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THE IMPERATIVE OF MEDIATED COMMUNALISM

At 3 p.m. on 10 February 2015, Anwar Ibrahim, the leader of the Malaysian Opposition Front, Pakatan Rakyat (PR), was driven in an unmarked vehicle from the Malaysian Federal Court at the Palace of Justice in Putrajaya to the Sungai Buloh prison to be jailed for the second time in his political career. Five federal justices led by Chief Justice Arifin Zakaria unanimously rejected his appeal against a prison sentence of five years for sodomy. The case was a virtual facsimile of his earlier conviction of 1998 when he was sentenced to six years jail but released in 2004 after a federal court overturned the earlier decision. Anwar's incarceration the second time around — indeed, he was detained in 1975 as a social activist too — shows not just the occupational hazard of being a politician in Malaysia but also the extremely high stakes of political contests and outcomes. Malaysia's electoral politics over six decades has seen the tumultuous struggles of political figures, none more prominent than Anwar, to change and drive the country in a more democratic and accountable direction. It has been a politics of repressive tolerance dominated by the ruling coalition of the Alliance and then the Barisan Nasional (BN) after. At the point of writing, the

opposition alliance of the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) had twice denied the BN its customary two-thirds command of parliamentary seats and, most spectacularly, won more than 50 per cent of the popular vote in the 2013 election.

This study examines the manner in which Malaysia's multicultural, largely democratic politics have manifested through elections and the factors that drive electoral success and failure. So far there have been thirteen general elections, along with an accompanying number of state elections. The most recent and much anticipated general election was held on 5 May 2013. These elections, the preceding political campaigns and the post-electoral ramifications provide a rich source of materials for the study of procedural and electoral democracy in Malaysia. These two concepts have found their way into the political science literature; the former referring to a process of incorporating technical, transparent electoral procedures while the latter connotes a notion of popular or voter sovereignty. Yet another term is "participatory democracy", usually taken to mean a substantive form of democracy beyond mere electoral processes. Malaysia has failed to make the cut in the U.S.-based Freedom House definition of electoral democracies, but it cannot be denied that it possesses some elements of an electoral democracy despite some obvious flaws, which will be explained in the next chapter.¹

A particular genre of literature has categorized Malaysia as a form of "competitive authoritarianism"; namely, a sort of hybrid regime which marries democratic electoral processes with a measured dose of repressive politics (Levitsky and Way 2010).² This sort of politics, as Slater puts it, is effected through an "authoritarian leviathan" (Slater 2010) often resistant to democratic "breakdowns" (Pepinsky 2009). The generalizability of the Malaysian case for broad theorizing related to democratization is highly suggestive and the works cited above demonstrate this. I will touch upon this further in the final chapter but, suffice it to say for now, that in analysing electoral politics over some six decades in Malaysia, I have certainly found many aspects of the authoritarian politics alluded to by writers such as Slater and Pepinsky to be highly evident. My own work in the late 1980s focused on Malaysia as an example of bureaucratic authoritarianism (Saravanamuttu 1987). The burden of my analysis in this book, however, is to show how elections are won or lost in a severely divided plural polity, and thus much of the theoretical underpinnings

of the book hark to the scholarship concerned with ethnic politics and elections, which I review further below.

Certainly, electoral exercises cannot also be divorced from deeper political and societal processes which provide the context for electoral contests. While its electoral system inherited from the British may still be found wanting, Malaysia possesses many of the elements of electoral democracy, and is also somewhat exemplary of how a multi-ethnic Asian society has succeeded by and large to mediate ethnic contestations through the ballot box. Moreover, since its emergence as an independent state in 1957, Malaysia has become one of the prime examples of ethnic power sharing and coalition politics in the world. Save for 1969 when a general election sparked racial riots and bloodshed, all other elections have been peaceful and have seen no undue violence. Nonetheless, a major criticism has been that the electoral system, a first-past-the-post (FPTP) single-member constituency plurality choice model, unfairly favours incumbent political parties and has kept the ruling coalition of parties in power for an unbroken six decades (Rachagan 1993; Lim 2002; Brown 2005).

That said, on 8 March 2008 the opposition parties deprived the ruling coalition of its two-thirds majority of seats and defeated it in five out of thirteen state elections. This result has led analysts (including this one) to suggest that electoral politics may have breached a threshold that augurs for the development of a fully fledged two-party system. Turnover political systems are seen by political theorists to be the *sine qua non* of democratic politics. In Malaysia's case, after decades of one-party dominance, 8 March seemingly carried the promise of a new trajectory towards a two-party electoral system. However the 5 May 2013 general election did not see a turnover of the ruling coalition, although the opposition coalition won the popular vote. The prospect of attaining a real turnover political system and "consolidated democracy"³ clearly remains elusive as long as certain structural obstacles of the electoral system or the substantive and formal development of an effective alternative alliance of forces to the incumbent ruling coalition is not achieved. Huntington (1991) views a stable democracy as one which has passed the "two turnover test"; that is a state which has undergone two peaceful democratic changes. Linz and Stepan (1996) hold that consolidated democracies are those where the citizenry has acquired democratic norms and major actors believe

that democracy is the “only game in town”. However, these standard political theories do not take account of the problems encountered in ethnically divided societies where democratic processes, as in Malaysia’s case, are constitutive of complex ethnic, religious as well as regional bargaining processes.

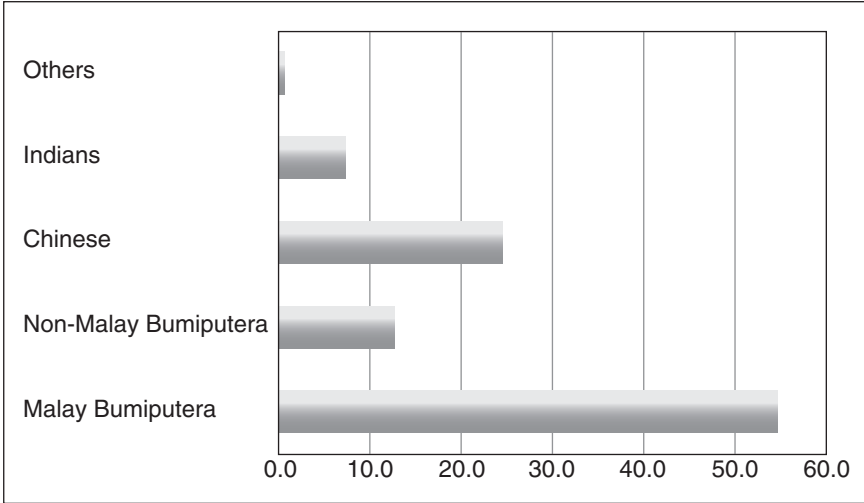
POPULATION AND COMMUNITIES

In order for the reader to understand adequately the general thrust and arguments of the book with respect to ethnic politics and power sharing, I provide below a number of charts showing Malaysia’s population, its ethnic and religious communities and current levels of urbanization in its thirteen states. The information is taken from the latest Population and Census report of 2010. I also provide in Appendix 1A a list of political parties within the different political coalitions in the present and the past.

