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15th General Election: What Are the Factors Determining the Electoral Results?

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ABSTRACT

The 15th general election held on 19th November 2022 was the most intense and unpredictable in the Malaysian electoral history. This is due to the fact that there were four main coalitions contesting in the Peninsular Malaysia, namely Barisan Nasional (BN), Pakatan Harapan (PH), Perikatan Nasional (PN) and Gerakan Tanah air (GTA). The 15th general election took place in the midst of political turmoil in Malaysia stemming from the previous 14th general election whereby within approximately four years, Malaysia had experienced three alternating governments. This study aims to analyze the results of the 15th general election as well as examining the factors that shaped the results. This study uses qualitative method via analysis of commentary and observation on the political landscape of Malaysia circa the date of the dissolution of parliament on 20th October until the polling day. The study finds that subsequent to the announcement of the 15th general election results, no one party had secured an easy majority victory resulting in a hung parliament. The coalition which garnered the most seats won was Pakatan Harapan at 82 seats followed by Perikatan Nasional at 73 seats and Barisan Nasional at 30 seats. In addition, this election also witnessed the declined support for Pakatan Harapan, even more deteriorating for Barisan Nasional, while drastic increase of support was seen for Perikatan Nasional. A variety of factors were identified as instrumental to the results such as poor leadership, young voters and social media campaign.

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Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature in the field of politics especially studies related to general election. It also contributes in terms of providing an overview of the change in people's support for political parties. Practically, this study is important towards the maturity of the democratic process in Malaysia.

1. Introduction

The 14th General Election (GE 14) on 8th of May embarked upon a new hope for democratic system in Malaysia. For the first time in 61 years, a change of government was mandated by the people of Malaysia. Barisan Nasional which ruled for 61 years prior was ousted from power in the said general election. Pakatan Harapan consisting of a coalition of opposition political parties, namely; Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), Parti Bersatu Pribumi Malaysia (Bersatu) Parti Amanah Negara (PAN), Democratic Action Party (DAP), with support from local Sabah parti WARISAN gained simple majority victory and formed a new government. The triumph of Pakatan Harapan gave birth to the new era of N Malaysia and new leadership line-up in the government. Armed with a slogan of New Malaysia, numerous plans of change were hatched by the Pakatan Harapan government to fulfill the administrative period of a term of five years with emphasis given on reforms, particularly institutional reform.

Unfortunately, due to myriad of issues brewing in the leadership of Pakatan Harapan, consequence of which some parliamentary members of the parties defected causing cleavage in the component parties. The collapse of Pakatan Harapan (PH) was inevitable after only 22 months of power. The country subsequently was headed by Perikatan Nasional (PN), which government was constituted on 29th February, 2020 following a political exploit dubbed as "Sheraton Move". PN consisting of Bersatu, Barisan Nasional and PAS with the appointment of Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as the Prime Minister. He was officially sworn in as the eight Prime Minister upon the approval of Yang di-Pertuan Agong; hence, ending the political turmoil that lasted almost a week. The decision was finalised after political leaders and the members of the House of Representatives submitted names of the Prime Ministerial candidates to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. Nevertheless, his administration was not without challenges, by which he was faced with discontent from both the opposition as well as component parties of Pakatan Nasional itself. They demanded that the then Prime Minister to step down. The demand also came from the Pakatan Nasional members of parliament whom retracted their prior support. This manoeuvre resulted in the Prime Minister losing his parliamentary majority and inevitably the Prime minister had to concur and resigned after 17 months in power.

