

The Politics of Locality and Temporality in the 2004 Malaysian Parliamentary Elections

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This article examines the role of locality (ethnic composition of the constituency) and temporality (the almost five-year hiatus between elections) for BN in the parliamentary elections. In the 2004 Malaysian parliamentary elections, the ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional (National Front, BN), secured a two-thirds majority. BN also increased both its share of popular votes as well as the total number of seats in bumiputera majority constituencies, recovering ground lost in the 1999 elections. In bumiputera minority constituencies where voter sentiment was divided symmetrically between BN and the Democratic Action Party (DAP) it is the latter which has been more successful. It is in the mixed constituencies where BN has been most popular. The increase in the number of seats in this category of electorate has worked overwhelmingly to BN's advantage, enabling it to control nearly 90 per cent of the 219-seat parliament, implying therefore a continuation of NEP (New Economic Policy) trends in Malaysia's political economy.

Introduction

Parliamentary elections in Malaysia are hotly contested affairs. The March 2004 11th General Elections were billed to be one of, if not, the most interesting yet. Abdullah Badawi, Mahathir Mohammad's hand-picked successor who had only in October 2003 been appointed as Prime Minister and leader of UMNO, led the Barisan Nasional (National Front, henceforth referred to as BN)¹ campaign. His popular image and

credentials as “Mr Clean” and “Mr Religious” was deemed to augur well for BN, bleaching it of various allegations of mismanagement, cronyism, corruption and, more importantly, bridging the bitter factions in the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the leading member of BN. There was also widespread belief that the country could witness a repeat of the oppositional coalition Barisan Alternatif’s (Alternative Coalition, henceforth referred to as BA) strong performance in the 1999 general elections.

Defying speculation, BN emerged victorious to win a two-thirds parliamentary majority, capturing 64 per cent of the popular votes, a little short of the stunning 65 per cent it won in the 1985 elections. Dr Mahathir Mohamad, whose resignation as Prime Minister came just a few months shy of the general elections, had enough magnanimity to suggest his departure from the political limelight after 22 years in office — a factor that may indeed have worked to the BN’s advantage — allowed it to make a turnaround.²

Adopting an approach that divides the electorate into different bandwidths or frequencies based on ethnic composition of the constituencies, the article compares and juxtaposes the voting pattern and trends of the 1999 and 2004 parliamentary elections. It argues that temporality, i.e. the hiatus of nearly five years between elections, and locality in terms of ethnic composition of the constituency, were vital for BN securing two-thirds majority. The article begins with an overview of BN and non-BN³ electoral performance in the 2004 parliamentary elections. The next section discusses temporality and locality on BN’s performance by subjecting the election data to statistical analysis using the multinomial logits saturated model. The conclusion summarizes the main points.

The Elections in Malaysia

In the 2004 parliamentary elections the BN won 181 of the 202 seats that were contested and 17 uncontested seats, bringing its total to 198 seats. The remaining 21 seats were won by the non-BN comprising the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) and Parti Keadilan Malaysia (National Justice Party, Keadilan) and Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) which together merged in a loose coalition called the Alternative Front (Barisan Alternatif, BA) and the Democratic Action Party (DAP).⁴ Table 1 shows how the parties fared in the 14 States. Table 2 shows seats won by the respective political parties and their percentage share of popular votes.

The BN managed to retain the 3 seats in Perlis up for grabs, while increasing its share in Kedah from 7 to 14 of the 23 seats it contested. In Kelantan the BN increased its share of seats from one to

TABLE 1
Distribution of Parliamentary Seats by State and Party in 2004

<i>State</i>	<i>BN</i>	<i>Non-BN</i>	<i>Total</i>
PERLIS	3		3
KEDAH	14	1	15
KELANTAN	8	6	14
TERENGGANU	8		8
PENANG	8	5	13
PERAK	21	3	24
PAHANG	14		14
SELANGOR	22		22
NEGRI SEMBILAN	8		8
MELAKA	6		6
JOHOR	24		24
SARAWAK	21	1	22
SABAH	15	1	16
W. PERSEKUTUAN	9	4	13
TOTAL	181	21	202

Figures indicate contested seats only. In Sabah only 16 seats out of a total of 25 seats were contested, 9 seats were won by BN uncontested. In Sarawak 22 seats out of a total of 28 seats were contested, 6 seats were won by BN uncontested. In Johor only 24 out of 26 seats were contested, with BN winning 2 seats uncontested.

SOURCE: *New Straits Times*, 19 March 2004, 22 March 2004, 23 March 2004; *Utusan Malaysia*, 22 March 2004; *Berita Harian*, 22 March 2004; *The Star*, 22 March 2004. The data is sourced from the Election Commission of Malaysia.

TABLE 2
Distribution of Parliamentary Seats by Political Parties in 2004

<i>Party</i>	<i>Total Seats</i>	<i>Total votes</i>	<i>% valid votes</i>
BN	181	4,434,203	63.93%
PAS	7	1,057,853	15.25%
Keadilan	1	621,330	8.96%
DAP	12	688,630	9.93%
Independent	1	133,976	1.93%
Total	202	6,935,992	100.00%

SOURCE: *New Straits Times*, 19 March 2004, 22 March 2004, 23 March 2004; *Utusan Malaysia*, 22 March 2004; *Berita Harian*, 22 March 2004; *The Star*, 22 March 2004. The data is sourced from the Election Commission of Malaysia.

