

# Introduction





# 1

## **GE2022 IN PERSPECTIVE The Context of the Contest**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Malaysia's 15th General Election of November 2022 (GE2022) embodied the fluid state of its politics. It was fitting for the country to experience its first hung parliament, engulfed as it was in the flux and instability that had seen three prime ministers take office since the 14th General Election of May 2018 (GE2018). Polling day was 19 November, and by that night the votes were tallied and the winners announced. The result was a panoramic scoresheet of freshly elected parliamentarians from three national coalitions, two regional coalitions and multiple stand-alone parties, plus a few independents.

Yet no single entity had secured a majority. The two largest coalitions, Pakatan Harapan (PH) and Perikatan Nasional (PN), held 81 and 74 seats, respectively—a long stretch from the 112 needed for a majority in the 222-seat Dewan Rakyat (Table 1.1). The spotlight fell on each of the coalition leaders, PH's Anwar Ibrahim and PN's Muhyiddin Yassin, and their ability to rally allies to their side and convince the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Malaysia's king, that they had the numbers to be prime minister.

Following five days of intense behind-the-scenes negotiations that leveraged on his charisma and communication skills, Anwar Ibrahim—the two-time opposition leader, Reformasi icon, pardoned prisoner and president of Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR, the National Justice Party)—became prime minister of Malaysia in a dramatic denouement on 24 November 2022.

Heeding the Yang di-Pertuan Agong's call for unity in government, Anwar tapped on his personal relationship with Zahid Hamidi, president of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and head of Barisan Nasional (BN), to harness that coalition's thirty MPs. The subsequent support of the biggest swing bloc, Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), which was enabled by PH overtures to smooth over past frictions and mend fences, secured Anwar another 23 MPs for a well-buffered total of 144 seats. The domino effect continued thereafter, and the Unity coalition would eventually reach the psychologically important two-thirds threshold of 148 seats. Indeed, Malaysia had not seen such a large majority since the landslide secured by BN's Abdullah Badawi in 2004.

Multiple storylines can be plotted from data-laden Table 1.1 and the richly shaded and textured maps on the inner leaves of this book's front and back covers. Two defining themes emerge.

The first revolves around the **crowded arena of Malaysian politics**, arising from the fragmentation of coalitions, the emergence of new parties, and the drawing of new fault lines. Every general election from 1957 to 2018 effectively pitted the incumbent Alliance, later BN, as a national coalition against opposition parties that either stood alone or joined forces in a broad coalition. PH, we should recall, won a parliamentary majority on its own in GE2018; Parti Warisan Sabah (Warisan) subsequently joined the already-formed government. After the departure of Sarawak and Sabah from national coalitions after GE2018, PH's diminution through defections from PKR, and Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia's (Bersatu) en bloc crossover to cause PH's downfall in February 2020, ripped apart the script for contesting power that had prevailed for decades. UMNO's internal troubles and elite splits resulting from the 1MDB scandal have added further complexity to the panorama. Its splinter parties such as Bersatu, Warisan and Pejuang have, in turn, crowded the former's traditional rural Malay electoral heartland and created unprecedented competition for this key vote bank.

This fractured landscape has spawned new modes of contesting elections and securing ruling majorities. The post-2020 political fluidity in general, and precedents of the state elections of Sabah, Melaka and Johor in 2021 and 2022, have given rise to electoral patterns of ad hoc cooperation, strategic realignment and agreement on governing coalitions *after* elections. GE2022's multiple groupings (three competitive peninsula-wide coalitions; namely, PH, BN and PN) and the Sarawak and Sabah regional coalitions brought with them multi-cornered fights across the board and equally multicoloured results. Following a near-total sweep of the north, PN established new footprints in the middle and south of the peninsula, PH retained urban bases, BN plummeted in popularity and recorded its worst-ever seat haul, Sabah's parties were scattered with no clear linchpin, and Sarawak's dominant performance by GPS provided a stark contrast to the dispersed power elsewhere in the country.

The process for forming government stands out even more in post-2020 Malaysia. While previous elections have also seen crowded election fields, the hung parliament and cobbling together of a majority that followed GE2022 was unprecedented.

**TABLE 1.1**  
**Seats Held by Parties and Coalitions at Parliament Dissolution (10 October) and Polling Day (19 November), and Government/Opposition Alignment (24 November)**

<i>Coalition / Party</i>	<i>10 Oct</i>	<i>19 Nov</i>	<i>24 Nov</i>	
	<i>Parliament dissolved</i>	<i>General election</i>	<i>Unity Gov.</i>	<i>Opp.</i>
PH (Pakatan Harapan) <sup>a</sup>	90	81	81	
PKR (Parti Keadilan Rakyat)	36	31		
DAP (Democratic Action Party)	42	40		
Amanah (Parti Amanah Negara)	11	8		
UPKO (United Progressive Kinabalu Organisation)	1	2		
MUDA (Malaysian United Democratic Alliance)	1	1	1	
PN (Perikatan Nasional) <sup>b</sup>	40	74		74
PAS (Parti Islam se-Malaysia)	17	42		
Bersatu (Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia)	23	31		
PN-direct <sup>c</sup>		1		
BN (Barisan Nasional) <sup>d</sup>	41	30	30	
UMNO (United Malays National Org.)	37	26		
MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association)	2	2		
MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress)	1	1		
PBRs (Party Bersatu Rakyat Sabah)	1	1		
GPS (Gabungan Parti Sarawak)	18	23	23	
PBB (Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu)	13	14		
PRS (Parti Rakyat Sarawak)	2	5		
SUPP (Sarawak United People's Party)	1	2		
PDP (Progressive Democratic Party)	2	2		
GRS (Gabungan Rakyat Sabah)	8	6	6	
Bersatu Sabah	6	4 <sup>e</sup>		
PBS (Parti Bersatu Sabah)	1	1		
STAR (Parti Solidariti Tanah Airku)	1	1		
Warisan (Parti Warisan Sabah)	7	3	3	
PBM (Party Bangsa Malaysia)	6	1	1	
Pejuang (Parti Pejuang Tanah Air)	4			
PSB (Parti Sarawak Bersatu)	1			
KDM (Parti Kesejahteraan Demokratik Malaysia)		1	1	
independents	3 <sup>f</sup>	2 <sup>g</sup>	2	
<b>Total</b>	<b>219 <sup>h</sup></b>	<b>222</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>74</b>

*Notes:* <sup>a</sup> PH contested and won in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak; <sup>b</sup> PN contested in Peninsular Malaysia, Sarawak, and Sabah; <sup>c</sup> PN-direct candidate and winner in Arau was not a member of any PN component party; <sup>d</sup> BN contested in Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah; <sup>e</sup> GRS-Bersatu candidates contested under the GRS banner, resigned from Bersatu in December 2022 and joined Parti Gagasan Rakyat Sabah in January 2023; <sup>f</sup> Kuala Nerus, Lubok Antu, Sri Aman; <sup>g</sup> Kudat, Tenom; <sup>h</sup> Total of 219 due to 2 vacant seats (Gerik, Batu Sapi) and 1 independent (Gua Musang) in neither government nor opposition.

*Source:* Authors' computations from Tindak Malaysia's election dataset.

Changes of government outside of an election, which had transpired in various state legislatures over the decades, eventually struck parliament. The Sheraton Move in February 2020, named after the hotel where its protagonists gathered to orchestrate the administration's fall, bolstered the practice of shifting allegiances, deal-making and realignment. The vagaries of Malaysia's political class have also allowed the country's monarchy to lean in as a stabilizing agent.

