Perception and Attitudes toward Terrorism in a Muslim Majority Country

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Abstract

The purpose of this research article is to examine and to ascertain whether general public in a Muslim majority country do support organized violence and terrorism. The discussion focuses on Malaysia as a case study. The study adopted a quantitative approach with questionnaires being used as the instrument for data collection. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results show that the Malaysian public do not support terrorism. The findings also found that ethnicity and religiosity have important bearings toward political violence and terrorism. Malay-Muslims, for instance, tend to exhibit some inclinations toward aggressive attitude compared to that of non-Malay Muslims. Furthermore, the study also found that gender, race, religion and occupation do play a part in determining perception on acts of terror.

Keywords: Terrorism, Political violence, Public perception and attitudes

1. Introduction

Terror attacks and political violence do occur in many parts of the world – in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Northern Ireland, North Korea, and even in the United States of America (US) – to name a few (Fair 2007; Aryasinha, 2006; Kivimäki, 2003a; Gunaratna, 2002; Lee, 1983). Those attacks were usually politically motivated. The violence was justified in response to tyranny, corrupted administration, exploitation; corruption,

social injustice, genocide, and suppression (Sukma, Abdullah, & Jamhari, 2011; Laitin & Shapiro, 2008; Bergesen & Lizardo, 2004; Mazarr, 2004; Kegley, 2002; Loiuse, 2002). However, in the post-9/11 period, there have been tendencies among the Western community to relate terrorism and violence to Islam and Muslims (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007; Osman, 2005, Haddad & Khashan 2002). Islam is labeled as a religion which promotes terrorism and encourages its followers to cause violence (Gabriel 2002). For example, Kivimäki (2003b) specifically relates Islam to terrorism. In the case of Indonesia, he suggests that,

> [t]he intensification of Islamic terrorists activities in Indonesia has surprised many students of Indonesian culture and religion. Did Indonesian religious practices not represent the most relaxed and tolerant form of Islam? (Kivimäki, 2003b, p 15)

Furthermore, a study undertaken by Berry, Gibbs, Hudson, Karacan, Kollars, & Miro (2003) identifies several countries that have problems with political violence and terrorist threats (Berry, Gibbs, Hudson, Karacan, Kollars, & Miro, 2003). The study points out that India, with a substantial number of Muslim populations, is one of the countries that has suffered from violence and has a continuous track record on terrorist activities. According to the study, India experiences five cases of internal rebellion, excluding conflicts in Kashmir. There have been about 100 domestic terrorist groups moving actively in the country. Interestingly, the study also has also found that Monaco has become an international centre for political violence activities. This is due to its geographic location, which is sandwiched between France and Italy that allows this sovereign city state as one of the centers for Italian and Russian Mafia groups.

Hence, it is fair to suggest at this juncture that terrorism is universal in nature and the perpetrators are not confined to only Muslim majority countries. Furthermore, statistics released by the US government even suggest that there were more violence acts committed by non-Muslims than by Muslims (Masud 2003, p. 20). Even though some of the acts of terror were committed by Muslims, it is rather premature to suggest that Islam promotes violence. Masud (2003, p. 20) suggests that the world should study and try to understand reasons and motives behind the act of terrors committed by Muslims. He further argues that the acts of violence committed by Muslims symbolise the responses from the Muslims towards the invasions of Islamic countries by the world super powers led by the United States.

Terrorism, as many experts on the field argue, is a form of violence with political purpose, and requires political response (Al-Rashid, 2005; Aydinli & Ali, 2011; Esposito, 2002; Gunaratna, 2002; Gunaratna & Aviv, 2010; Hoffman, 2010, 2006; Kurtulus 2011; Lanquer, 1987; Tan, 2007). The perpetrators with a political aim tend to carry out their attacks against targets that are carefully chosen with political calculation. States, governments, and their strategic interests have become major target for terrorist attacks. States subsequently have no choice but to react with various counter terrorism approaches. Yet, while researching the attackers and its targets is certainly important in counter-terrorism research, the third actor – the general public – also requires our attention. This is because public responses to terrorism significantly influence policy options of the government, and public responses at the time of terror incidents gain little systematic attention in the counter terrorism efforts.