Ismail Sabri took the oath of office of the Prime Minister on 21st August 2021 upon approval of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. The appointment gave a ray of hope that the political polemics engulfing the country would be able to be put to rest the soonest. He gained the support of a majority of 114 members of the House of Representatives to enable him to form a government dubbed as "*Keluarga Malaysia*" based on inclusiveness, togetherness and gratitude. The Ismail Sabri government comprising of Barisan Nasional, Bersatu and PAS. In order to stabilize the local political atmosphere, Ismail Sabri took a drastic measure by signing a Memorandum of Understanding on Political Transformation and Stability between the federal government and the oppositions on 13th September 2021. The MoU was aimed at forming a bi-partisan partnership, by way of upholding the spirit of "*Keluarga Malaysia*". With the signing of the MoU, the political temperature

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diminished with the focus of all parties directed towards the recovery efforts of the country, pertaining various aspects predominantly that which affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there were rumours that a number of politicians were not on the same page with the administration of Ismail Sabri. Eventually, after approximately 14 months of office, the parliament was dissolved on 11th October, 2022 on account of insistence from certain members of parliament. The premature dissolution of parliament which was still about eight months away, according to Prime Minister Ismail Sabri was intended to reinstate the mandate of the people and to create stronger and more stable government.

However, the electoral result of the 15th general election revealed that not a single party had secured an easy majority to form a government. The parliament after the 15th general election was deferred to almost a week. The competing political parties had to negotiate among another to form a government. Anwar Ibrahim the leader of Pakatan Harapan which gained the most seats of 82 from 222 parliamentary seats had to negotiate with Barisan Nasional, Gabungan Parti Sarawak and Gabungan Parti Rakyat Sabah to form a Unity government. On 24th November the Yang di-Pertuan Agong conceded to the appointment of Anwar Ibrahim as the 10th Prime Minister of Malaysia. Anwar Ibrahim heads the unity government which comprises of the parties which supported him. This study aims to analyze the electoral results of the 15th general election and studying the factors that shaped it. The focus of the discussion lies on the parliamentary seats per se. This is particularly so due to the fact that during the general election, only three states out of 13 dissolved their State Assembly seats (DUN).

2. Literature Review

Abdul Rashid (2009) through his article, 2008 General Election in Malaysia: Democracy at Work writes about the 12th general election (GE 12) held in 2008. He mentions that after the landslide victory of Barisan Nasional in the 11th general election (GE 11) in 2004, they failed to deliver their promises to make change towards better administration. As a result, the people protested in succeeding GE12, by opting for the oppositions coalition, namely Pakatan Rakyat consisting of Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) which won 82 Parliamentary seats, thereby denying a two-third majority held by Barisan Nasional. The success of Pakatan Rakyat in the said general election had transformed the culture of Malaysian politics and unlocked the opportunity for better democracy. This is predominantly so due to the fact that the people had access to myriad of information and had courage to manifest drastic decisions via the ballot box. In a study entitled Social Media Impact on Malaysia's 13th General Election by Gomez (2014) illustrates that Barisan Nasional and Najib Razak used various measures to entice the support the people in the 13th general election (GE 13) in 2013, including the intensive use of social media. Unfortunately for them, the efforts did not come to fruition when they did not gain the support of the people in that general election as the latter were discontented at the failure of the government to make fundamental changes as per the Government Transformation Plan, not addressing the high cost of living and corruption. In spite of the virtuosity of the Government's Transformation Plan, the implementation was not comprehensive as there was still maladministration such as corruption and abuse of power among civil servants and politicians.

In addition, another study on GE13 authored by Saravanamuttu (2016) entitled Power Sharing in a Divided Nation: Mediated Communalism and New Politics in Six Decades of

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Malaysia's Election, he analyses the people's protest against the Barisan Nasional's government in GE13 in the form of Bersih Demonstration 2 on 9th Julai 2011 and Bersih 3 on 28th April 2012. As a result, the people's grievances manifested in the declining electoral results for Barisan Nasional compared to that of which achieved in GE12; explicitly in the dwindling number of seats won and Barisan Nasional's loss of popular votes to Pakatan Rakyat, that is at 47 percent to that of Pakatan Rakyat's at 51 percent. Saravanamuttu (2016) further remarks that the protests were prominent in the urban areas advocated by the young people, leaving the Barisan Nasional not getting enough votes from such demographic. This voting trend by the urban voters as well as young voters throughout the country in rejecting Barisan Nasional was an indicator of their dissatisfaction with the governmental transformation that bore no positive results causing the people to be squeezed by the rising cost of living. The cost of living should be made the priority by Najib Razak's administration but it was not given attention to in spite of the existence of the policy and implementation of the Economic Transformation Plan.