Figure 1.1 denotes the population of Malaysian citizens distributed by ethnic group (8.2 per cent of the population are non-citizens). The largest single grouping of citizens is the Malay bumiputera, which accounts for 54.6 per cent of the population, followed by Malaysians of Chinese origin, who make up almost 25 per cent of the total population. These are followed by non-Malay bumiputera and Indians who constitute 12.8 per cent and 7.4 per cent of the population, respectively. Figures 1.2 and 1.3 give a further breakdown of this division in accordance to residential location. Among those classified as urban population, Malay bumiputera make up 50.8 per cent, while Chinese Malaysians make up 31.3 per cent. On the other hand, among rural residents non-Malay bumiputera make up the second largest group (24.6 per cent) next to the Malay bumiputera rural population of 63.9 per cent.

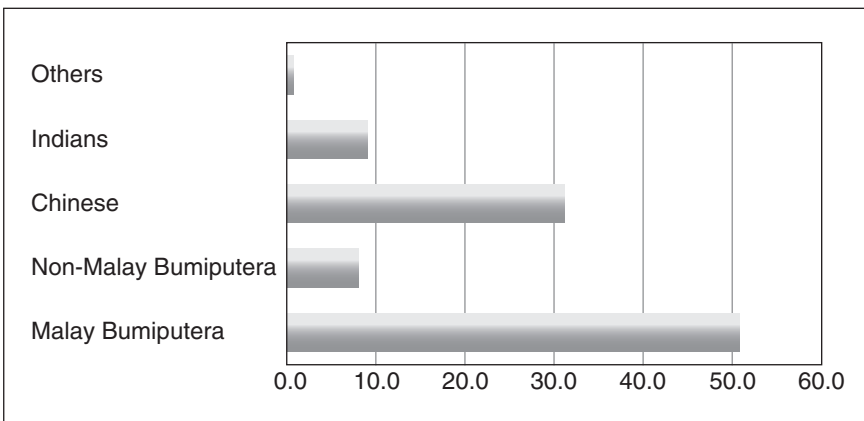
Another significant demographic factor is religious identity (Figure 1.4). Muslims predominate at 61.3 per cent, followed by Buddhists comprising 19.8 per cent, Christians 9.2 per cent and Hindus 6.3 per cent of the population. Finally, Figure 1.5 shows the level of urbanization in accordance to states. The most urbanized being the federal territories of Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur, followed by Selangor and Penang. Based on the 2010 census, Malaysia’s population

Figure 1.1
Malaysia: Population Division by Ethnic Groups, 2010



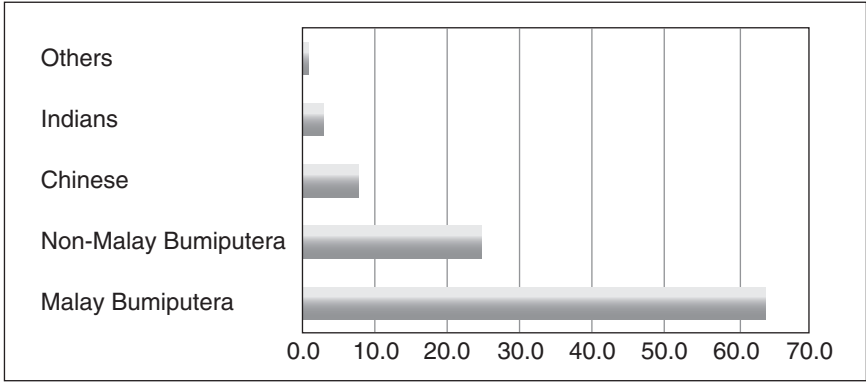
Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia 2010.

Figure 1.2
Malaysia: Population Division by Ethnic Groups in Urban Areas, 2010



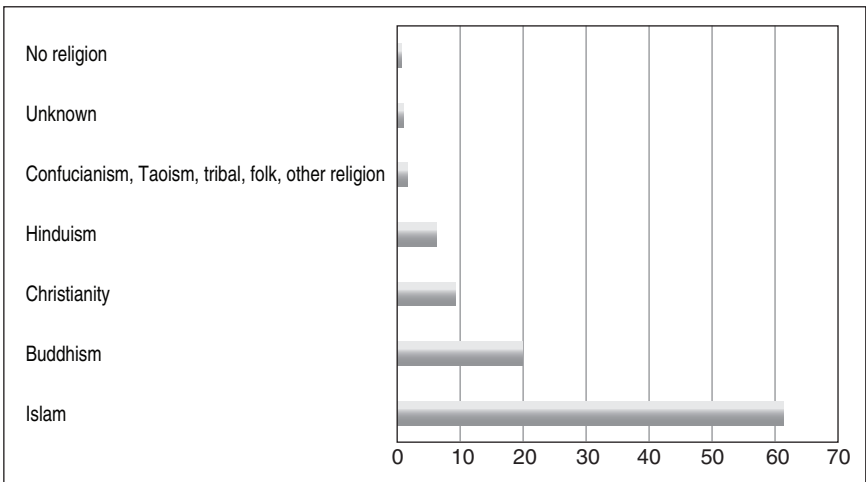
Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia 2010.

