

The By-Election in Cameron Highlands, Malaysia: Testing Political Party Support

Abdul Rashid Moten**

Abstract: The Cameron Highland's by-election held in January 2019 was keenly contested by two major political coalitions in a district in Pahang. It was an election with a difference. The ruling coalition at the national level was the underdog contesting in a state controlled by BN/UMNO, the opposition which, in turn, has been in shambles since GE 14, with only three of 13 parties remaining in the coalition. The by-election created history by electing an Orang Asli (aboriginal people) as a member of parliament. The ruling coalition lost the by-election which was attributed to the use of race and religion by the opposition BN/UMNO in alliance with a party promoting race and religion. The candidate of the ruling coalition won the Chinese and some Indian votes. Based upon ethnographic fieldwork, targeted interviews, and documentary materials, this study analyses the Cameron Highland's by-election by focusing upon several factors including the nature of the constituency, the party system, and the candidates campaigning highlighting the local and national issues. The study found that racial issues did play a strategic role in the outcome of the by-election. The ruling coalition needs to manage the economy and address the issues faced by Malaysia's myriad ethnic communities.

Keywords: Cameron Highland's by-election, Orang Asli, PH the underdog, Race and religion, Campaigns.

Abstrak: Pilihan raya kecil Cameron Highlands yang dijalankan dalam bulan Januari 2019 telah melibatkan dua pakatan utama politik bertanding dalam satu daerah di Pahang. Ia merupakan pemilihan yang lain daripada yang lain sebelum ini. Pakatan parti pemerintah dalam peringkat kebangsaan merupakan parti di belakang dalam negeri yang dikawal oleh BN/UMNO yang merupakan pakatan pembangkang yang telah gagal pada pilihan raya ke-14 dengan hanya

*Professor Emeritus, and Guest Writer at the Centre for Islamisation at the International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: rashidmoten@gmail.com

tiga daripada tiga belas parti yang tinggal dalam pakatan tersebut. Pilihan raya kecil telah membentuk sejarah dengan memilih seorang Orang Asli sebagai ahli parlimen mereka. Pakatan pemerintah kalah dalam pilihan raya kecil ini disebabkan oleh penggunaan bangsa dan agama oleh parti pembangkang iaitu parti gabungan BN/UMNO yang mengutarakan bangsa dan agama. Calon pakatan pemerintah telah menang undi daripada bangsa Cina dan India. Namun, berdasarkan kerja lapangan etnografi, wawancara yang disasarkan, dan bahan-bahan dokumen, kajian ini menganalisis pilihan raya di Cameron Highlands dengan memberi tumpuan kepada beberapa faktor termasuklah sifat kawasan pilihan raya, sistem berparti, dan kempen-kempen calon yang menitikberatkan isu-isu tempatan dan kebangsaan/nasional. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa isu-isu bangsa turut memainkan peranan yang strategik dalam keputusan pilihan raya kecil. Pakatan pemerintah perlu menguruskan ekonomi dan menitikberatkan isu-isu yang dihadapi oleh komuniti etnik Malaysia yang pelbagai bangsa dan agama.

Kata kunci: Pilihan raya kecil Cameron Highlands, Orang Asli, PH kebelakang, bangsa dan agama, kempen.

Introduction

Malaysia is a parliamentary democracy where elections are held at periodic intervals as defined in the Constitution promulgated at the time of independence of the country. According to the Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, “Many people would dispute what I say because they think that Malaysia is not very democratic but I would like to tell you that since independence, it has held 14 elections and there was not much complains about the elections. . .” (Bernama, 2019). Consequently, much discussion of Malaysian politics has centred around elections, the nature of political parties and coalitions of parties formed before and after the election, and on the ethnic factor that undergirds the Malaysian parties.

Noticeably, Malaysians have taken an active part in by-elections. Since the first meeting of parliament in 1959, there have been a total of 72 by-elections which were well contested. Article 54(1) of the Federal Constitution stipulates that a casual vacancy in the parliament must be filled within 60 days from the date on which it is established by the Election Commission to fill that vacancy. A by-election is subject to all the electoral laws that apply to a general election. The main grounds that lead to a by-election are: death or resignation of the incumbent,

disqualification, nullification of the election result by the court and expulsion of an MP from the House. A by-election is “a fresh vote with a fresh slate of candidates and an opportunity for voters to behave differently than at the previous ballot” (Rose 2000, p. 27).