The above argument begs us to answer a very fundamental question, how do the public reconcile with terrorist attacks? Do public perceptions in a Muslim majority country like Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan or Uzbekistan differ from one another? How do they perceive terrorism? Some studies have been made on public perception of terror and political violence in Western countries, especially in the aftermath of the September 11 incidents (Stevens et. al., 2011; Jore, 2007; Lemyre, Turner, Lee, & Krewski, 2006; Goodwin, Willson, & Stanley Jr., 2005; Lewis, 2005; Crenshaw, 1995).

But, we are yet to see a systematic; cross cultural study on public understanding of terrorism especially in Southeast Asian, a region with substantial number of Muslim populations and, that has been identified as the second front of the US's Global War against Terrorism (Chalk, Rabasa, Rosenau & Piggott, 2009; Tan, 2007).

Hence, the objective of this article is to investigate Malaysian public perception and attitudes on terrorism and political violence. Malaysia is chosen as a case study since it is a multi religious and multiracial country, yet Islam is an official religion. Muslims represent roughly 60% of total population. Constitutionally, the Malays, the largest ethnic group, are Muslim. Other major ethnic groups include the Chinese, Indians, Iban, and Kadazan. Most of them are Buddhist, Hindus, or Christians. Hence, this article would contribute further to our understanding of how general public in a Muslim majority country, with substantial non-Muslim populations perceive political violence and terrorism. At the same time, the article investigates factors that affecting those attitude and perception.

2. Theoretical Framework

Perception on political violence or terrorism (PERCTERROR) is influenced by attitude towards the acts of terror (ATTACT) (Stevens et. al., 2011; Crenshaw, 1995). Individuals who exhibit a more aggressive attitude tend to support political terror and vice-versa. However, it can also be argued that ATTACT plays only a mediating role since other variable such as demography (e.g. gender, age, education, income, etc.), interest in politics, extremist view on religion and experiences on acts of terror could also play an influential role (Stevens et. al., 2011; Sukma et. al., 2011; Esposito & Mogahed, 2007; Martha, 1995;). It must be appreciated that demographic variables represent the sociological and economic dimension of understanding one's perception as proposed by Esposito and Mogahed (2007). Furthermore, Esposito and Mogahed (2007) also suggest that individuals who have deep interest in politics (POLITICS) and prescribe to extremism in religion (RELIGIOSITY) tend to be more aggressive in their attitudes and vice-versa. At the same time, people who have been the victims of acts of terror in the past tend to have less aggressive attitudes.

PERCTERROR is also influenced by perception on the government of the day (PERCGOD) (Terdman 2007). PERCGOD includes government's measures to protect state security, national policies, or government management or service delivery or even effort to eradicate corruption. The expectation is that those who are satisfied with the performance of the government of the day is expected to be less supportive of terrorism, vice-versa.

Interestingly, Silong, Hassan, Krausse's study (2008, p. 725) reveals that religious belief or ideology is the least cited reason for the increasing support for violence acts among people in the Muslim world. Their findings were also in contrast to Esposito and Mogahed's (2007) who have suggested that religion is one of the factors which contribute to one's support towards terrorism. Instead, Silong et. al. (2008, p. 725) suggest that major powers' behaviour such as US's domineering foreign policies and its unilateral approach to gain control over natural resources of other countries were at the top on the list. Silong et. al.'s findings are consistent with the results of a survey conducted by the 2007 World Public Opinion.org in Morocco, Indonesia, Egypt and Pakistan. The World Public's survey suggests that the respondents have a perception that US has an agenda to weaken Islam and to isolate Muslims from the rest of the world (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). Silong et.al.'s (2008) findings also show that perception on US foreign policies (PERCUS) is another important independent variable to understand further public perception on contemporary terrorism issues. It can be argued that those who are in favour of US foreign policies tend not to support terrorism, vice-versa.

At the same time, local and international media reported news on terrorist activities and incidences might also influence public perception on the issue. Esposito and Mogahed's study on public perception on selected countries show that perception on media (PERCMEDIA) affects perception on political violence (PERCTERROR). It is fair to postulate that individuals who perceive media as reporting the truth to perceive that acts of terror, from both sides – the militants and the authority – are justifiable and therefore support terrorism, vice-versa.