Figure 1.3
Malaysia: Population Division by Ethnic Group in Rural Areas, 2010



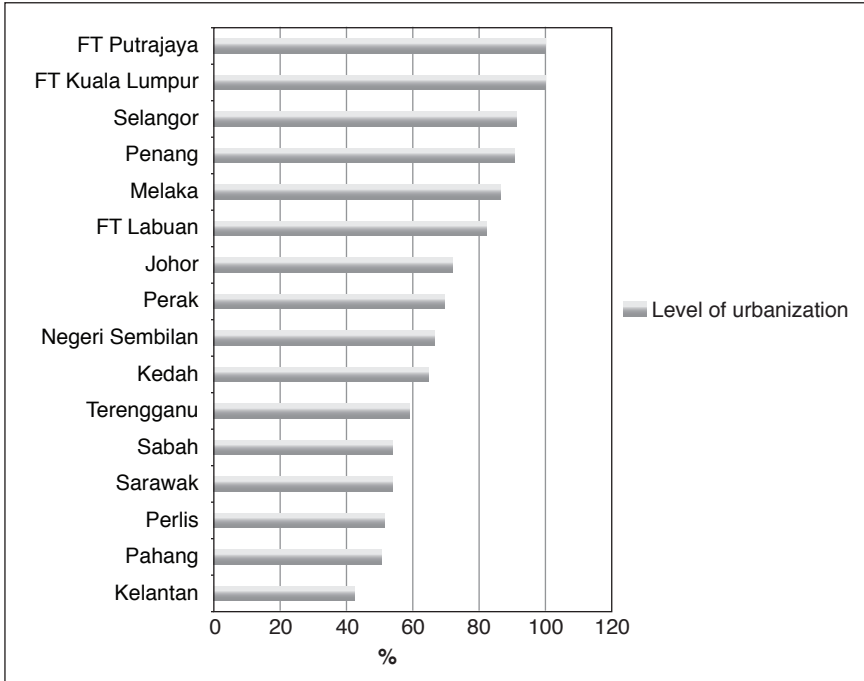
Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia 2010.

Figure 1.4
Malaysia: Percentage of Population by Religion, 2010



Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia 2010.

Figure 1.5
Malaysia: Level of Urbanization by State, 2010



Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia 2010.

topped thirty million in February 2015 and the population has more than tripled since its formation in 1963.⁴

It is against this backdrop of cultural and regional diversity that the contestation for political control has taken place. The convergence of ethnic identity with spatial location (rural versus urban) and the preponderance of the Malay bumiputera is a major reason for the need to secure the support of this community, as well as to mediate all other forms of diversity in the power-sharing model of electoral competition.

COMMUNALISM AND THE PLURAL SOCIETY

This book draws on the deep well of work on communal and electoral politics, as well as theoretical work on “plural societies”.⁵ Malaysian electoral politics have historically been premised on a hybrid model of “communalism” (Ratnam 1965) and “consociationalism” (Lijphart 1977). According to Ratnam, communal politics, a feature of the “plural society” (Furnivall 1948), valorized communal interests through ethnically constituted political parties. Moreover, ethnic cleavages were reinforced with religious affiliation, such that Malays were also Muslims, Chinese were also Buddhists, and Indians Hindus. Furnivall’s notion of the plural society comprised small sections or communities living side by side but without integrating, and only held together by dint of colonial power. Alternatively, it was based on the anthropologist M.G. Smith’s (1965) notion of divided societies having distinct cores of basic institutions of different sections or groups that cohere only because of political and legal coercion. The same may have been said of the early Malayan society, which was divided into different cultural sections conceived of as homogeneous entities not capable of acting cooperatively within shared values and institutions but only separately through cultural markers among their own members that were “primordial” in character.⁶ An inevitable consequence of this primordialism, it was further assumed, was the manifestation and rise of intractable conflicts among groups. Communalism was thus a social feature of plural societies detrimental to social and national integration (Geertz 1963). In Malaya’s case, communalism came to be mediated by political processes of ethnic power sharing since the mid-1950s, which analysts have associated with Lijphart’s notion of consociationalism. Lijphart argued that ethnically divided societies could live with their ethnic cleavages, that conflict could be contained by leaders of the ethnic communities and that democracy within such divided societies could be managed through formal institutional arrangements — such as federalism and proportional representation — to contain ethnic conflict. He suggested four conditions for the successful implementation of consociational democracy; namely, a grand coalition of all ethnic groups, a mutual veto in decision-making, an ethnic proportionality in allocation of opportunities and offices, and ethnic autonomy, often through federalism.

The corollary to Lijphart's argument was that the adversarial democracy of the Anglo-American variety was unsuitable for plural societies. Writers like Milne and Mauzy (1980) have tried to show that Lijphart's model could be applied to Malaysia with some modification. While consociationalism may explain why and how power sharing arrangements are made, it fails to explain why electoral success is achieved in ethnically and regionally divided societies with a complex distribution of votes and constituencies comprising ethnic majorities, which can be large or small, as well as those with a mix of ethnic voters. The basic consociational model also glosses over the diversity existing within each ethnic group, based on class, place, education and even ideology. The simplification of the older consociational model makes it inadequate as a singular approach for understanding the complexity of intra-communal variations and differences.

A newer theory of political engineering deploys "centripetalism" as a countervailing concept to communalism and consociationalism (Reilly 2006). Essentially, this approach suggests that a centripetal spin of moderate policies to a centre can blunt divisions in ethnically divided societies and thus lead to more sustained systems of electoral democracy. Centripetalism entails the formation of "bridging" rather than "bonding" political parties based on practices of compromise, accommodation and integration across ethnic divides. Bonding parties tend to consolidate ethnic identities in the political system. When bonding becomes predominant in party formation, as is well known in a country like Malaysia, political rewards are given to ethnic constituents at the expense of public goods (Reilly 2006, chap. 4). Reilly considers Papua New Guinea and Fiji to be examples where centripetal systems were adopted. Indonesia after 2004 is also thought to have introduced such a system based on devolutionist politics. Even Singapore with its group representation constituencies, which ensure ethnic inclusiveness, can be said to be an example of such a model of politics. Reilly suggests that governments in Asia are increasingly attempting political reform based on centripetal strategies rather than the older consociational or communal approaches to ethnic peace (Reilly 2006, pp. 85-86).

