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The Political System in Malaysia

Malaysia (known as Malaya until 1963) is a constitutional monarchy, with the ‘Yang DiPertuan Agong’ (king) as its head of state. The king, selected from among the nine Malay rulers (or sultans) to serve a five-year term, is obliged to act in accordance with government advice. The nine Malay sultans collectively form part of a unique ‘chamber’, the Conference of Rulers, whose members also comprise the four other non-hereditary heads of state, known as ‘Yang DiPertuan Negeri’ (governors), who are appointed by the federal government.¹

Although power under Malaysia’s system of federalism is divided constitutionally between a central government and the 13 state governments, the distribution of power overwhelmingly favours the federal government.² Nevertheless, the 13 Malaysian states have managed to retain considerable powers, and the principle of constitutional equality – with regard to the constitutional status of these states in their relations with one another and to the central government – is emphasized. The sultans of the Malay states have also largely retained their pre-Independence positions, the main exception being that they generally can no longer act contrary to the advice of the state’s Executive Council. The sultans, however, possess discretionary powers on matters pertaining to Malay culture and tradition. Each of the sultans is the head of Islam in their own state. The ‘Yang DiPertuan Negeri’ of the non-royal states are federally appointed for four years and also act on the advice of the representative state governments (Mohammed Suffian et al., 1979).

Six years after Malaya attained independence from the British in 1957, Singapore and the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak (all of which share a history of colonization with the 11 states in the peninsula) were incorporated into the federation to form the Federation of Malaysia in September, 1963.³ The basic organizational core of the Federation of Malaya was retained, but to entice and accommodate the new states of Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak into the federation, amendments were instituted which allowed the three states more autonomy, rights and powers in comparison to the states in Peninsular Malaysia. Despite these concessions, Singapore eventually left the federation to become an independent state in August 1965.⁴

The proposal for a federation – as distinct from a unitary state – of Malaysia was made so that the indigenous political systems and territorial diversity of the various states could somehow be assimilated into a common whole.⁵ Each of these states had dissimilar political and administrative traditions, differing patterns of economic organization and activities, as well as distinct social, cultural and communal characteristic developments. For example, the sultan of each peninsular state – with the exception of Penang and Malacca which are ruled by a ‘Yang DiPertuan Negeri’ – remains to this day the symbol of authority, even if he is not always the focus of loyalty in his state. Thus, the federal system has allowed for the preservation of the nominal authority of the Malay sultans.

Malaysia’s bicameral parliament consists of a *Dewan Negara* (senate) comprising 69 senators and a *Dewan Rakyat* (house of representatives) of 192 parliamentarians. Election of

members to the *Dewan Rakyat*, from territorially delimited constituencies through the single-member plurality system, is required to be held by universal adult franchise at intervals no longer than five years from the date on which parliament was first convened. Failure to do so results in the dissolution of parliament. In the *Dewan Negara*, the 69 appointed members – who are allowed to serve a maximum of two terms, each for three years – include two representatives from each state, appointed by the state legislatures, while the Federal Territories of Labuan and Kuala Lumpur have one and two representatives respectively; the remaining 40 senators are appointed by the king. This provision was made in the constitution to protect the interests of the states in the federal parliament. The senate also has a component made up of members nominated by the federal government to serve the interests of particular groups or sectors, including the professions, commerce, industry and agriculture, and to represent minorities. Although it was originally intended that the number of senators appointed by the states would outnumber the federal government's appointees, the latter currently dominate the *Dewan Negara*; this has had the effect of impairing the federal element in the system. Each state also has a unicameral State Legislative Assembly whose members are elected in a similar manner as parliamentarians (Shafruddin, 1987; Sothi, 1993).