It is generally agreed that the vast majority of by-elections are unimportant because these do not necessarily lead to a change of government. The governing party normally enjoys good majority support in the parliament so that losing a few seats would not affect their position. However, by-elections become crucial when the ruling party, with a small margin, loses enough by-elections and thus face a vote of no confidence. Under certain circumstances, political scientists and media specialists often point to by-election victories or defeats as important signals having consequences for the legislature, political parties, election campaigns, and the party system in a country. Certain by-elections, such as the Cameron Highland’s by-election in Pahang, Malaysia, may serve a critical function as tests for political party support. Victory in a by-election can substantially boost leadership credibility and party.

The Cameron Highland’s by-election was seen by many as a de facto referendum on Pakatan Harapan’s (PH) performance in government. For BN, the victory in the highlands is needed to reinvigorate the beleaguered and divided party. Interestingly, one candidate came from PH, which forms the federal government, and the other was from BN, which leads the state government of Pahang. Evidently, the Cameron Highland’s by-election deserves a serious study. As a backdrop, it is necessary to consider the context in which the by-election was held. This is followed by the discussion on the constituency, the candidates, the campaign, and the results.

The Context

Malaysia operates a federal parliamentary system with the king, Yang Di-Pertuan Agong, as the constitutional head. It has a bicameral parliament that is composed of a 69-members, largely non-elected, Upper House (Dewan Negara) and a popularly-elected House of Representatives (Dewan Rakyat) that currently consists of 222 members elected from single-member districts by universal suffrage. Each of its thirteen states has a legislature elected likewise. Since independence in 1957, Malaysia’s commitment to democracy, at least in its electoral aspect

is indicated by the fact that it has conducted fourteen general elections at the national and state levels with an appreciable degree of public participation reaching up to 84.8 per cent in 2013 and 82.32 in 2018.

The 14th GE was held on May 9, 2018, in which 36 political parties contested parliamentary and state assembly seats. Of these, 13 were components of the Barisan Nasional (National Front or BN), the coalition that ruled the national government till 2018. United Malays National Organization (UMNO) is the dominant party, followed by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysian People's Movement Party, GERAKAN) and other smaller parties. Najib Tun Razak has led the coalition since becoming UMNO president in 2009 and resigned in 2018. The major competitor of BN is Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope, PH) composed of People's Justice Party (PKR), Democratic Action Party (DAP), National Trust Party (Amanah) and Malaysian United Indigenous Party (PPBM or Bersatu). There were two other coalitions of four parties each. One is the Gagasan Sejahtera (Harmonious Alliance, GS) which promotes the "ideas of peace" in Malaysia and consists of the Islamic party of Malaysia, (PAS), Parti Ikatan Bangsa Malaysia (IKATAN), Pan-Malaysian Islamic Front (BERJASA) and Malaysian Hope Party (PHM). The fourth coalition is Gabungan Sabah Bersatu (The United Sabah Alliance), a coalition of four parties based in Sabah, Malaysia. Remaining eleven parties contested the election on their own. The BN secured 4.08 million votes (33.8%), and won 79 parliamentary seats. The opposition alliance won 226 assembly seats and formed governments in five states. GS won 18 parliamentary seats with 2.05 million votes. Most Malaysians, fed up with rising inflation, paranoia, and absurd levels of graft, voted for the opposition coalition and thus heralded a "new Malaysia." The national turnover of power through the ballot box and the peaceful transfer of power were significant advances in electoral democracy (Moten, 2019).

Following BN's poor performance in the election, many component parties decided to leave the BN reducing it to original three-party coalition composed of UMNO, MCA, and MIC. Many members of parliament belonging to UMNO were also contemplating to switch allegiance to PH especially to PPBM headed by Mahathir. By December 2018, seven members have joined PPBM who according to Mahathir were good former UMNO leaders. The existing UMNO leaders were unhappy

with the exodus of party leaders and hence struggling to strengthen the party and return grassroots faith in UMNO. The Cameron Highland's by-election was the opportunity to prove that UMNO remains relevant. They did not want to lose and contribute an additional seat to Pakatan Harapan in the Parliament. The by-election was significant also for the fact that it provided an opportunity for PH to test their influence following the 14th general election.

