

The 1995 Parliamentary Elections in Malaysia

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Abstract: The parliamentary elections in Malaysia have brought about a significant change in the distribution of partisanship in the electorate. It redefined the relationships between social groups and party support and have enhanced the political stability of the country. The Barisan Nasional's victory, attributable to a booming economy, full employment, and superior organization and finance, signalled a vote of confidence in the politics of accommodation characterised by tolerance, mutual cooperation, and compromise.

Elections, the most ubiquitous of contemporary political institutions, are regarded among the most tangible, formal, and demonstrable acts of collective decision making in the political process. At the centre of politics everywhere, elections are among the best indicators of the tone and direction of the political system and provide clues to the measure of linkage between the governors and the governed. The electoral process tends to bring into sharp focus the nature of political culture, the crosscurrents of nationalism and subnationalisms, and the continuing impact of various associational, nonassociational and institutional groups. They indicate, as perhaps nothing else does, whether the congeries of political groups in a given society are on the way to becoming a "political community" promoting "political development," rather than edging the country toward "political decay."

Elections may assume many forms, some of which are more symbolic than effective. They may, in fact, be a mere façade for limited participation and authoritarian manipulation and control.¹ Truly

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meaningful elections, however, would help evolve a "participant society" which functions by consensus and develop an accepted base for political stability. Elections, therefore, deserve close scrutiny not merely to evaluate the extent of participation present, but also to bring into sharp focus the operation of most of the practices of a particular political system. The 1995 parliamentary elections in Malaysia will be analyzed from this perspective, with the intention of demonstrating that the country has displayed the practices of a "consensual" polity that had its origin in a limited form in 1952.

Election Schedule

It had been speculated that the ninth parliamentary elections would take place in October or November 1994. Observers have offered several explanations for the popularity of 1994 as the election year. According to one analysis, elections in Malaysia have usually taken place in even-numbered years (1974, 1978, 1982, 1986, 1990), and all such elections have been favourable for the ruling coalition. The only odd-numbered election was 1969, which had serious consequences for the ruling Alliance and for the nation as a whole. The other analysis simply points to the "intervals" between the elections. The elections held between 1978 and 1990 show an interval of about four years (see Table 1). In fact, the 1978 elections under Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn and the 1982 elections under his successor Mahathir Muhammad had an interval of less than four years. An October 1994 election would yield a gap of four years and hence would be in keeping with the tradition. Finally, the months of October and November were considered to be favourable for elections in terms of weather, school schedule, national festivals, and other situational variables.

Prime Minister Mahathir Muhammad, however, was in no hurry and saw no reason to call a snap election as he did in 1982. The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the major component of the ruling coalition, the Barisan Nasional (BN), has grown stronger and united under Mahathir's leadership. Collated into roughly 15,000 branches and 1,665 divisions, UMNO enjoys a membership of about two million *Bumiputera* (sons of the soil).² In the 1993 UMNO general assembly election, Dr. Mahathir was elected unopposed for a fifth three-year term as UMNO president.

UMNO's stability must be juxtaposed with Malaysia's economic miracle to gain the true strength of the ruling party. Malaysia's economic success can be seen in an uninterrupted and continuing eight per cent

plus growth rate, almost zero unemployment, low inflation of about 3.8 percent, and an increase in international reserves from US\$18 billion in 1993 to over US\$30 billion in 1994.³ Malaysia is the nineteenth-biggest trading nation in the world and is "today amongst the top five of 135 developing countries in terms of progress and achievements."⁴

Table 1: Some Features of Parliamentary Elections in Malaysia

Year	Nomination Day	Polling Day ^a	No. of Constituencies
1959	July 15	August 19	104
1964	March 21	April 25	104
1969	April 5	May 10	144
1974	Aug. 8	Aug 24	154
1978	June 21	July 8	154
1982	April 7	April 22	154
1986	July 24	Aug 3	177
1990	Oct. 11	Oct. 20	180

Source: NSTP Research and Information Services, *Elections in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: The New Straits Times Press, 1994) 145-6.

