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## From Electocracy to Democracy: Coalition, Cohesion, and Function

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### Abstrak

Studi ini menelaah Demokrasi di Malaysia. Secara umum, demokrasi menyusun unsur-unsur pemilihan, hak dan kebebasan, kelas menengah, dan aturan hukum untuk mengatur negara dan rakyat. Malaysia memiliki pengalaman terbatas tentang demokrasi yang absen dari unsur-unsur di atas. pemilihan pertama selama era kolonial yang menentukan fungsi pemilihan. Belakangan, pemilihan menjadi rutin setiap lima tahun yang menjadikannya sebagai negara demokrasi atau budaya politik tetapi tidak memiliki kemampuan politik. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengkaji demokrasi politik di Malaysia di era sekarang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kajian pustaka, fokus penelitian pada Pemilihan yang terakhir di Malaysia. Teknik Pengumpulan data melalui kajian pustaka, hasil penelitian, berita online, dan hasil-hasil kajian terdahulu mengenai demokrasi di Malaysia. Teknik analisa data menggunakan teknik analisa data kajian pustaka sehingga kesimpulan dapat ditarik setelah menelaah kajian-kajian terdahulu. Hasil Penelitian menunjukkan apa yang di lihat sebagai demokrasi di Malaysia berada dalam tingkat melek politik yang rendah. Seluruh kelompok gerakan sosial yang disebut “Bersih” [1.0, 2.0, 3.0, dan 4.0] adalah tentang menuntut pemilihan yang bersih dan bukan tentang demokrasi. Pemilihan yang bersih sangat penting dalam politik Malaysia, yang terlalu berorientasi etnis yang menekankan pada mayoritas politik Melayu kemudian menilai kekayaan Cina yang dominan, walaupun sebelumnya ada sejumlah partai politik yang mewakili beragam identitas dan ideologi. Dalam kasus Malaysia bahwa perangkap sejarah membentuk kembali bentuk demokrasi yang sesuai dengan masyarakat multietnis. Namun, hasil dari pemilihan GE14 tahun 2018, dapat dilihat sebagai munculnya demokrasi yang nyata.

**Kata kunci:** demokrasi; elektrokrasi; politik rasial;

### Abstract

*This study examines democracy in Malaysia. In general, arrange freedom of elections, rights and freedoms, the middle class and the rule of law for the state and the people. Malaysia has limited experience about democracy that is absent from the above. the first election during the colonial era that determined the function of the election. Later, elections became routine every five years which made it a democratic country or political culture but lacked political ability. The purpose of this study is to examine political democracy in Malaysia in the present era. This study uses a literature review, research focus on the last election in Malaysia. Data collection techniques through literature review, research results, online news, and research results on democracy in Malaysia. Data analysis techniques using data analysis techniques. Research shows that what is seen in democracy in Malaysia is at a low level of political literacy. The whole group called "Clean" [1.0, 2.0, 3.0, and 4.0] is about demanding clean elections and not about democracy. Clean elections are very important in Malaysian politics, which is too politically oriented which emphasizes Malay politics then on dominant Chinese wealth, previously linked to politics representing a variety of identities and ideologies. Malaysia in that case is a tracking history that is compatible with multi-ethnic societies. However, the results of the 2018 GE elections, can be seen as a real substitute for democracy.*

**Keywords:** democracy; electrocracy; racial politics;

**How to Cite:** Khalid, K. A (2020). From Electocracy to Democracy: Coalition, Cohesion, and Function, *Politeia: Jurnal Ilmu Politik*, 12 (1) (2020): 49-61

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## INTRODUCTION

Malaysian politics, after the historical peaceful regime change, have received much positive attention globally. Harding (2018) complemented the peaceful regime change after General Election (GE14) from a BN dominated regime of 60-years rule to a new alliance of Pakatan Harapan (PH) as a new government, also known as the Malaysia Baru or New Malaysia. The transition of government reflects a 'pure spirit of democracy.' This paper intends to retrace the evolution of the election, as a colonial political and social control structure, labeled as 'electocracy.' The discussion will examine election in Malaya during post-second world war to the most recent democratically-informed election in Malaysia, the General Election in May 2018. It is also the intention of the paper to critically examines the various analytical tools that have been applied and offered by local and foreign analysts in assessing Malaysian politics. Both their strengths and weakness will be highlighted, as well as suggesting a few analytical tools to examine various facets of politics in Malaysia.