6 thereby reducing PAS' majority to 8 seats from the 13 it held before parliament was dissolved. In Terengganu, BN won all 8 seats which were held by PAS previously. In Penang, BN won 8 of the 13 seats (2 of which were new) up for grabs, while DAP won 4 and BA represented by Keadilan, one seat. In Perak, of the 24 seats (one new seat) BN captured 21 and DAP retained its previous total of 3 seats. Pahang, which had 3 new seats to bring a total of 14 seats, was firmly in the hands of BN. The BN also won all 22 seats in Selangor, ditto in Negri Sembilan, Malacca and Johor (which remains a strong BN state). In Sarawak, it managed to win 21 of 22 seats that were contested with DAP winning one seat and in Sabah BN captured all 15 of the 16 seats contested; the Sandakan seat (P186) was won by an independent candidate. In the Federal Territory, BN captured 9 of the 13 seats, while DAP managed to retain the 4 seats it won in 1999.

Apart from PAS, both Keadilan and DAP suffered significant losses in terms of votes seeing a decline in their share of the non-BN votes from 11.4 per cent in 1999 to 9 per cent in 2004 for Keadilan and 12.6 per cent in 1999 to 9.9 per cent in 2004 for DAP. PAS, DAP and Keadilan together polled 94.6 per cent of the votes in 2004 and 94.7 per cent in 1999 indicating independents as well as non-BN parties such as the Malaysian Democratic Party (MDP), Parti Reformasi Negeri (National Reformation Party, STAR), Party Rakyat Malaysia (Peoples Party of Malaysia, PRM), Barisan Jemaah Islamiyah SeMalaysia (Malaysian Islamic Front, BERJASA) are not popular with the electorate. There were 174 straight contests between BN and non-BN of which 106 were between UMNO and non-BN parties and the rest involving other BN component members and non-BN parties.

Ratnam and Milne (1970) point to the importance of location in the sense of constituency type for parliamentary elections. Employing categories such as rural, urban, quasi urban, and "others" and associating them with particular ethnic groups, they seek to show how the votes actually went in the 1969 parliamentary elections in West Malaysia. To be sure, the 10 May 1969 general elections has a special place in Malaysia's postcolonial history because three days after those elections Kuala Lumpur and its immediate vicinity became the scene of bloody racial riots. There is an obvious link between the Alliance's⁵ (precursor of the BN) miserable showing in the elections and the racial pogroms suggesting how germane winning two-thirds majority, which the Alliance failed to secure, is for political stability.

It is popularly contended that the Alliance's poor performance in the 1969 parliamentary elections was a direct result of a swing in non-Malay support for the opposition, in particular the DAP. However,

Ratnam and Milne (1970) whose study among other things was concerned with the trend in the “communal votes”, showed that the Alliance had lost more of the Malay votes than the non-Malay ones. Victory processions by DAP were seen as provocative, triggering violent retaliation from Malay nationalists. Bigots on both sides were not concerned with such precision or veracity; mistaken estimates were legitimized to bring the dogs of war out for a fight resulting in race riots.

The National Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1970 to ensure political stability and prevent further racial unrest by addressing Malay concerns for more equitable wealth distribution and restructuring society to eliminate the ethnically defined occupational structure. Malays were predominantly in subsistence agriculture while, by and large, the Chinese were concentrated in urban areas and the Indians in plantation estates.

But apart from this singular and isolated scar in 1969, the body politic has been in the main unblemished. That the BN has consistently won two-thirds majority in all parliamentary elections since its debut in 1974 would indicate that the NEP has contributed to political stability.

An examination of voting trends indicates the important role played by what Ratnam and Milne have described as the anti-communal vote for BN. Typically denoting a tactical voting strategy which finds a Malay voting for a non-Malay candidate from either Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) or Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) rather than a candidate from the DAP. The aim is to deny the latter, which articulates a Malaysian Malaysia ideology, victory as the DAP is largely perceived as serving non-Malay interests. A similar rationale informs non-Malay voters who would rather vote for a Malay candidate from UMNO than a candidate from the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), which most non-Malays perceive as serving a Malay-Islamic agenda. This voting tactic which predominates in the mixed constituencies where no single “communal group” has a high majority in the electorate, works to the advantage of BN, the Alliance’s successor, providing it with political mileage as it packages itself as an inter-communal party. In 1969, Ratnam and Milne noted that the non-Alliance parties have been able to make inroads in this category of the electorate too, suggesting that the Alliance cannot continue to depend on the electorate behaving so predictably. To be sure, anti-communal voting has continued to be important for BN, the Alliance’s successor. Ratnam and Milne add the caveat

one must therefore be careful not to misinterpret these findings. While it is clear that the MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association, an Alliance and subsequently BN member) is not very popular among the non-Malays it would be wrong to conclude that non-Malays in

any way prefer the UMNO. The point may also be made that, despite its poor showing the MCA ... even if it cannot attract sufficient support for its own candidates, its links with UMNO at least helps to make it more acceptable to Malays.⁶

