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The Defeat of Barisan Nasional

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The Defeat of Barisan Nasional

Missed Signs or Late Surge?

EDITED BY

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FOREWORD

For most Malaysian watchers, 9 May 2018 will go down as one of the most remarkable days in the country's history. For the first time ever, an opposition alliance succeeded in deposing the predominant Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition in a general election. The transition, characterized by a delayed swearing-in ceremony of the new prime minister, was peaceful if somewhat grudging. The losers were clearly shocked by their overwhelming defeat, but no less than the winners' surprise at their victory. After an initial spell of apprehension, a sense of buoyant optimism and idealism infected the mood of the country, though it would ultimately prove unsustainable after the real task of governing began.

The events of GE-14 are all the more remarkable because of how unlikely they seemed just a few years earlier. The opposition was in disarray after an earlier coalition fell apart when the Islamic Party broke off ties with another member party. Mahathir was still a highly distrusted figure by many key opposition stalwarts, not least because of what he had done to them in his previous stint as Prime Minister. Anwar Ibrahim, the most effective campaigner in the opposition, was in prison again and unable to run or campaign. Anwar and Mahathir were estranged, and the depth of disdain that they had for each other since the former's dismissal from the post of Deputy Prime Minister, his assault in custody and subsequent trial on questionable charges was seen as unbridgeable. Even the economy, while not performing at full potential, was still chugging along.

The only thing that the Pakatan Harapan had going for it was the simmering unhappiness over the 1MDB scandal. This undercurrent was strong enough to cause turbulence even within the dominant Malay party, UMNO, itself, and accounted for its incumbent Deputy President being dropped from his post and later stripped of his membership.

However, even with this, it took a combination of many factors for the upset of GE-14 to occur. It was aided by the ubiquity of social media that allowed the government-controlled media to be by-passed. There was also the political statesmanship displayed in the coming together of Mahathir, Anwar and Lim Kit Siang, among others, to form a political alliance. Also significant was Mahathir's

effective campaigning and the strong symbolism of his return to active politics at the age of ninety-two against someone he had mentored in the past. These and many other factors, including several missteps by the ruling coalition, came together to deliver the result against all odds.

This book examines this remarkable historic event from the viewpoint of many researchers who have studied it as it was being played out and have spent many hours analysing the reasons that led to it. Readers may or may not agree with the conclusions drawn, but we hope that many will benefit from the numerous insights this collective work offers.

Choi Shing Kwok
Director, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute
12 June 2019

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The maps within this book enhance our view of Malaysia’s political panorama. We applaud the immense work of our cartographers, Benjamin Hu and Pearlyn Pang, in making such optically pleasing and informative maps. Data on election results and registered voters enabled us to numerically observe vote patterns and analyse relationships with electorate composition. We record our thanks to the NGO Tindak Malaysia, and Danesh Chacko specially, who generously shared their databases. Mohammad Syafiq Suhaini provided excellent translation work at short notice, for which we are very grateful. Ibrahim Suffian of the Merdeka Center has been an exceptional source of support and insight, sharing his in-depth knowledge of the country’s continuously evolving context and making judicious recommendations. We thank Zaiem Iryad for his help in interviewing Iskandar Abdul Samad and transcribing the text for Chapter 21.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFC	Asian Financial Crisis
Alliance	precursor to Barisan Nasional, comprised of UMNO, MCA, and MIC
Amanah	Parti Amanah Negara (National Trust Party)
B40	Bottom Forty (low-income households)
BA	Barisan Alternatif (Alternative Coalition)
BARJASA	Barisan Rakyat Jati Sarawak (Sarawak Native People's Front)
BERJAYA	Parti Bersatu Jelata Sabah (United Sabah Folks' Party)
BERSIH	Coalition for Free and Fair Elections
BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
BR1M	Bantuan Rakyat 1 Malaysia (1Malaysia People's Assistance)
bumiputra	term referring to Malays, indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak
<i>ceramah</i>	political rally
CPI	consumer price index
DAP	Democratic Action Party
Dong Jiao Zong	Malaysian Chinese Education Movement
DOS	Department of Statistics
EC	Election Commission, or SPR (Surahanjaya Pilihanraya)
ECRL	East Coast Rail Link
EIP	Electoral Integrity Project
FELDA	Federal Land Development Authority
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FPTP	first-past-the-post electoral system
GBS	Gabungan Bersatu Sabah (United Sabah Coalition)
GDP	gross domestic product
Gerakan	Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysian People's Movement Party)
GLC	Government-linked corporation
GPS	Gabungan Parti Sarawak (Sarawak Parties' Coalition)

