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THE MARCH 2008 GENERAL ELECTION IN MALAYSIA AS A HISTORICAL CONJUNCTURE

Johan Saravanamuttu

This chapter argues that the twelfth general election of 8 March 2008 in Malaysia was a watershed political event, which may be appreciated as a historical conjuncture, following Ganesan.¹ Certainly, 8 March altered significantly the political parameters of electoral politics and, as I have argued elsewhere, constituted or at least contributed to a reconfiguration of the political landscape in Malaysia.² In terms of electoral politics, it may be suggested that 8 March created a *de facto* and perhaps a *de jure* two-party (or two coalition) system if one considers both the parliamentary and state levels of governance. The character of Malaysian federalism may have paradoxically allowed for such a development.

The event saw the ruling National Front (Barisan Nasional) government lose its two-thirds share of seats in parliament which it had held since Malaysia became independent in 1957. The opposition parties, later formalized as the People's Alliance (Pakatan Rakyat),³ won a total of 82 out of the 222 seats up for contest. The National Front barely won 50 per cent of the 7.9 million ballots cast, demonstrating that the electorate was

virtually split down the middle. Furthermore, five state governments fell to opposition hands, unprecedented in Malaysian history. This essay argues that the political moment creating a two-party system in Malaysia was reinforced by several subsequently held by-elections after 8 March. The outcome of these by-elections indicates that the momentum and the factors that explain the 8 March result continue to drive current political developments. Factors driving Malaysia's new politics are both a function of its political transformations which have disembedded political legacies since arguably the 1980s and certainly after Anwar Ibrahim's sacking and incarceration in 1998. I suggest that while ethnicity remains a crucial variable in Malaysian politics, cross-ethnic voting represents the driver of Malaysia's new politics. Citizens across the board are now more informed of universal issues such as corruption and minority rights.

The path-dependency notion of "increasing returns" could be usefully applied to the 8 March conjuncture in that the series of nine by-elections held up until the end of 2009 saw seven won by the People's Alliance. This provides "diachronic" validation to the fact that the event of 8 March was no political fluke. Contrariwise, the increasing returns argument could well be applied to the ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional, with "first mover advantage" in electoral politics for decades, given its copious political and economic investments in institutions which reproduce ethnicized political structures. The fact that path dependency was dented on 8 March suggests to this author that a new path dependency based on a radically altered mode of political mobilization may have taken root in the Malaysian political system. This need not mean a departure from ethnicized politics, but a political shift in the direction of more universalist, participatory politics. This argument will be developed in the course of this chapter and in the conclusion.

An important theoretical point has been raised by O'Shannassy, who sought to answer the question of whether 8 March represented a "truly progressive moment, one that is long-term and structural, or is this instead a short-term, regressive, "restorative" moment?"⁴ Invoking a Gramscian perspective, O'Shannassy seems to suggest that the jury is still out on this question although certain transformative elements of politics seem to have surfaced with 8 March. The view taken here is that such a Gramscian analysis probably understates significant political developments of an electoral sort which are closer to reformist rather than "revolutionary" developments in Malaysian politics. We will return to this question in the conclusion of this chapter.

The chapter begins with a section contextualizing the 8 March event and its outcome examining the *reformasi* movement and the emergence of new politics in Malaysia. It argues that the 8 March outcome was driven mainly by domestic political developments with little or no external impetus. A second section of the paper delves into the character of Malaysian ethnic politics and examines the significance of cross-ethnic voting on 8 March. The third section of the paper analyses the outcomes of by-elections after 8 March as well as other political developments.

CONTEXTUALIZING MARCH 2008 AS HISTORICAL CONJUNCTURE

The 8 March historical conjuncture needs to be contextualized by the rise of “new politics” in Malaysia, which was an outcome of the *reformasi* movement.⁵ The movement was in turn sparked by the Anwar Ibrahim imbroglio, which saw the erstwhile Deputy Prime Minister and deputy leader of the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) incarcerated for what many have alleged to have been fabricated charges of political corruption and sexual misdemeanour. The Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who saw Anwar as a political threat, was instrumental in bringing about the Anwar episode. Driven by and spearheaded by Malay reformist groups, the *reformasi* movement went well beyond the demand for Anwar’s release and Mahathir’s resignation to valorize such issues as “the rule of law”, “participatory democracy” and “justice for all”. Specifically the reforms⁶ called for the removal of the Internal Security Act (ISA), for “accountancy” and “transparency” in decision-making and the eradication of “corruption, cronyism and nepotism”. The formation of two civil society driven umbrella organizations called Gagasan Rakyat and Gerak was evidence that a large sector of the Malay middle class was involved in reform politics, which was then insitutionalized in the form of the Barisan Alternatif (BA), comprising the PKN (Parti Keadilan Nasional, the predecessor of the PKR, or People’s Justice Party), PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia) and DAP (Democratic Action Party). Writing on the significance of the *reformasi* movement, Weiss has argued that it represented a major shift in Malay politics and was distinctive in terms of its coherent aims, its innovative tactics of mobilization and organization and its substantive significance in terms of institution building. She further argues that it was distinctive because “the movement reflected the long-term demographic

and ideational shifts, including the development of a multiracial ‘new’ middle class and gradually rising support for social issues”.⁷ This “new politics” as explained by Loh and Saravanamuttu⁸ was characterized by the fragmentation of Malaysia’s ethnic communities and by that token a devaluation of ethnicism coupled with the rise of participatory politics:

[That] ethnicism no longer overwhelms the other discourses of Malaysian politics as it used to, at least not to the same predictable extent. For a large multi-ethnic middle-class coalition now exists in Malaysia, factions of which have become increasingly critical of the BN government, not just its resort to the politics of ethnicism but also its authoritarianism and economic policies increasingly riddled with cronyism.⁹

Most importantly, Weiss talks about how the institutional development of the *reformasi* changed from a collection of largely inchoate protestors into the broad based Gagasan and Gerak formations and then into the BA. She argues that the BA was the logical extension of the *reformasi* into Malaysian coalition politics, with four key institutional developments:

- First, the BA’s commitment to displacing race as the central organizing principle of political contestation, all BA parties being non-racial ones, contra those of the BN;
- The BA’s principle of opposing patronage politics, i.e., objective of eliminating corruption, cronyism and nepotism;
- The BA’s contempt for “politics as usual” and debunking of old-style money politics and that politics should not just be left to politicians;
- The role of civil society agents (CSAs) which clearly laid claim to a niche in BA politics, whether working directly with political parties or as candidates endorsing particular policy positions.¹⁰

The outcome of the 1999 general election showed that new politics had gained traction perhaps more with Malays than with non-Malays at that stage. The BN’s landslide win in the 2004 general election saw a swing against a waning opposition front weakened by a lack of leadership because of Anwar’s imprisonment and the squabbling over the issue of an Islamic state which caused the departure of the DAP from BA. The electoral performance of the BN under Abdullah Badawi in 2004 has also been attributed to his hijacking of *reformasi* agendas by the ruling coalition.

For these reasons, it is thus argued here that the March 2008 electoral outcome as a natural development of new politics produced a necessary historical rupture and thus spurred the onset of a new path-dependent trajectory in Malaysian politics. However, it should be noted that the event may not be of the same order of a “critical juncture” of the sort alluded to by Collier and Collier,¹¹ namely, that it produces a distinctly new legacy by ending an old one, such as demolishing an *ancien régime*. In my reckoning, there would continue to be important continuities in politics after the 2008 general election. Secondly, the critical junctures identified by the Colliers in Latin America spanned periods of nine to twenty-three years.¹² March 2008 was but about ten years after the antecedent event of *reformasi* which generated the reform politics alluded to above. Its electoral antecedent was the 1999 general election which is acknowledged to have been “underwhelming” certainly when compared with what happened later in 2008. Nonetheless, the argument is that path dependence was created from 1999 which had valorized democracy, the discourse of social justice and participatory politics. Malaysian politics has changed palpably and radically but perhaps not to the extent implied by Collier and Collier and much will depend on further developments in the years following 2008.