^aElections in Sabah and Sarawak were held on slightly different dates.

Given the confidence generated by a buoyant economy and political stability in the party and the country, Mahathir waited until April 6, 1995 to announce the dissolution of the eighth parliament, thus paving "the way for the country's ninth general election since independence, and ending almost a year of intense speculation."⁵ The general election must be held within sixty days from the date of dissolution of parliament and State Assemblies. Subsequently, the Election Commission announced April 15, 1995 as nomination day with polling to be held on April 24 and 25, 1995.

Redelineation Exercise

At stake in the ninth general election were 192 seats, compared to 180 in the eighth general election. This was made possible through the redelineation exercise carried out by the Election Commission between October 1992 and August 1993. Article 113 of the Malaysian Constitution provided for an election commission that is empowered to conduct elections, keep electoral rolls, and review constituencies.⁶ The Commission felt that the changing nature of demography, topography, infrastructural developments, and the like called for a redelineation exercise to ensure "a free and fair election."⁷ Consequently, Article 46 of the Federal Constitution was amended in October 1992 paving the way for the Election Commission to redelineate the constituencies. The Constitutional Act (Amendment) 1992 became effective on November 20, 1992.

The Thirteenth Schedule of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia required the Commission to ensure that the constituencies do not cross state boundaries; that the administrative facilities be available within the constituencies to facilitate polling exercise; that the number of electors within each constituency in a state be approximately equal; and that regard ought to be given to the inconveniences attendant on alterations of constituencies, and to the maintenance of local ties.⁸ In accordance with these principles, the Commission redelineated and created twelve new constituencies, one each in Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, and Pahang; three each in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, and two in Johor.

The population, registered voters, and the number of seats allocated to the thirteen states and the federal territories, along with their percentages, are shown in Table 2. Sarawak has the largest number of seats (27) followed by Perak (23), Johor (20), Sabah (20), and Selangor (17). In the rest of the states, the number of seats ranges between 3 for Perlis and 15 for Kedah.

One may observe some sorts of correspondence between the percentages of population, registered voters and seats allocated in most of the states. The exception is Sarawak which has about 14 percent of the total seats, though it has a little over 9 percent of the total population of Malaysia. This is largely due to the state's size, problems of accessibility, and the availability of infrastructural facilities. The case of Selangor is rather the reverse. With about thirteen percent of the population and almost the same percentage of the voters, it has only about 9 percent of the seats. The size of the

state and the distribution pattern of the population may account for this disparity.

The Election Commission hired some 100,000 temporary workers to beef up its work force, reportedly printed some 17.5 million ballot papers, and prepared over 40,000 ballot boxes.⁹ Special hotlines were installed to help voters identify their polling stations. Armed forces, police and government officials serving abroad, and students were allowed to cast their votes by post.¹⁰

Table 2: Population of Registered Voters and Number of Constituencies by States

State	Population		Registered Voters (000)		No. of Constituencies	
	(000) ^a Number	%age	Number	%age	umber	%age
Perlis	184	1.05	104	1.16	3	1.56
Kedah	1,305	7.43	725	8.04	15	7.81
Kelantan	1,182	6.73	608	6.75	14	7.29
Terengganu	771	4.39	368	4.08	8	4.17
P. Pinang	1,065	6.06	635	7.04	11	5.73
Perak	1,880	10.70	1,116	12.40	23	11.98
Selangor	2,289	13.03	1,099	12.40	17	8.85
N. Sembilan	691	3.93	382	4.24	7	3.65
Melaka	505	2.88	293	3.25	5	2.60
Johor	2,074	11.81	1,108	12.98	20	10.42
Sabah	1,737	9.89	647	7.18	20	10.42
Sarawak	1,648	9.38	817	9.07	27	14.06
F.T. ^b	1,199	6.83	612	6.97	11	5.7
Total	17,567		9,012		192	

Source: *New Straits Times*, Friday, February 10, 1995; *New Sunday Times*, April 16, 1995; *The Sun*, April 16, 1995; *Information Malaysia 1994 Yearbook* (Kuala Lumpur: Berita, 1994) 53.

