

## When and How are Hegemonic Party Regimes Democratized by Elections?: Evidence from Malaysia

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In May 2018, one of the most resilient, hegemonic parties, Barisan Nasional (BN) led by the UMNO (United Malays National Organisation), peacefully relinquished power after suffering defeat in the fourteenth general election (GE14). Recent studies (e.g., Welsh, eds. 2018; Hutchinson and Lee 2019; Gomez, et al. 2020) have pointed out various factors to explain the unexpected turnover of the government. These include: the 1MDB (1Malaysia Development Berhad) financial scandal; leadership factors, such as deteriorated anti-Najib sentiment and pragmatic support for the experienced Mahathir; the introduction of a Goods and Services Tax (GST); inflation and an increased cost of living; infighting within the UMNO; and the development of an opposition coalition and civic movements. However, few studies have provided a systematic analysis to show how these factors interacted to bring about the historical defeat of the BN, and which factors carried more weight. For example, the BN had survived more serious economic crises, factional splits, and coordinated challenges by opposition parties. We cannot understand the mechanism of the BN's (acceptance of) electoral defeat merely by focusing on GE14-specific factors.

This study extends the historical scope and fills this gap by exploring why and how the key pillars of the resilient, hegemonic party regime have been undermined since the 1990s and especially since Najib's inauguration. By referring to comparative studies of hegemonic party regimes, this study highlights the significance of four complementary pillars of resilience: (1) the image of invincibility, (2) resource advantages, (3) spatial advantages, and (4) manipulative advantages. By systematically analyzing the electoral, socioeconomic, budgetary, survey, and electoral boundary data, this study elucidates how these weakening pillars have dampened the virtuous cycle of dominance.

Although this study focuses mainly on the government turnover at GE14, it also discusses why the subsequent Pakatan Harapan (PH) government failed to consolidate its power base and allowed the UMNO and conservative, Malay-based factions/parties to take over the power by forming a new coalition, Perikatan Nasional (PN). It also discusses the latent vulnerability of the PN government and the future prospects for Malaysian democracy.

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【Summary】

Rejuvenation of Regional Parties in Penang:  
A New Dimension of Federal-State Relations in Malaysia

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In Peninsular Malaysia, the federal government has strong power over state governments in terms of legislative jurisdictions as well as revenue collections and allocations. With limited financial resources, the state government tends to rely on finance from the federal government in the form of grants and loans. The federal government would not distribute or delay grants and loans to the opposition state governments. The federal government would also distribute development grants through federal agencies and ruling parties to the states, bypassing the opposition state governments. Such practices by the federal government have caused opposition state governments to face financial difficulties. Moreover, voters are afraid to choose the opposition party as their state government, fearing punishment from the federal government. This goes on to further secure the dominance of the federal ruling party over the state and local governments.

However, such punishments from the federal government have lost functions in Penang after the state government fell into the hands of Pakatan Rakyat, the opposition coalition, in 2008. The Pakatan Rakyat government and its successor Pakatan Harapan government, with the Democratic Action Party at the core of the coalition government, highly evaluated and adopted the development model constructed by the Penang Development Corporation since the 1970s under the strong initiative of Lim Chong Eu, the then Chief Minister of Penang, which generates revenue by developing the state's land bank. Securing financial resources, the Penang state government has been able to promote development projects in the state, despite the federal government's interference.

The punishment from the federal government to the state government turned out to be gifts for the people in Penang. Competing with the distributing channels provided by the state government to the people in Penang, the federal government also established its own distributing channels for the people in Penang. This enabled the people in Penang to access different resources through different channels.

The federal government also bypassed the Penang state government in the conservation projects in George Town on Penang Island, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The federal government distributed its grants through Khazanah Nasional, a government-linked company, which established Think City in 2009 to implement the conservation projects in George Town. It is interesting to note that Think City worked closely with the Penang state government and its agencies as well as the Penang Island City Council, gaining cooperation from various local organisations managing historical buildings and NGOs engaging with the conservation projects.

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**【Summary】****Politics of Party Switching:  
Development of Party Politics in Sabah, Malaysia, 1963-2018**

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Malaysia experienced its first change of government after independence, following a general election on 9 May 2018. The League of Hope won 113 of the 222 seats in the House of Representatives, defeating the National Front, which had been in power for 61 years. One of the factors behind the change of government was the growing strength of the League of Hope in Sarawak and Sabah, once referred to as the ‘fixed deposit’ of the National Front.

Malaysia is a federation comprising 11 states in the Peninsula and the states of Sarawak and Sabah on the island of Borneo. Parties based in the Peninsula formed the core of the federal government, and local parties in Sarawak and Sabah formed a coalition with it. Since the Peninsula accounts for about 70% of the seats in the House of Representatives of Malaysia, a coalition of parties that hold more than 70% of the seats in the Peninsula will gain a majority in the House of Representatives. It is not an exaggeration to say that the federal ruling parties had been downplaying Sarawak and Sabah, in part, because the National Front had always won more than 70% of the seats in the House of Representatives in the Peninsula. However, as opposition cooperation grew in the Peninsula after 1990 and the opposition grew to rival the ruling party after 2008, support from Sarawak and Sabah became essential to maintain the federal ruling party’s status.

When it became clear that the National Front had lost its majority in the House of Representatives in the 2018 elections, three MPs in Sabah left the National Front within three days after the elections and 19 MPs in Sarawak a month later.

It is not surprising that an elected MP transfers to another party or a constituent party in a political coalition forms a coalition with another party, as those can be commonly seen in Sabah. While those actions have often been criticised as self-serving, this study presents an interpretation of inter-party transfers and coalition recombination as a strategy used by the people of Sabah to negotiate with the state and federal governments.