When we turn to Malaysia it is obvious that the BN, with its consociational model, has dominated central political structures, while the emergent PR, which collectively advocates more moderate, arguably

more centripetal politics, remains weak institutionally. The implied notion of centripetalism, that moderate policies tend to garner a larger pool of support, can be applied effectively to the ethnically divided situation of electoral politics in Malaysia along with its need for basic consociational arrangements. Both the BN and now the PR have become effective in pooling the votes of Malaysia's ethnic communities in elections by moving or "spinning" to the centre of the political terrain and advocating moderate ethnic policies. That said, the tendency for Malay-Muslim political parties such as UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) and PAS (Islamic Party of Malaysia) to pull towards extremist and purist ethnic and religious lines have escalated over the last few years.⁷

MEDIATED COMMUNALISM

Taking into account the notions of centripetalism as well as the older notions of communalism and consociationalism, I would like to introduce an approach that could account more fully for electoral success in the Malaysian case. This is the notion of *mediated communalism*, defined as a process which softens the most extreme ethnic, religious and cultural demands and gravitates its actors towards win-win or variable sum outcomes rather than zero-sum ones.⁸ Mediated communalism valorizes *bridging* rather than *bonding* dimensions of ethnic relations and is related to the considerable body of social capital literature, particularly the work of Robert Putnam, which stresses that such bridging social capital also brings about a high level of civil engagement to democratic politics.⁹

For Malaysia and other ethnically divided societies, the notion of mediated communalism incorporates consociational and other bridging arrangements of ethnic groups working towards social policies as a stratagem for electoral success. This process also concomitantly moves actions and outcomes to a moderate centre. Unlike Reilly, I do not see centripetalism, consociationalism and communalism as mutually exclusive "ideal types" but as generic stratagems on a continuum of ethnic mobilization. As such, the approach of mediated communalism uses the necessary stratagems implied in these concepts for electoral success. Riker's classic work on political coalitions with

its central notion of “minimal winning coalition” is of relevance here. However, beyond minimal imperatives, inter-ethnic political negotiation usually involves both necessary as well as sufficient conditions for desired outcomes.¹⁰ In the Malaysian case, I would argue that consociational arrangements are a necessary first step for communal political parties to establish centripetal practices of moderation. Thus, I posit that there are two *necessary general* conditions for the practice of mediated communalism:

1. A grand coalition of major communal parties
2. A centripetal spin to moderate ethnic/religious policies

However, observations show that for a political coalition in Malaysia to achieve electoral success, given the country’s history and the persistence of communal politics, there needs to be three *specific sufficient* conditions for mediating communalism:

1. Strong and effective Malay leadership
2. Strong non-Malay bumiputera support for coalition parties
3. Strong non-bumiputera support for coalition parties

In relation to the BN, the current ruling coalition, a strong and effective Malay leadership refers to the hegemonic bloc that has been controlled by UMNO from the outset. While ruptures in the hegemonic Malay bloc occurred in 1969, after the 13 May riots; in 1987 in the party’s Team A–Team B conflict; and in 1998 after Anwar Ibrahim’s ouster, the UMNO leadership was always able to regroup and re-establish itself in time for the next general election. Leadership splits in UMNO seemingly had minimal effects on the ruling coalition’s stable practice of mediating communalism as long as a new leadership prevailed. It is now axiomatic that the ruling coalition has its sustained support in the East Malaysian bumiputera communities, notably the Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau and Orang Ulu in Sarawak and the Kadazan-Dusun and Bajau in Sabah. Indeed, UMNO has become the dominant party in Sabah, although its membership is of non-Malay bumiputera rather than Malays as such. In these East Malaysian states the indigenous coalition parties have remained strong. On the Peninsula, Chinese and Indian support has fluctuated more than that of the other groups. Whenever the BN has tended to veer from its moderate policies, which is one of two *necessary general* conditions (a centripetal spin

of policies towards moderation), Chinese and Indian votes on the Peninsula have receded. Up till the 1990s, on the opposition side, the main parties, such as the DAP (Democratic Action Party) and PAS (Islamic Party of Malaysia), have been unable to fulfil almost all of the *necessary general* conditions for a successful mediated communalism. However, from 1999 onwards there was a breakthrough in the formation of the grand coalition; firstly the BA (Barisan Alternatif, or the Alternative Front) in 1999 and then later in 2008 and 2013, the PR. Having had this success, the opposition parties were then able to enhance their support among the non-bumiputera voters and to further fragment the Malay vote, denying UMNO its customary hegemonic control.

In the ensuing chapters of this book I will show that in all elections in which the BN has been successful, the above *necessary general* and *specific sufficient* conditions were mostly present. The two *necessary general* conditions, i.e., the grand coalition and centripetalism in practising mediated communalism, apply *mutatis mutandis* to the opposition coalition, and were achieved in the 2008 and 2013 elections. Likewise, the lack of some of the *specific sufficient* conditions usually presaged poor electoral performances for contesting political parties, whether on the BN or opposition side. The PR succeeded in fulfilling the three specific conditions for winning state contests to form five state governments in 2008 and three in 2013. In short, the *necessary general* conditions can determine marginal electoral success, but, arguably, the *specific sufficient* conditions make for superlative electoral performances. Finally, it should be noted that intervening though not insignificant factors such as external national threats, control of the media, party organization (party machine), finance and money politics (to be discussed in ensuing chapters) are also major factors contributing towards electoral outcomes.

I would like to further deploy the heuristic concept of “path dependence” to reinforce and embellish this theory of mediated communalism. Path dependence theorizing has become associated with a sub-field of politics or school of thought known as “historical institutionalism”.¹¹ This literature puts the accent not on just institutional stability but on institutional change. I would argue that its genealogy harks back to the early work of S.P. Huntington on political institutionalization and his notions of “political development” and

“political decay” as well as his subsequent work on democratization.¹² In adopting path dependence as its approach to explaining electoral success and failures, this book could arguably fall within the rubric of this genre of work. Beyond this, however, I am particularly interested in explaining the character of coalition politics in ethnically divided polities, of which Malaysia is a prime example.

A path dependence meta-analytical framework can serve to illustrate trajectories of electoral politics and also explain how electoral successes are continued and enhanced in a multicultural social formation such as Malaysia. Such an overarching framing also warns and guards against analyses that are fully predicated on rational choice and that “satisficing” solutions could often obtain based on more realist assumptions of politics.¹³ Moreover, path dependence could show the limits to institutional design to address politics given that contingent events sometimes lead to major changes in political regimes. That said, paths taken as opposed to paths not taken tend to develop positive feedback loops as long as actors are able to capitalize on initial advantages. Thus, an important notion of path dependence theory is “first-mover advantage” (FMA), normally used in economics and business studies to refer to the technological advantage of a pioneering firm or a new entrant in a field of enterprise. Paul Pierson has adapted this notion for the analysis of politics in a seminal article followed by a book.¹⁴ Coupled with FMA is the notion of “increasing returns” which, in brief, refers to the probability that further steps along a particular path tend to lead to increases down that path. Both concepts are central to path dependence theorizing.

