

A large, dense crowd of people is shown from a high-angle perspective, filling the entire frame. The individuals are mostly seen from behind or in profile, looking towards the center of the gathering. The lighting is somewhat dim, suggesting an indoor or evening setting. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

MARCH 8

**Eclipsing
May 13**

**Ooi Kee Beng
Johan Saravanamuttu
Lee Hock Guan**



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Foreword

Sensing that great changes were approaching in Malaysia, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) decided in early 2008 to focus on the snap general elections that Premier Abdullah Badawi had called for March 8.

Three of our researchers — Ooi Kee Beng, Johan Saravanamuttu and Lee Hock Guan — travelled to different states in Malaysia to study the public mood during the campaign period. Kee Beng was based in Penang during that time, Johan was in the state of Kelantan, and Hock Guan was in the Klang Valley.

This volume is the result of their efforts. It does not only supply information about the elections, but also provides a deep analysis of how the opposition managed to cause such great upsets on that fateful day.

More importantly, the book attempts to initiate discussions about the significance of March 8 in the unique context of Malaysia's nation-building process, and draw attention to the psychological importance of the results where inter-ethnic relations are concerned.

In many ways, March 8, 2008 does hold the potential for bringing closure to May 13, 1969. How complete this closure will be is being decided by present events.

K. Kesavapany

Director

ISEAS

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Introduction

A nation trudges along by securing symbolic events, iconic periods and defining personages as pillars for its central storyline. This acquired storyline goes backwards and forwards at the same time, generating common concepts and injecting a common understanding of the nation into its population.

In the case of Malaysia, there is the idea of the first Baling talks of December 1955 when the communists were outplayed by the anti-communist parties; there is the image of the first premier Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra raising his arm in a salute as he declares independence from the British on August 31, 1957; there is the national mosque, the parliament building, the Kuala Lumpur Tower and the Petronas Twin Towers; there is the Malaysian flag; and there are depictions of the police and the armed forces aided by civilians stymying Indonesian infiltrators in the 1960s.

And then there are images that the nation would rather forget. These include Singapore's separation; the racial riots of May 13, 1969 in Kuala Lumpur, with burning buildings and cars spread throughout the city; and lately the Education Minister raising an unsheathed keris before an assembly of UMNO Youth members. Recently, pictures of large demonstrations, along with police water cannons, have also begun to etch themselves onto the Malaysian psyche.

With the advance of the mass media, more such images will in the near future uncontrollably bore themselves into the minds of the nation.

However, the prize for the country's greatest fixation must still go to May 13. This is not because there are that many pictures publicly available for viewing, but because changes stemming from it were so comprehensive and profound.

In its eagerness to curb trouble-makers, the government of the day used the proverbial hammer to kill the ant. In 1971, muffling legislations were pushed through a chastised parliament, including amendments to the Sedition Act of 1948, which overruled parliamentary immunity among other things; the Constitutional (Amendment) Bill that forbid discussions about sensitive issues such as citizenship, the national language, the special position of the Malays, the legitimate interests of non-Malays, and the sovereignty of the sultans; as well as the Universities and University Colleges Act, which strongly denied students from participation in political activities.

We know today that the government of the day, the Razak-Ismail administration, was working against time, with the knowledge that the two top leaders could literally die at any minute. Legislations were quickly pushed through and a veneer of normalcy was recreated, all in order to bring formal parliamentary democracy back into place before their demise.

And so, Malaysia was left with a hastily constructed solution to a pressing problem. The New Economic Policy (NEP) came into being. It expedited race-based affirmative action to such an extent that racialism threatened to become the conclusive factor in policy making.

No proper closure to the trauma of May 13 was possible under such circumstances. Fifty years down the road, inter-ethnic relations have not improved, and inter-faith issues have become a common controversy. As was poignantly stated in 2007 by the Regent of Perak state, Raja Nazrin Shah, “Malaysians no longer celebrate diversity”.

One long-term effect of the battery of measures taken by the government in the early 1970s — and the thing that hampers the country’s route to maturity as a nation — was the undermining of the country’s debate culture. Public space diminished dramatically as a direct result of increased mass media control and parliamentary passivity. The standard of public debate has since dropped to a globally embarrassing level, as exemplified by cases assembled in Amir Mohammad’s recent so-funny-if-it-were-not-true book, *Malaysian politicians say the darndest things*.

Perhaps the common intolerance of opposing views in Malaysian politics, which stretches to the extent of wishing death and destruction on opposite camps, emanates from the “sensitivities straitjacket” used for so long to silence debate.

But then came March 8, 2008. In many ways, the results of the general election that gave five states to the opposition and pushed the ruling coalition into existential crisis, were a cry of desperation, and a last-ditch attempt by common Malaysians at stopping the divisive trend that the extended postponement of closure to May 13 had wrought upon the body politic.

Catching the spirit of the day, opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim used the slogan “A New Dawn” during the 2008 election campaign. What this new dawn will bring, and whether it will come at all, will be decided, not only by

individual leaders like Anwar, but, as was so clearly the case on March 8, by each single Malaysian feeling that he deserves a better deal.

A post-March 8 episode that has not been given due attention by analysts occurred on the night of April 14, when Anwar Ibrahim used the end of the suspension of his right to run for public office to give a fiery speech in Kampung Baru before a 20,000-crowd consisting largely of Malays. He declared: “All of you will witness this tonight. We will not talk about Malay supremacy but the supremacy of all Malaysians”.¹ For non-Malaysians, for whom the mere mention of crowds in Kampung Baru immediately conjured images of the beginning of the May 13 riots of 1969, a message coming from that same place from a Malay leader talking to a Malay crowd, and calling for a more inclusive model of nation building, was greatly welcome indeed. The significance of that evening seemed sadly lost on the mass media.

Nevertheless, it did happen, and it could happen because March 8 happened.

March 8 holds great potential for eclipsing May 13 and erasing the fears linked for so long to that spectral night in the short but eventful history of Malaysia.

All three authors of this book were monitoring Malaysia’s 12th General Elections in different parts of Malaysia during the thirteen days of campaigning. Each chapter is a study of what they observed during those two weeks, analysed against a background of data gathered from other sources. Together, the book seeks to capture vital aspects of that momentous occasion. It is hoped that the reader can gain some insights from our efforts.

Note

1. Areen Mazlan, “Kampung Baru hails ‘Ketuanan Rakyat’”, in <*Malaysiakini.com*>, April 15, 2008.

Ooi Kee Beng

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1

The Opposition's Year of Living Demonstratively

Ooi Kee Beng

Introduction

It is quite impossible to deny that Malaysia's 12th General Elections of March 8, 2008 is a watershed in the country's history. The significance of that day is monumental in ways that analysts are still discovering months after the fact.

For a start, it is difficult for the long-time ruling coalition, the Barisan Nasional (BN), not to blame itself for the surprising losses it suffered. Understanding the rise of the opposition coalition — Pakatan Rakyat (PR, People's Pact) — requires at least an analysis of the foregoing period of several months and of how a BN that was in possession of a record-strong mandate could so quickly lose so much ground. Just as interestingly, the BN has not shown any capacity to regain ground in the months that followed.

The actual campaign period itself — thirteen days — showed how unprepared the BN's component parties were for elections that they themselves were empowered to call at any time they found suitable. However, an explanation of the surprising results cannot merely focus on the election

campaign itself. The events that went before were too significant to disregard, and the activism of opposition forces too focused to ignore.

A Year of Living Demonstratively

Street rallies in Kuala Lumpur had been on the rise throughout 2007, egged on by a series of by-elections. By the end of that year, these had developed into huge demonstrations. The striking lack of dialogue between protesters and the government, along with the highhanded methods used by the authorities against demonstrators, alienated the activists further from the government and the BN parties.

When 2007 — the 50th anniversary year of Malaysia's independence — began, the opposition had very little going for it. This impression was strengthened as the year progressed by convincing BN victories in a series of by-elections.

Already in an earlier by-election held in November 2005 in Pengkalan Pasir, Kelantan, the BN had managed to win a stunning psychological victory by snatching the seat away from the Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), leaving the state government with only a one-seat majority.¹ BN seemed invincible then. Its winning streak, which had seen Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi getting a record mandate of 91 per cent of parliamentary seats in April 2004, seemed to have no end.

At the next by-election, held in Batu Talam in Pahang in January 2007, PAS and the Parti KeAdilan Rakyat (PKR), both sensing that they had little chance of winning, decided

to shun the whole affair, facilitating in the event an easy win for BN over an independent.²

The opposition quickly learnt from this that such boycotts were a self-defeating tactic. In early April that year, when a by-election was called in Machap in Malacca, the third opposition party, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), fielded a candidate to fight the BN component party, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA). The DAP lost by a huge margin.³

Two weeks after that, another by-election became necessary, this time in Ijok in Selangor, a constituency with a relatively high Indian population. There, the PKR chose Khalid Ibrahim, at that time a well-known corporate figure, to run against K. Parthiban, a candidate from the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), another BN component party. Khalid lost, also by a sizeable margin — 1,850 votes.

Despite these successes, some signs caused the BN some worry.⁴ Firstly, Chinese sympathy for the opposition was unexpectedly high in the racially mixed constituency of Machap, an MCA stronghold. Indian support for BN, however, remained strong at 80 per cent, at least according to MIC president S. Samy Vellu. Secondly, cooperation between the opposition parties was impressive. PKR took to the streets in aid of DAP in the Malacca by-election, while both PAS and DAP stood behind PKR at Ijok.

In the event, the snap general elections that took place the following year, on March 8, 2008, saw Khalid Ibrahim win the Selangor seat that he had earlier lost by 1,850 votes, with a majority of 1,920 votes. Parthiban, the man who trounced Khalid in the by-election, lost in another constituency, Bukit Melawati, to a PKR man.⁵

It would seem, therefore, that in the ten months between the hotly contested Ijok by-election and the general elections, a radical shift in public sympathy towards the opposition away from the BN did take place. This swing seemed to follow a geographic delineation, with four states in the north — Penang, Kedah, Perak and Selangor — falling on March 8 to the opposition parties that later became the alternative coalition of Pakatan Rakyat. PAS's hold on its home state of Kelantan was retained. Incidentally, Machap, despite earlier signs of discontent among Chinese voters, remained in BN hands. The BN also lost its two-thirds majority in parliament.

Factors ventured by analysts as contributory to the March 8 results include the general feeling of disappointment heightened by the lackluster celebration of the country's 50th anniversary, rising prices and the fear of huge increases in the near future, cases of heated inter-faith contests over apostasy and burials of Muslim converts, and outrage over what seemed to be profound dishonesty within the judiciary system. The last included the release by the *de facto* opposition leader and former deputy prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, of video recordings — now infamously known as the “Lingam Tapes” — purportedly showing a top lawyer boasting over the phone about his ability to fix judge appointments.

One central issue that continued to undermine support for BN — and which was used to good effect by the opposition at their rallies — was the unsheathing of the Malay *keris* by Education Minister Hishamuddin Hussein at the dominant United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) general assembly. Hishamuddin, leader of the

party's youth wing, had performed this ritual for three successive years despite strong protests from various quarters that the act amounted to a threat of violence against other races.⁶

In a situation where the opposition is perennially weak, as was the case in Malaysia before March 8, 2008, the boundary between non-government organizations (NGOs) and opposition parties with regards to both to personnel and issues, tends to be indistinct, and often consciously kept that way by the parties involved.

Rising prices were evidently an increasingly important concern for the common Malaysian. On June 18, 2007, about 600 demonstrators had gathered outside the prime minister's office in response to government refusal to initiate minimum wage legislation.⁷ Further rallies organized by the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) followed. Only a week later, on June 25, hundreds of workers gathered at over a dozen locations throughout the country to press the same demand.

Poignantly, it was only after Malaysia's 50th National Day on August 31 that street demonstrations increased dramatically in size. The issues spread beyond mere wages.

Provoked by the Lingam Tapes, a "Walk for Justice" was organised on September 26 by the Malaysian Bar Council. Over 2,000 lawyers and supporters marched to the prime minister's office to call for measures to remedy the soiled reputation of the judiciary. This was the second time in history that the council had organized such a public rally.⁸

On November 9, 2007, the final day of UMNO's annual general assembly, Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi decided

to ban a rally planned for the following day, and that had been publicly announced weeks ahead by *Bersih*, a coalition of sixty-four NGOs and five political parties, formed to demand electoral reforms.⁹

The protest went ahead despite the police putting up roadblocks at entrance points into Kuala Lumpur, and despite the use of water cannons on one occasion. Most of the estimated 50,000 demonstrators were dressed in the royal colour of yellow. They marched to the residence of the Agong, the paramount king, where Anwar Ibrahim handed over a memorandum.

Abdullah's ban proved ineffectual, and ended with the government having no safe means of punishing the well-behaved demonstrators for defying him. The opposition was in turn emboldened by the tactical potential of sidestepping the government and appealing for electoral reforms successively and directly to nine sultans one at a time, until general elections were called.

However, before the second demonstration in the series could be held, another group got into the act, changing the equation dramatically, and in favour of the opposition.

The Hindu Rights Action Force (*Hindraf*) became a household name in Malaysia on November 25, 2007. Two days earlier, police had arrested three of its leaders under the Sedition Act for the planned rally that the authorities had now outlawed. Police attempted to curb the flow of Indians into Kuala Lumpur over the next two days. Despite that, and despite the use of tear gas and chemical-laced water on groups of Indian demonstrators at places such as the Batu Cave Hindu Temple — whose grounds are considered holy by many Hindus — at least 30,000 managed

to assemble to hand over a petition to the British Embassy. They were tactically seeking significant remuneration for the Malaysian Indian community for historical discrimination, and were blaming the British for leaving them at the mercy of the Malaysian government after 1957.

The authorities reacted harshly, arresting thirty-one demonstrators and charging them for the attempted murder of a police officer. These were later released, but not before five leaders of the movement were detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) on December 13.¹⁰

These arrests provided a rallying point for further protests against the government. On February 16, 2008, police used tear gas and water cannons on 300 Indians, including children, who were using the handing over of a rose as a symbolic request for the release of the five leaders.

This took place four days after Prime Minister Abdullah had inexplicably broken a promise not to dissolve parliament on February 13. He did dissolve parliament on February 13, apparently in line with his reported preference for the number “13”, and Malaysia went into election mode one year ahead of schedule.

Thirteen Days of Official Campaigning¹¹

This section limits itself to observations made during the campaign period in the northern state of Penang, where the DAP and its allies managed against all odds to oust totally its major rivals — the Gerakan and the MCA — from the political scene. No one seemed more surprised than the DAP itself at this turn of events, although it had grown increasingly obvious to its candidates the nearer they moved

towards Election Day that voter support for them was increasing.

Campaign strategies employed by the opposition parties proved extremely effective in capturing the rising anti-BN sentiments among voters. The DAP campaign in Penang was symptomatic of this success. The efficacy of the campaign helps to explain why it was so difficult for pundits to predict the results any earlier. They were simply not predictable until a few days before March 8 (see *appendix*). In general, what the campaign period witnessed was BN parties functioning clumsily and stiffly, and the opposition showing adaptability and imagination.

Despite dissent evident on the streets and on blog sites, it was far from obvious how Malaysians would actually vote when March 8 dawned. Penang voters were notorious for supporting the BN at state level and the opposition at federal level, apparently as a strategic exercise. This habit seemed certain to continue.

The Gerakan had been ruling Penang since 1969, and Koh Tsu Koon had been the chief minister since Dr Lim Chong Eu retired after being defeated by DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang in the 1990 elections. The party's hold on Penang appeared solid.

The DAP had over a couple of years been consciously perking up its appeal to young Malaysians by recruiting bloggers such as Tony Pua and Jeff Ooi, names easily recognized by the Internet generation.¹²

Encouraged by calls within his party to focus on Penang, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng decided, after some initial hesitation, to field a formidable team to challenge the Gerakan. The DAP's showing in the 2004 elections had

been discouraging to say the least. It had won one state seat and four parliamentary seats out of thirteen.

The 2008 general polls were also Lim's comeback election after he had been imprisoned for twelve months in 1998 for sedition after championing an alleged rape victim in the state of Malacca. Consequently, he was disqualified for five years from seeking public office.

Part of the DAP's electoral strategy this time around was for it to be seen to be negotiating only with PKR, and not with PAS. An openly joint platform with PAS and PKR in 1999 had caused the DAP to lose badly in Penang. It was therefore keen to avoid making the same mistake this time around. For 2008, the DAP fielded candidates in seven parliamentary seats, and reached agreement with the PKR to contest in nineteen state seats.¹³ The rest was for PKR to share with PAS.

Against all expectations, the DAP won all its contested seats at both levels. Its ambitions when campaigning started were quite modest. Since Penang voters were expected to favour the opposition for parliament, the party aimed more for success at the national level rather than at the state level. This was evident in the high-powered team it fielded for parliament.¹⁴

An added tactic was for Lim not only to contest in the parliamentary seat of Bagan, but also to challenge the state seat of Air Putih, which was held by the MCA. This seat subsumed under the Gerakan parliamentary stronghold constituency of Bukit Bendera, where his strategist Liew Chin Tong was taking on Gerakan strongman Chia Kwang Chye. This was to give Liew, a newcomer candidate, an advantage in a seemingly impossible struggle against the formidable Chia.

The arena for contention appeared set by the time campaigning started on February 25. Indian support seemed to have deserted the MIC wholesale, and moved to the DAP. For the DAP, the plan was to entertain and retain this support. Partly for this reason, it fielded academician P. Ramasamy in the constituency of Batu Kawan, which has a sizeable Indian population.¹⁵

Perhaps in the hope that he could regain a portion of the Indian vote, Gerakan's acting president and Penang chief minister Koh Tsu Koon decided to contest in that constituency against Ramasamy. Some street pundits have suggested that Koh's standing with the Chinese was so damaged by that time that he was making that choice because he had to rely on the non-Chinese votes that the BN banner could garner in order to strengthen his position.

As a sign of how important the Indian vote had become, and how much sympathy for the *Hindraf* movement and its jailed leaders had grown, the cry of *Makkal Sakti* (people's power) became the common call of all three opposition parties at their rallies.

Besides recruiting young talents, the DAP had amended its constitution in mid-2006, and had settled many of its internal conflicts before the elections.¹⁶ The Gerakan, on the other hand, was caught with a serious succession problem just in time for the elections.¹⁷

Its long-time president, Lim Keng Yaik, had retired as party president in April 2007, leaving Koh Tsu Koon as acting president. Without Lim to represent party interests at the national level, party members had been pressuring Koh to leave the safety of the state level and move into federal politics. Only after snap elections were announced by Abdullah did Koh agree to run for parliament, making it

necessary for him at that point to name his successor as chief minister.

One favourite for that post was party secretary-general Chia Kwang Chye, the man who had defeated DAP stalwart Lim Kit Siang in 1999 for the Bukit Bendera seat. However, he was picked to continue as parliamentary candidate, which took him out of the running. Other favourites included state executive councillor Teng Hock Nan, and the rising star Lee Kah Choon. Apparently, after holding discussions with Abdullah, Koh put forward a new third name, his former political secretary Teng Chang Yeow.

Koh's indecisiveness fired rumours that Teng Chang Yeow was a compromise candidate picked by the BN leadership. What was worse was the tactical dilemma the party now found itself in. Should Koh publicise his final choice before the elections, there was a risk that the party would be divided. Should he not, then the fear was that voters would punish the party for keeping that information from them before the elections.

Koh's popularity had suffered badly in recent months from his willingness to cooperate with Patrick Lim, a businessman closely linked to Abdullah Badawi's family. Lim had been pushing ahead with his gigantic Penang Global City Centre project in the face of strong resistance from non-governmental organizations in Penang.¹⁸ The project had been forced to retreat to the drawing board for the time being, and the state government was not taking a final stand on the matter until after the elections.

The vague motto the Gerakan decided to use in the campaign was "Keep reinventing" (*zai zhuanbian*, in Chinese pinyin). Not only was the Chinese version incorrect, the

slogan seemed inappropriate for a party in power to use. It allowed the DAP to tag on its own rhymed ending to Gerakan Chinese posters already hanging throughout the state. Its volunteers started putting up posters saying “Vote for the Rocket” (the DAP’s symbol) (*tuo huojian*) close to posters bearing the Gerakan’s original message.

This light-hearted initiative by the DAP was accompanied in its aggressive slogan campaign by the theme “Just Change It” (“*Jom Ubah*” in Malay), with the “J” sometimes ticked in a way jocularly reminiscent of the stylized “J” found in the multinational company Nike’s famous logo, “Just Do It”.

The use of short message services (SMS) by all parties in informing the public of rally times and venues was proving successful. Voters could register their mobile phone numbers at DAP offices, for example, in order to receive campaign information.

DAP tacticians soon realized that without mainstream channels for publicity, their individual rallies were failing to make their presence properly felt among Penang voters. They then decided that a joint rally with PKR where all candidates would appear together on stage would capture the imagination of voters much more effectively than separate and disconnected ones could. Indeed, separate rallies meant that the candidates had to follow a punishing routine of travelling between various venues all evening giving similar speeches. Most of them were already losing their voice.

