
The Politics of Unity in Malaysia: a Case Study of the 15th Malaysian General Election 2022

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ABSTRACT

The 15th Malaysian General Election in 2022 marked a significant political shift in Malaysia, as no coalition achieved the minimum majority of 122 parliamentary seats, leading to unprecedented political negotiations. This study examines the political dynamics surrounding the election, focusing on the formation of a unity government between Pakatan Harapan (PH) and Barisan Nasional-UMNO (BN-UMNO). Using a qualitative research method, the study analyzes data from journals, government documents, and media reports to explore the election's outcomes and implications. The findings reveal that the political deadlock was resolved through the intervention of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, resulting in Anwar Ibrahim's appointment as Prime Minister and the establishment of a unity government. The research highlights the role of historical factors, such as the IMDB scandal and the Sheraton Move, in shaping voter behavior and coalition strategies. The study concludes that the unity government represents a new political constellation in Malaysia, balancing experienced governance from BN-UMNO with PH's reform agenda. Implications include the potential for stabilized governance and renewed public trust, though challenges remain in addressing corruption and ethnic divisions.

KEYWORDS

15th General Election, Barisan Nasional-UMNO, Pakatan Harapan, Anwar Ibrahim.



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INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a country located on the Asian continent. Geographically, it is located at 01.0-06.9 North Latitude (LU) and 99.6-104.8 East Longitude (BT), as well as Sabah and Sarawak at 00.8-08.2 N and 109.2-119.4 E respectively. Geographically, Malaysia is located close to Brunei Darussalam, Kalimantan, and Singapore. The total population in Malaysia is 34,308,525 people (Kementerian Luar Negeri Indonesia, 2017).

Malaysia implements a constitutional monarchy system of government. Namely, the highest power of the state is in the kingdom and the highest power of government is in the prime minister. The King of Malaysia is elected in a special

meeting with the nine sultans of the states in Malaysia, and the elected one is called the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

Malaysia is a country similar to the British, namely a former British colony. Therefore, there is a rather distant difference with the Indonesian state. Malaysia implements a parliamentary system in its government, while Indonesia implements a presidential system in its government.

Today, democracy is considered the best system of state government compared to other systems, because it implements the concept of definite human rights, especially political rights and freedom of opinion. General elections are the existence of a democratic state. In line with Aristotle's thought, he said that the birth of democracy is the belief that human freedom is equal in all aspects (Russell, 2022). However, today, democracy has undergone several changes and advances due to the development of the times and history. Each country has a different historical and cultural background. Therefore, the child of the mind was born from the grand theory of democracy initiated by the three great philosophers of the Ancient Greek era.

In Malaysia, there was a political phenomenon during the Covid-19 period, namely government instability (Mokhtar & Abidin, 2020; Lee & Tan, 2021). There was a change of prime minister's position (Ismail, 2020; Omar & Yee, 2021). In Malaysia's history, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) has been the major party of parliamentary power since Malaysia's independence (Hassan & Yaakub, 2019). UMNO is a member of the Barisan Nasional coalition formed in 1973 together with the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) (Gomez & Jomo, 2021). Barisan Nasional has a party composition with representatives of three major ethnicities in Malaysia, namely Malays, Chinese, and Indians (Nair, 2020; Kamaruddin, 2021). But, in 2018, UMNO and Barisan Nasional had a nightmare. Those already in power in parliament suffered a defeat in the 2018 General Election (Zainal & Muhamad, 2020).

In the 14th Malaysian General Election in 2018, UMNO and Barisan Nasional lost to Pakatan Harapan. The composition of Pakatan Harapan consists of the People's Justice Party (PKR), the *Democratic Action Party* (DAP), the State Trust Party (Amanah), and the United Malaysian Indigenous Party (BERSATU) which was formed in 2015. Pakatan Harapan was an opposition coalition during the Barisan Nasional era when it came to power. Pakatan Harapan also represents three major ethnicities in its composition. No doubt if politics in Malaysia is filled with identity politics.

Another reason for the defeat of Barisan Nasional-UMNO in the 14th and 15th General Elections was also due to the 1MDB case imposed on former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak. Starting from the incident and the case, the public began to distrust the Malaysian government. And coupled with the Sheraton event.

In the 15th Malaysian General Election in 2020, the number of Malaysian votes did not reach the minimum threshold, which is 122 seats out of 212 seats in parliament. Each coalition and prime ministerial candidate claims that they are the winners. In the 15th Malaysian General Election, 4 candidates for prime minister were contested, namely Ismail Sabri Yaakob (UMNO) from Barisan Nasional,

Anwar Ibrahim (PKR) from Pakatan Harapan, Muhyiddin Yassin (BERSATU) from Perikatan Nasional, and Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (UMNO) from Pakatan Harapan.