**Crafting power** emerges as the second overarching theme. Malaysia's polity is now shaped by dispersed power, diverse contending interests, and different configurations across federal and state elections. Whether parties form coalitions and coordinate campaigns is an outcome of electoral calculus more than enduring loyalty. In the event of a post-election hung parliament, parties and coalitions solicit, bargain and compromise to cobble together coalitions, or coalitions of coalitions. This is exemplified by the Unity Government's sprawling lineup comprising national and regional coalitions and other members tallying up to nineteen parties (including independents as a category). The art of politics requires a blend of doggedness and finesse.

Coalitional complexity has also grown. The kingmaker parties, especially the BN and GPS blocs, are exercising more leverage and extracting concessions that entail a delicate balancing act. The monarchy's discretionary influence has crept into the appointment of government leaders, whether by exhorting parliamentary rivals to hammer out a unity government or by selecting as chief minister someone who was not the winning side's candidate for the post (as happened after Johor's 2022 state election; Hutchinson 2022). These recent precedents potentially add more layers of influence to future government formations. Post-GE2022, the scales were also tipped in Anwar Ibrahim's favour through personal trust and mutual interest (Anwar and UMNO President Zahid Hamidi) and as result of partisan truce (GPS and Sarawak DAP), suggesting that tacit dealmaking and suppressed rancour lie beneath the painted veneers of government unity and consensus.

## CHAPTER OUTLINE AND TERMINOLOGICAL NOTE

Any research on a general election must take into account the preceding political developments and the national milieu in which the electoral contest transpired. In light of the unprecedented upheavals since GE2018, this context-setting exercise is especially vital for a book on GE2022.

This introductory chapter thus proceeds with Malaysia's political journey, unpacking the forces and vested interests causing instability, the challenges and opportunities for cultivating popularity, and the ensuing fluidity that made GE2022 unpredictable. This retrospective overview is followed by a primer on the parties, personalities and platforms that clashed in GE2022. The final section paints in broad strokes the results of the vote.

Rather than summarizing each chapter in sequence, we incorporate various insights from the chapters in the paragraphs that follow. We reserve for the concluding

chapter some thoughts on Malaysia's current political situation and key trends at the mid-point of the administration, assuming a full term until 2027.

Before venturing further, a brief digression into acronyms. This book applies a year-based shorthand for elections—namely, GE2022 for the general election of 2022 and SE2023 for the subsequent peninsula state elections of 2023. Seasoned readers of Malaysian politics might notice that this practice departs from the sequence-based shorthand—GE15 for the 15th General Election—which has been the convention in the literature.

This juncture warrants a new lexicon for reasons of clarity, consistency and accessibility.

First, the sequence becomes increasingly difficult to track with each successive election, particularly when referring to the more distant past. For instance, between GE12 and GE2008, most people would find it easier to recall the latter. Second, the new normal of asynchronous parliamentary and state elections adds more events than can be simplified with year-based identification. State elections independent of the general election have already been referenced by year, particularly the 2023 election in six peninsular states. An emergent practice of referring to GE15 alongside SE2023 (or PRN2023, from the Malay *pilihan raya negeri*) perpetuates inconsistency, in contrast to a readily understood standardization of GE2022 and SE2023. Third, while the sequence-based identification of general elections is a distinctive, and perhaps cherished, element of public discourse within Malaysia, the practice risks becoming a Malaysia-specific reference that disconnects rather than engages audiences beyond the country's shores.

While we apply this new nomenclature in this book and encourage broader adoption, we do not enforce it pedantically by omitting all sequential references to Malaysia's elections. There is value in variation, and referring to the 15th General Election of 2022 reminds us of Malaysia's democratic heritage. We are also mindful that the convention applies in retrospect; without fixed parliamentary terms, the timing of the next election is indeterminate and hence must be referred to as the 16th general election. With all this said, we continue with a discussion of the upheavals between GE2018 and GE2022.

## **POST-GE2018 POLITICS: FLUIDITY, POLARIZATION AND INSTABILITY**

BN's defeat in GE2018 ended six decades of the coalition's unbroken rule.<sup>1</sup> UMNO's hegemony within BN had established the norm of a Malay party anchoring and presiding over the ruling coalition. In that context, PH's ascent to power constituted a break from previous practice on multiple levels. Beyond being the first contender to unseat BN, PH also brought a different political complexion headed by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia's former and long-serving prime minister who previously led BN. While PH included UMNO splinter Bersatu (led by Mahathir) and Parti Islam se-Malaysia (PAS) splinter Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah), its

multi-ethnic parties PKR and Democratic Action Party (DAP) contributed the bulk of its parliamentary seats.

Malaysia's post-election turmoil commenced soon after the euphoria of the 14th General Election of May 2018. Indeed, vote patterns reflected a deeply polarized electorate and conditions that could be exploited. In Peninsular Malaysia, PH garnered an estimated 93 per cent of Chinese votes and 84 per cent of Indian votes, but only 22 per cent of Malay votes. The Malay vote was split three ways, with 44 per cent siding with BN/UMNO and 34 per cent with PAS (Ibrahim and Lee 2020).

This outcome may be surprising if we equate the mainstreaming of multi-ethnic parties with the dilution of ethnocentric politics, but GE2018 showed that ethnic representation, particularly of the Malay majority on the peninsula, remained the most relevant and potent political factor. Indeed, PH had incorporated Malay party Bersatu and its leaders to assure Malay voters that their interests would be protected and to wrest seats from UMNO in the Malay heartland (Wan Saiful 2018). East Malaysia, we must note, continued to write its own story. In Sarawak, state-based parties cemented their dominance and subsequent autonomy in federal government when they left BN to form GPS and moved to the opposition (Lee 2019). In Sabah, political power remained more dispersed, with both national parties and state-based parties in the mix (Bagang and Puyok 2019).

PH, with Sabah's Warisan, secured a solid parliamentary majority. A number of state governments came under PH control for the first time, with the coalition in power in the west coast states from Johor to Kedah (Hutchinson and Lee 2019). At the national level, Mahathir occupied the highest office and Malay leaders held key posts, while leadership representation was broadened, notably through the appointment of a non-Muslim attorney-general, non-Malay minister of finance and a woman chief justice. The government delivered on some election pledges, saliently the abolition of the goods and services tax and the constitutional amendments that lowered the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen and instituted automatic voter registration (Li 2018; Chai 2022). But PH fell short of its lofty promises and expectations of change, particularly among its urban non-Malay base. The coalition also struggled to fend off aspersions and insinuations that it had failed to protect Malay interests.

A string of by-elections would test the administration's general credibility and its standing against an energized and collaborative opposition. PH retained the Selangor state seats of Seri Setia and Balakong in September 2018 in two by-elections triggered by the deaths of the former assemblypersons (*Straits Times* 2018). The coalition charted a pathway for Anwar Ibrahim to return to frontline politics via the resignation of PKR's MP in the relatively safe seat of Port Dickson. Anwar convincingly won the ensuing by-election in October 2018 and began to assume a higher profile as the slated prime-minister-in-waiting (Hazlin 2018).

However, PH also came under pressure from the opposition, comprising an UMNO-dominant BN alongside PAS and GPS. The Malay-Muslim parties of UMNO and PAS overcame historical hostilities to form the National Consensus (*Muafakat Nasional*) pact in September 2018 and galvanize Malay antipathies towards the

government. The DAP was particularly demonized, with charges that the multiracial but largely Chinese party dominated the coalition (Wan Saiful 2020).

