



THE 13TH MALAYSIA ELECTIONS

ISSUES, TRENDS AND FUTURE TRAJECTORIES

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Edited by
Mohamed Nawab
Bin Mohamed Osman

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Mohamed Nawab Bin Mohamed Osman

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

by Mohamed Nawab Bin Mohamed Osman

The 13th Malaysian Election was dubbed the mother of all elections and was expected to be a game changer in Malaysian electoral politics. The elections turned out to be a setback for both the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) and the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) coalitions. Contrary to expectations that PR would eke out a win and form the next government, the opposition fell substantially short of this stated aim although it won a slim majority of the popular vote, a first for the Malaysian opposition in the country's history. The BN failed to improve on its disappointing showing in the 2008 election, which saw the coalition losing its traditional absolute majority in parliament. In 2013, the coalition lost even more seats, reducing its majority to a mere 28 seats, from a total of 133 seats in the 222-seat parliament. The election was a watershed for several reasons.

1. The ruling coalition lost the popular vote for the first time in the country's history.
2. BN lost seats in several states that have long been known strongholds of the governing coalition, including Johor, Sarawak and Sabah.
3. The results confirmed that a new normal now shapes Malaysian politics, one where there is equal opportunity for either BN or PR to win the political contest. The election also established firmly that a two-party system has become a permanent fixture of Malaysian politics.
4. East Malaysia has emerged as the crucial kingmaker for the next Malaysian government. The race for East Malaysian votes is likely to intensify in the next election.

Political developments in the post-election milieu have further

exacerbated issues of race and religion. In the aftermath of the election, the BN leadership immediately blamed the Chinese electorate for voting en-masse against the ruling coalition. Prime Minister Najib described the election results as a Chinese tsunami whereas the former chief minister of Melaka, Ali Rustam, described the Chinese as an ungrateful lot who were unappreciative of the good that the government had done for the community. Several Malay-rights groups began to demand for the Malaysian government to focus more on enhancing the position of the Malay community and ignore the Chinese and Indian electorates, who they argued did not support the government and hence would not deserve any governmental assistance. The Malaysian government's position on the Allah controversy and the higher allocation of subsidies given to Malays in the 2014 budget underlined the success of these groups in influencing the government's policies.

The chapters in this monograph are comprehensive analyses of the different issues covering three different themes. The first theme examines the complex issue of how each of the two major ethnic groups, Chinese and Malay, voted. The second theme analysed the campaign in specific constituencies. The third theme examines the role played by religion and race during the campaign.

Afif Pasuni's chapter analyses the campaign and results in the state of Terengganu, a predominantly Malay majority state. In his chapter, he argues that Islam, the role of Muslim religious scholar Azhar Idrus and Malay rights featured prominently in the campaign. He posits that UMNO's adamant stance on issues pertaining to Malay-Muslim rights effectively forced PAS to abandon its more inclusive position in the Terengganu campaign. He concludes that the campaign and results of the Terengganu election will result in a new Islamisation race that not only impacts Malay societies but also the non-Muslim populace in the country.

Choong Pui Yee's chapter is an analysis of the multiracial state seat of Titiwangsa. She argues that the case of Titiwangsa challenges the traditional model of the "3Ms" of money, media and machinery and puts forth the "3Cs", community, class and conscience, which have become equally if not more crucial in determining the final out-

come of the contest. In this regard, Choong observes that the ruling coalition has utilised old strategies of dishing out financial perks, employing mainstream media to attack the opposition candidates and relying on its vast election machinery, which far outweighed that of PAS. Yet, these tried and tested strategies were not enough to secure a definite win for BN. Factors such as the perceived image of candidates, race and class are key determinants in the contest for Titiwangsa. The case of Titiwangsa clearly shows that the failure of BN to affect real institutional changes could result in its demise in the next (14th) Malaysian election. A key similarity that can be discerned from the cases of Titiwangsa and urban seat and seats in rural Terengganu is that racial factors remain important in determining the outcome of the election.

The 2013 election also saw the confirmation of a trend that emerged in the 2008 election. The Chinese support for PR has increased exponentially. Similarly, Malay voters were beginning to turn back to BN, albeit by a smaller scale. Mohamed Nawab Bin Mohamed Osman's chapter examines the Malay voting pattern and the factors that impacted the way the Malays voted. Drawn from extensive fieldwork conducted in the states of Perlis, Kedah, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Johor, he notes that the Malay votes were divided and discerns several patterns in the voting trend. These patterns include the rural-urban divide, class divide and differences in the way the Malays voted in the northern Malay states of Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis as compared to the southern Malay states of Johor, Melaka and Negeri Sembilan. The chapter argues that factors such as race and religion remain crucial in determining the Malay voting pattern. New factors such as the desire for more social equity and economic imperatives are equally important in deciding the way the Malays in Malaysia voted. The chapter makes the case that the coalition that forms the next government will be the centrist force that gives attention to issues such as alleviating corruption, social inequity and economic development.

Oh Ei Sun proffers that BN's racial policies have pushed the Chinese to a breaking point, resulting in the massive swing of the community's support away from BN. The Chinese grievances were so severe that many were willing to support PAS, a party that had

been traditionally deemed as a threat to the well-being of the Chinese community. In analysing the Chinese voting pattern, Oh argues that this election spelt the demise of the main Chinese parties, including the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), Gerakan and the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP). Oh convincingly dispels the myths of both the supposed Chinese tsunami and Chinese dilemma. He notes that other factors such as the swing of the middle-class urban votes away from BN also led to its dismal performance. Likewise, he postulates that, contrary to the perception that the Chinese political and economic influences have diminished following the elections, the Chinese community's position has been relatively unchanged since they were never well-represented by the Chinese parties in BN in the first place. Furthermore, the vast majority of Chinese businessmen have been dealing with Malay officials rather than top government officials, and this relationship will not change. In concluding, Oh highlights that the Chinese community will need to re-assess their political strategies to ensure that the community is not marginalised in the future.

Farish Noor observes in his chapter that Islam was not foregrounded as it had been in the past, and was not used in a divisive or polemical manner during the campaign period. Accusations about PAS being an extremist party or UMNO being a secular or liberal party did not feature prominently during the campaign. He postulates that, interestingly, Islam has emerged to be a major concern after the election. The results of the election, which have polarised parliament along ethnic-religious lines, in addition to the Malay-Muslim ethno-nationalist groups' fervent defence of the economic and political position of the Malays, have led to Islam returning to centre stage of Malaysian politics. Since May 2013, various issues involving non-Muslims "insulting" Islam have been reported. The state's religious authorities have also begun to warn of an imminent threat to Sunni Muslims in Malaysia due to underground subversive activities being carried out by "Shia deviants" who are said to have infiltrated the state apparatus, the media and the educational system. These factors have led to Islam becoming once again an integral part of the competition between UMNO and PAS.

Yang Razali's insightful chapter makes the case that GE13 has

revealed the fault line between old politics and new politics in Malaysia. The Malaysian leadership seems to exhort contradictory postures. He notes that Prime Minister Najib has made tremendous efforts to introduce forward-looking policies that embrace new non-racialised politics. Yet, he continues to draw on old racialised politics in certain policies and public statements. This conflicting disposition manifests the fact that either Malaysian politics is in a state of flux or the country is indeed transitioning from old to new politics. In concluding, he forwards the view that GE13 has entrenched parties that promote bumiputeraism—a pillar of old politics—despite the reduced majority faced by BN. As such, it is unlikely that these political actors will want to advance fundamental changes to politics without first securing their own interests in the future.

Indeed, Malaysian politics is undergoing an interesting and very important political transition in the country's history. It is likely that the country will encounter more severe challenges as it moves from the old-style politics of race to new multiracial politics that is more focused on substance than rhetoric. Race and religion are likely to feature prominently in the next few years as the old guards within the political system continue to remain obstinate in the face of growing demands by the Malaysian electorate for new politics. Recent moves by Malay-rights groups such as PERKASA demanding that the government accords more rights to the Malays at the expense of the non-Malays as well as decisions by Malaysian religious bureaucrats to curb the activities of certain Islamic sects point to a knee-jerk reaction on the part of these conservatives to turn to the comforts of racial and religious politics. Within UMNO, Prime Minister Najib himself is beginning to encounter opposition from conservative UMNO stalwarts who deemed him to be too lax in dealing with the non-Malays. This conservative backlash can be seen in the opposition Islamic party PAS. The principalist group comprising conservative ulama and professionals moved against the reformist group in the last PAS party election in an attempt to eliminate the reformist influence within PAS and re-assess the party's relationship with its partners in the PR coalition. While the attempt was unsuccessful, there will be continued pressure from principalists to ensure that PAS sticks to the party's key principles.

Several parties in Malaysia are also undergoing transformations as well. The MCA has seen a new leadership under Liow Tiong Lai seeking to rejuvenate the party with the aim of re-capturing Chinese votes. It is difficult to ascertain whether the MCA has any chances of making headway with the Chinese populace. Likewise, PKR is likely to see an intense contest for key party posts in its party polls scheduled for April 2014. It is likely that this contest will see leaders allied to party deputy president Azmin Ali challenged by those opposed to him, including Khalid Ibrahim, Nurul Izzah Anwar and Tian Chua. The party polls may see some real prospects of irreversible permanent divisions formed within the party. The DAP is perhaps the only party with no major splits. Nevertheless, the party has been having problems trying to discard its image as a Chinese chauvinistic party among Malay voters, which is crucial if the PR seeks to capture states like Johor and Negeri Sembilan in the 14th Malaysian elections.

Observers of Malaysian politics note that since 2008 the political dynamics in the country has become more fluid, making it difficult to predict the future trajectory of Malaysian political developments. However, one can conclude that the GE13 has completely altered the Malaysian political landscape. Gone are the days when the ruling BN can feel secure about forming the next government. From this point, every election will be keenly contested and both PR and BN will have an equal chance of forming the next Malaysian government.

THE TUSSLE IN TERENGGANU

ISLAMISATION, SHARED LANGUAGES AND BLURRED IDENTITIES

by Afif Pasuni

Introduction

The 13th general election was dubbed by many as the election that would shape the future of the country. Days of official campaigning, which unofficially started soon after the 2008 general election, concluded with victory for the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition. In terms of popular vote, this was their worst performance to date, winning only 47 per cent of the popular votes. The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)—the party that leads the BN coalition—nonetheless managed to win more seats than it did in 2008. In 2008, UMNO bagged a total of 79 parliamentary seats, while in 2013, this increased to 88 seats. As a coalition, however, the BN performed worse. The BN coalition saw a reduction in their parliamentary seats from 140 in the 2008 elections to 133 in 2013.

The opposition Pakatan Rakyat (Pakatan) did better in popular vote, capturing 51 per cent of the votes. They won a total of 89 seats, up from their 82 seats in the 2008 elections. The key to their success was DAP's resurgence in popularity among the Chinese voters, which led to PM Najib Razak dubbing the result a "Chinese tsunami". While racial politics is not something new in Malaysia, political polarisation was exacerbated just a day after the elections. The UMNO-owned Malay newspaper *Utusan Malaysia*'s front-page spread chose the now-infamous headline "*Apa Lagi Cina Mahu?*" [What else do the Chinese want?]. The Chinese focus in the aftermath of the general election was due not only to DAP's strong showing in the consociational opposition coalition—winning 38 of the 89 seats—but also to the weakened Chinese-based party in the BN coalition. The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), which represents the ethnic Chinese in BN and an anchor of Chinese votes, managed to win only

seven parliamentary seats. This was a far cry from its heyday as the dominant Chinese voice in Malaysian politics. At the same time, their popularity among the Chinese voters were on a decline since DAP took over Penang in 2008.

Among the opposition, Anwar Ibrahim's Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) performed second best, winning 30 parliamentary seats in the elections. The Islamist Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) was the worst performer, winning only 21 seats, two fewer than it did in 2008. Among the reasons for this was UMNO's successful push to court votes from the more traditional and conservative Malay voters. PAS, in taking a moderate stance, such as downplaying their Islamic state agenda and supporting the use of the word "Allah" by non-Muslims, has pushed aside the concerns of its traditionally conservative support base.¹ This was the unintended result of PAS' close relationship within the opposition coalition, as it cooperated with both PKR and DAP, both of which are avowedly secular parties. This has split PAS into at least two camps. The "liberal" camp within PAS, who are generally regarded as staunch supporters of Anwar Ibrahim, seek to solder support within the Pakatan coalition, while the more "conservative" are worried about PAS sweeping fundamental issues such as *hudud* (Islamic penal law) and Islamic state under the rug.² Some conservative PAS members are beginning to espouse a closer relationship, and possibly a unity coalition, with the ruling UMNO

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- 1 Initially in 2010, PAS issued a statement declaring their view that the usage of "Allah" should be allowed for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. While that was the party's official position, not all of PAS' leaders supported it. Later, in 2013, the PAS Syura Council contradicted their earlier statement by saying that "Allah" should not be used by non-Muslims, except orally.
 - 2 In reference to factions within PAS, "conservatives" shall refer to a particular group that largely ascribes to Islamism as a singular political ideology. The term "liberal" shall be assigned to those who view the shift of Islamism from a strictly political ideology to a general representation of piety and religiosity in politics. It should be noted that this differentiation is anything but static, and the positions might vary according to issues.

party, which will be more fitting to PAS' traditional Islamist agenda.³

This “liberal” versus “conservative” dynamics is not only playing out within PAS but also among the voters. As such, although the popular votes have swung in the direction of the opposition, BN won a greater number of Malay-majority seats than it did in 2008. In the 12th general election in 2008, BN won 65 per cent of the Malay-majority seats. In 2013, BN won 75 per cent of the Malay majority-seats.⁴ This marked increase proved to be more vital to BN's overall electoral victory.

The Case of Terengganu

This chapter focuses on the coastal state of Terengganu. Terengganu is located in the north-eastern part of Malaysia, one of the “Malay belt” states, alongside Perlis, Kedah and the PAS stronghold of Kelantan. In neighbouring Kelantan, PAS has performed consistently well over the years. Since taking over power in the state in 1990, they have limited BN's win to only one or two parliamentary seats for most years. An exception was in 2004, where BN won eight parliamentary seats in Kelantan, their best showing in the past 33 years. Even in the most recent general election, BN only managed to win five parliamentary seats there. BN's showing at the state level reflected this general trend. Their best result in 33 years was in 2004, when they won 21 of the 45 state seats, while in 2013 they won only 12 state seats.

In 1999, when the opposition managed to grab power in the Terengganu state government, they won 28 out of the 32 state seats. From then on, the results in Terengganu have consistently favoured

³ PAS was formed, according to its constitution, to establish a state with Islamic values and law. Its 2003 Islamic State document defined this by the implementation of aspects of the Shariah including the penal code, which covers the contentious *hudud* sentence. However, in recent years, the party has distanced themselves from this interpretation of the constitution.

⁴ Hock Guan Lee, “Steadily Amplified Rural Votes Decide Malaysian Elections”. *ISEAS Perspective*, 34 (6 June 2013). Retrieved from http://www.iseas.edu.sg/documents/publication/iseas_perspective_2013_34_steadily_amplified_votes_decide_malaysian_elections.pdf.

the BN coalition. Even in 2008, when the so-called “political tsunami” took place, the coastal state of Terengganu became a BN stronghold; they retained 24 of the 32 state seats while winning all but one of the eight parliamentary seats there. Indeed, it seemed that national issues plaguing the country did not find traction with the Terengganu voters. PAS’ win in 1999 was attributed to divisions within UMNO in Terengganu and other local issues,⁵ especially due to the six-term chief minister at the time, Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, who had held the position since 1974. When PAS won in 1999, Hadi Awang took over the chief minister’s post. He later became PAS president after the demise of the moderate Fadzil Noor in 2002.

In the 2013 elections, the results in Terengganu were much closer. The eight parliamentary seats in Terengganu were divided equally between the two sides, as the opposition improved its showing from two seats in 2008. Out of the 32 state seats, PAS won an additional seven seats compared to their showing in 2008. Their 15 state seats were, however, insufficient to beat BN’s 17 seats.

Although the opposition lost the battle for the state government, their share of popular votes for Terengganu state seats were close: 265,195 votes and Pakatan won 264,465 votes,⁶ a difference of merely 730 votes between the sides, or 0.1 per cent of the total votes cast. For Terengganu parliamentary seats, the opposition’s share went up to 48.5 per cent, up from 44.8 per cent in 2008.⁷ BN’s share of popular vote went down, in line with the national average to 51.4 per cent, from 55.1 per cent in 2008.

Pakatan performed well in Kelantan, winning 520,294 votes

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- 5 Jason Abbott and Sophie Gregorios-Pippas, “Islamization in Malaysia: Processes and Dynamics”. *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (June 2010): 142, doi:10.1080/13569771003783851.
- 6 Meena Lakshana, “In the Malay Press: Pakatan Won Popular Vote Only in 4 States, KL”.
- 7 Kian Ming Ong, “GE2013 Results Shows That It Was a Malaysian Tsunami and Not a Chinese Tsunami That Increased Pakatan’s Popular Vote and Number of Parliament and State Seats”. Ong Kian Ming, 10 May 2013. Retrieved from <http://ongkianming.com/2013/05/10/press-statement-ge2013-results-shows-that-it-was-a-malaysian-tsunami-and-not-a-chinese-tsunami-that-increased-pakatans-popular-vote-and-number-of-parliament-and-state-seats/>.

against BN's 343,417 votes for state seats.⁸ For the parliamentary constituencies, the fight was much closer, as Pakatan obtained 405,478 votes against BN's 402,503.⁹

The 2013 results

The 2013 result in Terengganu was generally in line with the national trend. However, this was not the case five years ago (2008), when BN performed much better in Terengganu. This section of the chapter examines several factors that resulted in this closer margin between the BN and PR(PAS) in the 2013 election. The crux of this chapter focuses on the issues affecting PAS in the elections as well as those related to UMNO, as these two parties were the dominant parties contesting for most of the seats in Terengganu.

One of the reasons for PAS' better showing in Terengganu was the overall increase in Pakatan's popularity in Malaysia. This was reflected in the percentage of popular vote, which has steadily increased in its favour. The cooperation between DAP, PKR and PAS has allowed for these parties to capitalise on the changing political dynamics in the country. Street rallies, which have become a feature of Malaysian politics following the Bersih rally in November 2007, have worked well in gaining more visibility for the opposition.

Even in 2013, after the official results of the 13th general election were announced, the street rallies persisted, undeniably as a way to retain momentum of the popularity of the opposition parties.¹⁰ As Malaysia went through a total of 16 by-elections in the last term alone, the continued rallies would be a galvanising point for opposition voters.

Aside from mass demonstrations, from which the opposition

⁸ Meena Lakshana, "In the Malay Press: Pakatan Won Popular Vote Only in 4 States, KL." FZ.com, 19 May 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.fz.com/content/malay-press-pakatan-won-popular-vote-only-4-states-kl>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The by-election in Kuala Besut, Terengganu, was held on 24 July 2013, and won by BN.

parties have benefited, their national political agenda was also a contributive factor to their popularity.

National-level Agenda: Dilution of Islamist goals

As mentioned, cooperation within the opposition is far from perfect. This is due to several factors, namely, the competing ideology between the Islamist PAS and the secularist DAP as well as internal politicking among opposition members in the PKR. In addition, PAS has also taken a more centrist stance in politics, which for some time has been on core issues pertaining to an Islamist party, such as the party's objection to make Malaysia an Islamic state and the hot-button *hudud* issue. Furthermore, although their inclusive view on the "Allah" issue was based on religious texts, their opinion on the matter displayed the party's compromise in protecting the Malay-Muslim identity. In an about-turn later in 2013, the PAS Shura Council contradicted their earlier statement by insisting that "Allah" should not be used by non-Muslims.¹¹ While PAS' initial stance in 2010 was lauded positively by their counterparts in the Pakatan coalition, it was sorely criticised—in the more conservative Muslim circles—as an unequal partner of the secular parties in the alliance. In contrast, UMNO marshalled itself to condemn the court's decision, appearing as the main political party defending Malay-Muslim rights.

As such, although there seems to be an increase in the wave of Pakatan supporters, and that it has reached Terengganu in 2013, the shift was just not enough to secure a victory for the capture of the state government. In addition to PAS being seen as a weaker party in Pakatan, its policies are regarded as being dictated by secular parties within the coalition. PAS' shift towards a more centrist position in politics hinges greatly on its short-term means of *tahaluf siyasi*, or political alliance, an Islamic term it often cites to justify cooperation

11 Ida Lim, "PAS Syura Council: Prevent Translation of 'Allah' by non-Muslims". *The Malaysian Insider*, 14 January 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/pas-syura-council-prevent-translation-of-allah-by-non-muslims>.

with secular parties.¹² Aside from the “Allah” issue, which saw PAS moving from the centre to the more conservative position, the party also attempted to mitigate the effect by adopting a more racially inclusive approach. For instance, the PAS fielded non-Muslim candidates for the first time in its history. Clearly, the move was aimed to capture the centre ground and attract non-Muslim votes.

While this is unsurprising, it still does not explain how the opposition managed to capture close to half the votes cast in Terengganu, a Malay-majority state with an estimated 96 per cent Malay voters.¹³ This brings us to the next point: successful campaigning.

State-level Agenda: Staunch Islamist Personalities

In the final week of campaigning in Terengganu, the opposition PAS invited the Terengganu-based religious preacher Azhar Idrus to campaign for them. Ustaz Azhar Idrus (*ustaz* is a honorific title for an Islamic preacher) is a well-known religious personality in Malaysia. Apart from his religious credentials, his religious talks are peppered with jokes, a defining trait of his presentations, and he draws thousands to his sermons. He is widely regarded as a conservative religious preacher in Malaysia.

A factor that contributed to his popularity is his usage of social networks; he routinely takes photos of his own talks and posts them on his Facebook page, which has around 1.2 million followers. Videos of his sermons, often edited to feature the humorous segments, are

12 *Tahaluf siyasi* is a religious term used to explain the conceptual framework of PAS' alliance with secular parties. PAS President Abdul Hadi Awang explained that the same concept was used to justify PAS' alliance with UMNO in the 1970s. According to him, the cooperation that PAS enjoys with PKR does not undermine PAS' long-term objective, although this was contested by others in the party. See Abdul Hadi Awang, “Tahaluf Siyasi PAS Bersama Pakatan Rakyat,” *Harakah Daily*, 13 October 2012. Retrieved from <http://bm.harakahdaily.net/index.php/columnist/presiden/13826-tahaluf-siyasi-pas-bersama-pakatan-rakyat>. Reme Ahmad, “PAS Considers Future Alliance”, *AsiaOne*, 30 September 2013. Retrieved from <http://news.asiaone.com/news/asia/pas-considers-future-alliance>.

13 Mun Fah Lim, “Be Rational” [trans. Phui Jee Soong], *My Sinchew*, 9 May 2013, Retrieved from <http://www.mysinchew.com/node/86224>.

widely available on YouTube. He has authored several books, including a comic book featuring his quotes. Understandably, having him in their stable of speakers proved to be a boon for the opposition. He joined PAS' campaigning trail throughout Malaysia before campaigning solely in Terengganu in the last few days before the elections.