Moniruzzaman and Farzana (2018) in their analysis on electoral result of the 14th general election (GE 14) opine that the GE14's results in 2018 was nothing short of a surprise and unexpected as no previous studies had predicted Pakatan Harapan would be able to form a government. With a strength of 113 parliamentary seats, spread between the following component parties; namely Parti Keadilan Rakyat at 47 seats from 71 contested, Democratic Action Party at 42 won seats out of 47 contested, Bersatu triumphed with 13 seats out of 34 contested and AMANAH at 11 seats won out of 34 contested. The main contributing factor of these massive victories of Pakatan Harapan was due to Tun Dr. Mahathir's return to political arena by leading Pakatan Harapan. Tun Dr. Mahathir who had led the government for 22 years still had the support of the people. Other factors include the people's protest against the issues of corruption in the government particularly the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), FELCRA and FELDA that saw massive sway of votes to Pakatan Harapan led by Tun Tun Dr. Mahathir.

Another study on GE 2018 was penned by Muhamad Nadzri dan Jamaie (2018) whom view that the ability of Pakatan Harapan in developing a strong, representative and authoritative opposition alliance was especially by involving a Malay/Bumiputra-based party into Pakatan Harapan, is one of the pivotal reasons for the disruption in the dominance of Barisan Nasional's in Malaysian politics. This article also identifies other factors that led to the downfall of the Barisan Nasional regime in GE14 namely: the internal disintegration of the ruling elite (elite ruptures); colossal issues that have an impact; and technological advancement (ICT) as well as the formation of digital/informative society in Malaysia.

The findings of a study conducted by Junaidi (2019) exhibit several key factors for the defeat of Barisan Nasional in the 2018 general elections. Among others, the determination of the oppositions to bring down Barisan Nasional, the increasing cost of living of the people, the damage to the image or personality of Barisan National leaders and the party, the unity of Pakatan Harapan, the role of social media, the influence of Tun Dr. Mahathir, the influence of 1.4 million young voters and war of perception. These combined factors had successfully created a wave that toppled Barisan Nasional in 2018 general election. As such, the electoral results demonstrate the dynamics and the art of political science and that there is nothing impossible in due process of politics.

In Malaysia, there are two main issues warranting protests. To begin with, political and administration issues such as corruption, abuse of power, and misappropriation of

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government funds. Secondly, issues pertaining to the economy such as the implementation of goods and services tax, the high cost of living, price hike of petrol and the instability of the national economy. From the perspective of the impact of protests, the analysis illustrates that it has produced a better democratic process. Additionally, it also affects the electoral results of the general election which altered the political landscape of Malaysia (Zawiyah & Mohammad Agus, 2019).

In general, the above studies discuss the general election in Malaysia with common findings that the support of the people for Barisan Nasional which held power for 61 years in Malaysia began to decline since GE12 in 2008. It prolonged in GE13 in 2013 and finally was defeated by the opposition in GE14 in 2018. Failure to deliver their manifestos as well administration weaknesses are cited as the factor that led to the downfall of Barisan Nasional. Contrary to previous studies, this study shall analyse the factors influencing the outcome of the recent 15th general election (GE 15) held on 19th November, 2022.

3. Methodology

This is a qualitative study through document analysis and observation of the Malaysian political landscape. Detailed observations were carried out commencing from the dissolution of the parliament on 20th October until the polling day on 19th November, 2022.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Analysis of electoral result of the 15th general election

GE 15 on 19th November, 2022 was the most intense and unpredictable election in Malaysia's electoral history. This is particularly so given the four major party coalitions in Peninsular Malaysia explicitly Barisan Nasional (BN), Pakatan Harapan (PH), Perikatan Nasional (PN) and Gerakan Tanah Air (GTA) as well as two coalitions in Sarawak and Sabah namely Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) and Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS). Additionally, GE 15 was held in a turbulent Malaysian political situation given the fact that post GE 14, there were three alternate governments within a span of just four years.