Policy missteps added further fuel to the fire. In September 2018, the government announced its decision to ratify the United Nations' International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) at the UN General Assembly. ICERD is an international treaty that seeks to eliminate racial discrimination and criminalize the propagation of ideas promoting racial supremacy. Capitalizing on anxieties that Malaysia's ratification would imperil the Bumiputera's special position under the constitution, UMNO and PAS, with various Malay organizations, played up such fears and rallied against ICERD. By early November, PH component members Bersatu and Amanah stated their rejection of the ratification, and by late November the government announced that it would not sign the convention (Jayasooria 2021). Nonetheless, protests continued after this decision, and a demonstration with approximately sixty thousand protesters was organized by UMNO and PAS in December 2018. Held in Dataran Merdeka, it doubled as a protest against the PH government (Hew 2018). Social unrest was rekindled when a dispute over plans to relocate a Hindu temple in Subang Jaya, Selangor, spiralled out of control, particularly when the temple was stormed by a group of masked and armed men on 27 November. In the ensuing violent mayhem, vehicles were torched, some temple devotees injured, and police and firefighting personnel were attacked. Tragically, one of the firefighters, Muhammad Adib Mohd Kassim, succumbed to his injuries on 18 December. The episode, besides heightening ethnic tensions, also strained relations within the PH-led administration, with some cabinet ministers alleging that the police had been slow to respond and quell the situation.

The electoral ground under PH would further change in the following year, with a series of by-election losses. BN held its ground in the January 2019 parliamentary by-election in Cameron Highlands and then wrested the Selangor state seat of Semenyih from PH in March 2019. This second race indicated that the rapprochement between UMNO and PAS had electoral legs, particularly in a context where disenchantment over the slow pace of reform had begun to creep in (Tee and Choong 2019).

The November 2019 by-election in Tanjung Piai, Johor, which flipped from PH to BN, proved more pivotal. BN's victory gave a shot in the arm to the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), UMNO's partner that had barely survived GE2018, and seemingly reflected a winning formula for BN-PAS cooperation (Hasni 2020).

The agenda of unseating PH gained momentum. Multiple political factors and personal interests, including discord between Mahathir and Anwar over the timeline for handing over the prime ministerial reins, set in motion a plot culminating in PH's implosion three months after Tanjung Piai (Wan Saiful 2020).

The Sheraton Move was triggered by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's shock resignation on 24 February 2020. Bersatu left PH, fourteen PKR parliamentarians defected, and GPS openly aligned itself with PN—but no clear prime minister replacement could seize the post, creating a power vacuum. The Agong declared Mahathir the interim prime minister. Mahathir then launched an attempt to form

a “unity government” revolving around him rather than a party-based coalition (Hutchinson and Lee 2020). It failed.

After a week of intrigue and suspense, and the summoning of every MP for a one-on-one audience with the Agong, the monarch deemed Muhyiddin Yassin the parliamentarian who commanded the confidence of a majority of the Dewan Rakyat (Lower House). The realigned coalition counted 113 seats for a razor-thin majority in the 222-seat House (Saravanamuttu 2021). This national-level political change had a ripple effect at the state level, as state administrations were toppled and reconfigured to reflect the new national political reality (Hutchinson and Zhang 2020).

Turmoil continued throughout the short-lived administrations of Muhyiddin Yassin (March 2020 – August 2021) and Ismail Sabri (August 2021 – November 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic caused a public health crisis and an economic downturn, which Prime Minister Muhyiddin initially stewarded with considerable efficacy and an avuncular touch.

Following most countries, Malaysia enforced lockdowns, movement control orders—first on a nationwide basis and subsequently localized—and provided social assistance to supplement income, avert mass unemployment and support businesses, although there were lapses in communication and deficiencies in implementation (Chin 2022; Serina 2022). Grassroots initiatives such as the *#kitajagakita* (we look after ourselves) and *#benderaputih* (white flag) stepped in where government programmes were inadequate by urging community support or coordinating platforms for aid to be delivered (Serina 2021b). Dissatisfaction towards the government echoed in the *#kerajaangagal* (failed government) meme popularized in mid-2021.

As 2021 unfolded, protracted mobility restrictions and compounded hardships stirred public discontent and disaffection towards the political class (Serina 2021a). Partisan strife also heightened, with UMNO increasingly agitated at its lower status in the pecking order, after Bersatu and PAS. Meanwhile, former Prime Minister Najib Razak was convicted of corruption and UMNO President Zahid Hamidi’s own corruption case was advancing through the courts—fuelling demands for UMNO to return to power, supposedly to relieve the burden of prosecution (Chin 2022).

Muhyiddin, on his part, sought refuge from the intensified pressures by invoking emergency declarations. The first request of October 2020 was rejected by the Agong, but the second was approved, resulting in the suspension of parliament for six months, from January to June 2021. The pressures were merely paused, however, and they re-ignited after the emergency, compelling Muhyiddin to resign in August 2021. Deputy PM Ismail Sabri took the reins with the Agong’s blessing. Muhyiddin, Malaysia’s first prime minister to take power outside of an election, could not hold on for the full term.

Ismail Sabri’s ascension was also historically unprecedented. Most consequentially, he was the first prime minister who was not the leader—or even the second-in-command deputy president—of his party (Ooi 2021). Being one of UMNO’s three vice presidents, he lacked control of the party. Political instability persisted under Ismail Sabri, primarily the result of internal duress, most forcefully from party

president Zahid Hamidi. Pressures on Ismail Sabri to dissolve parliament mounted in the wake of the March 2022 Johor state election. BN won by a landslide, and this was taken as a sign that the party's fortunes were ripe for harvesting at the federal level (Hutchinson 2023).

Amid these tribulations—in some ways because of the need to steer through the choppy waters—Malaysia registered some legislative landmarks, most significantly the memorandum of understanding between the Ismail Sabri administration and PH for the period 14 September 2021 to 31 July 2022. This first-ever bipartisanship deal set out some terms for cooperation and restraint from no-confidence motions. Ironically, the coalition government was more reliant on the opposition than its partners to keep afloat.

The MoU delivered the popularly termed anti-hopping law designed to prohibit party switching to overturn a government, as had happened in the Sheraton Move. Constitutional amendments were made to plug loopholes that allowed party-hopping with impunity, although some persisting gaps have been exposed. The MoU also stipulated that all MPs would receive equal constituency development funds (CDF), in contrast to the unequal funding that opposition MPs had been receiving under the PH administration (2018–20) and the zero constituency funding for opposition MPs under pre-2018 BN rule (*Straits Times* 2021). The implementation of the CDF agreement was patchy, with opposition MPs reportedly receiving varying and lesser amounts than those in government (Yeoh 2024).

Consequently, the political milieu in the post-2018 period, especially after the Sheraton Move, shaped the 15th General Election of 19 November 2022 in three areas: polarization, fluidity and instability. While this book focuses on the outcome of the election, the chapters also unpack these themes—their presence and the countervailing factors—as the authors paint the backdrop to GE2022 from the perspective of each chapter's subject matter.

There are four sub-themes.

First, the high turnover of government, intra-party power struggles, and fragmentation of political coalitions blurred the lines between incumbent and challenger and injected uncertainty into the formation of the government post-election (**Chapter 2, Ostwald**). As GE2022 shaped up, the immediate incumbent party UMNO was not gearing up to defend its government; specifically, the party did not rally behind Prime Minister Ismail Sabri or campaign on his administration's track record as would normally be the case. PN, on the other hand, took up the mantle of incumbent despite being elbowed aside by UMNO in August 2021. The peculiar dynamics between UMNO, Bersatu and PAS also left open various possibilities for post-GE2022 cooperation. Although UMNO's rift with Bersatu and PAS had grown to the point of competing against each other, the door remained open for them to regroup to form a governing majority (Azmil 2022). The allegiance of Sarawak and Sabah coalitions and parties, which had enjoyed greater autonomy since 2018—albeit with continuing affinities among former BN components—would also be much less guaranteed than in the past (Lee 2021; Bagang and Puyok 2019).