In *Two Treatises of Government*, John Locke (1689) emphasized to life, liberty, and property as the fundamental element to embrace democracy. It is a system that recognized the fundamental human rights that makes democracy a beacon for human being and suspending another authoritative form of governance, including socialism, and communism. This democratic idea became the missionary agenda for the colonial power to invent and to force other underdeveloped or developing countries in the name of 'white men burden.' Although the democratization process in Iraq post-war deferred, in other countries, democracy is creatively crafted to fit in the indigenous context for survival.

Democracy installed in a different form during the colonial era. For a former colonial country like Malaysia, colonial knowledge is an essential context in describing the structure and the biography of

its institution and society. Malaya colonized by a few colonies, namely Portuguese (1511-1641), Dutch (1641-1825), and British (1825-1957). The English-Dutch treaty of 1824 determined the dichotomy between the two colonial powers that divided Malaya [Peninsular and Strait Settlements] for British and Indonesia [Dutch East Indies] for Dutch. The British defined and ruled Malaya according to the capitalism approach that urged the colony to bring in migrants from China [Fujian, Guangdong, Hainan, Guanzhao] to work on their mining areas. Migrants from the Southern Indians placed to work at their estates and plantation (Low, 2014 ). While Malays complete with their social hierarchy maintaining the auxiliary power as the Sultan reigned the state with British residents and commissioners running the country and managing taxes, capitals, and resources except for matters about religion and culture.

During the colonial era, the society transformed into a plural society defined by Furnivall (2010) as a society of plural community segregated and profiled with limited interaction. They only met at the market for trading, and the communication appeared at the market with a distinctive motive, and such interaction did not socialize further. Mahmoud (2012) argued that the British's approach of define and rule had identified and labeled inter-ethnic Chinese of different state origin in China and dialect of Hakka, Cantonese, Hailam, Teochew into a single label of Chinese. Simultaneously to the Indian community of Malayalam, Tamil, Singhalese, and Ceylonese, they were labeled as Indian despite differences of their dialect, character, and district origin (Arasaratnam, 1982). Moreover, the British's divide and rule policy allowed the colony to control and manage the plural society efficiently. They provided rewards and grants to the Chinese immigrant, while able to maintain the obliged Southern Indian migrants to work at the

British estates despite inadequate facilities and barb-wired guarding the estates.

The define, divide, and rule had chopped Malaya into urban-rural based on ethnic socio-economic profile. The racial identity farther sharpened the gap among the races, and it assured for the British to remain influential. British brought a system that believed to be able to rule the nation in a way the British wanted. For instance, the British continued introducing a policy that legitimized British power through the Malayan Union in 1946 that diminished the power of the Malays Sultanates and forming a Republic that uniformed all citizens of migrants and indigenous communities. In other words, they denied the rights of the indigenous as commonly done by the white colonies in Australia, where wars against the natives in the form of mass massacres carried out to justify their existentialism as the rightful owner of lands and resources (Allam and Evershed, 2019). In the United States of America, the settlers were against the natives of Sioux, Navajo, Cherokee, Comanche, and other ethnic minorities. The ethnic cleansing was essential to install power and control over the land and resources (<https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/native-american-timeline>).

However, the mission of Malayan Union failed, the Malays formed massive movements against this mission, and Onn Jaafar was able to rally strong support from the Malay peoples to march against Malayan Union and pushed the British to withdraw the political agenda.

As a result, the Federation of Malaya Agreement 1948 signed to unifying eleven states in Malaya consulted by the Malays only. The Chinese leaders protested this agreement, and later they established the All Malayan Chinese Joint Action (AMCJA) demanded the British to include the minorities' opinions into the setting up of the Constitution. The Community Liaison Committee (CLC) was formed in 1949 by Sir Malcolm MacDonald and invited leaders of the Malays, Chinese and Indians to discuss the Federation of Malaya

Agreement as the basis for the Constitution (Fernando, 2012). Therefore, the Malayan Constitution was moderate that exhibited ethnic tolerance and acceptance of the King as the sovereign ruler, the Malays and indigenous as the host, and the trade-off was granting 'jus soli' citizenship to all settlers in Malaya. Other fundamental rights provisions stipulated in the Federal Constitution protect non-Malays reasonably and sufficiently (Harding, 1996; Shad Faruqi, 2015; 2018).