THE 8 MARCH DECISION

There is little denying that the year 2008 will be remembered as a watershed in Malaysian electoral politics. The then Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi already had more than his fair share of problems to deal with even before his tenure headed into 2008. After the 25 November 2007 rally on the streets of Kuala Lumpur involving some 30,000 Indians, five Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF)¹³ lawyers were detained under the draconian Internal Security Act (ISA) that allows for detention without trial, while one was at large. The V.K. Lingam video exposé in September and the Royal Commission of Inquiry of January 2008 remained much in the public consciousness,¹⁴ so too the Mongolian model Altantuya’s murder trial which implicated Najib Razak and had dragged on from 2007. Interfaith fractures, which had surfaced since 2005, remained largely unresolved along with internal squabbles within the ruling coalition parties. Most sensationally, the MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) Minister of Health had to resign because of the circulation of a sex video by his detractors. Finally, the economy was not in great shape with petrol

prices and inflation spiking and former premier Dr Mahathir still sniping Abdullah from the sidelines. Yet speculation was rife by early 2008 that an early election would be called presumably to salvage the premier's beleaguered situation, more than one year in advance of the mandatory five years. In a CNN interview Abdullah did admit that a fresh mandate was necessary for him to address a host of new issues and to make good his unfulfilled anti-corruption agenda.

During the event, parliament and state assemblies, with the exception of Sarawak, were dissolved on 13 February 2008. The Election Commission called for nominations on 24 February for the 12th General Election of Malaysia to be held on 8 March 2008. An unusually long period of thirteen days was given for campaigning and some 222 parliamentary seats were in contention along with 505 state seats. Two days before election day, Malaysian analysts (including me) speaking at a seminar were not prepared to concede that the Barisan Nasional (BN) would lose its two-thirds majority in parliament, let alone four more state governments.¹⁵

THE ELECTION OUTCOME

The outcome of the 8 March 2008 general election has been dubbed a "political tsunami" that some have argued brought about a tectonic shift to the Malaysian political landscape. The other hyperbole used was "a perfect storm".¹⁶ But veteran political analyst Khoo Boo Teik strikes a more cautious note:

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.¹⁷

This observation notwithstanding, the three major ethnic communities — Malays, Chinese and Indians — and almost all the Peninsular states¹⁸ swung decisively in favour of opposition parties as shown in Table 8.1 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. However, more sceptical analysts may suggest that basically Malaysian politics remained 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

Table 8.1
Results of Parliamentary Election, 2008

Party	Votes	%	Seat	%
Barisan Nasional	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
Pakatan Rakyat	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.

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 and Von Vorys on “communalism” in Malaysia.¹⁹ Not totally rejecting this paradigm, this essay suggests that a sensibility to universal values such as human rights and even class or bread-and-butter issues have become increasingly germane to an understanding of election results.²⁰

It is now recognized that the 8 March general election in terms of enduring political outcomes has surpassed the 1969 watershed general election which triggered the outbreak of riots in Kuala Lumpur on 13 May.²¹ The 2008 outburst of election rallies throughout the campaign period by opposition parties was oddly reminiscent of May 1969, but perhaps eclipsing the 1969 campaign by the sheer numbers that attended such rallies throughout the country.²² One large rally in Penang saw some 50,000 in attendance, a turnout that was clearly unprecedented.²³

Despite the ruling BN coalition losing its hold on the two-thirds majority of seats, no untoward events occurred after 8 March, speaking

well for the fact that Malaysian society had arrived at a political threshold where violence as an instrument of change was eschewed.

What then are the salient facts of the 2008 outcome? The BN government arguably suffered its worst defeat in history with a loss of its two-thirds majority of seats. As shown in Table 8.2, the BN government also just about lost the popular vote in Peninsular Malaysia, including the loss of four state governments while one continued to be in opposition hands. There was a vote swing away from the BN government in every state in the Peninsula.

Table 8.3, based on estimates, shows that Chinese and Indian voters clearly preferred the opposition parties while Malays still had a preference, but a reduced one, for the BN parties. The most significant swing came from Indians, who evidently abandoned the ethnically constituted Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). The Chinese voters also swung palpably in the direction of ostensibly non-Chinese parties, dealing the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) its poorest showing since 1969.

Most significant, I would argue, was that Malaysia edged towards a formal parliamentary two-party system and in fact instituted a two-party system at the state-level of governance. Let us now turn briefly to the

Table 8.2
Percentage of Votes for Opposition Candidates, Parliament, 1995–2008

State	1995	1999	2004	2008	Change 2004–8
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: Khoo, *Aliran Monthly* 28, no. 3 (2008): 4.

Table 8.3
The Malay, Chinese and Indian Vote for BN, per cent²⁴

	1995	1999	2004	2008	Change 2004–8
Malay	69	53	63	58	5
Chinese	56	62	65	35	30
Indian	96	75	82	47	35

Source: *Straits Times*, 11 March 2008.

election results, a summary of which is found in Table 8.1. Some of the salient outcomes of 8 March could be said to be the following:

- The BN barely got half (50.1 per cent) of the 7.9 million ballots cast nationwide and lost the popular vote on the Peninsula, garnering only 49 per cent of the ballots.
- The BN lost its two-thirds majority in parliament, winning 140 federal seats and 307 state seats; the opposition took 82 and 198 respectively.
- The BN lost the state governments of Selangor, Penang, Perak and Kedah, while Kelantan remained in opposition hands. (In its worst performances of the past, BN had failed to capture only two state governments, Kelantan and Terengganu, in 1959 and 1999).
- BN casualties included the Women, Family and Community Development Minister, Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, Information Minister Zainuddin Maidin, the presidents of the Malaysian Indian Congress, S. Samy Velu, People's Progressive Party (PPP), M. Kayveas, and Gerakan, Koh Tsu Koon.
- Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS)'s women's wing chief Lo' Lo' Mohd Ghazali became the second woman from the party to win a parliamentary seat (the first was Khadijah Sidek in 1959).

One of the more significant aspects of 2008 in contrast to previous general elections, was the comprehensive vote swing of all major ethnic communities away from the BN parties. Political scientist Ong Kian Ming has estimated that some 30–35 per cent of non-Malay voters swung to the opposition parties, compared with the popular vote in the previous election of 2004. Although the overall corresponding swing for Malays was only about 5 per cent, Ong has argued 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% and was closer to 10% 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.²⁵