Kimivaki (2003, pp. 4-5) suggests religious tolerance (TOLERANCE) as another influential variable to people's perception on violence and terrorism. His study on Indonesia shows that a positive correlation exists between TOLERANCE and PERCTERROR.

Finally, perception on terrorism is also affected by one's SENSITIVITY towards hostile or aggressive cues (Dodge & Schwartz, 1997, pp. 171–180). However, this study takes a different path of argument with regards to sensitivity. Instead of measuring sensitivity towards hostile cues, this study examines sensitivity towards the sufferings of the victims of terrorism as a major focal point. In line with this argument, it is fair to expect that individual Muslims, who are sensitive to the sufferings of fellow Muslims, are expected not to be supportive of terrorism and vice-versa.

Therefore, it can be concluded at this stage that PERCTERROR is expected to be influenced by ATTACT, PERCGOD, PERCUS, PERCMEDIA, TOLERANCE and SENSITIVITY. At the same time, ATTACT is expected to be determined by RELIGIOSITY, POLITICS as well as demographic variables such as age, gender or income groups.

3. Methodology

3.1 Population and Sampling

The population of the study was identified as students of tertiary institutions (both public and private), civil servants and the groups which have no direct access to government polity. In order to have a good possible representation of the Malaysian public within the pre-determined sample size, a stratified but purposive sampling

technique was used. The sample was selected from five different regions, i.e. (1) central region of the Peninsula of Malaysia, (2) southern region of the Peninsula, (3) northern region of the Peninsula, (4) eastern region of the Peninsula, and (5) East Malaysia, which consists of the states of Sabah and Sarawak. At the end of the data collection process, there were 1,200 subjects for the analyses.

3.2 Instruments

A questionnaire was developed and used to solicit information from the respondents. All items used were close-ended in nature to allow easier quantitative analyses. The questionnaire was divided into six sections. Section A requires the respondents to provide some demographic information. Questions with regards to other variables identified in the conceptual framework were disguised in the remaining sections. Section B contains items that seek the respondents' opinions on life in Malaysia. Section C attempts to solicit the perception of the respondents on treatments received by Muslims around the world. Section D seeks the respondents' perception on political violence and terrorism. Perception on media was asked in Section E. Finally, Section F contains questions with regards to experiences on acts of terror. In total, there are 71 items altogether in the questionnaire.

3.3 Data Analyses

The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). In addition to descriptive analyses (e.g.: frequencies and means), the study also performed necessary statistical procedures to test for the hypotheses (e.g.: χ^2 for association, Mann-Whitney test and Kruskal-Wallis for differences, and Spearman for correlation, etc.). Despite the large sample size, non-parametric tests were used due to the fact that the distribution of the data is not normal.

4. Results and Discussion

In this study, females represent 64.9% of the respondents. The over representation of female in the survey reflects a changing demography and social structure in Malaysia. Females, for instance, are the largest student body in Malaysian universities. They represent 70% of student population (Samsudin, 2011, p. 14). The higher ratio of female respondents is of benefits to the present study, since there has been a popular assumption that males tend to show a higher tendency towards the acts of terror.

The majority of the respondents (62.%) fall into the age groups of 30 years old and below with 32.2% of them aged between 21 to 25 years old. On the other hand, 32.1% of them belong to the age groups of 31 to 50 years old. Only 5.8 % belong to the age group of 51 years old and above.

Nearly all of (98.65%) of the respondents have completed at least secondary school education. At the same time, 881 or 73.7% of the respondents have tertiary education, i.e. post-secondary school education. 59.9% of the respondents have monthly household income of Malaysian Ringgit (MYR) 2000 (USD 650 at the current prevalent rate) or less. This is due to the fact that some of the respondents are college students who rely on education loans and scholarship to support their livelihood. At the same time, some of the respondents are young individuals who possess secondary school education. It is fair to expect them to fall into those income categories. Only 5.3% of the respondents have household income of more than MYR 5000 (USD 1634) per month.

