

REPORT 1

13th General Election in Malaysia: Overview and Summary

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This Project Report covers Malaysia's 13th General Election (GE 13) that was held on May 5, 2013. As was customary, elections were held at the same time for Parliament and the State Legislative Assembly in all states except Sarawak that had last held its state election in 2011. The principal objective of this Report is to survey and analyze key issues, outcomes and implications related to GE 13 that, according to expectations, turned out to be the most tensely contested general election in the political history of Malaysia. The results of GE 13, summarized in a later section, below, bear quite complex interpretations and its implications for the power balance between the ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional (BN, or National Front) and the opposition coalition, Pakatan Rakyat (PR, or People's Alliance) and the likely directions of future politics.

I. Background: the impact of the 12th General Election

Reflecting and in fact contributing to the complexity of GE 13 was the unsurpassed extent, depth and tenacity of the campaigning which in all but name had begun almost as soon as the watershed 12th General Election (GE 12) of March 8, 2008 was over. At GE 12, the combined opposition – made up of the Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS or Islamic Party) and Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR, or People's Justice Party) which proceeded to form PR – took 82 out of 222 seats in Parliament. Hence, PR denied BN a two-thirds majority for the first time ever. Moreover, PR won control of five state governments out of thirteen, adding Kedah, Pulau Pinang (Penang), Perak and Selangor to Kelantan which had been ruled by PAS since 1990. In addition, the PR parties won ten out of eleven parliamentary seats in the national capital of Kuala Lumpur. Although BN remained in power with a sizeable majority in Parliament, the unprecedented scale of BN's losses and PR's gains raised

many worries among BN and its allies, and equally many hopes among PR and its allies, about the strength of PR's challenge in GE 13, BN's ability to retain power, and the changes that could befall the political system if the result were to be a very close one.

In the five-year period between GE 12 and GE 13, twelve by-elections and the Sarawak state election (2011) were held. Those elections took the breadth, diversity and intensity of popular participation in Malaysian politics to levels that had not been seen before, not even during the crucial general elections of 1990 and 1999 when different opposition parties had formed coalitions to challenge BN for power. On both sides of the electoral divide, non-party actors, including BN-linked parastatal bodies, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) supportive of BN or PR, entered the fray. Perhaps the most spectacular expressions of the heightened political participation were the mass demonstrations called by BERSIH 2.0 (Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections), joined by many different ad hoc dissenting coalitions and supported by PR parties. The use of internet-based media by PR, which had no access to state-controlled print and broadcast media, reached its peak before and during GE 13.

After GE 12, DAP, PAS and PKR decided to form PR. Yet the Registrar of Societies refused to register PR as a formal coalition, thereby keeping the parties legally separate and unable to contest on a common platform using a common symbol (such as those that were used by BN or its predecessor coalition, The Alliance). Despite having to contest with their separate party symbols, the PR parties remained cohesive as an opposition coalition that intended to supplant BN from national and state power. Between GE 12 and GE 13, Malaysian politics entered a phase of flux where the political stakes rose with far-reaching questions for potential power restructuring.

If the opposition coalition performed better than in 2008, would there be major changes to the political system revolving around the institutionalization of a two-coalition system? What would be significant implications for pluralist politics, for the re-ordering of the regional balance of power within Malaysia, and changes to the policy regime? If BN, however, decisively overcame the opposition challenge, would

basic but controversial policies be retained and the existing ethnic framework of representation and power-sharing remain despite having come under considerable stress recently? In general, would new sources and vehicles of political activity, new alliances and demands for reform combine to affect the outcome of GE 13 significantly or would the electoral system remain impermeable to transformation?

One issue was critically important – the conduct of GE 13 itself. The BN and the Electoral Commission insisted that GE 13 would be free and fair but PR and its civil society allies demanded crucial reforms and changes to electoral procedures and rules before the election took place. And if GE 13 were to produce a ‘hung Parliament’, would the political system enter a stage of profound instability?