The BN’s electoral successes, as I will try to show in ensuing chapters, were achieved by its mediated communalism being on a trajectory of increasing returns, or, to put it differently, it was able to capitalize on actions and policies which were electorally successful which further enhanced its model of multi-ethnic politics. Such path-dependent success continued in spite of ruptures of the hegemonic Malay bloc in 1969, 1987 and 1999, as argued above, because of well-managed and well-executed mediated communalism involving the consociational partners of the ruling front. Thus, I would argue that path-dependent electoral success was premised on the maintenance

and management of mediated communalism even when coalition partners — be they UMNO, MCA, MIC or East Malaysian partners — were experiencing internal conflicts.

An element lacking or understudied is the political economy of electoral politics. The book also deals with the phenomenon of money politics and invokes the notion of “party capitalism” as a major factor impinging on electoral politics. This factor is dealt with in Chapter 5 and alludes to a form of rentier economics that had become a concomitant of the New Economic Policy (NEP) involving the engagement of UMNO and its coalition partners in business. Akin to “pork barrel politics”, money politics qua party capitalism deeply embeds and melds ruling political parties into political businesses and the corporate economy (Fields 1995). In Malaysia, party capitalism saw its apogee in the Mahathir years and remains prevalent in the Najib Razak years. It may be conceived of as both a positive and negative phenomenon in terms of causing increasing or diminishing returns to electoral success, as will be explained in Chapters 5 and 6.

Broadly, electoral politics in Malaysia could be viewed as transitioning through three chronological periods:

1. Emergent Mediated Communalism: 1950s to 1960s
2. Corporatized Mediated Communalism: 1970s to late 1990s
3. Contested Mediated Communalism: Late 1990s to 2013

In the first period Malaysian politics may be said to be cast within the frame of an initially somewhat pristine strategy of mediated communal politics, which was anchored on a form of basic consociational politics. The discursive trope of mediated communalism during this first phase was the politics of “The Bargain” — the compact among ethnic political elites at the point of Independence, where supposedly non-Malay citizenship was “exchanged” for Malay political primacy¹⁵ — which saw the politics of ethnic competition and compromise, well captured in much early work on Malaysian politics. In this early phase, electoral politics were sharply divided by ethnic schisms within the ruling coalition of the Alliance Party and its rival the Independence Malaya Party (IMP) and between them and the non-Malay opposition parties. However, the ruling coalition somehow was held together by the informal rules of a basic form of

consociation, not least of all by the strong and dominant personality of its first leader Tunku Abdul Rahman. Although not using consociational theory, Von Vorys (1975, chaps. 6 and 7) describes this model well as one with the oversight of a "Directorate" of the major leaders of ethnic communities headed by the Tunku. The Directorate's task was one of ensuring "vertical mobilization" (i.e., getting support of respective ethnic communities) and "horizontal solidarity" through building trust among ethnic leaders. Compared to the Alliance, opposition parties had no such nationally driven stratagems. The Islamic party (PMIP, then) failed to significantly penetrate national politics and later ensconced itself in the East Coast of Malaya. Other parties that opted out of this consociation were the professed ideological parties, namely the Labour Party and the Malay-based socialist party, PSRM (Partai Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia). In a period when the ruling Alliance Party invested heavily into consociational power sharing arrangements, positive returns were reaped to keep the ruling coalition comfortably in power until the late 1960s. However, these arrangements tended to be highly elite-biased and failed to provide increasing returns, especially to its larger rural-based Malay constituency.

In hindsight the racial riots of 13 May 1969 were a predictable outcome of the stark nature of Malayan communal politics and the failure of consociational arrangements to contain extreme ethnic politics outside of the Alliance. In the words of Von Vorys (1976), it was a "democracy without consensus" that would structure the next phase of politics. Thus, investment in political arrangements began to swing to the other extreme. In this second phase of Malaysian politics one saw how Malay supremacy became both the discursive trope and the primary political tool of the main Malay political party. UMNO refurbished its role as *primus inter pares* and patently dominated all aspects of political life through the implementation of the NEP. However, despite or even because of the NEP, a new form of mediated communalism was effected through party capitalism. The BN was highly successful in this phase in melding politics with business and rewarding its own political parties and cronies. An expanding pie ensured that the distribution of spoils was more than satisfactory. This phase of electoral politics could aptly be termed "corporatized mediated communalism". However, while the

ruling coalition successfully expanded into the more encompassing National Front, electoral democracy was clearly hamstrung by a highly micromanaged form of politics, which placed a premium on the creation of bumiputera institutions, businesses, legislation and regulations to promote the NEP goals. While UMNO was able to capitalize on the increasing returns to its NEP-driven policies, its non-Malay partners began to lose political ground. The expanding economic pie coupled with a comprehensive network of politically linked corporate entities ensured that all BN parties received a suitable share of the economic largesse to the extent that several UMNO-linked non-Malay figures rose to or remained at the commanding heights of the economy.

The second major rupture of the hegemonic Malay bloc occurred when Tengku Razaleigh challenged Mahathir for the UMNO leadership, leading to the deregistering of UMNO itself. In spite of this rupture the BN's mediated communalism was managed well and given much sustenance through UMNO and its partner parties' corporate and business linkages, and this was enough to secure an electoral victory in 1990 because of the inability of the opposition parties to form a united front. Instead, two opposition fronts were created to mobilize Malay and non-Malay parties and pressure groups and, as shown by outcomes, this was less than satisfactory.

Perhaps the most significant rupture of the Malay bloc occurred after the sacking of Anwar Ibrahim as deputy prime minister and his incarceration. This episode, another manifestation of intra-party rivalry within UMNO's leadership, is not unconnected to fallouts and crises of UMNO's party capitalism. This opened the floodgates of a participatory *new politics*. This new participatory politics of the third period was symbolized by the Reformasi Movement, which sparked unprecedented multi-ethnic and cross-ethnic engagement in politics on the part of civil society and oppositional forces.¹⁶ In this book I use the term *new politics* as a modality rather than an outcome to denote an ongoing participatory politics of civil engagement in the public sphere with the objective of valorizing democratic values and human rights over and above ethnic interests.¹⁷ *New politics*, however, does not necessarily supersede the need for political actors, particularly political parties, to deploy stratagems of mediated communalism for electoral success.

The developments associated with *new politics* spilled over on to the electoral process. The political shift that occurred with the surfacing of such politics in the late 1990s culminated in the political watershed of the 8 March general election of 2008. At this juncture it became obvious that with the rise of a coherent united opposition and the alternative alliance of the PR, BN's mediated communalism was seriously challenged.