Respondents represent a wide spectrum of occupations. The largest group of them, 42.4%, represents the public sector. The second largest group (38%) represents students who are both at the secondary school and tertiary levels. The number of employees of the private sector, even though relatively small at 10.9%, is still large enough to allow statistical tests to be performed on them. This is expected since it is quite difficult to get them to cooperate with any form of surveys. Furthermore, 55.7% of the respondents are bachelors while 42.5% are married. The rest of the respondents are either divorced or divorcees or survivors of deceased spouse.

In terms of ethnic background, the majority of respondents or 70.8% of them are Malays. The percentages of Chinese and Indian respondents are 18.1% and 5.6% respectively. The relatively small numbers of Chinese and Indian respondents are expected not to affect the quality of data analyses since the numbers are adequate to perform statistical tests. This variable was later re-coded as Malays and non-Malays. In addition, the majority (73.0%) of the respondents are Muslims. Sixty percent of the respondents come from urban area, while 480 (40%) of them live in the rural area.

4.1 Perception on Political Violence or Terrorism (PERCTERROR)

Perception on political violence or acts of terror (PERCTERROR) is measured using seven indicators. An example of the questions used is "The burning of Metro Tabernacle Church in Kuala Lumpur on 7 January 2010 was an act of terror." Another question to measure PERCTERROR is "The bombing of the JW Marriot Hotel in Jakarta on 17 July 2009 were carried out to respond to all the mistreatments of Muslims around the world."

Based on the seven indicators discussed above, a composite measurement of PERCTERROR was computed as a simple mean of the respondent's score on the seven indicators. For the purpose of the computation, all negative questions were recorded to reflect positivity in the measurement. Thus, higher PERCTERROR score reflects less support of terrorism. The distribution of the respondents according to their PERCTERROR is exhibited in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that based on a scale of one to five, the majority of the respondents do not support terrorism as a means to solve a conflict or to achieve an objective. The mean score of PERCTERROR is 3.14 (standard deviation = 0.407), which suggests that on average; the Malaysian public does not support terrorism.

4.2 Attitude Towards Terror Act (ATTACT)

Attitude towards the act of terror (ATTACT) is measured by using three indicators. Among the questions asked were, "I feel that the Malaysian Air Force should shoot down the Singaporean fighter jets which provocatively enter the Malaysian air space." and "I believe that Malaysia should retaliate if attacked by other countries."

Based on the three indicators, the composite variable of "Attitude towards the Act of Terror" (ATTACT) was computed as a simple mean of the three indicators. Higher scores reflect favourable attitudes towards act of terrors and vice-versa. Prior to the computation of ATTACT, all negative questions were transformed into positive. The distribution of respondents according to their scores on ATTACT is shown in Figure 2. It is evident from Figure 2 that based on a scale of one to five, the majority of the respondents exhibit mixed attitude towards the act of terror. The mean score is 2.78 with a standard deviation of 0.922. The Spearman correlation coefficient between ATTACT and PERCTERROR is 0.170 which is significant at the 1% level. Consistent with the suggestion of the theory, this result suggests that less aggressive individuals (who have favourable attitude) tend not to support terrorism and vice-versa.

Political inclination or interest in politics (POLITIC) and RELIGIOSITY are expected to affect PERCTERROR through their effects on ATTACT. Therefore, the effects of these two variables on ATTACT were tested and discussed below.

4.3 Political Inclination (POLITIC)

Political inclination or interest in politics (POLITIC) was measured using two indicators. The questions asked were "I am interested in politics" and "I frequently engage in discussions on politics with my friends." POLITIC was computed as the simple mean of the two indicators.

It is evident in Figure 3 that in general, Malaysian public is not interested in politics. The mean score of the political interest measure (POLITIC) is 2.76 with a standard deviation of 0.986. Nevertheless, POLITIC is negatively correlated with ATTACT. The Spearman correlation coefficient is -0.142 which is significant at the 1-% level. This result suggests that individuals with deep interest in politics have the tendency to be more aggressive in their attitude, vice-versa.

Therefore, it can be concluded at this juncture that POLITIC is negatively correlated to ATTACT, which is positively correlated to PERCTERROR. This suggests that individuals who have deep interest in politics tend to be more aggressive in their attitudes and thus supporting terrorism, vice-versa.