However, Ratnam and Milne's employment of terms such as urban, rural, and quasi-urban to denote the categories of electorate are, like all previous studies of Malaysian politics, wanting. Scant attention is given to defining how the above concepts are used (Mauzy 1979, Mauzy 1983, Means 1991, Muzaffar 1982, Crouch 1980, Gomez 1996, Khong 1991, Ratnam and Milne 1967, Sankaran and Adnan 1988, Strauch 1978, Loh and Saravanamuttu 2003). To be sure, the status of constituencies change over time, depending on the rate of economic development of particular States in the federation, and the use of "others" as an ethnic category is ambiguous. Categories such as rural, urban, coastal, riverine, highland, inland, working class, middle class, elites, must be problematized and grappled with so that they may be employed meaningfully with a measure of precision. The best official categorizations in Malaysia are those employed by the Land Office for calculating quit rent. Using such categorizations however, would have an electoral constituency such as Gelugor in Penang Island being defined as rural when a significant proportion of the denizens are professional rich and middle class. This raises valid questions regarding the accuracy of terms employed and the issues that must be taken into account when defining constituencies as urban or rural.

Such simplistic dispensation however, is not confined to the use of categories but also the manner in which general inferences are made from voting patterns. Thus, for example Loh and Saravanamuttu (2002) in their partisan pro-*Reformasi* study of the 1999 elections made unqualified assertions such as rural voting patterns are more predictable than urban voting behaviour almost exclusively by looking at percentage changes in voting. Their hypothesis, premised on percentage changes without the rigors of statistical analysis, would have us accept subjective adjectives such as "high" and "low" to describe electoral support. What is considered a high or low percentage is at best ambiguous and debatable.

A cursory glance of Malaysia's Constitution would show the salience of ethnicity for politics. The two classes of citizens, the *bumiputera* and non-*bumiputera*, is a product of UMNO-led ethno-nationalism wherein the goal of ensuring Malay ethnic political dominance is central.⁷ Nevertheless, it should be noted that the affirmative action policy owes its roots to British attempts to offer moral rationale for colonization by protecting and safeguarding Malay customs and religion; it found expression in Malay land reservations and enhanced educational and

employment opportunities in the form of quotas. The postcolonial government's brief however deepened this policy through the NEP by expanding Malay corporate wealth ownership. It must be stated here that Malay laments over the pattern of wealth distribution ignores the fact that it was through the exploitation of Indian and Chinese labour in the rubber and tin industries respectively that that wealth was created. The NEP in essence cemented the discriminatory British policies vis à vis the Indians and Chinese in Malaysia.

Thus, what underpins and underwrites the delineation of electoral boundaries and constituencies are ethnic considerations, against which background the electorate is categorized in the following section.

Locality and Ethnic Demographics

To analyse BN's performance in the parliamentary elections, constituencies have been categorized based on the *bumiputera* percentage of the electorate: (a) *bumiputera* minority constituencies where *bumiputera* constitute less than 30 per cent of the electorate, (b) *bumiputera* high majority constituencies where they constitute 60 per cent and above but below 80 per cent, (c) *bumiputera* absolute majority constituencies where they constitute more than 80 per cent of the electorate and, (d) the mixed constituencies where the *bumiputera* electorate constitute between 30–59 per cent. It is assumed that the make up of mixed constituencies poses challenges to a political party to win solely on the votes of a single ethnic group. Thus, even in the top one-third band of this category i.e. where *bumiputera* constitute 50–59 per cent of the electorate, even a ten per cent split in *bumiputera* votes would imply that a political party seeking to win must secure enough non-*bumiputera* votes. This scenario does not obtain in *bumiputera* majority or *bumiputera* minority categories where a party can win purely on the support of a single ethnic group. Table 3 shows the ethnic breakdown of the electorate in 1999 and 2004 respectively, while Tables 4 and 5 show the different categories of electorate, their percentage share of seats and votes garnered in 1999 and 2004 respectively.

In 1999, a total of 192 parliamentary seats were up for grabs. This precludes the one seat won by BN uncontested. Fifty-eight of the contested seats were in mixed constituencies, 115 in the *bumiputera* majority range of which 70 were in the *bumiputera* absolute majority category while 45 were in the high majority category, and 19 seats where non-*bumiputera* are in the majority. The mixed seats accounted for 30.2 per cent of the total number of seats, *bumiputera* majority constituencies 60 per cent, and non-*bumiputera* majority constituencies 10 per cent.

TABLE 3
Ethnic Composition of the Electorate 1999 and 2004

<i>Ethnic Breakdown</i>	<i>Overall Electorate 1999</i>	<i>Percentage Share</i>	<i>Overall Electorate 2004</i>	<i>Percentage Share</i>
Bumiputera	5679231.4	59	5703040.9	58
Chinese	3110459.72	33	3213679.278	33
Indians	692693.9	7	741796.12	8
Others	85351.007	1	95314.286	1
Total Electorate	9567736		9753830.4	
Total Seats	192		202	

SOURCE: *New Straits Times*, 19 March 2004, 22 March 2004, 23 March 2004; *Utusan Malaysia*, 22 March 2004; *Berita Harian*, 22 March 2004; *The Star*, 22 March 2004. The data is sourced from the Election Commission of Malaysia.