On the evening of February 29, the DAP organized a huge manifestation at the indoor stadium of Han Chiang High School with most of its top candidates attending, and

with Anwar Ibrahim invited as the star attraction. This turned out to be a huge success, judging from a turn-out estimated at over 10,000, half of whom remained standing outside in pouring rain, and from the record huge donation (RM38,000) collected from the enthusiastic crowd.¹⁹

Anwar's entrance into the hall saw a sea of DAP supporters parting to let two rows of PKR flags lead him to the podium. This created an undeniably poignant visual display for the crowd to see.

Indian support for the DAP, according to campaign workers at party centres, continued to be stable. As the campaign period dragged on, DAP candidates became more and more confident that their successes would be much bigger than they had initially expected. The parliamentary candidate for Bukit Bendera, Liew Chin Tong, disclosed on March 5 in a private interview that they might actually win enough to control the state (see *appendix*). Fearing a voter backlash should such an opinion be aired at all, he asked that the point be kept confidential for the time being.

This fear appeared well founded. A source within *The Star* disclosed privately that reporters for the MCA-controlled newspaper had been told to be on the alert for any DAP leader making a public claim that the party would win the state, and to report that comment prominently and immediately. This choice of tactic stemmed from the belief that Penang voters would turn conservative should they think that their open support for the opposition had become strong enough to topple the state government.

Interestingly, when asked about this clandestine directive later, Liew admitted that his party was aware of it because

a DAP supporter within *The Star* had phoned and informed them about it. In any case, he said, the party was wise enough by then not to commit such a blunder.

In an apparent move to counteract arguments that its candidates were not from Penang, the DAP chose among other things to project the image of Penang state as a progressive place in decay, and presenting that as a perspective best understood by outsiders. Other campaign issues included bread-and-butter ones about impending inflation, Koh Tsu Koon's apparent deference to UMNO, be it about securing investments for Penang or the choosing of a new chief minister, the *keris*-waving threat of Hishammuddin Hussein, and the need for "transparency, accountability and rule of law" in governance.

Signs that Chinese voters in Penang, normally considered a cautious group, were entertaining the idea of voting against the BN government were becoming more undeniable. Opposition rallies were far better attended than BN ones. The latter drew such small crowds that there were reports of some closing down for the sheer lack of an audience.

A large audience was in itself no guarantee of support. This is true especially where opposition parties were concerned. For the man and woman on the street, criticisms tend to be more stimulating and refreshing to listen to than boasts about past achievements. What was a more reliable sign of support, however, were the record monetary contributions collected from the crowds. In Perak, Melaka, Selangor and Penang, DAP rallies broke donation records in succession over the final ten days of campaigning.²⁰

By the evening of March 6, when a giant DAP rally attended by an estimated 50,000 people was held on the

huge open field at Han Chiang High School, things appeared to have gone the way of the opposition parties. Jeff Ooi, the candidate for the parliamentary seat of Jelutong, had his electric guitar brought up from Kuala Lumpur. With him singing songs in local languages in a hoarse voice instead of making a speech, the demonstration appeared to be more a celebration by the DAP of a concluded and successful campaign than an attempt to garner votes. Fireworks were lit to end the long evening just after midnight, the official time beyond which campaigning rallies were not allowed.

That evening, a new record sum of RM133,000 was donated by the crowd to the party. The idea for this second giant rally at Han Chiang, according to Liew, was for the DAP to parade all its candidates and its PKR allies on a long stage before as big a crowd as possible. This was in effect and on purpose a visual manifestation orchestrated in lieu of a verbal declaration to Penang voters that the DAP and the PKR were ready to form a new government and that they had the personnel to do so.

In contrast, a rally organised at Rifle Range Flats by the BN one evening earlier, which had Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi and other BN veterans as the main speakers alongside popular entertainers drew a small crowd reported at between 2,000 to 5,000.

The use of the Internet, SMS's and other modern electronic means was an unmitigated success for the opposition, enabling it to overcome its otherwise crippling lack of access to the mainstream printed media and television channels. However, modern media had its own interesting twists as well. Before the March 6 rally, for example, different SMS's circulated giving the same time for the

event, but stating different venues. A false venue — the Penang International Sports Arena (PISA) — was given in some of these messages.

Anwar Ibrahim, still banned from contesting for political office because of the early election date, had paradoxically the opportunity to perform as the uniting figure for the opposition, giving fiery speeches each day at different venues. The crowds that came to see him grew successively, and DAP sources speculated that many Malays voters swung over to the opposition only in the final days of campaigning.

Polling took place without any major incident. Preliminary results — coming in first through the Internet newspaper *Malaysiakini.com* early on the evening of March 8 — strongly indicated that the opposition would win a landslide. This trend stayed steady, and just after 9 p.m., Chief Minister Koh Tsu Koon had publicly admitted defeat, ending Gerakan's 39-year control over the state of Penang.

The opposition had taken Penang. Nationwide, they now controlled five states in total, including most of the urban centres, and had broken the BN's two-third majority hold on parliament.²¹ The DAP took all the nineteen seats and all the seven parliamentary seats it contested in, while the PKR won eight, and the PAS one. In the process, the Gerakan lost its contested thirteen state seats and four parliamentary seats, the MCA its contested ten state seats and four parliamentary seats, and the MIC failed in its two state constituencies.²²

As the results left Penang voters stunned at what they had accomplished, the word was out that public celebrations

should be avoided. Spontaneously, this advice was heeded, and the streets of Penang remained calm. March 8, 2008 was an exceptionally quiet Saturday night on the island. The winning candidates, playing it safe, stayed in their hotels and had their hand phones switched off.

Summary

Given how much the governing coalition had going for it on the eve of the 12th General Elections, it is more apt to say that it lost the polls in the five northern states than the opposition won it. What the opposition parties did was to harness the discontent that had become obvious throughout Malaysian society. They succeeded in doing this very well, and made few mistakes before Election Day, presenting desperate voters with good enough reasons to overcome inner resistance to vote against the BN. In short, PKR, DAP and PAS succeeded in presenting themselves collectively as “a viable opposition”.

The election results has also made it inevitable for BN parties such as the Gerakan, the MCA and the MIC to do some serious soul-searching. The MIC, a party that had never lost any seat it contested in under the BN umbrella, suffered badly. The Gerakan, which started out as an opposition multiracial party in the late 1960s, had become by 2008 a loyal member of the ruling coalition, and a Chinese-based party in fact if not in principle. Even the MCA, long-time ally of UMNO, is forced to consider the historical crossroads at which the country now finds itself. That party can no longer represent non-Communist Chinese the way it did in the 1950s and 1960s; it has not been able to represent sufficiently the Chinese community after the

1969 elections; and it has had trouble profiling itself within an UMNO-dominated BN ever since. Whatever its achievements within the coalition over the decades may have been, the MCA's relevance and appeal to younger Chinese had dropped abysmally by 2008.

UMNO itself is now challenged by two other Malay-led parties — the PAS and the PKR, which are allied with each other at that. Its intuitive appeal to the majority of Malays as the natural representation of the community has grown feeble, and the dubious morality that is now associated with it repels many young urban Malays from supporting it the way their fathers and mothers had done. Evident hubris, a history of corruption, and bad leadership must bear much of the blame for the defeat suffered by the BN.

Alternative media and new electronic channels of information played a big role in these elections, not only during the campaign weeks, but also in the months before, in making unconventional information accessible to the public, and new arenas for discussion possible. One could also argue that the tight control over the mainstream media exercised for so long by the government backfired by alienating the BN from Malaysian society, and societal forces at large. Judging from its inability to adjust to changes during the campaign period, the BN had come to believe too much in its own propaganda, and even when it had not, it was unable to act flexibly. Elections seemed to have become too much of a formality as far as it was concerned, and winning elections with its superior resources and apparatus had become a god-given thing to its members.

PKR played a critical role on March 8. It became the largest opposition party, going from having one member of

parliament to having thirty-one. With this triumph, the bias that Malays tend to vote for the government and non-Malays for the opposition was broken, perhaps for good. The absence of violence following these elections may be due in no small measure to the success of the Malay-led PKR and its multiracial platform. Race alone no longer suffices in explaining Malaysia's voting pattern and political behaviour. In that way, March 8 eclipses May 13, and will continue to do so in various ways.

Anwar Ibrahim's need to return to power and exonerate himself should not be underestimated. The same thing goes for BN's fear that it might not be able to regain its former glory. With the rise of Pakatan Rakyat (People's Pact), Malaysia's immediate political future will be decided by how well this new grouping of parties stay united, and how the BN in general, and UMNO in particular, responds to the new balance of power and the paradigmatic shift that has taken place.

Appendix

Lunch Chat with Liew Chin Tong” at 3 p.m. on March 5, 2008.

“We Have to Stop the Rot and Make a New Deal”²³

Mr Liew Chin Tong is the Democratic Action Party’s parliamentary candidate for Bukit Bendera, Penang, and a top election strategist for his party. When he started campaigning two weeks ago against two-term incumbent Chia Kwang Chye of the Gerakan, he was fully conscious that he was a David facing a Goliath, with no chance of causing an upset.

However, the warm and active response that the opposition parties have been getting from voters, particularly in Penang, has heartened him greatly, and such an upset is no longer unthinkable. The wave of discontent among Malaysians, he suddenly realizes, is stronger than anything anyone had imagined. Just three days before polling day on March 8, he speaks between mouthfuls during his lunch break, to the author about the ongoing campaign.

OKB: So what is the present situation?

LCT: I hear that the Barisan Nasional is not doing very well in Kedah and Trengganu. This was something I did not expect. Now, although I do not see BN losing in Trengganu this time round, we have to remember that despite the 28–4 advantage in state seats that the BN gained from 2004, PAS still has a 40 per cent base there. So if there is a sympathy swing of merely 10 per cent among voters, then the balance will quickly tip the other way and become 4–28, as was the case in 1999. So the difference in sympathy for the two parties is not as big as it seems.

Kedah is different in that there are 20–30 per cent non-Malays, and as we know, the Indians are feeling very disaffected

with BN. They will probably vote for anything but BN, and may even support PAS.

In Penang, the BN is also in trouble. I don't necessarily see the opposition taking over the state government, but the ground is shifting, the ground is definitely shifting.

OKB: The question is whether it will shift enough to make a difference.

LCT: Yes, if it shifts enough, then that might carry even people like me and many others to a surprise victory. If the opposition manages to win several state seats within my parliamentary constituency, then anything can happen. There are many forces working in Penang at the moment, and all not in BN's favour.

OKB: Nothing going BN's way?

LCT: In Penang, no. You see, Penang UMNO is not helping Gerakan. It has dreams of having a Malay chief minister. So, if the MCA and Gerakan lose seats, then that will make them weaker vis-à-vis UMNO, making it more probable for a Malay chief minister to be appointed.

OKB: The case would then be that the Chinese vote is split between the Gerakan, MCA and DAP.

LCT: That reasoning may be based on the faulty premise that Parti Keadilan Rakyat is not strong enough to take any state seat. So far, the government side has been getting their tactics wrong, stressing on global forces making it impossible for it to keep inflation down. They can't reduce oil prices; they can't do this; they can't do that, and so people have to accept their fate.

But in response, we merely ask voters that, given economic growth on paper of 6.3 per cent, have their wallets become thicker by 6.3 per cent. Of course, the obvious answer is "No".

That's about it. The Malay ground does respond to that, because the Malay community is living at the lowest class stratum. This will affect the Malay voting pattern somewhat.

And if Anwar Ibrahim's charisma is strong enough, I think some seats will change hands. The whole voting pattern in Penang is now very unpredictable and is therefore highly interesting to watch.

OKB: The swing in sentiment seems to be going your way. Is this because you guys have been doing the right things, or is it because the groundswell of public discontent is stronger than anyone had suspected?

LCT: The wind has been more strongly in our favour than we had thought. Let me put it this way. We have not been committing any noteworthy mistake so far, while the government side has been making many tactic errors and mistakes.

The winds of change, if we may use that phrase, is the major factor.

OKB: What has been driving these winds to become as strong as they now seem to be?

LCT: It is like in the Sarawak elections two years ago. BN lost to a surprising extent because of an anti-establishment wind. Same thing here and now. There is despair and a general feeling that it is time for a change.

To be honest, we are shocked by how much support we are getting. Last night, at one single ceramah in Klang, we collected RM63,000, and that is from a crowd of only 6,000.

We had bigger crowds before than during this election, but the response is more deeply felt. People donate; they don't only make an appearance. This morning, when I visited a market, there was a sixty-year-old lady who had had all her toenails

painted with our rocket symbol. That is quite amazing. She was not a party member, looked rich, had a maid with her, English-speaking.

All this has really surprised us. I know we put together a good team under Lim Guan Eng, one of our best teams ever, but we are nevertheless overwhelmed by the support shown to us so far. We have already solved all our internal troubles, unlike Gerakan, which seems to find itself embroiled in internal squabbles right in the middle of an elections campaign.

So we have been able to concentrate on our campaigning.

The Gerakan has become very comfortable and has been taking the people for granted. People can see how Penang, once the centre for so much — education, etc. — is now exporting its people. Its sons and daughters have to leave the state to make a living.

I think what Penang people have been longing for is a worthy opposition to vote for. Now we see that the Indian swing is extremely solid and compact.

Complacency is the major failing of the government.

I saw that Gerakan would get into a succession tussle if Koh Tsu Koon continued acting indecisively. My comments on this were made very early, and were carried in the Chinese press. Then, luckily, *The Star* newspaper picked up the story, turning the issue into a big public problem for Gerakan. The party is now paying for that lack of foresight, and for the lack of decisiveness.

The message they are sending to voters is that they are staying in power for the sake of staying in power.

Their campaign strategy itself was surprisingly bad. When they called for reinvention, they were choosing to fight on our territory. Parties in power can campaign with slogans calling for change only if there has been a change in leadership, as was the case for Abdullah Badawi in 2004.

It is now very late in the day for them to do anything about it. Let's compare that to what UMNO did in its campaign

against Kelantan. UMNO decided to get rid of Annuar Musa, an unpopular man, as the front man in the state. So just before nomination day, the party got rid of him and put Awang Adek there as the potential *mentri besar*. Straight away, we have a new ball game, and UMNO is able to parry some attacks from the opposition.

No such thinking was evident where the Gerakan and Penang were concerned.

The worry for Penang people and Malaysians in general is the lack of direction, the lack of leadership that the country is suffering from. This time around, we see that those who embrace our presence and our message are from the middle class — English-speaking, maybe Christian, people concerned with governance. Our rallies are surprisingly big in middle class areas.

I think this election is about whether we can stop the rot or not. We need to see whether we can reach a new deal, and a new way forward.

Notes

1. *Bernama*, December 7, 2005.
2. Wong, January 23, 2007.
3. Hong, April 13, 2007.
4. Reme, April 24, 2007.
5. *Jawatankuasa Pilihan Raya Pusat*, April 6, 2008.
6. Hong, November 7, 2007.
7. Syed Shahir, July 9, 2007; *The Star*, May 4, 2007.
8. The Malaysian Bar Council, September 26, 2007.
9. Ooi, November 14, 2007.
10. <*Malaysiakini.com*>, December 17, 2007.
11. This section builds on an extent of interviews with campaign workers and journalists covering the elections. A series of interviews, some formal and some less so, were held with DAP electoral strategist Liew Chin Tong during the campaign

period. He was contesting the parliamentary seat of Bukit Bendera.

12. Soon, February 17, 2007.
13. <www.undi.info>.
14. <Malaysiakini.com>, February 23, 2008. The seven candidates were party secretary-general Lim Guan Eng; veteran Karpal Singh, the MP for Bukit Gelugor; newcomer Jeff Ooi; Chong Eng, the MP for Bukit Mertajam; Chow Kon Yeow, the DAP state president and MP for Tanjong; Liew Chin Tong, party strategist, columnist and advisor to the party leadership; and retired professor P. Ramasamy.
15. Veerangan, February 1, 2008.
16. Beh, July 4, 2006; Kuek and Soon, September 7, 2006; *New Straits Times*, January 24, 2007; *Bernama*, February 18, 2008.
17. Ooi, March 6, 2008.
18. Fauwaz, September 17, 2007.
19. <<http://blog.limkitsiang.com/2008/03/08/top-dap-election-ceramah-donations/>>.
20. <<http://blog.limkitsiang.com/2008/03/08/top-dap-election-ceramah-donations/>>.
21. Jalil, March 8, 2008.
22. Tan, March 9, 2008.
23. This article was written for the *Straits Times*, Singapore, on the same day the interview was done. Due to a lack of space, it was not published.

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2

A Tectonic Shift in Malaysian Politics

Johan Saravanamuttu

Introduction¹

It was puzzling for many why Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who won by a landslide in 2004, should call a snap general election for March 8, 2008, a whole year ahead of the end of his five-year term. Much of the reasoning revolved around two factors; the economy and Anwar Ibrahim. The economic situation seemed destined to deteriorate, with the American economy likely to go into recession with its knock-on effects on Malaysia. The U.S. is still Malaysia's single largest trading partner with about 19 per cent of overall trade. Even without this happening, petrol, diesel and kerosene prices were due for a hike and the inflation rate had been climbing steadily. Sometime in January, the government resorted to a rationing of cooking oil because of acute shortages. This policy was quickly revoked after a public outcry.

There was of course the Anwar Factor. Anwar Ibrahim, former deputy premier, now de facto leader of the opposition People's Justice Party (PKR) complained perhaps not

unjustifiably that the government and the Election Commission had denied him the right to stand by calling for a March election. He would after all have been eligible by mid-April. It is entirely credible that the Abdullah Badawi government agonized over the fear that Anwar as a member of parliament meant trouble. However, the above two factors may not exhaust the plethora of reasons why an early general election really needed to be called. Abdullah himself admitted in a CNN interview that he needed a fresh mandate because of a whole host of new issues, and more time to complete his anti-corruption agenda. However, he surely would have preferred that the outbursts of street protests late 2007 did not occur before his dissolution of Parliament. The *Bersih* coalition of political parties and NGOs calling for clean elections on November 10 reportedly saw 40,000 people taking to the streets, and the *Hindraf* rally of some 30,000 Indians came close on the heels, on November 25, 2007. Abdullah took the heavy-handed action of detaining five *Hindraf* leaders under the draconian Internal Security Act (ISA), which he did not appear to relish.

Abdullah could hardly afford more street rallies or new issues denting his moderate image any further, or worse, risk giving more time for a more formidable Opposition to gain momentum. A host of issues peppered Abdullah's short first term, especially in the last two years.² Some of these developments were truly remarkable in exposing the mendacity, incompetence and corruption of the government, its leaders, political cronies and institutions in past years. Abdullah himself was embroiled in charges of nepotism. Amongst the more damning revelations were those related to the judiciary, albeit these were acts committed during

Mahathir era. The V.K. Lingam video recording impelled Abdullah himself to call for a Royal Commission to ascertain the extent of judge-fixing and case-fixing by the eponymous lawyer named in the scandal. The hearings revealed misdeeds that went so far as to include alleged writing of judgments by the self-same defence lawyer, for his presiding judge.

There could even be a more mundane factor that caused the early calling of this general election, namely the new blood or generational shift factor. Many untested, younger UMNO and Barisan National politicians were anxiously waiting in the wings to rise in the hierarchy and to seek their baptism of fire. Among them was Abdullah's son-in-law, the fast-rising Khairy Jamaluddin, as well as Lim Si Pin, the son of the receding Gerakan Party leader. The Malaysian Chinese Association's (MCA) also needed to jettison some so-called "Team A" members, although one of them, former health minister Chua Soi Lek, conveniently disqualified himself after resigning over a widely distributed sex video. Then, in the tiny northern state of Perlis, two UMNO ministers were evidently on the chopping block. There were also political trimming exercises to be undertaken within the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), in its desperate attempt to retain the Indian vote. All in all, an exciting 12th General Election was in the offing but hardly any political analyst, including this one, could have predicted the major shift in the voting behavior of the Malaysian electorate that was to come.³

The Results

In the event, the outcome of the March 8 general election brought a tectonic shift to the Malaysian political landscape.

Other hyperboles included “a tsunami” and “a perfect storm”.⁴ As veteran political analyst Khoo Boo Teik puts it:

The metaphors may be excessive. A true tsunami, say, would have swept the BN out of office. A perfect storm would not have bypassed Sabah and Sarawak. (*Aliran Monthly* 28, no. 2, p. 6).

This notwithstanding, the three major ethnic communities — Malays, Chinese and Indians — and almost all the Peninsular states⁵ swung decisively in the direction of Opposition parties as shown in Table 2.1, and deprived the ruling coalition of its all-important two-thirds majority in parliament, thus dealing a heavy blow to its ethnic power-sharing formula.