From the author's own experience attending the rallies in Terengganu, Azhar Idrus managed to pull in the crowds even more than the local candidates. The election rallies in Malaysia were such that there would be several similar events held in many constituencies at the same time. As there could be anything from five or more speakers per rally, most speakers made quick appearances in each rally before travelling to another venue, one after another, in a single night. This means that each speaker was given several minutes to talk at a rally before hurrying off to the next one. Their exact time of arrival was also hard to predict, as it was dependent on the accessibility of the rally venue, among other factors. But the local candidates, who were stationed at a particular rally, almost always gave way to the more prominent speakers such as PAS president Hadi Awang or the preacher Azhar Idrus when they arrived. In one event held in a mosque compound where the author attended, the combination of Azhar and PAS president Hadi Awang managed to attract a large crowd estimated to be more than ten thousand people, who weathered the hot sun as it was held following the afternoon prayers.

At the same time, the UMNO campaigning rallies in Terengganu were notably more private and less carnival-like. The opposition rallies tended to attract street vendors, who capitalised on the sheer number of crowds. Some of the UMNO events appeared to be more formal, and even had invitation cards being sent to residents of the area prior to the rally.

It is pertinent to note that gauging the popularity of the political party from attendance is problematic for several reasons. One is due to the fact that not all who attended could be categorised as supporters, as their attendance might be due to the fact that they enjoyed Azhar Idrus' sermons.

Secondly, due to Azhar Idrus' sheer popularity, those who attended were not only voters who reside in that particular constitu-

ency but also those residing elsewhere in Terengganu, in other parts of Malaysia, or even as far as Singapore (based on car license plates). Furthermore, the carnival-like atmosphere of such events meant that many chose to bring their children to political rallies, inflating the number of attendees. Although, if those in attendance were not from the constituency where the rally is being held, it ultimately worked in PAS' favour, as they demonstrated, by extension, the popularity of the party. Either way, the only outcome from an event that attracted huge crowds was positive for the organisers.

In addition to Azhar Idrus, PAS' events were also enlivened by younger Muslim singers and preachers, including several from Imam Muda [Young Imam], the Islamic-themed reality-TV show in Malaysia, which saw young Islamic preachers being pitted against one another. In the TV series, which has entered its third season, the contestants were tested on their religious knowledge, Quranic recitations and oratory skills. Prior to the elections, six Imam Muda contestants voiced their support for PAS.¹⁴ Their inclusion in the campaigning strategy appealed not only to the conservative voters but also to the religious-urban voters, as these episodes were broadcast on paid TV channels. The individual persona is so vital that in nearby Kelantan, the highly influential spiritual leader of PAS, Nik Aziz Nik Mat, announced his retirement only after PAS' victory in the state was confirmed one day after the election. As he had been the chief minister of Kelantan for the past 23 years, announcing his resignation from the post earlier would undoubtedly shake the voters' confidence. This indicates the consideration of a party's individual personalities in influencing the outcome of the election.

As the campaigning included religious personalities, understandably their religious message permeated the overall tone of the campaigns. For instance, the preachers iterated in their *ceramahs* that voting for UMNO was akin to supporting unfair and corrupt politics. They cited religious verses or quotes to justify why voters should be voting for the opposition. Even more so, they attempted

14 "6 Tokoh Imam Muda Isytihar Sokong PAS". *Harakah Daily*, 16 March 2013. Retrieved from <http://bm.harakahdaily.net/index.php/headline/17458-6-tokoh-imam-muda-isytihar-sokong-pas>.

to justify why an Islamist party could cooperate with secular parties.

The religious factor was undoubtedly at play in Terengganu politics. The ruling UMNO did not want to be out-Islamised by the opposition. The chief minister of Terengganu, Ahmad Said, promised in a *ceramah*, alongside Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, that a new Imtiaz school (Islamic schools which combine both religious and secular subjects) would be built if BN won. Parents who were interviewed in Terengganu generally held high regard for Imtiaz schools due to its unique curriculum and ability to churn out top students. In addition to that, the school's emphasis on Quran memorisation is also a huge draw.

Between the Lines: The Campaigning Messages

As the personalities proved their worth in galvanising votes for the opposition, the message that they relayed also deserve a closer look. The religious intonations, along with the varying nuances from both parties, indicated that Islamisation continues to be a persistent theme in Malaysian politics.¹⁵ Although such rhetoric had worked well for UMNO before, Lee argued that with the “increasing religious zeal through Islamisation, the image of Malay-Muslim unity is promoted, thereby diverting attention from the ongoing internecine struggles in UMNO”¹⁶.

Furthermore, Islamic messages were intertwined with the Malay identity as well, and that posed a problem, as voters might lump both sets of identity into one, where a perceived offensive on one identity is regarded as an attack on the other. Some have argued that the perception of synonymity between Islam and Malay is due to the former being “racialised beyond the constitutional definition”, the issue being further compounded by “some unpalatable policies”

15 For examples of Islamisation in previous elections, see John Funston, “Malaysia’s Tenth Elections: Status Quo, ‘Reformasi’ or Islamization?”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (April 2000): 23–59; Abbott and Gregorios-Pippas, “Islamization in Malaysia: Processes and Dynamics”.

16 Raymond L. M. Lee, “Patterns of Religious Tension in Malaysia”. *Asian Survey*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (April 1988): 415.

that were justified as being “required by Islam”.¹⁷ While these blurred identity markers continue to complicate the Islamisation agenda, it has also aided the democratisation process in Malaysia by introducing measures that inadvertently support a more open civil society and an expansion of the public sphere.¹⁸ The following are several observations from the campaign messages.

Shared Secular and Religious Languages

Amidst the campaigning, what is apparent from the main points raised above is that there seems to be a stark difference between the national and local agenda. On the national level, the agenda for PAS was about toning down its Islamist image and promoting certain universal values that were shared by the other secular parties in the coalition. The opposition manifesto, referred to by many as *Buku Jingga* (Orange Book, due to its theme colour), talked about how the country was in an economic crisis for many years due to “endemic corruption”,¹⁹ that the goal for the opposition was the “fairer distribution of income” to ensure prosperity,²⁰ and the improvement of the nation’s school system,²¹ among many others. While these are all undoubtedly issues that could be couched in religious language, *Buku Jingga* placed the objectives under modern nomenclatures such as “social justice” and “transparency”, and not once used religious terms, which might drive away certain segments of voters.

Meanwhile, on the local level, while individual opposition parties remained officially committed to *Buku Jingga*, the terms used in

17 Patricia A. Martinez, “The Islamic State or the State of Islam in Malaysia.” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (December 2001), 488.

18 Sven Schottmann, “Paving the Ground? Malaysia’s Democratic Prospects and the Mahathir Government’s Islamic Discourse”. In Joseph A. Camilleri & Sven Schottmann (Eds.), *Culture, Religion and Conflict in Muslim Southeast Asia: Negotiating Tense Pluralisms* (pp. 52–69), Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series 56. London, New York: Routledge, 2013.

19 Pakatan Agenda: Change Now, Save Malaysia! (Pakatan Rakyat), 9. Retrieved from http://dapmalaysia.org/newenglish/pub/buku_jingga/Buku-Jingga-Eng.pdf on 25 July 2013.

20 Ibid., 12.

21 Ibid., 14.

ceramahs and campaigning differed largely from the secular jargons of *Buku Jingga*. Understandably, Terengganu is a Malay-Muslim majority state, and in order to capture the attention of the audience, relevant key words had to be utilised alongside religious verses for justification and reasoning.

Yet what the local PAS campaigning has demonstrated is that the secular political discourse need not be side-lined by religious language, and vice versa. Instead, what is shown is how the religious terminologies complemented the more secular agenda brought forward by the Pakatan coalition. For instance, the ruling UMNO party was described as promoting inefficient and corrupt policies, and how it was a religious duty for voters to take a united stand against unjust rulers. Religious justification was also offered—during campaigning—on why democracy was compatible with Islam, and why an Islamist party like PAS could work within a coalition that consisted of secular parties as well. This helped PAS in the campaigning on three levels. First, voters who were fence sitters or those who were hesitant to vote were provided with Islamic justification for modern democratic obligations, which they might accept as part of their religious duty. Second, certain concepts in a modern democracy that were incoherent, or perhaps viewed as foreign by potential voters, were elaborated and justified in simpler religious terms. Finally, as these were presented by religious personalities, such reasoning might appeal to the voters' religious views.

Varying ‘Versions’ of Islam

Clearly, the more religious tone being promoted at the local level was calculated. Due to the sheer number of Malay-Muslims in many parts of Terengganu, the message at the local level was tailored to the audience. Although both UMNO and PAS focused on Islamic issues, this also meant that both parties attempted to project differing “Islamic views”.

When it came to campaigning, UMNO’s relation to Islam was usually portrayed as the “defender” of the religion—one that promoted the building of more Islamic schools, defended against foreign

influences and deviant teachings, and protected the traditional rights of Muslims. In essence, they took on the stance of a “defender” of the Islamic identity. But as the Islamic and Malay identities in Malaysia are very closely intertwined, therein lies the problem. Their guardedness on the identities was also regarded as an offence on the identities of other religions. Since the common space is shared by many beliefs in Malaysia, an exclusive domination of a part of it would essentially limit the rights of others. To illustrate, one issue that tended to come to the fore was the “Allah” issue, which the UMNO-led government took the role of the “Islamic defender” when the issue was being publicly contested. In banning other religions from using the word “Allah” in their religious texts, they were signalling that a part of the space was exclusive only to one religion and thus could not be shared. This made UMNO appear more adamant at protecting the rights of Muslims, which worked well with their party’s image, as well as challenging PAS’ religiosity with just one stroke of the brush.

PAS’ emphasis on the Islamic message is usually more focused in justifying why the party should be voted in. As such, PAS candidates pointed out allegations of corruption and why it was a religious duty to vote out a corrupt government in their campaigning. PAS was also required to justify their cooperation with secular parties, as they were often being painted as being the party with the weakest say in the coalition. Interestingly, PAS recently backed down from allowing non-Muslims to use the word “Allah”. The PAS Syura (Islamic Advisory) council viewed that the word should not be used in written religious texts but allowed it to be used by non-Muslims orally.²² Religious definitiveness notwithstanding, their change of stance—which was made just five months before the elections—could be perceived as an effort to retain their status as an Islamist party that looked after the Malay-Muslim interest.

Exclusivist stances in favour of Malay-Muslim fervour were not displayed by only UMNO but at times by PAS. It is unclear whether PAS’ views to become more exclusive on certain issues were contingent on the feedback they received from their traditional support-

22 Lim, “PAS Syura Council: Prevent Translation of ‘Allah’ by non-Muslims”.

ers. As mentioned above, PAS even backtracked on its decision in allowing non-Muslims to use the word “Allah”. Whatever its motivation, the need to appear more Islamic was a vital factor, as popular sentiments had the potential to move large segments of voters. As apparent during campaigning, both UMNO and PAS were contending on the basis of religiosity, claiming on Islamic legitimacy and offered mosques and schools with specialised Islamic curriculum as a reward for winning.

Both UMNO and PAS saw Islam as a valuable identity marker but the former viewed it as something that would starkly differentiate them from the other parties. PAS initially saw their faith as shared values that could be appreciated by other voters. Yet, as this was alienating some of its conservative base, PAS changed track on some issues to possibly court back its fleeing voters. As such, while both parties sought legitimacy and votes from the same religion, Islam would ironically be the unifying and separating factor between them.

Persistence of Islamisation and the Racial Race

In an attempt to attract and secure the traditional Malay votes, both UMNO and PAS gravitated towards the same direction—to be the party that was seen to be in the vanguard of the Malay-Muslim identity in the country. This was one of the factors lending credence to the idea of an UMNO and PAS coalition, as both parties coveted votes from the same demographic of voters. While PAS is officially adamant on not joining UMNO, talks between the two parties have occurred at various levels. Thus this brings a risk that the Islamisation race may drive the wedge deeper between Malays and other ethnic groups in the country, especially if the two most “Malay-Muslim” parties are forced to be more fervent in their adherence to political Islam for the purposes of securing votes.

In analysing the broad messages promoted during the campaigning period, Islamisation is set to be a more persistent factor in Malaysian politics. Based on the first two points raised—the Islamic language being used to promote values shared with the secular counterparts and the differing versions of Islam—they illustrate the ever-persistent religiosity being displayed in the political realm. This

is not only the case with a Malay-majority state like Terengganu and Kelantan but is also persistent even in the more urban states like Selangor, where issues and fears like the Christianisation of Malaysia has become a major issue.²³ Yet this form of Islamisation in politicking is not something new to Malaysia.

While some have argued that the “Islamisation race” has contributed to the democratic development in Malaysia as well as promoting civil societies²⁴ and mitigating ethnocentrism,²⁵ the flourishing Muslim non-governmental organisations are also developing an Islamisation agenda, among others, to influence the political sphere.²⁶ The ongoing development begs the question: What kind of politics will Malaysia be heading? On the one hand, while Islamisation may very well have contributed to the flourishing of democratic elements, the feeling of racial superiority is being intertwined with an ever-increasing religious rhetoric. In addition to the existing “feudal cultures and precedents”,²⁷ this blurring of lines between race and religion is creating a more complex political dynamic as well as more zealousness, which may create a more hostile political environment.

Conclusion

Following the 2008 general election, the political changes in Malaysia has remained gradual and moderate. Indeed, while 2008 represented a significant shift in the political scene, the subsequent general election in 2013 is no less important, for making the declining popular support for the BN coalition.

In the Malay-majority state of Terengganu, the opposition’s 15

23 In 2011, the Selangor Religious Department (JAIS) raided a Damansara Utama Methodist Church dinner event, citing proselytisation of Muslims. The issue caused a furore to the PAS-led Selangor state government. In the aftermath, one of the state’s executive committee members, Hassan Ali, was dismissed from the party.

24 Schottmann, “Paving the Ground? Malaysia’s Democratic Prospects and the Mahathir Government’s Islamic Discourse”.

25 Martinez, “The Islamic State or the State of Islam in Malaysia”, pp. 488–490.

26 Meredith L. Weiss, “Edging Toward a New Politics in Malaysia: Civil Society at the Gate?”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 49, No. 5 (September 2009): 747.

27 Martinez, “The Islamic State or the State of Islam in Malaysia”, 475.

seats against BN's 17 seats marked the close fight between the two sides. While the ruling government's cash handouts prior to the elections were well received in many parts, its effectiveness in Terengganu was tempered by the opposition's campaigning. In particular, the opposition PAS attracted large droves of supporters to its events by getting popular religious personalities to head their cause. Aside from that, the party's message was also tailored to the audience. Instead of blandly promoting the official *Buku Jingga* manifesto, religious arguments were included to appeal to the crowd.

As both BN and PAS campaigned on the religious ground, the messages brought by both parties, as well as recitations of the religious verses and arguments in the *ceramahs*, indicate the overlapping of language between the secular and religious spheres. The increasingly complementary nature of religious texts may have aided in the understanding of secular political concepts among the urban voters. Yet, in using the same religious platform—Islam—to further their cause, these competing political entities also displayed varying stances when it came to religion. UMNO's adamant stance on issues pertaining to Malay-Muslim rights effectively forced PAS to abandon its more inclusive position. Concomitantly, such attitudes contribute to the persistence of Islamisation in Malaysian elections, in addition to a more complex dynamics where the line between the Islamic and Malay identities is increasingly being blurred. As Lee argued, "If Islamisation is accelerated as a manifestation of the turbulence in Malay politics, the organised response of the non-Muslims to this threat will become more apparent. Because non-Muslim religious groups lack political clout, they will necessarily seek assistance from established non-Malay political parties."²⁸ Such an effect will be tempered for the time being, as PAS has committed itself with the opposition coalition. But one can validly question whether the persistent religious and racial polemic will change such dynamics in the long run. Another question will be: Will history repeat itself when UMNO and PAS become an alliance? There is a need to examine the likelihood of a Malay-Muslim unity government in the future.

28 Lee, "Patterns of Religious Tension in Malaysia", 418.

Although the analysis in this chapter is based on observations in Terengganu, such patterns were visible in other parts of Malaysia as well, including Selangor. Effectively, polarised politicking is an increasingly prominent part of Malaysian politics. As the voters chose between a stronger Malay-Muslim-based government and an opposition that claimed to offer new beginnings, the political entities—more than ever—displayed the acidity of racial and religious politics.

MALAYSIA'S 13TH GENERAL ELECTION

WHAT MATTERS IN TITIWANGSA?

by Choong Pui Yee

Introduction

The 13th general election in Malaysia was arguably one of the most closely-fought elections in Malaysia. The emergence of a widely popular and united opposition, Pakatan Rakyat (PR), which comprises the Peoples' Justice Party (PKR), the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), has provided a formidable challenge to the ruling party, Barisan Nasional (BN). While PR espoused ideas of social justice, a welfare state and a needs-based policy, BN continued to highlight its track record in governing Malaysia and its service-oriented approach to voters.

With BN monopolising the “3Ms” (media, machinery and money), conventional wisdom suggests that BN would have an added advantage in winning the general election. However, the campaign in Titiwangsa suggests that perhaps this combination of “3Ms” is not the only reason that resulted in a successful election campaign. The factors of community, class and conscience—the “3Cs”—are equally important to understand the electoral dynamics.

This chapter examines the 2013 electoral campaign in Titiwangsa in terms of the above two models, namely the 3Ms and the 3Cs, and assesses the extent to which they help to explain the outcome in Titiwangsa. The 3Ms refers to “media, machinery and money” while the 3Cs refers to “community, class and conscience”. “Community” here is used loosely to refer to the different ethnic communities whereas “class” refers to the socio-economic class.

Titiwangsa serves as an interesting case study due to its demographic make-up. Malays form the majority in the constituency (68 per cent). However, this constituency also has a relatively large

percentage of Chinese and Indian voters, with the former constituting 20 per cent and the latter, 10 per cent. The ethnic composition of this constituency mirrors the national ethnic composition in Peninsular Malaysia. In terms of methodology, an ethnographic research approach is employed. The study draws heavily on personal observations of the campaign period as well as extensive interviews with candidates, campaign managers and local journalists covering the constituency.

The Results in Brief

The contest for the Titiwangsa seat proved to be a close one, with BN managing to wrest the seat back from PAS with a wafer-thin majority of 866 votes. Total voter turnout increased by 14.4 per cent from the 2008 general election, to 82.3 per cent. While a total of 49,892 voters turned out in 2008, this number increased to 55,282 in 2013. Of these, 68 per cent were Malay voters, 20 per cent were Chinese voters and 10 per cent, Indian voters.²⁹

The Competing Candidates

In the 13th general election, the contest for the constituency of Titiwangsa was a straight fight between UMNO and PAS. Hitherto a stronghold of UMNO, Titiwangsa fell to PAS in the 2008 general election when Lo' Lo' binti Mohd Ghazali defeated her opponent from UMNO with a margin of 1,972 votes. Lo' Lo' was a popular member of parliament among many residents of Titiwangsa and was known to be a hardworking MP. Aside from voter confidence in PAS, there were voters who voted for Lo' Lo' because of her personality instead of the party she represented. But two and a half years into her incumbency, she passed away from cancer and her seat was vacated.

In the 13th general election, Ahmad Zamri Asa'ad Khuzaimi (known as Zamri) was selected by PAS to contest the seat of Titiwan-

29 Source: <http://undi.info/wilayah-persekutuan/p/P114>, <http://undi.info/wilayah-persekutuan/p/P119>

gsa. A lawyer by profession, this was the first time Zamri contested in a general election. However, Zamri was not a political neophyte. He had served as chairman of PAS' legal and human rights department and in the special committee that looked after the affairs of Titiwangsa after Lo' Lo's death. Prior to Lo' Lo's death, Zamri also worked alongside her in Titiwangsa, making him well suited to contest in the constituency.

The BN candidate was Datuk Johari Abdul Ghani (known as Johari), the acting chief of the UMNO division in Titiwangsa. A local resident in Titiwangsa, Johari was a successful businessman who held several directorships. Johari had consistently credited his professional success to the support he received from the BN government in the form of scholarships and opportunities to study overseas. Two and a half years before the election, Johari established a community centre in Desa Pandan with a staff of ten, funding it through his own personal resources. This community centre has been a major vehicle through which he has built rapport with and reached out to his constituents in Titiwangsa.

3Ms: Media, Machinery and Money

As with all past elections in Malaysia, the 3Ms played a vital role in the election campaigns. In Titiwangsa, it was clear that BN possessed the stronger party machinery compared to PAS. For instance, BN election booths were ubiquitous and their numbers far surpassing those of PAS. In certain roads and alleys in Kampung Baru, one could easily identify at least three to four election booths that were festooned with BN flags and decorated with BN banners that highlight Prime Minister Najib Razak's 1Malaysia programme.³⁰ A vast array of BN paraphernalia—from banners, badges and even clappers as well as BN brochures celebrating BN's achievement and that mocked the

30 Under the 1Malaysia programme, there is a wide range of cash and other welfare assistance in the form of 1Malaysia People's Assistance Program (BR1M), 1Malaysia Books Assistance (BB1M), 1Malaysia Housing Assistance (PR1MA), 1Malaysia People's Store (KR1M), 1Malaysia Citizen's Clinic (KR1M) 1Malaysia People's Charity (KARISMA) and Ending Poverty Era (AZAM).

leaders of Pakatan Rakyat—were also being liberally distributed at the election booths. All these campaign paraphernalia were provided by UMNO.³¹

In terms of human resources, there were always at least two to three BN supporters manning the election booths and checking voters' polling stations. Most of these supporters were part-time workers who were remunerated for their efforts. However, there were also numerous volunteers. Effective communication between campaign workers was facilitated by the use of walkie-talkies. These walkie-talkies proved to be critical for the coordination of logistics and human resource deployments across Titiwangsa during the campaign.

In Dato Keramat, numerous banners highlighted the 1Malaysia Peoples' Assistance Scheme (BR1M)—the brainchild of Prime Minister Najib—which offered a one-off cash payment of RM 500 to households earning less than RM 3,000 per month. Election booth managers interviewed in this area emphasised the cash assistance distributed by BN through the 1Malaysia initiative and expressed their gratitude for this cash handout. Some BN party workers also shared how much they had benefited from other 1Malaysia initiatives in starting up their small and medium-sized businesses.³² Compared to campaign workers in other parts of Titiwangsa, those in Dato Keramat appeared more focused on endorsing the BN coalition rather than their candidate, Johari. These workers unabashedly said that they would definitely vote for BN to express their appreciation.

While the party flags and banners of PAS were frequently seen throughout Titiwangsa, their numbers did not surpass those of the BN. Portraits of Zamri wearing the skull cap (*kopiah*) and another version of him wearing a simple cap were more visible in Kampung Baru than other parts of Titiwangsa. Given the visible distinction between these two portraits of the PAS candidate in terms of the symbolic headgear, it can be surmised that each portrait was meant to target a different audience—the *kopiah* was to appeal to the

31 Interview with BN party workers, 29 April 2013.

32 Interview with BN party workers, 29 April 2013.

more religious constituents while the simple cap was targeted at the more youthful crowd. That aside, some banners of Zamri with PAS President Hadi Awang and spiritual advisor Nik Aziz were displayed in different parts of Titiwangsa as well. These posters were clearly meant to send the message that Zamri was supported by the top leaders of PAS.