II. Summary of GE 13 results

On May 5, 2013, the voter turnout was 11.05 million voters, or almost 85 per cent of total registered voters, the highest recorded in the country’s electoral history, demonstrating in general the seriousness with which voters regarded GE 13. Yet, the very high turnout partially reflected a direct response by pro-PR voters to calls that PR and BERSIH issued to voters to show up in large numbers in order to negate the impact of possible illegal voting by non-citizens.

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
Seats won by BN and PR component parties, Parliament

	State or Federal Territory (FT)	BN	PR				Malaysian Total
			DAP	PKR	PAS	Total	
1	Perlis	3	0	0	0	0	3
2	Kedah	10	0	4	1	5	15
3	Kelantan	5	0	0	9	9	14
4	Terengganu	4	0	0	4	4	8
5	Pulau Pinang	3	7	3	0	10	13
6	Perak	12	7	3	2	12	24
7	Pahang	10	1	2	1	4	14
8	Selangor	5	4	9	4	17	22
9	Kuala Lumpur (FT)	2	5	4	0	9	11
10	Putrajaya (FT)	1	0	0	0	0	1
11	Negeri Sembilan	5	2	1	0	3	8
12	Melaka	4	1	1	0	2	6
13	Johor	21	4	1	0	5	26
	Peninsular Malaysia	85	31	28	21	80	165
14	Sabah	22	2	1	0	3	25
15	Labuan (FT)	1	0	0	0	0	1
16	Sarawak	25	5	1	0	6	31
	Sabah, Labuan and Sarawak	48	7	2	0	9	57
	Total	133	38	30	21	89	222

Source: Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya (SPR) (2013a), 'Statistik keseluruhan bagi Parlimen PRU13', *PRU13*, <http://keputusan.spr.gov.my/#home> (accessed June 25, 2013)

2. Election Results: State Legislative Assembly

In State Legislative Assembly elections, BN retained control of seven states (Perlis, Terengganu, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Johor, and Sabah) that BN had won in GE 12. It retained the state of Perak which BN had seized control after

engineering the defections of two PKR and one DAP representatives in 2009. The BN regained control of Kedah. The PR retained power in Kelantan, Pulau Pinang and Selangor (Table 2). (In addition, BN continued to rule 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				Malaysia total
			DAP	PAS	PKR	Total*	
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
Peninsular Malaysia		227	91	85	42	218	445
12	Sabah	48	4	0	7	12*	60
Total		275	95	85	49	230	505*

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

Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya (SPR) (2013b), 'Statistik keseluruhan bagi DUN PRU13', *PRU13*, <http://keputusan.spr.gov.my/#home> (accessed June 25, 2013)

III. *Some points of note*

- i. The 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 with pronounced constituency malapportionment gave BN a disproportionately high share of Parliamentary seats (Table 3).

Table 3
Malaysia, General Elections 1959–2013
% of total vote compared with % of Parliamentary seats

Election Year	Alliance/Barisan Nasional			All opposition parties			Total no. of seats contested
	% total vote	No. of seats won	% seats*	% total vote	No. of seats won	% 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	50.8	89	40	222

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

Sources: Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya, *Election Report*, various years; SPR (2013a and 2013b)

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 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 various reasons, many more ‘independent’ candidates (or those without a party affiliation) 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 multiethnic urban middle-class populist 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 general election in which Najib Tun Razak led BN after he succeeded Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as Prime Minister in 2009. The GE 13 result is already 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.

Clearly it would take an exhaustive study to explore and tackle the many issues and particularities that GE 13 raised. This project and the contributions by the team members have more modestly provided an overview of GE 13 as it was contested in Malaysia as a whole, focusing on the outcomes, providing explanations and raising some related implications. Although the project, properly speaking, does not divide the political system into three territorial units – Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak – it recognizes that there were significant differences in the issues, campaigns, approaches, problems and outcomes which make it convenient and useful to look at the ways GE 13 took place in each of these three areas.