Moreover, the establishment of CLC was a crucial attempt by the British to promote inter-elite cooperation that resulted in a multiracial political alliance in Malayan politics (Fernando, 2012). The deliberation of CLC was a means to achieve national consensus and nation-building. Although CLC was an informal body, many agreements reached the government adopted the CLC meetings. Besides, CLC's records indicated that the agency also served as a useful platform for the colonial administration as a trial platform to test new ideas and potential policies (Kartini et al. 2018). On a broader dimension, CLC was a colonial creation of a pragmatic framework for political elites to hold inter-ethnic bargaining and negotiation in private that influence the emergence of consociation politics in Malaya. This historic moment allowed Malaya to experience first-hand bargaining and negotiation process to mitigate differences. This precedence created a strong foundation for the country to continue using this approach, facing a moment of disagreements of competing interests among multiethnic groups.

The purpose of this study is to examine political democracy in Malaysia in the present era

## **Method**

This study utilized secondary data, namely previous election result of General Election 2018, reliable sources of online news, and a collection of literature reviews. The level of analysis involves states and society, particularly Institutions that construct societal behaviors. The

critical Influence from the structure and biography of multiethnic society in Malaysia through the Institutionalization of election (Mills, 1970).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Elections without democracy

After the Federation of Malaya and CLC, another critical part of the Malaya history was the period of emergency - fighting communist. The period of 1948 until 1960, the British embarked a fight to defeat the Malayan Communist Party-led by Chin Peng (Cheah, 1983). The British designed several ways to beat the Malayan communist of *Bintang Tiga* in the formed of guerilla fights, propagating the heart and mind agenda to persuade the communists to surrender, the Briggs Plan of relocating the Chinese settlers in organized guarded residencies, and identifying and declaring the white and black areas marking the free or active communist groups and movement (Roslan & Ishak, 2018). Finally, the establishment of a deep state in the formed of Special Branch of the police force to gather information on communist activities and members of the communist parties (Comber, 2008). All of these strategies monitored consistently. During this moment of controlled, Malaya had its first election in the year 1952 at the municipal level in Kuala Lumpur that witnessed political cooperation between race-based parties.

Shamsul (2019: 230) argued that this local council election was a strategic and pragmatic decision by the British to counter the spreading of anti-colonial rebellions and revolutions in Southeast Asia. It was also meant to protect their massive economic interests in Malaya. Consequently, the election used as a distraction tool to channel the awaken of independence movements in most British colonies. Three years later, the 1955 Malayan General Election held to elect members of the Federal Legislative Council. Before this, the appointment was appointed by the British Commissioner. Both local and federal elections conducted during the emergency period that applied strict curfew rules and limited election campaigned. Malaya's experience revealed that all elements mentioned above about democracy were absent when the first election held with

the presence of colony, the influx of migrants as the low-level workers in tin mining and estates, traditional Malays society, and the rule of settlement determined the entitlement and rights of individuals.

Other than the aspect of social class, literacy, and liberty, political parties during this period emerged from community associations and organizations which attended the funeral association or welfare associations that looked after each ethnic interest under the British colony (Kartini et al., 2018). For instance, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) was a funeral and lottery organization that attended the Chinese migrants' welfare. The United Malays National Organization (UMNO) was an alliance of twenty-six diverse associations of teachers, journalists, and attorneys to form a political party representing the Malays. On the other hand, the Malayan Indian Council set up to fulfill the need for representing the minority Indians in most British-owned estates and plantations.

The idea of election institutionalized in Malaya and election was about selecting and celebrating symbols. The British and local officials assisted the public on how to vote, and the majority of people were politically illiterate. They received help to select from the political parties' logos provided in the bail-out paper. Democracy in Malaysia began with guidance, and the idea of direction later evolved in the form of a dominant alliance of political parties called Barisan Nasional (BN), which continued to guide the social and political structure of the country. BN through colonial experience guided each major ethnic [UMNO, MCA, and Malayan Indian Congress (MIS)] to ally, later this alliance getting bigger and stronger with additional members from other political parties in Sabah and Sarawak that ruled Malaysia for since after independence of 1957 until 9 May 2018.