TABLE 4
Categories of the electorate, their percentage share
of the seats in 1999 and 2004
(figures in parenthesis represent percentage share)

% of bumiputera	1999			2004		
	<i>BN</i>	<i>Non-BN</i>	<i>Total/%</i>	<i>BN</i>	<i>Non-BN</i>	<i>Total/%</i>
Minority <30%	11	8	19 (9.89)	10	12	22 (10.89)
Mixed 30–59%	56	2	58 (30.2)	67	1	68 (33.66)
Majority 60–79%	38	7	45 (23.43)	49	1	50 (24.75)
Absolute M 80+%	42	28	70 (36.46)	55	7	62 (30.69)
TOTAL	147	45	192	181	21	202

SOURCE: *New Straits Times*, 19 March 2004, 22 March 2004, 23 March 2004; *Utusan Malaysia*, 22 March 2004; *Berita Harian*, 22 March 2004; *The Star*, 22 March 2004. The data is sourced from the Election Commission of Malaysia.

The BN won 56 or 96.5 per cent of seats contested in mixed categories. Its share of seats won in the two categories of *bumiputera* majority constituencies was 69.6 per cent or 80 seats — 42 in *bumiputera* absolute majority areas and 38 in the 60–79 per cent range. In the *bumiputera* minority constituencies the BN captured 11 seats or 58 per cent of the contested seats. In terms of the total 147 seats won by the BN: 38.1 per cent were from mixed constituencies, 54.4 per cent from *bumiputera* majority constituencies, and 7.5 per cent from *bumiputera* minority constituencies.

TABLE 5
Categories of the electorate and votes garnered in 1999 and 2004
 (figures in parenthesis represent percentage share)

% of bumiputera	1999			2004		
	BN	Non-BN	Total/%	BN	Non-BN	Total/%
Minority <30%	430,612(50.74)	417,955(49.25)	848,567	451,165(50.43)	443,339(49.56)	894,504
30–59%	1,507,813(60.12)	999,932(39.87)	2,507,745	1,865,557(69.64)	812,937(30.35)	2,678,494
Majority 60–79%	876,553(58.62)	618,583(41.37)	1,495,136	1,067,180(67.73)	508,241(32.26)	1,575,421
Absolute M 80+%	946,671(52.93)	841,683(47.06)	1,788,354	1,050,301(58.75)	737,272(41.24)	1,787,573
TOTAL	3,761,649	2,878,153	6,639,802	4,462,684	2,473,308	6,935,992

SOURCE: *New Straits Times*, 19 March 2004, 22 March 2004, 23 March 2004; *Utusan Malaysia*, 22 March 2004; *Berita Harian*, 22 March 2004; *The Star*, 22 March 2004. The data is sourced from the Election Commission of Malaysia.

The BA won 2 or 3.4 per cent of seats in the mixed constituencies. In the *bumiputera* majority category, BA's share was 30.4 per cent or 35 seats, 28 seats in the *bumiputera* absolute majority category and 7 in the 60–70 per cent range. In the *bumiputera* minority category BA won 8 seats or 42 per cent. In terms of the total 45 seats won by BA: 9 per cent were in mixed constituencies, 78 per cent in *bumiputera* majority constituencies, and 18 per cent in non-*bumiputera* majority constituencies.

Hence, it is clear that the major challenge to BN comes from *bumiputera* and non-*bumiputera* majority constituencies with BA being able to capture in the region of 32 per cent, close to a third of seats in these categories. While doing well in these constituencies is vital, it is the performance of the BN in mixed constituencies where the non-BN challenge is weakest that helps the former win such a large majority. In this category of electorate anti-communal voting is definitely working to undermine BA, in particular PAS and DAP. And arguably, it is the BN's performance in this category of electorate which enabled it to defeat BA in what was perhaps Malaysia's most challenging election.

In the 2004 parliamentary elections DAP pulled out of BA. The DAP elite and their constituency were not impressed with PAS's push for *hudud* law, the Islamic penal code, in Kelantan and Terengganu after its 1999 victory. There was also a 4 per cent increase in the electorate and if taking this fact into consideration, there was an increase in the total number of seats up for grabs to 202. This precludes the 17 seats BN won uncontested. Sixty-two or 30.7 per cent of the total number of seats were in the *bumiputera* absolute majority category, 50 in the *bumiputera* high majority category, and 22 seats or 10.9 per cent in the *bumiputera* minority category. Mixed constituencies accounted for 68 seats or 33.6 per cent. Table 3 shows the different categories of the electorate and the share of seats held by the BN and non-BN in 1999 and 2004.

BN captured 67 seats or 98.5 per cent of seats contested in mixed constituencies. It won 104 seats or 93 per cent in the *bumiputera* majority constituencies of which 55 seats or 49 per cent were in *bumiputera* absolute majority constituencies and 43.7 per cent where *bumiputera* were in the 60–79 per cent range. In the *bumiputera* minority category BN won 10 seats or 45.4 per cent. In terms of the total 181 seats won, mixed constituencies accounted for 37 per cent, *bumiputera* majority 57.4 per cent and *bumiputera* minority 5.5 per cent.