4.4 Religiosity (RELIGIOSITY)

RELIGIOSITY was measured using four indicators. Among the questions asked were "Life is meaningless without religion" and "I consider myself as a pious person." Later, RELIGIOSITY was computed as the simple mean of the four indicators. It is evident in Figure 4 that the majority of the respondents consider themselves as religious. Based on a scale of one to five, the mean score is 4.34, which suggests high level of religiosity. A Spearman correlation test reveals that there exist a negative correlation between RELIGIOSITY and ATTACT. The Spearman correlation coefficient is -0.245, which is significant at the 1% level. This suggests that religious individuals tend to be more aggressive in their attitude, vice-versa.

Therefore, it can be concluded at this juncture that RELIGIOSITY is negatively correlated to ATTACT, which is positively correlated to PERCTERROR. This suggests that individuals who perceive themselves as religious tend to be more aggressive in their attitudes and thus support terrorism, vice-versa.

4.5 Perception on the Government Of The Day (PERCGOD)

Perception on the government of the day (PERCGOD) has three components, i.e. (i) perception on national policies (NATIONAL POLICIES), (ii) perception on corruption (CORRUPTION), and (iii) perception on the government management (GOVTMANAGEMENT).

NATIONAL POLICIES was measured by using six items or indicators in the questionnaire. Among the items or questions asked were, "Malaysians are free to practice their respective religions" and "Malaysia is a democratic country." NATIONAL POLICIES was later computed as the simple mean of the six items or indicators. Figure 5 reveals that the majority of the respondents perceive favorably on the national policies. Based on a scale of one to five, the mean score is 3.56 with a standard deviation of 0.526.

4.6 Perception on Corruption (CORRUPTION)

Perception on corruption (CORRUPTION) was measured using four indicators. Among the questions asked were, "The Government is serious in eradicating corruption." and "The level of integrity among the leaders of this country is high." Subsequently, CORRUPTION was measured as a simple mean of the six indicators. It is evident in Figure 6 that the respondents do not perceive favorably on the issue of corruption in this country. Based on a scale of one to five, the mean score is 2.78 and the standard deviation is 0.819.

4.7 Perception on the Government Management (GOVTMANAGEMENT)

Perception on government delivery system (GOVTMANAGEMENT) was computed using eleven indicators. Among the questions asked were, "Malaysians enjoy a better quality of life compared to people in other countries", "Malaysians have access to good education" and "Malaysia is a safe country."

GOVTMANAGEMENT, which reflects the effectiveness and the efficiency of Malaysian government in managing the country, was computed as a simple mean of the eleven indicators. It is revealed in Figure 7 that the respondents have a favorable perception of the Malaysian government's service delivery system with a mean score of GOVTMANAGEMENT of 3.72 with a standard deviation of 0.534.

Subsequently, PERCGOD was computed as the simple mean of NATIONAL POLICIES, CORRUPTION and GOVTMANAGEMENT. It is revealed in Figure 8 that the respondents do exhibit favorable perception towards the government of the day. Based on a scale of one to five, the mean score is 3.48 with a standard deviation of 0.52.

A correlation procedure reveals that PERCGOD is positively correlated to PERCTERROR. The Spearman correlation coefficient is 0.217 and is significant at the 1% level. The result suggests that those who are satisfied with the government of the day have the tendency not to support terrorism, vice-versa.

4.8 Sensitivity Towards The Sufferings Of The Victims Of Terrorism (SENSITIVITY)

The respondents' sensitivity towards the sufferings of the victims (SENSITIVITY) is measured by seven indicators. Among the questions asked were, "I am worried that economic sanction against Iran will affect the livelihood of Muslims there" and "I have heartfelt sympathies for the poor living condition of the Afghans caused by invasion of foreign soldiers."

The score of SENSITIVITY was computed as a simple mean of seven indicators. Figure 9 indicates that the majority of the respondents are sensitive and show great sympathy towards the sufferings of Muslims around the world. Based on a scale of one to five, the mean score is 4.05 with a standard deviation of 0.651. At the same time, there exists a positive correlation between SENSITIVITY and PERCTERROR. The Spearman correlation is 0.092 which is significant at the 1% level. This means that as they become more sensitive towards the sufferings of the victims of terrorism, the lesser they support terrorism, vice-versa.