Second, the socio-economic adversities of the Covid-19 pandemic and economic downturn persisted and reshaped the relationship between government and people. Post-crisis elections typically disfavour incumbents; electorates tend to vote against administrations that oversee a period of increased unemployment and economic hardship. But Covid-19 was an exceptional crisis that could make for a more forgiving electorate, hence GE2022 also gave the opportunity for incumbents to campaign on a record of managing the troubles (**Chapter 4, Lee**). PN, believing that the Muhyiddin administration's pandemic policies were well-received, would appeal to voters on the basis of its policies and the Prihatin brand it had established, as well as Muhyiddin's crafted "Abah" image (**Chapter 6, Ong and Chan; Chapter 5, Jalli**). However, GE2022 also arrived amid lingering public discontent towards extended lockdowns, poor coordination, inadequate socioeconomic support, and unfair enforcement practices that harshly penalized common folk for infringements while showing leniency to elites committing the same (Serina 2021a).

Third, a surge of new voters and novel social media channels injected more uncertainty into the race. The constitutional amendments that reduced the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen and automatically registered voters—known as Undi-18 and AVR, respectively—added six million potential first-time voters, whose participation could sway the outcome. Even with a lower voter turnout rate, the burgeoning absolute number of voters could be a difference-maker (**Chapter 10, Chai**). The Johor state election of March 2022, the first to be held with Undi-18 and AVR in effect, and under Covid-19 travel restrictions and physical distancing, registered an exceptionally low turnout rate of 55 per cent. By November 2022, borders had opened and restrictions were lifted, presaging a surge in new voters (**Chapter 12, Hutchinson and Zhang**). New media, especially TikTok, also held the potential to reach young and first-time voters, whose preferences were less known (**Chapter 5, Jalli**). In this milieu of fluidity and uncertainty, campaigns would seek to capture the public imagination in new and innovative ways (**Chapter 6, Ong and Chan**).

Fourth, the four state elections since GE2018—in Sabah (September 2020), Sarawak (July 2021), Melaka (December 2021) and Johor (March 2022)—suggested new dynamics and momentum swings (**Chapter 15, Paridi and Puyok; Chapter 14, Lee; Chapter 12, Hutchinson and Zhang**). Sabah's election tilted the balance away from PH and Warisan, while Sarawak's showed the dominance of GPS, which portended growing leverage. Melaka and Johor, won decisively by BN, emboldened Zahid-leaning factions within UMNO to pressure Ismail Sabri to call for a snap general election. In fluid times, signs of shifting momentum were taken as a window through which to capitalize.

## THE FIGHT: PARTIES, PLATFORMS, PERSONALITIES

On Monday, 10 October 2022, three days after Friday evening's Budget 2023 speech, Prime Minister Ismail Sabri dissolved parliament. The budget would not be debated; the country would head into a general election. Ismail Sabri urged states on the

general election cycle—all peninsula states except Melaka and Johor—to follow suit. However, only three states complied—the ones governed by BN, either on its own (Pahang and Perlis) or in coalition with PH (Perak). Other states ruled by PN or PH alone did not dissolve their assemblies, arguing that the possibility of floods and the ensuing safety risks made holding year-end elections ill-advised.

The Election Commission set nomination day for 5 November 2022, and polling day for 19 November. Unlike the second Najib administration, which stretched the parliamentary term to its limit and made campaign planning for the opposition easier, GE2022 was called early. This played to the incumbent administration's hand, given that the opposition had less forewarning. Learning from GE2018, the Ismail Sabri administration did not hold the election on a weekday, opting instead for the traditional Saturday voting.

Going into the campaign, the federal governing coalition disbanded. BN and PH would contest separately, and, with PH, GE2022 would see three national coalitions going toe to toe. While it is fair to say that PH was more multi-ethnic in composition and BN and PN were dominated by Malay parties, all three major coalitions contained Malay-based parties (including Amanah in PH) and multi-ethnic line-ups (MCA and MIC in BN, Gerakan in PN). All three ran campaigns in Sabah and included either a Sabah partner (PBDS in BN, UPKO in PH) or, in the case of Bersatu, its distinct party chapter. In Sarawak, there were three national coalitions, but only PH had an effective presence, mainly through DAP and PKR in urban seats. East Malaysia, with 56 parliament seats (25 per cent of the total 222), could swing the outcome, but the champion of the peninsula—whether at the election or by post-election manoeuvres—would be in the driver's seat.

The key features of national coalitions primarily vying for the 165 Peninsular Malaysia seats encapsulated the battle for control (Table 1.2). All three fielded candidates widely. All three national coalitions fell short of 30 per cent women candidates, which has been a national aspiration, if not a partisan promise. While we admittedly devote little attention to the gender aspect of Malaysia's politics, the lack of women's representation is an issue that warrants more attention (for the perspective of the first Dayak woman elected to parliament, see **Chapter 21, Doris**). Unique to PH was its pact with the Malaysian United Democratic Alliance (MUDA), with which it shared similar reform agendas but also sought to appeal to the same voter base (for a deep dive into the youth vote, see **Chapter 10, Chai**). Following protracted negotiations, the two eventually came to view a partnership positively and entered a seat-allocation agreement to avoid competing against each other.

While all national coalitions were acutely mindful of the need for East Malaysian support, PH had a more established presence in urban East Malaysia. For their part, BN and PN had more limited presence in the Borneo states, most notably in Sarawak. In Sarawak, the strength of GPS on the back of a landslide win in the 2021 state election meant that the main anticipation was not whether GPS would win at GE2022 but rather on how many of the state's thirty-one parliamentary seats it would secure—and to which side it would lean as a kingmaker. Sabah's more capricious

**TABLE 1.2**  
**Three National Coalitions in GE2022: Key Information**

	<i>Barisan Nasional</i>	<i>Perikatan Nasional</i>	<i>Pakatan Harapan</i>
Component parties	UMNO MCA MIC PBRS (Sabah) <sup>1</sup>	PAS Bersatu Gerakan Bersatu Sabah <sup>2</sup>	PKR DAP Amanah UPKO (Sabah) <sup>3</sup>
Affiliate			MUDA
Total seats contested	178	171	214
Women candidates (% total)	22 (12.4%)	16 (9.4%)	39 (18.2%)
Slogan	<i>Kestabilan &amp; Kemakmuran</i> Stability and Prosperity	<i>Prihatin, Bersih, Stabil</i> Caring, Clean, Stable	<i>Kita boleh!</i> We can!
PM candidate	undeclared	Muhyiddin Yassin	Anwar Ibrahim

Notes: <sup>1</sup> Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (United Sabah People's Party); <sup>2</sup> Bersatu Sabah is the lead party in Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS); <sup>3</sup> United Progressive Kinabalu Organisation.

Source: Authors' compilations from various sources and Tindak Malaysia's election dataset.

politics presented a contrast, but growing assertiveness towards state-based parties was expected to curtail the national coalitions' prospects, and its twenty-five seats gave weightage to the state in the formation of government, even in the absence of a dominant victor.