^a Population figures are according to 1990 census.

^b F. T. = Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan.

Nominations for the Election

An array of 428 candidates contested the 192 seats for the parliament. Of these candidates, 195 belonged to 6 political parties and 191 contested under the banner of Barisan Nasional, a coalition of 14 political parties. The remaining 42 candidates, most of whom were denied nominations from their parties of preference, contested as independent candidates.¹¹ The BN alone could nominate candidates for all the seats. One of its nominees was disqualified on technical grounds. Among the opposition, Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (S46) filed the largest number of candidates (65), followed closely by the Democratic Action Party (DAP) with 50 candidates.

Table 3. Parliamentary Candidates by State and Party

State\party	BN	DAP	PAS	S46	PRM	PBS	AKIM	IND
Perlis	3	-	2	1	-	-	-	-
Kedah	15	-	9	6	-	-	-	1
Kelantan	13	-	6	8	-	-	2	1
Terengganu	8	-	4	4	-	-	-	-
P. Penang	11	8	2	2	-	3	-	-
Perak	23	11	5	9	-	-	-	3
Pahang	11	2	3	6	-	-	-	3
Selangor	17	3	3	11	1	-	-	2
F. T.	11	6	2	2	1	1	-	2
N. Sembilan	7	3	2	3	-	-	-	1
Malacca	5	2	3	2	-	-	-	-
Johor	20	5	4	11	1	-	-	1
Sabah	20	4	1	-	-	20	-	10
Sarawak	27	6	-	-	-	3	-	19
Total	191	50	46	65	3	28	2	43

Source: *The Sun*, Sunday, April 23, 1995; *The Star*, Tuesday, April 25, 1995.

*IND=Independent

Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) nominated 46 candidates, and Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) had 28 nominees. Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM)

and Angkatan Keadilan Islam Malaysia (AKIM) filed three and two candidates respectively (see Table 3). It is worth noting that the PAS and S46 belonged to the opposition coalition known as Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah, but they decided to file candidates under their respective party symbols and issue separate party manifestos.

The BN scored an early success when eleven of its nominees were declared elected unopposed. The remaining 181 seats were contested by 417 candidates. Out of 181 constituencies, 136 had two candidates each, thus having a straight one-to-one fight. There were 37 constituencies with three candidates each, six constituencies had four candidates each and the remaining two constituencies were contested by five candidates each. The average number of candidates per contested constituency was 2.30.

Given the plural nature of Malaysian society, it would be instructive to look at the ethnic composition of the candidates contesting the elections. Ethnic diversity with reinforcing cleavages, as is the case in Malaysia, endangers stability. Aware of this danger, Malaysian political leaders of various ethnic groups have opted for a consensus politics through the formation of the National Front or the Barisan Nasional, a coalition of fourteen political parties representing important ethnic groups in the society, which dominates Malaysian politics.¹² The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) is the dominant party in the coalition, followed by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), and other smaller parties.

As the ruling coalition representing various ethnic groups, the BN professes multiculturalism; within the coalition, each party safeguards the ethnic interests it represents. The candidates for elections are nominated through the complicated process of seat-sharing. The "time-tested" formula behind the distribution of seats is that the parties will not field candidates against each other and that each will contest where it is most likely to win.¹³ This means that the Malay majority constituencies will be contested by UMNO candidates; in non-Malay areas, the candidates are from the MCA, MIC or other component parties. Additionally, there is the concept of "sacrifice"— sacrifice of seats for each other, especially for those communities having no constituency in which they form a majority, as is the case with MIC. This is what Mahathir calls "a situation of *quid pro quo*: you scratch my back, I scratch yours."¹⁴ Thus, though there is not a single constituency where Indians constitute a majority, the Barisan has consistently fielded MIC candidates for the parliamentary as well as state assembly

elections. There are about five constituencies where the Indian population amounts to about 20 percent of the total electorate. Malays form majorities in 106 constituencies, Chinese in 46 constituencies, the non-Muslim Bumiputera (indigenous natives) in 22, and the Muslim Bumiputera in 18 constituencies.¹⁵