This said, the more sceptical among us may opine that much has remained the same despite the unexpected electoral results; that Malaysian politics remain basically pivoted on ethnic mobilization, symbolized by the still successful, if slightly frayed, formula of racially constituted political parties at its helm. The already growing literature on electoral politics in Malaysia has generally weighed in on the proposition that ethnicity or racial motivations have always driven Malaysian electoral politics. Implicitly or explicitly, writers would take their point of departure from the two classic studies by Ratnam (1965) and Von Vorys (1976) on “communalism” in Malaysia. Not totally rejecting this paradigm, some more recent studies have suggested that a sensibility to universal issues such as human rights and even class or bread-and-butter issues have become increasingly germane to an understanding of election results.⁶

What then are the salient facts of the 2008 outcome? The National Front (*Barisan Nasional*, BN) government

TABLE 2.1
Percentage of Votes for Opposition Candidates,
Parliament, 1995–2008

<i>State</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>Change 2004–08</i>
Perlis	31.5	43.8	36.3	39.9	+3.6
Kedah	35.3	44.2	40.2	53.2	+13.0
Kelantan	56.7	60.9	48.7	55.0	+6.3
Terengganu	45.4	58.7	43.6	44.7	+1.1
Penang	39.0	48.4	43.2	63.0	+19.8
Perak	31.7	44.1	40.5	53.3	+12.8
Pahang	28.4	42.6	32.3	40.5	+8.2
Selangor	24.7	44.8	34.0	55.4	+21.4
KL	41.1	49.4	41.2	62.0	+20.8
Putrajaya	—	—	11.7	24.4	+12.7
N. Sembilan	29.7	40.8	30.1	45.1	+15.0
Melaka	31.7	43.4	28.8	42.6	+14.3
Johor	20.5	27.1	20.4	34.7	+14.3
Pen. Malaysia	33.4	44.4	36.2	50.2	+14.0

Source: Philip Khoo, *Aliran Monthly* 28, no. 3 (2008): 4.

arguably suffered its worst defeat in history with a loss of its two-thirds majority of seats. As shown in Table 2.1, the BN government also just about lost the popular vote in Peninsular Malaysia,⁷ including the loss of four state governments while one continued to be in Opposition hands. Table 2.2, based on estimates, shows that Chinese and Indian voters clearly preferred Opposition parties while Malays still had a preference but a reduced one for the BN parties.

TABLE 2.2
The Malay, Chinese and Indian Vote for BN⁸

	1995	1999	2004	2008	Change 2004–08
Malay	69%	53%	63%	58%	5%
Chinese	56%	62%	65%	35%	30%
Indian	96%	75%	82%	47%	35%

Source: The Straits Times, 11 March 2008.

The most significant swing came from Indians, who evidently abandoned the ethnically constituted Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). Chinese voters also swung palpably in the direction of ostensibly non-Chinese parties, giving the MCA its poorest showing since 1969.

Another salient element of the March 8 election was that all the main Opposition parties had agreed to one-on-one contestation against the BN, that is, there was a *de facto* Opposition alliance on polling day and during the campaign period of thirteen days. The significant number of Opposition victories have led some to suggest that Malaysia could well be on the road to a two-party system, with BN representing the politics of the old communal mould and the newly minted People's Pact (*Pakatan Rakyat*, PR), a 'new politics' which transcends ethnicity. Both coalitions are exemplars of ethnic power-sharing but the PR has evidently captured the middle ground from the BN. The multiethnic People's Justice Party (*Parti Keadilian Rakyat*) born out of the

Reformasi movement of the late 1990s has become the symbol of this sort of middle ground politics, drawing support from all ethnic communities. Being the main Opposition party in parliament today, it also lays the ground for its charismatic leader Anwar Ibrahim to become Malaysia's next leader.

Perhaps as equally significant as the election results themselves were the events and political ramifications following March 8. These developments contribute further to the discussion about whether the Malaysian landscape did shift or not. Clearly, the PR making good on its claim of toppling the BN government would be ultimate proof of such a shift. Should the current BN leadership hold its ground, the old political formula will continue to retain some validity. That said, Malaysia, even without a PR takeover, has already seen a palpable change in its political character, edging towards a two-party system.⁹ This essay for the most part provides an analysis of the March 8 outcome and concludes with a section on the significance of post-election developments.

Issues and Events Affecting the Election

In order for us to understand the outcome of the 2008 election, it is important to examine the issues that peppered the Malaysian social and political terrain in the period preceding the election. In hindsight, it could well be said that the Abdullah Badawi government had egregiously failed to deal effectively with issues such as the inter-faith fractures, UMNO arrogance and excesses, the Mongolian murder case, economic scandals, rising cost of living, crime and

corruption. Two other events that contributed to the poor showing of the Abdullah government were the *Bersih* and the *Hindraf* rallies, which will also be briefly discussed below. Let me now touch on some of the prominent issues.

Inter-Faith Fractures

The idea of an Inter-Faith Commission (IFC) was mooted by the Human Rights Sub-Committee of the Bar Council subsequent to an increase in the number of knotty religious disputes and legal cases. In April 2005, a conference was held with about 200 participants representing all major faith-based groups and various sectors of civil society. In the event, a coalition of thirteen Muslim groups calling itself the Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic NGOs (ACCIN) demanded that the government scuttle the idea of the IFC. The government subsequently obliged. After the abandoning of the IFC idea, legal tangles involving conversion and apostasy continued to surface. The attempt by the civil society-sponsored group, Article 11, to aerate and discuss these cases in terms of constitutional guarantees of religion freedom, was brought to an abrupt end by the Prime Minister when Muslim groups demonstrated against these forums just as they had done against the IFC.

Among the most prominent conversion cases were the Moorthy Maniam and Lina Joy cases. Kaliammal Sinnasamy, the widow of Moorthy, sought the right in the civil courts to bury her husband according to Hindu rites on the ground that he had been a practising Hindu despite the contention by the Islamic religious authorities that he had converted to

Islam before his death. The Appellate and Special Powers division of the High Court ruled that it had no jurisdiction over the Syariah Court decision, even though it affected Kaliammal's rights. Moorthy was buried on 28 December 2005 according to Islamic rites. The formation of the Hindu Rights Action Force (*Hindraf*) came fast on the heels of the Moorthy controversy. It does not take much imagination to suggest that Indians of the Hindu faith were deeply affected by the Moorthy case and showed their displeasure to the government and the Indian party, MIC, through the ballot box in March 2008.

In the backdrop to the Moorthy case were other controversies involving Hindus, although the Lina Joy case earned particular prominence nationally and internationally. Lina was a Malay who embraced Christianity in 1988. She applied to the National Registration Department for a change of name and religious status in 1997. In 1998, the NRD allowed the name change, but not the change of religion. Lina appealed against this decision in the High Court in 2001. That court ruled against her stating that the jurisdiction in conversion matters lay solely in the hands of the Syariah Court. In 2004, the Court of Appeal dismissed Lina's case on the grounds that the Syariah Court or any other Islamic authority had not confirmed her renunciation of Islam. Most controversially, the final court of appeal, the Federal Court, ruled 2–1 in May 2007 that she remained a Muslim and could not change her religion on a “whim”.¹⁰ It is commonly acknowledged that during the general election, Christian groups actively campaigned against the ruling coalition and even provided lists of approved candidates to their friends.¹¹

Issues and Scandals

The prominent issues and scandals plaguing the Abdullah government during the general election campaign were the V.K. Lingam and Chua Soi Lek videos, the Altantuya murder case and the UMNO Youth keris-wielding episodes.

A Royal Commission of Inquiry into the V.K. Lingam Video Clip was instituted in late 2007 to investigate an allegation of illegal intervention into the judicial appointment process of Malaysian judges purportedly occurring in 2002. The formation of the commission was a follow-up to a recommendation by a three-man panel tasked to determine the authenticity of a video clip of a telephone conversation that raised the allegation. The allegation was first made public in September 2007 by Anwar Ibrahim, when he released the video allegedly showing lawyer V.K. Lingam talking into a mobile phone to former Chief Judge Ahmad Fairuz Abdul Halim about the appointment of the latter into the office of Chief Justice of the Federal Court. Ahmad Fairuz retired as the Chief Justice of the Federal Court in late 2007 after his tenure was not renewed due to objection from the Conference of Rulers.

Dr Chua Soi Lek, the Minister for Health in the Abdullah Government, resigned from the Cabinet after admitting to being the man in a sex video. DVDs were distributed anonymously in Muar and other towns in Johor, showing Dr Chua having sex with a young woman in a hotel suite in Batu Pahat. The woman was allegedly one of his personal friends. Chua claimed no involvement in the filming or production of the DVD in question, originally stating that he would not resign over the scandal, instead leaving it up

to the Prime Minister to decide whether or not to allow him to continue holding his position. On January 2, 2008, he formally announced his resignation from all posts including Member of Parliament for Labis, vice presidency of the MCA and as Health Minister.

The bizarre murder of a 28-year-old Mongolian woman, Altantuya Shaaribuu, hit the headlines on November 6, 2006. Her skeletal remains were found on a hilltop in Puncak Alam in Shah Alam. It was subsequently revealed by the police that Altantuya's body was blown up by military-grade C4 explosives after she had been shot. A chief inspector and a corporal of the police's Special Action Squad were charged with her murder at the Shah Alam magistrate's court on November 15. More sensationally, political analyst Abdul Razak Abdullah Baginda, director of the Malaysian Strategic Research Centre (MSRC) was charged the next day with abetting the crime. The bare facts of the case are that Chief Inspector Azilah Hadri, and Corporal Sirul Azhar Umar, were charged with killing Altantuya between 10 p.m. on October 19 and 1 a.m. on October 20, 2005 while Abdul Razak Baginda, is charged with abetting them. Abdul Razak Baginda was alleged to have persuaded the pair to commit the murder because Altantuya, by Razak Baginda's own admission, was his lover, and had allegedly come to Kuala Lumpur to blackmail him, asking for RM500,000 according to one testimony. All three face the death penalty if convicted.

The MSRC is a think tank closely associated with Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Najib Abdul Razak. Altantuya was said to have been the interpreter for the purchase of eighteen Russian Sukhoi-30 jets and three French submarines contracted by the Malaysian Defence Ministry

in 2003 and 2002 respectively. The Russian-educated Altantuya was fluent in Chinese, Russian, French and English. The trial was originally scheduled for March 2008 but later brought forward to June 2007. Controversial changes have been made with respect to the presiding judge, prosecution and defence teams. A cousin of Altantuya, Uuriintuya Gal Ochir, testified that her arrival with her murdered cousin and a friend in October 2006 was not found on immigration records. Uuriintuya claimed to have seen a picture of Defence Minister Najib Abdul Razak together with Abdul Razak Baginda and her cousin Altantuya. The link of the murder to Najib Abdul Razak could not be but a major source of discomfort for the Abdullah government. Furthermore, the fact that the murdered women may have been involved in dealings concerning Malaysian defence contracts with the Russian and French governments raises the whole question of disclosures about defence issues and policies of the government. At the time of the election campaign, the trial was ongoing but this hardly prevented Anwar Ibrahim and other Opposition figures making copious references to it.

Finally there were the infamous keris waving and keris kissing incidents at the UMNO general assemblies of 2006 and 2007 which were strewn all over Malaysian alternative media. The reluctance of UMNO Youth chief Hishammuddin Hussein to apologise for his act clearly irked large numbers of non-Malay voters. His keris-waving image was used to great effect in Opposition campaign posters all across the country.

The visual impact of the keris was more than matched by the audio-visual expose of the Lingam and Chua videos,

and the Opposition went to town with the infamous “correct, correct, correct” Lingam sound bite during *ceramahs*.¹² All of these events found their way in double speed and measure into cyberspace and were easily accessed (even up till now) on YouTube and any number of blogs.

The Bersih and Hindraf Rallies¹³

Related to the issues above, but perhaps properly categorized as somewhat more orchestrated political events, were the back-to-back *Bersih* and *Hindraf* rallies held in November 2007.

The *Bersih* Rally was held in Kuala Lumpur on November 10. The title of the rally is derived from the name of the organizers, *Bersih* (Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections).¹⁴ Event organizers intended to have a non-violent rally, advising participants in the days and weeks beforehand how to keep the rally peaceful. However it was marred by some police violence. The demonstration was precipitated by allegations of corruption and discrepancies in the Malaysian election system that heavily favoured the ruling BN. Much of the publicity for the rally was distributed through online media. Initially, the organisers planned to have a gathering point at Dataran Merdeka square. However, it was later revealed that this was a red herring to distract the police. The locations of the four gathering points were only released the day before the protests by word of mouth, mobile phones and emails. The rally began with gatherings of people at four locations: Sogo department store, Masjid India, Masjid Negara and Pasar Seni. These four groups of people combined into a single group on their march towards

the palace gates to hand over a memorandum to the King, demanding electoral reform. Early estimates put the number of attendees between 10,000 to 40,000. Plans called for 100,000 people to join in the rally, and there are claims that this number was indeed achieved, as the many early estimates failed to include those who simultaneously gathered at different locations and those who were barred by police from continuing the walk.

The holding of the *Bersih* rally indicated that the Opposition forces of PKR, DAP and PAS were able to cooperate and mobilize large numbers of people to their cause in a peaceful and well-managed manner. It was also proof to voters that the Opposition had the manpower and organizational skills to challenge the ruling BN.

The Hindraf rally was held in Kuala Lumpur on November 25.¹⁵ It came close on the heels of the demolition of the Sri Maha Mariamman and another temple in Shah Alam on October 30 and November 15, just prior to Deepavali, the Hindu festivals of lights or new year. The rally organizer had called the protest over alleged discriminatory policies favouring ethnic Malays. The demonstration started when a crowd of some thousands gathered outside the Petronas Twin Towers at midnight or early Sunday morning. On the morning of the rally, the crowd had swelled to about 20,000–30,000 people, carrying life-size portraits of Queen Elizabeth II and Mahatma Gandhi, to indicate the non-violent nature of their protest. Five thousand riot policemen dispatched to the scene used tear gas and water cannon to disperse the crowds. Some 136 people were arrested and 240 people detained, but half of them were later released.

The purpose of the rally was to hand over a 100,000 signature memorandum to the British High Commission. The memorandum was to petition the Queen to appoint a Queen's Counsel to represent poor Malaysian Indians. Malaysian police refused to grant a permit for the rally, and set up roadblocks in the Klang Valley along roads leading up to the rally to screen motorists entering the city centre and identify "troublemakers". They also advised the public not to participate in the rally, and detained three leaders of *Hindraf*. Many shops around Kuala Lumpur including Suria KLCC were closed on that day in fear of trouble. One day before the rally, police arrested three *Hindraf* lawyers, P. Uthayakumar, P. Waytha Moorthy and V. Ganabatirau, on sedition charges. Uthayakumar and Ganabatirau posted bail of RM800 each, but Waytha Moorthy refused bail as a sign of protest. Subsequently, five *Hindraf* leaders were detained under the ISA. They were the movement's legal adviser P. Uthayakumar, lawyers M Manoharan, R. Kenghadharan and V. Ganabatirau, and organising secretary T. Vasantha Kumar. Waytha Moorthy escaped detention and is at large outside Malaysia.

The *Hindraf* slogan of *Makkal Sakthi* (People's Power) became a symbol for the Opposition during the election campaign. It turned Indians massively against the BN and the MIC. Indian youths were seen everywhere helping the Opposition campaign.¹⁶

We will now draw on opinion surveys and polls conducted by the Merdeka Centre on the eve of the election to show the issues of concern to citizens and the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the Abdullah government.¹⁷ An opinion poll conducted in late February showed that

economic issues were uppermost in people's minds, with some 37 per cent of the sample citing it as the most important problem with ethnic issues (10 per cent) and crime and public safety ranking (10 per cent) third, and social problems (9 per cent) fourth. Indians were clearly dissatisfied with the way things were going in the country. Strikingly, Merdeka Centre's survey found that the 88 per cent who had expressed satisfaction with the government in March 2006 had shrunk to a mere 34 per cent by February 2008 (Merdeka Centre 2008). The sense of marginalization on the part of the Indian community was highly apparent, with some 84 per cent believing this to be the case, although only 32 per cent of Malaysians overall agreed with this.

Another poll indicated that the BN government was clearly on a poor wicket before the election. A large proportion of voters, some 42 per cent, did not reveal their preference or had no response on the question of the party of their choice while 16 per cent were undecided. Only 27 per cent would say they were voting for the BN and this figure contrasted sharply with the 40 per cent figure of April 2007. Any government should have taken note of such a clear swing of mood but the Abdullah government apparently showed little or no reaction.

The Campaign

Parliament was dissolved on February 13 along with all state assemblies, with the exception of Sarawak. The Election Commission announced that nominations would be on February 24 and polling day on March 8. The thirteen days for campaigning was the longest assigned in recent times.

Some 222 parliamentary seats and 505 state assembly seats were in contention. Right in the middle of the campaign period, the Election Commission (EC) sparked a controversy by reversing its decision to use indelible ink to check electoral misdemeanour. The reason given was that such a measure could contravene the constitutional rights of voters. Earlier, it had obtained a *fatwa* (religious ruling) that it was permissible for Muslims to be marked with indelible ink. The Opposition parties condemned the decision alluding to the wasted 2.4 million spent on 48,000 bottles of ink and the bad faith of the EC. The EC budgeted some RM200 million and hired 149,000 teachers and another 50,000 casual workers to man the election. By law, parliamentary candidates were not to exceed RM200,000 in spending and state candidates not more than RM100,000. It is not clear how the EC was to monitor this and by all accounts many candidates did surpass these amounts.

The government announced a RM125 million package of “goodies” already before the campaigning began, as reported by Internet newspaper, *Malaysiakini*. These included:

- The granting of RM20 million for Chinese schools, the building of nineteen new Chinese schools and the relocation of another three and the granting of 7,167 hectares of farmland with a thirty-year lease to Perak just before the Chinese New Year celebrations.
- Thaipusam was declared a public holiday for Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya and the Education Ministry allocated RM20 million for Tamil schools and the Health Ministry recognised the medical degree offered by MIC’s

Asian Institute of Medicine, Science and Technology (AIMST).

- The Gerakan-sponsored Wawasan Open University College was allocated RM20 million by Abdullah.
- The Ministry of Culture and Arts and Heritage allocated RM500,000 for the maintenance of the both Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall and St George's Church in Penang respectively (*Malaysiakini*, February 18, 2008).

Nomination day saw the BN winning eight seats uncontested. The BN had just launched its 24-page manifesto of "Security, Peace, and Prosperity" while the call of the PKR, led by Anwar, was for "A New Dawn for Malaysia". The PAS manifesto was a wordy "A Trustworthy, Just and Clean Government, a Nation of Care and Opportunity" and specifically for Kelantan, it used "Develop with Islam (Membangun Bersama Islam)".¹⁸ The DAP had a manifesto which said "Just Change It" which came along with a well-circulated song, somewhat emulating the Obama campaign, called "Just Change".¹⁹ All kinds of CD material were made available on the Opposition. The BN 8-point manifesto touted its achievements, peppering it with economic statistics and figures, and among others, called for balanced development, reducing corruption, law and order and religious unity.²⁰ It promised to raise the productivity, income and competitiveness of Malaysia. Short of saying it would not raise the price of petrol and diesel, it argued that the government had spent a massive RM16.2 billion to subsidise the pump price in 2007. The PKR's five-point manifesto promised rule of law, an independent judiciary, vibrant economy and the debunking of the NEP. In fact, prior to this

Anwar had been making his rounds and circulating a pamphlet called “A Malaysian Economic Agenda” which was the PKR’s proposed alternative to the NEP. He argued for jettisoning the NEP and adopting an economic agenda of transparency, plugging corruption, improving efficiency and creating an economy with safety nets which nevertheless capitalizes on globalization. PAS’s call for a *Negara Kebajikan* (welfare state) based on Islamic values became an important counterpoint to its former “Islamic State” policy. In fact nowhere in the manifesto or during the campaign was the Islamic state phraseology used and this obviously went down well with non-Muslim voters. PAS also engaged the services of a private consultant stationed in Kota Bharu, and had daily press releases circulated by streaming on an Internet TV called Global Media Channel.²¹

The Internet played a particularly important role in this election. All the issues and scandals which did not find their way into the mainstream media or were toned down were given full play and more on the Internet by well-known bloggers such as Raja Petra Kamaruddin, Jeff Ooi (himself a DAP candidate), Haris Ibrahim, Rocky Bru and Nathaniel Tan. The YouTube website was particularly fortuitous for the Opposition as the Lingam video and all sorts of political satire was made available to the electorate before and immediately after the election.²²

In my travels to various parts of Kelantan during the first week of the campaign period, I was impressed with the PAS electoral machinery and organizational capacity on the ground. UMNO ceramahs were poorly attended while thousands flocked to the PAS rallies. In some instances, mass rallies would end with the dawn prayer in the early

hours of the morning in open fields. It was interesting to note that up till the middle of the first week of campaigning in Jeli, an UMNO stronghold, some if not most UMNO branch offices had no campaign material. It must have been that UMNO was either very confident or that it was simply not organized.