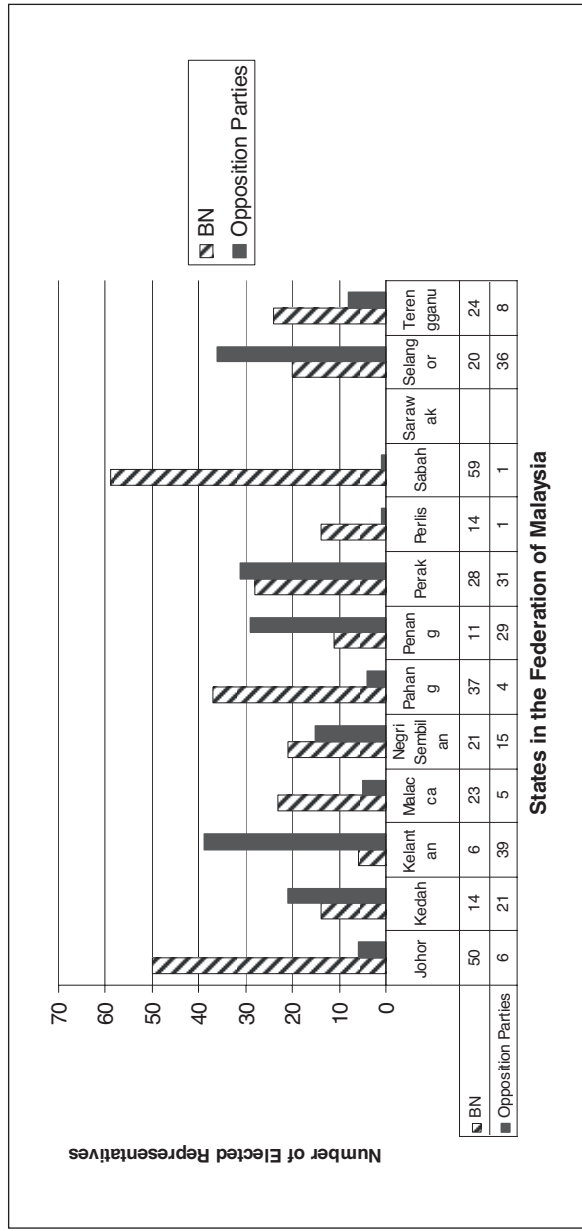
Nationwide, in mixed seats where the electorate formed 40–60 per cent of Malay voters, the BN won 28 seats and the opposition 26 seats, showing that the alternative Pakatan had become a veritable contender to the BN and in some sense was emulating BN's model of electoral success.²⁶ It could well be argued that cross-ethnic voting accounted for a significant number of victories of the Pakatan and, had the pattern of cross-ethnic voting which occurred in the Kelang Valley been replicated in states like Pahang, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan and Johor, the BN government might well have been toppled on 8 March.²⁷

A TWO-PARTY SYSTEM

The fact that Malaysia may have become a *de jure* two-party system at the state level can be attributed to the stunning victories of the Pakatan coalition of forces led by Anwar Ibrahim as shown in Figure 8.1. In fact some analysts have pointed out that the sixth state to fall was the federal territory of Kuala Lumpur, where all but one parliamentary seat out of 12 seats went to the Pakatan.²⁸ Anwar further reinforced the 8 March outcome by sweeping the Permatang Pauh by-election with a majority of well over 15,000 votes on 26 August and was subsequently officially anointed as Leader of the Opposition in Parliament.

First, it must be stressed that the major change in the political landscape is the still nascent, two-party (or two-coalition) system at the state level, where Pakatan governments initially ran five governments, namely, Selangor, Penang, Perak, Kedah and Kelantan.²⁹ In these states the BN found itself in the unfamiliar role of opposition, except in Kelantan where this had been the case for about two decades. One could well argue that Malaysian democracy has perhaps arrived at a new threshold and that citizens could now have the opportunity to judge four alternative state governments and choose to re-elect or reject them the next time around. As such, the formalization of the Pakatan coalition as an alternative coalition to

Figure 8.1
Malaysian Election 2008: Distribution of Seats Won in Each State Legislature



Source: Computed from Election Commission data.

the National Front appears to be *fait accompli*. Unlike its predecessor, the Alternative Front (*Barisan Alternatif*) of 1998–99, the Pakatan governmental presence seems guaranteed for some time to come by virtue of state power. By late 2009, the Pakatan had announced a common political manifesto and agreed to a common logo, like the BN. Its registration awaits the approval of the Registrar of Societies at the time of writing.

Second, the obverse trend may be true for the BN coalition. This long-standing coalition is clearly in a state of flux if not turmoil. Already one component party, the Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) has left the BN coalition (on 17 September 2008) while the Gerakan and even the MCA have noted their deep disaffection with UMNO politics. These two Chinese-based component parties are themselves in a state of political reinvention, spurning an earlier suggestion of merger. After the 8 March result, one senior woman leader and her supporters left the MCA and joined Anwar's party.³⁰ Most significantly, former UMNO law minister Zaid Ibrahim and former MCA vice president Chua Jui Meng became members of the PKR.³¹ The suggestion by the Gerakan President Koh Tsu Koon to have direct membership in the BN and to turn it eventually into a multiracial party is a veiled critique of the current poor formula of racial power sharing within the National Front today. The leader of Sabah's native-based United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Murut Organization (UPKO), Bernard Dompok, has also expressed grave concern about the failure of the National Front government to deal with three urgent matters, namely, the unequal exchange of economic benefits to Sabah and its concomitant status as Malaysia's poorest state, the issue of religious freedom and the unresolved problem of the influx of more than one million illegal immigrants into Sabah.³²

However, not all was necessarily rosy for the Pakatan governments in the aftermath of 8 March. Taking the instance of Penang, the DAP-led government may have weathered a number of UMNO-generated political storms and self-inflicted faux pas but the going has been tough, admitted as much by Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng.³³ Similarly, the PKR-led Selangor government also had its fill of challenges but it seems to be holding firm. The most outrageous development was the power grab by the BN of the Perak state government in February 2009 (to be discussed further later). The PAS-led government of Kedah also has its own political hiccups.

At the federal level, the formation of a strong parliamentary opposition with 82 seats seems to be having a noticeable impact on the BN, even

without a no-confidence vote against the government.³⁴ The Malaysian budget for 2009 was made somewhat irrelevant by the global financial crisis in October 2008, with the new Finance Minister introducing new measures such as the injection of a RM7 billion ringgit stimulus package for the economy.³⁵ By the end of 2008, UMNO appeared to have re-established itself under its new leader, Najib Razak, whose actions (at the time of writing) have been partially successful in checking the negative effects of the 8 March outcome for the ruling coalition while managing damage control in BN politics up to a point.

ETHNIC AND CROSS-ETHNIC VOTING ON 8 MARCH

In trying to comprehend the nature of ethnic voting patterns in 2008, the overall swing in popular votes deserves deeper analysis which we will now undertake. As can be seen from Table 8.3, 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 government coalition lost the popular vote for the entire country. In 2008 the BN barely scraped through and showed even poorer performance in terms of the percentage of parliamentary seats secured.

Below are three scatter plots (Figures 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4) 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 are displayed. Ethnic proportionality in terms of Malay, Chinese and Indian votes is measured by simple percentage as again 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 find their electoral success in mixed constituencies despite their ethnic