Among the opposition, the Democratic Action Party (DAP) is a professedly noncommunal party but it is strongly identified with the Chinese and has difficulty obtaining support from others. Yet the party fielded many Malay candidates in the election. The Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) is a Malay-based Islamic party which has won the support of voters in the northern states. PAS has also sought to reach out for non-Malay support by declaring its willingness, if need be, to sponsor non-Malay candidates. However, since the PAS's strength is largely confined to the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia where the Malays constitute the majority, the party has not felt the need for multi-cultural composition of its candidates. The same can be said about the Party Melayu Semangat 46 (S46). The Party Bersatu Sabah (PBS), however, is the Sabah-based party appealing to regional sentiments. Lately, its president has declared the party to have opted for multi-culturalism. Other opposition parties are small and of minor consequence to the government and politics of Malaysia.

Table 4: Nominated Candidates by Ethnicity and Party

Party/ Ethnicity	BN	S46	PAS	DAP	PRM	AKIM	PBS	IND
Malay	91	65	45	7	3	2	0	7
Chinese	56	-	-	35	-	-	7	7
Indian	8	-	-	6	-	-	1	1
Others	36	-	1	2	-	-	20	27
TOTAL	191	65	46	50	3	2	28	42

Source: Compiled from *New Sunday Times*, April 16, 1995; *The Sun*, April 23, 1995; *The Star*, Tuesday, April 25, 1995.

As can be seen in table 4, the BN and the DAP have fielded candidates representing all the ethnic communities. S46 and PAS have fielded all Malay candidates. But their candidates did not contest only

in Malay majority constituencies. Some of them were nominated to stand in non-Malay areas. This is true of all the political parties in Malaysia which exemplifies that all the political parties of consequence did at least uphold the need for the politics of accommodation.

The Campaign and the Issues

Campaigning for the ninth general election started long before the parliament was dissolved. Officially, however, the election campaign started immediately after the nomination closed at 12:30 pm on April 15, 1995. Given a short, ten-day period for the campaign, it was an uphill task for the political parties to convey their viewpoints to the electorate. The problem was magnified by the ban, for the sake of public security, on organising public rallies and holding mass processions. Under the circumstances, campaigning assumed three major forms: poster wars, *ceramahs* and door to door campaigning. These are in addition to the air time provided by Radio Malaysia to major political parties to explain their manifestos.

Posters, buntings, leaflets, and billboards have always been an integral part of election battles in Malaysia. The BN had some 3,000 billboards ranging from 3x3m to 12x3m located strategically at roundabouts, T-junctions and along highways throughout the country. These billboards highlighted the achievements of the BN government and exhorted the viewers to vote BN for continued prosperity.¹⁶ In general however, political parties resorted to displaying posters of their candidates in the constituencies where they were contesting. Parties and candidates, however, were required to obtain a permit costing RM 50.00 for putting up posters. They had to adhere to several conditions governed by the Local Government Act of 1976. For instance, they were not allowed to paste posters on trees, buildings, road signs, public phone booths, or street lights.

Ceramahs or lectures were another mechanism used by the candidates to reach out and grasp the pulse of the people. *Ceramahs* were held in houses, halls and community centres and consisted largely of party supporters and undecided voters. Organised by almost all political parties throughout the peninsula, *ceramahs* assumed extraordinary importance, in some states, particularly in Kelantan. *Ceramahs* were considered the most essential and fundamental means of political discourse, the most effective means for bringing politics to the people, and for allowing the electorate to gauge the sincerity of the political aspirants. Some *ceramahs* held in open grounds were open to

all, while others were targeted at specific groups of about 50 to 100 people. Besides *ceramahs*, door-to-door campaigning was resorted to by the candidates. The candidates visited the houses and markets, and walked down the streets explaining their stands and soliciting votes. This style of campaigning has been proven to be effective for swaying the fence-sitters.