The DAP won one seat or 1.5 per cent of seats contested in mixed constituencies. BA's share in *bumiputera* majority constituencies was 8 seats or 7.1 per cent of total seats in this category whereby its share in *bumiputera* absolute majority constituencies was 7 seats or 6.2 per cent and one seat or 0.9 per cent in the *bumiputera* high majority category. In

the *bumiputera* minority category DAP won 12 seats or 54.5 per cent of seats contested. In terms of the total 21 seats won by non-BN (9 by DAP and 12 by BA): 4.8 per cent came from the mixed constituencies, 38.1 per cent from *bumiputera* majority constituencies and 57.1 per cent from *bumiputera* minority constituencies.

A comparison of the percentage change in popular votes garnered by BN in 2004 with 1999 in the different categories of electorate indicates the following: a decrease of 0.31 per cent in the *bumiputera* minority category, an increase of 9.5 per cent in the mixed category, an increase of 9.1 per cent in the *bumiputera* high majority range, and an increase of 5.8 per cent in the absolute majority category. In the case of mixed constituencies BN domination has been almost impenetrable — with the party winning 96.5 per cent of seats contested in 1999 and 98.5 per cent of seats contested in 2004. Hence, mixed constituencies were undoubtedly critical for BN in securing two-thirds majority in both 1999 and 2004.

Abdullah Badawi's "squeaky clean" image and the addition of 26 new seats in the 2004 polls following boundary adjustments worked to boost BN's electoral fortunes. The 26 seats were carved mainly out of existing constituencies after ostensibly taking into account changing demographics. It was a complex and shrouded procedure involving moving electorates between constituencies, causing chagrin and confusion even among Election Commission staff.⁸

Of the 26 new constituencies in 2004, 5 were in the *bumiputera* absolute majority category, 6 where *bumiputera* are in 60–79 per cent range, 10 in mixed constituencies, and 5 in the *bumiputera* minority category. The BN won 21 of these new constituencies: 9 of the 10 new seats in mixed constituencies, all 5 new seats in *bumiputera* absolute majority constituencies and all 6 where *bumiputera* are in the 60–79 per cent range. In *bumiputera* minority constituencies BN won only one of the 5 new seats.

In 1999, BN won 147 of 192 contested seats and 181 of 202 contested seats in 2004. Subtracting the 21 seats the BN won in the new constituencies in 2004 would indicate the spearheading of the election campaign by Badawi as the new Prime Minister had only increased BN's share of seats by 13 — most of which were in the *bumiputera* majority category. If the foregoing points to how boundary adjustments helped increase the BN's majority they also show how the BN's electoral performance differed in different categories of the electorate.

There were weaknesses within the BA too in 2004 which worked to the BN's electoral advantage. The opposition coalition was fragile when DAP decided to pull out in 2001. This development was

complicated by the death of Fadzil Noor, the then PAS president and the detention of Nik Adli (the son of Kelantan Menteri Besar, Nik Aziz) under the Internal Security Act for having undergone training in Afghanistan and for having connections with militant Islamic groups. Mahathir for the first time managed to establish a link between radical Islam and PAS — something that he had been unable to do before. Badawi's accent on a tolerant version of Islam and symbolic gestures like leading the parliamentary prayer session for the late Fadzil Noor and the government's firm actions against Kumpulan Militan Mujahideen (Militant Mujahideen Group) helped to boost BN's popularity.

The above analysis allows four hypotheses on the Malaysian parliamentary elections: one, locality in terms of the ethnic composition of the electorate having a significant bearing on elections; two, the re-drawing of electoral boundaries has worked to BN's advantage; three, the dependability of the mixed constituencies and the anti-communal voting employed there works overwhelmingly in BN's favour; and four, the first-past-the-post system as a mechanism helps BN as it causes votes by losing parties to be wasted since the system operates on a winner-takes-all basis.

Temporality

Estimating the anti-communal votes in mixed constituencies is difficult as it is not possible to know how an individual actually voted and, short of a more detailed study based on voting behaviour in individual polling booths in a particular constituency, the best that can be done is to calculate the odds. Dividing the total votes won by BN in 2004 which was 1,865,557 with the votes won by non-BN as a whole, which was 812,937 in the mixed category an odds of voting BN of 2.3 times can be discerned. This contrasts with the odds of voting BN in *bumiputera* minority constituencies which was 1.01 times, obtained by dividing the total votes won by the BN i.e. 451,165 with the total votes won by the non-BN i.e. 443,339. Combining *bumiputera* majority constituencies with constituencies where *bumiputera* are in the minority and designating them as non-mixed constituencies (i.e. *bumiputera* majority and *bumiputera* minority) the ratio of votes in mixed to non-mixed constituencies expressed in terms of the odds of voting BN in 2004 was 1.5 times higher. The odds-ratio of mixed to non-mixed constituencies obtained by dividing the odds of voting BN in mixed constituencies (i.e. 2.3) by the odds in non-mixed constituencies (i.e. 1.5) was 1.5 times, indicating the choice for BN is one and a half times higher in a mixed category than non-mixed category. When the data for 2004 and

1999 are compared for mixed constituencies a voting trend in favour of BN i.e. 1.5 times was discerned for 2004 indicating that the odds had gone up. In 1999 the odds in favour of BN in a mixed constituency was 1.26 times.