An analysis of the landmark 2008 general election shows why the BN lost its first-mover advantage, an edge it had held for decades with its copious investments, both political and economic, in institutions which reproduced its form of mediated communalism for electoral outcomes. The fact that this path dependence was broken on 8 March suggests an alternative path dependence based on a new mode of political mobilization executed through the mediated communalism of the PR. A major plank of the PR's mediated communalism was its engagement of people-oriented and civil-society-driven agendas. It has become increasingly clear in the early years of the PR's success that newer more effective forms of political investments were being introduced by the opposition coalition in spite of a previous steep learning curve. While still relying on the older consociational arrangements of ethnic power sharing, the PR has invested time and effort in political institutions which have aimed to provide good governance, economic welfarism and civil rights in the tradition of delivering more universal "political goods" to the citizenry.¹⁸ This new trajectory was one that put the premium on participatory politics while debunking the deleterious effect of a rentier political economy based on the ruling coalition's party capitalism. The trajectory of new politics did not at all mean a total departure from ethnicized politics, but rather a political shift in the direction of an investment in more universalist and democratic politics coupled with economic sensibility and even-handedness in the distribution of political goods within the context of a neo-liberal economy. These were the new elements of political engagement which layered the practice of a contested mediated communalism. After 2008 the BN no longer monopolized the terrain of the latter, with the PR as its new, credible competitor. Political developments in mid-2015 have seen the disbandment of the PR, but there were immediate attempts to revive a similar opposition alliance, as narrated in a later chapter.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 examines the literature on electoral politics and the origins of an electoral system introduced and reconstituted within the parameters of Malaysia's "plural" or divided society. The constant tweaking of the electoral system has led some to suggest its departure from democratic norms. However, it should be remembered that Malaysia's first-past-the-post, single-member constituency system was from the outset a legacy of British rule and tutelage and its historically unique features have remained intact. Electoral politics has been broadly anchored to elements of procedural democracy such as transparent and autonomous electoral institutions and procedures, freedom of political association and campaigning and the like, guaranteed by law and the Constitution. This said, the erosion of some of these constitutional guarantees and best practices through electoral manipulation and amendments to electoral laws are now thought to have reached unacceptable proportions. Such amendments to the electoral system, and particularly the practice of the malapportionment of greater rural weight to constituencies, have seemingly ensured the longevity of the ruling coalition, which has held power since Independence. The maintenance of such a system is clearly premised on political investment in arrangements that have largely kept *ethnic peace*, without necessarily valorizing electoral democracy.

Having examined the origins and various critiques of Malaysia's first-past-the-post system, in Chapter 3 the book next analyses and critiques ethnicity manifested as "communalism" (Ratnam 1965) and how this defined the parameters and discursive terrain of Malaysian electoral politics. This chapter traces the origins and entrenchment of Malaysia's first consociational arrangement through the grand coalition of the Alliance. Basic elements of mediated communalism were successfully incorporated into this model of politics and helped to keep the electoral process on an even keel until the fateful May 1969 general election. This chapter presents the results and interprets the elections of 1959, 1964 and 1969. The Alliance was able throughout this period to capitalize on its power sharing arrangements, although the parliamentary leftist forces, the Socialist Front, mounted a veritable challenge.

The next two chapters, Chapters 4 and 5, study the post-1969 situation, namely the rise of a reconstituted Alliance in the form of the BN as a response to communal riots in 1969 and the breakdown of the first power-sharing model. Undoubtedly, the framing of Malaysian politics under the NEP and the discursive device of *Ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy) impacted heavily on how a new mediated communalism was to be institutionalized. Admittedly, it did have the salutary effect of constituting a highly stable if authoritarian political order anchored around the dominance of UMNO within the BN governments of those years. Along with Malay supremacy came along the notion that the BN could never afford to lose its two-thirds majority of seats in Parliament or, for that matter, control of any state government. The general elections of 1974 and 1978 are analysed in Chapter 5. The Islamic party (PMIP, then later, PAS) was incorporated into the ruling coalition from 1974 until 1978, as well as the previously oppositionist party, the Gerakan. The period ended with PAS's departure from the BN but with the strengthening of Gerakan as a Chinese-centric party in control of the Chinese-majority state of Penang.

Following from this, Chapter 6 analyses the impact of a new element in the mediation of communalism — its corporatization in the form of money politics under the premiership of Mahathir Mohamad. The character and persistence of money politics is examined by invoking the concept of “party capitalism” to dissect how this had become a contributory factor in keeping mediated communalism intact, yet not immediately destructive of the ruling coalition in this initial phase. Malaysia has become a prime example of how political parties are directly involved in business wherein capitalist practices themselves are a function of political agendas. In this period, investment in bumiputera institutions also helped to a great extent to keep the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak firmly within the BN. UMNO, under the leadership of Mahathir, took party capitalism to its zenith in the 1990s, and the BN's landslide victory in the 1995 election perhaps marked the high point of this type of politics. As with the economic notion of “boom and bust”, the 1995 election also symbolized the beginning of diminishing returns for the ruling coalition. The financial meltdown of 1997–98 occurred in tandem with this decline. The limits to and deleterious impact of

money politics is shown against the backdrop of the 1982, 1985, 1990 and 1995 elections.

Chapter 7 examines the rupture of the hegemonic Malay bloc, the mainstay of UMNO, which occurred after the sacking of Anwar Ibrahim as deputy prime minister. This event and his incarceration led to the emergence of a new participatory politics, manifested in the 1999 general election, also the last election held under the premiership of Mahathir. The political shift that occurred in the late 1990s culminated in the political watershed of 8 March. The chapter delves into the genesis of the Reformasi Movement, the burgeoning of civil society organizations and their involvement and engagement in the electoral process. The new factor of cyberspace and social media and their implications for and impact on electoral politics via the expansion and engagement of civil groups in the public sphere provide a significant trope for analysing this period. The chapter discusses the formation of the People's Justice Party (PKR), the emergence of the multi-ethnic Barisan Alternative just prior to the 1999 election, the election's outcome and the political fallout of the ensuing years.