4.9 Perception on U.S Foreign Policies (PERCUS)

Perception on United States (US) foreign policies (PERCUS) was computed using three indicators. Among the questions asked were, "The US-led invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq is also an attack on Islam as a whole" and "The USA and other developed countries are only interested in controlling the natural resources of the less developed nations." PERCUS was computed as a simple mean of the three indicators.

Figure 10 shows that the respondents have favourable perception towards the US foreign policies. Based o a scale of one to five, the mean score is 2.27 with a standard deviation of 0.82. It is worth noting that for PERCUS, lower scores reflect favourable response to US foreign policies, vice-versa. However, their perception on US foreign policies does not affect their perception on terrorism. The Spearman correlation coefficient between PERCUS and PERCTERROR is -0.032 which is not significant at the 5% level.

4.10 Level of Tolerance (TOLERANCE)

Level of tolerance (TOLERANCE) was measured using five indicators. Among the questions asked were, "Malaysians should visit their friends of other faiths during the festive seasons", "Malaysians of all faiths should be able to live harmoniously in the same neighbourhoods" and "Religious tolerance is practiced in this country."

TOLERANCE was computed as a simple mean of five indicators. Figure 11 indicates that the respondents exhibit a relatively high level of tolerance. Based on a scale of one to five, the mean score is 3.81 with a standard deviation of 0.565. However, their tolerance does not affect their perception on terrorism. The Spearman correlation coefficient between TOLERANCE and PERCTERROR is -0.038 and is not significant at the 5% level.

4.11 Perception on Media (PERCMEDIA)

Perception on media (PERCMEDIA) was measured by using five indicators. Among the questions asked were, "The local print media (newspapers, tabloids, magazines) always report the truth about terrorism" and "Western media have the agenda to purposely tarnish the image of Islam."

PERCMEDIA was computed as a simple mean of the five indicators. Figure 12 shows that the Malaysian public does not perceive the media favourably, as far as reporting the incidences of acts of terror are concerned. The mean score of the perception on media (PERCMEDIA) is 2.85 with a standard deviation of 0.728. There exists a negative correlation between PERCMEDIA and PERCTERROR. The Spearman correlation coefficient is -0.291 which is significant at the 1% level. This explains that as the respondents perceive more truthful in the media reporting, the more they would support terrorism as the consequence of frustration.

A question remains; however, do demographic profiles of respondents influence their perception on terrorism? Do gender, marital status or education background influence their perception on terrorism?

(i) *Gender* - The mean rank of ATTACT for male and female respondents is 540.91 and 627.03 respectively. A Mann-Whitney test procedure resulted in Mann-Whitney U statistic of 138283.00, which is significant at the 1% level. This means that the males and females do differ in their attitude towards acts of terror. Further examination of the mean statistics reveals that males tend to be more aggressive in their attitudes as compared to their female counterparts.

(ii) *Age* - A Spearman correlation procedure was run to prove the hypothesis that age is correlated to attitude towards acts of terror (ATTACT). The results indicate that the Spearman correlation coefficient between AGE and ATTACT is -0.041, which is not significant at the 5% level. Therefore, it is safe to say that age is not correlated to attitude towards the acts of terror.

(iii) *Marital status* – A Kruskal-Wallis procedure was used to test the differences in attitudes towards acts of terror (ATTACT) among respondents of different marital status. The Chi-Square statistic is 2.563 and is not significant at the 5% level. This suggests that marital status be it bachelors, divorced/divorcees and widows/widowers do not differ in their attitudes towards the acts of terror.

(iv) *Occupation* – A Kruskal-Wallis procedure was also used to test the differences in attitudes towards acts of terror (ATTACT) among Malaysian public of different occupation categories. The Chi-Square statistic is 15.253, which is significant at the 5% level. This suggests that people of different occupational groups tend to differ in their attitude towards the acts of terror.