The Yang di-Pertuan Agong finally took steps to give freedom and negotiations to Pakatan Harapan and Perikatan Nasional, the coalition with the largest majority in the 15th Malaysian General Election, to immediately negotiate with the coalition or other parties to form a coalition so that it can reach the minimum limit of the majority of seats in parliament. However, Perikatan Nasional refused to form a coalition with Pakatan Harapan. Therefore, there is uncertainty in the government, but the government must continue and do not cause *chaos* in the Malaysian community and prospective investors who will invest in Malaysia.

This study aims to find out the political constellation in Malaysia after the results of the 15th Malaysian General Election in 2022. The researcher will look at the chronology of how Pakatan Harapan was able to win in the 15th Malaysian General Election in 2022 and how the political constellation in Malaysia is.

Parti	Kerusi
PAKATAN HARAPAN	82
PERIKATAN NASIONAL	73
BARISAN NASIONAL	30
GABUNGAN PARTI SARAWAK	22
PARTI GABUNGAN RAKYAT SABAH	6
PARTI WARISAN SABAH	3
BEBAS	2
PARTI BANGSA MALAYSIA	1
KESEJAHTERAAN DEMOKRATIK MASYARAKAT	1

Kemas kini 8:47 PM, 06 Julai 2024

Picture 1. The results of the 15th Malaysian General Election 2022 are based on the total number of votes of the parties.

Source: <https://pru.astroawani.com/>

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used by the researcher is qualitative research. The object of this study is the Malaysian political constellation after the 15th Malaysian General Election in 2022 with its various political dramas. The data presented is also relevant, specific, so that researchers can conduct inductive data analysis. The data and information are sourced from journals, books, government documents in the form of laws, documents in the form of presidential regulations, news and mainstream media related to this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the 15th Malaysian General Election there was a political drama. This occurred due to the uncertainty of the prime minister's office because each coalition and party did not reach the minimum threshold of majority in parliament, which is

122 seats out of 222 seats in parliament. This is contained in Article 40A paragraph (2) of the Malaysian Constitution part a.

As attached in figure 1, the number of votes cast by Pakatan Harapan and Perikatan Nasional was the largest majority in the 15th Malaysian General Election in 2022. The Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sulyan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah has made it a policy for the top two coalitions with a majority in the General Election to form a coalition or seek a coalition up to the minimum threshold of the number of majorities in parliament. The Yang di-Pertuan Agong has given a deadline of 21 November 2022 at 14.00 Malaysia time to immediately grant or form a coalition to the Pakatan Harapan and Perikatan Nasional camps (Blq, 2022).

However, neither camp can reach negotiations to form a coalition to reach the minimum threshold of majority votes in parliament. Finally, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong held a Malay General Assembly with the kings in nine Malaysian states to determine how to make a deliberative and consensus decision on the outcome of the 15th Malaysian General Election in 2022. The hearing was held on November 23, 2022 (Deutsche Welle, 2022). The results of the Malaysian state king's session resulted in Anwar Ibrahim and the Pakatan Harapan coalition winning the 15th Malaysian General Election in 2022.

Malaysian Politics in the 14th Malaysian General Election 2018

In the 14th Malaysian General Election in 2022, it was shocked by the return of Malaysian political senior, namely Tun Mahathir Mohamad. He was the Former Prime Minister of Malaysia from 1981-2003. He is also known as the Father of Malaysian Modernization. What is interesting about Tun Mahathir Mohamad's nomination as a candidate for Prime Minister of Malaysia in the 14th Malaysian General Election in 2018 is that he is 93 years old. He should have retired from politics at that age, because there are still many other prime ministerial candidates who are still young.

Nevertheless, in the history of Malaysia's development and development, he is one of the most respected people. Likewise in the world of politics. He is running in the 14th Malaysian General Election (GE14) of the Pakatan Harapan coalition. He is the former Chairman of the BERSATU Party. He and Pakatan Harapan have one goal in common, which is to reform the government. In accordance with the direction of the Pakatan Harapan coalition which has been in opposition since its establishment.

Tun Mahathir is also known to be close to Dato' Anwar Ibrahim. In accordance with its history during the leadership of Prime Minister Tun Mahathir. If you look at the history between Anwar Ibrahim and Tun Mahathir Mohamad, the closeness between the two of them is considered like "fathers".

The mission carried out by Tun Mahathir in winning Pakatan Harapan in the 14th Malaysian General Election in 2018 is in the One Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) case carried out by Tun Najib Razak and other defendants. Tun Mahathir wants to restore the image of the government that is pro-people and far from corruption. Because, if the people's trust decreases, there will be chaos and a motion of no confidence.