The government is formed by that party or coalition of parties whose individual members are able to command a majority in the *Dewan Rakyat* – the constitution, like that of most other countries, is silent on the subject of political parties. The prime minister is traditionally the leader of the party or coalition of parties which secures the most seats in parliament. The cabinet, headed by the prime minister, consists only of members of both houses of the legislature and is collectively responsible to parliament. Since the prime minister is to be selected from among the elected members of the legislature, this weakens the system of checks and balances envisaged in the constitution since the executive branch is hardly accountable to parliament. The prime minister is traditionally also the president of the United Malays' National Organization (UMNO), the leading component party member in the ruling coalition, the Barisan Nasional (National Front), which comprises about a dozen, mostly ethnically-based, parties. The Barisan Nasional, and its predecessor, the tripartite Alliance coalition, has consistently maintained control over the government since elections were first held in 1955.

Political parties come under the purview of the Societies Act and applications to form a party have to be submitted to the Registrar of Societies, who has discretionary powers to accept or reject an application or to request various changes in its structure (including the proposed name of a party and articles in its constitution) before its registration is permitted. The Registry of Societies is a bureaucratic body under the ambit of the Ministry of Home Affairs. One of the most important and powerful cabinet portfolios, which is normally held by a senior member of UMNO, usually its president or deputy president, its impartiality in registering political parties and dealing with issues pertaining to them has been questioned. However, since political parties are governed by the same regulations that oversee all societies in the country, including welfare, social, public interests and non-governmental organizations, there are few stringent requirements regulating the registration and functioning of a political party. The requirements for the disclosure of sources of party funding, for instance, are minimal. Thus, since political parties are not funded from the government budget and in view of the unequal distribution of wealth and concentration of political power in Malaysia, certain parties have had or continue to have greater access to funds, thereby increasing their chances of influencing the electorate vote (see Gomez, 1996b).

Much of the character and constitution of Malaysian political parties are influenced by

the multi-ethnic feature of its population. Of Malaysia's almost 20 million people in 1996, *Bumiputeras*,⁶ or the indigenous, accounted for 61 per cent, while the Chinese constituted about 30 per cent and the Indians eight per cent; the remaining one per cent was made up of other minor ethnic groups.⁷ One outcome of the multi-ethnic constitution of Malaysian society has been the establishment of political parties which are primarily ethnically-based. For instance, even though the governing Barisan Nasional is a multiracial, multiparty coalition, the three senior members of the coalition are ethnically-based parties – the Malay-based UMNO, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). UMNO, however, has been the dominant political party in Malaysia through the hegemony of the Barisan Nasional (and the Alliance, which also comprised the MCA and the MIC). The ethnic factor, likewise, shapes opposition politics. When the multiracial Gagasan Rakyat (People's Movement) coalition was created in 1990, its principal members included the predominantly Chinese Democratic Action Party (DAP), the Indian-based All-Malaysia Indian Progressive Front (IPF) and the Malay-based Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (Spirit of '46 Malay Party), which led the organization.

The third arm of the government, the judiciary, is constitutionally vested with the power to ensure an adequate division of powers and to sustain a system of checks and balances, particularly with regard to the executive branch, and to ensure that the political liberties and rights of members of society are protected. The constitution also tries to ensure the independence of the judiciary by securing the tenure and remuneration of its members. Although all senior judicial appointments are made by the king (who, however, exercises no discretion in judicial matters) such appointments are made based on the recommendation and advice of the cabinet; similarly, the king is also vested with the authority to remove a judge from office (Mohammed Suffian et al., 1979; Lee, 1995).

The Main Political Parties

Ruling Coalition: From Alliance to Barisan Nasional

The bonding of UMNO, MCA, and MIC under the Alliance was linked directly to the British colonial government's development of the Malayan economy. Despite the formation of a plural society in Malaya with the mass migration of Chinese and Indians into the country, there had been very little integration, and only limited interaction, among the ethnic communities. The fact that the majority of the Chinese were mainly involved in the urban-based tin mines, the Indians cloistered in self-contained semi-rural plantations, and the Malays serving as, and largely remaining, peasants in rural areas, meant that the communities were essentially isolated from each other through their economic specialization. There was also no felt need for integration among the migrant population since the general perception of many of the Chinese and Indians was that their stay in Malaya was only temporary. Since they were to return 'home' to China or India after accumulating enough savings, they naturally did not conceive of Malaya as their new homeland. Since the migrant communities viewed Malaya as a transitional land, they were largely indifferent to local politics.