Campaigning throughout was intense and the poster war was embellished by DVDs and a constant flow of Internet material which is probably unprecedented in Malaysian history. The largest rallies appeared to be held in Selangor and Penang, where literally thousands and even tens of thousands would gather to hear Opposition candidates. In Penang, there was the famous rally, organised by the DAP, held in the field of Han Chiang School which reportedly saw the attendance of some 50,000 persons. At rallies in Penang, the audience typically waited for Anwar to arrive with great fanfare and aplomb amidst traffic jams. During his speeches, the audience would typically applaud or react loudly to his many jokes and jibes at the BN. From what I could observe, Anwar, who campaigned with seemingly indefatigable gusto and determination in Penang, easily won the hearts and minds of the non-Malays with his political rhetoric.²³

The March 8 Outcome

The overall results saw a severe shrinkage of BN dominance, compared with previous elections, with the exception of 1969. In the 2004 election, the BN won about 64 per cent of the votes cast nationwide and 92 per cent of the 219 parliamentary seats. It won all the state elections except for

TABLE 2.3
Results of Parliamentary Election, 2008

<i>Party</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Seat</i>	<i>%</i>
<u>Barisan Nasional</u>	4,090,670	50.14	140	63.1
UMNO	2,381,725	29.19	79	35.6
MCA	849,108	10.41	15	6.8
MIC	179,422	2.20	3	1.4
Gerakan	184,548	2.26	2	0.9
Others	495,867	6.08	41	18.5
<u>Pakatan Rakyat</u>	3,786,399	46.41	82	36.9
DAP	1,107,960	13.58	28	12.6
PAS	1,140,676	13.98	23	10.4
PKR	1,509,080	18.50	31	14.0
Others	28,683	0.35	0	0
Independents	63,960	0.78	0	0
Spoilt Votes	175,011	2.14	–	–
Unreturned votes	41,564	0.51	–	–
Total	8,159,043	100	222	100

Source: Computed from Election Commission data.

Kelantan. In 2008, the BN barely got half of the 7.9 million ballots cast nationwide (50.1 per cent) and lost the popular vote on the Peninsula, garnering 49 per cent of the ballots. There was a significant 1.4 million new voters in this election. In terms of seats, the BN lost its two-thirds majority, capturing 140 of the parliamentary seats and 307 state seats, while the Opposition took 82 parliamentary seats and 198 state seats. What was particularly significant was the loss of four important states, Selangor, Penang, Perak and Kedah, and the retention Kelantan by the Opposition. This

development is unprecedented in Malaysian political history; in its worst performances in the past, the ruling coalition only lost the two states of Kelantan and Terengganu (1959 and 1999).

The major casualties for the BN parties, and obversely, achievements for the Opposition, were the following:²⁴

- The Women, Family and Community Development Minister Shahrizat Abdul Jalil lost her Lembah Pantai parliamentary seat to first-timer Nurul Izzah, daughter of Anwar Ibrahim. So did her deputy G. Palanivel who was beaten in Hulu Selangor and parliamentary secretary Chew Mei Fun in Petaling Jaya Utara.
- Information Minister Zainuddin Maidin lost in Sungai Petani while his deputy Chia Kwang Chye lost in Bukit Bendera.
- The two biggest casualties of BN component parties were Gerakan and People's Progressive Party (PPP). Gerakan president Dr Koh Tsu Koon lost in Penang and the party won only two parliamentary seats in Simpang Renggam and Gerik. PPP president M. Kayveas lost his Taiping seat while another PPP candidate, Lee Heng, who contested in the Pasir Bedamar state seat in Perak lost it to the DAP.
- Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM) leader Dr D. Jeyakumar carried out the greatest giant-killing act in beating MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu in Sungai Siput.
- Malaysian Democratic Party (MDP) secretary-general Wee Choo Keong became the first MP of the party, a splinter of the DAP. Wee contested in Wangsa Maju on a PKR ticket.

- PAS women's wing chief Dr Lo' Lo' Mohd Ghazali became the second woman from the party to win a parliamentary seat when she beat Barisan's Aziz Jamaludin Mohd Tahir in Titiwangsa. The first PAS woman MP was Khadijah Sidek, who won the Dungun parliamentary seat in 1959.

Before examining more closely the outcome in key states, the nature of the overall swing in popular votes deserves some analysis. As can be seen from the table above, a minor swing in popular votes could produce significant seat changes in the first-past-the-post electoral system of Malaysia but the comprehensive character of the BN's slippage in 2008 cannot be denied. The 2008 election is comparable to the 1969 result when the Alliance lost the popular vote for the entire Malaysia. In 2008, the BN barely scraped through but showed an even poorer performance in terms of the percentage of parliamentary seats secured.

TABLE 2.4
Popular Votes and Seats Won by the BN

<i>Votes</i>	1969	1990	1995	1999	2004	2008
Entire Malaysia	49.3%	52%	63.3%	55.5%	62.5%	51%
Peninsular Malaysia	46.2%	53.8%	64.1%	54.2%	62.2%	49%

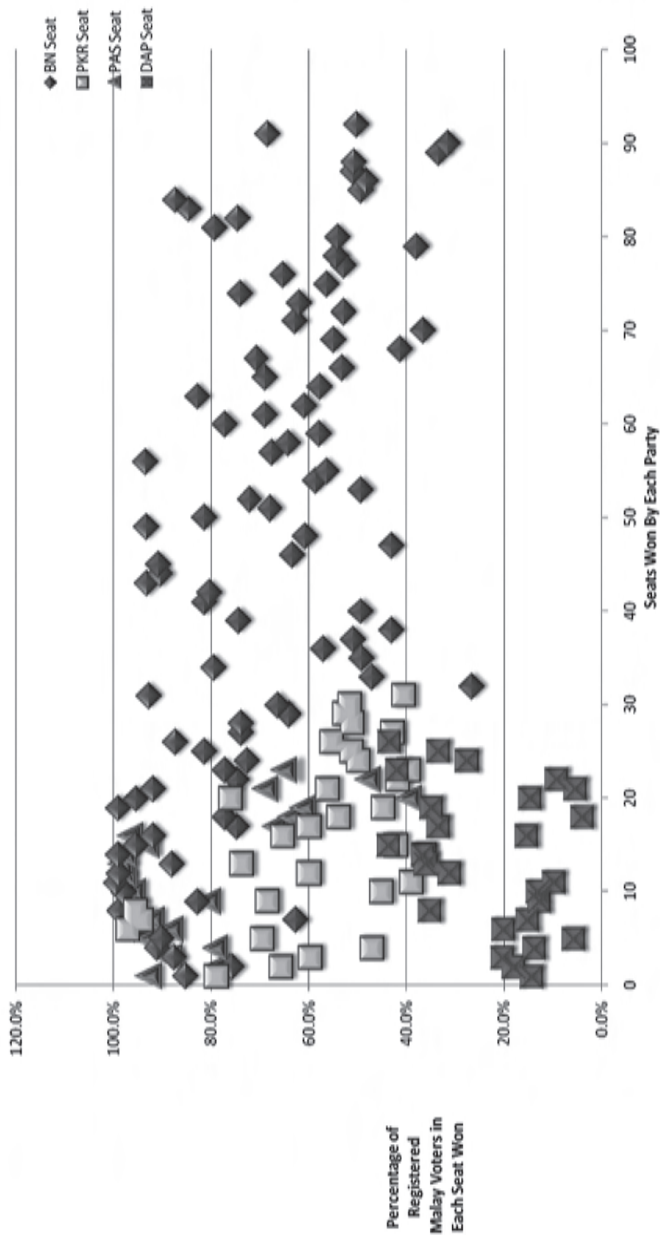
<i>Seats</i>	1969	1990	1995	1999	2004	2008
Entire Malaysia	66%	70.6%	84.4%	76.7%	90.9%	63.1%
Peninsular Malaysia	64.4%	75%	85.4%	70.8%	89.1%	51.5%

Source: The *Straits Times*, 11 March 2008.²⁵

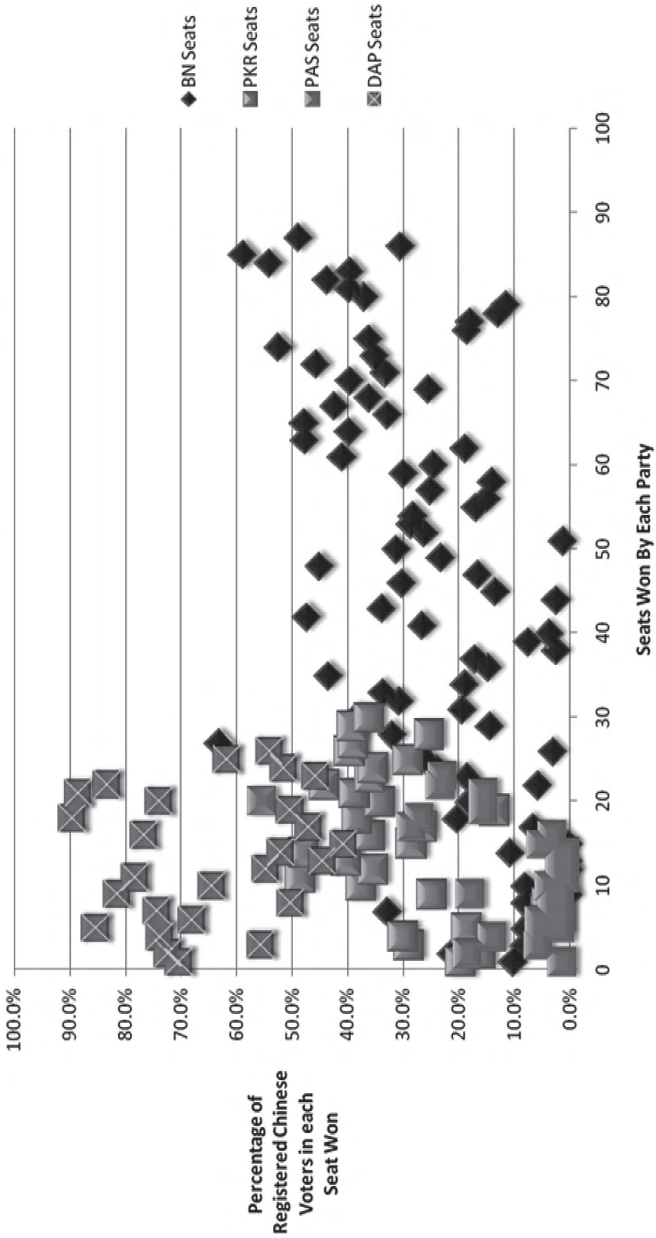
Below are three scatter plots showing parliamentary seats won by the main parties in Peninsular Malaysia in terms of the ethnic proportionality of the seats. As we are using the data provided by the Election Commission (EC), the parties of the ruling coalition have been collapsed into the BN while the individual parties of the Opposition parties are displayed. Ethnic proportionality in terms of Malay, Chinese and Indian votes is measured by simple percentage as provided by the EC data. Our scatter plots reveal some interesting facts about the 2008 election. The first point to be made is that Malaysian political parties are still predominantly ethnic in their electoral politics, or put differently, UMNO and PAS tend to be successful in predominantly Malay constituencies while the DAP is particularly successful in predominantly Chinese constituencies. The exception tends to be the PKR which has performed with great success in mixed constituencies. Paradoxically, we could extrapolate from the scatter plots that UMNO non-Malay partners also found their electoral success in mixed constituencies despite their ethnic orientation.²⁶ Let us examine each of the scatter plots for more specific observations.

In the first scatter plot, we can clearly see PAS and DAP at two extreme ends of the Malay racial continuum, PAS winning in high-density Malay constituencies while DAP takes low-density Malay seats. The PKR plays the perfect role of winning the mixed seats and thereby holding the PR coalition together. The second scatter plot shows the obverse position vis-à-vis Chinese high-density constituencies. The PKR coalition again holds the middle ground. When looking at the BN's performance which unfortunately is not

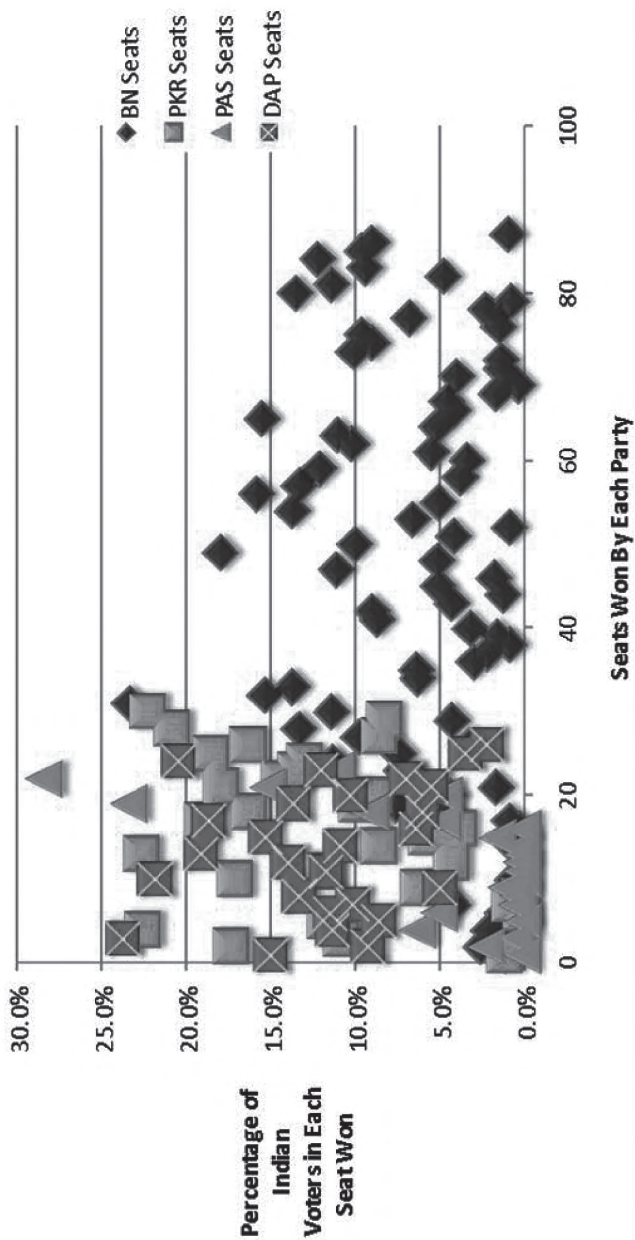
Proportion of Malay Voters for Each Seat Won by Political Parties



Proportion of Chinese Voters By Seats Won



Percentage of Registered Indian Voters By Seats Won



decomposed into that of its component parties, it can still be deduced that UMNO wins high density Malay constituencies. A much larger proportion of high to middle density Malay constituencies are won by the BN, suggesting that its component parties also can do well in Malay majority constituencies. A clear rejection of BN parties in Chinese high-density constituencies is indicated in the second scatter plot, and implied in the first. This should definitely be of concern to Chinese-based BN parties, the MCA and Gerakan.

Turning to the Indian vote as shown in the third scatter plot above, the first thing to note is that the PKR has performed very well along with the DAP with two PAS outliers seemingly securing high Indian votes. Since there are no real high-density Indian constituencies, with 30 per cent as its uppermost limit, one could extrapolate that winning seats above the 15 per cent margin is a good indicator of Indian support. This being the case, the BN parties have fared poorly in securing the Indian vote, with barely four wins in that category.

People's Pact Victories in State Elections

The most stunning outcome of the March 8 vote were the Pakatan Rakyat victories in the five states of Selangor, Penang, Perak, Kedah and Kelantan. In fact, some have pointed out that the sixth win was in Kuala Lumpur, a federal territory. The Perak and Kedah victories were icing on the cake as hardly anyone had expected those. All eyes had been trained on the Klang Valley and Penang. In Penang, the win was particularly devastating for the BN, as all the Gerakan and MCA candidates lost their contests. The Kedah

result deserves a comment. This is the first time that the Opposition has won in this Malay-majority state with one Chinese-majority and two mixed constituencies. As is well known, UMNO's past domination had been effectuated by its pro-farmer subsidy policies and rural developments projects in this 'rice bowl' of Malaysia. The 2008 result in Kedah provides us with a prime example of the multiple swing of Malays, Chinese and Indians to the Opposition, which won handsomely in the urban and semi-urbane constituencies. The results show that UMNO is still dominant in the more rural constituencies.

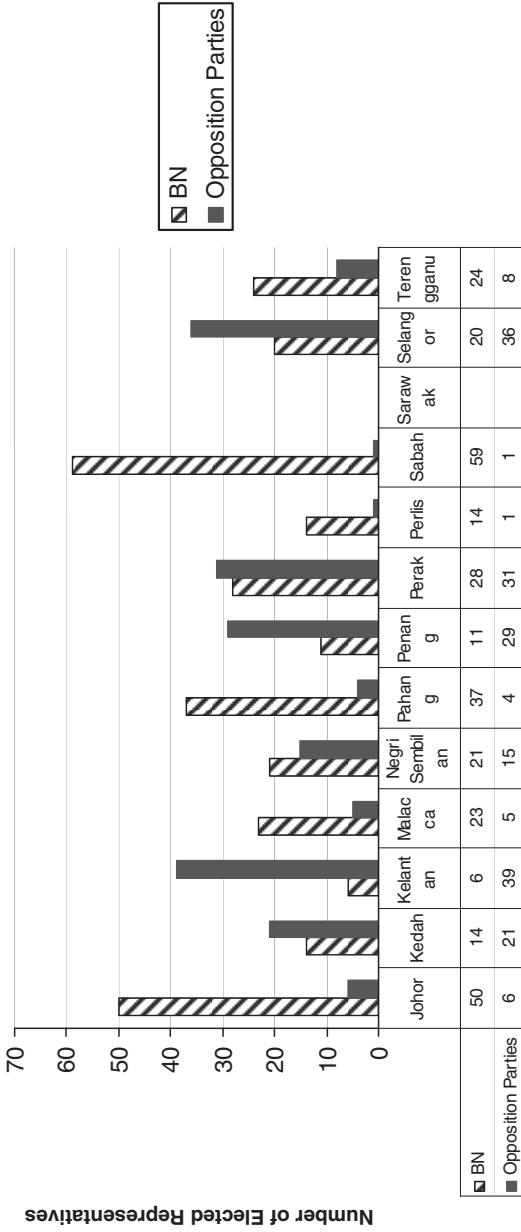
Below is a bar chart showing the distribution of seats in all the states after the 2008 outcome. I will continue my account with a focus on the Opposition win in Kelantan as this was where I carried out my fieldwork.

Kelantan — Islam Embedded

I have borrowed the phrase "Islam embedded" from Farish Noor (2004) who has till date written the most complete political history of PAS in two large tomes. Farish has stated that "PAS is here to stay, and it is largely due to the efforts of PAS over the past five decades that Islam is well and truly embedded in the social, cultural, economic and political terrain of Malaysia." (Farish Noor 2004, p. 753). The validity of Farish's statement was confirmed, *a fortiori*, after March 8 in the state of Kelantan.

Historically, Kelantan with a 95 per cent Malay population, is not just the bellwether for the Malay-Muslim vote but the social formation that imbibed the political struggles and fortunes of Malaysian political Islam.

**Malaysian Election 2008:
Distribution of Seats Won in Each State Legislature**



States in the Federation of Malaysia

Source: Computed from the Election Commission Data.

Moreover, Kelantan is unique in the sense that in no other state has Islam been so thoroughly woven into the social fabric to the extent that it becomes indistinguishable from its overall lifestyle. It is also the only state that has remained in the hands of PAS for an uninterrupted eighteen years, and after the 2008 general election, several years more. PAS began establishing its political presence by defeating the Alliance in Kelantan in the 1959 election and further re-established itself by beating the BN in the 1974 election.²⁷ Thus, put succinctly, Kelantan is a state that is distinctive in political culture, with Islam embedded as a lifestyle in sync with Kelantanese cultural sensibilities.

In general there has been little penetration politically and socially of “outsiders” in Kelantan. Thanks to the PAS government, non-Kelantanese are not allowed to own land in the state. Under the guidance of PAS’s *Mushid’ul Am* (spiritual leader), Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat as Menteri Besar (chief minister), the state has maintained a soft Islamic image and posted a credible level of economic performance, provided citizens with a clean, uncorrupted government, and propagated a form of Islamic welfare state (*Negara Kebajikan*). The latter was used to great effect in the electoral campaign of 2008. PAS has gained in political strength in tandem with UMNO’s slippage into money politics and corruption and what PAS terms “immoral” and non-Islamic activities. In his campaign speeches, Tok Guru, as Nik Aziz is affectionately known, reminded his audience that PAS was the only Islamic party, and that UMNO was a pretender and its Islam was *ersatz*.²⁸ Kelantan also shows a pluralism of leadership. In counterpoint to the *ulama* camp,²⁹ PAS in Kelantan has the likes of more urbane and modernist leaders

like vice president Husam Musa, who is an economist by training, and is known for his more pragmatic policies. The party secretary-general, Kelantanese businessman Kamaruddin Jafaar, a former political scientist at UKM, is also a close associate of Anwar Ibrahim.

PAS won handsomely in 2008 after teetering on a one-seat majority in the last state government. It took thirty-nine seats to UMNO's six and nine parliamentary seats to UMNO's two. The PKR won one state seat and three parliamentary seats, and that only, some would argue, because PAS agreed to the election pact. The Mentri Besar-designate for UMNO, Dr Awang Adek, was defeated in his state seat of Perupok in his own kampung,³⁰ and in his incumbent parliamentary seat of Bacok as well. Both Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi and his deputy Najib Razak had visited Kelantan during the campaign period, promising the setting up of the Kelantan University. Deputy Finance Minister Awang Adek was to lead the charge in Kelantan, superseding the disfavoured UMNO Kelantan leader Anuar Musa. Given his strong federal backing, Awang Adek's defeat at the state and parliamentary levels was a massive slap on the face for UMNO. It was a clear rejection of the lure of development, symbolised by the proposed setting up of the Kelantan University in Bacok itself. The prime minister had himself come for a foundation stone-laying ceremony of the new university two days before the end of the election campaign. Awang Adek's loss in Bacok to an outsider and Kedahan, Dr Nasharudin Mat Isa, was a particularly bitter blow. Nashruddin is PAS's deputy leader and the word was out that PAS was pitting its top echelon leadership against UMNO in Kelantan, banking on the loyalty of the Kelantanese to the PAS cause. In the event,

Awang was defeated by a not-too-slim 2,901 votes in a constituency of 64,808 voters. As shown in the box below, Awang Adek won Bacok comfortably in 2004.