A full survey of participants would take up a whole chapter, but some should be acknowledged for adding colour to the crowded field. These include the Gerakan Tanah Air (GTA) coalition led by right-leaning Malay party Pejuang, which tried to tap into the fading aura of Mahathir Mohamad; Warisan, which made the first significant foray of an East Malaysian party into the peninsula; and Parti Bangsa Malaysia (PBM), which absorbed a few former PKR defectors. These parties plunged into GE2022 waters but barely made a splash; most forfeited their deposits.<sup>2</sup>

The coalitions brought their campaign slogans and manifestos to the battlefield of ideas (**Chapter 6, Ong and Chan**). Stability featured prominently on the BN's and PN's platforms—with the difference that BN was harking back to its former glory days as the guardian of stability and prosperity, while PN was positioning itself as the stabler and cleaner alternative to UMNO. PH invoked a can-do spirit of possibility with its rallying call, *kita boleh!* (we can!). Reflecting the established ideological convergence on economic policy, all the manifestos covered welfare provisions (with differences in form and magnitude). On governance and reforms, all three coalitions advocated institutional reforms, with PH expectedly maintaining the broadest agenda, while BN notably contrasted with its past opposition to such change. All sides also pledged to promote Sarawak and Sabah autonomy and address outstanding MA63 issues (Lee 2022).

Curiously, despite being the immediate incumbent, BN did not campaign on its record but instead offered a “new and fresh deal” of extensive socio-economic support and free provisions, including a signature income top-up to all households below the poverty line. On the other hand, PN highlighted its achievements in government and, riding on Muhyiddin’s popularity and PAS’s religious credentials, presented itself as a safe and clean option. PH pressed the case that it would best safeguard people’s welfare, govern with integrity, and prepare the nation to face the future. Local manifestos were also projected along with the national campaigns, arguably to a lesser extent than in previous general elections in light of the minority of states simultaneously electing their governments. Our segment on the state elections captures the local and national dynamics in Kelantan, Johor, Selangor, Sabah and Sarawak (**Chapter 13, Azmil; Chapter 12, Hutchinson and Zhang; Chapter 11, Lee and Adib; Chapter 14, Lee; Chapter 15, Paridi and Puyok**).

Political figures add personality, persuasion and panache to electoral campaigns, and GE2022 had its fair share of storylines. Mirroring Malaysia’s fragmentation, the tussle among the top leaders was multi-cornered in contrast to GE2018’s showdown between Najib Razak and Mahathir Mohamad and similar head-to-head clashes of the past.

One unusual feature of GE2022 was BN’s absence of a PM candidate, reflecting Ismail Sabri’s lack of charisma and weakness within the party, which sidelined the campaign’s focus on his tenure as prime minister and precluded him from being projected as BN’s prime ministerial candidate. It was apparent that Zahid Hamidi wielded the power and was waiting in the wings to call the shots after the election, even while he was regarded as being too controversial to be placed at the top of the BN ticket. UMNO’s internal strife and repositioning also generated some prominent “parachuting” moves, including two from the outgoing cabinet. In Selangor, Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin, sidelined from his three-term seat of Rembau, was deployed to Sungai Buloh; and Finance Minister and Senator Tengku Zafrul Aziz contested Kuala Selangor in a first-time pursuit of a parliament seat.

PN and PH definitively came together around their leaders, with the former rallying behind Muhyiddin and the Prihatin brand of Covid-19 social assistance policies, as well as Muhyiddin’s “Abah” image (**Chapter 5, Jalli**). PAS pursued a dual approach. Its leadership line-up included non-clerical “professionals”, whether their comportment was more technocratic (Terengganu *menteri besar* Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar) or grassroots (Kedah *menteri besar* Sanusi Mohammed). Nonetheless, there was a large cohort of clerics as candidates, and the presence of Party President Hadi Awang loomed large (**Chapter 13, Azmil**). PH upped the ante through Anwar Ibrahim’s daring move to Tambun, Perak, where the state elections were being held concurrently. There was the sense of this being Anwar’s “last dance”, and, coupled with Perak’s unique pre-GE2022 political journey, this gambit was orchestrated (**Chapter 19, Lee**). PH’s campaign was also punctuated with a resolve to redeem the betrayals of 2020 and punish the perpetrators, particularly in Selangor and Gombak, which was one of the highest profile contests of GE2022, between Bersatu’s Azmin

Ali and PKR's Amirudin Shari (**Chapter 11, Lee and Adib**). DAP remained the disciplined party and was ensconced in its strongholds, but it also had to manage the exit of stalwart Lim Kit Siang and leading technocrats Tony Pua and Ong Kian Ming. PH's "frenemy" relationship with MUDA, which centred on Syed Saddiq and had frayed after both clashed in the Johor state election, would bear fruit in seat allocations and joint campaigning, but with mixed degrees of cooperation.

## **OUTCOME AND OUTLOOK: PATTERNS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE VOTE<sup>3</sup>**

The election result is the primary focus of this volume. The chapters ahead will illuminate the GE2022 theatre from multiple angles and delve into some underlying dynamics. For the remainder of this chapter, we paint the election results in broad strokes, focusing on the candidacies and wins for major contestants, with summations of the performances of coalitions and component parties. We then encapsulate some reasons for the outcomes and discuss a few emerging themes that persisted into the 2023 state elections and current politics. This analysis will be fleshed out further in this book's conclusion.

In Peninsular Malaysia, PH, PN and BN contested all seats, except for five that PH allocated to MUDA in their pact (Table 1.3). PH and PN performed remarkably similarly, with matching win rates. By party, however, DAP's exceedingly high

**TABLE 1.3**  
**Peninsular Malaysia and Federal Territories: GE2022 Results of Major Coalitions and Parties**

<i>Coalition / Party</i>	<i>Seats contested</i>	<i>Seats won</i>	<i>Win rate (%)</i>
Pakatan Harapan	161	70	43.5
PKR (Parti Keadilan Rakyat)	74	29	39.2
DAP (Democratic Action Party)	40	33	82.5
Amanah (Parti Amanah Negara)	47	8	17.0
MUDA (Malaysian United Democratic Alliance)	5	1	20.0
Perikatan Nasional	166	73	44.0
PAS (Parti Islam se-Malaysia)	62	42	67.7
Bersatu (Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia)	83	29	34.9
PN-direct	1	1	100.0
Gerakan (Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia)	20	0	0.0
Barisan Nasional <sup>a</sup>	166	23	13.9
UMNO (United Malays National Organisation)	106	20	18.9
MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association)	44	2	4.5
MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress)	10	1	10.0

*Notes:* Includes Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Labuan; <sup>a</sup> BN also includes IPF, MMSP, PCM, BN-direct, KIMMA.

*Source:* Authors' computations from Tindak Malaysia's election dataset.

**TABLE 1.4.**  
**Sarawak: GE2022 Results of Major Coalitions and Parties**

	<i>Seats contested</i>	<i>Seats won</i>	<i>Win rate (%)</i>
Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS)	31	23	74.2
PBB (Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu)	14	14	100.0
PRS (Parti Rakyat Sarawak)	6	5	83.3
SUPP (Sarawak United People's Party)	7	2	28.6
PDP (Progressive Democratic Party)	4	2	50.0
Pakatan Harapan (PH)	30	6	20.0
DAP (Democratic Action Party)	8	5	62.5
PKR (Parti Keadilan Rakyat)	16	1	6.3
Amanah (Parti Amanah Negara)	6	0	0.0
Perikatan Nasional (PN)	4	1	25.0
Bersatu (Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia)	3	1	33.3
PAS (Parti Islam se-Malaysia)	1	0	0.0
Parti Bangsa Malaysia	1	1	100.0
PSB (Parti Sarawak Bersatu)	10	0	0.0

*Source:* Authors' computations from Tindak, Malaysia's election dataset.

win rate outshone its PH allies and both Bersatu and PAS—discounting the sole PN direct candidate. Of course, the party confined itself to its urban strongholds, while PKR and Amanah contested in the more competitive Malay-majority seats. PAS and Bersatu won about half of their contests, but far outdid UMNO which, following its diminishing trajectory of recent election cycles, won a paltry 18.9 per cent of seats contested. UMNO's partners MCA and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) fared even worse.