Figure 8.2
Proportion of Malay Voters for Each Seat Won by Political Parties

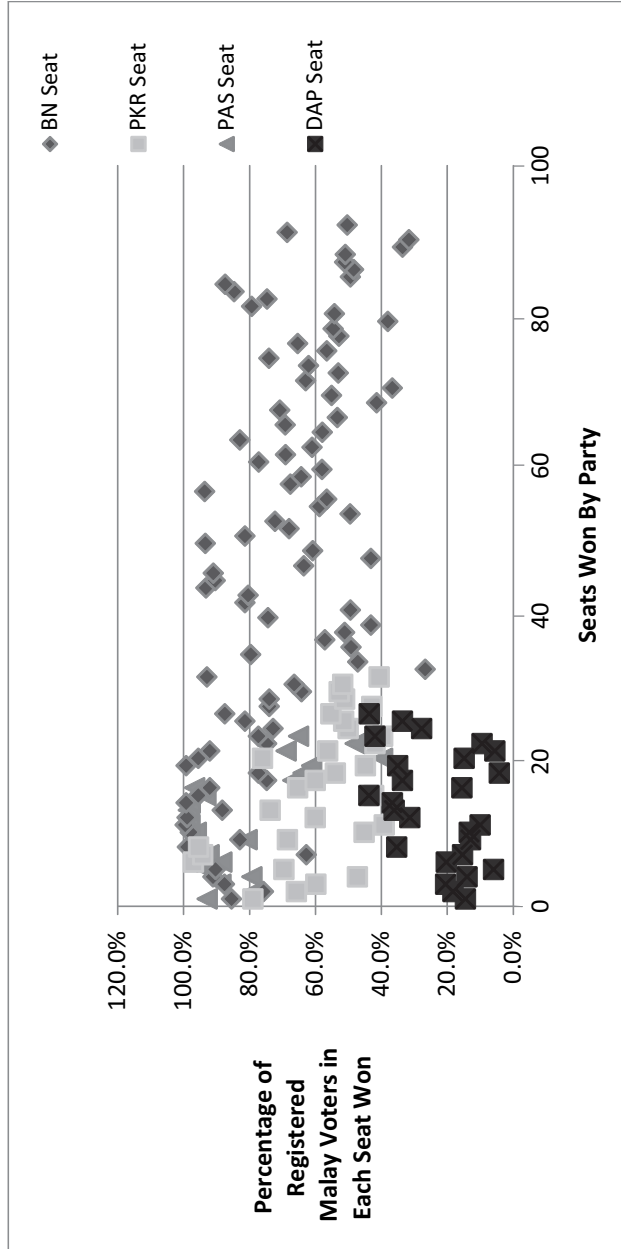


Figure 8.3
Proportion of Chinese Voters by Seats Won

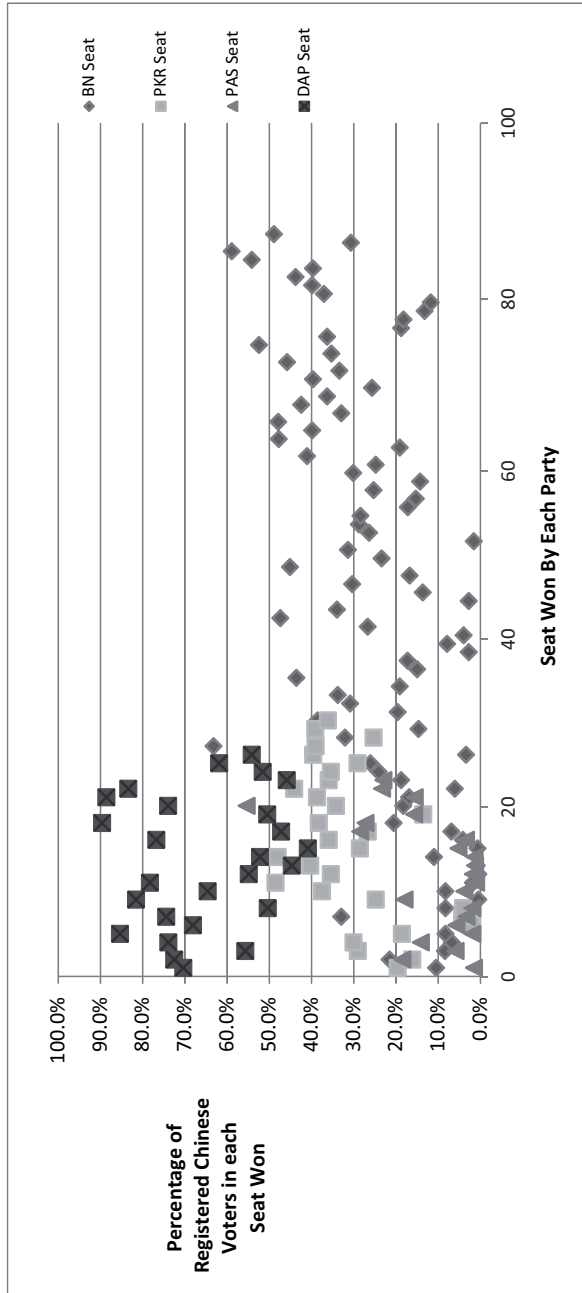
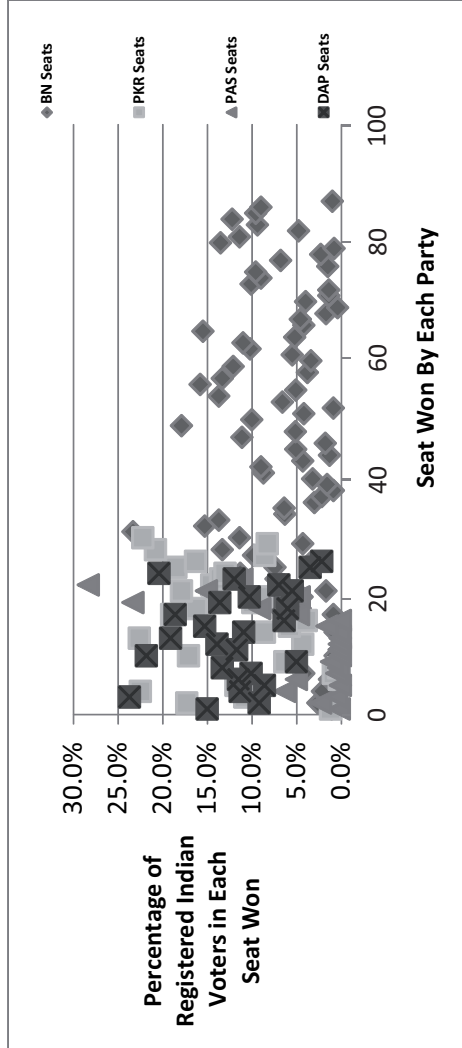


Figure 8.4
Percentage of Registered Indian Voters by Seats Won



orientation.³⁶ Let us examine each of the scatter plots for more specific observations.

In Figure 8.2, 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. Figure 8.3 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 broken down into that of its component parties, it can still be deduced that UMNO won the 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 Figure 8.4, 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.

CROSS-ETHNIC VOTING IN KUALA LUMPUR AND SELANGOR³⁷

As can be seen in Table 8.4, the BN received a severe thrashing in Kuala Lumpur in 2008. This is explained by a massive swing of Malay, Chinese and Indian votes in the direction of PAS, DAP, PKR. Even in the constituency of Putrajaya, where civil servants constitute the electorate, the PAS candidate gained some 12.7 per cent more votes than in 2004. In total the Pakatan won 61.6 per cent of the votes in Kuala Lumpur and most significantly won all the mixed constituencies except for Setiawangsa. The top performing Teresa Kok of the DAP won a 19.4 per cent swing of votes in Seputeh, garnering a stunning 36,500 votes, which was 82 per cent of the total. However, perhaps the most significant result came in the mixed

Table 8.4
Ethnic Composition and Seats Won in Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, 2004 & 2008

	Malay %	Chinese %	Indian %	2004	2008
Kepong	4.1	89.5	6.0	DAP	DAP
Batu	42.9	39.6	16.3	Gerakan	PKR
Wangsa Maju	51.1	39.0	8.5	UMNO	PKR
Segambut	34.9	50.4	13.6	Gerakan	DAP
Setiawangsa	56.4	31.3	10.0	UMNO	UMNO
Titivangsa	65.0	22.9	11.1	UMNO	PAS
Bukit Bintang	14.7	73.9	10.3	DAP	DAP
Lembah Pantai	52.8	25.3	20.8	UMNO	PKR
Seputeh	5.4	88.9	5.5	DAP	DAP
Cheras	9.3	83.3	7.0	DAP	DAP
Bandar Tun Razak	51.7	39.1	8.3	MCA	PKR
Putrajaya	93.5	1.5	4.2	UMNO	UMNO

Source: Adapted from Ooi, Saravanamuttu and Lee (2008, p. 93).

constituency of Lembah Pantai, where Nurul Izzah, Anwar Ibrahim's daughter, up-ended three-term incumbent and Women's Minister Sharizat Abdul Jalil. The 22.2 per cent in the voter swing saw Nurul win by a 2,895 majority, an impressive result by any measure for a rookie candidate. As pointed out by Ooi, Saravanamuttu and Lee,³⁸ Nurul's win came from the sizeable Chinese and Indian vote since these communities make up 25.3 and 20.8 per cent of the constituency respectively.

