

MALAYSIA 13th General Election: An overview

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Malaysia held its 13th General Election (GE 13) on May 5, 2013. GE 13 comprised elections for Parliament and twelve State Legislative Assemblies. The voter turnout of 11.05 million voters, or almost 85 per cent of total registered voters, was the highest recorded in the country's history.

1. Election Results: Parliament

A total of 222 seats in Parliament were contested. The incumbent ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional (BN, or National Front), resumed its control of the Federal government when it won 133 seats while the opposition coalition, Pakatan Rakyat (PR, or People's Alliance), took 89 seats (Table 1).

Table 1
Malaysia, 13th General Election, 2013
Distribution of seats in Parliament between BN and PR

	State or Federal Territory (FT)	BN	PR*			PR total	Total
			DAP	PAS	PKR		
1	Perlis	3					3
2	Kedah	10		1	4	5	15
3	Kelantan	5		9		9	14
4	Terengganu	4		4		4	8
5	Pulau Pinang	3	7		3	10	13
6	Perak	12	7	2	3	12	24
7	Pahang	10	1	1	2	4	14
8	Selangor	5	4	4	9	17	22
9	Kuala Lumpur (FT)	2	5		4	9	11
10	Putrajaya (FT)	1					1
11	Negeri Sembilan	5	2		1	3	8
12	Melaka	4	1		1	2	6
13	Johor	21	4		1	5	26
14	Sabah	22	2		1	3	25
15	Labuan (FT)	1					1
16	Sarawak	25	5		1	6	31
	Total	133	38	21	30	89	222

* PR is made up of Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Islam (PAS, or Islamic Party) and Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR, or People's Justice Party).

Source: *The Star (StarSpecial, Full Results, 13th General Election 2013)*, 7 May 2013

2. Election Results: State Legislative Assembly

In State Legislative Assembly elections, BN retained control of eight states (Perlis, Terengganu, Perak, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Johor, and Sabah) and regained one (Kedah), while PR retained Kelantan, Pulau Pinang and Selangor (Table 2). (In addition, BN rules Sarawak which did not hold a state election this time. In Sarawak's state election of 2011, 55 seats were won by 15 by PKR and one by an independent candidate.)

Table 2
Malaysia, 13th General Election, 2013

Distribution of State Legislative Assembly seats between BN and PR

	State	BN	PR			PR total	Total
			DAP	PAS	PKR		
1	Perlis	13		1	1	2	15
2	Kedah	21	2	9	4	15	36
3	Kelantan	12		32	1	33	45
4	Terengganu	17		14	1	15	32
5	Pulau Pinang	10	19	1	10	30	40
6	Perak	31	18	5	5	28	59
7	Pahang	30	7	3	2	12	42
8	Selangor	12	15	15	14	44	56
9	Negeri Sembilan	22	11		3	14	36
10	Melaka	21	6	1		7	28
11	Johor	38	13	4	1	18	56
12	Sabah	48	4		7	12*	60
	Total	275	95	85	49	230	505*

* Includes one seat won by a minor PR ally contesting only in Sabah.

Source: *The Star (StarSpecial, Full Results, 13th General Election 2013)*, 7 May 2013

3. Points of note

i. Margins of BN's victory

The outcomes of GE 13 were closer than BN's triumph suggested. At the national level, PR gained a significantly higher proportion of the popular vote than BN. In all Parliamentary contests, PR obtained 50.87 per cent of the popular vote compared to BN's 47.38 per cent.

As in past elections, however, its domination of a gerrymandered first-past-the-post system gave BN a disproportionately high share of Parliamentary seats (Table 3).

Table 3
Malaysia, General Elections 1959–2013
Popular Vote Compared with Parliamentary Seats

Election Year	Alliance/Barisan Nasional			All opposition parties			Total no. of seats contested
	% of popular vote	No. of seats won	% of seats*	% of popular vote	No. of seats won	% of seats*	
1959	51.7	74	71	48.3	30	29	104
1964	58.5	89	86	41.5	15	14	104
1969	49.3	92	64	50.7	51	36	143
1974	60.7	135	88	39.3	19	12	154
1978	57.2	130	84	42.8	24	16	154
1982	60.5	132	86	39.5	22	14	154
1986	55.8	148	84	41.5	29	16	177
1990	53.4	127	71	46.6	53	29	180
1995	65.2	162	84	34.8	30	16	192
1999	56.5	148	77	43.5	45	23	193
2004	63.8	198	91	36.2	21**	9	219**
2008	51.4	140	63	48.6	82	37	222
2013	47.4	133	60	50.9	89	40	222

* Rounded to nearest 1%. ** Figure includes one independent candidate.

Sources: Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya (Election Commission), *Election Report*, various years; *The Star (StarSpecial, Full Results, 13th General Election 2013)*, 7 May 2013; Tommy Thomas, 'BN is effectively a minority government', *Malaysiakini*, May 10, 2013, www.malaysiakini.com/news/229692 (accessed May 10, 2013)

Moreover, although BN won nine out of the 12 state elections, BN only obtained 275 (or 54.5 per cent) out of a total of 505 State Legislative Assembly seats contested. While it only took control of three 12 states, PR gained 230 seats (or 45.5 per cent of the total).

ii. Progress towards 'two-coalition system'

Since the last general election of 2008, DAP, PAS and PKR have cohered as a coalition despite doubts about their ideological compatibilities, and severe pressure from the regime. The PR's unity was most clearly shown when DAP was prepared to 'borrow' the party symbols of PAS and PKR after the Registrar of Societies (RoS) refused to recognize the DAP's current leadership. The RoS's stance, officially made two days before nomination day, made it risky for DAP candidates to register for nomination using their party's own symbol. In the event, the RoS had to permit DAP to use its symbol but the DAP-PAS-PKR cooperation was widely supported.

In addition, for a variety of reasons, many more 'independent' candidates contested at Parliamentary and state levels than ever before. Yet, none of them was elected, leaving BN and PR the only victors in GE 13.

Thus, in PR's operations and voters' calculations, a 'two-coalition system' already existed.

iii. Impact of socio-economic transformation

The main opposition to the BN in GE 13 came from a populist multiethnic urban middle-class dissent against corruption, lack of transparency, weak governance, institutionalized ethnic discrimination and right-wing and bureaucratic religious (Islamic) chauvinism. This groundswell of dissent, that had arisen in 2007–2008 and was organized into various social movements supported by a broadening social media, bore PR to its unprecedented hopes of defeating BN and taking national power. Most of this socio-political development – grounded in the changed demographic and ethnic character of urban constituencies – emerged from four decades of structural economic transformation, the social engineering of the New Economic Policy and extensive urbanization.

iv. Issues of government

GE 13 was the first election to which Najib Tun Razak led BN after succeeding Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as Prime Minister in 2009. The GE 13 result is already being seen as considerably short of a resounding personal mandate for Najib. Whether Najib, who had been dogged by allegations of complicity in various scandals in the past few years, will be able to fend off criticisms and a potential challenge to his leadership of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), BN's dominant party will be clarified closer to UMNO's party elections in October this year.