To measure the extent to which choice of party might differ across categories of electorate and if the four-and-half year hiatus between elections (i.e. temporality) affects voter decision, the multinomial logits saturated model was developed and applied to 1999 and 2004 election data.⁹ This model will help to measure voting trends in 2004 relative to 1999 by calculating probabilities, odds, and the odds-ratio of voting BN in different categories of electorate. The saturated model had to be applied whence given its zero degrees of freedom would result in a perfect fit between model and data. Thus, odds can be expressed in the form of a log-linear equation

$$\ln (m_{ij}) = \alpha_i + \beta_j + \gamma_{ij} \dots\dots(1)$$

where m_{ij} indicate say the expected number of votes based on $i = 1$ or 2 (1 representing mixed constituencies and 2, non-mixed constituencies), $j = 1$ or 2 (1 representing the vote for BN and 2, non-BN). The log of the odds m_{ij} are set equal to parameters: α_i , the main effect of votes cast by constituency type and β_j , the main effect of choice of party during voting and γ_{ij} , the interaction effect between constituency votes and party choice.

The log-odds may thus be represented by logit

$$L = \ln (m_{i1} / m_{i2}) = (\alpha_i + \beta_j + \gamma_{i1}) - (\alpha_i + \beta_j + \gamma_{i2}) = (\beta_1 - \beta_2) + (\gamma_{i1} - \gamma_{i2}) \dots\dots(2)$$

which expresses the difference in voting outcome, i.e., β_j $j=1,2$ whether BN or opposition on the basis of different in constituency types γ_{ij} $i = 1,2$, whether mixed or non-mixed. It is possible to interpret the logit in terms of probabilities by the transformation:

$$p_{ij} = 1 / (1+e^{-L}) \text{ or in terms of odds-ratio } e^L \dots\dots(3)$$

Applying the model to the data set found in Table 5 logits, probabilities, odds and odds ratio obtained are given in Tables 6 to 8.

The above tables seek to show contrasting scenarios by comparing mixed constituencies with *bumiputera* majority constituencies, *bumiputera* absolute majority constituencies and *bumiputera* minority constituencies. The probabilities, odds and odds-ratios obtained are derived from equation (3).

It can be observed that the probability of a voter in a mixed constituency voting BN in 2004 was 69.6 per cent and 60.1 per cent in 1999. In terms of odds, the voter in a mixed constituency indicated 2.3 to 1 odds of voting BN in 2004 and 1.5 to 1 odds in 1999. These

TABLE 6
Logits, probabilities, odds and odds-ratios mixed against *bumiputera* majority and *bumiputera* minority category voting for BN in 1999 and 2004

<i>Logits</i>	2004	1999
Mixed constituencies	0.8306	0.4107
Majority and minority	0.4193	0.1823
<i>Probabilities</i>	2004	1999
Mixed constituencies	0.6965	0.6013
Majority and minority	0.6033	0.5454
<i>Odds</i>	2004	1999
Mixed constituencies	2.29	1.51
Majority and minority	1.52	1.20
<i>Odds-Ratio</i>	1.51	1.26

Odds-ratio 2004 to 1999 mixed=1.52; Majority and minority=1.27

TABLE 7
Logits, probabilities, odds and odds-ratios, *bumiputera* minority against *bumiputera* majority and mixed category voting BN in 1999 and 2004

<i>Logits</i>	2004	1999
Minority constituencies	0.0174	0.0298
Majority and mixed	0.66	0.303
<i>Probabilities</i>	2004	1999
Minority constituencies	0.5043	0.5074
Majority and mixed	0.6593	0.5752
<i>Odds</i>	2004	1999
Minority constituencies	1.02	1.03
Majority and mixed	1.93	1.35
<i>Odds-Ratio</i>	0.53	0.76

Odds-ratio 2004 to 1999 Minority=0.99; Majority and mixed=1.43

numbers are higher than in *bumiputera* majority or *bumiputera* minority constituencies, which recorded a combined probability of voting BN of 60.3 per cent in 2004 and 54.5 per cent in 1999. To compare the relative performance between constituencies in the mixed category and those in the non-mixed categories, odds-ratios were

TABLE 8
Logits, probabilities, odds and odds-ratios comparing
***bumiputera* majority against *bumiputera* minority and**
mixed category voting BN in 1999 and 2004

<i>Logits</i>	2004	1999
Minority constituencies	0.5307	0.222
Majority and mixed	0.612	0.3127
 <i>Probabilities</i>	 2004	 1999
Minority constituencies	0.6296	0.5553
Majority and mixed	0.6484	0.5775
 <i>Odds</i>	 2004	 1999
Minority constituencies	1.70	1.25
Majority and mixed	1.84	1.37
 <i>Odds-Ratio</i>	 0.92	 0.91
Odds-ratio 2004 to 1999 Majority=1.36; Minority and mixed=1.35		

calculated. In 2004, the odds-ratio was 1.5 to 1 for mixed constituencies over non-mixed constituencies in favour of BN. However, the likelihood of the voter voting for the BN in 1999 indicated an odds ratio of 1.2. This suggests that there were much better odds in favour of the BN in 2004 compared to 1999 in both types of constituencies, particularly in mixed constituencies.