We now turn to the state of Selangor. Selangor registered the largest vote swing of about 21 per cent for the Pakatan in both parliamentary and state contests winning the coalition some 55 per cent of the total votes. Most impressively, Pakatan won 18 of the 22 parliamentary seats and left the BN with only 3 out of the 18 mixed constituency seats. A comparison of parliamentary seats won in 2004 and 2008 in Table 8.5 shows the comprehensive character of the BN's defeat in 2008 in the most developed state of Malaysia.

The DAP and Pakatan swept the four constituencies where Chinese made up the majority or largest plurality, namely in Petaling Jaya Utara, Klang, Serdang and Petaling Jaya Selatan. DAP also won in the mixed seat of Puchong which had a Malay plurality. PAS candidates defeated UMNO counterparts in other mixed Malay plurality seats in Shah Alam, Kuala Selangor and Hulu Langat. It is clear from the above results that the Pakatan won most of the middle ground in Selangor. As suggested by Ooi,

Table 8.5
Seats Won in Selangor by Ethnic Composition

Parliamentary Constituency	Malay %	Chinese %	Indian %	2004	2008
Sabak Bernam	81.30	13.60	5.10	UMNO	UMNO
Sungai Besar	67.90	30.30	1.80	UMNO	UMNO
Hulu Selangor	53.90	26.70	19.00	MIC	PKR
Tanjong Karang	72.10	16.70	11.10	UMNO	UMNO
Kuala Selangor	61.00	15.60	23.30	UMNO	PAS
Selayang	44.80	38.24	16.23	MCA	PKR
Gombak	76.00	13.50	9.90	UMNO	PKR
Ampang	56.20	34.20	8.90	UMNO	PKR
Pandan	49.34	45.04	5.15	MCA	BN
Hulu Langat	39.50	55.30	4.70	UMNO	PAS
Serdang	36.60	52.10	10.90	MCA	DAP
Puchong	43.60	40.80	15.30	Gerakan	DAP
Kelana Jaya	41.90	38.70	17.90	MCA	PKR
Petaling Jaya Selatan	39.60	44.10	14.50	MCA	PKR
Petaling Jaya Utara	15.40	76.70	6.40	MCA	DAP
Subang	50.00	35.90	13.50	MIC	PKR
Shah Alam	68.80	15.50	15.10	UMNO	PAS
Kapar	51.40	35.40	13.00	MIC	PKR
Klang	33.50	47.10	18.60	MCA	DAP
Kota Raja	47.80	23.20	28.30	MIC	PAS
Kuala Langat	55.30	29.10	18.50	UMNO	PKR
Sepang	58.70	23.30	17.90	UMNO	UMNO

Source: Adapted from Ooi, Saravanamuttu and Lee (2008, p. 105).

Saravanamuttu and Lee,³⁹ had the pattern of cross-ethnic voting in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor held for the rest of Peninsular Malaysia, the Pakatan may have won the majority of the parliamentary seats on the Peninsula. However, the older ethnic voting pattern continued to prevail in the states of Pahang, Malacca, Negri Sembilan, and particularly in Johor.

BY-ELECTIONS AFTER 8 MARCH

Remarkably, sixteen by-elections and a state election in Sarawak have been held since the March 2008 general election up until mid-2011. The threshold period for by-elections expired at the two-and-a-half year mark post-March 2008. This section will attempt to briefly review and analyse the

results of most of these by-elections and related political developments. On 26 August 2008, as noted above, Anwar Ibrahim won a landslide victory in his old parliamentary constituency of Permatang Pauh after his wife Wan Azizah stepped down to let him contest the seat. While this was largely predictable, Anwar's political comeback meant that the Pakatan as a coalition was further strengthened given his pivotal role as its leader. The second by-election came in Kuala Terengganu on 17 January 2009 with the death of UMNO's deputy education minister Razali Ismail. On this occasion, the PAS candidate Abdul Wahid Endut won 51 per cent of the vote with a comfortable margin of 2,631 votes. This was a major blow to the faltering UMNO leader Abdullah Badawi and also his deputy Najib who was responsible for the campaign. At the end of the day, Abdullah turned out to be a major casualty of the 8 March political tsunami with the Kuala Terengganu result propelling his departure from the political stage.

Then came the triple by-elections of 7 April 2009 in Bukit Gantang, Perak, Bukit Selamabau, Kedah, and Batang Ai, Sarawak, all state seats. The Batang Ai result, which saw the Barisan Nasional win convincingly by garnering some 66 per cent of the votes of mostly Ibans, confirmed that the overall 8 March trend did not really penetrate into East Malaysia. However, the outcome in Perak and Kedah proved the opposite. As I have argued elsewhere,⁴⁰ the new dynamics of politics were reinforced by the double whammy defeats delivered to the BN in the two "bukits".

Let me begin with Bukit Gantang, the more significant of the two Peninsular by-elections, a parliamentary constituency with an electorate of 55,471 voters, lying on the outskirts of Taiping town. A former stronghold of UMNO, it slipped into PAS's grip in the 8 March General Election, the Islamic party capturing a credible majority of 1,566 votes. The death of the PAS assemblyman forced the 7 April outcome which saw the charismatic Nizar Jamaluddin take on UMNO's local boy, Ismail Safian. Nizar, the erstwhile Menteri Besar (MB — Chief Minister) of Perak took the seat with an increased majority of 2,789, this despite the fact, PAS would admit, that he lost the Malay votes. An analysis by PAS showed that Nizar may have won only 43 per cent of the Malay votes. The results showed that the more rural areas of Trong gave UMNO a majority of votes while the more urbanized regions around Sepang, Bukit Gantang proper and Kuala Sepetang gave Nizar sizeable majorities.

Nizar won the seat by capturing a sizable portion of the Malay votes, but in Malaysian politics today, this is a necessary but not a sufficient condition

for success. Nizar had to win the non-Malay votes by a good margin and he did. Thus, the non-Malay electorate has become kingmakers whenever the Malay vote is split more or less down the middle. It was crystal clear that Nizar swept the non-Malay, mostly Chinese, votes sometimes to the tune of 80 per cent. At the DAP contribution dinner at Simpang, Bukit Gantang, on 5 April, Nizar arrived to speak to the tumultuous roar of approval of thousands of Chinese supporters.⁴¹ A field trip to Kuala Sepatang (formerly Port Weld), gave me the distinct impression that the Chinese fishing community seemed totally supportive of this man, who in his short tenure as MB had legalized Temporary Occupation Lease (TOL) land to Chinese farmers and other tenants.

Nizar had called the by-election a “referendum” on the BN government, particularly the action of new premier Najib Razak in seizing power from his (Nizar’s) government in February 2009. The Perak Assembly was hung with Nizar mounting a legal challenge to newly minted UMNO MB Zambry Abdul Kadir after three Pakatan legislators crossed the floor to the BN. The by-election result was seen not only as indictment of Najib Razak’s action but also that of Sultan Raja Azlan Shah who speedily anointed Zambry as MB without a vote of confidence in the Assembly, while rejecting Nizar’s request to dissolve the Assembly for fresh elections after the three Pakatan members hopped out of the coalition.