After the dissolution of Parliament on 20th October, 2022, the Election Commission announced the nomination day on 5th November, 2022 and the GE 15 polling day was held on 19th November 2022.The registered voters in the said general election was 21.7 million. This number increased in comparison to GE 14 which was only 14,940,624 registered voters. The increase of approximately six million registered voters was due to the VOTE18 Policy passed in December, 2021. The policy reduces the eligible age to vote from 21 to 18 and implements automatic voter registration for citizens attaining the age of 18. Of the total electorate, 1.4 million are of the age between 18-20 years old and 4.61 million are of the age of 21-29 years (Razak & Diyana Pfordten, 2022).

In the said election, 122 seats were contested. 39 parties contested with a total of 945 candidates, inclusive of independent candidates. The main coalition Barisan Nasional fielded 178 candidates, followed by Pakatan Harapan: 206 candidates, Perikatan Nasional: 171 candidates (including those in Kelantan and Terengganu who used PAS emblem), Gerakan Tanah Air (using Pejuang emblem): 116, Warisan: 52, Gabungan Parti Sarawak: 3, Gabungan Rakyat Sabah: 22, MUDA: 6 and independent candidates: 108.

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As show in Table 1, it illustrates exceeded expectation as most political analysts expected a fierce rivalry to occur between Pakatan Harapan and Barisan Nasional. This is due to Pakatan Harapan having won the most seats in GE14 while Barisan Nasional was the ruling party for more than 60 years had performed well in state elections post GE14; explicitly in Malacca, Johore and Perak. Meanwhile, Perikatan Nasional was a newly formed coalition in 2020 consisted of BERSATU and PAS.

Table 1: Electoral Results of 15th General Election: Parliamentary Seats

Party	Total Contested	Won
Barisan Nasional	178	30
Pakatan Harapan	206	82
Perikatan Nasional	171	73
Gerakan Tanah Air	116	0
Gabungan Parti Sarawak	31	22
Gabungan Rakyat Sabah	22	6
WARISAN	52	3
Independent/Others	169	5
TOTAL	945	221

Note: Pakatan Harapan candidates in Sarawak used DAP emblem while Perikatan Nasional candidates in Kelantan and Terengganu used PAS logo.

Source: Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya Malaysia (2022)

However, when the results were announced, what transpired defied the predictions of political analysts. Fierce competition was seen between Pakatan Harapan and Perikatan Nasional. Pakatan Harapan which triumphed in the GE14 and formed a government on 9th May 2018 had lost several seats particularly from the component party of Parti Keadilan Rakyat. Perikatan Nasional by comparison, a newly formed coalition in 2020 gained the second most seats, an achievement no one political analyst expected. Meanwhile, Barisan Nasional the ruling party for the past 61 years in Malaysia and had formed parts of the government in 2021 fell from grace and was mercilessly defeated in the electoral history of Malaysia. As for the Gerakan Tanah Air Party, none of its candidate triumphed including the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. Thus, this phenomenon begs a question of what were the factors that characterize such decision?

4.2. The factors that reshape electoral results of GE15

Based on the findings of the studies, there are three main reasons that attribute to the electoral results, namely party leadership, young voters and campaign strategy. This aspect of leadership refers to the main party leadership of Barisan Nasional. Barisan Nasional suffered greatly from the view point of leadership issues as their top leadership had faced court on account of multiple corruption charges. In addition, the former Prime Minister who was also the former Chairman of Barisan Nasional, Najib Razak was found guilty of breach of trust, money laundering and abuse of power in August 2022. The leadership scandal had severely compromised the confidence of traditional voters of Barisan Nasional, hence dwindling their support, thereby benefiting their rival in GE15 in particular, the Perikatan Nasional with a rebranded party motto as Caring, Clean and Stable. Not only that, they also managed to portray a clean image amongst their leaders, who were not tainted by the issue of corruption.