In 1946, when the British returned to reclaim control over Malaya following the surrender of the Japanese in World War II, they proposed a unitary Malayan Union scheme which involved placing under one government all the nine Malay states and the Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca; Singapore, the other remaining Straits Settlement, was to be left out of the Union. The Malays, however, were vehemently opposed to the idea of the Union, renouncing it as a British ploy to abolish the Malay Sultanate. The Malays also

objected to the Union's objective of providing citizenship with equal political rights to all Malaysians, irrespective of race, as long as they professed loyalty to and regarded Malaya as their home (Funston, 1980).

In May 1946, an assortment of Malay clubs, associations, and political organizations merged to form UMNO to oppose the Union. Spearheaded by Malay aristocrats and by its effective galvanizing of the indigenous Malay political structure – from the Malay rulers down to the village headman – UMNO managed to marshal widespread Malay opposition to the Union (Funston, 1980). UMNO's key role in contesting the Malayan Union made the party the leading political force in Malaya, particularly in rural areas. Even now, in the 1990s, despite a membership totalling almost 2.4 million, making the mass-based UMNO the largest local political party, its bastion of support still remains the rural Malays.

Although the British had collaborated with the predominantly Chinese-based Malayan Communist Party (MCP) during the war – the party had gained a reputation among Malaysians for its role in opposing the Japanese during that time – they were fearful of the growing impact of the party and the influence of other 'left-leaning' organizations on the Chinese. As tension mounted between the British and the MCP and as a State of Emergency was declared over the entire country in 1948, the need for an alternative Chinese party that was conservative yet pliant to British interests had now become imperative.⁸ This need paralleled British hesitation to negotiate independence with a single, communally-based party such as UMNO. To initiate the formation of such an alternative Chinese party, the British turned to leading Chinese businessmen who, like them, would have vast interests in the economy to protect after independence was gained. Thus, it was hardly surprising when Tan Cheng Lock, a wealthy Chinese Baba from Malacca who did not speak Chinese, became the leader of the new Chinese party established in February 1949. The main, if covert, preoccupation of the MCA's leadership, which comprised some of the wealthiest Chinese businessmen and professionals in the country, was to ensure the protection of their economic interests through some form of political involvement (Heng, 1988, p. 57).⁹ The linkages made between Chinese businessmen and politics was quite expedient, since many MCA leaders were then not only serving as president of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce in most states in Malaya, but also figured as leaders of important Chinese associations such as the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, the Perak Chinese Association, the Penang Chinese Town Hall and the Johore Bahru Chinese Association. They also led key trade guilds, cultural, social and recreational associations, and numerous dialect and territorial associations (Heng, 1988, pp. 64-5). However, in view of the bourgeois nature of the MCA leadership and the subservient role it played to UMNO in the ruling coalition, the party has always experienced much difficulty in mobilizing and sustaining the support of the working class and middle class Chinese. Chinese support for the MCA has been heaviest during periods when the country was experiencing an economic boom, most notably during the early 1980s and the mid-1990s. In a move to reduce its dependence on UMNO to retain seats during elections, the MCA has tried persistently to shed its 'towkay' image and promote itself instead as a mass-based party representative of all Chinese.

The Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) was formed in August 1946 after Indians were encouraged by visiting Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to remain in Malaya (Stenson, 1980). Originally led by left-leaning, middle class, non-communal members, the MIC displayed a bias in favour of multiracial political organizations. But when it became apparent that multiracial parties received little electoral support, the MIC in 1954 became the third partner in the Alliance, a coalition which UMNO and the MCA had first formed on an

ad hoc basis two years earlier to contest municipal-level elections. The MIC's entry into the Alliance was precipitated by fears over its political survival, since the party represented a small fraction of the community which was well dispersed in the electorate (Stenson, 1980; Arasaratnam, 1980).