There were indeed additional forms of campaigning, such as the incorporation of election-based inspirational songs sung to the tunes of popular songs as well as programmes tracing the country's development and progress. Satirical snippets on the various parties were also aired on the various radio channels.

Though some of the electioneering campaign did degenerate into "bad-mouthing" or character assassination, the major political parties, in general, built their stand around issues of politics, economics, social services, and the like. The Barisan Nasional's campaign was based upon Malaysia's current economic performance, and the promise of an industrialised nation coupled with the cultural appeal of "Bangsa Malaysia." Replacing the 1990 theme of "peace, stability, and prosperity" with "vision, justice, and efficiency," the BN began its campaign by highlighting its record of multiethnic government and politics of accommodation, it emphasised the need for continuity of present administration to attain vision 2020. Its nine-point plan covered aspects of just and efficient government, continuity of development, religious freedom, nurturing a confident future generation, dynamic foreign policy, healthy environment, high technology industrialisation, prudent financial management, and an effective and efficient administration.¹⁷

BN's strong and financially resourceful election machinery carried its slogans to all corners of the country. Its electioneering effort, however, was concentrated mainly in three states: Penang, Kelantan, and Sabah. In Penang the DAP was determined to form the next state government; Kelantan was already under opposition rule, while the PBS-led Sabah government had only recently been overthrown in the 1994 state elections. The Prime Minister chose Penang as his first stop on his election trail, pleading for continuity. In subsequent visits, he added additional themes of the rule of law, democracy, and human rights as rallying points. He criticised the PAS for using Islam to gain political advantage and the DAP for fanning ethnic hatred and violent tactics to capture power. In Kelantan, the BN promised to bring development to this state, promised huge infrastructural projects if it were elected, and

requested all concerned to join the BN as "there is place for all under BN."¹⁸ In Sabah, the BN mounted a strong campaign hoping to capture more than half of the twenty parliamentary seats to demonstrate a clear mandate from the people. The MCA, MIC, Gerakan and other components of BN campaigned on the broad Barisan platform. They stressed the government's achievements in terms of ethnic harmony, political stability, and economic development.

The DAP's campaign had the motives of denying the BN a two-thirds majority in the parliament so as to thwart what it called the possibility of a "single-party state" in Malaysia; to replace "minor liberalisation" with "full liberation," and a promise to continue efforts to create a "Malaysian Malaysia." Its ten-point manifesto called for Bumiputera status for all Malaysians born within the country; independence of the judiciary; freedom of religion; responsible, trustworthy government accountable to the people; and free and fair elections.¹⁹ Its campaign focused on the acts of omission and commission of the BN government: misuse of power, monopolisation of mass media, absence of freedom, and whatnot. The DAP campaign was strongest in Penang where the party had launched Tanjung Three, a project to win at least seventeen seats to form the state government.

Semangat 46 relied largely on door-to-door campaigning which, it believed, was more effective than nightly *ceramahs*. Its twenty-point manifesto with the theme "Justice For All" also reflected this individualistic approach, as it directly addressed various sectors in the society. For the professionals, it promised abolition of the New Remuneration Scheme, increase in the salaries of the armed forces and police personnel, and the abolition of road tax; to the working women, extended maternity leave up to sixty days; to the religious sector, an enhancement in the status of religious officials like *mufti* and *kadi*; to the royalty, restoration of the supreme position of the Yang di Pertuan Agong in law-making; to the educational sector, a reduction in the age of primary school going children and fixing a limit of twenty-five pupils as class size.²⁰ The party fielded candidates in all Malay-majority constituencies, mainly in the east coast of the peninsula.