Aside from these personal portraits, campaign brochures and other paraphernalia highlighting the manifesto of PR could also be easily obtained. Significantly, there were several brochures that focused on the Kampung Baru issue (which is discussed later in this chapter). Aside from these more conventional materials, PAS also relied heavily on social media such as Twitter, Facebook and even blogs in their campaign. Zamri regularly updated his social media sites, sharing his thoughts and announcing his campaigning schedules. In contrast, although Johari also used social media and blogs, his updates were not as regular as Zamri's and it was harder to track his schedule online. Besides, while Zamri was often more candid in engaging voters through the social media realm, Johari was more formal in the way he used social media to engage voters. While BN possessed an extensive campaign machinery and a highly-organised supporting team, they clearly lost the battle in cyberspace.

In general, the BN effort in Titiwangsa had a stronger party machinery compared to PAS. However, PAS appeared to command a greater presence in cyberspace through the prodigious use of new media tools. Nevertheless, it was likely that Johari had a slight advantage over Zamri. This was simply by virtue of the fact that as a result of the operations of his community centre, Johari was more familiar to the electorate than his opponent.

3Cs: Community, Class and Conscience

Apart from the classical 3Ms model, the message of the campaign was tailored to target the different communities and class of voters. There was also an implicit message that appealed to the conscience of the voters. Albeit in varying degree, both BN and PAS engaged the constituents through this 3Cs model.

First, the contested local issue of Kampung Baru was clearly aimed at the Malay community. Kampung Baru is an area located at the heart of Titiwangsa and there are approximately 18,000 predominantly Malay voters in this area alone.³³ Prior to independence, the British colonial administrator gazetted Kampung Baru as a Malay Agricultural Settlement (MAS), where non-Malays were not allowed to buy the land or to live there. To date, Kampung Baru is still the heartland of the Malay community.

However, the residents of Kampung Baru had grown increasingly concerned about their land rights after Kampung Baru was designated for urban regeneration by the government.³⁴ The issue of Kampung Baru was highly politicised because there were misconceptions surrounding it. Residents in the area were afraid that these lands would be taken by force and Kampung Baru would no longer be a Malay heartland if it had to be developed by the government. It was against such backdrop that provocative banners declaring “UMNO will defend every inch of land in Kampung Baru from being taken away by any parties by force” could be seen everywhere. The theme of the defence of the Kampung Baru land was also echoed during Johari’s *ceramah* and speeches, where he strove to give assurances that he would not allow the land to be taken away and that Kampung Baru would remain as the heartland of the Malay community in Titiwangsa.

Similarly, Zamri also capitalised on the Kampung Baru issue during his campaign. In his campaign brochures, the clarion call of “Saving Kampung Baru” was made. For instance, in both his *ceramah* and campaign literature, Zamri expressed his concerns regarding the Kampung Baru Development Corporation Bill 2011, alleging the possibility of the dissolution of MAS by the BN government. Such messages and the attempt to be the defenders of Kampung Baru were clearly targeted at the concerns of the Malay community

33 Mohsin Abdullah, “Kampung Baru … The Jewel of Titiwangsa”. *The Edge Malaysia*, 25 April 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.theedgemalaysia.com/political-news/237138-kampung-baru--the-jewel-of-titiwangsa.html> on 21 May 2013.

34 Thean Lee Cheng, “Regeneration Challenge – Kampung Baru Redevelopment – An Ambitious Project”. *The Star*, 20 July 2011.

in Kampung Baru. It was by projecting themselves as the protector of Kampung Baru that both Johari and Zamri strategically appealed to the Malay community and offered themselves to be the reliable party to safeguard Malay rights.

Aside from targeting the Malay community, due attention was also given separately to the Indian and Chinese communities as well, especially by Johari. For instance, instead of merely speaking in large-scale rallies, Johari allocated time to meet Chinese and Indian communities in their People's Housing Project (PPR) blocks. These small-scale meet-ups were often pitched to target the different ethnic communities. During these engagements, Johari took questions from voters and mingled with them through hi-tea or simple buffet sessions. As these events often involved small crowds, they offered Johari a more intimate atmosphere, which in turn allowed him to leverage on his personal appeal to reach out to his non-Malay constituents. Such engagements also increased his visibility among the different community of voters. That aside, Johari also organised other events targeted specifically at youth voters. Instead of doing large-scale rallies, Johari scheduled his campaign for targeted engagements with the different communities.

Aside from targeting the specific ethnic community, the message that both parties sent to the voters was also crafted along class lines. A case in point is Johari centring his speeches on the practical aspect of service when he spoke to the constituents, especially to the lower-income households or working class voters. To that end, he identified three types of services. The first type was defined as immediate assistance in the form of financial assistance on matters such as the payment of school fees or cash assistance for funeral services. The second was defined as intermediate assistance, which covered initiatives that required a longer time to complete, such as the repainting of PPR housing blocks. The third was defined as issues that required follow-up on policies made at the national level, such as the 1Malaysia programme. In his emphasis on service approach, Johari also highlighted his service centre in Desa Pandan. For lower-income household voters, especially those from the older generation, this personal appeal might have worked as they saw a candidate who would "*turun padang*" [going to the ground to engage voters] and

one who would try to understand the sentiments and needs of the voters in order to represent them better in parliament.

Although PAS also had a service centre in Titiwangsa, Zamri rarely mentioned it and it was difficult to gauge how active the centre was. Therefore, to the lower-income group of voters, Johari's service centre might be perceived as a more convenient place for them to solve some of their daily financial issues. For instance, getting assistance in paying their children's school fees or bus fare were more immediate concerns, compared to other national issues. The use of financial inducements among these constituents had a more direct and immediate impact. Hence this might have worked in favour of Johari, as his service-oriented message resonated better with the lower-income voters.

Conversely, Zamri focused his message on national issues and the more lofty ideals of democracy or a welfare state to target middle-class voters. Generally, Zamri's campaign was in line with the PR manifesto, which highlighted national issues, the importance of social justice and to bring Malaysia forward to be a welfare state, as well as emphasising needs-based government assistance. Zamri consistently emphasised PAS' clean image. Furthermore, Zamri argued that while Malaysia was democratising, it would remain some distance from a new brand of politics that would be devoid of the corruption and thuggery that had come to be associated with the manner in which Malaysian politics had been conducted in the recent past.³⁵ In this manner, these messages resonated differently among a different class of voters as they were being asked to select between a party that focused on the practical aspect of services and a party that veered to the direction of intangibles like social justice and long-term changes in policy.

In stark contrast to lower-income households, the middle-class voters appeared to be more concerned with national-level issues in recent times. This was because middle-class voters did not need to struggle with day-to-day issues as much as the lower-income voters. This being the case, PAS' emphasis on national issues and persistent

35 Interview with Ahmad Zamri Bin A'zaad Kuizami, 29 April 2013.

attacks on BN's or UMNO's disregard for the welfare of citizens, not to mention endemic corruption, might have found traction with some middle-class voters.

Compounding the class and community factors, the campaign also indirectly appealed to the conscience of the constituents as both candidates capitalised on values that they claimed to personify. In the case of Johari, he consistently emphasised his personal success and achievements, which he attributed to opportunities provided by the BN government, to which he owed a debt of gratitude. The personal story that celebrates BN's goodwill dovetailed with his service-oriented appeal. This message might likely resonate with voters who could capture the gratefulness underlying Johari's speech. As such, they might have felt some measure of obligation to support BN.

On the contrary, PAS attempted to turn the value-contest on its head by focusing on the need to vote in a just and clean government and a party that was prepared to press for the transformation of state institutions. Often, he would either explicitly or implicitly condemn the BN administration as corrupt, lacking in transparency and other attributes that were deemed to be against Islamic teachings and the universal good. Furthermore, when campaigning among the ethnic minority communities, Zamri attempted to discredit his opponent by capitalising on a YouTube video in which Johari was caught commenting that he did not require Chinese or Indian votes to win the election.³⁶

This message was calibrated to juxtapose PAS' image as a clean party with that of UMNO's, thereby positioning the former as a viable alternative for the constituency of Titiwangsa. In so doing, PAS indirectly pricked the conscience of the constituents of Titiwangsa with two simple choices: vote for a "corrupt" government, or vote for a "clean" government. At times PAS would also invoke the appeal among the religious segment to vote for them when they engaged religious scholars to speak in their events.

36 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqNeDS283_o. Retrieved on 21 May 2013.

Interpretation: Prospects and Challenges

BN has always enjoyed an efficient and effective machinery, mainly because it has better access to funds.³⁷ Traditionally, this factor has accounted for BN's electoral victory, especially in the rural Malay heartlands. However, Titiwangsa is the home of urban Malays where the constituents are different from the rural Malay heartlands. Notwithstanding the fact that the 3Ms model might have worked in favour of BN in securing the votes of the lower-income voters, the foregoing observations also illustrated the dwindling efficacy of the 3Ms model.

For instance, the role of money in this campaign debunks certain stereotypes of the traditional notion of money politics in Malaysia. Money politics in the Malaysian context usually means vote-buying during elections, and it also refers to political patronage and abuse of power in awarding government concessions.³⁸ Without denying that such features still existed in this campaign, especially through Prime Minister Najib's BR1M cash handouts, we witnessed a reverse flow of money in which voters were donating to the party, especially in the case of PAS. During the campaign period, PAS had placed donation boxes in its election booths for supporters to donate and had used this donation as a source of their campaign funds.

For voters who are donating to the party, they may likely see this as a form of political investment to enact political change. It may also be an expression of their belief in the party. Thus, for the PAS supporters, the traditional notion of money politics during the campaign period where one would receive largesse or monies from the party might no longer be an effective campaign strategy after all.

Compared to the opposition, BN also needed to confront its weakness in utilising new media. A report from The Asia Foundation in 2012 suggested that two-thirds of Malaysian youth (aged 17–35

³⁷ Gomez, T. E., "Monetizing Politics: Financing Parties and Elections in Malaysia". *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 46, Issue 5. Cambridge University Press. September 2012, pp. 1670–1697.

³⁸ Menachem Hofnung, "Financing Internal Party Races in Non-majoritarian Political Systems: Lessons from the Israeli Experience". *Election Law Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 4: 372–383.

years) obtained news and information primarily from the Internet.³⁹ Such findings indicated that even when traditional media was utilised in the campaign by BN, the information that youths obtained from the Internet offered them alternative ideas that countered BN's message. As Titiwangsa is largely an urban constituency, the youths in this district would very likely be affected by such trends and would increasingly grow to become a more sophisticated group of voters.

In the foregoing discussion, the message that both candidates crafted also appealed differently to different classes of voters. While Johari's message was more likely appealing to lower-income households or working class voters, it had clearly failed to address the concerns of social justice, democracy and good governance. Henceforth, issue-based campaigns and ideals encompassing social justice, welfare state and democracy will not simply disappear in the immediate future. Similarly, PAS will continue to harp on BN's lack of credibility in addressing issues of corruption, rising costs of living and other institutional issues. In essence, it did not matter whether PAS was able to address these issues. What mattered was how such rhetoric would erode BN's credibility.

Aside from this, it is also interesting to note that Johari's campaign on the theme of gratitude towards BN made for an interesting contrast with UMNO's longstanding political narrative of the ingratitude of Malays who "betrayed" the community by voting against the party.⁴⁰ The departure from a guilt-trip tactic might have also worked in his favour to secure the votes from the Malay constituents. However, the notion of gratitude might not work for voters who subscribed to PAS' message, where one should vote out a "corrupted" government. For voters who saw this election as an event beyond their constituency, their moral compass or conscience might easily lead them to vote against BN.

39 <http://asiafoundation.org/news/2012/12/the-asia-foundation-launches-the-youth-factor-2012-survey-of-malaysian-youth-opinion/>. Accessed on 7 October 2013.

40 Maznah Mohammad, "The Contest for Malay Votes in 1999: UMNO's Most Historic Challenge". In *New Politics in Malaysia*. Singapore: ISEAS, 2003, pp. 66–86.

Emerging Trends

In addition to that, the electoral campaign in Titiwangsa illustrated a few emerging trends that may likely continue in urban Malaysia. The prevalent use of new media, the mobilisation of youths as party volunteers, and increased donations all illustrated the growth of participatory democracy in contemporary Malaysia. Different vehicles of political participation were more readily available for ordinary Malaysians than before. Instead of formal institutional participation, the opposition party offered informal avenues to be part of the electoral process.

The evident youth participation in politics, as well as increased instances of financial contributions, indicated that the characters of those who engage in politics, and the terms of their engagement, are changing. This is not to say that old paradigms of communalism or money politics in the form of handouts no longer feature in election campaigns. Indeed, issues of land rights and the protection of Malay rights and interests still featured prominently on both Johari's and Zamri's campaigns. However, the new developments cited above demonstrated that constituents are more varied, sophisticated and engaged.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, one needs to look beyond the traditional model of the 3Ms of money, media and machinery to understand the electoral dynamics in a campaign. Notwithstanding the importance of the 3Ms from the government, one cannot rule out the importance of the 3Cs: community, class and conscience. Similarly, one also cannot rule out the growing demand of institutional changes among voters. Therefore, to remain relevant, BN needs to truly reform and offer fresh ideas that go beyond offering services to the people. While Johari managed to wrest the seat of Titiwangsa from PAS with a slim majority of 866 votes, he will have to strive harder to redeem the image of BN and move beyond espousing BN's service appeal. This is because the concept of gratefulness has limited traction.

MALAYSIAN CHINESE IN A TRANSITIONING MALAYSIA

by Oh Ei Sun

Introduction

In the 2013 Malaysian general election, the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) led by Prime Minister Najib Razak had its parliamentary majority reduced from 140 won in 2008 to 133 out of a total of 222, thus failing to recapture the vaunted two-third majority needed for passing constitutional amendments. The opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR), on the other hand, managed to increase its total number of parliamentary seats from 82 seats in 2008 to 89 seats. The results are however significant in another way. PR captured nearly 51 per cent of the popular votes, and BN secured only slightly more than 47 per cent, despite winning the general election. PR also continued to form state governments in Penang, Selangor and Kelantan with increased majorities.

A closer examination of the election results will show that despite the reduction in BN parliamentary seats, the leading BN component, United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), actually increased its overall seats by another nine seats as compared to 2008. But this was almost cancelled out by a reduction of eight seats by another BN component, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), which has traditionally represented the interest of the Malaysian Chinese community.⁴¹ Other Chinese-based BN component parties also did not fare well. Gerakan was left with a single seat from the two it garnered

41 From 15 won in the 2008 general election to 7 in 2013. It should also be noted that in the 2004 general election, MCA won 32 seats, thus experiencing a downward spiralling of its number of parliamentary seats over the last two general elections.

previously.⁴² The Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) also saw its overall tally reduced markedly, from six seats previously to a mere one seat in the 2013 election. In Sabah, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) saw its president defeated, leaving the BN component party without any parliamentary representation. In some constituencies, it was estimated that close to 90 per cent of Malaysian Chinese voters cast their votes for the opposition. This general election was not the first time that the majority of Malaysian Chinese community decided to vote for PR instead of BN. In the 2008 election, which saw BN losing its two-third parliamentary majority, most Malaysian Chinese voters already chose the nascent opposition coalition led by former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim over BN.⁴³ The preference for the opposition was in stark contrast to the community's solid support for BN in most of the previous general elections. The question that arises then is: What were the main impetuses for such a drastic political change?

The answer lies mainly in the unequal treatments of the different ethnic communities in Malaysia as practised by BN, which has ruled the country since its inception. The Malaysian Constitution provided certain privileges for the then lagging Malay community, with the aim of uplifting their socio-economic status. Following the 1969 racial riots and the tumultuous period that ensued, a series of preferential programmes collectively referred to as the New Economic Policy (NEP) were enacted to benefit the bumiputera, or indigenous communities.⁴⁴ These policies included the mandatory 30 per cent bumiputera shares in public-listed companies, reserved bumiputera places in local public universities and government scholarships. Over

42 In the Malaysian political context, an ethnic-based party is one that proclaims itself to be multiracial in its membership make-up but in reality derives most of its members from a single race.

43 Anwar Ibrahim was dismissed by then Malaysian prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamed and jailed in 1998 over an alleged sodomy offence. It was widely viewed as the result of political differences between the two men. After spending nearly six years in prison, Anwar was subsequently released in 2004 when the Malaysian Federal Court overturned his sodomy conviction.

44 Including not only Malays but supposedly also the natives of Sabah and Sarawak.

the years, the chief beneficiaries of the NEP remain the bumiputera elites, while the non-bumiputera population, Malaysian Chinese among them, complain of unfair treatment or unequal opportunities despite being citizens of Malaysia.

Successive BN administrations chose to ignore these grumblings among the Malaysian Chinese community. Meanwhile, patience was wearing thin among the Chinese, as many more aspired to be treated equally as citizens of the country and not as “second-class” citizens. MCA and other Chinese-based BN component parties were also widely perceived as mainly interested in dividing political spoils left by UMNO and, in any case, ineffectual in representing the interests of the Malaysian Chinese community in government.

Even after the 2008 general election, when it was clear that the Malaysian Chinese were clamouring for political change in line with the aspirations of other communities, the ruling BN continued to drag its feet in effecting genuine transformation towards a more equal and meritocratic society.

At the same time, many in the Malaysian Chinese community were beginning to pin their hope for genuine change on the opposition PR, made up of the Democratic Action Party (DAP), the People’s Justice Party (PKR) and the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS). DAP is a Chinese-based party with socialistic ideals, espousing a “Malaysian’s Malaysia” as its political destination. It has always enjoyed a certain level of support among the Malaysian Chinese community but in the 2008 and 2013 general elections it registered an impressive showing of 30 and 38 seats, respectively. PKR was formed as a Malay-based multiracial party after Anwar’s 1998 dismissal, and also enjoy an appreciable level of Malaysian Chinese support, winning 30 seats in 2013.

Perhaps the most surprising outcome of the 2013—and indeed the 2008—general election was the overwhelming support among the Malaysian Chinese community for PAS. PAS was formed with the theocratic ideology of creating an Islamic state in Malaysia. During its more conservative years in the 1980s and 1990s, PAS’ Islamist image incited fear among many in the Malaysian Chinese community. The party has begun transforming to become a more moderate political

party over the last few years. The party has drawn a clear distinction between its religious credentials and overt racialism—a demarcation that was not adopted by UMNO. PAS has also consciously reached out to the Malaysian Chinese community through various measures, including assisting to build Chinese religious institutions in its incumbent state of Kelantan. The Malaysian Chinese community has responded positively to overtures by PAS. MCA's repeated warnings over the last few years of an imminent theocratic state if PAS or, by extension PR, comes to power fell on deaf ears among the Malaysian Chinese. In the last Malaysian general election, the percentages of Malaysian Chinese voter support for PAS in some constituencies even exceeded those of Malay voter support for the same.⁴⁵

The three PR component parties espoused different political ideologies and, as such, it is inevitable that from time to time they clash among themselves, with some disputes even spilling to the public domain. For instance, the sale of alcohol in the PR-ruled state of Selangor once became a point of contention between the more conservative PAS and the more secular DAP. The matter was settled only after the three parties held a series of consultative meetings. In the eyes of the Malaysian Chinese community, this demonstrated that the three PR component parties are of equal status and were able to resolve differences through negotiations. This attests to the fact that PR has become more politically matured and hence is much preferred to an UMNO-dominated BN where all Chinese-based component parties must play second fiddle at the beck and call of UMNO.

In the run-up to the 2013 general election, a glitch in DAP's party election led to the Malaysian Registrar of Societies (ROS) not recognising DAP's leadership line-up. In order to ensure that all its candidates could indeed contest the general election, DAP resolved to have all its candidates prepare separate sets of nomination papers so that in the event that they were not allowed to use the DAP "rocket" logo, they would use the PAS "moon" logo in West Malaysia and the PKR

45 See, for example, Hammim, Rizalman and Ahmad Fairuz Othman (2013), "Chinese Votes Helped PAS". *New Straits Times*, 11 May. Retrieved from <http://www.nst.com.my/nation/general/chinese-votes-helped-pas-1.276559> on 14 December 2013.

“eye” logo in East Malaysia. On the eve of nomination day, PAS and PKR rushed to sign the authorisation letters into the wee hours of the morning. Although this cautious step eventually proved unnecessary, PAS and PKR’s goodwill to help out their counterparts in DAP in a time of need appeared to have helped further solidify the inter-party bonds among the supporters of the PR component parties.⁴⁶

Draining the “Chinese Tsunami”

The rush in the aftermath of the 2013 general election to explain the reduced majority and inability to regain a two-third majority suffered by BN have led some BN leaders—including, first and foremost, Prime Minister Najib Razak—to openly attribute their dismal electoral performance to a so-called “Chinese tsunami”. While the precise meaning of such a blanket characterisation remains unclear, it is perhaps safe to surmise that it goes along the line of the argument that BN’s non-stellar results were mainly a consequence of Malaysian Chinese not having voted for BN.

At first glance, such a statement appears to be a plain description of what happened in the 2013 general election, especially in view of the fact that most Malaysian Chinese actually did not vote for BN. Indeed, in a mature democracy, the political preference of a majority of a particular ethnic community in and of itself is nothing more than a convenient—even academic—labelling for political analysis. Upon closer examination, however, the “Chinese tsunami” statement is both perilously “loaded” and categorically inaccurate.

This is because the seemingly harmless, technical claim of a Chinese tsunami causing BN’s worse-than-2008 electoral performance cannot be viewed in the abstract but must be framed in the context of the often-fragile racial relationships in a multiracial society such as Malaysia, and especially in view of the racially and religiously charged

46 See, for example, Reme Ahmed (2013), “Opposition Parties Singing Same Tune”, *The Straits Times*, 22 April. Retrieved from <http://www.stasiareport.com/the-big-story/asia-report/malaysia-elections/opinion-blogs/story/opposition-parties-singing-same-tun> on 14 December 2013.

environment⁴⁷ instigated by some racial supremacists and religious extremists before and after the 2008 general election.⁴⁸

Furthermore, the claim is also predicated on the assumptions—which some may view as arrogant and self-serving—that UMNO, as the “rightful” defender of Malay rights and privileges, has “graciously” allowed BN (which it dominates) to “give in” to a large extent to the demands of the Malaysian Chinese community (which should have acquiesced such Malay rights and privileges as per the aforementioned social contract), and that the Malaysian Chinese community should have thus been “grateful”, but instead chose to “rebel”.⁴⁹

While the actual motivation of those who espoused the notion of a Chinese tsunami cannot be fathomed, the potential consequences are that such a “loaded” statement can engender racial ill feelings or worse, especially among segments of the Malaysian population that are prone to be swayed by supremacist influences. That is perhaps why many civil society leaders as well as political figures from both sides of the political divide immediately refuted and deplored such a “Chinese tsunami” claim.⁵⁰

47 Racial and religious matters in Malaysia often intertwine with each other, primarily due to the Malaysian constitutional provision that a Malay is by definition a Muslim.