Chapter 8 begins with a narrative on the political retirement of Mahathir and the emergence of the Abdullah Badawi government. It examines the results of the 2004 elections to explain how in the context of new politics this election may merely have represented an aberration, a sort of "swan song" before an egregious decline of the ruling coalition. On 8 March 2008 the opposition parties in Malaysia deprived the ruling National Front coalition of its two-thirds majority of seats and defeated it in five out of thirteen states it contested. The chapter argues that March 2008 augured the beginning of a new path-dependent development of a turnover electoral system in Malaysia. Path dependence analysis is used here to explain why the BN progressively lost its first-mover advantage. March 2008 represented a decline of this earlier path dependence for the BN. Put differently, the BN was not able to reap "increasing returns" from its established practice of mediated communalism. This was largely because of the emergence of the PR, which succeeded in establishing its own practice of mediated communalism. The PR's path-dependent success in 2008 was reinforced by the fact that that it won eight of the sixteen by-elections held after March 2008. It became increasingly clear that newer forms of political processes and sensibilities were being

introduced by the opposition coalition. This new trajectory was one which put a premium on urban-based participatory politics.

The post-2008 period saw the continued expansion of the public sphere, the engagement of civil society and youth in the political process and the significance of social media. In the four years preceding the 2013 general election, the changed political landscape became more than evident. The tracking of two-coalition politics continued at the federal and state levels. The outcome of the Sarawak state election of 16 April 2011 saw the development of two-coalition politics in this state, with the swing of urban votes to the PR. The Achilles heel of the PR was its lack of capacity to penetrate the vast and geographically removed rural constituencies where traditionally powerful parties like the PBB (Parti Bersatu Bumiputera, United Traditional Bumiputera Party) maintained its strong path dependence. Money politics and party capitalism at the state level no doubt contribute greatly to the victories of the state BN parties. On the Peninsula, the leadership of Najib Razak saw attempts to introduce reforms, including the abolition of draconian laws like the ISA (Internal Security Act). The impact of such reform seemed minimal in the changed political landscape. Citizens continued to take to the streets to demand electoral reforms in two massive BERSIH¹⁹ rallies held in 2011 and 2012.

In the context of these political developments, Chapter 9 analyses the general election of 5 May 2013. While the 2013 election proved to be a significant development in the progress of electoral democracy, there was no electoral turnover of the BN and, in hindsight, the 2008 outcome may be said to be a more critical conjuncture of political change than 2013, as it had created the onset of the two-coalition system. However, 2013 did mark further progressive movement in terms of more than 50 per cent of the popular vote attained by the PR. One could argue that this was a technical breach towards a turnover electoral system, although one still without substantial political significance. The rural–urban divide that appears to be deeply embedded in Malaysia’s configuration of electoral politics is the main cause for the current electoral impasse, as the rural weighting of seats as well as the large number of East Malaysian seats continue to favour the ruling coalition.

Political developments post-2013 turned out to be highly chaotic for both the government and the opposition, and events

are still unfolding at the point of writing (mid 2016). Two political developments which will have a major impact on society and elections are, first, the beleaguered position of Prime Minister Najib Razak and, second, the break-up of the Pakatan Rakyat. The first development has seen yet another schism within the ruling UMNO party with the sacking of deputy premier Muhyiddin Yassin and his replacement by Ahmad Zahid Hamidi. This came after revelations surfaced on the 1MDB scandal involving an RM42 billion debt and alleged malfeasance on the part of executives and advisers of the federal fund. Most damaging were media revelations pointing to the flow of RM2.6 billion into Najib Razak's private bank account and the likely use of some of the money for campaigning in the 2013 general election. This development may not necessarily lead to a breakup of UMNO and the BN but will no doubt have grave implications for its cohesion and institutional capacity for the next election. The other major development was the breakup of the PR after the 61st PAS Mukthmar (party congress), of June 2015, when a resolution was passed to sever relations with the DAP. This action by PAS and the responses to it by the DAP and PKR effectively brought an unceremonious end to the opposition alliance. I deal with these developments in Chapter 10 with the view to bringing the reader up to speed on the manner the opposition alliance tried to reconstitute itself for the next general election. The book ends with a substantive conclusion which reinforces the importance of consociation and mediated communalism in electoral politics, demonstrating the particular constraints encountered in the special case of Malaysia in constituting centripetal electoral arrangements, as well as the problem of using generic theories of politics to explain the Malaysian case.

In summary, the book through Chapters 3 and 4 explores the idea of emergent mediated communalism of the early period, from the 1950s to the late 1960s. Chapters 5 and 6 make a case for the onset and entrenchment of a mediated communalism in a corporatized mould via Malay primacy and party capitalism from the 1970s till the late 1990s. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 subsequently trace the origins of a contested mediated communalism and new politics, spanning the period between the late 1990s till 2013. Developments beyond 2013 are dealt with in Chapter 10, while Chapter 11 reiterates the major arguments and draws out the conclusions of the book. Through its discursive and empirical

explorations the book attempts to test the saliency of a distinct approach to ethnic power sharing and electoral dominance, notably through a process of mediated communalism, a practice that is particularly suited to a social formation such as Malaysia, which is ethnically, religiously and regionally divided, yet which has been remarkably if tenuously integrated throughout its electoral history.

APPENDIX 1A

Barisan Nasional (BN) Component Parties

	Name	Acronym	Year founded
1	United Malays National Organisation*	UMNO	1946/1988
2	Malaysian Chinese Association	MCA	1949
3	Malaysian Indian Congress	MIC	1946
4	Malaysian People's Movement Party	Gerakan	1968
5	People's Progressive Party	PPP	1953
6	United Traditional Bumiputera Party	PBB	1973
7	Sarawak United People's Party	SUPP	1959
8	United Sabah Party**	PBS	1985
9	Liberal Democratic Party	LDP	1988
10	United Sabah People's Party	PBRS	1994
11	United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation	UPKO	1994
12	Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party	SPDP	2002
13	Sarawak People's Party	PRS	2004

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) Component Parties

	Name	Acronym	Year founded
1	People's Justice Party	PKR	1999
2	Democratic Action Party	DAP	1966
3	Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party***	PAS	1955

* UMNO was founded in 1946. In 1988 it was deregistered over breach of party rules. A new UMNO (UMNO Baru), under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, was registered in the same year.