The PAS manifesto repeated its 1990 theme of "Progress With Islam." It aimed at creating a just community and an efficient administration based upon the principles and values of Islam with the *Shari'ah*, the Islamic law, as the ultimate source of legal reference. Its fourteen-point manifesto promised to create a disciplined, pious, and responsible society with humanitarian and high moral values. In terms

of economic policy, it promised to continue with the privatisation policy (except for public utilities), but to abolish all forms of economic activities which clashed with ethical and human values, including gambling. It pledged to preserve the environment, pursue a dynamic foreign policy, and protect people's fundamental rights. Other commitments included abolishing the Internal Security Act and reviewing the National Land Code, Printing Presses and Publications Act, Official Secrets Act, and University and University Colleges Act. The manifesto emphasised the concept of "leaders for the people, and people together with leaders" in administering the country.²¹

The PBS wanted the role of a watchdog; asking for votes to ensure that the BN government fulfils all its development promises. Some elements in PBS appealed to Kadazan nationalism, which had been used in the previous elections, and argued that the vote for PBS would secure the community from discrimination.²² The Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) based its twelve-point manifesto on opposing the abuse of power, on strengthening responsible opposition, and ensuring that the development benefits the majority without creating glaring socioeconomic inequalities. It promised construction of low-cost houses, building more schools and hospitals in less developed areas, and increase in wages and allowances for lower grade officials.²³

Election Results

The 1995 election demonstrated the continuing weakness of the opposition parties. None of them fielded candidates in all the parliamentary seats, for their strengths were confined. Consequently, the parliamentary contest was not about displacing the BN government but about curtailing its majority. The poll watchers, as such, had no quarrel over the victory of Barisan Nasional in the election. Their disagreement centred on whether or not the BN would succeed in retaining its two-thirds majority in the Dewan Rakyat, the lower house of parliament.

Unofficial election results compiled by the authors from various sources are summarised in Table 5 showing the percentage of votes polled and number of seats won by various parties. The election was hitch-free and the voter turnout was about 71.6 percent. While the BN was expected to win handsomely because of the strengths of Mahathir's administration, and the economic boom, the size of the BN majority came as a big surprise. The Barisan won 162 (or 84.38 percent) of the 192 parliamentary seats and secured an all-time high of 65.05 percent of the valid votes cast. This is an increase of about twelve percent of the

popular votes and about fourteen percent of the seats won in the 1990 elections. Among the Barisan partners, UMNO won eighty-nine out of 101 seats it contested, MCA won thirty out of thirty-four, GERAKAN won seven out of ten, and the MIC won all seven seats it contested. The other components of the Barisan, won a total of twenty-nine out of thirty-seven seats they contested.

Table 5: Results of Parliamentary Elections

Parties	% Votes Polled	Seats Won	% of Seats
BN	65.05	162	84.38
S46	10.18	6	3.13
DAP	12.16	9	4.69
PAS	7.36	7	3.65
PBS	3.27	8	4.17
PRM	0.64	0	0
AKIM	0.18	0	0
IND	1.26	0	0
Total	100.00	192	100.02

Source: Compiled from *New Straits Times*, April 27, 1995; April 28, 1995; *The Star*, April 27, 1995.

The opposition parties obtained 34.96 percent of the popular votes and won thirty seats, down from the 46.62 percent popular votes and fifty-three seats respectively in the 1990 elections. The PRM, AKIM and independent candidates failed to win any seats whatsoever. All the forty members of the BN who were expelled from the party for contesting as independent candidates lost their election deposits.

Election figures indicate that the margin of differences between the ruling coalition and the opposition was great. The DAP, with 17.6 percent of the votes and twenty seats in the 1990 elections could win only nine seats with 12.16 percent of the popular votes. According to one of the state DAP vice-chairmen, the DAP knew that this election would be a difficult one for the opposition parties in view of the

country's strong economy. However, he blamed the media for not giving a fair hearing to DAP. "We could have pulled through," he said, "if the reporting had been fair and we had been given access to television."²⁴ The Parti Melayu Semangat 46 won six seats with 10.18 of the popular votes, down two seats and 4.88 percent of the votes from the 1990 elections. The PBS won eight seats as opposed to its previous fourteen. Its share of popular votes has gone up from 2.29 percent in 1990 to 3.27 percent in 1995. This is due to the large number of candidates (28) fielded by PBS in four states and the federal territory of Labuan as against fourteen, all in Sabah.