In addition, Tun Mahathir also wants to replace the UMNO-Barisan Nasional hegemony in the government. Because, there should be reform in the Malaysian parliament and government. This is in line with the words of Tun Mahathir Moahamad, namely "Only our votes can save our country. The bad luck will continue into the next generation if the current government is still in power" (Tutukansa, 2022). From the narrative, it is explained that Tun Mahathir has a strategy to start political reform in parliament. UMNO-Barisan Nasional hegemony in parliament collapsed. The total number of votes cast in the 2018 Malaysian General Election is as follows (The Star, 2020):

Table 1. Vote count in the 14th Malaysian General Election in 2018.

No.	Party	Win	Contestation
1.	Barisan Nasional	79	222
2.	Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PH)	48	71
3.	<i>Democratic Action Party</i> (PH)	42	47
4.	Islamic Party in Malaysia (PN)	18	157
5.	PPBM (PH)	12	52
6.	AMANAH (PH)	11	34
7.	WARISAN	8	17
8.	IN	3	24
9.	Sabah STAR	1	5
10.	PFP	0	2
Result		222	

So, Pakatan Harapan won 113 seats, Barisan Nasional 79 seats, PAS 18 seats, and others 12 seats. From the results, it is explained that Pakatan Harapan won and Tun Mahathir Mohamad served as the Prime Minister of Malaysia. Barisan Nasional's voice was lost due to the 1MDB case and the narratives of Tun Mahathir Mohamad. This makes Tun Mahathir Mohamad's strategy successful in carrying out political reform in parliament. However, Tun Mahathir did not last long as the Prime Minister of Malaysia. He only served from May 10, 2018 to February 24, 2020. This is due to his statement that he will retire from the world of politics. He came from the BERSATU party and was a member of Pakatan Harapan, but after he did not become the Chairman of the BERSATU party, he was replaced by Muhyiddin Yassin, changing the direction of Malaysian politics again.

During the leadership of Muhyiddin Yassin as President of the BERSATU Party, BERSATU, which was previously a member of Pakatan Harapan, carried out political maneuvers. Muhyiddin Yassin joined Perikatan Nasional. And he

declared, as BERSATU President, to become the Prime Minister of Malaysia in place of Tun Mahathir Mohamad. This was the beginning of the split between BERSATU and Pakatan Harapan. In fact, BERSATU was actually grown by Tun Mahathir Mohamad and its ideal is to be an opposition party with Pakatan Harapan.

15th Malaysian General Election

Prior to the 15th Malaysian General Election, Malaysia was faced with the Post-Sheraton Era. Post-Sheraton was a time when Malaysia experienced a political crisis in 2020-2022. Sheratra's move resulted in the resignation of Tun Mahathir Mohamad as Prime Minister of Malaysia and the replacement of BERSATU chief Muhyiddin Yassin. The Sheraton move or the Sheraton incident is considered a 'betrayal' between Muhyiddin Yassin and Tun Mahathir Mohamad.

This is because BERSATU was in the Pakatan Harapan coalition during the leadership of Tun Mahathir Mohamad, and then when Muhyiddin Yassin came to power, he made political maneuvers to Perikatan Nasional. This made the beginning of a political crisis in Malaysia.

Muhyiddin Yassin took office as Prime Minister of Malaysia on March 1, 2020. He served as Prime Minister until August 21, 2021. The maneuver carried out by Muhyiddin Yassin is one of the wrong steps or *blunder*, because the Perikatan Nasional vote cannot hold on to the threshold of majority in parliament. He also took the fatal step, namely revoking the national emergency status without the king's approval (Ericssen & Iswara, 2021). After losing votes to the Perikatan Nasional coalition in parliament and numerous no-confidence motion petitions, on August 21, 2021, he resigned as Prime Minister of Malaysia.

With Muhyiddin Yassin's resignation, there was a vacancy in the post of prime minister. Because of the vacancy, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Abdullah entrusted Tun Ismail Sabri Yaakob to fill the vacancy in the post of Prime Minister of Malaysia. He was also the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia during the Muhyiddin Yassin era. He took office as the Prime Minister of Malaysia on 21 August 2021. He is from the major party affected by the 1MDB case, namely UMNO.

Tun Ismail Sabri Yaakob assumed the Prime Minister of Malaysia on 21 August 2021. He was soon in the Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia. He served only until 24 November. The reason for his resignation as prime minister was that there was some rejection from the public due to the failure to tackle Covid-19. Regarding this, he resigned on October 10, 2022 and suggested that the Malaysian General Election be held immediately. On 19 November 2022, the 15th Malaysian General Election was held.

In the 15th Malaysian General Election in 2022, there are several prime ministerial candidates supported by each coalition. The prime ministerial

candidates are, among others, Ismail Sabri Yaakob of Barisan Nasional, Anwar Ibrahim of Pakatan Harapan, Muhyiddin Yassin of Perikatan Nasional, and Ahmad Zahidi Hamidi of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) (Darwati, 2022). It is known that UMNO's electability is somewhat less good, because there are problems in the 1MDB case.

