

Malaysian Politics after Sheraton Move 2020: Inter-Coalition and Intra-Coalition Political Dynamics

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Abstract

This paper examines both inter-coalition and intra-coalition political dynamics in Malaysia following the Sheraton Move that triggered the collapse of the 22-month Pakatan Harapan Plus (PH+) government in February 2020. With the establishment of the Perikatan Nasional Plus (PN+) government that centred on the three Malay-Muslim parties (Bersatu, UMNO and PAS), national identity contestation has been clear cut in Malaysian politics, with the ruling coalition distinguishing itself as a Malay-Muslim multiracial coalition centred on ethno-religious governing ideologies, while the PH-dominated opposition bloc is seeking to forge a West-East Malaysia multiracial coalition with a multicultural governing outlook. Apart from such inter-coalition political dynamics, both the PN+ ruling coalition and PH-dominated opposition bloc are also beset with explicit territorial competition among their partnering parties. Such intra-competition political dynamics are especially vicious for the PN+ coalition, in which UMNO-Bersatu competition has resulted in the termination of cooperation between the two parties for the next general election (GE), whereas UMNO-PAS competition has remained confined to specific geographical localities. As for the PH-dominated opposition bloc, such territorial competition among potential partnering parties is relatively stable due to the coalition's absolute

dominance in grassroots support, not just in West Malaysia but also, the East as well. As of March 31, 2020, UMNO-Bersatu territorial competition has overshadowed the PN+ coalition's national identity contestation with the PH-dominated opposition bloc, and this will be disadvantageous to the ruling pact's aim to become the third political alternative in Malaysia.

Key words: Sheraton Move, Perikatan Nasional Plus (PN+), Pakatan Harapan (PH), national identity contestation, territorial competition

I. Introduction

This paper examines the political dynamics in Malaysia following the widely reported Sheraton Move which triggered the collapse of the Pakatan Harapan Plus (PH+) government on February 24, 2020.¹ Beleaguered with identity politics after its rise to power, the PH administration came to an abrupt halt after 22 months following the resignation of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and the departures of Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu) as well as another group of Pro-Azmin lawmakers from the other ruling party, Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) (Chew, 2019; Lim, 2020). Succeeding the PH+ government is an entirely new coalition known as Perikatan Nasional (PN) Plus (or PN+), led by Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin – comprising Bersatu, UMNO (United Malays National Organisation), Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) and other BN component parties that represent other minority races in Malaysia.

More than a year after the unprecedented Sheraton Move, political dynamics in Malaysia continued to be fluid, with a national identity contestation between the two political blocs and territorial competition among the political parties within each bloc. For this purpose, this paper seeks to explore the two underlying dynamics that will shed light on the future of Malaysian politics, regardless of whether a snap general election (GE) will be called in 2021 or not. First and foremost, it looks at the national identity contestation (inter-coalition political dynamics) between the PN+ ruling coalition and PH-dominated opposition bloc that has reached its climax during the Muhyiddin administration. Second, this paper also assesses the explicit territorial competition (intra-coalition political dynamics) within both the ruling and opposition blocs that saw political forces contesting for the same electoral base despite cooperating (loosely or formally) with each other.

¹ The regime change was staged in the Sheraton Hotel in Petaling Jaya, and thus it is known as the 'Sheraton Move' in the Malaysian media and analytical works.

Finally, the paper ends with the author's overall observation of Malaysian political dynamics until the next GE, based on the latest developments as of March 31, 2020.

II. Before 2018: Consociational Power-Sharing Arrangement for Political Coalitions

As defined by Lijphart (2004), consociational democracy is characterised by grand political coalitions formed among ethnic groups that involve mutual veto power in decision-making process and proportional allocation of opportunities, offices as well as autonomy among the participating parties. In the context of Malaysia, its pluralistic population has rendered it difficult for a single political party to govern the country on its own, and as such, the consociational power-sharing arrangement became a vehicle to gain broad electoral support from different ethnic communities since independence in 1957 (Gomez, 2007).² But as opposition parties began to form coalitions since the late 1990s, an alternative consociational power-sharing arrangement emerged, in that particular segments within ethnic groups are tapped as potential electoral bases, carving away BN's support bases in each ethnic group of Malaysia. By comparison, such a relatively sophisticated arrangement is fundamentally different from BN's superficial approach of taking each ethnic group as a collective entity for derivation of support.

As the earliest coalition to rule Malaysia, from 1957 to 2018, the then Parti Perikatan and later, Barisan Nasional (BN) was formed based on proportional allocation of opportunities, offices and autonomy among the participating political parties. When Parti Perikatan (the Alliance Party) was established before independence, it comprised three component parties – UMNO, the Malaysian Chinese Association

² It should be noted that UMNO was also against PAP's expansion of political power into the federal level of Malaysia.

(MCA) and Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) – that were responsible for safeguarding the interests of three main ethnic communities in Malaysia, namely, Malays, Chinese and Indians.³ Notwithstanding each component party having veto power in the early years of the coalition's decision-making process, the allocation of opportunities, offices and autonomy was maintained based on UMNO holding the central political power. With the formation of Malaysia in which Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak joined Malaya as a federation in 1963, this power-sharing arrangement became even more challenging to preserve as more political parties from East Malaysia, as well as the People's Action Party (PAP) from Singapore, entered the fray with an eye to providing a national alternative to the Malaya-based Parti Perikatan.

As Wong rightly points it out, the formation of Malaysia once again put into question the conflict between state impartiality and favouritism that could be traced as early as 1946 (Wong, 2015). When the British founded the Malayan Union, which would give citizenship to both ethnic Chinese and Indians in 1948, it sparked huge Malay opposition throughout the country and culminated in the birth of UMNO in May that year. When the Federation of Malaya was created to replace the Malayan Union in 1948, the Malay party scored its first communal victory and established itself as the dominant party in the lead-up to Malaya's independence later on (Wong, 2015). But with the formation of Malaysia in 1963, the Parti Perikatan's consensus that affirmed UMNO's political hegemony in exchange for the non-Malays' citizenship in Malaya was put to the test as PAP and East Malaysian parties formed the Malaysian Solidarity Convention (MSC) to compete against the Malayan coalition through the former's national agenda

³ MCA and MIC changed the word 'Malayan' in their party names into 'Malaysian' later on.

known as 'Malaysian Malaysia' (Wong, 2015).⁴

Such political conflict, however, came to an end with the Malaysian federal government's expulsion of Singapore from the federation in 1965. Following that, the new coalition plan collapsed and both the Sabahan and Sarawakian parties were left leaderless in their pursuit of an impartial Malaysia without ethnic favouritism for the Malays. From this development, it is clear that Parti Perikatan's consociational power-sharing approach had emerged as the sole choice for Malaysia, with UMNO re-affirming its dominance within the multiracial coalition. As for Sabah and Sarawak, the failure in redefining Malaysian politics at the national level eventually led to the adoption of 'splendid compartmentalisation' among their political parties, an approach that segregated their sub-nationalities away from the federal politics in Malaya.