PAS's representation in the parliament remains the same. It won seven parliamentary seats but increased its share of popular votes from 6.72 percent in 1990 to 7.36 percent in 1995. This gives an erroneous impression that the PAS's performance level has improved since 1990. In fact, though PAS succeeded in retaining the same number of seats, in terms of percentage its representation level has shrunk from 3.88 in 1990 to 3.64 in 1995. As for the popular votes, the increase of 0.64 percent is due to the increased number of seats contested: forty-six in 1995 as against thirty in 1990. Compared to 1990, it polled fewer votes in the parliamentary constituencies where it won. The PAS president Ustaz Fadzil Noor was satisfied with the party's performance and considered it a "big victory" against what he described as a big fight put up by the BN.²⁵ The National Front, according to the Kelantan Chief Minister, brought a lot of money in and exchanged "cash for votes."²⁶ In any case, the election results have been disappointing to all the opposition parties — but it was a disaster for the DAP and S46.

The Barisan Nasional's victory has been viewed by the Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim as the people's "strong and solid support of the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Muhammad."²⁷ It also reflects support of government policies: "People want the BN to continue with the excellent work it had been doing."²⁸ This support came not merely from the rural Malay voters, but most importantly from the urban centres, and particularly from the Chinese.

The BN victory in the election can be attributed to several factors. Most of the electorates sharing the benefits of a booming economy and full employment did not wish to risk that by voting for the opposition. Additionally, the comprehensive BN manifesto pledging environmental protection, increase in workers' wages, curtailing the tax rate, and the like did not give the opposition a chance to raise any issue. There is no reason, as Mahathir pointed out in a postelection interview, for the

opposition parties "to be around because all those problems have been solved."²⁹ The BN's liberalisation policy, defusing previous bones of contention like tertiary education, economic opportunities, and cultural preservation, has been popular among the mainly Chinese urban voters. The BN leader's election speeches supporting the use of the English language and Chinese independent schools also appealed to the urban middle class. As such, the urban strongholds of DAP like Klang, Serdang, and Petaling Jaya Selatan constituencies in Selangor state, and Bukit Bendera and Bukit Mertajam in Penang, all voted for BN.

As against DAP's politics which, in the words of Mahathir, was "thick with communalism" and others with fanaticism,³⁰ Anwar Ibrahim was busy letting the voters and the future generation know that "this country can only be governed by consensus, which has always been the ultimate formula for this country's success."³¹

The BN campaign was based upon research surveys carried out by professional advertising agencies a month prior to the nomination day. The survey revealed that the new and middle-class urban voters valued nonviolence, nonextremism, and a peaceful multiracial society.³² The BN machinery made the best use of the result and bombarded the papers with the slogan "vote BN for a united and developed nation." The opposition parties could not match the election organisation and machinery of the Barisan, nor did they take notice of the changing trends in the voters' attitudes. At a time when the opposition leaders were busy accusing the media of being biased, burning the newspapers and expelling the journalists from their *ceramahs*, Mahathir and Anwar were extolling the virtues of peace, communal harmony, and the politics of accommodation. The DAP's "politics of fear" forced the people of Penang not merely to stock up rice and other essentials for fear of the replay of 1969 riots but compelled them as well to vote the BN for continuity. The electoral verdict was for continuity, inter-ethnic cooperation and development.

Conclusions

The 1995 general elections provided a clear mandate for the Barisan Nasional. That the Barisan Nasional would win the election comfortably was never in doubt. Mahathir was confident that the BN would do well in the election. The "thumping victory" or landslide must have surprised him as well. The Barisan had at its disposal superior organisation and finance, an enviable record of political stability and economic achievement, dynamic leadership, and an electoral machinery laced with

survey-based information about voter attitude. By contrast, the opposition parties were plagued by inter-party as well as intra-party squabbles, defections, lack of finances, and poor media exposure. They could neither forge electoral alliances nor offer alternative policy proposals; nor could they generate issues with much voter appeal.