East Malaysia's distinct and local-based politics, and the advantages of the incumbent ruling state government coalition, are evident in the overall results. In Sarawak, GPS showed its prowess, with Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) winning all contests and Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS) nearly recording a clean sweep (Table 1.4). Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) faced stiffer competition in the urban areas, its losses mirroring DAP's strong showing. DAP's PH partners PKR and Amanah, however, endured a near wipe out except for PKR's lone win. PN continued to struggle for traction. Even with just a few calculated candidacies, it only managed one win out of four. Sabah's GRS and BN, as the mainstays of the state government, both won at least half their contests. PH struggled more in Sabah than Sarawak; PKR managed only one seat, and DAP won two at a 29 per cent win rate, although United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Organisation (UPKO) did better with a 40 per cent win rate. Among non-coalition parties, Warisan's decline, after losing the state government in 2020, continued at the parliament level, with its seats down to three out of twenty-five contested.

Malaysia sustained its solid record of voter participation and credible elections. A respectable 74.7 per cent of voters turned out to cast their ballots at GE2022, with some variations across state, ethnicity and age (see box article). The 2022 turnout rate was lower than the remarkable 82.3 per cent of 2018, but this decline derived from automatic voter registration which added six million voters to the denominator. The number of votes cast increased from 12.3 million in 2018 to 15.6 million in 2022, including the newly enfranchised cohort aged 18–20 (Hutchinson 2023). Vote casting and counting and certification of results proceeded without major controversy. Allegations of campaign misconduct were raised, and a few challenges, including of vote-buying, were prosecuted. The most consequential case in Kemaman, Terengganu, resulted in the courts nullifying the result and a by-election being held in December 2023 (CNA 2023). Malpractice persisted, but some measure of confidence can be had that the system is holding perpetrators to account.

**TABLE 1.5.**  
**Sabah: Results of Major Coalitions and Parties in GE2022**

	<i>Seats contested</i>	<i>Seats won</i>	<i>Win rate (%)</i>
GRS (Gagasan Rakyat Sabah)	13	6	46.2
Bersatu Sabah <sup>a</sup>	6	4	66.7
PBS (Parti Bersatu Sabah)	4	1	25.0
STAR (Parti Solidariti Tanah Airku)	2	1	50.0
SAPP (Sabah Progressive Party)	1	0	0.0
Bersatu - Perikatan Nasional <sup>b</sup>	1	1	100.0
Pakatan Harapan	22	5	22.7
DAP (Democratic Action Party)	7	2	28.6
PKR (Parti Keadilan Rakyat)	10	1	10.0
UPKO (United Progressive Kinabalu Organisation)	5	2	40.0
Amanah (Parti Amanah Negara)	1	0	0.0
Barisan Nasional	12	7	58.3
UMNO (United Malays National Organisation)	11	6	54.5
PBRIS (Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah)	1	1	100.0
Warisan (Parti Warisan Sabah)	25	3	12.0
KDM (Parti Kesejahteraan Demokratik Malaysia)	7	1	14.3
Independents	20	2	10.0

Source: Authors' computations from Tindak Malaysia's election dataset.

Notes: <sup>a</sup> GRS-Bersatu candidates contested under the GRS banner, resigned from Bersatu in December 2022, and joined Parti Gagasan Rakyat Sabah in January 2023; <sup>b</sup> Bersatu – PN (Beluran) is not in GRS.

## VOTING AND TURNOUT BY RACE AND AGE

Ong Kian Ming

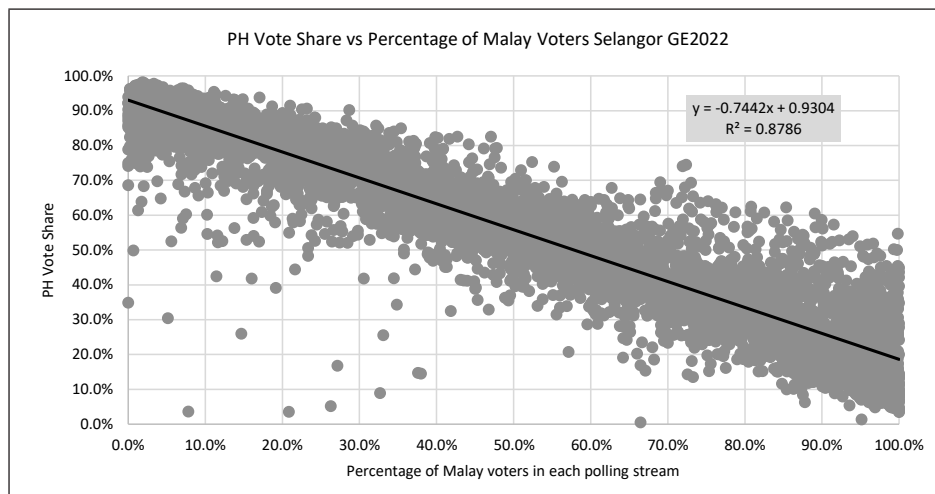
### Voting

Voting patterns, especially how the major ethnic groups in Malaysia voted, have been a subject of electoral study by several scholars (Brown 2005; Dettman and Pepinsky 2023; Welsh 2014). Most of these analyses use electoral data at the constituency level.

The way votes are cast and tabulated in Malaysian elections presents researchers with unique opportunities to analyse electoral outcomes and the factors influencing these outcomes at a more micro level. The majority of the 15.7 million voters who cast their votes in the 2022 general elections (out of a total of 21.2 million eligible voters) did so in designated schools in their voting constituencies and in designated classrooms, according to their age group. This allowed for the votes from each classroom (also known as “polling streams”) in each school (also known as “polling places”) in each voting district to be tabulated individually. These voting outcomes (also known as “dependent variables”) for each candidate representing their respective parties could then be compared against various characteristics of these voters (also known as “independent variables”) such as ethnic and age composition in each polling stream.<sup>4</sup>

For example, Figure 1.1 shows the relationship between the percentage share of votes won by PH in each polling stream in the state of Selangor versus the percentage of Malay voters in each polling stream. The graph in Figure 1.1

**FIGURE 1.1**  
**PH Vote Share for Each Polling Stream Versus the Percentage of Malay Voters in Each Polling Stream in Selangor, GE2022**



shows that a 10 per cent increase in the proportion of Malay voters reduced the support for PH by 7.5 per cent. This is a strong negative and highly correlated relationship. The R-squared of 0.8786 shows a high and negative correlation between these two variables. The PH vote share among Malay voters in Selangor is estimated at 18.6 per cent.

The ethnic composition of each polling stream was calculated using the electoral roll for GE15 and input based on a database of Malay, Chinese, Indian and Other names.<sup>5</sup>

The figures in Table 1.6 show overwhelming support for PH among the Chinese and Indian voters in Peninsular Malaysia. The Malay support for PH is relatively muted, at an estimated 10.4 per cent for Peninsular Malaysia overall, with the highest support in Selangor and Wilayah Persekutuan of 18.6 per cent and 21.3 per cent, respectively. The Malay support for PN is the highest in the four northern states of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu, with more than 60 per cent support. In Penang and Perak, Malay support for PN is more than 50 per cent but below 60 per cent. PN received plurality support in Pahang, Selangor, Wilayah Persekutuan and Melaka. BN only managed to win more than 50 per cent of Malay support in Negeri Sembilan, while receiving plurality Malay support in Johor.