GS	Gabungan Sabah (Sabah Coalition)
GS	Gagasan Sejahtera (Alliance of Prosperity), the coalition comprised of PAS and several minor parties; contested in GE-14.
GST	goods and services tax
HINDRAF	Hindu Rights Action Force
<i>huatuan</i>	Malaysian Chinese associations
<i>hudud</i>	a set of punishments established under shariah law for offences such as theft, robbery, consumption of alcohol, apostasy and illicit sex
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Ethnic and Religious Discrimination
IDE	Institut Darul Ehsan
IPF	All Malaysia Indian Progressive Front
ISA	Internal Security Act, replaced by SOSMA in 2012
KDCA	Kadazandusun Cultural Association Sabah
KDM	Kadazan Dusun Murut
KLCI	Kuala Lumpur Composite Index
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
M40	Middle Forty (middle-income households)
MACC	Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission
MARA	Majlis Amanah Rakyat (People's Trust Council)
MA 63	Malaysia Agreement 1963
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MIB	Malaysian Indian Economic Blueprint
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
Menteri Besar	Chief Minister of a state government
MP	Member of Parliament
NCR	Native Customary Rights
NDP	National Development Policy
NEP	New Economic Policy
NGO	non-governmental organization
NVP	National Vision Policy
1MDB	1 Malaysia Development Berhad
OPOVOV	One Person One Vote One Value
OSA	Official Secrets Act
PAADIAN	Persatuan Kadayan Sabah (Sabah Kadayan Association)
PANAS	Parti Negara Sarawak (Sarawak National Party)
PAP	People's Action Party (Singapore)
PAS	Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (Islamic Party of Malaysia)
PBB	Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (United Bumiputera Heritage Party)
PBDS	Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (Sarawak Dayak People's Party)

PBRS	Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (United Sabah People's Party)
PBS	Parti Bersatu Sabah (United Sabah Party)
PCS	Parti Cinta Sabah (Love Sabah Party)
PDP	Progressive Democratic Party
PESAKA	Parti Pesaka Anak Sarawak (Sarawak Native's Heritage Party)
Perkasa	Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa Malaysia (Malaysian Indigenous Empowerment Organization)
PH	Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope), the coalition comprised of PKR, DAP, Amanah and PPBM; founded in 2015
PHRS	Parti Harapan Rakyat Sabah (Sabah People's Hope Party)
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People's Justice Party)
PKS	Parti Kebangsaan Sabah (Sabah National Party)
PMIP	Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party; the precursor to PAS
PNB	Permodalan Nasional Berhad (National Equity Limited)
PPBM	Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Malaysian United Indigenous Party)
PPP	Parti Progresif Penduduk Malaysia (Malaysian People's Progressive Party)
PPPA	Printing Presses and Publications Act
PPRS	Parti Perpaduan Rakyat Sabah (Sabah People's Unity Party)
PR	Pakatan Rakyat (People's Alliance); the coalition comprised of PKR, DAP and PAS; in operation from 2008 to 2015.
PRS	Parti Rakyat Sarawak (Sarawak People's Party)
PSRM	Parti Socialis Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysian People's Socialist Party)
PTPTN	Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional (National Higher Education Fund Corporation)
RM	ringgit Malaysia
ROS	Registrar of Societies
SAPP	Sabah Progressive Party
Sarawak BN	Sarawak Barisan Nasional
SCA	Sabah Chinese Association
SCA	Sarawak Chinese Association
SIC	Sabah Indian Congress
SLA	State Legislative Assembly
SNAP	Sarawak National Action Party
SOSMA	Security Offences (Special Measures) Act
SPDP	Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party
SPR	Surahanjaya Pilihanraya, or EC (Election Commission)
STAR	State Reform Party
STAR	Parti Solidariti Tanahair Ku (Sabah Homeland Solidarity Party)
SUF	Sarawak United Front
SUPP	Sarawak United People's Party
TERAS	Parti Tenaga Rakyat Sarawak (Sarawak People's Energy Party)

<i>Ubah</i>	Change (campaign slogan)
UEC	United Examination Certificate
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
UPKO	United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Organization
UPP	United People's Party
USA	United Sabah Alliance
USNO	United Sabah National Organization
VP	Vote Popularity
Warisan	Parti Warisan Sabah (Sabah Heritage Party)