When the Alliance was officially formed in 1954 – and only formally registered four years later – it was not only to meet one of the colonial government's conditions that independence would only be granted to a multi-ethnic leadership, but also to appeal to the electorate as a multiracial coalition of parties instead of a single multiracial party. Despite its mass-based support, UMNO was continually bedevilled by financial problems, as the party's mainly rural, peasant membership could not provide it with sufficient funds to allow it to participate effectively in electoral contests. UMNO thus had to rely heavily on the cash-rich MCA to fund the Alliance.¹⁰ The MCA needed UMNO to win seats as the Malays were heavily over-represented in the electorate during the 1950s. During the federal election in 1955, for example, only 11 per cent of the 1.28 million voters were non-Malays while only two of the 52 parliamentary seats were non-Malay majority seats. Yet, following the partnership of the three parties in the Alliance, almost a third of the coalition's candidates were non-Malays – 15 from the MCA and two from the MIC. The proportion of the non-Malay electorate rose to 43 per cent by the 1959 general election, and Chinese majority seats increased to a 40 per cent share of the 104 constituencies (Sothi, 1993, p. 112).

The MIC played an important role in the Alliance in view of its influence on working class Indians in the rubber plantations through the party's control of the National Land Finance Cooperative Society (NLFCS). Since the NLFCS was used to acquire an interest in the plantation sector with funds raised from estate workers which gave them a stake in the industry, this boosted the MIC's appeal among this class (Gomez, 1994). The MIC also developed links with the influential National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW) whose long-standing president, P.P. Narayanan, was also chairman of the Malayan Trade Unions Council, the umbrella body for the country's major trade unions (Vasil, 1971, p. 93). The support of the Indian working class, especially that of the plantation-based sector (which the MIC managed to attract), was crucial in reinforcing the Alliance's rural dominance. This class of workers has remained the dominant base of support for the MIC.

Given the reasons for the formation of the Alliance and the status of the three component parties, which drew their leadership from the elite of their respective communities, it was doubtful if the parties shared a common political ideology or if they enjoyed stable mass-based support, except probably in the case of UMNO. What was obvious was that the impulse to cohere belied an instrumental concern for power – the aristocratic Malays were keen to secure dominant political power, while the Chinese bourgeoisie needed a strong political organization to preserve their economic base.

Nonetheless, the parties enjoyed a level of support which transcended class barriers. The multilayered support that the parties in the Alliance initially managed to elicit through the promotion of a multiracial coalition was reflected in the results of Malaya's first federal elections in 1955 – the Alliance lost only one of 52 seats contested. The MCA's easy access to funds helped the Alliance remain in power even with the rising costs of subsequent elections. As a consequence, the poorly financed, yet more ideologically-oriented and bona fide political organizations, experienced great difficulty in displacing the ruling coalition of ethnically-based parties. The single-member plurality system also tended to benefit the Alliance, as it meant that the fragmented opposition parties competed as much with each

other as with the Alliance. This helped the Alliance secure significant national victories without achieving majority mandates during elections.

By the late 1960s, with the declining popularity of the Alliance, and increasing factionalism within all three component parties, newly-established opposition parties began to make inroads into the Alliance's electoral base. In the general election of 1969, Alliance control over the government was severely threatened when the coalition obtained the support of only half of the Malay population and a third of the non-Malay vote. Although it was the MCA which sustained the heaviest defeat, UMNO's performance had also declined to the point that the Alliance managed to secure only 48.5 per cent of the popular vote. The results also suggested that the only reasons the Alliance had managed to retain control of the federal government was the communally-divided nature of the opposition, the rural bias of the heavily gerrymandered electoral system and the inability of the opposition in Peninsular Malaysia to forge meaningful links with possible allies in Sabah and Sarawak, despite the prevailing discontent in those states. Nevertheless, the states of Penang and Kelantan fell to the opposition, while the Alliance only barely secured majorities in the Selangor, Terengganu and Perak legislatures.

Since the Alliance had retained control of the federal government with a severely diminished majority, communal tensions ran high, as the election results were perceived by some quarters in UMNO as a reflection of the diminution of the party's – and hence, Malay – political hegemony. These tensions heightened following 'victory' processions held by opposition parties and UMNO in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. Inflamed racial sentiments eventually triggered the race riots of 13 May which spread quickly from Kuala Lumpur to other major towns. The riots led to the proclamation of a State of Emergency. Parliament was suspended and power was vested in a National Operations Council (NOC), swiftly established to restore order. Led by Deputy Prime Minister and UMNO Deputy President Abdul Razak Hussein, the NOC comprised mainly Malay senior bureaucrats and Alliance leaders.