The Constituency

The Cameron Highland's by-election was necessitated by the Election Court's decision to nullify the BN's victory in the Cameron Highland's parliamentary seat. As shown in Table 1, in the parliamentary election in 2018, Dato' Sivarraajh Chandran of the BN (Vice-President, Malaysian Indian Congress, MIC) won the Cameron Highland's seat with a slim majority of 597 votes. However, the opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) candidate M. Manogaran filed a petition in the Election Court alleging that Sivarraajh adopted corrupt practices to inducing voters to vote for him in the 14th general election. The Election Court found the allegation to be true "beyond reasonable doubt" and on November 30, 2018, nullified the election result leading to the by-election to fill in the vacant parliamentary seat.

This was the fifth by-election after the 14th general election. The earlier by-elections involved three state constituencies (Sungai Kandis, Seri Satia, and Balakong) won by PH. The fourth was the parliamentary constituency of Port Dickson in Negeri Sembilan caused by the resignation of its incumbent (PH candidate) paving way for Anwar Ibrahim to return to parliament after receiving a royal pardon from a controversial sodomy conviction. The Cameron Highland's by-election was the first to be held in a constituency won by BN in GE14 and was the first by-election to be held in a state under the rule of BN.

The Cameron Highland's is the most popular of the highland retreats in Malaysia. It is one of the eleven constituencies of Pahang. It occupies an area of 712.18 square kilometres (274.97 sq mi) and comprises three townships and five settlements. It has a diverse population of 33,278 people comprising Malay 33.5%; Chinese 29.48%; Indian 14.91%; Orang Asli 21.56%; and others 0.55% (Malaysia, 2012). The parliamentary seat covers the two state seats of Tanah Rata and Jelai. The former is mainly Chinese (48.12 %) and Indian (23.69 %) and was

won by Pakatan Harapan (DAP). The Jelai state constituency is made up mainly of Malays (64.14 per cent) and Orang Asli (33.82 per cent) population and was won by the BN/UMNO candidate. The parliamentary seat is described as BN's stronghold. The BN candidates from MIC has contested and won the parliamentary seat in four consecutive general elections since 2004. But the margin of victory secured by BN/MIC has gradually been reduced. In 2004, BN/MIC won by a majority of 6,260 votes; in 2008, BN/MIC won by 3,117 votes; in 2013 BN/MIC won by mere 462 votes, and in 2018 BN/MIC won by a slender majority of 597 votes only.

Table 1: Results of Cameron Highland's Parliamentary Seat in 2018

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
BN	Dato Sivarraajh Chandran	10,307	42.30
PH	Manogaran	9,710	39.85
PAS	Cikgu Wan Mahadir	3,587	14.72
PSM	Suresh Kumar	680	2.79
Berjasa	Ustaz Tahir	81	0.33
Total Valid Votes		24,365	100.00
Majority		597	2.45

Source: Malaysia, *Federal Government Gazette*. Putrajaya: Attorney General's Chamber. May 28, 2018, pp. 3-4.

The Candidates

There were a total of 32,048 registered voters in Cameron Highland's by-election. The Election Commission opened a total of 29 voting centres in the constituency of which 17 centres were in Tanah Rata and 12 in Jelai. The Commission deployed 811 election workers and used two helicopters to fly ballot boxes from rural areas to the vote tallying centres. The Election Commission (EC) fixed 12 January 2019 as nomination day and 26 January 2019 for polling and 22 January 2019

for early voting. The campaign period was 14 days from 12 January (the nomination day) till 11.59 p.m. on January 25, 2019. The by-election was estimated to cost RM 3.5 million. The EC appointed four Election Campaign Enforcement Team to monitor the 14-day campaign period in accordance with the provisions of the law under Section 27B of the Election Offences Act 1954 (The Commissioner of Law Revision, 2016).