KELANTAN: P25 — Bachok (2008)	Voters: 64,808
Datuk Dr Awang Adek Hussin (UMNO)	25,934
Dr Nasharudin Mat Isa (PAS)	28,835
	Majority 2,901
Racial Breakdown	
Malay: 98.40%,	
Chinese: 1.20%, Indian: 0.10%,	
Others: 0.30%	

KELANTAN: P25 — Bachok (2004)	Voters: 55,319
Datuk Dr Awang Adek Hussin (UMNO)	25,194
Wan Nik Wan Yusof (PAS)	21,922
	Majority 3,272
Racial Breakdown	
Malay: 98.20%, Chinese: 1.30%, Indian: 0.10%,	
Others: 0.30%	

Source: <<http://undi.info/state/ke/2004/parliament.html>>.

I would like to highlight another interesting contest in Kelantan in the heart of Kota Bharu for the seat of Kota Lama. This is the only constituency in Kelantan with a large Chinese minority, some 35 per cent. PAS's Anuar Tan

Abdullah, a Chinese Muslim, won the seat. As can be seen in the box below, Anuar has managed to achieve a very respectable result of a 5,206 majority in 2008 compared with his razor-slim win of 34 votes in 2004. I have calculated that if all of the Chinese and Indians had voted for the MCA candidate in 2008, Anuar Tan would have lost his seat by some 2,000-odd votes. Going by the result we can safely assume that he clearly garnered some measure of Chinese and Indian support. PAS’s support among non-Muslims was less evident in 2004 when it championed the notion of an “Islamic state”, as shown by Anuar’s poor performance that year.

KELANTAN: N9 — Kota Lama (2008)		Voters: 27,038
Tan Ken Teng (MCA)		7,661
Datuk Anuar Tan Abdullah		12,867
		Majority 5,206
Racial Breakdown		
Malay: 62.80%, Chinese: 34.90%, Indian: 1.70%, Others: 0.60%		
KELANTAN: N9 — Kota Lama (2004)		Voters: 24,787
Leong Su Siang (MCA)		9,120
Annuar Tan Abdullah (PAS)		9,154
		Majority 34
Racial Breakdown		
Malay: 60.5%, Chinese: 36.8%, Indian: 2.0%, Others: 0.7%		

Source: <<http://undi.info/state/ke/2004/states.html>>.

From viewing the map below, it is apparent that PAS's main challenge in Kelantan in the 2008 election came from the Tengku Razaleigh stronghold of Gua Musang, as well as two of its state constituencies.³¹ Gua Musang is also significant for its Orang Asli communities which invariably are BN supporters. The other challenge for PAS came from the parliamentary constituency of Jeli, which indicates the strength of Mustafa Mohamad, who like Razaleigh is not just Kelantanese but also an incumbent UMNO minister. Mustafa has over the years been able to provide developmental goodies to his constituents.³² Even so, two state constituencies in Jeli went to PAS. As for the rest of Kelantan, PAS and PKR won all of the northern and eastern constituencies of the state. The overwhelming presence and electoral machine of PAS was difficult to overcome in these more urban and semi-urban constituencies. The electoral map below indicates in graphic detail the political muscle of PAS in Kelantan.

By Way of Conclusion³³

Months after the March 8, 2008 general election, matters still did not see closure on the turbulent terrain of Malaysian politics. Malaysia may have escaped such earthly disasters as cyclones, earthquakes and floods but instead it has been immersed in a seemingly interminable political flux under the troubled leadership of Abdullah Badawi. A joke making its rounds was that "badawi" was accepted as a neologism by Oxford Dictionary to mean "to start something full of promise but end in disappointment, failure and/or disaster". This notwithstanding, it has been a time of great political

Kelantan Map with Parliamentary Outcomes 2008



- P19 - TUMPAT
- P20 - PENGKALAN CHEPA
- P21 - KOTA BAHRU
- P22 - PASIR MAS
- P23 - RANTAU PANJANG
- P24 - KUBANG KERIAN
- P25 - BACHOK
- P26 - KETEREH
- P27 - TANAH MERAH
- P28 - PASIR PUTEH
- P29 - MACHANG
- P30 - JELI
- P31 - KUALA KRAI
- P32 - GUA MUSANG

Legend:
Dark shade = UMNO seats
Light shade = PAS seats
Lightest shade = PKR seats

Source: <<http://undi.info/state/ke.html>>.

opening or “perestroika” in Malaysia as I have opined elsewhere.³⁴

Politically, this period of Malaysian politics should be seen as the extension of the new idiom of politics created by the *Reformasi* Movement of 1998, which gave life to the activism of civil society forces in electoral politics. While the ensuing 1999 election results were a disappointment for the *Reformasi* forces, Malaysia saw the emergence of an Alternative Front (*Barisan Alternatif*, BA) and the birth of the multi-ethnic Malaysian Justice Party (PKR). But the BA soon fell to intra-party and inter-party bickering. Abdullah Badawi’s stellar performance in the 2004 general election could be best explained first, by the BA’s self-destruction without the steadying hand of an Anwar Ibrahim, then languishing in prison, and second, by the debunking of Mahathir by his party, UMNO. In my view, Mahathir resigned because he was also pressured by his party to do so. With Anwar back in action in 2008, we saw him galvanized a newly minted alternative coalition for the 2008 election, and, along with a revitalized civil society, this proved too insurmountable for the leader of the ruling coalition. A litany of scandals, impending rising costs, the spectacular Mongolian murder and trial, and the constant barrage of criticisms from his predecessor augmented Abdullah’s problems.

The post election situation has been particularly debilitating for Abdullah. In October 2008 he indicated that he would bow out, faced as he was with internal criticism and challenges from within his own party and faces the open challenge to his leadership from Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and earlier from his own Minister of International

Trade and Industry, Muhyiddin Yassin, who is now content to contest for a vice president's post. Abdullah was forced to agree to hold party elections by December 2008, subsequently postponed till March 2009. This internal pressure had earlier forced Abdullah to announce his retirement by 2010. In the meanwhile, the opposition coalition, the People's Pact, has declared through its putative leader Anwar Ibrahim that it will form a new government from impending crossovers of BN MPs.

The announcement on June 18 by the Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) that it will move or support a vote of no confidence against Abdullah Badawi in Parliament is unprecedented in Malaysia's political history. In late July, MCA former women's wing deputy chief and former cabinet minister, Dr Tan Yew Kiew, quit her party and announced her intention of joining the PKR. This seemed to validate claims adrift that more Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) members may crossover to the PR, or not support Abdullah.

Nor does the economic situation favour the embattled Abdullah. If it were a game of golf, he appears to have bogeyed on all holes so far while a double bogey is awaiting him in the final hole. The hiking the oil price by 40 per cent on June 4, held back during the election period, was a decision which has baffled analysts. The inflation rate hit an unprecedented 7.7 per cent on the third week of July. His nemesis Anwar swore that were he prime minister oil prices would be reduced not increased because of Petronas' copious profits (96 billion in the financial year ending June 2008) and Malaysia's status as a net-exporting oil state. Abdullah's woes do not end here. The scandal of judicial impropriety (admittedly not of Abdullah's doing but that of

his predecessor) is more palpable after the V.K. Lingam expose and the Royal Commission recommendations of legal action against various protagonists. The appointment of Zaid Ibrahim as de facto Law Minister to assuage the legal fraternity and to apparently reconstitute an independent judiciary may still be a tall order, and at best, a long way from fulfillment. The loss of Pulau Batu Puteh (Pedra Branca) to Singapore makes another dent in Abdullah's political image among Malays.

Malaysia's political transition will clearly be stalled as long as the symbol of its impasse, Abdullah Badawi, remains at the helm. The more sanguine have argued that the *badawied* political process is salutary as it allows for many belated and necessary reforms to the Malaysian political system. In truth, Abdullah's stymied political hand only allows for tinkering rather than an overhauling of all that is wrong. For example, an Abdullah government could hardly debunk the deeply embedded racial politics and Malay supremacy as its underlying concept. It is the unfortunate truism for the current prime minister that unless he relinquishes power, the movement to the next stage of Malaysian politics will not happen.

Notes

1. Some of the main points in my introduction were made on February 15, 2008 in *OpinionAsia*, <<http://www.opinionasia.org>>.
2. See, among various critical evaluations of Abdullah, Ooi (2008). For a detailed narration and analysis of issues, events and scandals plaguing Abdullah in the year 2007, see Lee (2008).
3. Most pundits could not see the Opposition winning more

than forty seats. At a pre-election seminar in ISEAS, two days before polling day, main speaker Dato' Dr Michael Yeoh of the Malaysian think tank ASLI and other speakers did not see the BN losing its two-thirds majority although a much poorer performance than 2004 was predicted. I spoke with Dr P. Ramasamy on polling day in Penang and even he could not predict he would win the parliamentary constituency of Batu Kawan, defeating outgoing Chief Minister Koh Tsu Koon by a massive 9,485 votes.

4. See Stephen Gan's editorial in the Internet paper, *Malaysiakini*, March 19, 2008.
5. The exceptions were Terengganu, Perlis and Pahang, but even these states swung in single digit percentage points. See Table 2.1.
6. Loh and Saravanamuttu (2003) in particular have tried to show that a "new politics" which transcended ethnicity, sparked by the *Reformasi* movement, valorized non-racial campaign issues while driving the participation of civil society in the 1999 election. This development adversely affected UMNO's performance. For studies that put the accent on race as the primary factor driving electoral politics, see, for example, Ratnam and Milne (1967), Vasil (1972) and Muzaffar (1974). The volume by Puthuachery and Noraini Othman (2005) examines the electoral process from the perspective of democracy with authors attempting to steer discussion away from ethnicity to the direction of electoral reform.
7. Table 2.1 does not include independents; with the independent candidates on the other side, the BN vote drops to 49 per cent.
8. The sources cited by the *Straits Times* were Ong Kian Ming, *The Star/Asia News Network* and the Election Commission. In fact, political scientist Ong had done the calculations. In

an article for *Malaysiakini* (March 11, 2008), he explained that he used a certain statistical method called ecological inference, theorised by Gary King, who is a professor of government and statistics at Harvard University. On his figures, Ong says the following: “It is important to highlight that these vote swings are not uniformly distributed. For example, the Malay vote swing in the West Coast states, especially in Penang, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, was higher than the estimated 5 per cent and was closer to 10 per cent or even higher in certain constituencies like Balik Pulau, Gombak and Lembah Pantai. It would not have been possible for the opposition, PKR in these cases, to win without a sizeable swing in the Malay vote.”

9. At the time of writing (October 2008) Malaysian politics have remained highly fluid with a seemingly interminable surfacing of issues and developments threatening either a vote of no confidence in the BN government or its toppling with the crossovers of component parties or members of parliament to the newly formed PR. Another scenario is the possible coming together of UMNO and PAS after it was revealed that several rounds of secret talks or dialogue (*muzakarah*) between leaders of the two parties had been conducted since the March 8 outcome. Most importantly though, Anwar Ibrahim’s overwhelming by-election victory in Permatang Pauh on August 26 showed that the March 8 outcome was no fluke.
10. The Chief Justice, Ahmad Fairuz Abdul Halim, and his fellow Muslim judge, Justice Alauddin Mohd Sheriff, voted against Lina Joy’s conversion, while Justice Richard Malanjun dissented.
11. This was information I gathered when talking with Christian friends during the campaign period. The government

proscribing the use of the word “Allah” in bibles and the banning of several Christian children books had particularly upset many Christians. See Lee (2008, p. 189).

12. The Malay word, *ceramah*, normally carries the meaning of “seminar” but in electoral parlance means a gathering to hear political speeches or a political rally. Increasingly *ceramahs*, which used to be close-door events, have become public events in open areas. In that sense the EC and police have allowed for more open political campaigning strictly proscribed after May 1969. However, police permits are still required.
13. I have drawn from various accounts and supplemented this with other known facts. For a detailed rendering, see Lee (2008).
14. The word *bersih* means clean in Malay.
15. On August 31, 2007, the 50th anniversary of Malaysia’s independence, P. Waytha Moorthy, a *Hindraf* lawyer filed a class action suit against the United Kingdom in the Court of Britain for “withdrawing after granting independence and leaving us (Indians) unprotected and at the mercy of a majority Malay-Muslim government that has violated our rights as minority Indians.” The lawsuit claimed four trillion British pounds as compensation and sought to strike out Article 153 of the Malaysian Constitution bestowing Malay privileges and for the court to declare that Malaysia was a secular state.
16. In rallies I attended in Penang, the unusually large presence of Indians was highly noticeable. The cries of *makkal sakthi* punctuated political speeches.
17. The figures used are from a pre-election study conducted on February 23–27, 2008 (Merdeka Centre 2008). Survey and opinion polls are regularly conducted by the Merdeka Centre, which has become the most reliable polling agency

in Malaysia (<<http://www.merdeka.org>>). Typically Merdeka Center polls are representative sample surveys which draw on 1,000-odd respondents by using the telephone. Merdeka Centre claims a margin of error well within five per cent.

18. My sources, mainstream newspapers, actual manifestos, pamphlets are too many and varied to be cited conventionally.
19. The song was in three languages, English, Mandarin and Malay, sung by a mellifluous male voice to the tune of the Village People's "Go West". The two stanzas of the lyrics (by Tony Pua) read:

Just change for Malaysia
Just change for Malaysia
Just change we will over come
Just change we will see the sun

Together all races stand as one.
Together we will never run
Together it's like never before
Together what we're fighting for.

20. It would strike any astute political observer that these were the very areas in which the government had fared badly in the past four years.
21. I was able to speak with the personnel of Global Media Channel in Kota Bharu during the campaign period. The campaign agent had interesting material, which included candid and damaging photos (especially from the Islamic perspective) of the prime minister and others. One of the well-known pictures featured Abdullah's hand on the bare shoulder of starlet Michele Yeoh in convivial mood. Other pictures featured Abdullah's family members socialising with well-known businessman Patrick Lim.

22. The Lingam video would typically get 130,000–150,000 hits in various showings. This is not counting the further dissemination by cell phones and emails. The Comedy Court went to town with songs such as “Lingam’s Devil Curry”, “Rough Little Indian Boys” (*Hindraf* arrests) and Samy Vellu’s farewell song “Goodbye Sam”, which received well over 350,000 hits.
23. On the last day of the campaign period I tried to follow (by car) Anwar on his campaign trail through eleven points on the mainland and on Penang Island. His trail began after the *zohur* prayer at Seberang Jaya on the mainland, went on to the 10th point at Sungai Dua on the island and finished off at Permatang Pauh, Wan Azizah’s constituency, on the mainland side.
24. Based on a report in *The Star*, March 10.
25. The sources cited by the *Straits Times* were Ong Kian Ming, *The Star/Asia News Network* and Election Commission. See footnote 2.
26. The scatter plots do not show the seats won by the UMNO, MCA, MIC and Gerakan or other component parties of BN. I have made my inferences by examining the information given on candidates’ ethnicity given in the detailed results provided by the Election Commission.
27. PAS became the first Islamist party in all of Southeast Asia to democratically win an election and form a government. See Farish Noor (2004, p. 155). PAS in 1959 won nine out of ten parliamentary seats in Kelantan and about 64 per cent of the popular vote (Farish Noor 2004, p. 757).
28. Nik Aziz is also famous for his trademark quirky and controversial remarks. His campaign jibe that caused a stir was that UMNO members were likened to “Orang Utan”, the reason being that UMNO was not a party adhering to the rule of law. See *Mingguan Wasilah*, February 24–March 1, 2008.

29. The *ulama* faction in PAS is headed by its president Ustaz Hadi Awang of Terengganu. This is not to say that PAS Kelantan does not have supporters of the Ulama group. Nik Aziz is however seen as someone who is above the fray of modernist versus *ulama* politics in PAS.
30. I was not able to meet up with Dr Awang (who used to be my colleague at USM) but visited his house in Perupok, which is essentially a fishing town. Awang has refurbished his house well with concrete and brick and his mother lives there. Since becoming a minister, he hardly has time to be in Perupok. It has a large community hall attached to it, which is used for political meetings.
31. It should be noted that Razaleigh in his Semangat 46 years was an ally of PAS.
32. This could be seen on my visit to Jeli. Well-maintained schools and a community college were two prominent indicators of the minister's deliverables. Speaking with local supporters of PAS, I got the distinct impression of the pragmatism of villagers; they would be happy to take whatever the BN government doles out and still vote for their favourite party, but in Jeli, Mustafa's overall party machinery was clearly superior to PAS's.
33. Similar points were made in an article in *OpinionAsia* (<<http://www.opinionasia.org>>) on June 19, 2008.
34. See *OpinionAsia* (<<http://www.opinionasia.org>>), March 20, 2008.

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3

The Ethnic Voting Pattern for Kuala Lumpur and Selangor in 2008

Lee Hock Guan

Five months before the March 2008 General Election, *Bersih*,¹ frustrated by the BN government's refusal to act on their demands, organized a demonstration to protest against gerrymandering, voter fraud practices, rampant irregularities in elections, and the misuse of public funds and facilities by BN for electoral campaigning. Without a doubt, successive BN governments have modified and manipulated the 'first-past-the-post' electoral system to benefit the incumbent ruling coalition. With the inequitable electoral system buttressed by BN-UMNO hegemonic domination of ethnic discourse and politics, it was generally assumed the Opposition would have little chance of denying BN its two-thirds parliamentary majority and stop it from winning all the state governments, except for the Malay heartland states of Kelantan and Trengganu.² Most observers reckoned it a foregone conclusion that the Abdullah-led BN would win its two-thirds parliamentary majority.

The dramatic electoral setbacks suffered by BN in the elections thus took almost everyone by surprise, including BN and the opposition parties. BN did win but lost its two-thirds majority in parliament and the Kelantan, Kedah, Penang, Perak and Selangor state governments to the Opposition (Khoo 2008). Various explanations have been given to account for the unexpected March 2008 election results. Ong (2008) singled out Abdullah's ineffectual leadership and his administration's failure to deliver on the campaign promises he had made in the 2004 election as the most important contributing factor. Welsh (2008) offered ten factors; including "reformasi spirit lives on", "BN coalition failings and infighting", effective use of new media by the opposition, better opposition cooperation and strategy, and backfire from the personal attack on Anwar Ibrahim, the *de facto* leader of the opposition. Undeniably, several factors contributed to the uncharacteristic change in the ethnic voting pattern and ethnic vote swing in the election. Furthermore, it was the varying degrees in the Malay, Chinese and Indian vote swing in the direction of the Opposition that resulted in the BN's electoral setbacks.

Some observers however cited the sizable ethnic vote swing for the Opposition as proof that there had been an important shift towards cross-ethnic allegiance voting in the 2008 election, unlike in past elections where voter behavior was usually dictated by a greater preference for the party representing one's ethnic group. This is a highly problematic claim since vote swing simply measures the "average of the change in share of the vote won by two parties contesting an election" and "is not, nor is it intended to be a portrayal of the actual behavior of voters" (Rose

1991, p. 29). As such, although there were more cross-ethnic votes for the Opposition in the 2008 election, it would be premature to conclude that Malaysians had moved beyond voting according to ethnic allegiance.³

This paper will provide an analysis of the ethnic voting preference and ethnic vote swing with special focus on the extent of cross-ethnic voting for the opposition parties — PKR, DAP and PAS — in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor.⁴

Ethnic Voting Preference and Cross-Ethnic Voting

In Malaysia, it is usually understood that the vast majority of voters are inclined to support the party representing his or her ethnic group. This was because in the development of the Malaysian state, leaders who exploited ethnic sentiments and interests to mobilize ethnic voters had gained the upper hand. An ethnic voting pattern where people would vote according to ethnic allegiances and interests and not on the basis of the policies or credentials of the competing political parties and their leaders, prevailed and became entrenched. The end result was a ‘racial arithmetic’ where political parties derived their support from one or the other of the ethnic groups, where “selection of candidates for constituencies is also based on this consideration” and where “the major issues and problems are all viewed through racially tinted glasses” (Ong 1980, p. 169).

The ‘racial arithmetically’ defined electoral system would privilege the ruling coalition party, which is “an alliance of ethnic parties, each of which can still profess to be working for the interests of its own ethnic group even while

participating in the alliance” (Horowitz 1985, p. 396). After 1969, the new ruling coalition BN strengthened its support base by incorporating more parties into the coalition, including UMNO, MCA, MIC, Gerakan, PPP and, for a limited time, PAS (1971–77).⁵ As an alliance of ethnic parties, BN could reach out to all the three ethnic groups unlike the opposition parties PAS, Semangat 46 (1989–97) and DAP,⁶ whose support would largely come from one ethnic group. This was because a Malay, Chinese or Indian voting for BN could still view himself as voting for a party representing his ethnic group and thus he would not have transgressed his ethnic allegiance.