48 See, for example, R. K. Anand, (2013), “Go to the Moon, Vell Paari Tells Perkasa”, FMT News, 27 February. Retrieved from <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2013/02/27/go-to-the-moon-vell-paari-tells-perkasa/> on 14 December 2013. See also Deborah Loh (2013), “Who Supports Perkasa?”, The Nut Graph, 19 May. Retrieved from <http://www.thenutgraph.com/who-supports-perkasa/> on 14 December 2013.

49 See, for example, the unprecedented permission to build a Chinese independent secondary school in Kuantan in addition to the current 60. It should be noted that those advocating monolingualism see Chinese independent schools as a hindrance to national unity. Conversely, many of those in the Chinese education movements do not see the Kuantan school as a genuine Chinese independent school, and the “upgrade” of a Chinese college, Han Jiang, in Penang into a university college, both in the run-up to the 2013 general elections.

50 See, for example, Yiswaree Palansamy and Jennifer Gomez (2013), “BN Members Split on ‘No-Chinese Tsunami’ Study”, The Malaysian Insider, 9 July. Retrieved from <http://news.malaysia.msn.com/regional/bn-members-split-on-no-chinese-tsunami-study> on 14 December 2013.

The claim of Chinese tsunami is also factually inaccurate. Less than a week after the 2013 general election, renowned Malaysian independent pollster Merdeka Center dispelled the Chinese tsunami claim and reported several voting patterns that explained BN's dismal performance, such as their loss of the "multiracial urban and middle-class" voters.⁵¹

Two months after the 2013 general election, the Center for Strategic Engagement also released the results of a survey showing that voter support for BN fell across racial lines, and that even close to two-thirds of Malay respondents felt that the results of the 2013 general election was due to a "Malaysian tsunami" instead of a Chinese tsunami.⁵² In other words, both studies appeared to demonstrate that BN's unsatisfactory performance in the 2013 general election could not be "blamed" only on the mass "defection" of an admittedly large majority of Malaysian Chinese voters.

BN's Chinese Party Blues

Since before the 2013 general election, several Chinese based parties within BN had been plagued with internal strife. In the MCA, the then president Ong Ka Ting's decision not to seek re-election after the party's crushing defeat in the 2008 general election ushered in a series of internal party struggles which has lingered until the present. During his short tenure, Ong Tee Keat, who replaced Ong Ka Ting, did not see eye to eye with his deputy, Chua Soi Lek, and at one point the party central committee even decided to sack Chua. Chua fought back by having his position reinstated in an extraordinary general meeting, and in the ensuing party election defeated both Ong Tee Keat and a "returned" Ong Ka Ting to become MCA's president. But throughout Chua's tenure, undercurrents of discords similarly existed between Chua's camp and that of his deputy, Liow Tiong Lai, which

51 Boo Su-Lyn (2013). "GE13 not a 'Chinese tsunami', Says Merdeka Center". *The Malaysian Insider*, 10 May. Retrieved from <http://www.merdeka.org/media/275-100513.html> on 14 December 2013.

52 Md. Izwan (2013). "It Wasn't a Chinese Tsunami, Study Shows". *The Malaysian Insider*, 8 July. Retrieved from <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/it-wasnt-a-chinese-tsunami> on 14 December 2013.

intensified after the even more serious 2013 electoral defeat, coming to a fore during the latest party election.

In Sarawak, SUPP's loss of half of its state assembly seats in the 2011 state election led its then president George Chan to step down.⁵³ Despite a party central decision not to enter the new Sarawak state cabinet, party strongman Wong Soon Koh nevertheless was appointed a state minister.⁵⁴ The party then essentially split into two camps, one led by Peter Chin, then party vice president and a federal minister, and the other by Wong. The two camps came to a truce of sorts, with Chin emerging as the party president. However, with Chin's decision not to contest in the 2013 general election, it appears that another round of jostling for party power is on the horizon.

In Sabah, the LDP, the only local BN Chinese-based party, also experienced a sudden party rift after the last general election.⁵⁵ Notwithstanding a party central decision of not having contestants for the top two party posts except the incumbents, party secretary-general and state minister Teo Chee Kang announced his intention to contest the presidency, with support from a large majority of supreme council members. The incumbent president, Liew Vui Keong, thereafter fired Teo and other supreme council members supporting Teo. Not to be outdone, these "sacked" members convened a meeting and "removed" Liew.⁵⁶ The LDP party imbroglio looks set to persist for some time to come.

Internal party struggles in BN's Chinese-based component parties

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- 53 From 12 to 6 out of a total of 71 state assembly seats, with the voters in the lost seats being mostly Chinese and those in the retained seats being mostly bumiputera.
- 54 Whose party position then was actually a relatively junior assistant secretary-general.
- 55 Another multiracial Kadazan-based BN component party in the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) used to have two Chinese state assemblymen but was left with one after the 2013 general election, which also saw its number of Chinese members of parliament increased from one to two, one of whom being the new federal deputy education minister, Mary Yap.
- 56 FMT Staff (2013). "Suspended LDP Council Sacks Liew". FMT News, 11 September. Retrieved from <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2013/09/11/suspended-ldp-council-sacks-liew/> on 14 December 2013.

are understandably not viewed positively by the Malaysian Chinese community at large. Those challenging the incumbent party leader for the leadership of these parties have portrayed themselves as reformers trying to unseat the failed incumbents and introduce new political styles and policies. Nevertheless, for the average Malaysian Chinese voters, the rival camps in these “rejected” parties were just equally tired, old political faces who were fighting one another more for self-serving interests rather than genuine and renewed concern for the interests of the Malaysian Chinese community. In any case, due to their overwhelming electoral defeat in the 2013 general elections, as a whole these parties may not be perceived as politically relevant at all.

Some may argue that similar party struggles exist in the opposition PR as well. For example, after several rounds of confrontation and brinkmanship with ROS over the past year, DAP decided to hold fresh party elections a few months after the 2013 general election, and indeed the same previously elected party leaders were re-elected. But this round of re-election in DAP is not widely perceived by the Malaysian Chinese community as a result of internal party strife but merely a matter of compliance with regulatory requirements, and thus does not appear to detract from their support for DAP.

The Myth of the Malaysian Chinese Dilemma

Superficially, it thus appears that the Malaysian Chinese community faces a difficult dilemma. Reinstated or reinvigorated support for BN on their part is unlikely to receive the “good graces” of the ascendant UMNO right-wing that continues to dominate BN but is more likely to attract reinforced arrogance on the latter’s part, and which is likely to view the “return” of the Malaysian Chinese community as a sign of weakness to be exploited.⁵⁷ For one, in the view

57 During the UMNO general assembly in December 2013, calls for consolidating Malay support and “abandoning” the Chinese community abounded. See, for example, Zahiid, Syed Jaymal (2013), “At UMNO Assembly, Calls for ‘1 Melayu’ to Replace ‘1 Malaysia’”, *The Malay Mail*, 5 December 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/at-umno-assembly-calls-for-1-melayu-to-replace-1-malaysia> on 15 December 2013.

of the Malaysian Chinese community, discriminatory policies that in the first place were repugnant to the community (and indeed any community yearning for equal treatment) will most likely run their course. In fact, they see that such policies are being entrenched by, for example, the recent launch by Prime Minister Najib Razak of the bumiputera economic empowerment agenda, which, among other measures, was to set targets for government-linked companies on projects awarded to bumiputera vendors and emphasis on bumiputera property development.⁵⁸ As such, there is no logical incentive for the Malaysian Chinese community to renew their support for BN.

However, one could argue that throwing in their lot with the opposition PR, as was apparent in the last two general elections, presented the harsh reality for the community that even with such thumping support from the community, PR could not form the government, would further isolate the Malaysian Chinese community from the government decision-making process, and can thus be counter-productive to the well-being of the community. In this regard, the community is caught between two equally unenviable “options and must embark on extensive soul-searching”.

Such observations may not be entirely accurate. First, in the nearly half-year since the new federal cabinet was formed with its diminished Malaysian Chinese representation (currently one minister and one deputy minister), it does not appear that the Malaysian Chinese community deplored this perceived lack of governmental representation. In fact, seldom are complaints and regrets voiced in public or in private. The overwhelming feeling among the Malaysian Chinese community is that they have not been effectively and diligently represented by the BN Chinese-based component parties before the 2013 general election.

Second, for many in the Malaysian Chinese community, even the diminished Malaysian Chinese representation in the federal cabinet does not entail the automatic decimation of their political

58 Bernama (2013). “Najib Launches New Bumiputra Economic Empowerment Agenda”. *The Star*, 14 September 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2013/09/14/najib-bumiputra.aspx> on 14 December 2013.

representation. It should be noted that Malaysian Chinese voters continue to play a critical role in many constituencies, whatever their percentage in the voter make-up may be. This is especially prominent in “mixed” constituencies, where no single community occupies a clear voter majority percentage. It is even so in constituencies where Malaysian Chinese voters make up a small minority, due to an even split in support for BN and PR among the Malay voters. As such, the benefits and aspirations of the Malaysian Chinese community at the constituency or national levels cannot be brushed aside by the ruling BN. The aspirations of the Chinese community must continuously be addressed, failing which will result in further eroding of BN’s already wafer-thin support.

Third, ironically, despite four decades of overt discriminatory treatment by the ruling BN government, which gradually decimated the economic might of the Malaysian Chinese community, the Chinese have nevertheless boosted their resilience, resoluteness and resourcefulness. For the average Malaysian Chinese businessman who has to deal with government authorities in one way or another, new channels are being built or old ones re-established, focusing on direct contacts with Malay officials who have always been the real official decision makers anyway. For those not so business- or government contract-inclined, the necessity of dealing with the authorities is either not great in the first case or can be taken up by the elected representatives from either side of the political divide.

Therefore, it appears that the overwhelming preference of Malaysian Chinese voters for PR not only persisted from the 2008 to the 2013 general election but shows every sign to be sustained into the next general election.

Going Forward

After the 2013 general election, the Malaysian Chinese as a community appears to have reached a crossroad both politically and socioeconomically. In an age where democratic values have become a norm around the world and with the increased awareness of liberty and equality as universal values, the Malaysian Chinese community

looks set to settle for nothing short of equal treatment among all races in Malaysia. The continuing unwillingness on the part of the community to give their support for the ruling BN does not seem to alleviate their concerns about overt official discrimination. On the other hand, their persistent support for the opposition PR, which they view as more likely to reverse those practices, will also not be fruitful, at least not when PR still does not form the federal government and is in no position to effect policy change.

Some among the Malaysian Chinese community who were disappointed with the stalemate chose to migrate overseas, partially contributing to what the World Bank has characterised as an “intense” brain drain for Malaysia.⁵⁹ The Malaysian Chinese diaspora community is noticeable around the world, notably in neighbouring Singapore, Australia and Hong Kong. The more resourceful among them have successfully built their international careers and are able to shuttle with ease between Malaysia and their chosen venue for developing their talents. During a recent state visit, President Xi Jinping of China mentioned that there were those in China who mistook the Malaysian Chinese singer Fish Leong as a Chinese citizen.⁶⁰

But the cold, harsh fact remains that most members of the Malaysian Chinese community do not possess the wherewithal, such as professional qualifications or adequate wealth, to easily migrate to new destinations and restart their lives there. On the other hand, the Malaysian Chinese community’s previous and current strategies of participation in, abandonment of and even confrontation with the ruling BN have thus far proved to be ineffectual. As such, a long-term, albeit only partially acceptable, solution (to those affected) has to be devised for the political and socio-economic survival of the Malaysian Chinese community.

59 Jennifer Pak (2013). “Will Malaysia’s Brain Drain Block Its Economic Ambitions?”. BBC News, 5 June. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22610210> on 14 December 2013.

60 Adrian Wan (2013). “Xi Jinping Surprises with Reference to Malaysian Singer Fish Leong”. *South China Morning Post*, 6 October 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1325466/xi-jinping-surprises-reference-malaysian-singer-fish-leong> on 14 December 2013.

Part of the solution, paradoxically, may lie with the “deracialisation” of the Malaysian Chinese community’s struggle for equal treatment. By consciously and diligently framing the Malaysian Chinese community’s fight for equality away from an exclusively Malaysian Chinese-centric endeavour,⁶¹ and recasting it in the light of universal pursuit of justice and equality for all Malaysians, a “united front” may be gradually formed to encompass all non-bumiputeras⁶² in Malaysia.

Such a “united front” may even draw in disenchanted non-Malay bumiputeras.⁶³ In fact, in the state of Sabah before the entry of UMNO in 1994, a prototype of this socio-political model was practised, with the Sabah Chinese community often forming “coalitions”, official or otherwise, with the (bumiputra) Kadazan-Dusun community to “moderate” some of the more supremacist excesses of some other ruling communities.⁶⁴ The community represented by such a “united front” seeking equal justice—though still not the majority—would also be more substantial than the shrinking Malaysian Chinese population, thus increasing the degree of “bargaining” power when compromises are called for.

Another part of the solution for long-term political and socio-economic viability of the Malaysian Chinese community depends, somewhat ironically and rather precariously, on patiently anticipating and encouraging the awakening of the majority Malay community. On a more theoretical footing, as the general education levels of the Malay community rise, and as more and more of them, especially the young, are exposed either overseas or via the Internet to modern democratic ideals of justice and equality, their understanding of and

61 But not compromising the socio-cultural and linguistic integrity of the community.

62 Most conspicuous of which are the Malaysian Indians.

63 For example, the natives of Sabah and Sarawak who, though considered bumiputeras, often did not receive the same level of preferential treatment as the majority Malay bumiputeras, leading some of them to classify themselves as “second-class” bumiputeras.

64 It should be noted, nevertheless, that racial and religious harmony in Sabah has always been far more prevalent in East Malaysia than in West Malaysia, with, for example, high instances of interracial marriages.

empathy for the plight of their Malaysian Chinese and other compatriots will hopefully deepen.⁶⁵

In addition, the emergence of a viable Malay middle class, often urbane and modern in their outlook, also implies that they would endure similar lack of opportunities and inconveniences as their Malaysian Chinese compatriots. Serious crimes, dilapidating infrastructure, rampant corruption, deteriorating education, cramped transportation and other negative trends do not discriminate along racial or religious lines. These conditions are suffered by all communities in Malaysia equally and are often the detested results of supposedly well-meaning affirmative action twisted to benefit a small number of well-connected elites. Little wonder that among the many civil society and non-governmental organisations that have sprung up since the comparatively (to the Mahathir era) liberalised Abdullah Badawi era, many are multiracial in their make-up, fighting for non-racial issues such as electoral integrity,⁶⁶ environmental protection⁶⁷ and social justice.⁶⁸

But even self-interested elite should not automatically be categorised as lost causes in terms of the common struggle for equality for all Malaysians. It should be noted that in their competition for more power, prestige and money, members of the ruling elite do not necessarily coalesce together as an ideological block. The recent UMNO party elections bore witness to this observation, where those with

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- 65 This hope, however, is somewhat dampened by the results of the last general election, as it was found that the majority of young and first-time Malay voters preferred BN. Although this does not necessarily imply that these voters are in agreement with UMNO's racialist policies, it does suggest that more mutual understanding and clarification of political and socio-economic stances are needed among the various races in Malaysia. See TMI staff (2013), "The General Election Surprise: Younger Malays Too Went to Barisan", *The Malaysian Insider*, 16 August. Retrieved from <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/the-general-election-surprise-younger-malays-too-went-to-barisan> on 14 December 2013.
- 66 With Bersih, or Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections, as the foremost example.
- 67 With Himpunan Hijau, or the Green Assembly, as the foremost example.
- 68 With Suaram, or Voice of Malaysian People, as the foremost example.

more progressive views had to tangle with those who were more conservative and reactionary.⁶⁹ By skilfully aligning with the more progressive, albeit splinter groups among the ruling elite, the Malaysian Chinese community can patiently wait for UMNO's iron grip on power to be gradually chipped away. Indeed, this tactic should not be strange to the Malaysian Chinese community, for over the past five years an overwhelming majority of them has decided to pledge their support for Anwar Ibrahim, who used to be part of the ruling elite, but later split away from the powers that be. In fact, on an even larger scale, over the same period of time, the Malaysian Chinese community has also accepted and even embraced PAS, which also represented the sentiments of a large segment of the Malay population. The result of such political "marriages" has been stunning—with the opposition PR obtaining more than half of the popular votes.

Despite the present gloomy political outlook for the Malaysian Chinese community, all hope is not lost, and by skilfully aligning their legitimate aspirations for equal treatment with universal values, and carefully building viable coalitions with their fellow Malaysians in a transitioning Malaysia, Chinese Malaysians possess all the potential to free themselves from the shackles that have constrained them for so long, and assume their equal station as full-fledged Malaysians.

69 For example, among the newly elected UMNO top leadership, the supposedly more open-minded Najib has to work with his allegedly more conservative deputy, Muhyiddin Yassin. The acclaimed liberal-minded UMNO youth leader, Khairy Jamaluddin, has to deal with his UMNO women's wing counterpart, Sharizat Abdul Jalil.

ISLAM, ETHNICITY AND POLITICAL POWER

MALAY VOTING PATTERN IN THE 13TH MALAYSIAN ELECTION

by Mohamed Nawab Bin Mohamed Osman

“Saya adalah orang pertama yang akan mempertahankan orang Cina jika rusuhan kaum berlaku.” [I will be the first person to defend the Chinese if racial riots break out.]

– Mahfuz Omar, Vice-President of PAS and Member of Parliament, Pokok Sena

Introduction

The above statement made by Mahfuz Omar, Vice-President of PAS, is reflective of the role reversals that were displayed in the 13th Malaysian election. Mahfuz was responding to remarks made by former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed that if Lim Kit Siang, the veteran leader of the Democratic Action Party (DAP), was to win the seat of Gelang Patah in the state of Johor, there would be racial riots. The fact that Mahfuz chose to make such a remark in a rally in a Malay-majority urban area, a traditional stronghold of UMNO, is even more remarkable. Less than a decade ago, the notion that a leader of an Islamist party defending the Chinese populace against the racial tirade of a former Prime Minister would have been unthinkable. PAS was traditionally viewed as a fanatical party seeking to enact draconian Islamic criminal laws and promulgate an Islamic state that would limit the rights of non-Muslims in the country. On the other hand, the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) was lauded as the epitome of moderation in the Muslim world. Yet, in recent years, there has been a role reversal between the two parties, as highlighted above. This change is a result of changes in the politics of the Malay community in the country. These changes could be discerned in the Malay voting pattern in the 2013 election. This chapter seeks to understand this

trend. It identifies issues that affected the way the Malays voted during the elections and offers a trajectory on the future of Malay politics in Malaysia. The chapter makes the case that race, religion and political dominance are important in determining the way the Malays voted in the election but other factors, such as a need for a new social contract and economic factors, are equally important, especially among better educated and younger Malay voters.

The race for Malay votes has always been an important feature of Malaysian politics. In the 1990s, PAS and UMNO were engaged in what was termed an Islamisation race aimed at capturing the Malay vote. By 1998, the watershed emergence of the Reformasi movement following the sacking of then Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim further divided the Malay community. In the 1999 election, which followed, UMNO took a major hit when it lost 22 seats and the majority of the Malay votes.⁷⁰ If not for the non-Malay votes, the Malaysian government could have fallen to the opposition. The election also saw the emergence of a new player in Malay politics, the Keadilan party (later to be renamed Parti Keadilan Rakyat, PKR). Although officially multi-ethnic, PKR is essentially a Malay-based party. In the 2004 election, some Malays swung back to UMNO. This, together with strong support enjoyed by the Barisan National (BN) among the non-Malays, saw BN winning this election by a thumping majority.⁷¹ The 2008 election came as a surprise for many observers of Malaysian politics. It was the first time since the 1969 election that non-Malay voters shifted their support to the opposition. The Malay votes were once again split but a slight majority of the Malays threw their lot with UMNO and BN. The 2013 election was thus seen as an important test for PR in their quest to capture power and BN to retain control over the government. In this contest, the Malay votes were seen as crucial in determining the future directions of Malaysian politics.

70 For a detailed assessment of the 1999 elections, see Meredith L. Weiss, "The 1999 Malaysian General Elections: Issues, Insults, and Irregularities", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (May – June 2000), pp. 413–435.

71 See Abdul Rashid Moten and Tunku Mohar Mokhtar, "The 2004 General Elections in Malaysia: A Mandate to Rule", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (March/April 2006), pp. 319–340.

Malay Voting Pattern in GE13: The Results

The 2013 election indicated that a small majority of the Malays voted for UMNO and BN. A study by Merdeka Centre, the most reliable pollster in the country, indicated that BN and UMNO obtained 61.6 per cent of the Malay vote, a marginal 1.5 per cent aggregated increase over the 2008 vote share. The pollster estimated that there were some 119 Malay districts, and of these, only 20 were considered urban.⁷² BN swept 78 out of the 99 rural Malay seats but only five of urban Malay seats. UMNO scored the biggest gains in Kedah and Kuala Lumpur and saw its support noticeably drop in Terengganu and Perlis. One problem with the study is its failure in accounting for the Malay voting pattern in ethnically mixed seats. The voting patterns for such seats are complex, especially given that the Malay voters voted differently in different contexts. For instance, in the parliamentary seat of Selayang, where Malays and non-Malays are closely divided (Malays, 45 per cent, and non-Malays, 55 per cent), the PKR candidate improved his showing. He could not have done so without capturing at least 50 per cent of the Malay vote. Conversely, in Segamat, another ethnically mixed seat (Malays, 43 per cent, and non-Malays, 57 per cent), BN could not have won the seat without enormous support from the Malay community. This is assuming that a substantial number of non-Malays voted against BN.

Several trends can be discerned from the results. First, there was a divide in the way urban Malay voters and rural Malay voters voted. Among the rural voters, one can see that a large number voted for BN. This divide is most apparent when one assesses the results at a glance. Out of the 99 rural seats with a Malay majority, BN won 78 of them while it captured only five of the 22 urban Malay majority seats. However, a closer scrutiny of the results also shows differences in the way Malays in the northern Malay states (e.g. Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis) voted vis-à-vis the Malays in the southern Malay states (Johor, Melaka and Negeri Sembilan). In Terengganu, where BN is currently ruling with a two-seat majority, PAS won with sizable majorities in many rural seats such as Kuala Nerus, Dungun

72 Boo Su-Lyn, "GE13 not a 'Chinese tsunami, says Merdeka Center", *The Malaysian Insider*, 10 May 2013.

and Marang. In Perlis, another state with sizable rural population, PAS made inroads in several of UMNO's traditional strongholds. In the parliamentary seat of Kangar (which is 85 per cent Malay), BN's percentage majority was slashed by more than half. The BN candidate captured 70 per cent of the votes in 2008 but this was reduced to 54 per cent in 2013.⁷³ Despite its dismal performance, PAS won in at least five rural state seats in Kedah, including Bukit Pinang and Tokai, and yet the party lost by small margins of less than 2,000 votes in the state.⁷⁴ The voting patterns could be contrasted with seats in Negeri Sembilan and Melaka, where UMNO candidates maintained or improved their showing. A case in point is the seat in Rembau, where BN improved its showing by garnering 64 per cent of the votes, an improvement from the 55 per cent that it garnered in 2008.⁷⁵ In Johor, despite the significant presence of Chinese voters, who were generally supportive of the opposition, many rural seats remained with UMNO, indicating strong support for BN among the Malay populace.