The ensuing racial riot (or 13th May incident) triggered the inclusion of the then opposition parties into a rebranded coalition to replace Parti Perikatan by the then prime minister, Tun Razak. Now known as Barisan Nasional (National Front or BN), the coalition had absorbed more parties into its fold, making it a grand coalition that comprised component members from West and East Malaysia. Among all, the inclusion of Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan) into BN further weakened MCA's influence and with that, UMNO became an ever more dominant party in the coalition (Gomez, 2007). That said, the incorporation of PAS into BN in 1972 resulted in a political conflict with UMNO in which the party's territorial dominance in Kelantan was successfully diluted by the latter's expansion of influence in the northern state (Noor, 2014). Following a power crisis with UMNO,

⁴ It is important to emphasise that Sabah and Sarawak are made up of different ethnicities with similar compositions alongside diverse religions being practised within their populations. Although they are *bumiputera* by national categorisation, scholar James Chin described them as marginalised at best. An example is the New Economic Policy (NEP) that benefitted bumiputera Malays more than the other sub-groups of bumiputera. For more information, see Chin (2018b).

which now held power both in Kelantan state and at the federal level, PAS subsequently left BN in December 1977 before suffering its electoral defeat in the federal election held seven months later. As evident in current Malaysian politics, this territorial competition between UMNO and PAS is a long-standing phenomenon and will be part of the intra-coalition political dynamics for the PN+ coalition.

It was not until the 1980s that internal dissension started within UMNO, leading to establishment of new political parties to rival the party. The first was Tengku Razaleigh's (Ku Li's) power struggle with Mahathir for the UMNO's presidency in 1987. Following his failure to unseat Mahathir, the Kelantan prince left UMNO, and subsequently established Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (Spirit of 46 Malay Party or S46) to contest the 1990 GE with both DAP and Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) (Yahaya, 2003).⁵ Notwithstanding the failure of Gagasan Rakyat (GR) to gain significant seats in the 1990 GE, its formation should be construed as the first attempt by the opposition to provide a governing alternative in the form of a coalition. That said, the coalition stopped short of having a strong consociational power-sharing arrangement, as DAP and PRM had overlapping electoral bases, while S46 was far from influential in attracting conservative and centrist Malay voters vis-à-vis UMNO. What it portrayed, however, was the beginning of the opposition's attempts to gain support from different segments of ethnic groups (especially the Malays) instead of approaching electoral support along superficial ethnic lines, as had been the case with BN.

UMNO's other dissension occurred in 1998 following the sacking of Anwar Ibrahim as the Deputy Prime Minister by the then Prime Minister Mahathir. Unlike the previous S46, which was eventually disbanded in 1996, Anwar ignited the Reformasi (Reform) movement in the urban areas, and his supporters continued to form PKR to take on UMNO in the upcoming 1999 GE. Likewise, the birth of PKR also

⁵ The number '46' referred to UMNO's founding year of 1946.

led to the formation of another opposition coalition, Barisan Alternatif (Alternative Front or BA), that drew DAP, PRM and PAS into political cooperation with the new multi-racial party (Anand, 2015). This was the second opposition coalition in Malaysian political history, and one in which a stronger form of consociational power-sharing arrangement emerged among its component parties. While DAP served as the party to draw general Chinese and Indian voters nationwide, both PKR and PAS were looking to attract liberal/centrist and conservative Malay voters respectively at the expense of UMNO. Despite failure to mount a serious challenge to BN's dominance in national politics, the cooperation among DAP, PKR and PAS had the potential to attract different segments of voters into their camp in order to form a broad-based national government to replace BN.

In 2008 GE, the BN's rule began to experience its first rupture when the rebranded third opposition coalition, Pakatan Rakyat (People's Pact or PR), denied BN its two-thirds majority at the federal level.⁶ In that watershed election, BN lost Penang, Selangor, Kedah and Perak to PR, and this was on top of Kelantan, which was regained by PAS after 1990 (Singh, 2009). Altogether, PR was sent to power in these five states and among them, Penang and Selangor eventually became the strongholds of PH, and remain so today. The loss of these five states signalled the beginning of the end for BN's one-coalition rule, and as a matter of fact, put into question the continuity of UMNO's dominance in the grand coalition.

Such momentum continued for the GE 2013, and despite being unable to form a government in that election, PR gained higher popular support than BN's 50.8% as opposed to the latter's 47.3% (Faruqi, 2013). In this particular GE, the PR's component members were basically the same as in the defunct BA's in 1999 but with Anwar now designated as the prime minister candidate for the coalition. Not only was the 1999

⁶ Most PRM members were absorbed into PKR in 2003.

coalition's composition intact for the opposition as a whole, but PR also found itself in a solid position with Anwar as the sole leader uniting the two ideologically different component parties of DAP and PAS (Hairi, 2017). Notably, these are the two consociational power-sharing features that define PH today, even after its loss of federal power in 2020. The only difference is that Parti Amanah Negara (or Amanah) had replaced PAS as the Islamic party working with the secular DAP and Anwar-led PKR.

The end of BN's rule was finally realised when PH (the Alliance of Hope), the fourth opposition pact that replaced PR due to DAP-PAS's national identity contestation (on the hudud issue) (Astro Awani, 2015.06.16), won the historic 2018 GE in partnership with Bersatu, another splinter party from UMNO headed by Mahathir and the incumbent prime minister, Muhyiddin Yassin.⁷ For the first time in Malaysian history, an entirely new political coalition that was not BN was sent to federal power – with the latter left with Pahang and Perlis states after losing even its stronghold and birth state of Johor. It was not until after this election victory that the opposition coalition started to allocate the opportunities and offices in proportion to the component parties, with Bersatu's Chairman at the time, Mahathir, assuming the prime minister post, and PKR, DAP and Amanah holding important ministerial posts respectively.⁸ Due to PH being a coalition with autonomous component parties, the consensus of having Mahathir hand over power to Anwar within two years or so had brewed serious internal conflict within the pact and partly contributed to the instrumented Sheraton Move in late February 2020.

⁷ As expected, Bersatu's role was to draw centrist and conservative Malay voters away from UMNO in the GE 2018.