At the end of nomination day on January 12, the EC announced that four candidates would be contesting for the seat. Coincidentally, the four candidates came from four different professions and different ethnic groups. The BN initially planned to continue to let MIC field a candidate for the by-election with a pledge from the MCA to support the Indian candidate (Timbuong, 2018). This, however, did not materialise. Instead, the BN chose a local indigenous Orang Asli (aboriginal people) as its candidate. Barisan Nasional's 60-year old Ramli Mohd Noor is the former assistant Police commissioner who in 2015 became the highest ranking Orang Asli police officer in Malaysia. He is from the Semai tribe and is also the first Orang Asli to contest in the election in Cameron Highlands. In an informal discussion with the author (January 25, 2019), the acting UMNO President Mohamad Hasan said that Ramli did not belong to any of the BN component parties and that many of the tok batin (village chiefs) in the Orang Asli tribes in the area are his "cousins." According to UMNO Youth Chief, Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki, "From the early stages, when deciding a candidate, we focused on what the people would want. While traditionally this seat would have gone to a MIC member, this time we said the locals need a voice... "If we picked someone from their ranks, a local, then hopefully, the people will be more receptive to us" (Loheswar, 2019).

Pakatan Harapan nominated a 59-year old Indian, M Manogaran, who is a lawyer by profession, as well as the Pahang DAP deputy chief. In the 2008 general election, Manogaran contested and won the parliamentary constituency of Teluk Intan. In the subsequent two parliamentary elections, he contested from Cameron Highland's but was defeated both times by BN/MIC candidates. It was Manogaran who filed an election petition alleging bribery during the GE14 election in the constituency which eventually triggered the Cameron Highland's by-election.

There were two independent candidates. One is a local Malay resident, Sallehudin Ab Talib, is a retired teacher having taught for 20 years including at a teacher's training before retiring. The 61-year-old Sallehudin has a degree in political science as well as a Master's in education management and administration. He is the son of Felda settler and resides at Felda Sungai Koyan The second, Wong Seng Yee, is a Chinese and a farmer born and raised in Cameron Highlands. The 40-year-old Wong holds a Master's degree in agricultural science from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the US. He is also an activist involved in Cameron Highland's Agriculture Association (PPPCH), Cameron Highland's Flower Growers Association, and Regional Environmental Awareness Cameron Highland's (Reach). Wong did not belong to any political party and contested the by-election with "gardening hoe" as his election symbol.

There was also the President of The People's Progressive Party (MyPPP), M. Kayveas, who had earlier announced his intention to contest in the by-election. On nomination day, he decided not to contest and declared that "I will openly and aggressively support the Harapan candidate...Harapan is what Cameron Highland's needs to see a change it has needed for years" (Malaysiakini Team, 2019). People also expected the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) to file a candidate for the Cameron Highland's parliamentary constituency since its candidate secured 3,587 votes, almost 15 % of the votes cast in the GE 14. In this by-election, however, PAS decided not to contest the by-election to support the BN candidate. The BN leadership was happy to work with PAS as the latter enjoys strong support in rural constituencies. Evidently, the contest was between the candidates of BN and PH.

The Campaign

In this by-election, UMNO projected itself as the underdog party. It was aware of its slim majority in GE14 and that it no longer holds power at the federal level. UMNO has seen its ranks and leadership decimated. Many of its leaders are under investigation or have been charged in court. Therefore, the entire machinery was in full swing with former prime minister Najib Tun Razak, now infamous for his alleged role in the 1Malaysia Development Berhad scandal involving billions of dollars, in the forefront of campaigning in Cameron Highland's which

is located in his home state of Pahang.* Najib was seen riding pillion on a small motorbike moving from one place to another, shaking hands and asking for votes. He criticised PH's policies and appeared on social media to remind people that he had been the victim of lies spread by the PH administration. The BN was organised in its defence of the Cameron Highland's maximising its potential to retain support.

DAP's Lim Kit Siang considered Pakatan Harapan (PH) to be the underdog (Looi, 2019). He argued that Cameron Highland's had always been one of Barisan Nasional's (BN) "fixed deposit" parliamentary seats in the past six decades. PH won the majority support of the Chinese and Indian voters in the 14th general election but lost the seat by 597 votes. The PH's strategy was to maintain the support of the Chinese and Indians voters while increasing the support of the Malay and Orang Asli voters. Pakatan leaders, including DAP secretary-general LIM Guan Eng, Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Parti Amanah Negara president Mohamad Sabu, and Prime Minister and Pakatan chairman Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, were seen campaigning to win voters' support. It was, however, the DAP which led the campaign.