Second, while the bulk of Malay voters supported PR, a substantial number who favoured BN were from the lower-income groups. Hence, a case can be made that a class divide is one trend that has emerged from the election. For instance, in Kampung Kerinchi, an area with many lower-income Malays, the majority of the votes went to BN's Raja Nong Chik, while those in Bangsar, an area with a sizable number of upper-income Malays, the majority voted for PR's Nurul Izzah.⁷⁶

Third, the Malay voters were split according to age groups. Interestingly, first-time Malay voters supported BN despite all expectations that they would form the bulk of support for PR. It was the 31–40 age group that PR managed to capture. Those above

73 See <http://undi.info/perlis/p/P2>. Retrieved on 5 September 2013.

74 See <http://undi.info/#/kedah/n/2013>. Retrieved on 5 September 2013.

75 See <http://undi.info/negeri-sembilan/p/P131>. Retrieved on 5 September 2013.

76 Interview with Rafizi Ramli, Kuala Lumpur, 30 June 2013.

40 were firmly behind BN.⁷⁷ Several factors emerged as crucial in understanding the outcome of the election as well as the diversity in Malay voting pattern.

Electoral Strategies

One of the key successes of UMNO in garnering Malay votes during the election may be attributed to its electoral strategies. From the onset, UMNO and BN leaders knew that the key to the election was the Malay votes. As Clive Kessler noted, the key question was whether UMNO/BN, and especially UMNO itself, could win enough peninsular Malay votes, in association with its Sarawak and Sabah allies, to secure a clear parliamentary majority.⁷⁸ The campaign was to target the voter in the more traditional rural heartland areas. The government utilised traditional media outlets such as the Malay television channels and newspapers to directly appeal to the Malay's sense of insecurity that their political dominance might fizzle if they failed to support UMNO and BN.⁷⁹ BN sent SMS and snail mails to many rural folk, who found this approach to be very personal. Many rural voters actually thought that some of these SMS were sent personally by the candidates and were very touched by such a gesture.⁸⁰ UMNO also had the resources to employ individuals to assist in their campaign. Gifts in the forms of food, money and household items were dished out by BN to rural Malays. Beyond the official BR1M funds disbursed, many rural voters were also given vouchers that could be exchanged for money if BN wins. This had an impact on the psyche of many voters. This was coupled with promises of infrastruc-

77 "The general election surprise: Younger Malays too went to Barisan". *The Malaysian Insider*. Retrieved from <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/the-general-election-surprise-younger-malays-too-went-to-barisan> on 5 September 2013.

78 Clive Kessler, "Malaysia's GE13: What happened, what now? (Part 1)". *New Mandala*, 12 June 2013. Retrieved from <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2013/06/12/malaysias-ge13-what-happened-what-now-part-1/> on 5 September 2013.

79 Ibid.

80 Personal observation by author during the campaign period in Kedah and Perlis.

tural developments as well as assistance in other forms. UMNO's election campaign can thus be described as a carrot approach and generally found resonance with some rural and lower-income Malays. In Kedah and Johor, UMNO had clear chief minister candidates, Mukhriz Mahathir and Khaled Noordin. For many Malays, these were political figures that they could rally around.

PR campaigned on more abstract concepts such as good governance, ridding the nation of corruption and establishing a more equitable economic system. While these issues found traction with the better-educated Malay voters, the rural and less-educated Malays found these issues to be less relevant to their daily struggles. PR also utilised new media in trying to engage with the electorate. Nearly all PR candidates maintained their own Twitter and/or Facebook pages. These outlets were regularly updated to ensure that the public was kept updated about the activities of the different candidates. Another method employed by PR was the use of the WhatsApp application to send messages to the public to seek their support. Once again, new media was a double-edged sword for PR. While the coalition successfully reached out to urban and upper-class Malays, they failed to reach out to rural Malay voters, some of whom were still dependent on older models of handphones. The lack of access to traditional media outlets meant that it was difficult for PR to counter the narratives put forth by BN.

PR was also highly dependent on volunteers throughout the campaign due to shortage of funds. While these volunteers were highly committed, they paled in comparison to UMNO's machinery.⁸¹ In the daytime, many of PR's volunteers had to work, hence limiting their ability to assist in the electoral campaigning. PR was also not in a position to offer any real incentives to voters in the form of financial aid and assistance. Once again, this gave BN the upper hand in many rural seats. PR was also unable to present political figures who were chief minister candidates in the northern Malay states. Even in the state of Kedah, which was under PAS rule, there were rumours that Azizan Abdul Razak, the then chief minister, would be replaced by

81 Interview with Mahfuz Omar, Alor Setar, 1 May 2013.

a younger candidate. With the replacement of Hashim Jasin as PAS' commissioner in the state of Perlis, no credible chief minister candidate was presented if Perlis was to fall to PR. In Terengganu, Harun Taib and Mustafa Ali were both cited as possible chief ministers. In essence, BN's win in the rural areas could be attributed to a more effective campaign than PR.

Inciting Communal Panic

A key message that was reiterated consistently was the notion that the existence of the Malay race was in jeopardy. As Kessler noted, the UMNO campaign was simple: "All is at risk!"⁸² Politicians kept hammering away the notion that everything was at stake. If UMNO lost the election, the Malays would lose the ultimate bastion of Malay-Islamic identity and national primacy. UMNO leaders argued that they were the true defenders of the Malay political leadership, the religious ascendancy of Islam, and the constitutional position of the Malay rulers. It was further maintained that PR was seeking to eradicate the New Economic Policy (better known as the bumiputera policy), abolish the institution of Malay kings, and formulate policies that would result in Chinese dominance in both the economic and political spheres. The campaign was targeted at showing how tenuous the basis of the Malay identity had become due to the complex Malaysian political terrain. This was done by targeting DAP as the party that masterminded a plan to decimate the Malay political influence. Comparisons were made between the Malays in Malaysia and the Malays in Singapore. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad reached for an old playbook in order to drum up support by hitting out at Singapore. In a blog posting before the election, he accused the opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) of wanting to end the traditional Malay-Chinese cooperation in Malaysia.⁸³ Instead, he argued that the DAP wanted to implement meritocracy, which he said the ruling People's Action Party in Singapore championed

82 Kessler, "Malaysian GE 13".

83 Teo Cheng Wee and Zakir Hussain, "Mahathir blasts Singapore to rally support for BN". *The Straits Times*, 13 April 2013.

and was “about the winners taking all”. This would result in Malays losing their political power in Malaysia.

The threat of DAP was real for many Malays in the south, especially those in the rural areas. The mammoth political rallies organised by DAP in Seremban, Gelang Patah and Melaka drew widespread support from the Chinese populace in these areas. Nevertheless, it had a reverse impact of inciting fear among the Malays that their political position was threatened and hence alienated many Malay voters. Random interviews conducted with rural Malay voters in Jempol and Muar showed that many rural Malays saw the prospect of a DAP-led state government being formed in Negeri Sembilan and Johor as real.⁸⁴ Many Malays continued to see DAP as a Chinese chauvinist party, even as the party sought to assure them that it represented all races in Malaysia. When it was pointed out to these voters that the state constitutions of both Negri Sembilan and Johor stated that only a Malay would be appointed as chief minister, they cited stories that they had heard from relatives and friends over alleged curbs on Malay rights in Perak when it was ruled by PR, even though the chief minister then was a Malay from PAS.⁸⁵ Given the higher percentage of Chinese in the south, the fear of Chinese dominance was real for the southern Malays.

The “Doublespeak” of PAS versus UMNO’s “Commitment” to Islam

The Islamisation race between PAS and UMNO, long a feature of Malay politics in the country, emerged during the campaigning period. UMNO politicians presented their party as the bastion of the Islamic faith. Highlighting the Lina Joy case, which saw UMNO defending the decision of Malaysian courts to reject Lina Joy’s application to change her religion to Christianity, UMNO leaders noted that they played an important role in defending Muslims from the onslaught of Christians who sought to convert as many Muslims

84 Interview with Malay voters in Gelang Patah and Johor Bahru, 24 April 2013, and Jempol, 3 June 2013.

85 Ibid.

as possible to Christianity.⁸⁶ The Allah issue was also cited as an example of UMNO's defence of Islam from Christianity. In this issue, UMNO leaders had taken a stance not to allow Malaysian Christians to use the word "Allah" in the Malay translation of the Bible.⁸⁷ Beyond bragging about its Islamic credentials, UMNO leaders also criticised PR for their supposed attempts to liberalise Islam. DAP was portrayed as a Christian party seeking to transform Malaysia into a Christian state. Anwar Ibrahim, leader of the People's Justice Party (PKR), was accused of being a Jewish conspirator seeking to destroy Islam from within. Anwar's close relationship with American neo-conservatives such as Paul Wolfowitz was alluded to as proof of this supposed conspiracy. The harshest critique was reserved for PAS. UMNO leaders attacked PAS for their inconsistent stance on issues affecting Islam in Malaysia. In the Allah controversy, PAS leaders had issued contradictory statements, with some allowing the use of the word "Allah" in the Christian Bible while others were opposed to this.⁸⁸ It was also claimed that PAS was playing second fiddle to DAP and PKR and, as a result, had to bury its aim of promulgating an Islamic state in Malaysia. Therefore, it was evident that UMNO's key strategy was to cast doubts in the minds of Muslims in Malaysia about PR and buttress its own image as defender of the Islamic faith.

PAS' retorts against UMNO's attacks were far from convincing. It was as if the party was running two parallel campaigns. Many of the party's moderate leaders continued to advocate the need for PAS to respect the rights of minorities in Malaysia. Salahuddin Ayub, one of the party's moderate leaders, campaigned vigorously and assured non-Muslims in Malaysia that they would be accorded more rights if PR were to form a government at the federal level. He emphasised

⁸⁶ Akil Yunus and Adrian Lai, "PAS has no Influence in PR", *New Straits Times*, 14 December 2012.

⁸⁷ Najib Defends Ban on Use of "Allah" by non-Muslims. *Malaysiakini*, 26 April 2013.

⁸⁸ Nik Aziz, PAS's spiritual leader, had initially argued that Christians could use the word "Allah" in the Malay bible. However, other PAS leaders such as Harun Taib and Harun Din had opposed the usage of Allah in Malay bibles. See Salmah Mat Hussin, "Setuju kalimah Allah untuk tujuan dakwah – TG Nik Aziz", *Harakah*, 8 January 2013; and Sira Habibu, "Haron: I'll never agree to allow non-Muslims use 'Allah'", *The Star*, 10 January 2013.

the tenets of “Buku Jingga” and assuaged the fears of non-Muslim Malaysians by declaring that the party had no intention of establishing an Islamic state.⁸⁹ Such moderate talk was absent in the party’s campaigns in some parts of the northern states. During his campaign in Arau, Perlis, PAS’ deputy spiritual leader Dr Haron Din peppered his speeches with verses from the Qur’an and stated PAS’ firm commitment to enact Islamic laws in Malaysia. His speeches were focused on the un-Islamic nature of the UMNO-led government and how UMNO leaders have gone out of their way to prevent the implementation of Islamic laws in the country.⁹⁰ He presented an opposing view (to that of other PAS leaders) to the Allah issue, arguing that the use of the word should not be allowed in the Bible. In essence, PAS as a party was engaging in doublespeak and tailoring its message to the different audiences the party was engaging. The inconsistent positing of Islam in its campaign was quickly capitalised by UMNO through the mainstream media. The contradictory speeches of PAS leaders were screened during prime-time news, resulting in the decimation of PAS’ political credibility. PAS leaders found it difficult to present UMNO as an un-Islamic political entity, especially when the party itself was aligned with two secular parties and it had put its own Islamic state agenda in the back burner. This had an impact on the way the party performed in some of the northern states.

PAS as the Crucial Link

One key implication of the results is the massive responsibility that PAS shouldered during the election. PAS was at the forefront of having to win rural Malay seats for PR. While most observers have highlighted the poor performance of PAS in the election, a closer scrutiny of the results reveals that PAS actually improved its showing in terms of popular vote. Even in Kedah, the party lost marginally in most seats, whereas in Perlis and Terengganu, the party improved on its showing. PAS’ failure to retain Kedah can be attributed to the internal division within PAS Kedah. A former head of PAS Ulama in

89 Speech by Salahuddin Ayub at a rally in Gelang Patah, 22 April 2013.

90 Speech by Harun Din at a Mosque in Arau, 30 April 2013.

Kedah had called on his congregation not to support a Shiite candidate during a speech at a mosque.⁹¹ While he did not name anyone, it was clear to all that he was referring to Mohamed Sabu, the deputy president of PAS. Several *tok gurus* [religious heads] of *pondok* schools in Kedah also had a falling out with the then Kedah chief minister, Azizan Abdul Razak, resulting in these *tok gurus* throwing their support behind the UMNO candidates. One prominent case was that of Salahuddin Yahya, head of one of the most prominent *pondok* in Kedah, Pondok Pak Ya. He failed to acquire funds for his school located in Guar Chempaka, Jerai.⁹² He had instructed all his students and residents living in the area not to support the PAS candidate, Firdaus Jaafar. This was an important factor that saw PAS losing the seat of Jerai.

PAS was placed in a difficult position in the southern states of Melaka, Johor and Negeri Sembilan. While PAS was viewed as having put aside its agenda of Islamisation, many Malays in the southern states viewed PAS as a rural, Kelantan-based party with an extreme worldview on Islam. Many Malays in Johor continued to see PAS' version of Islam as running counter to their more "moderate" understanding of Islam. One UMNO candidate noted that the candidates campaigning for PAS in Johor tended to come from Kelantan and were viewed as conservatives.⁹³ PAS candidates had to contend with anti-PR sentiments. A case in point was the election campaign in Jempol, where Aishah, PAS' candidate in the seat, was forced to withdraw from campaigning in the Bukit Rokan area, which included the largely Malay FELDA community, after residents in the area told her to leave.⁹⁴

PAS' grassroots network tended to be weaker in the southern states. In the parliamentary seat of Pulai, PAS' candidate Salahuddin Ayub was highly dependent on a team that comprised non-Johoreans. Most hailed from Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Kelantan, making it difficult for them to truly understand the dimensions of local

91 Personal observation of author at Masjid Zahir Alor Setar on 2 May 2013.

92 Interview with Mahfuz Omar, Alor Setar, 30 April 2013.

93 Interview with Dato' Nur Jazlan Mohamed, Johor Bahru, 24 April 2013.

94 Personal observation of author at Bukit Rotan, 23 April 2013.

Johorean politics. One PAS activist quipped that the party received little support from DAP, which had a more established grassroots network in Johor and Negeri Sembilan. The fact that several DAP leaders even called for party members not to vote for PAS attested to the fact that many DAP members were reluctant to support PAS.⁹⁵

The Race Factor in Malay Politics

Several analyses that emerged after the election have argued that race remained a key determinant in the way Malaysian Malays voted. This could be discerned from the fact that Malay votes were clearly with BN. However, such assertions fail to consider the nuances within the voting pattern. The complete wipe-out of Perkasa in the elections bore testimony that the Malays in Malaysia were generally against racist politics. The fact that both candidates from Perkasa, Ibrahim Ali and Zulkifli Noordin, lost to PAS candidates drive home the point that such politics are neither accepted nor appreciated. The fact that Ibrahim lost to a conservative PAS candidate, Nik Abduh Nik Aziz, in a rural seat while Zulkifli lost to Khaled Noordin, a moderate PAS leader in an urban seat, clearly spelt out that Perkasa's politics has no place among both rural and urban Malays. The voting pattern reflected a fear that PR might do away with policies that gave special rights to Malays. While many saw these policies as crucial, younger Malay voters were beginning to shun policies that specifically discriminated against non-Malays. One such policy was the quota system in universities, which many Malays felt not only discriminated against non-Malays but awarded non-deserving Malay students places in top faculties within the country. This had a negative impact not only on non-Malays but also on Malaysian society at large.

Likewise, many Malays supported BN out of fear that DAP would be dominant within a PR government more than because they supported the racial policies of UMNO. UMNO's strategy of comparing DAP to the People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore, a country that many Malaysian Malays perceived as being discriminatory against

95 Nelson Benjamin, "DAP Johor rebel calls for voters to reject PAS national information chief Suhaizan Kayat". *The Star*, 28 April 2013.

its Malay minority, found resonance with some Malay voters, especially among the less educated. DAP's campaign, especially in Johor, Melaka and Negeri Sembilan, that drew tens of thousands fuelled this fear further. It is thus likely that race will remain a key determinant of future Malaysian politics. Nevertheless, given the fact that UMNO carried the elections by banking on Malay votes is likely to encourage the more conservative leaders within UMNO to carve a larger political space.

A Conservative Turn to Islam

In a pre-election talk delivered at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) in Singapore, Nik Abduh Nik Aziz, PAS' deputy youth chief, remarked that PAS' performance at GE13 would determine the final outcome of the election. Nik Abduh was not far off in his predictions.⁹⁶ While PAS' performance was not remarkably different from the 2008 elections, its inability to deliver a better result led to PR's disappointing failure to form the next Malaysian government. It was clear that it was the Malay votes that would ultimately decide the outcome of the election. This unsatisfactory performance has led some leaders in PAS to call for a return to its conservative roots. Some in the party have chastised the moderate leaders in PAS for the party's failures. It was argued that the enthusiasm of these leaders to capture power in the "Roadmap to Putrajaya" strategy headed by Husam Musa had led to the party's defeat in areas with a Malay-majority populace.⁹⁷ Many within the conservative group felt that PAS' election strategy was too focused on winning the votes of non-Malay and non-Muslim voters, leading to a decline in support among Malay voters. Remarks made by moderate PAS leaders such as Dr Dzulkifli Ahmad that the bumiputera policy would be scrapped if the opposition PR was to win were believed to have affected PAS' performance in Malay-majority seats. These conservatives are calling for PAS to start focusing on its core values and build on the

96 Nik Mohamad Abduh bin Nik Abdul Aziz, Deputy Youth Chief of PAS, "The 13th Malaysian General Election and the Future Direction of PAS". RSIS Seminar Series, 6 February 2013.

97 Personal conversation with Fadli Ghani, Head of PAS Archives, 20 May 2013.

party's Muslim base. PAS' strategy of *tahaful siyasi*, it was argued, has brought little benefit to the party. This strategy involved working with like-minded groups for a larger common objective.⁹⁸

In this pursuit, conservative leaders in PAS are already beginning to posit a more nationalist position. The late Harun Taib had called for PAS to maintain the supremacy of the Malay race in the country. In a direct contradiction to the earlier position stated by party president Hadi Awang, Harun had stated that it was forbidden for Malaysian Christians to use the word "Allah" to describe God in the Malay translation of the Bible. Many of the conservatives are also highly suspicious of DAP. One PAS leader told the author that PAS must embark on some serious research on DAP to ascertain DAP's final objective.⁹⁹ In essence, the conservatives are seeking to re-introduce the agendas of implementing Islamic laws and promulgating an Islamic state into the party's agenda. As such, a win for the conservatives in the upcoming party polls is likely to see a return of PAS' Islamisation agenda.

In the same vein, it is clear that UMNO is focusing its efforts on winning Malay votes. The recently rolled-out new economic empowerment agenda for *bumiputera* was aimed at winning the support of the Malays. Several new measures to enhance *bumiputera* equity ownership as well as to increase the home ownership of *bumiputeras* were clearly aimed at winning the support of the Malay electorate. The new initiative quickly drew criticisms from the opposition in its failure to assist the poor among the non-Malays.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, it was clear that the UMNO leadership is now more concerned with securing the support of their Malay constituents.

Among these measures, UMNO leaders are also seeking to highlight their Islamic credentials. One of the first changes made by Mukhriz in Kedah after his appointment as chief minister was

98 For more on *tahaful siyasi*, see Muhammad Ahmad Rasyid (2011), *Tahaful Siyasi: Hukum dan Syarat*. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Salam.

99 Interview with Nik Abduh, PAS Deputy Youth Chief, 7 February 2013, Singapore.

100 Neville Spykerman, "Hadi Awang: Don't exclude aid to other races on basis of bumiputera rights" *The Star*, 17 September 2013.

the banning of the teaching of the Shiite sect in the state. The state government planned to gazette the National Fatwa Council's ruling in 1996 that Shiite teachings were deviant.¹⁰¹ The ban received widespread support from several PAS leaders. Jamil Khir Baharom, the de-facto UMNO religious minister supported the ban in a move that was viewed as an attempt by UMNO to enhance its religious credentials. Key UMNO leaders accused Mat Sabu of being Shiite and in the process swayed some Malay voters to support UMNO.¹⁰² Hence, it is assumed that this will find traction within the Malay community. Prime Minister Najib has also attempted to enhance his Islamic credentials in the Muslim world. Just prior to the election, he went on an official trip to Gaza, where he met leaders of HAMAS and claimed to assist in mending ties between HAMAS and Fatah.¹⁰³ He also hosted Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leaders in Malaysia. At the recent UN General Assembly meeting, he also made a case for a more moderate Muslim world in a speech that was clearly aimed at propping his image in the Muslim world.¹⁰⁴ This strategy of positing a more Islamic foreign policy was also one adopted by his predecessors, especially when faced with domestic challenges.¹⁰⁵

The turn to conservatism that is occurring in UMNO and by some in PAS has led to more common ground between the two parties. Already there have been calls from UMNO and conservative PAS leaders that the two parties should come together for the sake

101 John Tiong, "Kedah Praised for Shia Teaching Ban". *New Straits Times*, 20 July 2013.

102 Personal observation of author in Kedah during the election campaign period.

103 Martin Calvarho, "Najib's move to mend Hamas-Fatah ties a historic moment". *The Star*, 24 January 2013.

104 "Moderation will help stop extremists, Najib tells UN General Assembly". *Malaysian Insider*, 28 September 2013. Retrieved on 28 September 2013 from [http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/moderation-will-marginalise-extremists-najib-tells-un-generalassembly?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+tmi%2Fnews%2Fallnews+\(TMI+-+All+News\).](http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/moderation-will-marginalise-extremists-najib-tells-un-generalassembly?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+tmi%2Fnews%2Fallnews+(TMI+-+All+News).)