⁸ PKR's president at the time, Wan Azizah (Anwar's wife), was the Deputy Prime Minister, DAP's secretary-general Lim Guan Eng was the Minister of Finance, and Amanah's president, Mohammad Sabu, was the Minister of Defence. It should be noted that Anwar was still in prison at this point in time and was unable to take part in GE 2018.

With the collapse of the PH government in 2018, Malaysia has witnessed another major reconfiguration of its national politics. Notably, the long-standing consociational power-sharing arrangements as adhered to by both the PH and BN coalitions were no longer practised by the new federal government that came into power after the Sheraton Move. Unlike PH, in which other partnering parties held important ministerial posts with Bersatu's leader as the prime minister, the new government saw the Malay party helming all of these offices at the expense of BN parties (including UMNO), PAS, GPS and smaller component parties in Sabah. Likewise, the fact that having a small Malay party like Bersatu be the dominant one in the new ruling government is fundamentally different than the previous BN administrations, in which UMNO, a large Malay party, held the central power within a coalition of component parties.

Rather, the new ruling coalition was a constructed coalition aimed to gain adequate numbers of Members of Parliament (MPs) from the *Dewan Rakyat* (House of Representatives) to form the government at the national (federal) level. As will be explained in the following sections 3 and 4 in this article, such expedient amassment of a ruling coalition is beset with intra-coalition territorial competition that is relatively vicious compared to what the opposition bloc is experiencing. Similarly, the constructed national identity contestation that is supposed to unite all Malay-Muslim parties against the opposition has been facilitative for the latter to distinguish itself from the ethno-religious line adopted by the ruling coalition. In all, these are the two political dynamics that will be discussed throughout this paper.

III. Inter-Coalition Political Dynamics: National Identity Contestation between Ruling and Opposition Blocs

The first post-Sheraton-Move political dynamics is national identity

contestation between PN+ and the opposition bloc at the national level. Whilst national identity contestation existed in Malaysia decades ago (as explained in Section 2), the fact that regime change resulted in a Malay-Muslim unity government has opened the political landscape to clear-cut national identity contestation between the ruling PN+ coalition and the opposition bloc. With different political compositions and governance ideologies for the country, both PN+ and the PH-dominant opposition bloc are the two main political rivals since the Sheraton Move (February 2020), which saw another regime change after 2018 GE. Whereas the former is a Malay/Muslim-centric multiracial coalition centred on ethno-religious governance ideology (J. Chin, 2020), the latter is exploring a grand multiracial coalition with other opposition parties that thrive on multiculturalism such as Parti Warisan Sabah (or Warisan) and the United Progressive Kinabalu Organisation (UPKO).⁹

1. Unexpected Political Setting after Regime Change

While there is no formal disclosure on the rationale behind the choice of initiating regime change during the COVID-19 pandemic instead of earlier, any observer of Malaysian politics would be aware that the triggering factors for this attempt were the contentious transition issue involving Mahathir and Anwar and the rancorous national identity politics that placed Bersatu in a passive and difficult position within the larger multi-cultural coalition of PH. Known as the 'Sheraton Move' by the Malaysian media, both Bersatu (aligned with Muhyiddin) and Azmin's camp of the then Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) had reportedly been architecting regime change with BN and PAS leaders for a new ruling coalition – just after earlier news of six political party leaders having an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (Malaysian King)

⁹ Warisan and UPKO are still keeping any cooperation with PH open due to the need for all opposition parties to have a united front. For more information, see Miwil (2021) and Malaysiakini (2021b).

came out in the afternoon of February 23, 2020 (A. Tan, 2020; Hew, 2020; The Star, 2020; The Edge Markets, 2020).

That said, the whole grand coalition plan did not turn out exactly as expected by the leaders of the Sheraton Move. Instead, a political setting in which both sides of the political divide were locked in a symmetrical contest ensued following two consecutive developments unforeseen by the Sheraton Move leaders. Unwilling to cooperate with UMNO en bloc, former Prime Minister Mahathir swiftly resigned from his post, and with that, it also marked the end of the entire PH Cabinet (Ho, 2020; Poveira and Yusof, 2020). At the same time, being a strong supporter of Mahathir, Warisan's leader and Sabah's Chief Minister, Shafie Apdal, also pulled out of the coalition after the former's decision not to join the PN+ government and to continue as part of the opposition bloc instead (Fong, 2020).

After Muhyiddin Yassin was chosen as PN+'s new prime minister candidate and sworn in on March 1, 2020 (Free Malaysia Today, 2020), the ruling coalition was faced with an immediate and long-term predicament. Without the support of Mahathir's faction and Warisan, PN+'s control of the Dewan Rakyat is based on its razor-thin majority of parliamentary seats. As of August 15, 2020, the PN+ bloc has two majority seats instead of the anticipated 17 – with the partnering parties now including UMNO, PAS, other BN parties, Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS), the Homeland Solidarity Party (STAR) and one independent Member of Parliament (MP). In particular, the participation of GPS is considered critical to the amassment of a majority of MPs for the PN+ despite the fact that the Sarawak-based coalition has made it clear that it is joining the federal coalition as an independent bloc. Instead of being a component member like its Sabah counterparts, the GPS is an equal partner that is not subservient to the PN+ and has renounced any possibility of competing in the next GE as part of the federal ruling

coalition (Bernama, 2021; Malaysiakini, 2020i). As stipulated by GPS' leader and Sarawak's chief minister, Abang Johari, the coalition's participation in PN+ is to 'save' the country from political turmoil and not more than that (Astro Awani, 2020).

As outlined by Table 1 below, the total number of parliamentary seats held by the PN+ coalition was 113, while the opposition (PH, Warisan, and the Mahathir faction) held 107 seats after the recent shift of political allegiances of certain MPs for both PN+ and PH. These included three who left PKR to support PN+ as well as two UMNO MPs who withdrew support from the ruling coalition to sit on the opposition bench (The Straits Times, 2020b).¹⁰ Two seats, meanwhile, are vacant following the deaths of two MPs from both the ruling PN+ and PH-dominated opposition blocs. Far from establishing a strong federal government from a grand partnership of all Malay political parties, the PN+ government is now confronted with the strongest opposition in Malaysian history and risks having a hung parliament situation should more UMNO MPs revoke their support of the ruling coalition in the coming months. Furthermore, the PN+ government is expected to face a lot of hurdles when comes to passing important bills (especially the national budget bill) in the Parliament.

2. Two Components of National Identity Contestations

The overarching political resistance, however, spanned beyond these probable scenarios in the Parliament. Unlike the past, when the ruling coalition was a dominant force, the current composition in the Malaysian Parliament has emboldened the ruling PN+ and opposition (PH-majority) blocs to battle each other for relative gains in the electorate. More than consolidating their electoral bases, both sides of the political divide are also looking to strengthen their appeal among

¹⁰ Ever since an emergency was declared in January 2021, the by-elections have been halted.

the centrist voters throughout the country. This is indeed what has been occurring on the ground ever since the establishment of the PN+ government in late February 2020. Distinguished by their political compositions and governance ideologies, both the ruling PN+ coalition and PH-dominated opposition blocs are mired in national ideological contestation at the federal level.