The by-election was the occasion to test PH's popularity level, six months after taking the helm of the country's administration. It also allowed Barisan Nasional to assess their standing following the raft of changes including leadership issues affecting the once-powerful coalition. The candidates from the two coalitions took to the social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others to reach to voters. Hundreds of posters, flags, and banners were also seen along the streets particularly in the Jelai state constituency. However, being aware of the limited internet infrastructure and the limited visibility of flags and banners, candidates resorted to meeting voters in public areas and to visit their homes including those in the Orang Asli settlements.

* Najib Razak was charged in court in a probe linked to how billions of dollars went missing from 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), a state fund he founded. *The Wall Street Journal* reported that up to US\$700 million was wired to Najib's personal accounts from various companies linked to the fund (Tom Wright and Simon Clark, "Investigators Believe Money Flowed to Malaysian Leader Najib's Accounts Amid 1MDB Probe," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 2, 2015). The 1MDB scandal was also a key topic of discussion at Malaysia's 14th general election.

The parties had to get police permission to hold gatherings. For the first three days of the by-election, the police issued 15 *ceramah* (small gatherings) permits to Pakatan Harapan (PH) and five to Barisan Nasional (BN) (Sulhi Azman, 2019). There were also talks held in various mosques. The Electoral watchdog “Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections” (Bersih 2.0) organised the first ever debate involving the candidates and was screened live over the television. The BN candidate did not take part in the debate.

The two candidates highlighted the need to improve basic infrastructures like proper access roads, clean water supply, electricity, as well as education, health and medical care, housing, economic opportunities. The PH candidate Manogaran pledged to solve problems relating to flood mitigation, landslides, temporary occupation licences (TOL), foreign workers’ permit registration, cleanliness, and local development. He promised to open Pakatan service centres in Jelai and Tanah Rata to serve the people. “I will also knock on the door of the Finance Minister (Lim) to get allocations for the development agenda” (Bernama, 2019). He also pleaded to do away with racial politics and to reject BN. Lim Kit Siang of DAP repeatedly pleaded with the voters to reject racial politics espoused by BN. The BN candidate raised similar issues and in particular highlighted the issue of the influx of foreign workers to plantations and orchards, some of whom became orchard owners and secured citizenship or permanent residence. He also expressed his unhappiness over indiscriminate land clearing by illegal farmers which led to the flood problem in the area claiming several lives. He lamented that the PH members were making use of the government machinery to help in their campaign and that the voters were threatened and bribed to vote for their candidate.

While the candidates emphasized local issues, national issues were also brought to light. The PH campaigners were trying to convince voters that it has delivered on its 2018 election promises by repealing the widely unpopular Goods and Services Tax and addressing political corruption. The BN was trying to rally support by framing PH as failing to deliver on its GE-14 promises. PH is yet to deliver on more pressing bread-and-butter issues such as lowering the cost of living and improving the national economy. The BN called on Malay voters to vote along racial and religious lines. It was, however, local issues that received heavy emphasis in the campaign.

Among the independent candidates, Sallehudin Ab Talib championed educational opportunities especially for the Orang Asli community. He also highlighted the issues of army veterans, traditional Malay kampung areas, second generation Felda settlers, as well as the social economy of the Orang Asli. He raised the slogan “Voice of the people for the people” and used the ‘book’ as a symbol for his campaign. The other independent candidate was Wong Seng Yee who contested using a “hoe” as election symbol. He pledged to introduce the highland agriculture policy to safeguard the environment.

As earlier announced, the campaigning for the by-election ended at 11.59 pm on January 25, 2019. The campaigning in these two weeks was relatively calm and smooth and the police did not “expect anything out of the ordinary to happen” (Tan 2019). Yet, the Electoral watchdog “Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections” (Bersih 2.0) documented 23 cases of election offences including abuse of state resources, bribery and undue influence, the incitement of ill-feeling on race and religion in campaigning, campaigning on polling day, and the like (Koya, 2019). The Electoral Commission observers from Engage also reported similar incidents (Al-Iran 2019). However, 29 police reports had been lodged mostly concerning reports on election bribery and abuse of government property or vehicles. The reports had been referred to the appropriate bodies for further investigation and action (Tan, 2019).