The above voting behaviour contrasts with the trend in *bumiputera* minority constituencies where the probability of voting BN was 50.4 per cent in 2004 and 50.7 per cent in 1999. Expressed as odds, the numbers are 1.0 to 1 in 2004 and 1.0 to 1 in 1999 indicating that, in straight contests between BN and Keadilan and between BN and PAS, and BN and DAP, the vote could go either way. In calculating the odds-ratios between *bumiputera* minority constituencies and the non-mixed constituencies, the figure 0.5 to 1 and 0.8 to 1 for 2004 and 1999 were obtained indicating a general underperformance by BN in both years. The odds-ratios comparing 2004 and 1999 turned out to be 0.99 to 1 in *bumiputera* minority constituencies and 1.4 to 1 in mixed and *bumiputera* majority constituencies combined. These ratios show a marginal decline in BN's performance in the two elections in *bumiputera* minority constituencies but a much better outcome among

the mixed and *bumiputera* majority constituencies combined over the two elections.

The situation in *bumiputera* majority constituencies (both high and absolute majority categories) indicated a stark increase in voting BN in 2004 where the probability was 63 per cent contrasting with the much lower 55.5 per cent in 1999. Expressed in terms of odds they were thus 1.7 to 1 in 2004 and 1.25 to 1 in 1999. To gauge how the odds in *bumiputera* majority constituencies fared relative to mixed and *bumiputera* minority constituencies combined, the weaker odds of 0.92 in 2004 and 0.91 in 1999 indicates the BN had performed better albeit marginally in both elections in the *bumiputera* majority category.

The foregoing analysis shows the BN performing much better in mixed constituencies and slightly better in *bumiputera* majority constituencies, thus, confirming the importance of the mixed constituencies for BN's victory. The outcome was unpredictable in the *bumiputera* minority category where probabilities of voting BN in both elections were 50 per cent. The hiatus between the elections of 1999 and 2004 shows the BN performing generally better, the exception being in *bumiputera* minority areas where the odds ratio in favour of the BN had fallen marginally.

The 1999 elections were contested in an atmosphere where the government was facing some of its most serious political setbacks. Mahathir's sacking of, and subsequent arrest and imprisonment of the then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Anwar Ibrahim in 1997 had helped ignite the *reformasi* (reformation) movement in the country. Drawing inspiration from the *reformasi* campaign in Indonesia, it likewise pressed for greater democratization at home.

Malaysia had begun to make tentative steps toward economic recovery after being badly hit by the 1997 Asian financial crisis triggered by the devaluation of the Thai baht. The Anwar corruption and sodomy trials, which began in 1998, were seen by many as making a mockery of the judiciary and smacking of executive interference in the judicial process. Against this backdrop, it was not surprising that non-BN — in particular the BA — was bullish of its chances in the parliamentary elections as was indeed confirmed by the election results.

The elections — though won by BN — was an endorsement (if only of sorts) of BA's *reformasi* campaign which managed to secure 43.3 per cent of the popular votes. The BN on the other hand saw its share decline to 56.6 per cent. The BA was particularly successful in capturing a significant proportion of the ethnic votes cast in *bumiputera* (particularly Malay) majority constituencies and *bumiputera* minority constituencies. The principal gainers were PAS and DAP while

Keadilan led by the wife of the imprisoned Anwar made an impressive first showing, winning 11.4 per cent of the popular votes.

That BN was able to, in spite of the formidable challenge posed by the opposition, win two-thirds of seats in parliament stemmed from the crucial role played by voters in mixed constituencies.

If in 1999 the *reformasi* movement had mounted a major challenge to the BN, that movement's impact appears to have been muted in 2004. Factors such as adverse effects of globalization on jobs, terrorist threats, the ongoing separatist movement in southern Thailand which did much damage to properties and loss of lives, the Bali bombing in October 2002 and consequent loss of tourism to Malaysia as well as the counterterrorism campaign against the Al-Qaeda linked Jemaah Islamiyah undoubtedly played a role in attracting support for BN, helping to recoup some of the ethnic vote. But it was in *bumiputera* majority and *bumiputera* minority constituencies that BN faced stiffer contest from non-BN ethnic-based parties — particularly from PAS. The departure of Mahathir from the political scene and subsequent appointment of Badawi as his successor appears to have had a positive effect on UMNO unity, sealing, if only temporarily, the gaping chasm created by factionalism. Mahathir's leadership had been blighted by bitter in-fighting, manifesting in UMNO's poor showing in the 1999 elections.

Within BN, Mahathir's orchestration of the departure of Ling Liong Sik as president of the MCA, a senior member of the coalition, allowing a younger group of leaders to take over the helm, helped contain elite factionalism. This intervention together with the push to introduce English as the medium of instruction in teaching maths and science in primary and secondary schools was warmly received by Chinese and Indian sections of the electorate, notwithstanding initial reservations of Dong Zhiong, the Chinese education lobby. The impact of the above issues among Malay and Chinese voters has boosted BN's popularity. In addition, the deficit spending strategy adopted by Mahathir's administration in the wake of the 1997 slump and higher petroleum output allowed the government to continue to stimulate economic growth, contributing to an economic turnaround. The government went to the polls with the image of a successful crisis manager appeasing concerns, principally among Malays, over the adverse impact of globalization on socio-economic advancement.

The BN's impressive gains in mixed constituencies in 2004 through the strong anti-communal vote were crucial in ensuring it secured two-thirds majority in parliament. The implications of this once again affirms the salience of mixed constituencies for BN in future elections. The fact that BN has done well in *bumiputera* majority constituencies

indicates that it will now have to deliver the economic goods to the constituents. Badawi's pre- and post-election focus on rural development appears to be geared to this end since any shortcomings in this regard can be expected to have repercussions for BN's support in future elections.