UMNO's narrow retention of power precipitated a struggle between the party's young Turks and its conservative factions, which led to the resignation in 1971 of the long-standing prime minister and UMNO president, Tunku Abdul Rahman. His successor, Razak, embarked on a round of discussions with all major political parties to regroup the Alliance into an enlarged coalition, the Barisan Nasional, which was registered as a party in June 1974, just two months before a general election was called. Apart from the DAP, most opposition parties, including the main Malay opposition party, Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS or Malaysian Islamic Party), the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan or People's Movement Party), and the People's Progressive Party (PPP), were co-opted into the Barisan Nasional. Their leaders were convinced by Razak's argument that warring political parties needed to stop 'politicking' and instead transcend their ideological differences to come together to forge a nation that had hitherto been torn asunder by racial strife. However, UMNO's ostensible attempt, through the system of consociationalism provided by the Barisan Nasional, meant that the huge Chinese support enjoyed by the Gerakan and the PPP had eroded the MCA's influence. Meanwhile, the incorporation of PAS, which was very influential in the east coast of the peninsula, enhanced Malay electoral support. UMNO's refusal to allow PAS to increase the number of seats it contested in the subsequent general election of 1974, when the latter was still a member of the Barisan Nasional, further strengthened UMNO's hegemony in the coalition; PAS eventually returned to the opposition in 1977.

Although the mass-based Gerakan professes to be a multiracial party, it draws its primary support from the Chinese; its membership is also predominantly Chinese. Like most other Barisan Nasional parties, its membership is open to all Malaysians over 18 years of age. Established in 1968, Gerakan's original leaders included prominent academics Syed Hussein Alatas and Wang Gungwu, notable opposition politicians Lim Chong Eu, then president of the now defunct United Democratic Party (UDP) and former Labour Party leaders, Tan Chee Khoon and V. David. The UDP had established a strong, predominantly Chinese, base in Penang, while the former Labour Party members drew their Chinese support from the other urban cities in the west coast of the peninsula. This allowed the Gerakan to have a wide base in the west coast of the peninsula as soon as it was formed. However, although the party was led by a Malay academic, Syed Hussein Alatas, and included several other Malay leaders, the Gerakan, in view of its limited grass roots base, had difficulties securing Malay support, a problem which was exacerbated by the strong multiracial orientation it professed in its policies. In spite of this, Gerakan obtained an impressive 17.8 per cent of the electoral support (although it won only eight parliamentary seats) and wrested control of the island of Penang in its very first electoral contest in the 1969 general election, making it the first non-*Bumiputera* opposition party to secure power over a state government (Vasil, 1971, pp. 304-5; Means, 1976, pp. 393-4; Lee, 1987, pp. 71-93). Though it has established branches in all states of the peninsula and has also won parliamentary and state seats in most states on the west coast of the peninsula, the Gerakan's dominant sphere of influence is still in Penang, where the party has provided the state's leadership since 1969, even after joining the Barisan Nasional.