The absence of an explicit campaign of political literacy prevails precisely when money politics in the form of cash and gift retains at the main interest by most political parties to get fast votes. Money politics is typical in an election, and a study by Parenti (2010) discusses all forms of gift and bribery to voters in the classical Greek to modern America of the past and present. Many developing countries, including Malaysia that adopt democracy, are inside the list of active states with money

politics at the top of the election campaign. Therefore, electocracy in Malaysia is no different from other countries that practice democracy due to shared-interest for power and wealth. Later, modern infrastructure and media controlled over the market shared by parties and politicians enhance the striking dominant of BN alliances to retain its status quo for more than sixty years.

### **Politics and analytical tools**

Before we further examine the level of democracy in Malaysia, selecting a sharp analytical tool results in different analyses. Analytical tool in sociological term means indicator or variables or equipment used to analyze the outcome of events and behaviors. Also, it could be concepts or theories used to analyze and explain the pattern of responses. Having an analytical tool enables analysts and researchers to analyze data from primary or secondary data with better analysis. Providing the guidelines of informed indicators that are fundamentals about Malaysia would assist analysts in their research exploration. Either the tools fit or not in researchers' diverse context of interest and scope, the idea is to guide them with the right tools in discussing Malaysians realpolitik. The everyday-defined experience is essential to understanding the communities, and it gives better interpretations than receiving information from the news online or messengers.

Other than the suggested debate on electocracy in Malaysia, most scholars analyzed Malaysian politics within the lens of analysis and terminology of western democracy that results in labeling simplistically Malaysian equality as quasi (Zakaria, 1989), semi (Case, 1993) and syncretic (Jesudason, 1996). The absence of correlating the colonial history and heritage causes their analysis to be deficient. Malaysia is one country with three tales; Peninsular with the nine sultans was under the British rule, Sabah remained in the form of the British North Borneo Company, and Sarawak ruled by a single British family named Sir James Brooke or Rajah Brooke (Philip 2019). The heavy-laden of colonial history and heritage created the society to become plural and diverse as well as the structure and system with loosely structured federalism. The accommodative formed due to ethnic division in population also determined the society to

retain each ethnic vernacular identity. Political identity remains at the core of Malaysians' politics because the census population established by the British in 1871 retained until the present, and it remains essential in describing the demographic profile of the multiethnic community in Malaysia (Predeep, 2019). Additionally, the democratic educational system allows vernacular education to thrive for cultural preservation.

Besides, most scholars continue to use the analysis of the two-party system model to define what essentially is a two-coalitions model that housed multi parties in each coalition. In fact, in the wake of PH victory in GE14, many political analysts were assuming the diminishing of racial politics on the basis for *Malaysia Baru*, which championed universal politics, less patronage, and ideological-based. However, these analysis tools are debatable. First, in examining Malaysian politics specifically, the exquisite nature of coalition or alliance established the formula of power-sharing to bond each significant ethnic's support to govern the state and nation. The coalition bargaining model other than the consociation model by Lijphart (1969; 1977; 1991) is a commonly referred model in discussing Malaysian politics. This model is a dynamic bargaining model applied to coalition formation. Diermeier et al. (2008: 485) argue that equilibrium could be maintained in this coalition through negotiation. The negotiation allows members to voice their proposals. If mediation failed, there are chances for coalition members to extract a favorable agreement from their counterparts and let the process continues.

This majority bargaining process also means that it is not necessary to reach consensus among all negotiating parties to agree. Stevenson et al. (1985) and Mintzberg (1983:259) argue that a political analysis model of coalition translated into organizational policy and action within the framework of the legislative coalition to maximize policy outcomes for members. As a result, coalition forms to maximize this advantage because people or parties are self-interested. If they support common interest or similar ideologies, forming a coalition enhances their chances of winning on proposal, decisions or votes. Drawing from the above-discussed models of the alliance, Malaysia is a multiethnic society,

and high tolerance among ethnics is required to achieve a harmonious balance. Shared interests and goals are difficult to accomplish when each ethnic has competing interests with which to deal with, alas it could disintegrate parties or organizations into a faction that disrupts the delicate balance.