Let me now turn to the Bukit Selambau by-election outcome. S. Manikumar of the People’s Justice Party’s (PKR) won by a large majority of 2,403 votes, adding a thousand votes to the previous win. This happened despite a lineup of fifteen contenders, something quite unprecedented in Malaysian political history. The PKR win was a major blow to Najib and, in particular, the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). Bukit Selambau, with 30 per cent of Indian voters, is a barometer of MIC’s popularity among Indians. MIC’s more experienced S. Ganesan lost to newcomer Manikumar even though six other Indians, along with six Malays, were there to split the PKR vote. The campaign had become acrimonious when MIC Youth kicked up a ruckus at a *ceramah* (prayer meeting) and the Federal Reserve Unit (FRU) had to intervene and stop the event before its allotted time. To my mind, the outcome shows that Anwar Ibrahim, leader of the Opposition, who campaigned vigorously in the constituency, effectively deployed a multi-ethnic coalition mode of politics. Additionally, Indian voters prefer to support PKR candidates rather than those from the MIC. The corollary of this is that the BN has lost an important plank in its

platform and along with it support of the Indian voters. Furthermore, as shown above, the Chinese have also evinced great support for even PAS candidates like Nizar. The Chinese party, MCA, was conspicuous by its absence in campaigning for both by-elections.

Three subsequent by-elections followed. On 14 July, PAS retained the Kelantan seat of Manek Urai by a wafer-slim 65 votes. PAS was clearly on the back foot after the exposé and open altercations over “unity talks” with UMNO which implicated their top leadership. By 25 August PAS regained its ground in Permatang Pasir, in the state of Penang, defeating UMNO by capturing some 65 per cent of the 14,832 votes. The PAS candidate of Pakatan routed the UMNO candidate of BN by 4,511, just 882 votes shy of the previous victory on 8 March 2008. A drop in voter turnout from 82.6 per cent to 73.1 per cent could account for this margin of difference. More interestingly, PAS won in both Malay and non-Malay polling stations according to ground reports and the Chinese areas evinced even more comprehensive support. It appeared then that Pakatan remained the choice for Malaysian voters after seven Peninsular Malaysia by-elections. The other by-election on 31 May in the Penang state seat of Penanti saw a no contest on the part of UMNO and was easily retained by PKR’s Mansor Othman. Three other independent candidates lost their deposits.

The BN finally stemmed the tide of by-election losses by a landslide victory in the state seat of Bagan Pinang on 11 October 2009, when former UMNO Negri Sembilan supremo, Mohd Isa Abdul Samad roundly defeated his PAS opponent by a majority of 5,435 votes. Certainly, the Bagan Pinang outcome augurs well for the new Prime Minister Najib and his government and commentators opined that it had stemmed the tide of the 8 March 2008 political tsunami. What was interesting was the large non-Malay swing towards BN, in particular the Indian vote, which constituted some 21 per cent of that constituency. However, the actual breakout of fights between UMNO and PAS supporters in this instance showed the intensity of intra-Malay politics.

The Bagan Pinang result seemed to seal a north-south divide in Peninsular Malaysian politics which is likely to remain for most of 2010 and beyond. Put differently, states south of Selangor seem to remain firmly under the BN wing. The Perak situation remained muddled until a conclusion came about when the Federal Court, on 9 February 2010, with a full panel of five judges, unanimously ruled that the UMNO leader Zamry Abdul Kadir was the rightful MB.⁴² However, conditions in Penang, Kedah

and Selangor have largely firmed up with the Pakatan well in place at the time of writing. Kelantan on the East Coast is likely to be PAS terrain for a long time to come. On the other hand, the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak seemed destined to remain as BN territory perhaps until a political change occurs in the centre. In short, Malaysia's nascent two-party system is set to remain in place until the next general election. This is despite the fact that both the BN and the Pakatan coalitions are facing internal problems.

After the Bagan Pinang result, an important contest came on 25 April 2010 by way of the tenth by-election for the parliamentary seat of Hulu Selangor which was a two-way contest between the MIC (BN) and the PKR (Pakatan). In 2008 the seat was won by the PKR's candidate by a whisker-thin margin of 198 votes. The new Pakatan heavyweight, Zaid Ibrahim, the former UMNO Minister, was clearly affected by pork-barrel politics and character assassination tactics against the BN's candidate. The 7,000 FELDA dwellers in the constituency were targeted with an RM1,000 handout and the promise of another RM49,000 should the BN win, while a Chinese school was promised RM3 million after the election. To compound the PKR problems, there were suggestions of internal differences in Zaid's choice as a candidate. In the event, the BN candidate, MIC's P. Kamalanathan, defeated Zaid by 1,725 votes. The BN's win was still a far cry from their 14,483 majority of 2004.

A famous victory for the Pakatan came in the parliamentary constituency of Sibu in Sarawak on 16 May. Taking up the cudgels for the Pakatan, the DAP candidate Wong Ho Leng defeated his SUPP opponent Robert Lau by a 398 vote margin in this predominantly Chinese seat (Chinese 66.7 per cent, Iban 22 per cent, Melanau/Malay 10.5 per cent). While slim, the Pakatan victory demonstrated a serious erosion of Chinese and possibly even of Iban support for the BN in its stronghold state of Sarawak. Most importantly, from the analytical stance of this essay, the trajectory of Pakatan electoral strength in Chinese-dominant constituencies appears to have remained stable two years after March 2008 and, indeed, was further demonstrated in the 16 April 2011 Sarawak state election.⁴³ The outcome of the Sarawak state election showed that twin-coalition electoral politics has found traction in this East Malaysian state, particularly that the Pakatan has made major inroads into the non-bumiputera constituencies of Sarawak.

Let us now examine the Tenang by-election held on 30 January 2011, which saw the third consecutive by-election victory of the Barisan Nasional

(BN) since the March 2008 general election.⁴⁴ This fourteenth by-election witnessed a resurgence of voter support for the ruling coalition but fell short of the 5,000 vote majority that the BN had expected. UMNO took the seat by a majority of 3,707, some 1,200 more than it won during 2008 with a voter turnout of 9,833, which is only 67 per cent of the electorate. Massive flooding in the constituency during voting day accounted for this low voter turnout. Tenang practically exhibits the Peninsular template of Malay-Chinese-Indian distribution (49-38-12, and 1 per cent "others") and its result could well be seen by some as a barometer of the state of play in Malaysian electoral politics. The electoral result shows that the UMNO candidate Azahar Ibrahim swept more than 80 per cent of the Malay vote. The PAS challenger Normala Sudirman evidently won the Chinese vote, but the numbers had shrunk somewhat since 2008. This was thought to be because of the low voter turnout among the Chinese. She was able only to win a majority in the 95 per cent Chinese polling area of Labis Tengah but lost in Labis Timor and in Labis Station, which had lower Chinese percentages. The DAP claim is that she still picked up the majority of Chinese votes. DAP publicity chief Tony Pua suggested that Umno's Azahar Ibrahim received 83.3 per cent of Malay votes, up four percentage points from 2008. This was helped by an 81 per cent showing of Malay voters. The Indian vote also went to BN but the community had a low 40 per cent turnout. The flood situation meant that more assistance was given to UMNO voters to get to polling stations. The Tenang by-election result was already predictable before voting day and only the margin of victory was at issue. As such, the interesting points to be made are about the different styles, tactics and approach to by-elections of Malaysia's twin coalition system. The BN clearly optimized on a strategy of using its copious resources and electoral machinery with great effect. The Pakatan on the other hand often floundered under the weight of BN power and its monopoly of state resources.