The ‘alliance of ethnic parties strategy’ has enabled the BN to overcome the cross-ethnic voting barrier. A Malay voter would not fear voting for MCA/MIC/Gerakan because UMNO is also in the alliance to represent his ethnic group. Conversely, a Chinese or an Indian could vote UMNO since he would indirectly be voting for MCA/Gerakan or MIC respectively. In contrast, DAP and PAS could not overcome the cross-ethnic voting hurdle as their candidates would not be judged on their credentials but by which ethnic group their parties represent or were perceived to represent.

Table 3.1 shows the ethnic voting preference in peninsular Malaysia from 1974 to 1995. During that period, UMNO could always depend on winning the majority of Malay votes because Malay voters had a greater preference for UMNO over PAS, except in Kelantan.⁷ In seats contested between DAP and MCA/MIC/Gerakan, the former would usually win the majority of Chinese votes since Chinese voters would have greater preference for the former over the latter. The prevailing ethnic voting pattern was also

TABLE 3.1
Ethnic Voting Preference: Peninsular Malaysia, 1974–95

<i>Voters</i>			<i>Comments</i>
Malay	Greater preference for UMNO over PAS	Greater preference for MCA/MIC/Gerakan over DAP	In 1990 and 1995, PAS won the majority Malay vote in Kelantan.
Chinese	Greater preference for UMNO over PAS	Greater preference for DAP over MCA/MIC/Gerakan	Since 1990, DAP still wins majority Chinese support, but with declining trend.
Indian	Greater preference for UMNO over PAS	Greater preference for MCA/MIC/Gerakan over DAP	BN has won the majority of the Indian vote since late 1980s.

characterized by Chinese voters having a greater preference for UMNO over PAS and Malay voters having a greater preference for MCA/MIC/Gerakan over DAP. Crucially, the BN could rely on solid support from the Indian community because Indian voters had a greater preference for UMNO over PAS and MCA/MIC/Gerakan over DAP, especially after the late 1980s.

The combined electoral strength of UMNO, MCA, MIC and Gerakan has certainly contributed to the BN having a

seemingly insurmountable advantage over the opposition parties, DAP and PAS. The effectiveness of this advantage is also dependent on a structural factor — the ethnic composition of each constituency.

Given the ethnic voting pattern from 1974 to 1995, BN-UMNO would typically contest and defeat the opposition party PAS in Malay majority constituencies, except Kelantan in 1990 and 1995. Following the UMNO split in 1987, the party's support in Kelantan was severely weakened by the exodus of Tengku Razaleigh and his followers, who then founded Semangat 46 in 1988.⁸ PAS and Semangat 46 successfully defeated BN-UMNO in the 1990 and 1995 elections in Kelantan.⁹ Also, in the Malay heartland states of Trengganu and Kedah where the constituencies are mostly Malay majority ones, BN-UMNO victory margins over PAS were usually modest.¹⁰ For mixed Malay constituencies, BN-UMNO would usually defeat PAS with ease because of the non-Malay voters' greater preference for UMNO over PAS.

In the contest over Chinese major constituencies, the DAP was more often than not victorious over BN-MCA/MIC/Gerakan. However, although Chinese voters still had greater preference for the DAP over MCA/MIC/Gerakan,

TABLE 3.2
Electoral Outcome by Constituency Type:
Peninsular Malaysia, 1974–95

<i>Majority/Ethnicity</i> ¹¹	<i>Malay</i>	<i>Chinese</i>
More than 70 per cent	BN-UMNO	DAP
Less than 70 per cent	BN-UMNO	BN-MCA/MIC/Gerakan

since 1990 the trend indicated a declining support for the DAP. For example, in the 80 per cent Chinese majority constituencies of Tanjong (Penang), Ipoh Timor/Pasir Pinji (Perak), Kepong and Seputeh, in 1990 DAP won 69 per cent of the total votes, but that declined to 53.7 per cent in 1995 and 51.3 per cent in 1999 (Ng 2003, p. 91). In fact, the DAP lost the Chinese majority Ipoh Timor/Pasir Pinji seat to MCA in 1995 and 1999, and Lim Kit Siang, the DAP leader, was defeated by Gerakan's Chia Kwang Chye in the Chinese majority Bukit Bendera, Penang seat in the 1999 election.¹² The declining Chinese voters preference for the DAP, when coupled with the fact that Malay voters continue to have greater preference for MCA/MIC/Gerakan over DAP would mean that in mixed Chinese constituencies, DAP's chances of defeating MCA/MIC/Gerakan would have been on the decrease.

Table 3.3 shows that the 1999 and 2004 elections results confirm the unassailable advantage the BN has over the Opposition in the mixed constituency type; BN won 92.7 per cent and 97.8 per cent of the mixed constituencies in the 1999 and 2004 elections respectively. In contrast, BN's chances of winning Malay or Chinese majority constituencies were less assured because in those types of constituencies BN would not have the full advantage of cross-ethnic voting. And since the 1987 UMNO split, the usually reliable Malay vote supporting UMNO could not be taken for granted by the party.

Thus, from 1972 to 1995, the prevailing ethnic voting preference and cross-ethnic voting invariably benefited the BN. UMNO-Malay electoral dominance was supported by UMNO consistently winning a majority of the Malay vote,

TABLE 3.3
Performance of BN in 1999 and 2004 General Elections
by Constituency Type

	1999		2004	
	# of seats	% of total seats won	# of seats	% of total seats won
Malay majority	52	42.3	60	88.3
Chinese majority	10	40.0	12	16.7
Mixed	82	92.7	93	97.8

Source: Modified from Loh 2004.

by the malapportionment of seats that disproportionately advantaged the Malay community, and by gerrymandering the electoral system to increase disproportionately the number of seats with Malay majority relative to their electoral percentage (Lim 2003). PAS was only a threat to BN in Malay majority seats especially in the Malay heartland states, and DAP a threat to BN only in Chinese majority seats. For BN to counter the electoral threat posed by PAS and DAP, the most effective way was to reduce the number of Malay and Chinese majority seats. Indeed, the results of the 1999 election showed how risky the situation could be for BN-UMNO in Malay majority seats when the Malay vote swung to the opposition parties, especially PAS. It would seem then the best strategy for BN to counter PAS' and DAP's threats was to enlarge the number of mixed Malay or Chinese constituencies.

The 1999 Election and 2002 Constituency Delineation¹³

In 1998, after he was sacked from his posts as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and expelled from UMNO, Anwar Ibrahim initiated and led the *Reformasi* movement to protest against corruption, cronyism and nepotism, and government abuse of power. His arrest and brutal treatment in September triggered street protests which only came to a halt after the state placed a number of the key organizers under detention under the ISA. Nevertheless, supporters of Anwar went on to found the multi-ethnic party Parti Keadilan Nasional (ADIL), which later joined up with the opposition parties PAS, DAP and PRM (Parti Rakyat Malaysia) to form the Barisan Alternatif (BA) to contest the 1999 general election.¹⁴

The formation of a Malay-dominated multi-ethnic coalition party BA with ostensibly a “non-ethnic” orientation was a major political development in Malaysia. The BA tried to provide an alternative to the race-based politics of BN by espousing the *Reformasi*’s universal issues. By forming a multi-ethnic coalition, the opposition parties had hope of reaching out to and garnering more electoral support from the three ethnic groups, and thus overcoming the cross-ethnic voting bugbear that had inflicted PAS and DAP in past elections. However, although the BA came up with a common manifesto to contest in the 1999 election, the differences among its member political parties remained transparent and wide (Lee 2002).

The 1999 election results confirmed a loss of UMNO’s legitimacy within the Malay community, its traditional power base. Although the ruling BN coalition retained its two-

thirds majority in parliament, securing 77 per cent of the seats, its share of the popular vote fell from a high 65 per cent in 1995 to 57 per cent in 1999. The 1999 election results witnessed a significant Malay vote swing towards BA especially in Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu and selected urban constituencies in the Klang valley (see Table 3.4).¹⁵ BN-UMNO suffered serious losses in the Malay heartland states of Kedah and Perlis and was soundly defeated in Kelantan and Trengganu where it lost the majority of the parliament seats and the state governments to PAS.

Hence, UMNO lost a substantial portion of the Malay vote, garnering only 49 per cent in the fifty-eight seats with more than 66 per cent Malay-majority (Maznah 2003, p. 73). Of the BN's loss of fifty-eight state assembly seats, UMNO accounted for fifty-five seats.¹⁶

Also, BN suffered double-digit declines in its share of the popular vote in the more multi-ethnic states such as Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Selangor and Penang, although it did not lose any seats.

TABLE 3.4
UMNO's Performance in Malay-Majority Seats
(Percentage), Selected States

<i>State</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>Vote swing</i>
Kelantan	43	37	6
Trengganu	55	41	14
Kedah	59	50	9
Penang	77	52	25
Perak	70	54	16
Selangor	82	51	31

Source: Modified from Maznah 2003, p. 73.

It was PAS that gained the most from UMNO's losses rather than the other opposition parties ADIL, PRM and DAP in the 1999 election. This was because the huge Malay vote swing made a decisive difference largely in Malay majority constituencies where PAS mostly contested against UMNO. Conversely, because ADIL mostly contested against UMNO in mixed Malay seats, the impact of the Malay vote swing would have been more than counterbalanced by the higher percentage of Chinese and Indian voting for BN. In other words, PAS and ADIL lost to UMNO in nearly all the mixed Malay seats because they could not overcome the cross-ethnic voting barrier. Chinese and Indian voters still had greater preference for UMNO over PAS or ADIL.

In the 1999 election, the Chinese vote swing to the Opposition was smaller than expected. As such, DAP's performance in the 1999 election showed only a slight improvement over 1995 (Ng 2003). Predictably, in the mixed Chinese constituencies, DAP in most cases lost to MCA/MIC/Gerakan because Malay and Indian voters still had a greater preference for the latter over the former.

The 1999 election results hence showed that Malay majority constituencies had become harder for UMNO to win and that DAP still had the upper hand over MCA/MIC/Gerakan in Chinese majority seats. In contrast, overall ethnic allegiance voting continued to benefit the BN and the party's chances of winning mixed Malay and Chinese constituencies remained unassailable. This was because the opposition parties, again, failed to overcome the cross-ethnic voting barrier as Malay voters remained fearful of voting for DAP and the non-Malays of voting for PAS and ADIL.

The erosion of Malay electoral support for UMNO in the 1999 election influenced the constituency redelineation exercise in 2002.¹⁷ Specifically, the primary aim of the exercise was to address the problem of future Malay vote swings against the BN-UMNO and to take advantage of the opposition parties' inability to overcome the cross-ethnic voting barrier. In short, to benefit BN-UMNO, the exercise increased the number of mixed Malay constituencies. In the Malay heartland states of Kelantan and Trengganu not much could be done to convert Malay majority seats into mixed Malay ones because of the very small number of non-Malay voters. In Kedah, Ong and Welsh (2005) show that the 2002 redelineation exercise assisted in reducing the risk for BN-UMNO in UMNO's Malay stronghold districts by increasing the number of non-Malay voters to reduce the Malay majority, or creating new mixed Malay constituencies, both at parliament and state levels.

Broadly, the 2002 redelineation exercise "reduced the ethnic bias of the electoral system" by "replacing it with a more direct political bias in favor of the BN", especially UMNO (Brown 2005, p. 14). The aim was to reduce the previously "pro-Malay bias in the electoral system" in view of the fragmentation of the Malay vote whereby BN was no longer assured of winning in many Malay majority seats. Conversely, the exercise sought to "increase the weightage of mixed" constituencies to capitalize on the obvious BN advantage over the Opposition in relation to the cross-ethnic voting hurdle. Thus, since the 1999 election, apart from the heavily pro-Malay gerrymandered electoral system, the BN winning formula had depended on winning the majority of Malay and Indian votes and close to 50 per

cent of the Chinese vote, and on the opposition parties remaining fragmented¹⁸ and unable to overcome the cross-ethnic voting barrier.

Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya

In the 1969 General Election, a political stalemate arose in Selangor over the forming of the state government when opposition parties led by DAP won half of the state seats contested.¹⁹ To ensure that Selangor would remain under BN control, the 1972 constituency redelineation exercise removed the urban Chinese voters in Kuala Lumpur from Selangor by converting Kuala Lumpur into a Federal Territory. Kuala Lumpur Chinese voter preference for DAP was further counterbalanced by successive redelineation exercises which in fact benefited UMNO more than its non-Malay coalition partners MCA, Gerakan and MIC. Pro-Malay gerrymandering hence has contributed to diluting the Chinese vote that comprised the majority of the electorate.

In the 1990 election there were four Chinese majority seats and one mixed Chinese seat and one each of a Malay majority and a mixed Malay seat. For the 2008 election, after the 2002 redelineation exercise, there were the four Chinese majority seats of Kepong, Seputeh, Cheras and Bukit Bintang, the one mixed Chinese seat of Segambut, and the six mixed Malay constituencies of Titiwangsa, Batu, Wangsa Maju, Lembah Pantai and Bandar Tun Razak (see Table 3.5). Setiawangsa, a mixed Malay seat, was founded in the 2002 redelineation exercise to further strengthen UMNO's position. Malapportionment of seats came in the

TABLE 3.5
Ethnic Composition and Seats Won, Kuala Lumpur
and Putra Jaya

	Total voters	Ethnic (%)			Seat won by		
		M	C	I	1999	2004	2008
Kepong	60,775	4.1	89.5	6.0	DAP	DAP	DAP
Batu	70,544	42.9	39.6	16.3	Gerakan	Gerakan	PKR
Wangsa Maju	54,509	51.1	39.0	8.5	UMNO	UMNO	PKR
Segambut	59,690	34.9	50.4	13.6	Gerakan	Gerakan	DAP
Setiawangsa	57,161	56.4	31.3	10.0		UMNO	UMNO
Titiwangsa	49,892	65.0	22.9	11.1	UMNO	UMNO	PAS
Bukit Bintang	59,986	14.7	73.9	10.3	DAP	DAP	DAP
Lembah Pantai	56,650	52.8	25.3	20.8	UMNO	UMNO	PKR
Seputeh	76,891	5.4	88.5	5.5	DAP	DAP	DAP
Cheras	68,725	9.3	83.3	7.0	DAP	DAP	DAP
Bandar Tun Razak	72,628	51.7	39.1	8.3	MCA	MCA	PKR
Putrajaya	6,608	93.5	1.5	4.2		UMNO	UMNO

Note: M = Malay, C = Chinese, I = Indian
Source: Election Commission.

form of the establishment in 2002 of the Malay civil servants-dominated and UMNO stronghold seat of Putra Jaya, the smallest seat in the country with around 6,600 voters.

For the 2008 election, DAP, PKR and PAS entered into an electoral pact that was similar to the formula they had used in the 1999 election, even though DAP was not part of the PKR-PAS coalition.²⁰ DAP would contest in the Chinese majority seats of Kepong, Bukit Bintang, Seputeh and Cheras and the mixed Chinese seat of Segambut. PKR would contest in the mixed Malay constituencies of Batu, Wangsa Maju, Setiawangsa, Lembah Pantai and Bandar Tun Razak, all constituencies with less than 60 per cent Malays. PAS would contest in the Malay majority seats of Titiwangsa and Putrajaya, which had more than 60 per cent Malays. Needless to say, the rationale for this seat allocation formula was based on the fact that DAP would appeal most to Chinese voters, PAS to Malay voters, and mixed Chinese-Indian-Malay constituencies would prefer PKR over PAS and DAP respectively.

In the 1999 general election, although the BN lost a substantial proportion of the Malay vote, the party still won all the mixed constituencies because the Opposition could not overcome the cross-ethnic voting barrier (see Table 3.6). Thus the BN, by winning a majority of the Chinese and Indian votes, was able to narrowly defeat PKR in the Batu, Wangsa Maju, Lembah Pantai and Bandar Tun Razak seats and PAS in Titiwangsa. Similarly, DAP lost the mixed Chinese seat of Segambut to Gerakan because the majority Malay vote had still preferred Gerakan over DAP, with the majority of Indian voters supporting Gerakan.

The 2004 election results saw BN easily winning all the mixed Malay seats, including the new Setiawangsa seat, as the Malay vote swung back in the direction of the ruling coalition (see Table 3.6). The BN also won a sizable number of Chinese and Indian votes in the DAP stronghold of Kepong and Bukit Bintang where DAP victory margins were reduced to 306 and 1,854 votes respectively. Only the popular Seputeh and Cheras DAP incumbent candidates Teresa Kok and Tan Kok Wai managed to win their seats with comfortable margins.

For the 2008 general election, BN suffered a thorough thrashing in Kuala Lumpur. The results showed a massive Malay, Chinese and Indian vote swing in the direction of DAP, PKR and even PAS, ranging from 14.3 per cent in the mixed Malay seat of Wangsa Maju to 23.16 per cent in the Chinese majority seat of Kepong and 30.79 per cent in the mixed Chinese seat of Segambut (see Table 3.6). Indicative of the huge Malay vote swing against the BN was the Putra Jaya seat where although the PAS candidate lost, he gained 12.74 per cent more votes. Malay civil servants constituted more than 90 per cent of the electorate there. In total the Opposition won 61.6 per cent of the votes in Kuala Lumpur, representing a vote swing of 20.18 per cent from 2004 to 2008. Most significantly, the Opposition won all the mixed constituencies except the mixed Malay seat of Setiawangsa won by UMNO.

The huge Chinese vote swing in favour of DAP was evident in the party's convincing victories in its stronghold seats of Kepong, Seputeh, Cheras and Bukit Bintang. A 19.42 per cent vote swing in her favour led Teresa Kok to

TABLE 3.6
Votes Won by and Vote Swing for Opposition (%) by Ethnic Constituency Type, Kuala Lumpur

<i>Constituency Type</i>	<i>1999</i>		<i>2004</i>		<i>2008</i>		<i>Vote swing 1999–2008</i>		<i>Vote swing 2004–08</i>	
	<i>Votes won</i>		<i>Votes won</i>		<i>Votes won</i>					
Mixed Malay										
P115. Batu	47.32		37.46		59.43		12.11		21.97	
P116. Wangsa Maju	44.73		35.89		50.19		5.46		14.30	
P118. Setiawangsa	new		22.56		40.51		none		17.94	
P119. Titiwangsa	47.88		32.63		52.92		5.04		20.29	
P121. Lembah Pantai	48.02		29.70		52.93		4.91		23.23	
P124. Bandar Tun Razak	48.59		32.09		52.34		3.75		20.25	
Chinese Majority										
P114. Kepong	50.77		52.07		75.23		24.46		23.16	
P120. Bukit Bintang	51.25		48.81		68.14		16.89		19.34	
P122. Seputeh	54.37		62.05		81.48		27.11		19.42	
P123. Cheras	59.51		62.82		78.18		18.67		15.36	
Mixed Chinese										
P117. Segambut	39.6		28.33		59.13		19.53		30.79	
Total	49.4		41.4		61.6		12.2		20.18	

Source: Election Commission, my calculations.

win an all-time high of 81.48 per cent of the total votes, trouncing her rookie MCA challenger Carol Chew Chee Lin by a massive margin of nearly 36,500 votes.²¹ In Cheras, a 15.36 per cent vote swing guided the popular incumbent, MP Tan Kok Wai, to win 78.18 per cent of the total votes. A 23.16 per cent swing vote helped Tan Seng Giaw, the seven-term Kepong DAP MP, to raise his share of the total votes from 52.07 per cent in 2004 to 75.23 per cent in 2008; thus reversing the declining support for him since 1990 (see Table 3.7). In the case of Bukit Bintang, Fong Kui Lun, the incumbent DAP MP, saw his victory margin declining from 1,134 votes in 1999 to 304 votes in 2004²² (see Table 3.7). In the 2008 election, a 19.24 per cent vote swing enabled Fong Kui Lun to capture 68.14 per cent of the total votes and increase his victory margin to 14,277 votes. In his case, the huge Chinese vote swing was most likely accompanied by a sizable Indian vote swing as well, Indians make up 10.3 per cent of the electorate in Bukit Bintang.

Segambut, with an electoral make up of 50.4 per cent Chinese, 34.9 per cent Malays and 13.6 per cent Indians, was regarded a safe seat for Gerakan, which had defeated the DAP since the seat was formed in 1994. In spite of the

TABLE 3.7
DAP Victory Margin (Votes) in Cheras and
Bukit Bintang 1986 to 2008

	<i>1986</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2008</i>
Bukit Bintang	30,145	23,253	5,546	1,134	304	14,277
Kepong	16,513	22,352	5,022	1,766	1,854	11,704

general view that the Chinese vote was against BN in the coming election, Gerakan dropped its incumbent Segambut MP Tan Kee Kwong, who had won the seat the last three terms, and fielded the party's Federal Territory Gerakan Youth chief Ma Woei Chyi, instead. On the DAP side, the party fielded its Segambut service centre chief Lim Lip Eng. A huge vote swing of 30.79 per cent enabled Lim to wrest the seat from Gerakan; he won 59.13 per cent of the total votes. To achieve the 59.13 per cent figure, had DAP won 70 to 80 per cent of the Chinese vote and 70 per cent of the Indian vote, it would still have needed to win about 30 to 40 per cent of the Malay vote.²³ In other words, given the Segambut seat ethnic electoral make-up, the DAP victory could only have been possible with a significant percentage of Malay crossover voting for the DAP.

