overseas Malaysians still understand and speak the national language, they are not well versed in the rapid growth of the language in the last years due to not having a chance to use it extensively. Therefore, all the information must be in Bahasa Melayu (BM) and English to ensure effective messaging.
2. MFMs should actively inform/remind Malaysians in their host countries of important dates and deadlines relating to postal voting.
3. Remove all outdated information on the websites and focus on centralised dissemination of accurate, consistent, and updated information.

⁶ *Elections (Conduct of Elections) Regulations 1981, s 3.*

4. A contact person at each Malaysian Foreign Mission specialising in overseas postal voting to guide overseas Malaysians and ensure that the correct information is being shared.
5. Encourage more discussion among the diaspora on electoral matters, e.g., organising or taking part in events or webinars or taking the opportunity at events/functions to disseminate information.
6. Take a non-partisan approach to overseas voters' education and information.
7. Reach out specifically to overseas Malaysian students by working with JPA and MARA to ensure that these students are well-informed and mobilised to vote.
8. To create a fear-free positive environment for the students to engage in democracy or voting-related activities.

How Global Bersih can help

- Provide material for use by MFMs on social media platforms and involve MFMs in an ongoing worldwide voter mobilisation campaign, as we are part of the diaspora and can identify the needs of overseas Malaysian communities.
- Assist MFM in disseminating information among the diaspora through events, social media, and other communication channels.

[For more information on the recommendations above, please click here.](#)

Recommendations for Political Parties

- Take up the overseas postal voting issue - mainly the above recommendations to the EC and Wisma Putra to bring attention to the issues, putting more pressure on EC to make faster reforms.
- Include overseas Malaysians in the social communication campaign of political parties. By addressing overseas Malaysians, specifically on the need to register and vote.

How Global Bersih can help

GB takes pride in being non-political and non-partisan in the local political scene, so these suggestions are made with the aim of bringing reform to the process and not as a lobbying platform for individuals or political parties.

- Gb will be able to provide content that can be used by the political party to be shared on social media as a part of their social media campaign.
- If the politicians come up with materials such as videos encouraging overseas voters to register and vote, Gb can share them with the networks worldwide.

[For more information on the recommendations above, please click here.](#)

Recommendations for the Ministry of Youth and Sports

- Ongoing social media campaign for mobilisation of overseas youth focusing on how to vote and the importance of voting no matter where they are
- Reach out to Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam(JPA) and MARA(Majlis Amanah Rakyat) to include voter education as a part of their orientation for overseas students.
- Encourage overseas students to engage with the local diaspora to exchange ideas by creating a non-partisan, fear-free environment for students to mobilise themselves.
- Work with new age trendsetters such as tik tok influencers to reach out to overseas youth to be interested and informed about voting.

How GB can help

- Identify the needs of the overseas youth and give feedback on what is needed
- Provide non partisan information dissemination.
- Help to create a fear-free environment for the students to engage in democracy or voting-related activities.

Closing

All these recommendations above are essential to ensure that the voting rights of overseas Malaysians are upheld. We have proved our motivation and passion during the last two GE, and now it is time our voices are heard, and actions are taken to enfranchise us in the democratic exercise of Malaysia. The recent GE15 Observation Report by Bersih also reflected that all these recommendations that Global Bersih has been working on for the last few years need to happen to ensure a more effective overseas postal voting system.

The mobilisation of the diaspora and ensuring that Malaysians overseas can vote is consistent with the idea of an inclusive society and respect for all segments of the population, which are the core values of Madani - Sustainability, Prosperity, Innovation, Respect, Trust and Compassion. These core values can be strengthened by engaging more with Malaysians overseas and encouraging them to contribute to Malaysia's development. Involving them more in the democratic process will be a positive step in this direction

Global Bersih remains at your disposal for further communication on this matter, and we are willing to work together to reach out to the diaspora.

Global Bersih is a non-profit organisation established under the Swiss Civil Code. It aims to support Malaysian civil society's efforts to strengthen Malaysia's maturing democracy using peaceful and legal means of action. Global Bersih is proud to be part of the vibrant Swiss civil society as it enables a stronger international platform for it to advocate for its causes, taking advantage of the dynamic international human rights movement in Geneva, a global human rights capital.

We aim to achieve:

- The full and effective fulfilment of Malaysia's right to a free and fair election that includes ensuring transparency of electoral roll, reform of electoral process and procedures, strengthening of public institutions, eradication of corruption and culture of impunity, and enhancing participation of international observers and media to monitor the polls.
- An independent and effective Election Commission of Malaysia, especially in monitoring electoral discrepancies.
- The advancement of human rights, rule of law and democracy in Malaysia.

What We Do

- We provide a global platform for the voices and stories of ordinary Malaysians and civil society to reach out to the international community, in particular international human rights bodies, diplomatic missions, foreign media and civil society.
- We enrich local and international exchanges of Malaysian issues, both in Malaysia and abroad to feed into national efforts related to electoral reform.
- We galvanize support and increase commitment from Malaysians across the globe towards creating a stronger international momentum for electoral and democratic reform in Malaysia.
- We carry out training and capacity building to encourage overseas Malaysians to participate in the civil society and electoral process.
- We promote all the above through peaceful and constructive dialogue.

For more info

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