105 For details of this, see Shanti Nair, "Islam in Malaysia's Foreign Policy" (London: Routledge, 2002); and Johan Saravanamuttu, *Malaysia's Foreign Policy: The First Fifty Years: Alignment, Neutralism, Islamism* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2010), pp. 234–274.

of Malay and Islamic unity. These calls have, however, been quelled by moderate leaders who prefer to continue working with PKR and DAP. However, the success of the conservatives at the PAS party election will alter the equation. If UMNO leaders are willing to accede to PAS' demands to implement Islamic criminal laws, conservatives within PAS might consider joining the governing coalition and give BN its much-desired absolute majority in parliament. However, this scenario is highly unlikely. Several key PAS leaders such as Nik Aziz are likely to oppose such a move. A more likely outcome is PAS leaving the PR coalition and functioning as an Islamist opposition to UMNO. This is likely to have a negative impact on PAS' chances of improving its performance in GE14, especially given the fact that the party has received substantial support from non-Muslims during the polls.

The Trajectory of Malay Politics: Moving to More Centrist Politics

The 13th Malaysian election saw the emergence of a new expression of Malay politics, which is both complex and nuanced. It is clear that Malays do not have an appreciation for extremist politics. The poor performance of Perkasa has shown the Malay electorates' rejection of extreme racial politics. Nonetheless, race and religion continue to play an important role. This is seen in DAP's inability to capture Malay votes in seats with sizable Malay populace, such as Johor. In moving forward, both PR and BN need to focus on Malay votes while maintaining the support of non-Malays. In this regard, both PAS and DAP will need to do more to reach out to Malay voters.

In the case of PAS, the party must be seen to be modern, moderate and able to govern Malaysia. The party must be seen to be a credible alternative to UMNO. PAS must note that Malays who support PAS are not necessarily supportive of its Islamist stance. Hence, in moving forward, PAS has to adopt the civic Islamism akin to the ideology of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey. Such

posturing will allow the party to win more seats in the southern states of Johor and Negri Sembilan. In the northern states, the party has a good shot at winning Terengganu and re-taking Kedah. The great improvements the party made in Perlis should also see it improving its performance further. PAS cannot risk its political future by resorting to its hard Islamist stance such as seeking to implement Islamic criminal laws , as it will risk the party losing both non-Muslim and Muslim votes.

DAP must also do more to change its image of being a Chinese-dominated party. The party has made significant progress in winning some Malay support. It boasts several Malay members of parliament and state assemblymen, and the party estimates that its support among the Malays has increased in certain states, such as Penang and Selangor. Nevertheless, Malay fear of DAP remains real, especially in the southern states, which have a larger Malay populace. As such, DAP must do more to reach out to Malay voters and shed its image of being an anti-Malay party. Its ability to allay fears will help ensure that its PR partners, PAS and PKR, will be in a position to capture more votes.

On the part of BN, Prime Minister Najib has vowed to undertake a process of national reconciliation with the aim of setting aside communalism and extremism. Several months after GE13, this pledge proved mere rhetoric, as the BN government dished out even more policies that exclusively benefited the Malays and introduced more measures aimed at enhancing Islamisation in the country. Contrary to this initial promise, UMNO is now focused on winning the Malay votes. Such a political strategy may be ineffective if it is not accompanied by serious steps aimed at curbing corruption, money politics and government mismanagement. It seems that BN is also not attuned to the fact that the days of old-school racial politics are numbered among younger Malays. Racial politics is beginning to find less resonance with many Malays, who are seeking a more cosmopolitan approach to politics. The failure of UMNO to reform and an overdependence on race and religion is likely to see a poorer performance by UMNO in GE14.

Conclusion

This chapter is an attempt to identify key trends of the way the Malay community voted in the 13th Malaysian election and factors that impacted this voting pattern. The chapter argues that factors such as race and religion remain crucial in determining the Malay voting pattern. Nevertheless, new factors such as the desire for more social equity and economic imperatives are equally important in deciding the way Malays in Malaysia voted. In the immediate aftermath of the election, UMNO began to do more to reach out to Malay voters by implementing more policies beneficial to the Malays and giving more focus to Islam through measures that are deemed to strengthen the position of Islam in Malaysia. On the part of the opposition, PAS will need to do more to build its grassroots base in states like Johor, Negeri Sembilan and Melaka to recruit more locals to assist the party. At the same time, PAS' continued moderate stance will ensure that the party garners more support as it progresses to the next election. Similarly, DAP will need to do more in reaching out to Malays in Malaysia. The perception that the party is pro-Chinese must be dispelled by its leaders. In doing so, the party must do more to appoint credible Malays within its leadership ranks. In sum, while race and religion continue to dominate the Malaysian political discourse, the coalition that will form the next government will be the centrist force that gives attention to issues such as alleviating corruption, social inequity and economic development.

THE 13TH GENERAL ELECTION OF MALAYSIA

THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR IN THE CONTEXT OF “1MALAYSIA”

by Farish A. Noor

Background to the 13th General Election in Malaysia: Three Decades of State-Driven Islamisation Thus Far

This chapter looks at one specific factor during the campaign for the 13th general election in Malaysia held on 5 May 2013, namely, the role played by religion—as a marker of identity and rallying-point—before, during and after the campaign. It addresses the question of how and why religion was relatively absent, or less important, during the campaign, in contrast to campaigns of the past, and asks if this was truly a landmark shift in the values and worldview of the Malaysian electorate, or whether it really signals a shift in the tactics and discourses employed by the respective political parties in Malaysia.

That Islam has been a visible marker in Malaysian politics and political discourse is a subject that has been studied extensively by several scholars by now and there exists several works that look at the role of the two main Malay-Muslim political parties—the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS)—in what has been dubbed the “Islamisation race” in the country (Noor, 2004). Scholars of Malaysia’s post-colonial history will note that the Islamisation process truly took off from the early 1980s, under the tutelage and direction of then-Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and the man who would later rise (and fall) as

his deputy, Anwar Ibrahim.¹⁰⁶ UMNO's Islamisation programme was intended to accomplish two goals simultaneously: (i) to demonstrate UMNO's commitment to Islam and Muslim concerns (Nair, 1997), and (ii) to also fend off the potential threat of an energised PAS that had become radicalised as a result of the Iranian revolution and the revolutionary model of Islam that was being spread across the Muslim world.

That the Malaysian state embarked on an Islamisation drive was neither new nor unique: Pakistan's Islamisation had led to the Hudood ordinances being passed in the mid-1970s, Sadat's Egypt had begun to turn to Islam as a discourse of legitimacy for the state and its political elites, Libya's Ghadafi had by then begun to experiment with his own brand of "Islamic socialism" (as did Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto), Indonesia was about to begin the process of "greening" its armed forces and high command—a tacit recognition of the growing importance of Islam in the world's most populous Muslim country—and Brunei had made Islam one of the three pillars of the kingdom's official ideology, alongside Malay identity and the monarchy. The Islamisation race in Malaysia was only accelerated as a result of the intensifying contest between the two biggest Malay-Muslim parties

106 Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, p. 36. In 1981, the UMNO general assembly issued a resolution that the federal and state Islamic councils should enforce and defend the "purity of Islam". New policies were introduced to safeguard Islam and the Muslim *ummah*. In 1981, Pusat Islam began identifying various sects and groups said to be guilty of deviationist teachings (*ajaran sesat*), and in 1982 the Ahmadis in the country were stripped of their Malay/Bumiputra status. By 1982, the Prime Minister's office had more than 100 *ulama* working under it and the Ministry of Education had 715 *ulama* on its payroll. The Fourth Malaysia Plan (1981–1986) also explicitly declared that henceforth Islam would play a major role in the development of the country (albeit on an inspirational level). In 1985, the head of the Religious Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Yusuf Noor, announced that the *Unit Akidah dan Ajaran Sesat* [Unit for Faith Protection and Deviant Teachings] was to be revamped under the *Pusat Penyelidikan Islam* [Islamic Investigation Centre] to monitor and police the spread of "deviationist" teachings (including certain Sufi practices and Shia teachings) in the country. "*Dakwah attaches*" were also sent to various Malaysian embassies to monitor the activities of Malay-Muslim students sent abroad to take courses in Islamic studies, and to ensure that they were not unduly influenced by "extremist" ideas.

of the land, namely, PAS and UMNO.

The 1980s witnessed the zenith of the Islamisation process, which led to the eventual radicalisation of PAS and the first instances of the state responding to a growing Islamist challenge with violence: the Memali incident (1984–1985), which culminated in the death of the radical PAS leader Ibrahim “Libya” and some of his followers; and soon followed by the Ops Kenari security dragnet, which led to the arrest of more radical Islamists, many of whom were linked to PAS as well.¹⁰⁷ Looking back at the elections of the 1980s and 1990s, it is clear that Islam has grown to be the most contested signifier in the repertoire of Malay-Muslim religio-political symbols. The intense contestation between PAS and UMNO in the 1980s and 1990s focused on the claim—made by both parties—that they were the true inheritors and defenders of the Islamic tradition, and that their opponents were guilty of either “watering down” the message of Islam or adapting it to the needs of the modern state (rather than the other way round.)

Islam was thus the major factor in the intra-Malay-Muslim contest for support and legitimacy in the elections of 1986, 1990, 1995 and 1999. It is interesting to note that at the general election of 1999, which came shortly after the East Asian economic crisis and the internal crisis within the ruling UMNO party that led to the expulsion of UMNO leader Anwar Ibrahim, the Islamists of PAS began to adapt themselves to the new social realities of the “reformasi” era that followed in the wake of the economic crisis and the fall of President Suharto. But even then, as PAS was adjusting itself to the new politics of the post-reform era that was rendered more virtual with the advent of the Internet, PAS did not relent in its goal to create an Islamic state in Malaysia. It is important to note that during the 1999 election campaign, the new generation of technologically savvy PAS leaders and members were combining a rights-based discourse

¹⁰⁷ By the mid-1980s the leadership of the Malaysian Islamic Party PAS had fallen into the hands of the more conservative Ulama faction, who were in turn inspired by the developments in post-revolutionary Iran. Some of the leaders of PAS, like Ustaz Ibrahim ‘Libya’, were then calling for an open revolt against the state, accusing the UMNO-led government of being too secular and pandering to Western interests (Noor, 2004).

of democratisation with their traditional discourse of religious orthodoxy. This, too, was symptomatic of the time as several other new democratic-Islamist parties were beginning to emerge across the Muslim world, such as the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera or PKS of Indonesia and the Islamist democrats of Turkey, who would eventually create the Justice and Development (AKP) party.

The centrality of Islam as the primary nodal point in the discursive-political contestation between UMNO and PAS was thus ensured by virtue of the fact that neither party could abandon their use of Islamic markers and symbols for fear of losing support from the Malay-Muslim constituency that was their primary vote-bank. The ever-increasing size of the Malay/bumiputera-Muslim community vis-à-vis other ethnic/religious communities in Malaysia also meant that this particular vote-bank made up of Muslims would be the decisive factor that determines which party eventually comes to power in the country. The situation remained largely unchanged, right up to the sudden exit from office by Prime Minister Mahathir and the equally sudden death of PAS's President Fadzil Noor.

Following the exit of Mahathir, the leadership of the UMNO party was taken over by Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who later became Prime Minister and who also ranked as the UMNO-Barisan Nasional (BN) leader who won the highest mandate in Malaysian political history at the 2004 general election. During Badawi's tenure, Islam retained its central position in Malaysian public political discourse. It was Badawi who introduced the concept of Islam Hadari [Civilisational Islam], which was part of a grander project to uplift the Muslim masses by opening their minds and cultivating a pragmatic, modern and logical outlook towards the creed and the world by extension.¹⁰⁸ Islam Hadari was touted as an instance of state-led moderation and

108 The thrust of the Islam Hadari project was to instil in the minds of Malaysian Muslims that Islam was fundamentally a dynamic belief and value system that has always been evolving and capable of addressing the needs of modernity and development. Central to its message was the call for Muslims to adapt to the rapidly changing social and economic realities of the time, and to engage with pluralism at a number of levels: societal, religious, ideological and epistemological.

an attempt by the Badawi establishment to steer a clear path for the Muslim community at a time when Islam and Muslims in general were suffering under the stigma that resulted from the War on Terror in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks on America.

However, Islam Hadari—despite its laudable intentions—was widely criticised by PAS, whose leaders denounced it as an instance of meddling with Islamic orthodoxy for religious ends. PAS leaders between 2004 and 2008 continued to label Islam Hadari as a diluted form of normative religiosity, calling it an aberration with no basis in history and summarily dismissing it as an invention by the Badawi administration to confuse Muslims. Throughout this period, Islam’s centrality at the pivotal nodal point in the public discursive arena was maintained, again as a result of both parties not being able or willing to relinquish their claim to be the sole defenders of Islam and Muslim concerns.

It is important to note that throughout the Mahathir (1981–2003) and Badawi (2003–2008) eras, Islam was the most hotly contested signifier in the incessant contest between PAS and UMNO to out-Islamise each other. As a result of this, Islam had permeated into almost all areas of Malaysian social life and was normalised in the public domain as well. From the midpoint of the Mahathir administration and throughout the Badawi administration, the state’s cultivation of a parallel religious bureaucracy fell in step with the wider aim of extending the scope and range of the state’s power into almost all areas of Malaysian life. The religious authorities during Badawi’s era were responsible for the screening and banning of books and films that were deemed “un-Islamic”; were engaged in the micro-management of the lives of ordinary Malaysian Muslims; and were busied with the task of creating (and expanding) an ever-widening network of laws, rules and regulations that impacted on the social, cultural, educational and political lives of Malaysians—including non-Muslims. It is telling that this was also the period that witnessed the rise of other non-Muslim religio-political mass movements such as the Malaysian Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf), which emerged to campaign for the rights of Hindus in the country.

Following the poor performance of the UMNO-led National

Front coalition at the elections of 2008, Prime Minister Badawi announced that he would step down. In the wake of Badawi's exit, it appeared that the Islam Hadari project would also come to an untimely end. It has hardly been mentioned ever since, and in comparison to the manner in which it was promoted—via a swathe of conferences, forums, seminars and books during Badawi's time—it would appear as if the Islam Hadari project has been wiped off the discursive terrain of Malaysia for good. In any case, it was not adopted and perpetuated by the administration that followed, which was led by the next Prime Minister, Najib Abdul Razak.

Instead, the Najib administration chose to foreground a new nation-building project altogether, which was labelled the “1Malaysia” project instead. The 1Malaysia project was essentially a nation-building exercise that was couched in terms of a nation-building discourse that was inclusive and non-sectarian, attempting to bring Malaysians of all ethnic and religious backgrounds closer together in the spirit of a single nation premised on the idea of universal citizenship. In comparison to the Mahathir and Badawi eras, the first administration of Prime Minister Najib (2009–2013) did not foreground Islam (or religion in general) as part of its discourse of legitimisation. 1Malaysia was relatively more open and inclusive in the sense that it was not targeted towards the needs and interests of a specific faith community. It was meant to heal ethnic-religious divisions that had evidently divided Malaysian society up to the elections of 2008.

A Moral Economy in the Absence of Religion: The Shift to the Register of Rights and Democracy

Few analysts have noted the significance of the 1Malaysia project and what it entails for the wider domain of Malaysian public political discourse. We have noted earlier that for a period of almost three decades (1981–2008) the contest between UMNO and PAS in Malaysia revolved primarily around the theme of religion, religious identity and the needs of a particular religious community. The shift to 1Malaysia was significant in the sense that this was the first time that Malaysia's national political arena was being reconfigured

according to a nation-building narrative that did not bear traces of religious communitarianism at all. (Indeed, it can be said that the concept of 1Malaysia does not have any theological basis.)

The promotion of 1Malaysia as the new discursive battleground for the hearts and minds of Malaysians occasioned a change of tactics and approach on the part of almost all major actors and agents on the Malaysian political scene. Here it has to be noted that Prime Minister Najib’s promotion of the 1Malaysia concept came at a time when there was an evidently growing sense of communal anxiety among the Malay-Muslims of the country in particular; the multiple challenges of rapid globalisation, foreign capital penetration into the economy, the opening up of the Malaysian market, which was aided by economic reform measures that were also being put in place by the Najib administration. All these meant that for some sections of the Malay-Muslim community in the country, there was the growing apprehension that the economic and political standing of the community was under threat. As a result of this sense of mass communal panic, a range of new ethno-nationalist NGOs, lobby groups and special interest groups emerged to occupy the already-overcrowded arena of the Malaysian public domain. Many of these groups—led by communitarian-minded Malay leaders—expressed their concern that the liberalising gestures of the Najib administration would spell the end of Malay dominance in Malaysia.¹⁰⁹

PAS, on the other hand, was in a new situation where Islam, which had long been its main clarion-call and rallying-point, was no longer the central idea in the public register. As we have seen earlier, Badawi’s attempt to promote his vision of a moderate Islam via the concept of Islam Hadari had been met with scorn and derision by PAS leaders, who argued that the project was fundamentally un-Islamic. But in the case of 1Malaysia, PAS was forced to deal with a

109 The strongest reaction to Najib’s 1Malaysia project came not from the ranks of the opposition parties but rather from a host of NGOs and pressure groups that were aligned to the ruling BN administration, made up of Malay-Muslim groups that felt that their standing and status in the country was in danger of being diluted, thanks to Najib’s appeasement of the non-Malay and non-Muslim minorities in the country. These included groups like Perkasa and the Ulama-supported ISMA movement.

new and very different kind of state-legitimisation discourse that was inclusive, non-sectarian and non-particular. To state that 1Malaysia was not an Islamic concept would have been self-evident, for the discourse of 1Malaysia did not present itself as a religious discourse in any sense of the word. The all-embracing nature of the 1Malaysia project, however, was politically correct to the utmost degree, and could hardly be faulted for being inclusive, tolerant and open to all. PAS was therefore forced to leave its comfort zone of Islamic discourse, something that it had not done since the 1980s.

As a result of Najib's promotion of 1Malaysia—which was widespread and saturated almost all aspects of Malaysian public life from advertising to government slogans, from state welfare benefit schemes to housing loans—a new discursive domain had been opened up in Malaysia. This also opened the way for reformists of the Malaysian Islamic party to come to the fore to project their own alternative, which was framed in terms of what was called the Islamic Welfare State (*Negara Kebajikan Islam*) concept.

PAS's promotion of the *Negara Kebajikan Islam* concept was really the result of the articulation of one particular segment of the Islamist party, namely the so-called “professionals” or “technocrats” of PAS, which was made up of the younger generation of PAS leaders who had entered the party in the 1980s, when PAS openly invited young Malay-Muslim university graduates to join the Islamist movement. Many of these younger members had been educated abroad in countries like the United States, Britain and Australia, and were therefore schooled in the hard sciences and/or the humanities and social sciences. They included those trained in medicine, like Dr Hatta Ramli and Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad, as well as those who were technocratically inclined like Dr Kamaruddin Jaffar. They also included long-time PAS veterans like Mahfuz Omar and Mohamad Sabu, known PAS leaders who had long championed the cause of the rural poor, the urban under-classes and students on campus. These members of PAS were then given the opportunity to re-orient the party in a direction similar to some of the more pragmatic Islamist parties in the world today, such as the AKP of Turkey (which likewise enjoyed the support of Muslim professionals, businessmen and technocrats), the Nahdah movement of Tunisia, and the PKS

(Partai Keadilan Sejahtera) of Indonesia. It was well known that the reformers of PAS saw themselves as the Malaysian equivalent of the Islamist democrats of Indonesia, Tunisia, Egypt and Turkey; and it was for this reason that this group was referred to as the “Erdogan” faction within PAS.

In the run-up to the elections of May 2013, both UMNO and PAS therefore presented the Malaysian public in general (and the Malay-Muslims in particular) with somewhat different views of what an Islamic modernity might look like. Prime Minister Najib’s 1Malaysia concept was fundamentally a nation-building discourse that sought to bring together the different ethnic and religious communities of Malaysia under an over-arching and all-inclusive framework of a plural-democratic nation that was undergoing economic liberalisation and capital-driven development. PAS’ Islamic welfare state, however, was fundamentally a form of “soft welfarism” that sought to compensate for the ill effects of rapid socioeconomic transformation and which attempted to protect Malaysian citizens from the ravages of an unfettered market economy. While 1Malaysia offered housing loans, student loans and support for small to medium-sized enterprises and start-up schemes, PAS’ welfare state model demanded an end to student fees, a lowering of taxes, house prices and car prices, and a reduction of cost for basic household goods. The former aimed to bring as many citizens as possible into the ever-expanding market economy while the latter attempted to protect the more vulnerable sectors of the population from the market economy and free Malaysians from the middle-income trap. Both, however, acceded to the dominance of the market and the paradigm of capital-driven development.

In this respect, the campaign leading up to the elections of May 2013 was somewhat unique in the sense that Islam was not foregrounded as it had been in the past, and was not used in a divisive or polemical manner as before. (Observers of previous Malaysian elections from 1990 to 2008 will note that previously PAS and UMNO had been vigorously trying to out-Islamise each other in the run-up to polling day, with both sides accusing the other of deviancy, moral corruption, and abusing, misinterpreting, misunderstanding or insulting Islam.) It is interesting to note that during the May 2013

campaign, there were few, if any, attempts by PAS to denounce Prime Minister Najib as a “secular” or “liberal” Muslim, as was done to Mahathir and Badawi before him. At the same time, it is also interesting to note that UMNO’s campaign against PAS did not revolve around charges of “radicalism”, “fanaticism” or “extremism”, as was the case in previous election campaigns, too.

The other consequence of this shift to a less overtly religious register was the emergence of a different kind of moral economy that set the tone and tenor of the election campaign. During the election campaigns of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, the conflict between UMNO and PAS tended to focus on the claims to religiosity made on the part of both parties. There were many election campaigns when PAS’ focus was more on the personal lifestyles and values of the leaders of UMNO and the country’s business and political elite, accompanied by accusations of decadence, impiety and immorality. This time round, however, ethical issues were framed in the context of governance and the delivery of services, and the accusations made by both parties tended to focus on whether or not the other side had delivered on their promises of development, social justice and equity. PAS’ welfare state idea, for instance, emphasised what Islamists regarded as the *neglect* of the UMNO-led government of poor urban settlers across the country, targeting key voting constituencies such as students and first-time house buyers. Prime Minister Najib’s 1Malaysia propagandists, on the other hand, focused on loan schemes offered under the umbrella of the 1Malaysia project as proof of the government’s *caring* attitude towards the less privileged. Just before the campaign really got off the ground, the prime minister and other senior ministers launched a series of initiatives to demonstrate their caring attitude towards the public at large, including mobile 1Malaysia markets and shop-on-wheels, aimed at bringing affordable goods to ordinary Malaysian households across the country. (Note the obvious fact that such mobile shop-on-wheels markets catered to *all* Malaysians, regardless of race or religion.) PAS leaders, in turn, toured the country, touting their people-friendly election manifesto that listed their promises to look into the economic welfare of *all* Malaysians if they were to come into power. It was against this back-

drop of the two Malay-Muslim parties battling over the definition of justice, equity and responsibility that Malaysia went to the polls on 5 May 2013. The result, however, proved to be a disappointment to both sides.