Unlike the 1999 election when ADIL, PRM and PAS lost in all the mixed Malay seats they contested in despite winning a substantial percentage of the Malay vote, in the 2008 election, PKR won four of the five seats it contested and PAS won the only mixed Malay seat the party contested — Titiwangsa. Putrajaya, a Malay majority seat, was easily won by UMNO's Tengku Adnan, who defeated a PAS candidate.

BN-UMNO managed to retain the mixed Malay constituency of Setiawangsa, a seat created in 2002. Even then, Zulhasnan Rafique, the incumbent and Federal Territories BN chairman, saw his majority reduced by 17.94 per cent. Setiawangsa is however a rather unusual constituency in that postal voters made up 26 per cent of the electorate (*The Sun*, March 3, 2008) and judging from past elections, the Opposition would usually win only a small

percentage of these votes. Since the vast majority of postal voters are police and army personnel, it would mean that BN-UMNO would have won a huge percentage of the Malay vote. As such, even if the Chinese vote, which made up 31.3 per cent of the electorate, had voted for PKR, it would have been easily countered by the overwhelming number of pro-UMNO postal votes.

In the Titiwangsa seat (65 per cent Malay, 22.9 per cent Chinese and 11.1 per cent Indian), UMNO's Aziz Jamaludin Mhd Tahir narrowly lost to Dr Lo' Lo' Ghazali, one of only two PAS woman parliamentary candidates, by 1972 votes. Dr Lo'Lo won 52.92 per cent of the total votes in 2008 with the help of a vote swing of 20.29 per cent.²⁴ Compared to the 1999 election when the PAS candidate won 47.88 per cent of the total votes but lost the seat by 1,513 votes, the vote swing from 1999 to 2008 of 5.04 per cent (see Table 3.6) was enough to help PAS win the seat. If we assume that the percentage of Malay votes for PAS was about the same for 1999 and 2008, then the 5.04 per cent more votes indicates an increase in the number of non-Malays crossover voting for PAS.²⁵ However, the small victory margin indicates that while the PAS Titiwangsa win was assisted by a sizable Malay vote swing, the total non-Malay cross votes for PAS would not have been many, although just enough to defeat UMNO.

Perhaps the most impressive result in Kuala Lumpur was the PKR winning four out of the five mixed Malay constituencies in 2008 in contrast to ADIL and PRM losing all the four mixed Malay constituencies they contested in 1999. It would appear that although the PKR was Malay-dominated, its multi-ethnic platform was appealing enough

for the party to overcome, in varying degrees, the cross-ethnic voting barrier.

In the 2008 election, Nurul Izzah Anwar, Anwar Ibrahim's eldest daughter, was tasked with the very challenging mission of taking on three-term incumbent Lembah Pantai UMNO MP Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, then Minister for Women, Family and Community Development in the Abdullah administration. Although Shahrizat won by a whopping 15,288 votes in the 2004 election, she did come close to losing the seat to PKR's Zainur Zakaria in 1999 when she gained a slim 1,417 majority. That the Malay vote was split in the 2008 election, as it was to 1999, was perhaps illustrated by the lukewarm reception Prime Minister Abdullah and Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Razak received when they campaigned for Shahrizat in contrast to the huge show of support among the Malays for Anwar when he campaigned for his eldest daughter in Lembah Pantai.²⁶ Besides her father, several other prominent individuals including a few DAP candidates and the famous blogger Raja Petra spoke at various ceramahs in Lembah Pantai to support Nurul Izzah. The DAP assisted by introducing and speaking with the candidate in ceramahs held at a number of predominantly non-Malay areas; for example, Cheras DAP MP Tan Kok Wai was with Nurul Izzah at a small ceramah in Tan Yew Lai, a largely lower-middle class Chinese and Indian neighbourhood of Old Klang Road.

In terms of campaign spending, it was obvious that Shahrizat outspent Nurul Izzah by a huge margin; Shahrizat's posters were plastered all over the constituency and her operation centre was well stacked with pamphlets and even publications issued by her ministry. Most telling was the fact that walking around Brickfields, parts of

which come under the Lembah Pantai seat, which has a large concentration of Indians, one could not find any poster of Samy Vellu, the MIC president. Symbolically speaking, perhaps in hindsight it did not help for Shahrizat to have her operation centre located in the affluent Bangsar vicinity. Nurul's operation room, in contrast, was located in the largely Malay working class neighbourhood of Lembah Pantai.

Impressively, a huge vote swing of 23.23 per cent resulted in Shahrizat losing Lembah Pantai to Nurul Izzah, who won 52.93 per cent of the total votes or a slim 2,895 majority²⁷ (see Table 3.6). If the Malay vote was split 50–50, Nurul Izzah's win would need a sizable Chinese and Indian cross-voting for her since the Chinese make up 25.3 per cent and Indian 20.8 per cent of the electorate. Assuming PKR had won 60 per cent of the Malay vote, it would have to win about 40 per cent of the non-Malay vote to achieve the 52.93 per cent figure; the vote swing from 1999 to 2008 was 4.91 per cent. Most probably a large chunk of the non-Malay vote for Nurul Izzah came from the Indian community as they were still aggravated following the *Hindraf* protest.

Similarly, for Wangsa Maju (51.1 per cent Malay, 39.0 per cent Chinese, 8.5 per cent Indian), Batu (42.9 per cent Malay, 39.6 per cent Chinese, 16.3 per cent Indian) and Bandar Tun Razak (51.7 per cent Malay, 39.1 per cent Chinese, 8.3 per cent Indian), a significant percentage of Chinese and Indians would have voted across ethnic lines for PKR for the party to have won. In 1999, the huge Malay vote swing against BN greatly reduced the BN's victory margin in Wangsa Maju,²⁸ Batu and Bandar Tun Razak to 5,718, 2,297 and 1,224 votes respectively. PKR fielded two Chinese candidates to contest; Wee Choo Keong, former

DAP MP of Bukit Bintang, in Wangsa Maju and Tian Chua, a well-known civil society activist, in Batu. A Malay candidate Abdul Khalid Ibrahim, a former corporate man, was fielded in the Bandar Tun Razak seat.

March 2008 marked the third time Tian Chua was contesting in Batu where he had lost twice to the incumbent Gerakan MP Ng Lip Yong, narrowly in 1999 and by a wide margin in 2004. In 2008, to the displeasure of some in Gerakan the party selected Lim Si Pin, a son of the party's former President Lim Keng Yaik, to contest in Batu. A huge 21.97 per cent vote swing helped Tian Chua to garner 59.43 per cent of the total votes and win the seat by almost 9,500 votes. Tian Chua won 12.11 per cent more votes in 2008 than 1999 when he narrowly lost by 2,297 votes; we could attribute the 12.11 largely to the more Chinese and Indian cross voting for him. If 60 per cent of the Malay vote supported Tian Chua, he would need to receive about 60 per cent of the non-Malay vote to reach his 59.43 per cent majority. In other words, Tian Chua's victory was only possible with the majority of Malay and a sizable Chinese and Indian cross voting for PKR.²⁹

PKR's Wee Choo Keong, buoyed by a vote swing of 14.36 per cent, narrowly edged out the incumbent MCA candidate Yew Teong Look by a mere 150 votes in Wangsa Maju. Wangsa Maju was a UMNO stronghold before part of it was carved out in the 2002 redelineation exercise to help form the new constituency Setiawangsa. The PKR victory in Wangsa Maju was most likely the result of a huge Malay vote swing and some Chinese and Indian cross voting in Wee's favour. For the Bandar Tun Razak seat, two-term MCA MP Tan Chai Ho narrowly lost, by 2,515 votes, to

PKR newcomer Abdul Khalid Ibrahim. In 1999, the well-known social activist and then ADIL candidate Chandra Muzaffar contested against and narrowly lost by 1,224 votes to Tan Chai Ho. Most likely, in 2008 the huge Malay vote swing was accompanied by a larger number of Chinese and Indian cross voting for PKR. The 3.75 per cent vote swing from 1999 to 2008 could be attributed to the non-Malay cross voting for PKR's Khalid Ibrahim.

Selangor

In the 1999 election, despite a significant vote swing against it, the BN won about 55 per cent of the total votes, while the Opposition failed to win any parliament seat. Reflecting the substantial swing in Malay votes against BN, UMNO candidates in many of the Malay majority parliament and state seats defeated PAS or ADIL candidates by narrow margins. Indeed, it was probably the solid support from Chinese and Indian voters that helped BN to counter its falling Malay support in the 1999 election. That a substantial number of Malay voters had shown their willingness to vote against BN, especially UMNO, led the Election Commission to implement the 2002 redelineation exercise in such a way as to strengthen UMNO further.

Disparities between Malay and non-Malay majority seats were preserved; 76.47 per cent of parliament seats and 75 per cent of state seats had a Malay majority in 1999, and the respective figures after the 2002 redelineation exercise were 77.24 per cent and 71.43 per cent. Most importantly, the new parliament and state seats were mostly mixed majority seats where no one ethnic group made up more than 60 per

cent of the majority; obviously, this type of seats played on the historical problem the Opposition had with the cross-ethnic voting barrier. The five new parliament seats of Sungai Besar, Ampang, Puchong, Kelana Jaya and Kota Raya were all mixed Malay constituencies (see Table 3.8). Thus the 2002 redelineation exercise clearly benefited UMNO, even at the expense of its non-Malay coalition partners.

In the 2008 election, Selangor registered the second highest vote swing in the country, both for parliament — 20.92 per cent — and for state — 21.13 per cent (see Table 3.10). At the parliament level, while BN and the Opposition won 65.77 per cent and 34.23 per cent respectively of the total votes in 2004, the BN's share shrank to 44.85 per cent in 2008 while the latter's increased to 55.15 per cent. Most stunning was the fact that the BN managed to win only five of the twenty-two parliament seats or about 22.7 per cent of the total number of seats (see Table 3.9). Even more impressive was that the BN only won three out of the eighteen mixed constituencies, which clearly demonstrated that the cross-ethnic voting barrier did not hinder the Opposition in 2008. Indeed, PKR won nine of the eighteen mixed seats or 50 per cent.

UMNO won four out of ten seats it contested while its non-Malay BN partners lost all but one seat. Of the four seats that UMNO won, three of them — Sabak Bernam, Sungai Besar and Tanjong Karang — were rural constituencies, which showed that the rural Malay votes in Selangor remained solidly behind UMNO; the swing vote for Sabak Bernam, Sungai Besar and Tanjong Karang were 9.06 per cent, 6.52 per cent and 10.26 per cent respectively. Sepang, the other seat that UMNO won, is a mixed Malay majority seat (Malay 58.7 per cent, Chinese 23.3 per cent,

TABLE 3.8
Ethnic Composition and Seats Won, Selangor

	Ethnic (%)			Seat won by		
	M	C	I	1999	2004	2008
Sabak Bernam	81.3	13.6	5.1	UMNO	UMNO	UMNO
Sungai Besar	67.9	30.3	1.8	new	UMNO	UMNO
Hulu Selangor	53.9	26.7	19.0	MIC	MIC	PKR
Tanjong Karang	72.1	16.7	11.1	UMNO	UMNO	UMNO
Kuala Selangor	61.0	15.6	23.3	UMNO	UMNO	PAS
Selayang	44.8	37.2	16.2	MCA	MCA	PKR
Gombak	76.0	13.5	9.9	UMNO	UMNO	PKR
Ampang	56.2	34.2	8.9	new	UMNO	PKR
Pandan	49.3	45.0	5.1	MCA	MCA	MCA
Hulu Langat	55.3	39.5	4.7	UMNO	UMNO	PAS
Serdang	36.6	52.1	10.9	MCA	MCA	DAP
Puchong	43.6	40.8	15.3	new	Gerakan	DAP
Kelana Jaya	41.9	38.7	17.9	new	MCA	PKR
Petaling Jaya Selatan	39.6	44.1	14.5	MCA	MCA	PKR
Petaling Jaya Utara	15.4	76.7	6.4	MCA	MCA	DAP
Subang	50.0	35.9	13.5	MIC	MIC	PKR
Shah Alam	68.8	15.5	15.1	UMNO	UMNO	PAS
Kapar	51.4	35.4	13.0	MIC	MIC	PKR
Klang	33.5	47.1	18.6	MCA	MCA	DAP
Kota Raja	47.8	23.2	28.3	new	MIC	PAS
Kuala Langat	55.3	29.1	18.5	UMNO	UMNO	PKR
Sepang	58.7	23.3	17.9	UMNO	UMNO	UMNO

Source: Election Commission.

TABLE 3.9
Performance of BN and PR in 2004 and 2008 General Elections by Constituency Type

	# of seats	2004				2008			
		BN	PKR	DAP	PAS	BN	PKR	DAP	PAS
Malay majority	3	3	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
Chinese majority	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Mixed	18	18	0	0	0	3	9	3	3

Indian 17.9 per cent). Even though there was a 17 per cent swing vote against UMNO, the gap was too wide for the PKR candidate to reverse (see Table 3.10).

The only other seat the BN managed to secure was Pandan, where the popular incumbent MCA candidate Ong Tee Keat narrowly defeated the PKR labour unionist candidate Syed Shahir Syed Mohamud. Syed Shahir lost by 2,961 votes even though the PAS candidate won the Chempaka state seat by 1,048 votes and the DAP candidate won the Teratai state seat by 8,085 votes. This would indicate a pattern of vote splitting, most probably by the Chinese community. In other words, Syed Shahir lost because a sizable percentage of Chinese probably voted UMNO instead of PKR at the parliament level, and voted DAP at the state level.³⁰

PAS candidates successfully defeated UMNO candidates in the mixed Malay seats of Shah Alam (30.6 per cent non-Malay) by eight or nine per cent and Kuala Selangor (38.9 per cent non-Malay) and Hulu Langat (44.2 per cent) by a very close margin of about two per cent. PAS's victory over UMNO in the largely rural Hulu Langat seat, where the majority of the Malay vote would have supported UMNO, would not have been possible without a sizable number of Chinese and Indians voting for the Islamic party. In the Kuala Selangor seat, where Indian votes make up 23.3 per cent of the electorate, PAS most likely won a huge majority of the Indian vote to narrowly defeat the UMNO candidate. In the case of Kota Raja (51.5 per cent non-Malay), the huge Indian swing vote for PAS — Indian vote making up 28.3 per cent of the electorate there — was probably accompanied by a similar swing among the Malay and

TABLE 3.10
Votes Won by and Vote Swing for the Opposition (%) by Ethnic Constituency Type, Selangor

	1999		2004		2008		Vote swing	
	Votes won (%) by Opposition		Votes won (%) by Opposition		Votes won (%) by Opposition		1999–2008	2004–08
Malay majority								
P92. Sabak Bernam	48.01		38.01		47.07		-0.94	9.06
P95. Tanjong Karang	46.49		33.00		43.26		-3.23	10.26
P98. Gombak	49.27		40.07		54.65		5.38	14.58
Mixed Malay								
P93. Sungai Besar	new		34.25		40.77		none	6.52
P94. Hulu Selangor	38		32.39		50.21		12.21	17.82
P96. Kuala Selangor	37.6		27.49		51.17		13.57	23.69
P97. Selayang	42.77		26.52		53.08		10.31	26.56
P99. Ampang	new		28.87		53.65		none	24.78
P100. Pandan								
(Ampang Jaya)	44.72		32.06		46.88		2.16	14.82
P101. Hulu Langat	46.36		30.73		51.24		4.88	20.51

P103. Puchong	new	46.62	60.94	none	14.32
P104. Kelana Jaya	new	28.48	54.53	none	26.05
P107. Subang	44.51	34.67	55.30	10.79	20.63
P108. Shah Alam	48.97	36.96	58.11	9.14	21.15
P109. Kapar	45.47	40.07	57.31	11.84	17.25
P111. Kota Raja	new	36.57	68.36	none	31.79
P112. Kuala Langat	40.39	27.01	50.94	10.55	23.94
P113. Sepang	40.81	27.93	44.94	4.13	17.01
Chinese majority					
P106. Petaling Jaya Utara	47.16	37.41	67.92	20.76	30.51
Mixed Chinese					
P102. Serdang	47.09	40.23	64.23	17.14	24.01
P105. Petaling Jaya Selatan	45.3	28.01	55.54	10.24	27.53
P110. Klang	44.35	36.98	56.47	12.12	19.49
Total	44.8	34.23	55.15	10.35	20.92

Source: Election Commission, my calculations.

Chinese if we are to account for the Islamic party's Dr Siti Mariah Mahmud defeat of the incumbent MIC S.Vigneswaran; the vote swing was 31.79 per cent, the highest in Selangor, and Dr Siti Mariah won by a massive 20,751 votes.

The DAP and PKR made a complete sweep of all the four constituencies where the Chinese made up the majority of the electorate. For Petaling Jaya Utara (PJU), rookie candidate technopreneur Tony Pua coordinated his campaign with the cooperation of PKR candidates such as Nurul Izzah and Nik Nazmi, and several civil society actors such as Raja Petra and Gayathry Venkiteswaran, Executive Director of Centre for Independent Journalism.³¹ The Chinese made up 76.7 per cent of the PJU electorate and it was probably the huge Chinese vote swing in favour of DAP that secured the victory for Tony Pua. The total vote swing was 20.76 per cent from 1999 to 2008 and 30.51 per cent from 2004 to 2008 and Tony Pua won 67.92 per cent of the total votes in 2008. Two DAP newcomers, Charles Santiago and Teo Nee Ching, won Klang (33.5 per cent Malay, 47.1 per cent Chinese, 18.6 per cent Indian) and Serdang (36.6 per cent Malay, 52.1 per cent Chinese, 10.9 per cent Indian) respectively. It was most likely the huge non-Malay vote swing against the BN, especially among Indians in Klang, that contributed to the DAP victories in Klang and Serdang. For example, if 75 per cent of non-Malays had voted DAP, then the party would have needed to receive about 20 per cent of the Malay vote to achieve its 56.47 per cent majority. In other words, the DAP probably won about a third of the Malay vote in Klang and Serdang.

The victory by PKR's Hee Loy Sian over three-term incumbent MCA candidate Donald Lim Siang Chai in the

Petaling Jaya Selatan (39.6 per cent Malay, 44.1 per cent Chinese, 14.5 per cent Indian) was a major surprise. In the 1999 election, in spite of the huge Malay vote swing, Donald Lim managed to defeat PRM candidate Syed Hussein Ali by 3,845 votes. Nevertheless, in 2008, a huge majority of Chinese and Indians voted for PKR and thus contributed to a vote swing of 27.53 per cent. Hee Loy Sian secured 55.54 per cent of the votes and defeated Donald Lim by 5,706 votes. Compared to Syed Hussein Ali in 1999, Hee Loy Sian probably gained an increased number of Indian and Chinese votes in 2008 to surpass the former's total by 12.12 per cent; the vote swing from 1999 to 2008 was 10.24 per cent.

In the mixed Malay constituency of Puchong, a vote swing of 14.32 per cent saw DAP's Gobind Singh Deo defeat Gerakan's Lau Yeng Peng by 12,600 votes.³² The old Puchong seat was won in 1986 and 1990 by V. David, former trade unionist, of DAP. Gobind's candidacy apparently brought back memories of V. David among many of the older non-Malay, and a significant number of Malay, voters and they started to call him by the nickname once reserved for V. David — 'Tiger of Puchong'. If 75 per cent of Chinese and Indian voters supported Gobind Singh, he would have needed to receive around 40 per cent of the Malay vote to reach the 60.94 per cent of the total votes that he won. As such, the DAP victory was most likely also given a boost by significant Malay cross voting.

Split voting probably contributed to the PKR victory over MIC in the traditional BN stronghold of Hulu Selangor by a narrow margin of 198 votes (spoilt votes 223) even though BN won all the state seats: Hulu Bernam (UMNO, 3,546 votes), Kuala Kubu Bharu (MCA, 448 votes) and

Batang Kali (UMNO, 2,179 votes). PKR's former Selangor Deputy Menteri Besar Zainal Abidin Ahmad probably won a significant percentage of the Malay vote (53.9 per cent of the electorate) and had that complemented by the Indian vote (19 per cent) backlash against the incumbent G. Palanivel of the MIC. The vote swing from 2004 to 2008 was 17.82 per cent, and from 1999 to 2008 was 12.21 per cent, the difference perhaps indicating the size of the non-Malay, especially Indian, vote swing in 2008.

Non-Malay PKR candidates successfully defeated MCA, MIC and Gerakan candidates in the mixed Malay seats of Selayang, Subang, Kelana Jaya and Kapar. A vote swing of 17.25 per cent saw PKR's S. Manickavasagam defeating MIC's incumbent P. Komala Devi in the largest parliament seat (112,224 voters) by 12,297 votes. In 1999, P. Komala Devi defeated PAS's Dzulkefly Ahmad by 2,860 votes. Manickavasagam probably won the majority of the Malay vote, which made up 51 per cent of the electorate, and benefited as well from the Indian vote (13 per cent of the electorate) backlash against the MIC.