What then were the new political dynamics that the Peninsular by-elections and the Sarawak state election have re-established? *First*, the momentum of 8 March 2008 establishing a two party (or two-coalition) system had not abated; indeed, the symmetrical by-election results of eight wins seem to reinforce the trend. Moreover, the Sarawak state election of April 2011 exhibited a clear traction of the opposition coalition politics of the Peninsula, with the DAP's strength established in the urban areas, PKR and PAS making important inroads in rural and semi-urban areas. *Second*, the BN formula for capturing cross-ethnic votes appears to have become

less effective, again following the trend of 8 March, while the opposite is true for the Pakatan forces which have largely succeeded where the BN has continued to fail. *Third*, the Islamic party, PAS, despite some internal hiccups, appears to be superseding UMNO as the voice of the Malays and, furthermore, as the putative Malay voice to non-Malays. I hasten to add that this last point comes with two caveats, namely that the process is still ongoing and has been the case for many years. But only now, West Coast states like Perak and Kedah have increasingly evinced such a trend while in the past this may only have been evident in East Coast states like Kelantan and Terengganu. The second caveat is that UMNO retains strong support among the older generation of voters and among highly rural constituencies.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Several important points should be made about considering 8 March as a historical conjuncture in this essay. First, it may not be fully of the order such as a “critical juncture” of the sort alluded to by Collier and Collier,⁴⁵ namely, that it produces a distinctly new legacy by ending an old one, such as demolishing an *ancien régime*. In my reckoning, there would be important political continuities in politics after the 8 March conjuncture. The critical junctures identified by the Colliers in Latin America spanned periods of 9 to 23 years. At the time of writing, the outcome of the March 2008 election has surpassed three years while the antecedent event to which we alluded was *reformasi* of the 1998–99 years, which was about 13 years ago. My argument is that politics has been putatively changed but perhaps not as radically as implied by Collier and Collier. As Malaysia prepares itself for the thirteenth general election, which is expected to be held in early 2013, the two-coalition political system laid down in 2008 remains well in place.

In addressing the profundity of change question, the thesis in this essay is that the political moment of 8 March basically had its antecedent in the *reformasi* movement of 1999 in disembedding certain legacies of Malaysian politics. The Anwar episode of 1998–99 generated a post-Mahathirism politics which, coupled with the failure and ineptitude of the short-lived Abdullah Badawi government, created the conditions for the 8 March moment. However, I may not go as far as to argue that “[s]ince March 2008, Malaysia’s political landscape has changed forever”⁴⁶ but that

new path dependencies are now palpable and if reinforced by events and “increasing returns” could generate a genuine political shift in the character of politics. This may not take the form of a Gramscian moment of organic change but it could drive the political system away from what one writer has termed “electoral authoritarianism”.⁴⁷ The same writer avers that 8 March was a “landmark event” with the suggestion that a sort of political liberalization may be occurring.⁴⁸ Again such a change may depend greatly on whether the incipient two-party takes firm root.

A second point is that 8 March does indeed represent a moment of political crisis. In a broad sense, UMNO and the BN faced a legitimacy crisis in which the former could no longer stand its ground firmly as a consociational party representing Malays and non-Malays. This legitimacy crisis runs deep also because of its egregious corruption and money politics of the political regime under the BN. Political parties such as UMNO, with its particular form of “party capitalism”, have lost legitimacy like parties in Taiwan and Japan.⁴⁹ It could be argued that UMNO’s cronyism could eventually be its Achilles heel. The Malay vote is now split almost evenly between UMNO and its two rivals PAS and PKR, but more so PAS has assumed its role as the putative voice of the Malay-Muslims. The PKR, on the other hand, since the 1999 election, has established the importance of cross-ethnic voting and clearly broke the mould of the old pattern of ethnic voting on 8 March.

Thirdly, 8 March also created a legitimacy crisis for the BN non-Malay component parties by Pakatan sweeping the middle ground of electoral politics — the mixed constituencies. The question that remains moot is whether this Pakatan formula can be effective in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. The Klang valley’s pattern of cross-ethnic voting could hold as long as the Pakatan continues to fashion a common political platform and succeeds in formalizing itself as a political entity like the BN. However, as I have argued elsewhere, because of its prevalent discourse and practices of Islamism, the PAS could be the spoiler in the Pakatan coalition. So far, however, the pact has held firm and appears (at the time of writing) to be on the path of constituting itself as a formal body in preparation for the next general election.⁵⁰

Finally, we return to the point made earlier that 8 March sees a culmination thus far of the “new politics” as articulated by Loh and Saravanamuttu and generated by the *reformasi* movement of the late 1990s. This was a politics which valorized participatory democracy and

the engagement of civil society forces directly in the electoral process. It was also one which set reformist agendas aimed at eroding a power bloc embedded in a form of highly corrupt, ethnicized politics. The trajectory of new politics, while remaining ethnic in sensibility and in terms of political mobilization, nonetheless favours cross-ethnic or multi-ethnic political coalitions which have as their objects a reformed political economy not anchored on race. I would argue that the reflexivity of such a new path dependency has produced a changed trajectory of Malaysian politics possibly for some decades to come.

Notes

1. Ganesan (2010) cites Pierson (2004) who sees a historical conjuncture as the conjoining of “distinct causal sequences” at particular points of time. He states further: “Conjunctures are moments in time that offer the possibility of evolving path dependent decisions.”
2. The narrative of 8 March, its outcome and ramifications draw considerably on these earlier pieces of writing of mine but further updating and analytical points have been added in this chapter. See Johan Saravanamuttu, “The 12th General Election in Malaysia”, *Opinion Asia*, 15 February 2008; “Malaysia: Political Transformation and Intrigue in an Election Year”, *Southeast Asian Affairs 2009*, edited by Daljit Singh; and Ooi Kee Beng, Johan Saravanamuttu, and Lee Hock Guan, *March 8: Eclipsing May 13* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008).
3. Also known as “People’s Pact”, hereinafter, also as “Pakatan” for short.
4. See Michael O’Shannassy, “Beyond the Barisan Nasional? A Gramscian Perspective of the 2008 Malaysian General Election”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 31, no. 1 (2009): 89.
5. Francis Kok Wah Loh and Johan Saravanamuttu, eds., *New Politics in Malaysia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003).
6. Loh and Saravanamuttu, “*New Politics*”, p. 10.
7. Meredith L. Weiss, *Protest and Possibilities: Civil Society and Coalitions for Political Change in Malaysia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 164.
8. Loh and Saravanamuttu, “*New Politics*”.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
10. Weiss, *Protest and Possibilities*, pp. 174–75.
11. Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labour Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).
12. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

13. HINDRAF, a coalition of Hindu NGOs, was formed in 2005 and declared illegal by the government in 2008.
14. The video clip showed lawyer V.K. Lingam allegedly speaking to former Chief Justice Fairuz Abdul Halim about his appointment as Chief Justice of the Federal Court. A commission of inquiry found the video to be authentic but till date no action has been taken on the matter.
15. Most pundits couldn't see the opposition winning more than 40 seats. At a pre-election seminar at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, two days before polling day, main speaker Dato' Dr Michael Yeoh of the Malaysian think tank ASLI and other speakers were confident that the BN would retain its two-thirds majority.
16. See Stephen Gan's editorial in the Internet paper, *Malaysiakini*, 19 March 2008.
17. See Khoo Boo Teik, "The Monkeys Strike Back: The 12th General Election and After", *Aliran Monthly* 28, no. 2 (2008).
18. The exceptions were Terengganu, Perlis and Pahang, but even these states swung in single digit percentage points. See Table 8.1.
19. K.J. Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya* (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1965); and Karl von Vorys, *Democracy without Consensus: Communalism and Political Stability in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur/Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1976).
20. Loh and Saravanamuttu in *New Politics in Malaysia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003) in particular have tried to show that a "new politics" which transcended ethnicity, which was 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, K.J. Ratnam and R.S. Milne, *The Malaysian Parliamentary Election of 1964* (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1967); Raj Vasil, *The Malaysian General Election of 1969* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1972); Chandra Muzaffar (Chandrasekaran Pillay), *The 1974 General Elections in Malaysia: A Post-Mortem* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1974). The volume by Puthuchery and Noraini Othman entitled *Elections and Democracy in Malaysia* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 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.
21. In the 1969 general election, the Alliance took only 48.5 per cent of the ballots while the opposition captured 51.5 per cent of the total vote. The Alliance lost its two-thirds majority in Parliament and the elections in Sarawak and Sabah were postponed. Both Perak and Selangor were also on the balance