The Result

Polling centres for the Cameron Highland’s Parliamentary constituency by-election opened at 8 a.m. on Saturday 26 January 2019 and the last of the 27 polling stations closed at 5.30 pm the same day. A total of 1,148 police personnel were deployed to monitor the situation and ensure public safety on polling day.

The results were announced about four hours later. According to the Government Gazette, the turnout rate was 68.79 per cent which was the highest compared to the earlier four by-elections. A total of 21,428 voters turned up to vote. 568 ballot papers were rejected. The balloting process went on smoothly. There were some tense moments when the BN and PH supporters exchanged verbal abuses but these minor incidents did not deter voters from casting their vote. Most of the voters

were ferried from all remote corners of the constituency to the centres via motorcycles, cars, and vans.

Barisan Nasional candidate, Ramli Mohd Nor, was declared the winner of the Cameron Highland's parliamentary seat by winning 12,038 votes (see Table 2). BN retained the parliamentary seat with a 3,238 vote majority compared to a majority of 597 its candidate scored in 2018. This was a big morale booster for the BN/UMNO as this was its first victory in five by-elections since GE14. The BN has been in shambles since GE 14, with only three of 13 parties remaining in the coalition. The retired senior policeman, Ramli Mohd Nor, has created history by becoming the country's first Orang Asli (aboriginal people) from Peninsular Malaysia to become a member of parliament. According to gazetted results, BN's vote share is 56.18 per cent which is very close to the combined vote share of BN and PAS (57.02 per cent) during GE14. It implies that BN managed to win most of the 14.72 per cent of votes secured by PAS during GE 14. Barisan Nasional acting chairman Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan appreciated the "cooperation and help from PAS" for the win and said that "both parties will continue their alliance as it was proven to be a good strategy" (Bunyan, 2019). Apparently, BN-PAS alliance to support each other on Malay Muslim issues is a winning strategy in the hinterland.

PH candidate, Manogaran, secured 8, 800 votes constituting about 41.7 per cent of the total votes cast. PH's share of the popular vote increased by 1.2 per cent compared to GE 14 which may be due to the support it received from Parti Socialis Malaysia which in GE14 garnered 680 votes. Though PH lost the election, it did succeed in increasing the popular votes and reducing BN's majority. However, there were others who considered the defeat in the Cameron Highland's by-election as a reminder to the leadership of the PH coalition to fulfil its promise to alleviate the people's financial burdens. Although some initiatives have been taken to fulfil the promises, PH has notably fallen short on rebalancing the inequalities faced by some ethnic groups. For example, PH has not allocated funds to the promised upgrading of infrastructure and pieces of equipment in Orang Asli villages.

The two independent candidates polled 314 and 276 votes respectively. They never expected to win against the candidates sponsored by the federal (PH) and state governments (BN). Having

failed to achieve one-eighth of the total number of votes polled by all the candidates in the constituency, they lost their deposit money.

Table 2: Results of the By-Election P.078 Cameron Highlands, 26 January 2019

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
BN	Ramli Bin Mohd Nor	12,038	56.18
PH	Manogaran	8,800	41.07
Independent	Sallehudin bin Ab Talib	314	1.46
Independent	Wong Seng Yee	276	1.29
Total Valid Votes		21,428	100.00
Majority		3,238	15.11

Source: Malaysia, Federal Government Gazette. Putrajaya: Attorney General's Chamber. January 28, 2019, pp. 3-4.

Conclusion

The Cameron Highland's by-election in Pahang was unique in that the ruling coalition was contesting the seat in a state under BN's rule. Both the contesting coalitions were claiming to be underdogs in the by-election. Unlike previous elections, the electoral outcome was not certain. Most of the traditional modes of campaigning were not available and hence the emphasis was placed on house-to-house campaigns and addressing small gatherings in the mosques or in the open spaces.