Conclusion

BN has won two-thirds majority in all parliamentary elections since its debut in the 1974 general election. If the 1999 parliamentary elections presented a major challenge to BN supremacy, the results of 2004 would indicate that the euphoria surrounding the *Reformasi* movement and struggle for greater democracy and social justice has fizzled out.

The overall increase in the total number of contested parliamentary seats from 193 in 1999 to 219 in 2004, the majority of which were in mixed constituencies, worked to BN's advantage. Overall, the BN won 90.4 per cent or 198 seats in 2004 while the non-BN share dropped to 21 seats, representing a decrease of 46.6 per cent from the 45 seats it controlled before parliament was dissolved.

The ruling coalition managed to do better in *bumiputera* majority constituencies while its performance in *bumiputera* minority constituencies was lacklustre, indicating that ethnic-based concerns continue to inform the electorate. In mixed constituencies anti-communal voting greatly helped BN. To be sure, the elections confirmed that locality, temporality (the intervening period between elections), the creation of new constituencies and first-past-the-post electoral system in Malaysia have in the main worked to BN's advantage to secure a comfortable two-thirds majority. The BN's 2004 electoral victory can also be interpreted as a form of endorsement of the UMNO-led coalition government's socio-economic policies to promote stability and pluralism in multi-ethnic Malaysia.

NOTES

- 1 All component parties in BN see themselves as representing particular ethnic groups. Parties such as the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) and Gerakan tend to see themselves as multiethnic despite the fact that they tend overwhelmingly to contest in non-Malay constituencies and party membership is almost exclusively monoethnic, i.e. from the non-*bumiputera*. The BN presently is composed of 15 political parties. Although UMNO (United Malays National Organization) is the leading member of the National Front, consent from all component members is required on issues pertaining to new membership.
- 2 See *the Star*, 11 March 2004.

- 3 Non-BN has two components: (i) the loose election alliance called BA which in 1999 consisted of DAP, KeADILan, PAS and PRM; in 2004 DAP pulled out of BA, while Keadilan and PRM were merged to become Parti Keadilan Rakyat Malaysia; and (ii) other political parties of which six contested in the 2004 elections. Malaysian election laws require a minimum of seven political parties for registration as a coalition. Taking BN as a single political party, a total of 10 political parties (including independents) contested in the 2004 parliamentary elections. In 1999, 14 political parties were members of BN; the Sabah-based PBS (Party Bersatu Sabah, Sabah United Party) although a member of BN from 1986 to 1990, left the national coalition to be readmitted in 2003. Taking BN as a single political party, a total of 11 political parties (including independents) contested in the 1999 parliamentary elections.
- 4 These four parties are major components of non-BN. PAS' ideology is to create a theocratic state along the lines of Iran. The party until recently barred women from participating in politics and even holding high public posts, viewing it as encouraging inter-sexual competitiveness and going against the grain. Keadilan, which was formed in 1998 after the sacking of former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, is led by his wife Dr Wan Azizah. Its political aims remain fuzzy but generally centre on a multiracial platform promoting tolerance, justice, greater accountability and transparency in governance. PRM is led by a former academic Dr Syed Husin Ali and fights for social democracy. DAP is multiracial although Chinese-dominated and fights on a platform of equality, abolishing ethnic politics and ethnic discrimination to create a "Malaysia for Malaysians". Notwithstanding this, the BA is a loose alliance, component members compete with each other in the polls thereby splitting non-Front votes.
- 5 The Alliance, formed in 1955, has its roots in pre-independence Malaysia and is a coalition of ethnic-based parties such as the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) which became the Malaysian Chinese Association after the formation of Malaysia; the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), which became the Malaysian Indian Congress, and the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), which retains its name despite having non-Malay indigenous peoples from the East Malaysian state of Sabah among its membership.
- 6 Ratnam and Milne, 1970, p. 221.
- 7 The term *bumiputera* refers to the Malays, the tribal groups in peninsular Malaysia, and the indigenous groups of Sabah and Sarawak. Under the country's Federal Constitution the *bumiputera* are singled out in terms of privileged access to jobs in the public sector, scholarships, and business licences. The non-*bumiputera* who are denied such privileges comprise ethnic Indians, ethnic Chinese, and the "others" precluded from the two categories such as Sri Lankans, Eurasians, etc. See Article 153 and Article 161a of the Malaysia Federal Constitution in Legal Research Board, *Federal Constitution* (Kuala Lumpur: International Law Book Services, 1995).
- 8 See press reports, the *New Straits Times*, 23 March 2004 and 24 March 2004 on complaints made by the electorate on not being able to vote in assigned polling centres as well as the responses of Election Commission officials.
- 9 This model was developed with the assistance of Chan Huan Chiang and Long Jet Heng from the Centre for Policy Research. The application of this model to election data in Malaysia is in accordance with the fact that voters are not randomly distributed, but rather different categories of electorate indicate relative differences in ethnic composition as seen in Table 4. This model allows too for a more sophisticated application of the election data, rather than inferences based on simple calculations of percentage changes.

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