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For the first time, in GE15, citizens as young as 18 were allowed to partake in the voting process. This is made possible following the reduction of voting age from 21 to 18 enforced in December 2021. The statistics illustrate a total of six million voters are from the age of 18 to 29. As young people, most of them express their dissatisfaction against several issues. To begin with, the government of Pakatan Harapan for 22 months did not deliver the most part of promises contained in their GE14 manifestos. In addition, the instability of the government post GE14 that which involved change of three governments whilst the country was battling COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the issues of corruption and abuse of power involving several national leaders of the country particularly from Barisan Nasional; thus, in conclusion, the leader of choice for the youths is equally young leaders with integrity as well as experienced leaders whom are clean from abuse of power or corruption. In this regard, the youths' political inclination particularly aged 18-20 fall to Perikatan Nasional which they view as a clean party devoid of corruption cases. However, those in the age range of 21-29 are for Pakatan Harapan which came up with reform agenda particularly institutional and economical reforms. In short, the choice of young voters is mostly in favour of Perikatan Nasional and Pakatan Harapan.

From the point of view of campaign strategy, social media campaign plays an instrumental role as was the case with the 2018 general election where the main social media platform of choice was WhatsApp. For GE15, the dominant social media of choice were Tik Tok and Twitter from which the young voters gained their information. Relatively, TikTok as a prevalent application was therefore made the core platform for election campaigns. Perikatan Nasional was among the parties that benefited from TikTok to gain public support. Their supporters from among the youths were also aggressively helping to campaign through the TikTok application. However, face-to-face campaigns and campaign materials such as flags and posters also played a substantial role. From the point of flag and poster campaign, Pakatan Harapan took the lead by aggressively installing flags and posters of candidates and prime ministerial candidates in various constituencies. Following was Perikatan Nasional, Barisan Nasional and Gerakan Tanah Air. Barisan Nasional's election campaign seemed dispirited in the sense that they were having internal issues such as leadership, selection of candidates and even consensus on their candidate for Prime Minister.

In brief, it was these factors that propelled the outcome of electoral results of the 15th general election, specifically firstly triumphing the most parliamentary seats for Pakatan Harapan, followed by Perikatan Nasional and Barisan Nasional. The electoral results signify the decreasing support for Pakatan Harapan in comparison to GE 2018. Although Pakatan Harapan garnered the most seats won at 82 seats however they were unable to attain simple majority. In order to enable them to form a government, they had to collaborate with other parties. Secondly, the voters' support for Perikatan Nasional was overwhelming. As a newly formed coalition, many did not anticipate that they would gain decent support from voters as evidenced by them bagging second place in the most parliamentary seats won that is at 73 seats. Thirdly, the support for Barisan Nasional was at its worst in the span of 61 years. Regardless of the trend of bi-elections and state elections between mid 2018 to mid 2022 showing support for Barisan Nasional was improving, but the support did not last to the 2022 general election where the community waived their support for Barisan Nasional leaving them with only 30 parliamentary seats from 178 seats contested.

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5. Conclusion

According to the then Prime Minister Ismail Sabri, the dissolution of parliament on 20th October, 2022 was premature as there were still 8 months outstanding before the expiry of his term, several days after the tabling of the budget and also in the monsoon season were all intended to restore the mandate to the people and to form a stable government. In this regard, Barisan Nasional anticipated that they would attain a huge mandate from the people. Likewise, with Pakatan Harapan which was confident of forming a government the second time around as was the case with GE14. However, the electoral results of GE15 would not concur, when their rival Perikatan Nasional hurled a fierce opposition and won in relatively large numbers. GE15 electoral results demonstrate that no party gained simple majority that forced them to collaborate with other parties to form a government. There are several focal factors that reshaped the electoral result of GE15 such as weakness in leadership in the party; predominantly of Barisan Nasional, the wave of young voters and the campaign strategy via social media. The factors gave advantage to Perikatan Nasional that enabled them to achieve second largest number of seats in spite of the fact that they were a newly formed coalition and a first timer to contest in the general election.

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Conflict of Interest

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