(v) *Level of Education* - This variable is re-coded into a dichotomous variable with 1= without tertiary education and 2= with tertiary education. A Mann-Whitney U-Test procedure was used to test the difference in ATTACT between respondents of different education backgrounds. The mean ranks of ATTACT for those without tertiary education and with tertiary education are 573.30 and 603.39 respectively. The Mann-Whitney U statistic is 130042.50 and is not significant at the 5% level. This suggests that the respondents with or without tertiary education do not differ in their attitudes towards the acts of terror (ATTACT).

(vi) *Race* - This variable is re-coded into a dichotomous variable with 1= Malays and 2= non-Malays. The study is interested to test the difference in ATTACT between the Malay and their non-Malay counterparts. The Mann-Whitney U-Test was again being used to prove the difference in ATTACT between the Malays and the non-Malays. The mean rank of ATTACT for the Malays and the non-Malays are 513.76 and 801.07 respectively. The Mann-Whitney U statistic is 76360.00 and is significant at the 1% level. This suggests that the Malays are more aggressive in their attitudes than their non-Malay counterparts.

(vii) *Religion* - The variable is re-coded into a dichotomous variable with 1= Muslims and 2= non-Muslims. The Mann-Whitney U-Test was used to test the hypothesis that the Muslims and non-Muslims do not differ in their ATTACT. The mean rank of ATTACT for the Muslims and non-Muslims are 516.35 and 816.32 respectively. The Mann-Whitney U statistic is 69987.50, which is significant at 1% level. This means that the Muslims tend to exhibit a more aggressive

attitude compared to that of the non-Muslims. This result is expected since the majority of the Muslims are also Malays.

(viii) *Monthly household income* - A Spearman correlation procedure was run to test the correlation between monthly household income (INCOME) and attitude towards acts of terror (ATTACT). The test reveals that the Spearman correlation coefficient is 0.016 and is not significant at the 5% level. This indicates that monthly household income is not correlated to the attitude towards the acts of terror.

Based on the findings discussed above, it is evident that gender, race, religion and occupation do play a part in determining perception on the acts of terror (PERCTERROR). These demographic variables do have bearings on respondents' attitudes towards the acts of terror (ATTACT), which subsequently affect the perception on the acts of terror (PERCTERROR).

5. Conclusion

Based on the discussion and findings above, it can finally be concluded that Malaysian public in general does not support or condone terrorism. Interestingly, however, in general, Malaysians, do believe in aggression as a way to solve conflicts. The study also indicates that the male respondents are more aggressive in their attitude compared to that of their female counterparts. As far as education level is concerned, the less-educated and the better-educated individuals do not differ in their attitudes towards the acts of terror (ATTACT). The findings also reveal that the Malay-Muslim respondents exhibit more aggressive attitudes as compared to their non-Malay and non-Muslim counterparts.

Interest in politics also has a significant effect on one's attitude towards the acts of terror. It is evident in the study conducted that those who have inclination towards politics tend to be more aggressive in their behaviour. This finding does not come as a surprise. Since, terrorism is politically-motivated, it is fair to suggest here that politically-inclined persons tend to express more aggressive attitude. Similar line of argument also explains why religiously inclined individuals tend to be more aggressive in their attitudes. Since terrorism is also religiously-motivated, it is not surprising to expect that more religiously inclined individuals tend to be more aggressive in their attitudes.

The Malaysian public also seems to have a low level of trust on media, both local and foreign, as far as reporting on terrorism is concerned. The fact that this variable is negatively correlated with PERCTERROR suggests that the more they trust the media, the greater would be their frustration as well as their support for terrorism, vice-versa. The findings also indicate that PERCMEDIA is negatively correlated with SENSITIVITY, which suggests that those who believe in the truth of media tend to be less sensitive to the sufferings of the victims of political violence, and at the same time are more supportive to terrorism, vice-versa. However, it is surprising to learn that PERCUS and TOLERANCE do not correlate significantly with PERCTERROR. Even though, in general Malaysians have low perception towards US foreign policies, it does not affect their perception on terrorism. At the same time, there exists no clear pattern in the relationship between TOLERANCE and PERCTERROR.