The 13th General Election of Malaysia: Outcome and Subsequent Fallout

Notwithstanding the attempts by the moderate-reformers of PAS to re-present the Islamist party as the party of Islamist democrats and promoters of the welfare state, the long-awaited victory of PAS did not materialise, though the opposition as a whole did make very significant gains. A significant swing of 4.12 per cent was made in favour of the opposition, earning the opposition Pakatan Rakyat coalition (of which PAS was a member) 50.8 per cent of the popular vote nationwide. PAS contested in 73 parliamentary seats and 236 state assembly seats, and fielded its candidates in all states across the Malaysian Federation. But as expected, BN did manage to hold on to power, though with evident losses among the non-Malay parties of the ruling coalition. The Malaysian Chinese Association’s (MCA) share of parliamentary seats dropped to seven, while Gerakan’s dropped to one. The Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) managed to gain four parliamentary seats. In total, BN won 133 parliamentary seats and thus registered a drop not only in popular votes but also parliamentary representation. It seemed as if all the effort that had been put into the 1Malaysia project had come to naught.

But PAS’ leaders and members were not entirely happy with the results they received as well. PAS’ ideological re-positioning of itself did not yield the expected results after all. Although the PR coalition increased its number of parliamentary seats from 82 to 89, it was PAS that suffered the highest net loss. PAS won 1,633,199 (14.7 per cent) of the total votes cast but its share of parliamentary seats dropped from 23 to 21. Significantly, some of the PAS leaders associated with the “Erdogan” faction also failed to retain their parliamentary and state assembly seats, despite their evident popularity on the Internet and their visibility in cyberspace. Mohamad Sabu lost at Pendang,

Husam Musa lost at Putrajaya, Salahudin Ayub lost at Pulai and Nusajaya, and Dzulkefly Ahmad lost at Kuala Selangor.¹¹⁰ In fact, the only known moderate-reformer who won was Khalid Samad, who retained his seat at Shah Alam.

Leading well ahead was the Malaysian Chinese-based Democratic Action Party (DAP), whose share of parliamentary seats increased from 28 to 38, after having won 15.7 per cent of the popular vote. The leaders of MCA subsequently announced that they would not be part of the next BN government, and set about addressing internal weaknesses within the Malaysian-Chinese party instead. In the meantime, however, it became apparent that most of the Malaysian-Chinese faces in parliament would be found on the opposition benches, polarising the country further. Most glaring of all was the obvious fact that for the second time in a row, PAS—which was still the oldest and biggest opposition party in the country—had failed to take the lead in the race to power. To add salt to the wounds of the Islamists, PAS came in third after DAP and PKR this time around.¹¹¹

Overnight, it became obvious to all that the political landscape of Malaysia had shifted visibly, and perhaps permanently. The mainstream press commenced its attack with headlines that questioned the loyalty of Malaysian Chinese to the country. The very next day Prime Minister Najib announced that he accepted the results but also described the 2013 election as a “Chinese tsunami”. With the MCA and Gerakan weakened, it appeared that an overwhelming majority of Malaysian Chinese parliamentarians were now on the opposition bench, polarising the country even further.

The campaigns waged by both UMNO and PAS at the 13th general election marked a significant shift in the manner in which both Malay-Muslim parties had been campaigning for decades but it proved to be less effective than anticipated. Both parties had to count the cost for their political posturing and the subject-positions

¹¹⁰ Amin Iskandar, *Another Son-In-Law Rises, this time in PAS*, TheMalaysianInsider.com, 27 July 2013.

¹¹¹ At the elections of 2008 PAS also came in third among the Pakatan Rakyat opposition parties, despite the fact that PAS had lent many of its members and supporters to the opposition campaign.

assumed before and during the campaign, and in both parties there has been considerable soul-searching over whether the tactics employed were effective or in fact counter-productive.

Within the ranks of UMNO, the 1Malaysia concept was received with lukewarm enthusiasm from some quarters. As noted earlier, all the way up to the elections, the Najib administration had been facing considerable pressure from Malay ethno-nationalist pressure groups such as Perkasa, who argued that by liberalising the economy and making concessions to the non-Malay/non-Muslim communities in the country, the Najib administration had compromised the dominant position of Malays in the nation. Following BN's failure to improve on its electoral standing and its loss of not only more seats but also more popular votes, there is the distinct impression that the 1Malaysia project may go down the same path as Badawi's Islam Hadari—yet another state-engineered and state-sponsored nation-building discourse that failed to resonate with the wider public and was thus discredited. Immediately after the election results were known, some of the more hardline elements of the ruling BN were already expressing their dissatisfaction with the manner in which the campaign was run. Over the following weeks and months, the mainstream press would persist with its sustained criticism of the opposition parties and continue to call into question the loyalty of the other non-Malay communities of Malaysia, thus rendering the universalist appeal of 1Malaysia somewhat blunt and ineffectual.

On the other hand, there also emerged deep schisms and rifts between the conservatives and progressives within the ranks of PAS. The former element began to question the ideological and religious conviction of the latter, who were largely held responsible for PAS' poor showing at the elections. As noted earlier, PAS was the only party in the opposition to lose more seats. Conservative leaders within PAS—notably from the party's powerful ulama chamber (Dewan Ulama) and youth wing (Dewan Pemuda) publicly criticised some of the reform-minded “Erdogans” for having “diluted” the message of PAS and for compromising the party's Islamist principles. The fact that PAS was not able to articulate its message and goal of creating an Islamic state in Malaysia during the election campaign was seen by some as a sign of weakness and a signal that the Islamist

party had gone too far in its compromises with its coalition partners, PKR and DAP. Since May 2013 the uppermost ranks of PAS' party leadership has come under the control of the more conservative camp, and it is widely speculated that the fate of the “Erdogan” faction now hangs in the balance.

For both UMNO and PAS, the decision to focus on other, non-religious and less sectarian/divisive issues before and during the May 2013 election campaign was a matter of deliberate political calculation. The assumption then was that for both parties to reach out to the wider Malaysian electorate—which remains an ethnically and religiously plural electorate—there was the need for both parties to emphasise ideas and values that were less communitarian in character and appeal. It was true to some extent and PAS' image did change as a result. But notwithstanding the positive reception that was given to both parties—both UMNO and PAS rallies were attended by a wider section of the Malaysian public that included non-Malays and non-Muslims, as was noted by the local media—this positive apprehension of PAS and UMNO did not result in any massive vote swing in either party's favour.¹¹² Barisan Nasional failed to improve upon its performance at the 2008 election and Pakatan Rakyat failed in its bid to topple BN with a majority of seats in parliament.

Aftermath: Islam Back to the Centre Again

The failure of both BN and PR to win a decisive victory at the May 2013 general election has left Malaysia at an impasse today. And while both party-political coalitions are busy with the task of counting their gains and losses, Malaysia remains an open market economy that is set on the path of even further economic liberalisation, which may in

¹¹² In the course of my fieldwork conducted at six different constituencies prior to the elections, I noticed a high level of participation from non-Malays and non-Muslims at several PAS rallies and meetings. It was noted that the PAS flag was even seen at the Chinese temples in Central Pahang, in the vicinity of Temerloh and Mentakab, which suggested the extent to which PAS' image had changed in the eyes of many Malaysian Chinese opposition supporters by then.

turn raise a host of new socio-political challenges for its society and governmental elite. Foremost among the concerns of the moment is the pressure being placed upon Malaysia to accede to the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) that will bring Malaysia into a network of trading nations that are in some respects beholden to the American economy. Local critics of the TPPA—which include former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad—have argued that by joining the TPPA, Malaysian firms will be exposed to the threat of lawsuits by foreign companies, and will eventually have to cave in to the demands of foreign capital.

These concerns also come at a time when the election results of May 2013 have polarised parliament along ethnic-religious lines and when Malay-Muslim ethno-nationalist groups are more fervent than ever in their defence of the economic and political position of Malays in the country. Tapping into the collective anxieties of Malays who are now faced with the prospect of living in a globalised economic world with less and less protectionist barriers, Malay politicians, intellectuals, businessmen and technocrats have begun to sound the clarion call for more Malay-Muslim unity, as expected.

It is against this rapidly changing background of a retreating state and a bifurcated society that Islam has also returned to the centre stage of Malaysian politics, as one of the universally known markers of the Malay-Muslim identity. Since May 2013, several instances of mass moral panic have been occasioned by media reports and controversies in the country. Between May to August 2013 the mainstream and tabloid press have reported numerous incidents of Islam being “insulted” by non-Muslims in the country, while the state’s religious authorities have begun to warn of an imminent threat to Sunni Muslims in Malaysia due to underground subversive activities being carried out by “Shia deviants” who are said to have infiltrated the state apparatus, the media and the educational system. Also linked to this is the media-generated fear of PAS as a party that has been infiltrated by pro-Shia elements as well—a point that was raised earlier on during the election campaign itself.

There is every likelihood that in the months and years to come Islam will return as a major nodal point in the repertoire of political/

ideological symbols and signifiers in the Malaysian public discourse. This is due in part to its ready availability as one of the most-recognised symbols in the discursive repertoire as well as to the fact that it can—and has—serve as an emotionally charged and over-determined signifier that can be used to mobilise the masses. But this has less to do with Islam and more to do with the manner in which Islamic signs and symbols have been politically deployed in the past, and it is certainly not unique to the religion of Islam itself. As we can see in other countries such as India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, the signs and symbols of Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism have likewise lent themselves to political usage and deployment at the hands of communitarian-minded politicians and ideologues. As a result, one should not jump the gun and come to the conclusion that Islam is the only religion that has been politicised.

What is important, however, is to note that the success or failure of ideologies that may or may not utilise religious symbols and signifiers has less to do with the discourses themselves and more to do with the socio-economic-political structures that support them. The foregrounding of non-religious signs and ideas during the election campaign of May 2013 was an instance of political experimentation that did not yield the expected results. Had either PAS or UMNO succeeded politically, however, the discursive-political landscape of post-election Malaysia today may well be rather different. An overwhelming victory for the Najib government may have allowed the administration to further consolidate its hold on the state apparatus, and thus broaden the hegemonic influence of the 1Malaysia experiment. Likewise, an overwhelming victory by PAS may have given PAS' moderate-reformists the opportunity to implement their experiment with Islamist democracy and the Islamic welfare state further. The failure of both means that Malaysia's Malay-Muslim politics has merely slid back to an older and more recognisable register, where Islam will once again play the pivotal role as the marker of identity for the country's largest political constituency.

MALAYSIA AT THE CROSSROADS

“NEW POLITICS” OR OLD POLITICS IN NEW CLOTHING

by Yang Razali Kassim

Introduction

The 13th general election in 2013 has accelerated the evolution of Malaysian politics away from the traditional paradigm of race and ethnicity. Some argue that the idea of “new politics” was first conceived in the late 1990s following the rupture in UMNO triggered by the sacking of Anwar Ibrahim, which gave rise to the Reformasi movement. Consistent with this argument, the trend has since gathered momentum as manifested in subsequent general elections, climaxing in the 13th general election of 5 May 2013. The road to the next general election—by 2018—is the new peak to anticipate. If it looks set to be defined by a transition from old politics to new, it is a path strewn with uncertainty. Given the twists and turns, questions arise as to whether the road ahead will indeed lead to new politics or to old politics in a new dress.

Rise of the Young Generation

Beyond doubt, the 13th general election of 5 May 2013 saw the young generation play a decisive role. Tending to be critical of the establishment, it was the young and urban voters who rooted for the opposition, contributing in no small measure to the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) winning the popular vote for the first time, even though PR lost to Barisan Nasional (BN), the majority of seats and the right to rule.¹¹³ Analysts noted how the “505” protest rallies immediately after the polls attracted large multiethnic crowds and

¹¹³ Ibrahim Suffian, ISEAS Seminar on Voting Demographics in the 13th Malaysian General Election, 5 September 2013.

predominantly young people. The record voter turnout at GE13 is said to be indicative of a “new wave of political awakening” within the population.¹¹⁴ In its aftermath, the voices of the young have continued to assert themselves in the public discourse on the future direction of Malaysian politics. One good example of this assertiveness is an article by a doctorate candidate, Adil Johan, published by the vocal non-governmental advocacy group Aliran entitled “Youth voters sparking New Politics in Malaysia”.¹¹⁵

Arguing that GE13 had sparked the beginning of a “new direction in Malaysian politics”, the writer said that the polls were the first time “for many young voters like myself in the 21–35 age bracket to exercise our right to decide on the country’s future and we have spoken very loudly”. The writer framed his views in terms of the search for political and social renewal. More Malaysians, he said, wanted a nation “free of corruption, misinformation and racial politics. As such, the results of GE13 indicate an indisputable shift towards an era of New Politics in Malaysia.”

The Genesis of New Politics

But what is “new politics” and how did this idea come about? At its core, new politics is the antithesis to “old politics”, the longstanding Malaysian political model based on race and ethnicity, or communal politics. Old politics emerged with independence, revolving around the concept of ethnic power-sharing in which the majority Malays controlled political power and enjoyed certain privileges as bumiputeras, or sons of the soil, in return for sharing their power with the other races, namely the Chinese and Indians who were granted citizenship at the time of independence in 1957. This concept manifested itself as the three-party Alliance comprising UMNO, representing the Malay; the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the Chinese; and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), the Indian

¹¹⁴ Henry Loh, A new Malaysia-post GE13, Aliran, aliran.com/14230.html

¹¹⁵ Adil Johan, “Youth voters sparking New Politics in Malaysia,” *Aliran*, 23 May 2013, pp. 1–2. <http://aliran.com/13603.html>

communities, respectively. This consociational model, as it is also known, was further entrenched when it was expanded to become BN as a more inclusive coalition of several more parties in the aftermath of the 1969 racial riots to achieve political stability. The opposition Islamist party PAS initially joined the BN but pulled out thereafter following a coalition crisis while the other opposition, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), was excluded.

While critics tend to refer to it as a construct to assert *ketuanan Melayu* or Malay supremacy, the UMNO narrative has traditionally described this political model by its essence of power sharing around which ethnic economic imbalances are rectified through redistributive affirmative action in the form of the New Economic Policy (NEP). This is based on the argument that the economic dominance of the ethnic Chinese, since the early decades of the 20th century had generated unease among the politically dominant Malays. The resulting sense of insecurity required them to preserve the Malay core of the country by entrenching their political position as bumiputeras. Through a “social contract”, the major communities were brought into the power equation of the ruling elite via the Alliance and later BN model while the economy was restructured through the NEP to eradicate ethnically stratified socio-economic imbalances.

Notwithstanding its shortcomings, the BN model has proved effective enough all these years in providing the superstructure for political stability, which in turn brought about economic growth, propelling Malaysia to become one of the fastest developing economies in East Asia. This combination of political stability and economic growth was a formula that has kept BN (and its predecessor, the Alliance) in power since the country’s independence. Indeed, the UMNO-led political coalition has never lost power. Yet, despite its formidable political strength, the popularity of BN has not been completely safe from voter erosion and fatigue. BN’s worst enemy for many years had not been so much a strong opposition but a weakening BN itself, torn by internal strife and leadership struggles within its key component parties, especially UMNO, MCA and MIC.

Over time, the idea of communal politics also suffered erosion as a new generation of Malaysians of all races, but critically the Malays,

emerged who are less enamoured by the politics of race and ethnicity, even as the race-based political model continued to be defended by the conservative political elite that dominated the system. A critical turning point came in 1998, when the sacking of Anwar Ibrahim from UMNO and the government catalysed the evolution of Malaysian politics from the race-based system to one that tried to free itself from communal politics, leading to the emergence of the Malay-dominated but multiracial Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People's Justice Party or PKR). This eventually led to the PKR-spearheaded opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat (People's Alliance or PR) comprising the Chinese-dominated but multiracial Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the Islamist PAS.

To be sure, the struggle over ethnic politics has been part and parcel of the political contestation in Malaysian politics. Despite the preponderance of the politics of communalism, multiracial politics, prior to the emergence of PKR, had been championed mainly by DAP, though it is arguable whether DAP has been successful in this. Indeed, DAP seemed unable to free itself from the ethnic politics of the dominant BN-defined system and has been seen more as a Chinese-dominant party championing, in reaction, largely ethnic Chinese aspirations despite its rhetoric of multiracialism. In recent years, however, DAP has been showing signs of some success in projecting its multiracial credentials, winning incremental support from the Malays. This shift came in the 2008 general election but especially so in GE13 when DAP more decisively embraced PAS as a serious partner in the PR opposition coalition, with the three component parties—PKR, DAP and PAS—campaigning jointly and inspiring young voters of the prospects of a viable alternative coalition as a platform for the new politics of non-communalism.

But four decades after the introduction of *ketuanan Melayu* and the emergence of BN, the Malaysian political system has engendered its own reformers. A number of thinkers—from scholars of politics and society to practitioners of politics from different political backgrounds—have been at the forefront of the discourse on what they see as the changing currents in the country over issues of identity. Prominent among them have been academics like Francis Loh Kok Wah and Shamsul AB, PAS politicians Dzulkefly Ahmad and Mujahid

Yusof, and UMNO’s leading reform-minded politician, Saifuddin Abdullah. Despite their differing backgrounds, they shared some common ideas: the essence of new politics revolved around non-racial politics, good governance and justice. While the notion of new politics has its origins in secular ideas advanced by academics like Loh, reformist PAS politicians like Dzulkefly have given an Islamic perspective as well.

Writing in his blog just after the 2008 general election, Dzulkefly defined new politics as exhorting “all the positives and eschews all the negative attributes of a government. It’s for the rule of law, social justice and good governance and it despises corruption, rent seeking, cronyism, nepotism and draconian laws such as the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the Official Secrets Act.”¹¹⁶ He noted that post-2008, many of the prejudices of non-Muslims towards PAS had been eroded and which PAS needed to build upon by celebrating plurality based on Quranic principles. He argued that PAS and its PR partners were united in their vision of a “new Malaysia” built on nationhood based on their common “principles of good governance, justice for all, transparency and accountability”.

One of the earliest scholars to note this shifting ground is Loh. Writing in the Aliran monthly in an article entitled “New Politics in Malaysia” in the aftermath of the 1999 general election, he argued that the polls had shown that “there exists a New Politics in Malaysia”. Loh distinguished between two realms of politics: formal participatory politics involving political parties and non-formal participatory politics involving NGOs and community groups that did not necessarily focus on winning elections. “The BN’s hegemony over Malaysian society will not be as comprehensive as it used to be, again.”¹¹⁷

Ethnicity, he said, remained a very salient aspect of Malaysian politics. However, it no longer did so to the same predictable extent. He noted that since 1998, a new discourse on participatory politics had gained ground among Malaysians, “particularly urban Malays”. He was referring to the critical year when Anwar was sacked from UMNO

¹¹⁶ Dzulkefly Ahmad, “PAS’ new politics”. drdzul.com, 28 April 2009.

¹¹⁷ Francis Loh, New Politics in Malaysia, Aliran Monthly. n.d. <http://aliran.com/archives/monthly/2003/6h.html>

under highly controversial circumstances leading to the emergence of the Reformasi movement, which contributed to the formation of the opposition coalition that made the 1999 general election critical. As thousands of stunned Malays who supported Anwar defected to the opposition, many had expected a drubbing for UMNO and BN at the polls. In the end, BN did suffer by winning narrowly, but it retained power, partly because Chinese voters remained loyal to BN, thus neutralising the Malay vote swing towards the opposition. What had often been overlooked is that the narrow win by BN eventually led to Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad stepping down in 2003 because he had become highly unpopular with the urban Malays for his controversial sacking of Anwar. Mahathir retired as prime minister also under dramatic circumstances, complete with emotional outbursts at the UMNO general assembly in the preceding year, exposing the internal rift within UMNO over the Anwar saga.

The 1999 general election was the beginning of the erosion of support for the UMNO-led BN, with the ruling coalition polling 56.5 per cent of the popular vote, down from 65 per cent in 1995. Loh argued that closer studies revealed that the Malay and Chinese electorate were beginning to split down the middle. “The point also is that the BN had lost its previous hegemony over the public, especially the NGOs. There occurred therefore, New Politics—not only the fragmentation of the ethnic communities but also open contestation of the ruling BN [sic] ideas...The New Politics of fragmented ethnic communities and of contestations of political ideas is here to stay.”¹¹⁸ Indeed, it can be argued that despite the success of BN under Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in reversing the losses of 1999 when he recaptured significant ground with a Malay return to UMNO following Mahathir’s exit, the larger trend seemed to be going south. In the 2008 general election, BN lost its two-thirds majority for the first time. In the 2013 general election, BN failed to recapture the two-thirds and even lost the popular vote for the first time to PR. It is against this broader trend of the declining popularity of BN that the evolution towards new politics gathered pace.

118 Ibid. Loh subsequently expanded his ideas into a book, *New Politics in Malaysia*, co-edited with Johan Saravannamuttu. Singapore: ISEAS, 2003.

Within UMNO, one of the most outspoken advocates of reform and shift from old politics to new politics is Saifuddin Abdullah. His book, *New Politics: Towards a Mature Malaysian Democracy*, was launched by Prime Minister Najib a year after the 2008 polls. Saifuddin discussed two types of politics: old politics, where money and corruption dominate and is antiquated; and new politics, which embraces political discourse, and engages in a higher-level battle of wits, intelligence, knowledge and integrity. He encapsulated the contrasting paradigms of new for old in terms of wisdom politics, not defamatory politics; and service politics, not vote politics.¹¹⁹

Indeed, Saifuddin has developed his ideas of new politics as motivated by a desire to “put a stop to gutter politics and money politics” and framed it in terms of what he called two circles: the developmental circle and the democratic circle. He sees himself as “not just talking about new politics but also practising new politics”.¹²⁰ He wanted to promote a new approach to politics by taking it to a higher level based on four pillars: political integrity; a new governance framework in which the state, civil society and business work more closely together in genuine partnership; innovation and democracy; and what he calls “progressive political thoughts” to “break away from old thinking”.¹²¹ According to Saifuddin, his ideas on new politics were shared by Prime Minister Najib who in private discussions had called for an end to the “sledgehammer strategy” to politics. “Najib said, ‘Masa strategi tukul besi dah habis’ [The days of the sledgehammer strategy are over]. Najib has also used the terms ‘model baru politik’ [new political model] and ‘transformasi politik’ [political transformation].”¹²² Indeed, Saifuddin argued, Najib’s repeal of the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the Emergency Ordinance (EO), amendment of the Universities and University Colleges Act, and introduction of freedom of the press were all policies to remove the vestiges of old politics.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Nurul Haziqah Abdul Halim, “Call for New Politics Built on Battle of Wits and Integrity”, UKM news portal, 25 March 2013.

¹²⁰ Author’s interview with Saifuddin Abdullah, 14 June 2013.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Najib announced these policies on 15 September 2011 in a television broadcast to mark Malaysia Day.