**TABLE 1.6**  
**Estimated Support (per cent) for PH, PN and BN Among Malay, Chinese and Indian Voters in Peninsular Malaysia and by Individual State, GE2022<sup>1</sup>**

State	Malay Support (per cent)			Chinese Support (per cent)			Indian Support (per cent)		
	PH	PN	BN	PH	PN	BN	PH	PN	BN
Perlis	10.2	60.3	25.9	>85	<1	<15	NA	NA	NA
Kedah	5.7	66.7	24.0	>95	<1	<1	NA	NA	NA
Kelantan	6.1	66.2	26.0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Terengganu	2.9	61.0	34.8	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Penang	11.3	54.5	32.3	>95	<1	<1	>95	<1	<5
Perak	8.2	51.7	37.9	>95	<1	<5	>95	<1	<5
Pahang	5.8	48.5	43.9	>90	<1	<10	>90	NA	NA
Selangor	18.6	49.1	28.4	>95	<1	<1	>95	<1	<5
WPKL	21.3	42.8	33.5	>95	<1	<1	>70	<5	<25
Negeri Sembilan	13.6	33.3	51.0	>95	<1	<1	>95	<1	<5
Melaka	10.1	46.0	42.4	>95	<1	<5	>85	<1	<15
Johor	11.0	42.8	48.7	>95	<1	<5	NA	NA	NA
Peninsular Malaysia	10.4	52.9	34.9	>95	<1	<5	>90	<1	<10

*Notes:* The estimates in Figure 1.1 were calculated based on the regression equations for each state against the proportion of Malay, Chinese and Indian voters. For the Chinese and Indian support for each party, only the states that had more than 10 per cent of Chinese or Indian voters were included in this calculation.

<sup>1</sup> Similar estimates for Sabah and Sarawak were not conducted because of the similarity between the names of Malays and other native Bumiputera voters. For states where the Chinese/Indian voters accounted for less than 10 per cent of total voters, accurate estimates were not available.

The focus on ethnic voting patterns in Malaysia is largely because political campaigning usually revolves around racial and religious lines. Politicians on all sides of the political divide use racial and religious themes to appeal to their supporters and fence-sitters. Swings in support for one coalition by one ethnic group can be instrumental in determining the results of a general election in Malaysia. For example, non-Malay voters swung towards the opposition PR coalition in the 2008 general election (Pepinsky 2009) causing the ruling BN coalition to lose control of three state governments (Penang, Perak and Selangor) and lose its two-thirds control of parliament for the first time since 1969. In the 2018 general election, enough Malay votes swung towards PAS and the PH coalition to cause UMNO to lose its majority support, which led to the first transition of power through the ballot box in Malaysian history (Ong 2019).

In the 2022 general election, PN's ability to capture the majority of Malay support in Peninsular Malaysia caused BN to suffer an even greater electoral defeat. The competitive multi-corner fights, where PN was able to gain the majority of Malay support and where PH was able to gain the majority of non-Malay support, meant PN was able to win most of the Malay-majority seats, while PH was able to win most of the non-Malay majority seats. In turn, BN was left defending its seats in its stronghold states of Johor, Negeri Sembilan and, to a lesser extent, Pahang.

The calculus of ethnic voting in the context of multi-coalition politics will influence the approach that PH and BN take in preparing for the next general election as both coalitions realize they need each other in order to defeat PN.

## Turnout

A similar method of regressing turnout against ethnic composition by polling stream was used to estimate turnout by race for each state in Peninsular Malaysia. The results are summarized in Table 1.7.

Table 1.7 shows that the estimated Malay turnout in Peninsular Malaysia is 78.7 per cent compared with 68.9 per cent and 68.6 per cent for Chinese and Indian voters, respectively. Large N survey type studies are needed to better understand the differential turnout rates by ethnic group.

The segregation of voters according to their age into different polling streams meant that it was possible to estimate support for the respective parties based on the average age of each polling stream and the ethnic majority in those polling streams. Table 1.8 separates the polling streams into those that were more than 70 per cent Malay, more than 70 per cent Chinese, and those that comprised more than 30 per cent Indian voters. This was done to try and isolate the influence of age according to each ethnic group (Table 1.8).

Turnout by ethnic group is important in influencing the final outcome of the election because variances in turnout among the major ethnic groups will change the effective composition of each constituency and can be a determinant in some of the closely contested mixed constituencies. For example, in a constituency

**TABLE 1.7**  
**Estimated Turnout (per cent) Among Malay, Chinese and Indian**  
**Voters by Peninsular State**

<i>State</i>	<i>Malay</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Indian</i>
Perlis	77.2	61.1	NA
Kedah	79.3	62.3	NA
Kelantan	70.4	NA	NA
Terengganu	79.7	NA	NA
Penang	82.4	71.9	65.3
Perak	78.7	62.3	63.3
Pahang	78.7	68.6	NA
Selangor	82.5	73.1	76.4
WPKL	77.2	69.3	59.1
Negeri Sembilan	79.2	70.2	72.3
Melaka	81.3	70.2	74.6
Johor	78.1	67.7	59.0
Peninsular Malaysia	78.7	68.9	68.6

that is 60 per cent Malay and 40 per cent non-Malay, and where the Malay voter turnout is 80 per cent in comparison to the non-Malay voter turnout at 70 per cent, the effective ethnic composition becomes 63 per cent Malay and 36 per cent non-Malay. This difference in ethnic voter turnout combined with distinctive ethnic voting patterns illustrates the importance of “Get Out the Vote” (GOTV) campaign strategies among the different coalitions. The higher voter turnout among the Malays in GE2022 meant that the relative importance of Malay voters increased.

The following conclusions can be drawn from Table 1.8:

- (i) Support for BN shows a steady fall from older Malay voters (45.4 per cent support among  $\geq 60$  years) to younger Malay voters (20.5 per cent for  $\leq 21$  years). Likewise, younger voters show less support for BN in the  $>70$  per cent Chinese and  $>30$  per cent Indian polling streams.
- (ii) The support for PN increases from the older Malay polling streams (37.4 per cent support among  $\geq 60$  years) to more than 50 per cent among the Malay polling streams aged under 50 (the four columns on the right). The increase in PN support from older and younger Chinese and Indian polling streams is due to the presence of more Malay voters in these polling streams.
- (iii) The support for PH increases slightly from the older Malay polling streams (13.7 per cent support for  $\geq 60$  years) to the younger Malay polling streams (22.4 per cent support for  $\leq 21$  years). The change in PH support by age does not differ significantly by age group in the  $>70$  per cent Chinese and  $>30$  per cent Indian polling streams.

- (iv) Finally, Table 1.9 shows the changes in turnout by different polling stream age groups for the >70 per cent Malay, >70 per cent Chinese and >30 per cent Indian polling streams.

From the figures in Table 1.9, the turnout among the ≤22 polling stream seems to be higher across all three polling stream categories compared to the ≥60 polling streams. This may be an indication that many first-time voters 21 years or younger were more excited to vote than their parents and grandparents.

The relatively high turnout among younger first-time voters (those between 18 and 21) coupled with the higher support for PN among these younger Malay voters presents a big challenge for BN, especially if it fails to win back some of the youth vote in the next general election.