Table 1. Composition of Parliamentary Seats in Dewan Rakyat (as of March 21, 2021)

Political Parties	Number of Parliamentary Seats
Perikatan Nasional Plus (PN+)	113
Bersatu	31
BN Coalition (UMNO, MCA & MIC)	39****
PAS	18
GPS Coalition	18
PBS	1
PBR5	1
STAR	1
Independents	4
Opposition (PH-Dominated)	107
PH (PKR, DAP & Amanah)*	88
Mahathir Faction (Independent)	4
MUDA (Independent)	1
Maszlee Malik (Independent)	1
UMNO (Non-PN+)	2
Warisan	8
UPKO**	1
PSB***	2
Vacant	2

Notes: **Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah)

**United Progressive Kinabalu Organisation (UPKO)

***Parti Sarawak Bersatu (PSB)

****More UMNO MPs may renounce support for PN+

Source: Parliament of Malaysia (2020b).

(1) Different Political Compositions

The most obvious difference between the two sides of the political divide is demonstrated in their political compositions within the overall coalitions. As alluded to by PAS President Hadi Awang, the PN+ government is a 'Malay-Muslim unity' government that is different from the purportedly 'non-Muslim dominant' PH administration (Welsh, 2020a; Malaysiakini, 2020b).¹¹ As such, the political composition of the whole coalition is reflective of its Malay/Muslim-centric multiracial representation that derives its electoral base mainly from the Malay conservative ground in the urban, sub-urban and rural areas of West Malaysia.¹² As for the opposition bloc dominated by PH, its political composition is relatively multiracial, with significant non-Malay/non-Muslim representation from West Malaysia as well as having a smaller group of East Malaysian MPs. As opposed to PN+, the PH coalition's electoral bases are mainly from liberal-leaning voters in urban and sub-urban areas that are racially and religiously diverse in both West and East Malaysia.

As shown in Table 2 below, the whole coalition is dominated by the three Malay-Muslim parties, and altogether, Malay-Muslims made up 67.3% (76) of PN+'s total MPs as opposed to the non-Malay/non-Muslim (West Malaysia) and East Malaysian parties, which separately

¹¹ Although UMNO and PAS have non-Muslim members, their influences in these parties are negligible. Similarly, Bersatu's latest move to admit non-Malay party members as associate members of the party is reminiscent of PAS' supporters wing in that they will find it extremely challenging to adjust to the party's overall Malay-centric agenda.

¹² Sarawak GPS is not included in this calculation, as it claimed that it is not a member of PN, but rather, a PN-friendly coalition of political parties in the East Malaysian state that cooperated with PN to ensure the political stability of Malaysia. As such, GPS Sarawak is not a permanent component of PN and it is not involved in the ideological construction of PN. Also, as a coalition that succumbed to the sub-nationalist sentiment of East Malaysia, GPS Sarawak did not subscribe to the Malay-Muslim identity politics that coloured the political scene in West Malaysia. For more information, see: Dayak Daily (2020).

control 5.3% (6) and 28.3% (32) of the seats.¹³ In contrast, the PH+ coalition had a relatively diverse composition prior to the Sheraton Move, which saw its ouster from power: 44.6% Malay-Muslim MPs from West Malaysia; 33.8% non-Malay/non-Muslim MPs (West Malaysia); and 21.6% from East Malaysia (Parliament of Malaysia, 2020a).¹⁴ Even after the Sheraton Move, which saw 30 of its MPs (mostly West Malaysian Malays) defecting, PH still preserved its largely diverse composition, as was the case when it formed the Malaysian government in May 2018. As of March 21, 2021, the PH-dominated opposition bloc consisted of 45.8% (49) West Malaysian Malay-Muslims, 41.1% (44) West Malaysian non-Malay/non-Muslims and 14.0% (15) East Malaysian MPs (Parliament of Malaysia, 2020b).¹⁵ At the same time, the PN+'s Cabinet members are made up of 24 Malay-Muslims from West Malaysia, while there are only two non-Malays/non-Muslims – as compared to the 14 Malay-Muslims (West Malaysia) and seven non-Malay/Muslim ministers (West Malaysia) of the previous PH+ government (see Table 2) (Cabinet of Malaysia, 2020; Awang Pawi, 2018).¹⁶ The only similarity is that both the PN+ and PH+ governments attached importance to the East Malaysian representation, with the former appointing six ministers from that part of Malaysia, while the latter appointed four in total (Cabinet of Malaysia, 2020; Awang Pawi, 2018).

¹³ Since East Malaysia has its own sub-nationalist sentiment that transcends race and religion, it is considered a collective bloc instead of separately along Malay-Muslim and non-Malay/Muslim lines as in the case of West Malaysia. As such, the East Malaysian MPs and Cabinet members are calculated based on their total numbers from the two states of Sabah and Sarawak.

¹⁴ Before the Sheraton Move, the numbers of PH-Warisan Malay and non-Malay MPs from West Malaysia were 62 and 47 respectively. For East Malaysia, there were 30 MPs for the PH-Warisan coalition at that time.

¹⁵ The West Malaysian Malay-Muslims included two UMNO MPs who withdrew their support for Muhyiddin.

¹⁶ The important portfolios of finance, defence and home affairs are taken by Malay-Muslim ministers, another strong indication that it does not intend to repeat the controversial appointment of a Chinese minister in-charge of the Finance Ministry as in the previous PH administration.

Table 2. Political Composition of PN+ and Opposition Bloc in Dewan Rakyat and Cabinet

Members	Dewan Rakyat	Cabinet
Ruling PN+	113	32
Malay (West Malaysia)	78	24
Non-Malay (West Malaysia)	3	2
East Malaysia	32	6
Opposition Bloc	109	-
Malay (West Malaysia)	47	-
Non-Malay (West Malaysia)	46	-
East Malaysian	16	-

Source: Cabinet of Malaysia (2020) and Parliament of Malaysia(2020).