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Figure 1. Overall respondents' perception on terrorism (PERTERROR)

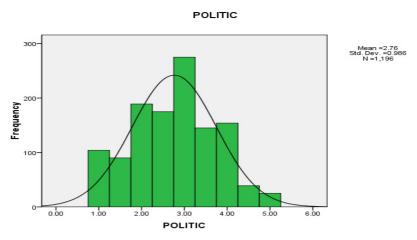Figure 2. The distribution of respondents according to scores of ATTACT

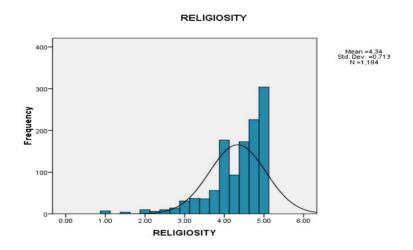Figure 3. The distribution of respondents according to their Political Inclination (POLITIC)

Figure 4. The distribution of respondents according to scores of RELIGIOSITY
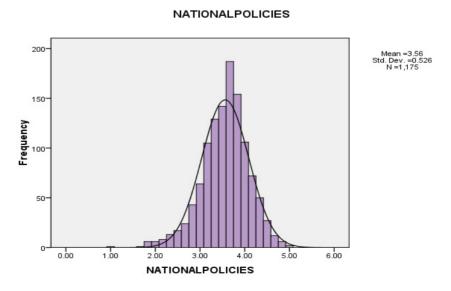

Figure 5. Distribution of the respondents according to their scores on "National Policies"
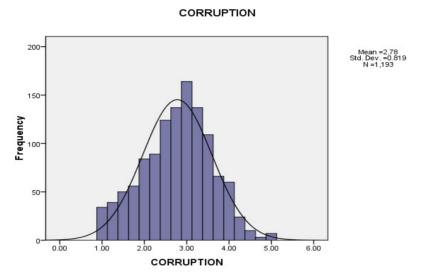
Figure 6. The distribution of the respondents according to their scores on CORRUPTION
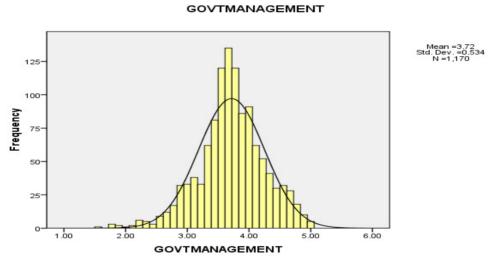

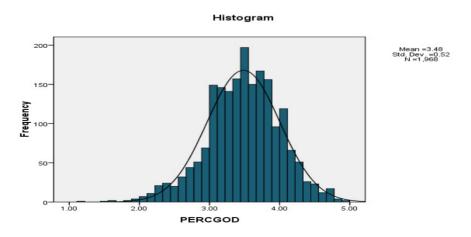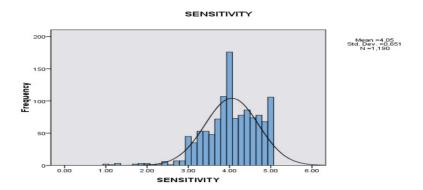Figure 7. Distribution of the respondents according to scores of GOVTMANAGEMENT

Figure 8. Distribution of respondents according to their scores of PERCGOD

Figure 9. The distribution of the respondents according to their scores on SENSITIVITY
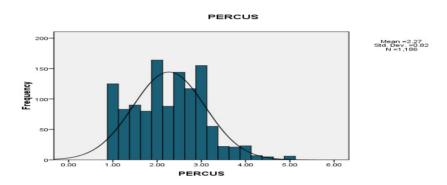

Figure 10. Distribution of the respondents according to scores of PERCUS
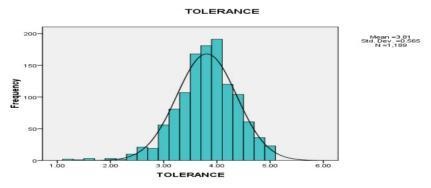

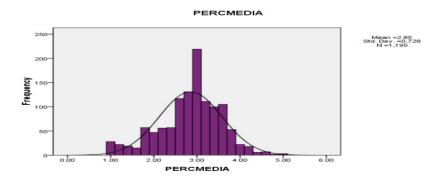Figure 11. Distribution of respondents according to scores of TOLERANCE

Figure 12. Distribution of respondents according to the scores of PERCMEDIA