That the party was more important than the candidate was evident in the case of PKR's Loh Gwo-Burne's victory over MCA's popular veteran Lee Hwa Beng in the Kelana Jaya constituency. Indeed, Loh Gwo-Burne was not even a member of PKR before he hit the headlines as the person who recorded the infamous Lingam video which Anwar released to the Malaysian public in late 2007. Loh Gwo-Burne's candidature was a last-minute decision based largely on his newly found 'celebrity' status, and indeed his campaign poster publicized his role in the Lingam video affair (see photos section).³³ With a vote swing of 26.05 per

cent, Loh Gwo-Burne garnered a total of 54.53 per cent of the votes. With an electoral make-up of 41.9 per cent Malay, 38.7 per cent Chinese and 17.9 per cent Indian, Loh Gwo-Burne's victory was probably the result of a significant percentage of Malay voters and the majority of Chinese and especially Indian voters supporting him.

The Subang parliament seat saw PKR's Sivarasa Rasiah, a former human rights lawyer, keenly contesting against MIC newcomer, Murugesan. In 1999, MIC's K.S. Nijhar defeated ADIL's Irene Fernandez by 7,152 votes. In 2008 election, a big vote swing of 20.63 per cent resulted in Sivarasa Rasiah winning 55.30 per cent of the total votes and a majority of 6,709 votes. His 55.30 percentage of the votes was 10.79 per cent more than what Irene Fernandez achieved in 1999. PKR's Elizabeth Wong³⁴ and Mohd. Nasir won the Bukit Lanjan (by 5,155 votes) and Kota Damansara (by 1,075 votes) state seat respectively, while UMNO narrowly defeated PAS in the Paya Jaras state seat (by 642 votes). From the ethnic voting of the three state seats, Sivarasa Rasiah probably won around 70 per cent of the non-Malay votes and around 40 per cent of the Malay votes.

Conclusion

If the ethnic voting pattern of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor were representative of the whole of peninsular Malaysia, then the Opposition would have won the majority of the parliament seats in peninsular Malaysia. However, that was not the case as the old ethnic voting pattern continued to prevail in the multi-ethnic states of Pahang, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, and especially Johor. Certainly, the most important

feature of the election results in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor was that the Opposition finally overcame the biggest hurdle that had prevented it from winning seats in past elections — the problem of cross-ethnic voting.

The three opposition parties — DAP, PAS and PKR — successfully defeated BN in all the mixed constituencies in Kuala Lumpur, except for Setiawangsa which had an unusually larger percentage of postal votes (26 per cent), and in fifteen out of eighteen of the mixed constituencies in Selangor. Malays in large numbers, usually about 30 to 40 per cent, were willing to cross vote for DAP candidates and significant numbers of Chinese and Indians, but less than the percentage of Malays voting DAP, were also willing to give PAS a try. Most significant of all was the Malay-dominated multiethnic PKR which appeared to appeal almost equally to all the three ethnic groups. In a sense, a vote for PKR cannot be identified as voting along ethnic lines or a cross-ethnic vote, but, rather, as a vote for a multiethnic programme, as presently represented by PKR.

Before the 2008 election, because of the ethnic voting preference and cross-ethnic voting, BN was more or less assured of winning mixed Malay or Chinese constituencies in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Suspiciously, the number of such constituencies was further increased during the 2002 redelineation exercise. The 2008 ethnic voting pattern in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor showed that once the Opposition overcame cross-ethnic voting, mixed constituencies no longer remained safe havens for BN.

Notes

1. Gabungan Pilihanraya Bersih dan Adil or Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections. Though purportedly a civil society

organization *Bersih*'s steering committee comprises members of both non-governmental organizations and opposition political parties.

2. After the 1987 UMNO split, BN had been losing Kelantan to PAS since the 1990 general election. In the political backlash triggered by the brutal treatment of Anwar Ibrahim in 1998, BN lost Trengganu to PAS in the 1999 general election.
3. I take cross-ethnic voting to mean voting across ethnic lines, that is, contra voting for a party representing one's ethnic group. However, cross-ethnic voting could be used as a strategy to express dissatisfaction with the party representing one's ethnic group, i.e. a protest vote. For example, a Malay vote for the DAP could just be a protest vote against UMNO and not because he identifies with the DAP's multi-ethnic policies. Similarly, a Chinese or an Indian vote for PKR or PAS could also be a protest vote against MCA/Gerakan or MIC respectively.
4. Also, the discussion in this paper is confined to peninsular Malaysia. Sabah and Sarawak electoral politics are very different from that on the peninsular. The main difference is that in Sabah and Sarawak the Malays are not the majority group and as such are not the politically dominant group there.
5. Three ethnic-based parties, UMNO, MCA and MIC, made up the initial ruling coalition, the Alliance. After the 1969 electoral setbacks, the Alliance was replaced by BN, formally registered on the July 1, 1974. BN is a broader coalition of largely ethnic-based parties.
6. "The DAP, despite its multiracial claim, is also caught in this web. Communalism existed before the DAP was formed and will continue even if it were proscribed, because every Malaysian in his daily life is continually exposed to it and socialized to accept it as a reality. It would be naïve to expect otherwise." (Ong 1978, p. 169).

7. Up to 1995, UMNO would generally win 70 per cent and PAS 30 per cent of the Malay vote in peninsular Malaysia but of course unevenly spread out from state to state.
8. Although there were ideological differences between UMNO and Semangat 46, the latter remained a party that wholly represented Malay interests and thus received support largely from the Malay community.
9. For an understanding of the unique political history and condition of Kelantan, see Kessler (1978).
10. For the close election contest between UMNO and PAS in Kedah in 1978, see Mahadzir (1980).
11. We will call a constituency with more than 70 per cent Malay or Chinese majority a Malay or Chinese majority constituency respectively. A constituency with less than 70 per cent will be called mixed Malay or Chinese constituency.
12. See Loh (2003). Although Kit Siang won the majority of the Chinese vote, nevertheless the trend was one of declining support for the DAP.
13. Constituency delineation is conducted every ten years by the theoretically independent Election Commission of Malaysia. However, in practice, it appears that the Election Commission has not always acted independently. See Lim (2005).
14. ADIL and PRM later merged to form Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR).
15. The Malay-majority here refers to seats with more than a 66 per cent majority. All seats in Kelantan and Trengganu are Malay-majority seats.
16. See Funston (2000) and Weiss (2000) for detail analyses of the 1999 election.
17. For a thorough analysis of the importance of the electoral delineation exercise in reinforcing BN-UMNO electoral dominance, see Lim (2003).

18. The BA fell apart shortly after the 1999 election when the DAP decided to opt out.
19. Out of the twenty-eight state seats, the DAP won nine, Gerakan, then an opposition party, won four and one seat fell to an independent candidate. See Vasil (1972) for an analysis of the 1969 election.
20. The same formula was also used by the parties even though DAP was not part of the coalition. It was only after the election that DAP joined PKR and PAS to form Pakatan Rakyat (PR). The reason DAP did not join before the election was because it feared the Islamic card being played up, which caused DAP a lot of non-Malay votes in the 1999 election.
21. I attended a couple of rallies by the two candidates. In a morning rally at the Overseas Union Garden wet market, Carol Chew only managed to garner a small crowd to listen to her speeches. In contrast, the popularity of Teresa Kok was clearly demonstrated by the rousing reception that received her when she made her rounds. Carol Chew's campaign also made a major blunder in using "sexist" posters to criticize Teresa Kok's running for both the Seputeh parliamentary seat and Kinrara state seat (see photos section).
22. For the 2004 election, the 304-vote victory margin was also partly the result of a four-corner fight where Wee Choo Keong, the former DAP Bukit Bintang MP, contesting under the banner of the Malaysian Democratic Party, won 1,107 votes and independent candidate Billie Lim Peng Soon won 132 votes.
23. A simple formula is used to estimate ethnic voting for the Opposition; $(\text{proportion of non-Malay voting Opposition}) \times (\text{percentage of non-Malay voters in seat}) + (\text{proportion of Malay voting Opposition}) \times (\text{percentage of Malay voters in seat}) = \text{percentage won by Opposition}$.

24. Importantly, Anwar Ibrahim campaigned in Titiwangsa for Dr Lo Lo on March 6 in Kampung Bharu and his ceramah was attended by non-Malays as well.
25. In a sense, the vote swing from 1999 to 2008 would largely account for the increase in the number of non-Malays voting for the Opposition in 2008, if we assume that the percentage of Malays voting for the Opposition in 2008 was more or less as in 1999.
26. On March 7, 2008, the DPM and Anwar campaigned that night for their respective candidates. Even though Sharhrizat's ceramah was held in a centrally located space next to the new Bangsar Shopping Center, with entertainment provided by three well-known artistes, free drinks and food and the presence of the DPM, only about 400 to 500 people showed up. In contrast, thousands of people, the majority Malays, waited in the rain, braving various inconveniences like massive traffic jams, until close to midnight to hear Anwar Ibrahim in Pantai Dalam. Before Anwar and Nurul, there were also other speakers like Raja Petra and Raja Devan (*Hindraf*).
27. Also contesting was an independent candidate Periasamy Nagaratnam who lost his deposit because he did not receive the required percentage of votes.
28. A part of Wangsa Maju was carved out to form the new Setiawangsa seat during the 2002 redelineation exercise.
29. The majority of Indian vote in Batu probably support PKR. In the largely Indian area of Sentul, located in Batu constituency, one would not see any poster of Samy Vellu or MIC either.
30. Nevertheless, it appears that in 2008 the number of seats where there was vote splitting was much fewer than in past elections. Vote splitting used to be quite prevalent in Penang where non-Malays would vote Opposition for parliament and BN for state.

31. I attended several ceramahs, all of which drew large crowds, by Tony Pua and his team. The most memorable was one night in SS2 Petaling Jaya when it was raining heavily and yet many people stayed on. Raja Petra was one of the guests and he was probably the most entertaining speaker that night.
32. Huge crowds, mostly Chinese and Indians, attended the several ceramahs organized by Puchong DAP, especially the night of March 5, 2008 at Tanah Lapang, Bandar Puchong Jaya when Lim Kit Siang spoke.
33. As a speaker, from a couple of ceramah I attended, Loh did not come across well and in fact showed a rather rudimentary understanding and knowledge of the issues of the day. Nevertheless, he was greatly assisted by other speakers from PKR, DAP and PAS, especially Nik Nazmi (PKR) and Hannah Yeoh (DAP) who were running for the Seri Setia and Subang Jaya state seats respectively. Nik Nazmi was instrumental in organizing a nightly ceramah at the Glomac Center for the duration of the election campaign.
34. On the evening of March 6, 2008, Sivarasa and Elizabeth Wong spoke at Bandar Utama 3, an affluent neighbourhood, at the invitation of the resident association. The President of the resident association mentioned that the multi-ethnic crowd of 400 to 500 was much bigger than the one that attended the MCA's candidate ceramah. Also, the donations that night was the biggest Sivarasa's campaign had collected.

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Postscript

Anwar's Path to Power goes via Permatang Pauh

On August 26, 2008, former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim managed to do what the snap general elections earlier that year had stopped him from doing. He succeeded in returning to the Dewan Negara (Lower House of Parliament) after an absence of exactly ten years.

That day, he won the by-election in his home base of Permatang Pauh in the state of Penang, and did it by substantially widening the already impressive margin of victory achieved by his wife Wan Azizah Wan Ismail in the general elections held about six months earlier.

This latest triumph is one rung higher in Anwar's climb towards the pinnacle of political power from which he fell in 1998. Sacked and arrested in September that year by his mentor-turned nemesis, Dr Mahathir Mohamed, Anwar suffered a bad beating while in detention and endured a subsequent humiliating and sordid trial. In 1999, he was sentenced to six years in jail for corruption, and the following year to nine years for sodomy in 1999. He was released in 2004 when the split decision in the Federal Court overturned the latter conviction on appeal.

Nevertheless, the prison term disqualified him from running for office until April 15, 2008. Strangely, Prime

Minister Abdullah Badawi, who had won the biggest mandate in Malaysian history in 2004, chose to schedule early elections for March 8, one week before the ban on Anwar to run for office would run out.

The nature of Anwar's by-election success is significant in a number of ways. First, it showed that although voters — at least those in Permatang Pauh — may have been surprised at their own cheek in acting so forcefully against the government in the earlier election, half a year later they were apparently not regretting having made that stand.

Second, the by-election was also the first one to be lost, and badly at that, by the formidable electoral machine of the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) since Abdullah Badawi became premier in 2003. The fall in support for the government seemed to be continuing.

Furthermore, Permatang Pauh is a constituency where almost 70 per cent of its constituents are Malays.¹ The rest are mainly Chinese, with the Indians, the community most disenchanted with the BN at the moment, making up a mere 5.7 per cent of the voting population. But despite the BN using racial arguments in the campaign and despite the fact that Anwar's party, the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), continued to propound a multiracial line, Anwar won almost 70 per cent of the votes.

Just as notable is the fact that the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) made full use of the sodomy charge against Anwar during the campaign period. His former aide, Mohamed Saiful Bukhari Azlan, had claimed that he had been sodomized against his will by Anwar. He then swore on the Quran that his story was true, thus bringing a controversial religious ritual into the basically secular business of voting.

To add to the confusion, deputy premier Najib Abdul Razak also swore in a mosque on August 22 that he had never known the Mongolian woman, Altantuya Shariibuu, who was grotesquely murdered in Kuala Lumpur two years ago.² His former advisor, Abdul Razak Baginda, is being tried for that crime. Anwar's camp had been making claims that Najib was in some way involved with the crime.

Despite calls to perform a similar ritual as Saiful had done, Anwar refused. Claims that this response would hurt his credibility among Malay voters proved to be unfounded.

These events suggest, as a third point, that if issues of race and religion did play a role in the voting, it was as a detriment to the BN.

Fourth, Anwar's candidacy ended Wan Azizah's ten-year virginal over the seat. She had expressly been keeping it in trust for her husband, almost losing it in 2004 when she hung on to it by a slim 590-vote majority.

Fifth, with Anwar's ascendance to a position of power, the Malay ground may be said to have split into three distinct fragments. UMNO continues to stand for a Malay-first policy, while Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) propounds a religious basis for the country's nation building. How Islam is to be defined and how it is to relate to what is commonly known as secularism will be the major issues that will occupy its thinkers in the immediate future. PKR, in turn, relies on support from educated urban Malays to exemplify its Malay-led brand of multiracialism.

Anwar's arrest in 1998 had drawn on social discontent among different races to form what become known as the *Reformasi* movement. Although the party founded to front it, which later became the PKR, remained weak until

March 8 this year, the movement inspired many young Malaysians to interest themselves in politics. One could argue that these have now come of age, and their activism is reflected in the rise of the new coalition, the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) headed by Anwar.³

Despite evident weaknesses in its structure, the PR sees itself as the government-in-waiting that will soon end the 51-year-old rule of UMNO and its allies. With a redoubtable coalition behind him, Anwar is aiming to make that wait as short as possible. The BN, on the other hand, is hoping that his political career will be over for good if he is convicted for sodomy again.

In the meantime, the return of real political competition in Malaysia cannot but bring about great and beneficial changes. Anwar is the frontman for that new force for now, but the social longing for change certainly goes beyond him, his party and his coalition.

In summary, the drama we witnessed on March 2008 is not about Anwar Ibrahim; it is not about the PKR; and it is not about the Pakatan Rakyat. It is about the beginning of a new act in Malaysia's nation-building play. That act, many would argue, has been delayed for too long to the detriment of the whole country.

There is now a lot of catching up to be done.

Notes

1. <www.undi.info>.
2. "Dato Seri Najib swears not knowing or had any connection with Altantuya", <http://besonline.rtm.gov.my/details.php?id=2820&pageno=2&field=na_Title&order=ASC&title=National>.

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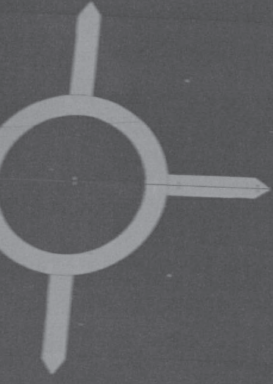
Ooi Kee Beng
September 2008

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P1: Makkal Sakti ('People Power' in Tamil) became a popular slogan at opposition rallies. Here, a PKR banner declares it at a major roundabout in Batu Kawan, Penang. *Photo taken by Ooi Kee Beng.*



P2: (Top) “New Hope for Malaysia” is announced in a PKR poster in Penang. (Bottom) DAP newcomer P. Ramasamy, formerly professor in political science at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, managed to defeat Penang’s Chief Minister Koh Tsu Koon in Batu Kawan. Here, their posters do battle. *Photos taken by Ooi Kee Beng.*



P3: (Top) An opposition banner serves to remind voters of Education Minister Hishammuddin Hussein's waving an unsheathed keris at UMNO general assemblies. (Bottom) Posters of DAP veteran Karpal Singh line a sideroad at Air Itam, Penang. Photos taken by Ooi Kee Beng.



P4: (Top) A DAP flag at a car park.

(Bottom) "Only One Choice", claims a BN poster outside Penang's Methodist Boys' School.

Photos taken by Ooi Kee Beng.



P5: Anwar Ibrahim speaks at the well-attended DAP rally held at Han Chiang High School Stadium on January 31, 2008. Photo taken by Ooi Kee Beng.



P6: (Top) The banner battle is fought in all nooks and corners of Penang.

(Bottom) Lim Guan Eng speaks at the well-attended DAP rally held at Han Chiang High School Stadium on January 31, 2008. *Photos taken by Ooi Kee Beng.*

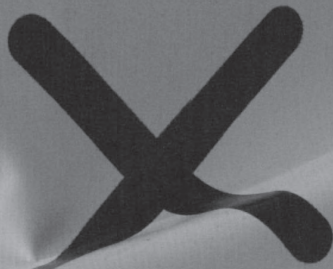
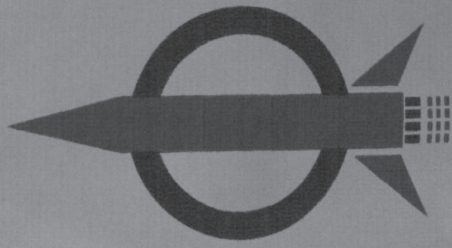
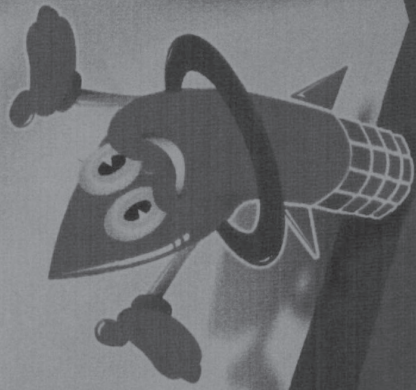


P7: (Top) PKR flags line a major road in Batu Uban, Penang.

(Bottom) Gerakan's acting president Koh Tsu Koon, campaigns at the Batu Lancang market in the middle of the day. *Photos taken by Ooi Kee Beng.*



P8: (Top) Gerakan's acting president Koh Tsu Koon gives support to state level candidates. (Bottom) DAP campaign poster introducing blogger Jeff Ooi and Law Heng Kiang. Photos taken by Ooi Kee Beng.



**JUST
CHANGE IT!**

P9: In response to Gerakan's call to "Keep Reinventing", the DAP issues the admonishment, "Just Change It". Photo taken by Ooi Kee Beng.



P10: BN and UMNO posters and flags line a low-cost housing area in Penang. Photo taken by Ooi Kee Beng.



P11: (Top) The DAP wages a successful banner battle against the Gerakan government. Here, poster declares, “The Gerakan Reinvents Itself, the People is Re-victimised”. (Bottom) DAP banners in Jelutong, Penang. *Photos taken by Ooi Kee Beng.*



P12: (Top) A DAP banner in Jelutong.
(Bottom) Banners and posters in Pulau Tikus village, Penang.
Photos taken by Ooi Kee Beng.



P13: The opposition holds a huge rally on the school field at Han Chiang High School on February 6. A crowd estimated at anything from 30,000 to 50,000 turns up past midnight despite rain. *Photo taken by Ooi Kee Beng.*



P14: (Top) The opposition depended on young volunteers during the campaigning. Here, a group of young volunteers helping Liew Chin Tong, the DAP parliamentary candidate for Bukit Bendera, celebrate their success.

(Bottom) DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng's campaign headquarters in Air Itam.
Photos taken by Ooi Kee Beng.



P15: (Top) A PAS poster announcing a prayer meeting and rally, in Jeli, Kelantan. (Bottom) Anwar Ibrahim speaks at one of his many rallies, this one in Sungei Batu, Penang. Photos taken by Johan Saravanamuttu.



Gwo-Burne Loh

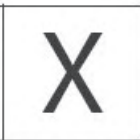
罗国本



Kelana Jaya, Parliament P104



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 Rasuah **Corruption** 贪污
 Inflasi **Hyper-Inflation** 货物澎涨
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135 Jalan SS 19/6,
 Subang Jaya,
 46100 Petaling Jaya,
 Selangor

www.lohgwoburne.blogspot.com

P16: (Top) A BN poster ridicules DAP candidate Teresa Kok. Analysts suspect it backfired badly on the BN. *Photo taken by Lee Hock Guan.*

(Bottom) Campaign poster for Loh Gwo-Burne, the man who videotaped the Lingam Tape. *Photo taken by Ooi Kee Beng.*

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