** PBS left the BN coalition in 1990 and rejoined it in 2002.

*** PAS joined the BN coalition in 1974 and left it in 1977.

APPENDIX 1B

Electoral Coalitions in Malaysia, Past and Present

	Name	Acronym	Founded	Dissolved
1	Alliance (Perikatan)		1951	1973
2	National Front (Barisan Nasional)	BN	1973	
3	People's Concept (Gagasan Rakyat)	GR	1989	1996
4	Ummah Unity Front (Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah)	APU	1989	1996
5	Alternative Front (Barisan Alternatif)	BA	1999	2008
6	People's Pact (Pakatan Rakyat)	PR	2008	2015
7	Sabah People's Front (Barisan Rakyat Sabah)	SPF	2010	
8	Coalition of Hope (Pakatan Harapan)	PH	2015	

Sources: Barisan Nasional website <<http://www.barisannasional.org.my/en>>; Wikipedia "List of Political Parties in Malaysia" <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_political_parties_in_Malaysia> (accessed 25 May 2015); *Straits Times*, 23 September 2015.

Notes

1. See Campbell (2008, pp. 18–30) for a discussion of the minimal and maximal definitions of "democracy".
2. Competitive authoritarianism is defined as follows: Competitive authoritarian regimes are civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents' abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents. Such regimes are

competitive in that opposition parties use democratic institutions to contest seriously for power, but they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily skewed in favour of incumbents. Competition is thus real but unfair (Levitsky and Way 2010, p. 5).

3. On the notion of consolidated democracy, see Linz and Stepan (1996) and the useful survey of work on the subject by Rose and Shin (2001). On democratization processes from an Asian perspective, see Saravanamuttu (2006). The classic work on democracy qua “polyarchy” is by Robert Dahl (1971). Samuel P. Huntington’s (1991) work on the “third wave” of democratization sparked the broad discourse and theorizing about new democracies and Larry Diamond (1999) and others have carried the discussions forward in the *Journal of Democracy*. Our interest here is how electoral democracy, as a subset of consolidated democracy, could be attained in Malaysia. In later chapters I also deal with how the expansion of the public sphere impacts on and deepens electoral politics.
4. See report of Statistics Department, cited in <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/population-to-hit-30-million-today-statistics-department-says>> (accessed 13 August 2015).
5. The literature on ethnic politics and elections in Malaysia is voluminous; the more prominent studies being Ratnam (1965), Ratnam and Milne (1967), Vasil (1972), Von Vorys (1976), Pillay (1974), Means (1976, 1991), Milne (1978), Milne and Mauzy (1980), Crouch and Lee (1980), Crouch (1982, 1996), Zakaria Ahmad (1987), Gomez (1996), Case (1996), Milne (1999), Loh and Khoo (2002), Loh and Saravanamuttu (2003), Verma (2004), Puthuchery and Noraini (2005), Ooi, Lee and Saravanamuttu (2008), Maznah (2008), O’Shaunassy (2009), Pepinsky (2009), Loh (2009), Faisal Hazi (2011), Weiss (2013, 2006), Chin (2013), Ahamd Fauzi and Muhamad Takiyuddin (2014), and Saravanamuttu, Lee and Mohd. Nawab (2015).
6. In Clifford Geertz’s well-cited essay (1963), primordial sentiments and attachments are ascriptive ties of blood, race and religion, which can obstruct societies from developing civil loyalties to larger entities such as the “nation”.
7. Ever since the BN’s loss of its two-thirds parliamentary majority in 2008, UMNO has adopted a strategy of winning greater Malay support through its exhortation of more extreme racial and religious causes. It has also tried to form a unity government with PAS to consolidate the Malay-Muslim bloc. On the tendency to re-communalize, see Case (2013).
8. I am invoking here a familiar concept of game theory, which is premised on rational choice.

9. See Putnam's two classic studies (1993, 2000). In a research project I undertook with USM colleagues (Chan Lean Heng, Yen Siew Hwa and Tan Lee Ooi) in 2005–6, we found that the associational life created by ethnically based NGOs in Penang were crucial steps towards the generation of subsequent bridging social capital to bring about some level of "ethnic peace" in society. We presented our findings at the 5th International Malaysian Studies Conference held in Kuala Lumpur on 8–10 August 2006 in a panel on "Building Social Capital through Associational Life". See Campbell and Yen (2007) for an exposition and summary of the research results.
10. Riker's famous work based on game theory and rational choice advances the idea that politicians will choose the minimal size of coalitions necessary for governance with minimal expense of resources (Riker 1993). While this may be true of politics in more homogenous societies, I believe that the classic work of anthropologist F.G. Bailey (1969) on "stratagems and spoils" of politics relates better to the nuances and complexities of ethnic politics in a country such as Malaysia.
11. See, for example, Mahoney and Thelen (2010) which has a collection of essays dealing with institutional change in terms of critical junctures and breakdowns of established processes.
12. See Huntington's classic work, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968) and his *The Third Wave of Democratization* (1991).
13. Herbert H. Simon was first to deploy the notion of "satisficing" to explain decision-making behaviour of public institutions. It refers essentially to arriving at approximate best results given administrative and political constraints; i.e., results that are satisfactory rather than optimal (Simon 1947).
14. Pierson (2000, pp. 251–67). See also Pierson's larger work, *Politics in Time* (2004) for a comprehensive exposition of path-dependence theorizing. Work cast in terms of historical sociology is found in Mahoney (2002, pp. 507–48).
15. However, there has been considerable debate over whether such a quid pro quo was in fact struck among the political elites or that it was the basis for the formalization of the provisions for Malay privileges in the Malayan Constitution. See Cheah (2002), especially Chapter 2.
16. In fact there have been two broad connotations of the term. The more broadly used meaning is that of the rise of participatory politics with the increased engagement of civil society in the public sphere (Loh and Saravanamuttu 2003). However, in his earlier work, Loh had used *new politics* to refer to the politics of developmentalism (Loh 2001, 2002) but later he adopted a more encompassing definition: "[New] politics

refers to the increasing fragmentation of the ethnic communities, on the one hand, the contestations between the discourses and practices of the politics of ethnicism, participatory democracy, and developmentalism, on the other” (Loh 2003, p. 297).

17. See also Loh’s collection of essays (2009) in a book entitled *Old vs New Politics in Malaysia*. On the back cover he states that old politics was essentially ethnic based and characterized by money politics, coercive laws and other restrictions, while new politics “demands more democratic participation and social justice, accountability and transparency, and is more multi-ethnic in orientation”.
18. For the notion of political goods, see the work of Pennock (1966).
19. BERSIH is the electoral reform movement which emerged just prior to the 2008 general election (see Chapter 9). For a pictorial account of one of the biggest of these rallies, BERSIH 3, see Yeoh (2012). Some have suggested that the 2015 BERSIH 4 rally topped BERSIH 3 in numbers (see Chapter 10).