- in terms of seats held, Perak virtually lost, but the opposition was split and had no electoral pact. See von Vorys (1976, pp. 297–98) and Harold Crouch, *Government and Politics in Malaysia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 74. For a broad discussion of the implications of 8 March in contrast to 1969, see Chapter 1 of Ooi, Saravanamuttu and Lee (2008).
22. This observation is based on personal experience as I was present in May 1969 as a journalist in Kuala Lumpur and I also observed the 2008 event in Kelantan and Penang.
 23. See Ooi's "The Opposition's Year of Living Demonstratively" for an account of the extraordinary events in Penang in Ooi et al. (2008), pp. 17–20.
 24. The sources cited by the *Straits Times* were Ong Kian Ming, *The Star/Asia News Network and Election Commission*. In fact, political scientist, Ong Kian Ming, made the calculations. Ong, in an article for *Malaysiakini* (11 March 2008), has explained that he used a certain statistical method called ecological inference, theorized 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."
 25. Ong Kian Ming, "Making Sense of the Political Tsunami", *Malaysiakini*, 11 March 2008.
 26. See Maznah Mohamad, "Malaysia — Democracy and the End of Ethnic Politics?" *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 62, no. 4 (December 2008): 46.
 27. This is the thesis proffered by Lee in Ooi Kee Beng, Johan Saravanamuttu, and Lee Hock Guan, *March 8: Eclipsing May 13* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), pp. 113–14).
 28. See Lee's analysis of the Kuala Lumpur voting, *ibid.*, pp. 92–103.
 29. Perak was lost to the BN after three Pakatan legislators crossed over in February 2009. Two were from the PKR, one the deputy speaker from the DAP. See my discussion further below.
 30. On 17 July 2008, MCA former women's wing deputy chief and former cabinet minister, Dr Tan Yee Kew, quit her party and in August joined the PKR with 1,700 supporters <<http://anilnetto.com/malaysian-elections/tan-yee-kew-and-1700-mca-members-cross-over-to-pkr/>>.
 31. Zaid wrote an open letter on 30 September 2008 which condemned the draconian actions of the Abdullah government in using the ISA and also upbraided it for its failure of law reform for which he was held responsible. See Saravanamuttu, "Malaysia: Political Transformation and Intrigue", pp.

- 183–84. However, Zaid subsequently left the PKR soon after losing the Hulu Selangor by-election and formed his own political party, KITA, in January 2011.
32. Dompok raised these issues in a twenty-one-page keynote policy address at his party's twelfth triennial meeting in October 2008. See "Dompok: Tide against BN in Sabah", *Malaysiakini*, 12 October 2008.
 33. See Lim's statement in *Malaysiakini.com*, 21 December 2008 <<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/95227>> (accessed 29 December 2008). By October 2009 another major issue was the Kampong Buah Pala episode which saw forty-odd Indian families dislodged for a housing scheme. The state government was however successful in negotiating adequate compensations for these families.
 34. The threat of crossovers remains possible although Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim appears to have dropped the idea, as suggested in the section below.
 35. Najib made this announcement on 4 November. The government had earlier also announced that there would be an injection of RM5 billion into the Malaysian Bourse, the money being sourced from the Employees Provident Fund (EPF). *Malaysian Insider*, 4 November 2008 <<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/index.php/malaysia/11792-najib-epf-loan-to-valuecap-is-guaranteed-by-government>> (accessed 29 December 2008).
 36. The scatter plots do not show the seats won by UMNO, the 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.
 37. I draw the data and analysis from the penetrating study of Lee (Chapter 3) in Ooi, Saravanamuttu and Lee (2008).
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
 40. Saravanamuttu, "More of a Double Blow Than Status Quo", *Straits Times*, 15 April 2009.
 41. I was there to witness the immense popularity of this man who was greatly liked by Chinese and Indian voters.
 42. See the *Star* online, 9 February 2010 <<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/2/9/nation/20100209091318&sec=nation>> (accessed 26 February 2010). The decision has been criticized by civil groups and legal experts as having overturned a legal precedent that a vote of no-confidence is required if a head of government does tender his resignation. The judges ruled that the Perak Sultan's decision to appoint a new MB was valid despite the lack of a no-confidence vote in the state assembly.
 43. The elections saw the BN winning 55 seats, with the PBB, Taib's party, winning all 35 seats contested, the PRS winning 8, the SPDP winning 6 and the SUPP

6. The BN more than retained its two-thirds majority, with the PR winning 15 seats in total, one going to an independent. Within the BN coalition, SUPP crashed with the defeat of its leader George Chan and deputy Tiong Thai King and retained only two Chinese seats. Its nemesis was the DAP which was the biggest winner on the opposition side, taking 12 of 15 seats it contested. The PKR fared poorly in terms of seats, contesting 49 and winning only 3. However, Baru Bian, land rights champion and leader of the PKR won his seat in Ba'kelalan, so too another prominent land rights lawyer, PKR's See Chee How in Batu Linatang. One other seat in the Miri area (Senadin) was won by the BN by a mere 58 votes. While PAS lost all 5 seats contested, it came within 391 votes of winning the predominantly Malay-Melanau seat of Beting Maro. Most importantly, the Pakatan as a whole won some 41 per cent of the popular vote and established itself, for the first time, as the opposition in the state of Sarawak. See Saravanamuttu and Rusalina, *ISEAS Viewpoints* (2011).
44. BN went on to win two other by-elections on 6 March 2011 in Malacca, namely, in the state seats of Merlimau and Kerbau, previously held by UMNO.
45. Collier and Collier (2002).
46. See James Chin and Wong Chin Huat, "Malaysia's Electoral Upheaval", *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 3 (2009): 70–85.
47. See Thomas B. Pepinsky, "The 2008 Malaysian Elections: An End to Ethnic Politics", *Journal of East Asian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2009): 115.
48. The caveat is whether UMNO "hard-liners" (Najib) or "soft-liners" (Abdullah) have the upper hand in politics, to wit: "For the 2008 Malaysian elections to yield true liberalization, the BN's soft-liners must come to believe that liberalization holds the key to their political survival, while hard-liners must be contained" (ibid., p. 117). Abdullah's fall and Najib's ascendancy must then cast a gloomy shadow on Malaysian political liberalization, going by this argument. I don't entirely agree. See my conclusion.
49. See my analysis of *Party Capitalism in Southeast Asia: Democracy's Bane?* Ishak Shari Memorial Lecture 2007 (Asia in the Twenty First Century), Bangi: IKMAS, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
50. The Anwar Ibrahim "Sodomy II" trial and its outcome may prove to be an important factor affecting the Pakatan's fortunes. Pakatan insiders have indicated that PKR president Wan Azizah will take up the mantle from Anwar should he be imprisoned again.

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