After the voters voted in the voting booths of each district or region, the number of votes did not reach the majority of 122 seats out of 222 seats. Pakatan Harapan and Perikatan Nasional have the highest number of votes, while UMNO's votes have suffered a significant setback.

Table 2. Vote count results for the 15th Malaysian General Election 2022

No.	Parliamentary Seats	PH	PN	BN	DLL
1.	Johor (26)	15	2	9	0
2.	Kedah (14)	1	13	0	0
3.	Kelantan (14)	0	14	0	0
4.	Melaka (6)	3	3	0	0
5.	Nine Countries (8)	3	0	5	0
6.	Pahang (14)	2	7	5	0
7.	Penang (13)	10	3	0	0
8.	Selangor (24)	11	10	3	0
9.	Perlis (3)	0	3	0	0
10.	Selangor (22)	16	6	0	0

Sumber: <https://pru.astroawani.com/>.

Table 2. The results of the 15th Malaysian General Election in 2022.

No.	Party	Chair
1.	Pakatan Harapan	82
2.	Perikatan Nasional	74
3.	Barisan Nasional	30
4.	Gabungan Parti Sarawak	23
5.	Gabungan Rakyat Sabah	6
6.	WARISAN	3
7.	The Fatherland Movement	0
8.	Parti Bangsa Malaysia	1
9.	KDM	1
10.	United Sarawak Party	0
11.	FREE	2

Source: <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2022/11/1028360/keputusan-rasmi-pru15>.

The results of the 15th Malaysian General Election in 2022 showed that no party or coalition reached the minimum threshold of majority, which was 122 seats out of 222 seats. Only Pakatan Harapan and Perikatan Nasional were the top majority in the 15th General Election. This made a stalemate in the 15th General Election. Each coalition claims that its share is the winner. In the 15th Malaysian

General Election there was also a new trend, namely easy voters allegedly by Undi 18.

The impasse as a result of the 15th General Election made the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sulyan Abdullan Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah descend the mountain to manage the impasse. Initially, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong gave the two camps time to form a majority coalition and submit the names of the prime ministerial candidates by November 21, 2022 (Blq, 2022). However, both sides could not reach the majority of the 122 seats. So, the King extended until November 22, 2022 at 14.00 Malaysian time.

Because of the impasse, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong summoned Anwar Ibrahim and Muhyiddin Yassin to the Palace. Anwar said that the Yang di-Pertuan Agong needs agreement and cooperation from all parties to form a government until the majority is met (Blq, 2022). The impasse was resolved by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong at the meeting of the Malay Rulers in Malaysia. The results of the trial stated that Anwar Ibrahim and Pakatan Harapan won the 15th Malaysian General Election.

Post-15th General Election: Unity Politics

After the appointment of Anwar Ibrahim as the Prime Minister of Malaysia. UMNO and Barisan Nasional (BN) have teamed up with Pakatan Harapan in parliament to form a government. This is in line with what was stated by UMNO President, Datuk Seri Dr. Ahmad Zahid Hamidi who raised the question of the Unity Government in a meeting of the Supreme Working Council (MKT) with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (Adnan, 2024).

It should be noted that Barisan Nasional and UMNO are coalitions and parties that have controlled the Malaysian parliament and government for a long time. Barisan Nasional and UMNO ruled from Malaysia's independence until 2018. It can be assessed that UMNO and Barisan Nasional are better in the government than outside the government. This is because UMNO and Barisan Nasional know and have more experience in government.

If UMNO and Barisan Nasional merge into Perikatan Nasional, then they will be out of government. This is considered to be more harmful than they joined Pakatan Harapan (Adnan, 2024). Even though UMNO and Barisan Nasional have been caught in the 1MDB case, it does not mean that UMNO and Barisan Nasional people are equated with the people who were accused in the case. However, it is undeniable that Barisan Nasional and UMNO lost their votes and electability in the 15th General Election. However, UMNO and Barisan Nasional still have several competent people to occupy several cabinet seats. And the Unity Government was also approved by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, so the Unity Government could be a historical renewal in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

The 15th Malaysian General Election in 2022 was a landmark event marked by unprecedented political complexity, as no single party or coalition secured the majority threshold of 122 out of 222 parliamentary seats. Pakatan Harapan, led by Anwar Ibrahim, and Perikatan Nasional emerged as the top contenders in terms of vote share. Following a consultative session convened by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah, a unity government was formed when Barisan Nasional and UMNO, experienced political coalitions, sought and received royal approval to join Pakatan Harapan in governing. This unity government reflects a strategic compromise aimed at stabilizing Malaysia's political landscape. Future research could focus on assessing the long-term effectiveness of such coalition governments in promoting democratic stability, governance reforms, and ethnic harmony in Malaysia's plural society.

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