To sum up, there is a clear difference in terms of the political composition between the ruling PN+ coalition and the opposition bloc. Whereas the former is a Malay/Muslim-centric multiracial coalition, the latter is a strong multiracial coalition with relatively diverse political composition. At the same time, PN+'s showcase of Malay/Muslim-centric political composition in the coalition and the Cabinet also served to appeal more widely to Malay centrist voters in West Malaysia who might have voted for PH in the last general election. Arguably, this will be the electoral base in which the opposition bloc (including PH and the Mahathir faction) hopes to preserve and expand its support before the next election as well. That said, PH is also looking into East Malaysia as its next expandable turf due to its strong multiracial composition, an advantage that the Mahathir faction does not possess and in which Warisan is a natural partner for the coalition.¹⁷

¹⁷ On August 7, 2020, five of the Mahathir faction's members announced the establishment of a new independent political party; according to the former prime minister, the party's principles are rooted in racial moderation and the goal of fighting corruption. Five days later, the party was unveiled as Parti Pejuang Tanahair (Pejuang), and it is expected to compete with Bersatu, UMNO and PAS in the Malay suburban and rural areas of West Malaysia. The other member of the Mahathir faction,

(2) Different Governance Ideologies

The other difference between the two sides of the political divide lies in their governance ideologies. Similar to the political composition feature, these governance ideologies are relied upon by PN+ and the opposition bloc to expand their appeal to the centrist ground of the electorate. For PN+, its position on various issues is reflective of its national ideology centred upon (ethno-religious) Malay-Muslim governance, notwithstanding the presence of East Malaysian political parties within the coalition. Often, the 'splendid silence' from former and incumbent BN component parties (PBS, PBRS and GPS) on Malay/Muslim communal positions taken by West Malaysian parties (despite generating dissension among non-Malay/non-Muslim voters in both states) has demonstrated the continuity of compartmentalising Sabah and Sarawak from the politics of Peninsula Malaysia since 1963 (J. Chin, 2018a, 2018b). This explains that even during the PN+ administration, the ruling coalitions of both East Malaysian states continued to be negligible representatives of multiculturalism at the national level, since their focus remained at the subnational level.

As for the opposition bloc, multiculturalism remains the governing ideology binding different political parties including the dominant PH, which has a strong presence in both West and East Malaysia. Apart from PH, Warisan has gained prominence as a staunch supporter of multiculturalism and with ambition to cross over to West Malaysia in its bid for power at the federal level. Altogether, there are four potent issues that stand at the forefront of such differences.

The first issue is the call for the banning of alcohol throughout Malaysia. For PN+, the number of deaths as a result of drunk driving should be resolved through strict measures within the Malay/Muslim-

Syed Saddiq, is expected to establish a new youth-centric and multiracial political party in the coming months. For information, see Lee (2020), Mosen (2020) and The Star (2020c).

centric governance ideology. Hence, it is of no surprise to hear the call for a ban by PAS leaders, while UMNO Youth has demanded the centralisation of alcohol sales and consumption to tackle drunk driving problems (Malay Mail, 2020; Malaysiakini, 2020c). In response to these calls, PH leaders steadfastly upheld the right of non-Muslims to drink, while at the same time they criticised UMNO's suggestion as a form of encroachment into the state's autonomy regarding alcohol regulation (The Malaysian Insight, 2020a; Suhaimi, 2020). Even after strong opposition from Chinese- and Sarawak-based organisations as well as the opposition leaders, the PN+ government made a rather assertive decision on the issue, albeit a more acceptable one for these opposing voices – suspending new applications for alcohol licenses until new guidelines are erected and the revision of laws is completed (Aruno, Zainal and Aravinthan, 2020; Borneo Post, 2020b; Suhaimi, 2020; Hassan, 2020; T. Tan, 2020a).

The second issue is the official recognition of the United Examination Certificate (UEC), a qualification held by the graduates of Chinese-medium schools in Malaysia. A source of anger among a big segment of Malay voters against the PH administration (especially the DAP) is its strong commitment to recognise the non-national academic qualification (Malaysiakini, 2020a), and both UMNO and PAS have continued to oppose such a move based on ethno-nationalist grounds. To the two parties and Bersatu, the UEC recognition is a violation and denigration of the status of the Malay language as the national language in the country (Kaos Jr. and Timbuong, 2018; The Star, 2018; Fuad, 2018). With the establishment of the PN+ government, PH's election campaign promise for UEC recognition has been shelved altogether – especially after Prime Minister Muhyiddin himself clarified for the first time that his government did not intend to recognise UEC following news reports that he may make the move in the future (New Straits Times, 2020; Malaysiakini, 2020e). As expected,

certain PH leaders such as Ronnie Liu have continued to pressure Muhyiddin to realise the coalition's UEC recognition pledge, as the latter was one of the senior leaders approving it in the 2018 general election (Mohd. Amin, 2020).

The third issue is proposed amendments to the Shariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act (or Act 355), which PAS has long wanted to debate in the Parliament. As this is a move that is bound to consolidate its support in the Muslim electoral ground of West Malaysia, PAS has continued to vie for the right time in pushing the shariah law amendment despite awareness that this will cause great concern among non-Muslims (The Malaysian Insight, 2020b; Periasamy, 2019). From the opposition side, PH's West-Malaysia-centric multicultural stance is the dominant ideology that stood against the tabling of the shariah law's amendment for parliamentary debate in 2017. While DAP opposed the proposed amendment by citing its unconstitutionality vis-à-vis the Federal Constitution, PKR leader Anwar Ibrahim, on the other hand, had consistently insisted that non-Muslims be included in the Act 355's parliamentary debate before any voting on the matter (Mok, 2017; Robertson, 2018). Like the call for an alcohol ban and UEC recognition issues, Act 355's amendment is another example of differences between PN+ and PH on what policies should be initiated in line with their respective governance ideologies.

The last issue is the electoral battle of governance discourses in case a snap general election is called soon. As highlighted by Malaysian analyst Tony Paridi Bagang, the PN+ coalition will become a formidable force if the three Malay parties are able to resolve the seat allocation impediment among themselves (Dzulkifly and Chan, 2020). Should such a scenario occur, it is expected that PN+ will contest as a Malay/Muslim-centric multiracial coalition that will also include the non-Malay parties in West Malaysia as well as the independent GPS of East Malaysia. While Muhyiddin can bank on his current popularity in

leading the country out of the COVID-19 pandemic and his personal appeal as a low-key and listening management figure (Welsh, 2020b), it is the Malay/Muslim-centric governance discourse that will be the overarching factor for their electoral appeal not only to conservative Malay-Muslim voters but also this community's centrist voters in West Malaysia.