Saifuddin, however, had come under heavy fire internally in UMNO for his reformist views. “I got a lot of flak from within UMNO. I have been accused of being a Pakatan guy planted within UMNO.” Indeed, there was some disquiet within the party with Najib’s announced reform of the security policies. “The morning after Najib’s announcement on 15 September 2011, I received a call that some people were not happy with PM’s announcement.” Saifuddin himself suffered politically at the 2013 general election. Despite his reformist credentials, he was defeated by a PAS leader, Nasrudin Hassan Tantawi. It was possibly due to internal sabotage because of his vocal criticism of his own party.¹²⁴

The fate of Saifuddin perhaps manifested the strains and resistance that confronts UMNO as it embarked into unfamiliar terrain. Significantly, top UMNO leaders have acknowledged that a transformation of UMNO is a big challenge, the latest among them being former prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Najib himself. Abdullah, in his book, *Awakening: The Abdullah Badawi Years in Malaysia*, described UMNO as a party at a crossroads that would be difficult to reform. Najib, agreeing with his predecessor, described his own drive at reforming UMNO as a “gargantuan task” that could take “a few generations”.¹²⁵ Given such sentiments at the top of the country’s ruling elite, the big question remains whether the current push towards new politics is more a flash in the pan than a trend.

GE13 and New Politics

It could be argued that GE13 was as much a contestation between old politics and new politics. But if the elections began that way, the outcome had thrown up a totally unexpected turn with features that approximate those of new politics. The BN as the vehicle for old politics came under strong challenge from the opposition, which held themselves out as embodying the politics of the future.

124 Anisah Shukry, “GE13: Big BN names defeated”. *Free Malaysia Today*, 6 May 2013.

125 Lee Long Hui, “Najib: Pak Lah is right, it’s difficult to reform UMNO,” *Malaysiakini*, 8 August 2013.

Although it failed to achieve its declared aim to dethrone BN through the ballot box in GE13, PR won the popular vote for the first time. BN won 133 seats in the 222-seat national parliament, the Dewan Rakyat. This is by far its worst electoral showing since BN’s formation in 1973. The victory was seven seats short of BN’s 140 seats won in the 2008 election under Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, when it lost its two-thirds majority for the first time. In GE13, BN, under Prime Minister Najib, failed to win back its two-thirds majority, which was one of its key targets. The loss of the popular vote—BN secured 5.3 million against PR’s 5.6 million—aggravated the situation for BN. If not for the weighted constituencies, which favoured the rural areas where it was strong as well as advance votes, BN would have lost the national election, according to the Merdeka Centre. Since then, BN has been seen by many—certainly by the opposition—as having won essentially a pyrrhic or hollow victory. This has put pressure on the leadership of Najib as UMNO president and as prime minister—an uncomfortable position that was somewhat eased but not completely overcome by BN’s victory in the Kuala Besut by-election on 24 July 2013.¹²⁶

Going forward, while the road ahead to the next general election may be riddled with fluidity and uncertainty, there will be at the same time a centrifugal pull towards accommodation as seen in the initiative put up by Prime Minister Najib for national reconciliation. Viewed another way, what we are seeing are conflicting forces of change unleashed by GE13, all of which are interacting within, albeit, a generally stable political system. The rebellious instincts of voters who are eager to bring about change to the way politics is practised will continue to be countervailed by the status-quo instincts of the more conservative political players and *rakyat* who are pushing for greater stability and accommodation. The outcome of this heady mix of trends and counter-trends is not easy to predict, given the increasingly complex nature of Malaysian politics. Within this

126 Syed Jaymal Zahid, “For Najib, a leadership crisis dodged with Kuala Besut win,” say analysts at *the malaymailonline.com*, 25 July 2013. <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/for-najiba-leadership-crisis-dodged-with-kuala-besut-win-say-analysts>.

mixture of fluidity, uncertainty and stability, three major currents or themes have emerged: ethnic polarisation, national reconciliation and political accommodation—each of which mirrored the contestations between old politics and new politics.

Ethnic Polarisation: Old Politics or “New Politics”?

The ethnic factor culminating in BN’s worst electoral showing on 5 May was followed by a controversial statement by Prime Minister Najib when he proclaimed this drubbing as largely due to a massive swing towards the opposition by the traditionally pro-BN Chinese electorate. His characterisation of this swing as a “Chinese tsunami” triggered a raging debate on whether the rising tide of the opposition was indeed due to a Chinese tsunami or a wider, multi-ethnic national phenomenon reflecting a larger urban discontent of which the Chinese voters were a significant part, largely because they tend to be urban dwellers. Some preferred to refer to the swing as also due to a “Malay flash flood” towards the opposition, making the phenomenon more a broader-based Malaysian than a Chinese tsunami.¹²⁷

Indeed, if we take a longer-term view and see GE13 within the larger context of the evolution of Malaysian politics since the watershed emergence of Reformasi in 1998, the debate on whether GE13 was a Chinese tsunami against BN would take a different complexion. Reformasi was largely a Malay-centric phenomenon that marked the third major fissure in the Malay community. As advanced by Mahathir, the Malays were now divided into three factions.¹²⁸ The first break saw a split from UMNO, leading to the formation of PAS in 1951. The second break was the split in UMNO in 1987, leading to the formation of an oppositionist Semangat 46 led by Tengku Razaleigh, following a bitter power struggle that saw Mahathir victorious by a slim margin. In typical Malay penchant for reconciliation

127 “A divide that’s growing wider”. *The Star Online*. 9 July 2013. <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2013/07/09/A-divide-thats-growing-wider.aspx>.

128 “Malays will become minority if they are divided,” says Mahathir. *Bernama*, 9 November 2011. https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=10150393865389658.

in the name of unity, Razaleigh subsequently returned to UMNO after an ineffective attempt to rival it and Semangat 46 died a natural death. The third split—following the 1998 sacking of Anwar—led to the eventual formation of PKR and the rise of the PKR-centred PR opposition coalition. Although officially multiracial, especially in its leadership, PKR is essentially a Malay-dominant party, yet its appeal was such that it succeeded in putting together a disparate opposition into a tripartite force, combining two diametrically-opposed parties: the Islamist PAS and the essentially Chinese-based DAP. It is this three-party coalition that has successfully attracted disgruntled voices from the Malay, Indian and Chinese communities.

It is clear that the Chinese community had swung decisively to the opposition in GE13, exacerbating the trend that was seen in the 2008 general election. The urban Malay community that had deserted UMNO since the sacking of Anwar in 1998 had remained essentially with the opposition, either supporting PAS or PKR, even though some, especially those in the rural fringes, had swung back to UMNO since the exit of Mahathir as party president. In other words, the Malay tsunami against UMNO post-1998 may have been stemmed but it had not been reversed. As a three-party alliance comprising all ethnic groups, PR is predominantly Malay in rank-and-file, given the broadly Malay membership of PAS and PKR. So the Chinese swing towards the opposition in GE13 was essentially adding another layer of support for the opposition that began with the third Malay split in 1998. In other words, the 2013 swing was not just a Chinese tsunami but also a Malaysian tsunami completed by the Chinese swing to the opposition.

In the 1999 polls that followed Anwar’s sacking a year earlier, BN suffered heavy losses but managed to retain power. Seeing the writing on the wall amidst accusations of being a divisive leader despite his immense popularity, Mahathir retired in 2003. Mahathir’s exit from formal politics led to a revival of support for UMNO under Abdullah Badawi, a softer and gentler leader who led BN to one of its best electoral victories in the 2004 general election. But while Abdullah succeeded in slowing down the desertion of Malays from UMNO, he did not succeed, as a BN leader, in keeping Chinese support for BN’s Chinese-based allies, namely MCA and Gerakan, both of which

suffered significantly in the 2008 elections. The 2013 elections merely continued the erosion of support for MCA and Gerakan, leading to their historic losses to the point of undermining their position as legitimate representatives of the Chinese community in political bargaining within BN's consociational system. Clearly, the Chinese voters were switching their support to DAP and it was this significant break that Najib referred to as the “Chinese tsunami” of GE13 at a press conference on 6 May 2013, just hours after the GE13 results were announced giving BN a simple majority.

Najib said that the opposition, especially DAP, had painted a false picture to the Chinese community that they could change the government by voting the opposition, using the slogan *ubah* or change. “[This was] as if the Chinese supported the opposition that they can change the government, while the reality was that even if a large number of the Chinese community voted against Barisan Nasional, we would remain,” Najib said. “The reality is that bumiputeras, including those in Sabah and Sarawak, and the Indian community, supported the BN—we cannot change the government without the support of the bumiputeras.”¹²⁹

Pendamaian Nasional: National Reconciliation as New Politics

The narrative of a Chinese or Malaysian tsunami or Malay flash flood justified the argument of those who were concerned about the further polarisation of the country along ethnic lines as a result of GE13. The fragmentation of Malaysian society along parochial divides, exacerbating what was already a feature of Malaysian politics given the nature of the race-based political system, threw up an unexpected call by Prime Minister Najib for *pendamaian nasional* or national reconciliation in a strategic “Big Tent” approach to defuse the range of political pressures confronting him. In fact, the idea of national reconciliation was broached by Prime Minister Najib publicly for the first time at the same post-election press conference where he talked about a Chinese tsunami. “The polarisation in this voting trend wor-

129 “Chinese taken for a ride”, *New Straits Times*, 8 May 2013.

ries the government. We are afraid that if this is allowed to continue, it will create tensions ... One of the programmes we will undertake (as the elected government) is national reconciliation,” he said.¹³⁰

What Prime Minister Najib meant by national reconciliation, and how it should be achieved, was left vague. This led to varying interpretations of what he had in mind. While some saw it as reconciliation between the major ethnic communities, others asked whether these could equally apply to reconciliation among the various political parties such that the widening gulf between the two sides of the political divide could be narrowed or bridged to bring about an overall cooling of temperature in the country as a whole. But Najib soon gave a clue to his thinking when he said in his Twitter three days later: “My task ahead is to harmonise communal issues. We need to approach others in a national reconciliation and moderation.”¹³¹ In an example of how diverse the interpretations had been, a former minister, Zainuddin Maidin, proposed that DAP join BN so that there would be Chinese representation in the new cabinet, which had seen the MCA and Gerakan vacating their presence following their dismal showing in GE13.¹³²

It was not until the first seating of the new Dewan Rakyat on 25 June 2013 that Prime Minister Najib expanded on what he had in mind. In response to a question by DAP leader Lim Kit Siang, the Prime Minister said the government had planned to set up a national consultative council on unity. The council would involve civil society, academics and even political parties from both sides of the political divide. The council would have a free remit to discuss all major issues affecting unity but the three core areas would be race, religion and

¹³⁰ Ram Anand, “Najib blames polls results on ‘Chinese tsunami’”. *Malaysiakini*, 6 May 2013. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/229231>. See also Shahanaaz Habib and Farik Zolkepli, “GE13: Najib – We will undertake national reconciliation”, *The Star*, 6 May 2013. Also available at <http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx?file=%2f2013%2f5%2f6%2fnation%2f20130506021056&sec=nation>.

¹³¹ “Harmonise communal issues: Najib”. *Sinar Harian*, 9 May 2013.

¹³² “Zam syor DAP sertai BN” [Zam proposes DAP to join BN to represent Chinese community in government]. *Sinar Harian*, 9 May 2013. <http://www.sinarharian.com.my/politik/zam-syor-dap-sertai.bn-1.158239>.

policies. “We can discuss all issues about race, religion and policies,” he said. But the Prime Minister also, for the first time, laid down a condition for national reconciliation: the opposition must accept the results of the elections, which he called the “main premise” for national reconciliation. “But first accept the results,” he said.¹³³

At around the same time, internal BN soul-searching about its own future identity following the less than satisfactory general election spilled into the public domain. Debates emerged around ending BN’s race-based politics and a possible merger of the component race-based parties into a single multiracial political vehicle—or what was referred to as 1BN. This idea of 1BN—certainly radical by the standards of Malaysia’s communal-oriented politics—was consistent with the unfolding drama towards national reconciliation. It gave more flesh to the initial bare-bones proposal for unity talks. But even this was still a raw proposal that required much debate and consensus building and at different layers of the political stage. Given the fluidity, various scenarios of moves and counter-moves may unfold over the next few months or years as the players adjust to the flux.¹³⁴

One possible scenario would be a general reconciliation between BN and PR, involving the ruling BN on the one hand and the opposition PR’s DAP, PAS and PKR on the other. In this scenario, however, a reconciliation *not* involving PKR—as even some in the opposition believe—is more likely, given UMNO’s “allergy” to PKR.¹³⁵ But evidence to the contrary has also emerged. Apparently, in the spirit of national reconciliation, Prime Minister Najib has extended an olive branch to Anwar to join BN in a unity government, offering him the post of deputy prime minister and four cabinet seats to PKR, which

133 Ram Anand, “PM: Reconciliation possible if GE results accepted.”

Malaysiakini, 26 June 2013. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/233985>.

134 Yang Razali Kassim, “Post-GE13: Issues, Impacts and Future Trajectories”. A presentation at RSIS Panel Discussion on GE13: Issues, Prospects and Future Trajectories. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), 22 May 2013.

135 Nik Abduh Nik Aziz, deputy chief of PAS Youth, at RSIS Seminar on the 13th Malaysian General Election and the Future Direction of PAS, RSIS, 6 February 2013.

Anwar rejected.¹³⁶ The offer was made by Prime Minister Najib through Jusuf Kalla, the former Indonesian vice-president who has played interlocutor between the Prime Minister and Anwar in a bid to reconcile the two leaders. This confirmed a report that described the offer as an olive branch from Prime Minister Najib.¹³⁷ There is some controversy as to who initiated this reconciliation move but the fact remains that Prime Minister Najib’s idea of national reconciliation is a serious post-GE13 political project, pursued even with the involvement of foreign third parties. But true to its controversial nature, such reports were subsequently denied by Prime Minister Najib on 16 August in a statement issued by the Prime Minister’s Office. As swiftly as it was released, the statement was countered by Anwar’s PKR, which maintained that the unity government offer was a fact and that the PKR leadership and its allies in DAP and PAS had been briefed, presumably by Anwar, on the Najib initiative.¹³⁸

Anwar’s apparent rejection of the offer—and Prime Minister Najib’s subsequent denial of any offer being made—was not surprising. For one, Anwar’s mission is to be the prime minister replacing Najib, not to be his second fiddle. Besides, an acceptance of this offer will almost immediately lead to a split within the PR coalition, which Anwar is not prepared to do. But in a surprising about-turn, and amplifying the fluidity of post-election politics, Anwar offered Najib an olive branch for a broad dialogue to resolve a range of national issues on 31 August 2013, though he was snubbed by UMNO leaders for being “too late”¹³⁹

At the same time, the pressure now is on DAP, as the biggest GE13 winner in the opposition alliance, and whether it wants to push forward with its expanded role as the new voice of the Chinese

136 As confirmed to the author by a PKR source.

137 Terence Netto, “The Gyration of Jusuf Kalla”. *Malaysiakini*, 1 July 2013. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/234416>.

138 Reme Ahmad, “Najib denies talk of ‘unity’ govt offer to Anwar,” *The Straits Times*, 17 August 2013.

139 Zurairi AR, Dubious Umno leaders say Anwar’s truce offer too late, *malaymailonline.com*, 30 August 2013, <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/dubious-umno-leaders-say-anwars-truce-offer-too-late>.

community by joining a reconciliation government to replace MCA, the traditional champion of the community. Significantly, selective reconciliation moves also broke out simultaneously involving the various ethnic-based component parties within BN as well as across the national political divide. Malay unity talks between UMNO and PAS, which have been ongoing since the time of Abdullah Badawi, are likely to be resurrected despite sporadic resistance from some quarters within PAS. In a new development, similar unity talks were also being attempted within the Chinese and Indian political communities. Within the BN, MCA, Gerakan and the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) have initiated merger talks to unite the Chinese-based parties. Notwithstanding the good intentions, these are expected to be difficult, as seen in the intra-party tensions surfacing into the public domain even within MCA between its top two leaders, Chua Soi Lek and Liow Tiong Lai. The same difficulties of clashing wills and interests can also be seen among the Indian-based parties within BN. These tensions suggest that the road ahead to national reconciliation will be an uphill one, if not one marked by token initiatives.

National Reconciliation and 1BN: Quo Vadis New Politics?

A related development arising from the push for national reconciliation as a counter-current to the polarisation of Malaysian politics is the drive to reform and transform BN from its current model as a race-based coalition of major ethnic parties into a single, merged multiracial entity. On the 44th anniversary of the 13 May 1969 riots, BN leaders went public with what has been an internal debate about its future identity. Among the first to speak up were UMNO secretary-general Tengku Adnan Mansor and UMNO Supreme Council members Nazri Aziz and Saifuddin Abdullah. Nazri called on BN to *ubah*, the same clarion call for change, which has become synonymous with the opposition during the GE13 hustings. Nazri described BN as “outdated” and a political vehicle that did not resonate with the younger voters. His comments evoked a response from Tengku Adnan, who revealed that BN could rebrand itself by merging its more than a dozen communal-oriented components into a single race-neutral entity. “BN could perhaps be made into a single party

that is no longer race-based someday,” he was quoted in an interview with *Malay Mail*.

The idea of rebranding and renewing BN was earlier mooted by Saifuddin, the reform-minded ex-MP who surprisingly lost his seat to the PAS candidate. The day after his defeat he said, “We are lucky to still be in government at the federal level.” He said that to strengthen its position going forward, “we need to rebrand, there needs to be a new BN”.¹⁴⁰ A related significant comment came from Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin when he said that UMNO must make comprehensive changes to remain relevant “and retain power”. Given UMNO’s central role in BN, his remark underscored a readiness to correspondingly introduce changes in BN as a survival strategy. “When I go to the ground I found that some UMNO members are less enthusiastic now ... they said the political ecosystem has changed and that they were worried that we would lose. In a situation like this ... if UMNO wants to retain power, it must make some changes.”¹⁴¹

Since then, various interpretations of what 1BN could mean have emerged as part of the evolving debate on a fundamental rethink of the coalition. There are even sceptics who doubt the seriousness of BN in its self-transformation project. But reformists in UMNO such as Saifuddin believe that the reform of BN is inevitable, though it may not be immediately achieved. To him, 1BN may emerge at the earliest in two more general elections—in other words, by or around 2023.¹⁴² In another manner of speaking, the next general election in five years’ time will still see the same BN model being used, with the attendant risks of it being rejected by the electorate or even its own supporters. This will be a big risk indeed because if the downward trend in support for BN continues, the next GE can see a BN defeat, and the beginning of a new era in Malaysian politics without BN in power.

140 Yang Razali Kassim, “Malaysian Politics Post GE13: The Deracialisation of BN?”. *RSIS Commentaries 094/2013*, 15 May 2013. <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/Perspective/RSIS0942013.pdf>.

141 “Muhyiddin: UMNO needs to change to stay relevant”. *Bernama*, 8 July 2013. <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2013/07/09/umno-needs-to-change-says-muhyiddin/>.

142 Saifuddin Abdullah, interview with the author in Singapore, 14 June 2013.

Conclusion: Old Politics in New Clothing?

It can be argued that Prime Minister Najib's "Chinese tsunami" remarks are typically old politics. Yet, in the same breath, the Malaysian premier was exhorting for forward-looking ideas that were reflective of the culture of new politics, namely, a transition to non-racial politics. This apparently conflicting or contradictory dispositions manifests either one or both of these state of affairs: that Malaysian politics is in a state of flux, or that it is indeed in transition from old politics to new politics. But it is perhaps premature to say that old politics, as manifested in communal politics, is being jettisoned. It may be more accurate to say that Malaysian politics is undergoing a process of introspection or self-examination, the outcome of which is still unclear. Paradoxically, it can even be said that the outcome of GE13 has entrenched parties that promote bumiputeraism—a pillar of old politics—despite the reduced majority faced by BN. As such, it is unlikely that these political actors will want to advance fundamental changes to politics without first securing their own interests in the future political landscape. One proponent of this view of entrenched bumiputeraist actors is Clive Kessler.¹⁴³

Reflecting a perception of many observers of Malaysian politics, he argues that while BN has come out weaker, "UMNO's domination of the governing BN coalition, of Parliament, public policy and national life generally had, perhaps oddly, been enhanced". While BN's total numbers were down from 140 in 2008 to 133 seats in 2013, UMNO increased its own, from 79 to 88, or about two-thirds of the total BN strength of 133. UMNO's main support now resides not in the original communal partners from the peninsula—MCA, MIC and Gerakan—but its newer allies from East Malaysia. And UMNO's strongest East Malaysian ally in numeral terms is a bumiputera party—Parti Bumiputra Bersatu (PBB). Within BN, Peninsular UMNO, with 74 seats, and East Malaysian UMNO (Sabah and Labuan UMNO) with 14 seats, together control 88 seats out of

143 Clive Kessler, Malaysia's 13th national election: Some further remarks – Clive Kessler, the malaymailonline.com, 30 August 2013, malaymailonline.com/what-you-think/article/malaysias-13th-national-election-some-further-remarks-clive-kessler

the 133 BN seats in parliament.¹⁴⁴ PBB, with 14 seats, is the second strongest BN party—ahead of MCA (7), MIC (4) and Gerakan (1). PBB is a long-term UMNO ally that has, “at the doctrinal level, a strong ‘nativist’ or ‘bumiputera-ist’ orientation and outlook”. Kessler continues, “In numerical and political terms, UMNO now dominates as never before—the national government.” In fact, he adds, “In national government, an era of unprecedented UMNO domination—and, very likely, an era of increasingly Islamising and even Islamist, Malay political assertion—may now, I concluded, be in the offing.” In other words, while GE13 has accelerated the shift towards new politics, it has also paradoxically strengthened the country’s Malay and bumiputera parties, thus entrenching the champions of old politics.

By extension, given the dominance of the bumiputera parties, any transition from old politics to new politics will be determined and decided by the UMNO-led bloc. Thus any change in the political culture is totally at the whim and fancy of the very political bloc whose own *raison de’tre* will be unravelled should old politics be completely abandoned. It is in this respect that the UMNO-led drive to transform BN from a race-based coalition to a single, multiracial platform is inherently contradictory. While it is highly visionary, it is at the same time open to internal tensions that may stymie this visionary drive. We can wonder to what extent a party will want to “dig its own grave” and be successful at it, given the internal struggles that such a drive is likely to unleash between those for and those against such a fundamental change in political ethos and identity. In short, while the trend towards new politics thrown up by GE13 is highly significant, it remains an open question whether and to what extent this trend will last—or whether it will be stillborn.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. See also Kessler’s correction of his original number of seats for UMNO in Greg Lopez, Clive Kessler’s analysis on UMNO’s strategy and a correction, 20 June 2013, <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2013/06/20/clive-kesslers-analysis-on-umnos-strategy-and-a-correction/>

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The 13th Malaysian General Election proved to be most hard-fought in Malaysia's history yet. The result of the election bear testament to this claim; despite winning more than half of the votes, the opposition still cannot break Barisan Nasional's dominance in parliament. This collection of articles from our experts attempts to underline the dynamics behind the result. We explore pertinent themes that influenced the outcome including identity politics, religious dynamics, as well as the impact of public policy agendas, not only from the theoretical perspective, but also through intensive fieldwork. At the same time, the aftermath of the elections was scrutinised in order to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex political underpinnings in Malaysia today. This book will be relevant for students of Malaysian politics and the general public alike.