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## Post-election Analysis

# **MALAYSIA** **Legislative Elections, 5 May 2013**

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On May 5<sup>th</sup> Malaysia held its thirteenth legislative elections since the country's independence. Simultaneously, twelve of the thirteen regional parliaments were renewed<sup>1</sup>.

These elections were much-anticipated by Malaysian society, as the high rate of turnout (84.4%) - the highest in its electoral history - attests<sup>2</sup>. The trend was the same in the regional elections, where 85.2% of the electorate cast their vote. This high percentage of participation can be put down to, according to the latest electoral polls published, the existence of a real possibility of political change which prompted a major mobilisation effort both from the government and the opposition. The change did indeed eventuate electorally, given that the opposition won more votes than the government: 5,623,984 versus 5,237,699. However, the current government will remain in power due to the impact of the majority electoral formula<sup>3</sup>, which produced a major distortion when converting votes into seats. Thus, *Barisan Nasional* obtained 47.38% of the total votes but 59.91% of the total seats. As for the opposition, despite winning 50.87% of votes, its share of seats was limited to 40.09%.

The distribution of parliamentary seats was the following: *Barisan Nasional* (BN) 133, the People's Justice Party (PKR) 30, the Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) 21 & the Democratic Action Party (DAP) 38. As for votes, BN reached 5,237,699 votes, the DAP 1,736,267, the PKR 2,254,328 and the PAS 1,633,389<sup>4</sup>.

At a regional level, of the 505 seats<sup>5</sup> in play in the 12 regional parliamentary elections, BN won 275 seats, the DAP 95, the PAS 85, the PKR 49 and STAR<sup>6</sup> one seat in Sabah state on the island of Borneo. This distribution of seats sees regional power stay practically the same as it was after the 2008 elections, with the exception that BN has recovered the states it then lost, Kedah and Perak. This recovery also took place at national parliamentary level, since BN won the legislative elections in both states after losing there in 2008.

The results of both elections have brought about significant changes to the national political landscape. The first factor is the unstoppable wear and tear of governing on *Barisan Nasional*<sup>7</sup> - obvious since 2008. While it has not lost all that many seats in the national parliament (its share has gone from 140 to 133), for the first time ever it did not win the most votes. Factors such as corruption, voter weariness, and above all, the almost complete loss of support among the ethnic-Chinese electorate (which has gone instead to the DAP), has accentuated

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<sup>1</sup> The only state which did not hold elections was Sarawak on the island of Borneo. Its parliament - a BN bastion - is the country's largest, with 71 seats.

<sup>2</sup> Malaysia Kini "EC: 84.84 percent cast their votes in GE13" available at: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/229339> (webpage available 7 May 2013)

<sup>3</sup> This can be clearly observed in the weight of each electoral district. On average BN needed 46,510 voters to win a district won, as opposed to the 77,655 voters needed by the opposition. For more information see: Terence Netto "BN victory or EC sorcery?" available at: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/229350> (webpage available 7 May 2013)

<sup>4</sup> Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya Malaysia "Keputusan pilihan raya umum ke-13" available at: <http://www.pru13.gov.my/default.balaiberita.06-01.php> (webpage available 7 May 2013)

<sup>5</sup> Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya Malaysia "Keputusan pilihan raya umum ke-13" available at: <http://www.pru13.gov.my/default.balaiberita.06.php> (webpage available 7 May 2013)

<sup>6</sup> STAR is a small regional party based in Sabah on the island of Borneo.

<sup>7</sup> *Barisan Nasional* was created in 1973 as a replacement to the coalition Perikatan (Alliance) which in turn had ruled Malaysia from the outset.

the decline of BN already apparent in the 2008 elections when it went from 198 to 140 seats. The loss of support among the Chinese electorate is very important as it shatters the idea of a multi-ethnic party with transversal support among Malay society.

Significant changes have also taken place among the opposition parties. The first of these is the fact that the Democratic Action Party (DAP) - a member of the International Socialist<sup>8</sup> and the representative of the national Chinese community - is now the leader of the opposition bloc. The transfer of votes from BN toward the DAP was critical. This phenomenon prompted a rise in the number of votes and seats won by the DAP. Indeed, due to the impact of the election system, despite having less votes than the other major opposition party, the PKR, DAP won more seats. By doing so, the DAP has become the ethnic Chinese community's primary option, leaving BN an essentially Malay party. This issue is kindling considerable criticism<sup>9</sup> inside BN over the reasons for this electoral parting ways with the Chinese community.

The Malaysian Islamic Party, PAS, had mixed results in these elections. Both at national and at regional level, it lost part of its seats in its historic bastions of Kedah and Kelantan<sup>10</sup> to BN. However, it has managed to hold onto power in the latter state. Additionally, it was the party that won the most seats, along with the DAP, in Selangor<sup>11</sup>, the country's most industrial state, and made progress, albeit moderately, in Johor, another of Malaysia's more urban and industrial states. This is encouraging for PAS as it may imply a certain inroad into the urban Malay electorate - the party has always been concentrated in the country's rural areas. This new trend will need to be confirmed in future elections.

The loser in these elections, together with the government, was the People's Justice Party, PKR, and its leader, Anwar Ibrahim - former Barisan Nasional party Finance Minister in Mahathir Mohamad's government<sup>12</sup>. Although the party only lost one seat compared to the last elections, it was relegated to second place among the opposition parties and above all, saw its hopes of ascension dashed. Anwar Ibrahim himself has been weakened by these elections, and for the first time voices have been raised in the party against his leadership.

Lastly, problems remain in terms of the the fairness and democratic quality of these elections, as the reports of several local think tanks and organisations working on the issue, such as CPPS<sup>13</sup>/Asli and IDEAS<sup>14</sup>. According to the CEO of

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<sup>8</sup> Socialist International, "Member parties of the Socialist International" available at: <http://www.socialistinternational.org/viewArticle.cfm?ArticlePageID=930> (webpage available 9 May 2013)

<sup>9</sup> Ram Anand, "Chinese rejected Malay hand of friendship" available at: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/229421> (webpage available 8 May 2013)

<sup>10</sup> Both states are rural with economies based principally on agriculture and fishing.

<sup>11</sup> Malaysia Kini, "PAS won't stake claim on Selangor MB post" available at: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/229506> (webpage available 9 May 2013)

<sup>12</sup> Mahathir Mohamad was prime minister of Malaysia from 1981 until 2003. He is considered the father of the Malaysian economic miracle.

<sup>13</sup> Center for Public Policy Studies. For more information see: <http://www.cpps.org.my>

<sup>14</sup> Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs. For more information see: <http://www.ideas.org.my>

IDEAS, Wan Saiful Wan Jan, the elections were “partially free, but not fair”<sup>15</sup>. The opposition, particularly the PKR, has started a series of protests against electoral fraud detected in its own investigations<sup>16</sup>. These protests have the potential to trigger major conflict.

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<sup>15</sup> Hazlan Zakaria, “Observers: GE13 partially free but not fair”: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/229482> (webpage available 8 May 2013)

<sup>16</sup> The Star, “GE13: PKR sets up team to investigate polls irregularities”: [http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2013/5/8/nation/13083338&sec=nation&utm\\_source=TSOL\\_main&utm\\_medium=links&utm\\_campaign=GE13](http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2013/5/8/nation/13083338&sec=nation&utm_source=TSOL_main&utm_medium=links&utm_campaign=GE13) (webpage available 8 May 2013)