As for the opposition bloc, the expanded West-East Malaysian multicultural discourse (from PH's West Malaysian-centric multiculturalism) is the way forward for the coalition to tap into voters in both Sabah and Sarawak as the 'kingmakers' for any change of government at the federal level (Liew, 2020.07.03). A proposal supported by Mahathir himself, the possibility for Sabah's chief minister, Shafie Apdal, to be the Prime Minister candidate of the opposition bloc was in the offing, as it had the preliminary backing of both DAP and Amanah (Malaysiakini, 2020d). With Warisan's loss in the Sabah election, however, this proposal did not reinforce the West-East Malaysian multicultural discourse that PH's strategists would want to present, as Shafie's credibility itself is in question. It remains to be seen what exact measures will be taken by PH prior to the coming GE that will appeal not only to its liberal and centrist electoral bases in West Malaysia but also to those in East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak).

From the four potent issues above, it is clear that both sides of the political divide are contesting against each other in line with their respective governance ideologies. Similar to the differences in political composition between the ruling PN+ coalition and the opposition bloc, the differences in governance ideology also speak of the identity contestation between the two sides of the political divide. Whilst the ruling PN+ coalition is attempting to expand its electoral appeal to the Malay-Muslim centrist voters through its Malay/Muslim-centric governance discourse, the opposition is also aiming for West and East Malaysia's liberal and centrist electoral bases with a different version.

Beyond seeking to consolidate its liberal and centrist voters through PH's West Malaysian-centric multicultural governance ideology on the three issues of a call for an alcohol ban, UEC recognition and Act 355's amendment issues, the opposition bloc is looking to venture into the same electoral bases in East Malaysia by inventing a multicultural governance discourse that appeals to both sides of Malaysia.

IV. Intra-Coalition Political Dynamics: Explicit Territorial Competition within Ruling and Opposition Blocs

The second political dynamics after the Sheraton Move is the explicit territorial competition among different parties within both the ruling and opposition blocs. With the collapse of the PH+ government in February 2020, four factions charted their own directions in the ruling and opposition blocs. The first two factions are the pro-Muhyiddin Bersatu and pro-Azmin PKR factions that triggered the end of the PH+ government by entering into cooperation with UMNO-led BN, PAS and other splinter parties to form the PN+ government. The third faction is the Mahathir group of former Bersatu lawmakers who refused to join the PN+ government and remained in opposition but independent from PH. The fourth faction, meanwhile, refers to the other political factions and parties that previously formed the PH+ government but continued to be PH-friendly in the Dewan Rakyat. They are former Bersatu lawmakers Syed Saddiq and Maszlee Malik, who left the Mahathir faction to form their own political party and movement, as well as both Warisan and UPKO in Sabah. It is within this context that both the ruling and opposition blocs are coloured with explicit territorial competition among existing coalition or future coalition partners.

1. The Situation within PN+ Ruling Coalition

As alluded to by Wong, the Achilles' heel of PN+ is that the three Malay-Muslim parties – UMNO, Bersatu and PAS – are too similar to each other, so much so that that rivalry for dominance will continue to mar the coalition until the next snap GE (Wong, 2020a). While Malay-Muslim grand unity is the *raison d'être* for PN+ cooperation, it is also the source of territorial competition that the three Malay-Muslim parties have to contend with. Appealing to the same conservative and centrist Malay/Muslim electoral base, the three Malay-Muslim parties are natural competitors contesting in the same electoral constituencies throughout West Malaysia. Based on cooperation in the past, from UMNO-PAS (1973-7) to Semangat 46-PAS (1990-6) (Wong, 2020a), it is clear that the three PN+ partnering parties are confronting the same territorial competition that is similar to the 1970s. In all, this territorial competition is the most explicit for UMNO and Bersatu, while less so for UMNO and PAS.

While UMNO-Bersatu territorial competition was less overt in the first six months of the PN+ government, it became increasingly explicit following former Prime Minister Najib Razak's conviction for one of his corruption cases after his fall from power. Three days after he was sentenced to a 12-year jail term in July 2020 (Latiff, 2020a), UMNO's president, Zahid Hamidi, announced the party's stand of not formally joining PN as a registered coalition, and further revealed Bersatu's intention to join Muafakat Nasional (MN) – another coalition that is set up between UMNO and PAS to push the Malay-Muslim unity agenda in West Malaysia (T. Tan, 2020b).¹⁸ As described by political observer Awang Azman Awang Pawi, UMNO's resistance against the registration of the PN coalition should be construed as UMNO's warning to Muhyiddin and the delay of MN's electoral seats

¹⁸ As revealed by Prime Minister Muhyiddin, Bersatu eventually applied to join MN on August 15, 2020. For more information, see Rahim (2020).

negotiation with Bersatu until the dissolution of Parliament (E. Chin, 2020b).

Then again, the unexpected Sabah state election (September 26, 2020) further exacerbated UMNO-Bersatu territorial competition despite occurring at the state level. While Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS), which is aligned with Muhyiddin, won in the East Malaysian state election, UMNO demonstrated no reservation in exercising its dominance within the newly forged coalition for Sabah (Tee, Loheswar and Razak, 2020; Malaysiakini, 2020f). Apart from warning Bersatu not to contest the majority of seats in Sabah, UMNO also engaged in clashes with other local parties aligned with GRS in spite of Muhyiddin's intervention to avoid such an eventuality. Adding to the rift is Zahid's insistence on the UMNO candidate as Sabah's Chief Minister (CM), which in the end went to a candidate from Bersatu instead (Mohd., 2020; The Straits Times, 2020a).

By all means, the failure of UMNO to gain the top post in Sabah despite winning more state seats than Bersatu is reminiscent of its subservient position at the national level. Like the situation in Sabah, all important ministerial portfolios are held by Bersatu (including two Senior Ministers) at the national level, while UMNO is only given a Senior Minister post for national defence. Following the Sabah state election, UMNO-Bersatu territorial competition has become apparent, with the former searching for its old dominant stature in the coalition while the latter holds the *de facto* power in the national government. In spite of Muhyiddin's intervention that resulted in a short-term political ceasefire with UMNO (Harun, 2020), the latter staged an unexpected political coup in the northern West Malaysian state of Perak less than three months later. Taking political pundits by surprise, the political coup was carefully plotted in cooperation with the opposition PH, to oust Ahmad Faizal Azumu from his Menteri Besar (MB) post via a no-confidence motion in the state assembly, and he was replaced with an

UMNO candidate. This move, according to UMNO's senior leader, Nazri Aziz, was in retaliation against efforts by Azumu (also, Bersatu's deputy president) to dominate UMNO in the state of Perak (Chong and Augustin, 2020).