The by-election was more than a decision by the electorate on who, or rather, which party would represent the constituency at the federal level. It was also a test for UMNO and its renewed "moderate" outlook. The by-election also proved to be a test to see if the former Prime Minister Najib's personality still retained its force to swing the voters to vote for BN/UMNO. Najib brought all BN constituent parties and

leaders with machine and money. PAS allied with UMNO and tried to match PH machinery in mobilizing voter support. Evidently, an UMNO and PAS alliance was a strong galvanising force to unite Malays in the hinterland. Though the leadership in the ruling coalition's PKR, PPBM, and Amanah are Malay based, none of these parties stake a solid claim to represent Malay interests. Of equal importance is Barisan Nasional's nomination of an Orang Asli candidate from Peninsular Malaysia who garnered solid support from his community who constituted 22 per cent of the voting population in the constituency. The fact of the candidate being a Muslim ensured Malay support as well. The PH/DAP candidate received Chinese and partly Indian support. Indeed, the Cameron Highland's by-election has underscored that racial issues continue to occupy a centre-stage in Malaysian politics.

The PH lost the by-election but its candidate scored 41 per cent of the votes cast as against 38 percent in GE 14. It should be satisfying for PH to have reduced BN's majority which will encourage the party leaders to improve election machinery for the future. According to many observers, the PH not only needs to improve its image but its fundamental approach to both managing the economy and addressing the issues faced by Malaysia's myriad ethnic communities.

References:

- Al-Iran (2019). "Cameron Highland's by-election: Findings of election observers," Al-Iran, 8 February 2019 at <https://aliran.com/civil-society-voices/cameron-highlands-by-election-findings-of-election-observers/> (Accessed April 5, 2019).
- Azman, Sulhi (2019). "15 ceramah permits issued to Cameron Highland's by-election candidates for campaign" *The Edge Markets*, January 15, 2019, at <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/15-ceramah-permits-issued-cameron-highlands-byelection-candidates-campaign>
- Bernama (2019). "Cameron Highlands: Pakatan's final push ahead of polling day", *The Star*, January 25, 2019.
- Bernama (2019). "Dr. M.: Malaysia's election system proves it is a democratic country," *New Straits Times*, January 19, 2019.
- Bunyan, John (2019). "BN declares Cameron Highland's vote a 'referendum' on Pakatan," *Malaymail*, 26 January 2019.
- Hamdan, Nurbaiti, "Court nullifies BN's GE14 victory for Cameron Highland's seat (Updated)". *The Star Online* Friday November 30, 2018, at <https://>

- www.thestar.com.my/ news/nation/2018/11/30/court-nullifies-bns-ge14-victory-for- Cameron-highlands-seat/ (Accessed March 23, 2019).
- Koya, Zakiah (2019). "Most number of electoral offences in Cameron Highlands, says Bersih" *The Star*, Thursday, 31 January 2019.
- Loheswar, R. (2019). "Odds favour BN in Cameron Highland's by-election, says Umno Youth chief," *MalayMail*, 23 January 2019, at <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/01/23/odds-favour-bn-in-cameron-highlands-by-election-says-umno-youth-chief/1715735> (Accessed April 15, 2019).
- Looi, Sylvia (2019). "Pakatan underdog in Cameron Highland's race, says Kit Siang" *Malay Mail*, January 2, 2019 at <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/01/02/pakatan-underdog-in-cameron-highlands-race-says-kit-siang/1708374> (Accessed April 3, 2019).
- Malaysia (2010). *Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristics, 2010*. Putrajaya: Department of Statistics.
- Malaysiakini Team (2019). "Four-cornered battle in Cameron Highland's by-election", *Malaysiakini* at <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/459886> (Accessed April 25, 2019).
- Moten, Abdul Rashid "The 14th General Elections in Malaysia: Ethnicity, Party Polarization and the End of the Dominant Party System," *Asian Survey*, 59.3 (May/June 2019).
- Rose, Richard, ed. 2000. *International Encyclopedia of Elections*. London: Macmillan.
- Syed Umar Ariff and Rizanizam Abdul Hamid, "Dr Mahathir: PPBM only accepts good former UMNO leaders", *New Strait Times*, December 14, 2018.
- The Commissioner of Law Revision, Malaysia (2016), *Election Offences Act 1954 As At 1 December 2016* (Kuala Lumpur: The Commissioner Of Law Revision, Malaysia).
- Tan, Vincent (2019). "Cameron Highland's by-election: Campaigning ends at midnight, says Pahang police chief", *The Star*, Friday 25, January 2019.
- Timbuong, J (2018), "Ahmad Zahid: Barisan reserves Cameron seat for MIC", *The Star*, Sunday, December 2, 2018.