The form of the coalition also promotes the assumption that the majority is the basis for a decision. Hence, the analytical tool by analysts commonly criticizing Malays as the majority that fears the Chinese perceiving that DAP (Democratic Action Party) is now controlling the PH government [PH is a coalition of a few parties, namely PKR, DAP, BERSATU, and AMANAH]. The assessment of fear-perceived is due to the socio-economic based that crafted the Malaysian society. In Malaysia, there are two types of majority. First, the demographic majority consists of the Malays and Bumiputera of Sabah and Sarawak, with a population of 62%, which becomes the overwhelming majority for voters. However, this majority group is the minority in the economy. Second, the economic dominance majority of wealth with 85% controlled by the Chinese, who demographically a minority of less than 22% of the total population of 33 million people. The fear factor articulated by a widespread view that the Chinese who controlled the economy would insert influence into politics. The wealth majority has never been discussed in assessing Malaysian politics. It is essential to understanding the power relations towards class and economy, which remain crucial to continue having race politics and alliances.

Even though the Malays and Bumiputera are the majority, gaining support in terms of votes from other ethnic groups is vital. The reason is that each ethnic group is intra-ethnically divided. It is inadequate to assume that the majority of Chinese will support DAP because their orientation and ideology are different amongst Chinese with English education, Chinese with Chinese school, and Chinese with national system education (Wong and Ngu, 2014; Hariati 2012; Rita Sim 2010). Not only they differ in dialects of Cantonese, Hakka, and Hokkien; hence, the orientation that they received becomes constructed socially and politically (Rita Sim 2010). Therefore the Chinese have MCA, Gerakan, DAP that is representing the intra-ethnic divide. The intra-

ethnic division is even profound amongst the Indian with Hinduism caste, class, and orientation; Indian with Malaya Indian Congress (MIC) and Indian Progressive Front (IPF). Amongst the Malay, the intra-ethnic divide is reflecting in their various political parties with Malay dominance such as UMNO, PAS (Parti Islam SeMalaysia), PKR (Parti Keadilan Rakyat), BERSATU, AMANAH, PSRM (Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia), and other.

Additionally, the intra-ethnic division is also essential in Sabah and Sarawak. Natives in Sabah [United Sabah National Organization, Parti Bugis Sabah, Sabah Chinese Party, Sabah Chinese Consolidated Party, and other natives in Sarawak [PESAKA, BERJASA, PANAS – later formed an alliance with one party named and logo Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu]. Such divides, pushing the agenda for racial politics to ally with race-based parties to represent the interest of each ethnic group in one big umbrella – the grand coalition of each party that represents the ethnic group.

Second, the two-party system argument is weak. In fact, in Malaysia, coalition or alliance, and political factions are essential. The formation of a political coalition leads to another tool of analysis, which is called oppositionism. This term coined by Shamsul (2008: 8-9) to counter-argued that most political analysts failed to differentiate between the two-party system model and the two coalitions model. The two-party system fits well in explaining American politics consisting of two dominant political parties of Republican and Democrats that are administering the Congress interchangeably. Although Malaysia has two alliances of BN and opposition [Pakatan Rakyat changed into Pakatan Harapan (PH)], the governing power retained at one alliance of BN for more than 60 years. BN was the alliance of ethnic heroes that utilized ethnicity as the socio-political capital to generate support and trust; hence, they carried the weighty responsibility of representing ethnic interest and hope for each community. As BN leaders championed the multiethnic agenda, they were the gladiators that fought hard within factions in the parties to reinforce ethnic polarization to their advantage. Now with PH administration, the control is still in the hand of one coalition with BN as the opposition absence of power and influence at

the Parliamentary level. Both parties coalitions have factions and experience splitting, for instance, the factions fought between old UMNO and new UMNO in 1988 resulted in Semangat 46; PAS splinters to AMANAH in 2018; factions in PKR split votes between Azmin's and Rafizi's camps in recent PKR election to select new central committee members.

Furthermore, in oppositionism, the previous government of BN was reluctant to recognize the opposition parties that utilizing the NGOs to channel public grievances and gained political mileage by doing so. BN was too focus on defeating the opposition parties and failed to cater to negative critics and images harvested by NGOs to collect support from the public. Also, BN lacked strategies to differentiate voters' needs and demand at the urban compared to rural areas. Most voters in the urban areas were exposed to NGO activities and be swayed away with activism. Therefore, when Mahathir becomes the Prime Minister again after a long retirement in 2003 (Perlez, 2003), he formed a government with the PH coalition [previously was the opposition during his reigned]. The power relation and control are still in the hand of one coalition led by a former BN leader – the autocratic Tun Mahathir. The gladiators' fight in the new Malaysia is still within the coalition; again, it is between Tun Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim. The 'square one' fight for power, but this time, the sequel is getting lethargic and predictable.