The climax of UMNO-Bersatu territorial competition was finally reached in January 2021 when two UMNO MPs, namely, Ahmad Jazlan Yaakub and Nazri Aziz, formally rescinded their support for the PN+ government (Zainudin, 2021; Rahim, 2021). On top of these two, Ku Li, who has branded the PN+ government as an illegitimate regime as early as in December 2020 (Povera and Chan, 2020), is also leaning towards withdrawal of his support of the Muhyiddin administration in the coming months as well. All these developments, in turn, raised the question of whether the PN+ government still commanded a majority in the Dewan Rakyat – an issue that was temporary mitigated through the defection of three MPs from PKR (PH's component party) to the ruling coalition by mid-March 2021. That said, the final nail in the coffin was UMNO's formal notification to Muhyiddin of its Supreme Council's decision to cease all cooperation with PN+ in the coming snap GE (Malaysiakini, 2021c). Notwithstanding UMNO's decision to continue its support for PN+ until the next GE, the party's latest decision marked the end of its cooperation with Bersatu within the ruling coalition established after the Sheraton Move. By extension to that, it denotes that Bersatu will contest against the largest Malay party, UMNO, in most of Malay/Muslim-majority constituencies in West Malaysia.

On the other hand, UMNO-PAS territorial competition has also resurfaced despite cooperating under the MN pact. With a snap GE expected to be called in 2021, UMNO's leader of Terengganu, Ahmad Said, has announced the state chapter's decision to contest in all constituencies including those belonging to their MN's partner, PAS

(Malaysiakini, 2021a).¹⁹ Considering that these UMNO's state leaders are powerful 'warlords' who have exercised their own authority against the central leadership, it is expected that they will take on PAS, which formed both Terengganu and Kelantan state governments after 2018 GE. In other words, both parties will battle against each other in these two East Coast states, which are the core political bases of PAS but which had been ruled by UMNO in the past.

Collectively speaking, UMNO-Bersatu territorial competition is of national scale as compared to that of UMNO-PAS, which is limited to the two East Coast states (or to the larger extent of the northern part of Kedah). For certain, the inability in finding common ground among the three Malay-Muslim parties has fundamentally threatened the Malay-Muslim grand unity discourse as propagated by PAS and Muhyiddin himself since the Sheraton Move (Malaysiakini, 2020b; Razak, 2020c). In fact, the MN pact featuring UMNO and PAS is also undergoing tension at the national level due to the Islamist party's stance of being equally friendly to PN as well (Yusoff, 2021). Whereas it is within PAS' interest to utilise Bersatu to avoid UMNO becoming dominant in Malay/Muslim-majority constituencies, it certainly ignited discontent from those in UMNO's central leadership who preferred that the Islamist party prioritise MN over PN in terms of contesting the next GE as a coalition (Wong, 2020b; Malaysiakini, 2020g). As described by Wong, these political collisions further demonstrated that Malay-Muslim unity is a myth that is coming to an end (Wong, 2021).

2. The Situation within PH-Dominated Opposition Bloc

For the opposition bloc, the territorial competition is essentially between PH and other, smaller opposition parties that sprouted out from the Sheraton Move. With the exception of Parti Pejuang Tanah Air

¹⁹ Said revealed that the MN pact inked between UMNO and PAS at the national level does not include the state of Terengganu.

(Homeland Fighters' Party or Pejuang), founded by the Mahathir faction after the collapse of the PH+ government, all other opposition parties are multicultural in their governing ideology regardless of whether they are from West Malaysia or East Malaysia. As such, their territorial competition is drawn from their contest for the same liberal and centrist electoral bases in the two geographical divisions of the country.

Since the Sheraton Move 2020, new political parties and movements have emerged from the opposition bloc. Aside from Parti Pejuang Tanah Air (Homeland Fighters' Party or Pejuang), founded by the Mahathir faction, all other parties are multicultural in their political outlook. It is precisely such political leaning that positioned them as natural partners for the much larger and stronger coalition of PH. Among them is the Malaysian United Democratic Alliance (MUDA), which was started by the highly popular former youth minister and MP, Syed Saddiq, as well as 12 professionals and activists from all segments of society (Malaysiakini, 2020h). Drawing inspiration from France's *La République En Marche!* and Thailand's Future Forward Party (FFP), MUDA is positioning itself as the disruptor of the old political order that is eagerly maintained by the current establishment (Latiff, 2020b). Equally important is that the party is also aiming for youth voters and has been vocal on current issues that have beleaguered all Malaysians (young and old), ranging from internet coverage for young students and political corruption/nepotism to manipulation of race and religion (Latiff, 2020b). With this orientation, it is bound to appeal to liberal and centrist voters from West and East Malaysia, the same voting bank that PH dominated in the urban and sub-urban constituencies. Even though it has yet to be registered by the Registrar of Societies (RoS) today, MUDA has established itself as the most promising new political party, with 30,000 members recruited just a month after its establishment in September 2020 (Bedi, 2021; Tee, 2020).

The other is Gerak Independent (GI), a united movement of four non-governmental organisations (NGOs), namely, Malaysia Action for Justice, Unity Foundation (MAJU), I Am The Third Force, KitaBantuKita and Malaysia First. Similar to MUDA, GI is trying to unshackle Malaysia from the old political order and 'reclaim' the country from the political elites (Razak, 2020a). Preaching progressive politics with anti-corruption, poverty eradication and anti-divisive (race and religion) politics, this multicultural movement is aiming at the urban voters at their initial stage of development, with gradual expansion into the rural areas (Razak, 2020b). With its anti-political party stance, it is expected that GI will compete individually as a coalition in the upcoming GE, and given its election strategy, it is bound to compete for the same liberal and centrist voters in the urban constituencies as the PH.

Likewise, there is another movement that is solely launched by former education minister and MP Maszlee Malik, who has left the Mahathir faction after the Sheraton Move in 2020. While this is an education movement instead of a political one, Maszlee has been swift in leveraging his popularity among Malay-Muslim voters to set up a movement that transcends ideology, politics, race and class in resolving education issues faced by average Malaysians (Kaos Jr., 2020). Known as Untuk Malaysia (For Malaysia), it is offering itself as a public platform in connecting those who require help and those who want to offer aid to others (Kaos Jr., 2020). Unlike GI, Maszlee has made it clear that he will be cooperating closely with PH as an independent candidate in the Parliament – a move that eventually led him to become the coalition's Chairperson of the COVID-19 Education Committee (Lee, 2021).