The predictability of the results and the apparent inability of the opposition parties to dislodge the BN and capture the seats of decision making at the centre does not nullify the value of the electoral process in Malaysia. The 1995 elections, as is true for all elections, allowed the masses to have some direct say in the choice of leaders and policies. In the process, the system was bound to, and did, permit a measure of legitimate political dissent. The elections also provided an opportunity to the political elite to mobilise the Malaysian public and to renew their enthusiasm and support for the government.

The BN victory in the elections showed that the "politics of accommodation" pursued by the Barisan has multiethnic support. The Barisan has secured equal support from Malays and non-Malays and from urban as well as rural constituencies. Furthermore, about 20 percent of constituencies returned candidates whose ethnic background differed from those of the majority electors. The earlier tendency of voting solely along ethnic lines has somewhat mellowed. Realising this, most of the opposition parties have declared their stand for multiculturalism. The 1995 elections have indicated the nature of the evolving political culture of Malaysia and the measure of linkage between the elites and the masses, and may even have helped to reduce ethnic polarization.

Notes

1. See, Guy Hermet, "State Controlled Elections: A Framework," in Guy Hermet, Richard Rose and Alan Rougieu eds., *Elections Without Choice* (New York: John Wiley, 1978).
2. NSTP Research and Information Services, *Elections in Malaysia: Facts and Figures* (Kuala Lumpur: The New Straits Times Press, 1994) 21. *Bumiputera* refers to the Malays and other ethnic groups recognised officially as "indigenous."
3. See Ataul Huq Pramanik, *Malaysia's Economic Success* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1994).
4. Barisan Nasional, *Towards a Peaceful, Stable and Prosperous Malaysia*

(Kuala Lumpur: BN, n.d.) 3.

5. *New Straits Times*, April 6, 1995.

6. *Federal Constitution* (Kuala Lumpur: International Law Book Services, 1993), Article 113 (1 and 2).

7. Suruhanjaya Pilihanraya Malaysia, *Laporan Suruhanjaya Pilihanraya Malaysia Mengenai Ulangkaji dan Persempadanan Semula Bahagian-bahagian Pilihanraya Parlimen dan Negeri bagi Negeri-negeri Tanah Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Suruhanjaya Pilihanraya Malaysia, 1994) 10-17.

8. *Federal Constitution*, Thirteenth Schedule (Articles 133, 116, 117).

9. *New Sunday Times*, April 9, 1995.

10. *New Straits Times*, April 18, 1995.

11. Of the forty-three independent candidates, forty-one belonged to the three component parties of the Barisan Nasional. They were sacked by the BN on April 19, 1995 for breaching party discipline. See *New Straits Times*, April 20, 1995.

12. For a brief account of the consensus politics since independence see Diane K. Mauzy, *Barisan National Coalition Government in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Marican & Sons, 1983); R. S. Milne and Diane K. Mauzy, *Politics and Government in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Federal Publications, 1978) 173-91.

13. *New Straits Times*, March 6, 1995.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Calculated from A. Rashid Rahman, *The Conduct of Elections in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing, 1994), Appendices i-xv.

16. *The Sun*, Sunday, April 23, 1995.

17. See Barisan Nasional, *Vision, Justice, Efficiency* (Kuala Lumpur: The New Straits Times Press, 1994).

18. *New Straits Times*, April 18, 1995.

19. Democratic Action Party, *DAP Manifesto: General Elections 1995* (Petaling Jaya: DAP, 1995).

20. Parti Melayu Semangat 46, *Manifesto: Justice for All* (PMS, n.d.).

21. See *Sunday Star*, April 9, 1995.

22. See *New Straits Times*, April 19, 1995.

23. Parti Rakyat Malaysia, *Please Support PRM* (Kuala Lumpur: PRM, n.d.).

24. *New Straits Times*, April 28, 1995.

25. *The Star*, April 27, 1995.

26. *Harakah*, May 3, 1995.

27. *New Straits Times*, April 27, 1995

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. *The Sun*, Sunday, April 30, 1995.

32. *New Straits Times*, May 4, 1995.