Third, patronage politics is deep-rooted in Malaysia; however, some analysts argue that such patronage can be mitigated using rule and regulation for a better transparency and integrity government (Weiss 2016; Schuster 2016). Ironically, Folke et al. (2011) admitted that patronage did help the political parties in the USA in power retain power. Patronage used to raise campaign funds, and it forged employees who were politically appointed to commit to the party's campaign, leaders, and candidates. The patronage in Malaysia does not stop at business networks, position rewards to loyal supporters, and campaign donors, but extended to family linkages and becoming political dynasty. Members of Parliament (MP) in the new Malaysia are family-related. For instance, Tun Mahathir with his son, Mukriz (both are MPs, and the former holds the Executive power); Wan Azizah Wan Ismail

(the current Deputy Prime Minister) with his husband, Anwar Ibrahim (President of People's Justice Party, and MP of Port Dickson) and daughter Nurul Izzah Anwar is the MP of Permatang Pauh; Lim Kit Siang and Lim Guan Eng (both father and son are MPs); Khairy Jamaluddin (MP and former UMNO youth leader) is the son-in-law to former fourth Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi; Najib Razak former sixth Prime Minister, a son of Tun Razak second Prime Minister of Malaysia; Govind Deo Singh and the late Karpal Singh (father and son, both DAP members and MPs); and the list goes on.

Patronage in the formed of family ties creates a political dynasty that continues to debate over favoritism and integrity. However, observing from the Kennedy families in the United States of America, politics in the UK, Scotland, and Ireland with long-standing politicians with family ties as well as in India, Pakistan, Singapore, and Thailand. Malaysian family patronages will continue to hover the political landscape for power and wealth. Patronage runs in the bloodlines of political elites in Malaysia, and it is perpetual because the heritage is self-preserved to the next generation in line.

Fourth, the federal-state relationship will always be the backdrop in assessing Malaysian politics, especially towards Sabah and Sarawak that continue to play the 'drum-demand' for inclusivity in a stable form of separatism movement. The slogan 'Sabah for Sabahan' and 'Sarawak for Sarawakian' exhibit the dissatisfaction of state government over federal that often accused of treating them as a secondary citizen of Malaysia. The movement for *Sabah Sarawak Keluar Malaysia* or Sabah Sarawak Out from Malaysia (SSKM) was constructed deliberately by a group of people who received funds from multiple sources of local and overseas. They established online media to propagate their idea of separatism and displaying selected pictures of natives' deprivation to ignite dissatisfaction over the Federal government. The SSKM group hired themselves or paid people to march in public wearing the same colored shirt to protest the federal government and to demand Sabah/Sarawak returned to the natives. Exploratory research conducted in 2017 with five focus group interviews, a total of fifty natives, and a few NGO leaders in Sabah and

Sarawak proved that social media was a platform to channel individuals' expression or personal grievances. The majority of respondents shared similar opinions and expressions that the grievances expressed on social media, especially on SSKM Facebook (FB), were targeted to push for improvement over inadequate facilities and infrastructural development. The respondents were aware of the consequences for separatism, and they rejected the idea (Nidzam et al. 2017: 41-46). Both Sabah and Sarawak enjoy more dichotomy power, and such decentralization allows them to even implementing a rule that requires citizens from the peninsular to bring their passport or Identification Card for verification to enter Sabah/Sarawak.

Finally, the role of social media and the harvesting of disinformation news make the public and voters in a big dilemma. The IT advanced is the current challenge in a democracy that was continually dealing with fake news or fabricated truth to collect public opinion leading to decision making. Besides, introducing electronic votes or online votes makes democracy at the brinks, especially when the public influenced easily with fake visual images. The analysis tool on the power of media, as well as a social deficit, must be recognized. The previous BN government under Mahathir created excessive laws as a tool to create fear, and the Human Rights Watch criticized Malaysia has a severe case of abused freedom of press and speech (Human Rights Watch, 2015). With the new Malaysia, the freedom of press assumed to be open and accountable. However, the present critique on FB by a graduate student on the PH government had sold over RM20billion national assets based on reliable facts and figures, the government responded negatively - the student received a warning (Malaysiakini, 2019).