Last but not least, there is Pejuang. Leaving Bersatu behind after the Sheraton Move in 2020, the initial group of five MPs who are aligned with Mahathir subsequently formed Pejuang in August 2020 to

provide an alternative to the former (Mosen, 2020). Putting forward the rationale that Bersatu, the party Mahathir previously founded with Muhyiddin, is no longer championing the interests and rights of the Malay community, Pejuang aimed to become a 'kingmaker' should any of the two coalitions be unable to secure a majority in the coming GE (Zainuddin, 2020). This aim, however, is deemed to be difficult, as its big loss in the Slim by-election had shown that it not only lost the non-Malay/Muslim votes by detaching itself from PH, but also was far from garnering conservative and centrist Malay-Muslim voters in the rural constituency (Zainuddin, 2020). Furthermore, with Maszlee leaving the group after his brief hiatus in Pejuang, the party is now reduced to four MPs (including Mahathir's son, Mukhriz) and confronted with the two key challenges that threatened its survival in the next GE – lack of grassroots support and the need for a new political discourse that differentiates itself from the two Malay parties of Bersatu and UMNO.

Generally speaking, the electoral seat distribution among opposition parties is less threatening than would be the case for PN+. As the sole coalition that enjoyed absolute dominance in grassroots support within West and East Malaysia, it is arguably unrealistic for other opposition parties to mount similar scale election campaigns as PH, when they lack the resources to do so. Given such asymmetrical capacity, it is within the interest of these smaller opposition parties (with the exception of GI) to present a united front with PH and avoid electoral seat clashes among themselves for the next GE. Adding to this need of smaller opposition parties is the fact that there exists an electoral seat distribution formula to which the opposition bloc can refer for the coming snap GE. Apart from GI and to a certain extent, MUDA, all opposition parties were part of the PH coalition that won the election in 2018. As such, the past arrangement plan for the contested electoral constituencies is readily replicable (albeit with slight adjustments) by the opposition parties in the coming GE. Whilst

MUDA and GI have ambitions to contest seats in more electoral constituencies, it remains challenging for them to win over significant liberal and centrist East and West Malaysian voters by going it alone.

The probability, therefore, is high for MUDA to team up with PH, Warisan, UPKO and Maszlee for West Malaysia and Sabah in the coming snap GE.²⁰ For Sarawak, the other East Malaysian state aside from Sabah, the talks are ongoing for PH to work with another state-based opposition party, Parti Sarawak Bersatu (PSB), to avoid seat clashes for the next GE as well. That leaves the other party on the sideline, Pejuang, as the last to face an uncertain future in the coming snap election. As the only opposition party that has overlapping Malay/Muslim-majority constituencies with PN+, it is confronted with the risk of a full wipe-out should it fail to cooperate with PH in the next federal election. As a whole, the PH-dominated opposition bloc is going into the next election with a more stable coalition than that of the ruling PN+.

V. Conclusion

Given that national identity contestation and territorial competition remain the inter-coalition and intra-coalition political dynamics until the upcoming snap GE, there is no question that Malaysian politics is embracing a new political order that was unseen in the past. As of March 31, 2021, territorial competition within the PN+ ruling coalition has overshadowed the pact's national identity contestation vis-à-vis the PH-dominated opposition bloc. With UMNO's recent termination of cooperation with PN for the coming snap election, it is expected that the ruling coalition will drastically push for a third alternative coalition

²⁰ Both Warisan and UPKO are existing parties that competed in Sabah in the 2018 election and are expected to make the East Malaysian state their main fortress for the coming GE. While Warisan signalled its intention to compete in West Malaysia, it is challenging for it to gain enough support from the liberal and centrist electorate there, as the situation in this part of Malaysia is drastically different from Sabah.

against the two larger and more established political coalitions of UMNO-led BN and PH.

That said, the future of Malaysian politics is likely to be dictated by the two political coalitions, namely, UMNO-led BN and PH, despite the fact that there is an instrumented attempt by the PN leaders to establish a third viable alternative for the wider electorate. As noted by Oh, Bersatu, the core party of PN, will have difficulty winning seats by going it alone, as some of the electoral support it derived from the last 2018 GE came from PH's electoral bases (Yusof and Tan, 2021). Wong even foresees that Bersatu stands to be annihilated by the much stronger UMNO in the event that three-cornered contests occur throughout Malaysia for the coming snap GE (Sin Chew Daily, 2021). The main rationale for such pessimism, according to Chin and Wong, largely stems from the stronger grassroots support within the Malay constituencies that enabled UMNO to mount superior electoral machinery as compared to Bersatu, a party that is relatively new to Malay voters, especially in the rural areas (Yusof and Tan, 2021). In short, it will remain challenging for the third coalition, of which Bersatu is the driver, to achieve the same political success on par with the UMNO-led BN and PH in the coming snap election.

For the opposition bloc, which has relatively stable territorial competition among the political parties, the incoming mutual competition of Malay-Muslim parties for the same conservative and centrist Malay/Muslim electoral bases throughout West Malaysia will work largely to PH's advantage. Following UMNO's termination of cooperation with Bersatu in the coming GE, the Malay-Muslim votes are expected to split into three camps – UMNO, PH and Bersatu – in the event that PAS is able to avoid seat clashes with UMNO through the MN coalition. For certain, this situation is advantageous for PH, as it is likely to retain the majority of non-Malay/Muslim votes in West Malaysia despite having fewer Malay-Muslim votes than UMNO and

PAS.

The other advantage is the preservation of PH's political bases in West Malaysia. Following the PH presidential council's decision for its states (Selangor, Penang and Negeri Sembilan) not to dissolve their state assemblies in spite of the snap GE (Ar, 2020), there is no question that their political bases will remain intact irrespective of the election outcomes nationwide. Fast forwarding, if PH is able to establish cooperation with other opposition parties such as MUDA (West Malaysia), Warisan and UPKO (Sabah) and PSB (Sarawak), it will manage to avoid any seat clash, unlike its political rival, PN+. But as noted in Section 4 earlier, this aim will not be hard to achieve, as these opposition parties have yet to achieve the size and strength of grassroots support equivalent to that of PH.

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喜來登行動後的大馬政治： 聯盟之間與聯盟內部的政治動態

李志良*

摘要

2020 年 2 月喜來登行動之後，大馬政治沿著兩個方向而發展。一是政治聯盟之間的國家身份論爭，二是聯盟內部的版圖競爭。國家身份論爭而言，國盟+執政陣營積極樹立大馬來—穆斯林聯盟的形象，推廣單一族群—宗教的執政理念。這與再也所奉行的多元路線態形成了明顯的對比。此外，朝野陣營內部的版圖競爭也變得白熱化。當中，執政陣營的土團，巫統和伊黨的版圖競爭最為激烈，最終使得巫統決定在下屆大選推出國盟。相比之下，再也集團的版圖競爭較為穩定，主要是希盟在東西馬的動員能力遠遠超過其他政黨。以目前的形式來看，國盟內的版圖競爭蓋過它和再也的國家身份論爭，而這不利於國盟成為第三政治勢力的議程。

關鍵詞：喜來登行動、國盟、希盟、國家身份論爭、版圖競爭

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