**TABLE 1.8**  
**Vote Shares for BN, PN and PH by Age Group in Polling Streams with High Proportions of Malay, Chinese and Indian voters, GE2022**

<i>Ethnic composition of polling stream</i>	<i>Age group</i>					
	<i>≥60</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>22-29</i>	<i>≤21</i>
	<i>Vote share for BN (per cent)</i>					
>70% Malay	45.4	38.6	32.1	28.6	25.9	20.5
>70% Chinese	12.1	9.1	8.2	7.6	6.0	5.3
>30% Indian	25.2	21.2	18.5	17.5	21.1	15.4
	<i>Vote share for PN (per cent)</i>					
>70% Malay	37.4	43.6	52.0	54.1	55.5	55.3
>70% Chinese	3.3	4.1	5.3	6.1	6.5	7.1
>30% Indian	9.5	12.8	15.4	16.3	17.4	19.5
	<i>Vote share for PH (per cent)</i>					
>70% Malay	13.7	15.1	13.7	15.4	17.0	22.4
>70% Chinese	82.0	85.2	85.0	85.2	86.5	86.8
>30% Indian	60.3	62.8	63.7	64.2	59.3	63.3

**TABLE 1.9**  
**Turnout (per cent) by Age Group in Polling Streams with High Proportions of Malay, Chinese and Indian voters, GE2022**

	<i>Age group</i>					
	<i>≥60</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>22-29</i>	<i>≤21</i>
>70% Malay	76.9	81.5	76.5	73.6	77.9	81.3
>70% Chinese	68.7	76.7	72.5	68.5	70.2	73.9
>30% Indian	70.6	77.9	76.0	73.5	75.1	78.8

## Concluding Thoughts

The availability of granular data at the local or sub-constituency levels presents many opportunities for a more fine-grained analysis of voting and turnout patterns by race and age. With more accurate ethnic identification methods in Sarawak and Sabah, this kind of analysis can be extended to East Malaysia, where more interesting trends and patterns can be revealed. The availability of this data will also lead to more sophisticated data analysis methods that have been used in other contexts and other countries so that more accurate estimates of turnout and voting can be obtained.

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GE2022 manifested the polarization pervading Peninsular Malaysia. General sentiments were more subdued compared with 2018, partly because of the more diffused contests unfolding rather than the head-to-head clashes. Public polling during the campaign period (3–18 November) found PH to be in the lead, support for BN receding and PN gaining momentum (Merdeka Center 2022). PN's giant leap from 39 to 74 parliament seats—the momentous change of GE2022—derived from Malay voters gravitating towards the PAS-Bersatu coalition and away from PH. The latter lost ground, going from 90 to 81 seats, but remained the overwhelming choice of minority groups. As noted in the box article, an estimated 53 per cent of the Malay electorate chose PN and 33 per cent supported BN; only 11 per cent voted PH.

Heading into GE2022, the question surrounding Chinese and Indian voters was not the party they would support but the margin—specifically, whether the optimism and galvanization of 2018 would be sustained, or disillusionment and lethargy towards PH would set in.

MCA and MIC showed glimmers of a comeback at the March 2022 Johor state election. Resoundingly, though, minority groups on the peninsula flocked to PH, further raising the high-water mark of its popularity. Among Chinese voters,

95 per cent stood with PH, 5 per cent with BN, and 1 per cent with PN; among Indian voters, 86 per cent chose PH, 10 per cent BN and 2 per cent PN (Ong, this chapter). PH was able to pull through in Malay-majority seats by dominating the non-Malay vote and taking a sliver of the Malay vote. DAP retained its base; PKR regrouped after a period of intra-party strife and state election setbacks (**Chapter 18, Nik Nazmi**). Of course, these preferences varied by state, and more granular analysis within constituencies reveal more nuanced pictures, notably among Indian and Orang Asli voters (**Chapter 9, Chacko**). Nonetheless, the ethnic pattern of the votes is as stark as ever (Marzuki and Suffian 2023). It is a fair generalization to say that non-Malays view PH as a bulwark representing their diverse interests.

PN's breakthrough in the Malay heartland was driven by both PAS and PN. While PAS rapidly grew to become the largest party in parliament, with 41 MPs, its advance had been years in the making and was deeply rooted, and its machinery and candidate selection was resonant with the times (**Chapter 7, Faizal; Chapter 17, Syahir**). PN's ability to ride on PAS's popularity in Kelantan and Terengganu was clear. Both PAS and Bersatu candidates contested under the PAS logo. PN's growing legitimacy in other states where it presented a unified front was validated by its sweeping wins in the peninsular north and east coast and its unprecedented inroads into the west coast.

In today's Malaysia, the advantages of incumbency have diminished, and new entrants can prevail against established names. Disinformation or malign messaging through social media have become general concerns. They are widely believed to have disproportionately targeted PH and been for the benefit of PN (**Chapter 5, Nuurrianti**). PN's gains in GE2022, and its continued momentum through the 2023 state elections, came primarily at the expense of UMNO, whose decline was evident numerically and has been attested to by party members and former leaders (**Chapter 11, Lee and Adib; Chapter 13, Azmil; Chapter 16, Shahril**). UMNO faces a long and uncertain road to recovery, though its credibility remains reasonably intact in the peninsular south—notably Johor (**Chapter 12, Hutchinson and Zhang**).

## THE SECTIONS AHEAD

The previous sections have set out the context within which GE2022 took place, sketched the broad contours of the book, and have linked these to individual chapters. This section will briefly lay out the structure of the book, its important signposts and how it relates to its predecessor, *The Defeat of Barisan Nasional: Missed Signs or Late Surge?*

As with that volume, the chapters are grouped into the same four sections—namely, campaign dynamics, interest groups, states, and personal perspectives. This mirrored structure allows for comparison and contrast between the two elections across key axes.

Campaign dynamics: This first section lays out and explores how political and economic factors influence the narratives and campaign messaging employed by the different coalitions, and indeed how the formation of the various coalitions

themselves shaped the eventual preferences of voters. This section explores the craft and art inherent in selecting messages, framing them, and then utilizing different media to reach out to voters.

**Interest groups:** This section looks at different interest groups and how their voting preferences are shaped. Of particular interest are the issues they perceive as important and how the various parties and coalitions seek to frame public debate and use a variety of means to connect with target groups. The principal ethnic groups are covered in this section, but additional angles are also incorporated by examining the roles of religion, urbanization status and age.

**States:** This section looks at specific states in east and west Malaysia, as well as the peninsula's north, centre and south. This is done to explore the degree to which trends and dynamics are similar or distinct in different parts of the country. The states covered in this volume are the same as those covered in *The Defeat of Barisan Nasional*, further allowing a subnational comparison and contrast between the two elections. The chapters on Selangor (Lee and Adib) and Kelantan (Azmil) contain further analysis of the August 2023 elections, allowing additional exploration of dynamics witnessed or unleashed in GE2022.

**Personal perspectives:** This final section includes the personal perspectives of politicians of varying backgrounds who contested in a cross-section of constituencies. The aim was to capture not just their individual experiences but also to explore the specificity of this election in contrast to those preceding it. This involved looking at the tactics and framing that the candidates sought to employ in reaching out to voters as well as seeking to outmanoeuvre their competitors.

The final chapter picks up some of the themes emerging from the chapters and provides a medium-term outlook for the country, relating the key changes witnessed to Malaysia's dynamic and ever-changing political trajectory.

## Notes

1. The Alliance of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) held power for the first fifteen years, encompassing Malaya's independence in 1957 and Malaysia's formation in 1963. In 1973 the Alliance was renamed as Barisan Nasional and expanded with the impactful subsumption of Parti Gerakan and East Malaysian parties. It governed for another forty-five years.
2. Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM) sought to rekindle its 2008–18 partnership with PH, but the latter was unreceptive. PSM contested one parliamentary seat and one state seat in GE2022.
3. The authors thank Danesh Chacko and Tony Paridi for their collaboration in verifying the electoral data of Tables 1.1, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5. Any remaining errors are the authors' responsibility.
4. Each classroom or polling stream has a maximum of 700 voters, and this decreases the likelihood of ecological inference errors from using simple regression methods such as ordinary least squares (OLS) to calculate the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

5. For example, names that had “Mohd” or “Muhammad” were classified as Malay voters, names which had “Chong” or “Wong” were classified as Chinese voters, names which had “A/L” or “A/P” were classified as Indian voters, and names which had “ANAK” were classified as others (mostly Orang Asli).

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