### **Kleptocracy versus Fake News?**

The current youtube viral on TEDTalks by Carole Cadwallard on Facebook's role in Brexit and the threat to democracy ([https://www.ted.com/talks/carole\\_cadwallard\\_facebook\\_s\\_role\\_in\\_brexit\\_and\\_the\\_threat\\_to\\_democracy?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/carole_cadwallard_facebook_s_role_in_brexit_and_the_threat_to_democracy?language=en)) - demands people to observe the Malaysian GE14 result deliberately. In Brexit case, the harvesting of hate and fears on the influx of migrants,

refugees, and the fake news on Turkey joining the EU through targeted profiles on Facebook during the referendum resulted in a high vote for Brexit. This electoral fraud made democracy at threat because people are voting online based on fake news and bad campaigns. A similar thing happened in Malaysia, except it carried out by local cyber troopers, not the multiple players of capital elites' networks of conspiracies like Brexit.

During the GE14 political campaigns, the keyword combined 'najib+perompak, penyamun, penyangak' [translation, Najib+thief+thug+corrupt] came out 98,000 in 0.41 second on Google search on Malay language only. Now, robust information technology causes democracy to face out due to massive data exploitation, specifically during an election. The anti-Najib campaigns on social media were vigorous, and the public fed with news on several accounts of misconduct and corruption. For example, the misuse of state funds 1MDB scandal, money-laundering, the purchase of equanimity luxury ship, the introduction of GST tax that outraged the public, the skyrocketing cost of living, and the introduction of Anti Fake News Act of 2018 that used as a tool for the BN regime to detain anyone who viral the unreliable news (TheStar, 2018). Though Najib is still under investigation, people against or pro-Najib realized the charges leveled against Najib, his wife, kids, and other leaders of UMNO are excessive.

The popular view is that if an individual has one or two clear charges against him, he would have had put into jail. The court evidence showed that Najib did receive RM2.6 billion from the Saudi Prince, acknowledged by the governor of Central Bank of Malaysia and top AMBank personals (MalaysiaToday 2019). This money was not from the 1MDB fund as accused by the Federal Prosecutor. The current development makes people rethink the image and accusation that kleptocracy was merely fake news to kill Najib's political career. The campaign against Najib, known as a kleptocracy, was overwhelming and intense in all forms of social media. The harvesting of bad images of corrupted Najib, his wife, and kids was more of a personality attack. The constant inventing images of corruption, money laundering, abused of power, embezzlement, shopaholic of the first lady manage to sway



away voters. As a result, the single target technique on personality attack allowed PH led by Tun Mahathir to claim victory on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

Electocracy is now facing another challenge of an online campaign that produces photoshop and inventing fake visual images to influence voters. With 8 million young voters will be joining the mainstream voters in the next general election as a result of lowering the voting age to eighteen years old, many analysts convince that this would affect the result of an election. As the famous framework of Laswell (2018) addressed that politics is about who gets what, when, and how, the young voters would be the indicator to determine which coalition will be the ruling regime for Malaysia.

Moreover, political literacy is at the brink of a robust IT revolution. Young voters at 18 years old are reckless and not politically savvy or matured to analyze political issues beyond what they can conceive from social media. They are the fence-sitters that effortlessly sway for some bulk of the cash, cool gadgets, or mobile top-up. Their political decision is depending on 'professor google,' Facebook, Instagram, viral Whatsapp for information, and whatever news feed to them will pass through their brain without screening mechanisms to sort out real from fake. Electocracy is facing the dark side of democracy without a clear intervention program to literate the young voters (8 million youths) in urban and rural areas. The spatial dimensions of rural communities constitute 24.63% of the total population (tradingeconomics.com, 2016). The percentage of rural communities should not be left out. Even in the urban areas, urban poverty is staggering in big cities, and the worst, the education level does not correlate with political literacy (Crick & Porter, 1978). The prevailing attitude of generation Y and Z, more concern about their cyber world and netizens comments over their selfies, any political agenda that promote jobs, state allowance, and fast internet service that will get their vote.

### **Disinformation and disruption of democracy**

Fukuyama's (2014) discourse on decayed democracy highlights the roles of corporatism in the USA that was dominantly influencing and lobbying political parties and campaign through donations in the election corrupted the function of democracy. Nevertheless, declaring

the spending and assets for such activities will free individuals/institutions from any corruption and embezzlement. In the new Malaysia, the voice for integrity and accountability has been on the moved and empowered. The new government is enthusiastic about minimizing corruption based on information received through whistleblowers on media. Malaysia adopts the rule for assets declaration to each member of parliament, referring to the Statutory Declaration Act of 1960. However, this mechanism limits the declaration up to the MP's registered income and property, alas assets under the pseudo name like a spouse, siblings, and children disregarded (Ahmad et al. 2019). Although such a rule introduced as a way to discourage corruption and bribery, the loophole in the implementation may defeat the purpose.

With artificial intelligence and advanced fiberoptic technology, being a whistleblower with a new label of cybertrooper or keyboard warrior is another new career open for big money. The fast-moving news, either fake or real, is beyond control. The spreading of news on social media, Whatsapp, Twitter, Telegram, and the such is like wildfire, untamed, and explosive. The GE14 election in 2018 dominated by disinformation on social media resulting in regime changed. The public fed with unclear, misinformation, and fabricating news. The present situation gets a lot worse with several disinformations news spinning every second online that exploited into racial tension. For instance, the road rage in Bangi resulted in the death of a man; netizens spun the issue as it was racial and racist. Another example was the failure of ICERD ratification, which caused the public outraged over the treaty that spreading the incompetence of ICERD to safeguard the Malays and natives' rights and privileged (Marina Chin, 2019).

The damage caused by disinformation is social uneasiness. The previous BN government introduced the Anti-Fake News Act to control racial tensions from accumulating into conflict. However, the accusation that BN was abusing this law for its political advantages by permitting all news from BN and restricting other information that criticizes BN. Malaysia has to think for a long-term approach to the problem in the form of literacy to educate and to train society of all age

cohorts ways to identify malicious content on the internet. This technique requires government, experts, and activists to teach the public method to differentiate the reliable source of literacy. For instance, the Brussel-based NGO Lie Detector sends journalists to schools in Europe, sharing their knowledge on sorting out real from fake. In Canada, the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol established to monitor and to notify agencies and the public about disinformation attempts (Marina Chin, 2019). The government could consider implementing this approach specifically during election time and makes it a felony charge for political parties spreading fake news through proxies that mislead the public.

Literacy for political psephology must begin at the pre-school, and the design of such education and training syllabuses must account for age cohort and cognitive ability. The implementation of the program is continuous and consistent, also inclusive to all states and spatial dimensions of urban and rural. People need to understand social engagement and participation besides the impacts resulting from such involvement towards their wellbeing and state development. The current civic education at secondary and higher learning institutions is to focus on the civil manner, and cultural appreciation through some schools put more effort into introducing religious ethics to uphold respect and tolerance amongst multiethnic students. Continuous political literacy programs will make electocracy a functional political culture that strengthens democracy even in its indigenized form. However, without a clear and consistent political literacy program inclusive to all citizens, electocracy remains systemic, nothing more than just a culture to cast a vote.

## Conclusion

Overall, what we see democracy in Malaysia is electocracy, which is still a low level of political literacy. The whole group of a social movement called Bersih [1.0, 2.0, 3.0, and 4.0] was about demanding for clean election rather than about democracy (Sulaiman & Kartini, 2017; thestraitstimes.com 2015). Having a clean election is essential in Malaysian politics, which is overly ethnic oriented in explanation emphasizing the majority Malay-politics then

assessing the dominant Chinese-wealth. The latter has a significant influence in determining the power and wealth relations amongst the political elites across ethnics. Additionally, the intra-ethnic division is essential in Malaysian politics. This division is real in assessing the multi-formed of political parties, both Peninsular and Sabah/Sarawak. This intra-ethnic divide absents in most analysis, alas Sabah and Sarawak were termed as a fixed-deposit for the previous BN government even though there are numbers of political parties representing diverse identity and ideologies. It is also quite evident in the case of Malaysia that the trapping of history reshaping the indigenized form of democracy that fits in the multiethnic society. The result of the GE14 election of 2018, however, could be seen as the emergence of a real democracy.

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