Following a dispute in the early 1970s, most of the Gerakan's founding leaders, including Syed Hussein Alatas and Tan Chee Khoon, left the party. A significant number of the Gerakan's leadership has since been Chinese, mostly former leaders of the MCA, which has further enhanced the party's identity as a Chinese-based party; despite this, the Gerakan does not receive much support from the Chinese business community, though it has more appeal among professionals, especially lawyers, doctors and academics. Lim Chong Eu, Lim Kheng Yaik, Alex Lee and Michael Chen, who have all served as leaders of the Gerakan, were prominent MCA leaders who left the party following factional disputes in the 1970s and 1980s, taking along with them into the Gerakan a phalanx of their supporters. While this indicated how aware these Chinese leaders were of their limited access to government office outside the Barisan Nasional, the dispute among these two predominantly Chinese parties has been carried into the grass roots level and has even manifested itself during general and state elections, with members of both parties covertly working with the opposition to undermine each other despite contesting under the Barisan Nasional banner. This division between the Gerakan and the MCA has only had limited repercussions on the Barisan Nasional, since the seats contested by both parties were in predominantly Chinese-majority constituencies which, in most instances, the ruling coalition could afford to lose. Furthermore, the combined number of seats contested by the Gerakan and the MCA was usually considerably less than one-third of the total number of seats contested by the Barisan Nasional. During the 1995 general election, for example, of the 192 seats contested by the Barisan Nasional, UMNO was allocated 103 seats, the MCA 35 and the Gerakan only ten. The victories secured by the Gerakan and the MCA in most constituencies they contested during state and federal elections were also attributed to the Malay support that UMNO had managed to secure for their candidates. This rivalry between Chinese-based parties, which has affected their electoral performance, has impaired the grounds for their justification to contest more seats in elections under the Barisan Nasional. Before the 1995 general election, for instance, when the number of parliamentary constituencies was increased by 12, UMNO was given seven seats,

the MCA three and the Gerakan only one (Gomez, 1996a).

The PPP, which was formed in Perak in 1953, is, like the Gerakan, another supposedly multiracial party. Though lacking a strong ideological base, the PPP, under the leadership of the Seenivasagam brothers, developed a significant following in Perak, especially among the urban Chinese. The party espouses racial and political egalitarianism and moderately socialist-based economic policies which appealed primarily to the non-Malays. Based in Perak, where the party was established, its influence outside the state has been insignificant, since the PPP's membership has never been large and its leadership is usually controlled by locally-based professionals, particularly lawyers (Vasil, 1971, pp. 222-51; Means, 1976, pp. 235-7). When the PPP joined the Barisan Nasional after the 1969 general election, it had four seats in parliament. However, wracked by infighting and poor leadership following the demise of the Seenivasagam brothers, the PPP's influence has diminished considerably and the party is currently seen as a very insignificant member of the Barisan Nasional. The PPP has not secured a single seat in parliament since 1969, despite its membership in the ruling coalition.

The leading Sarawak-based Barisan Nasional component party, the Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB or United Bumiputera Party), is a predominantly Dayak-based party formed in 1973 following a merger of two parties, Parti Pesaka, a small non-Muslim *Bumiputera* party, and Parti Bumiputera, a predominantly Muslim *Bumiputera* party. Led by Muslim Melanaus, PBB's long-standing president, Abdul Taib Mahmud, Sarawak's chief minister and a former federal cabinet member, has progressively become a dominant force in the state and maintains a close relationship with senior UMNO leaders, particularly Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. PBB is also the dominant party in the Barisan Tiga (Tripartite Front) comprising other Sarawak-based Barisan Nasional component members, i.e. the Chinese-based Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) and the Iban-based Sarawak National Party (SNAP). SUPP is the state's first legal party, formed in 1959 and open to all races but led predominantly by the Chinese; its original membership, however, included Malays, Ibans and Dayaks (Means, 1976, pp. 299-305). Another Sarawakian party, the Parti Bangsa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS or Sarawak Dayak People's Party), a Dayak-based breakaway of the SNAP, though a member of the Barisan Nasional, held the unique position of remaining an opposition party at state level. The PBDS subsequently sought and gained admission into the Barisan Tiga after faring badly in the state elections in 1991. Although all these are mass-based parties, none has any influence outside Sarawak.

In Sabah, the turnover of parties from the Barisan Nasional has been high. Among the former Barisan Nasional component members now in the opposition which once led the Sabah state government are the United Sabah National Organization (USNO) (1963-76) and the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS or United Sabah Party) (1985-94); the Bersatu Rakyat (Berjaya or United People), which ruled Sabah from 1976 to 1985, is near defunct though technically still a Barisan Nasional member. Among the current Sabah-based Barisan Nasional members are the Kadazan-based Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat (AKAR or People's Justice Movement) and the Chinese-based Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), both minor parties with limited influence. In 1994, several newly-formed Sabahan parties were accepted into the Barisan Nasional fold, notably the Chinese-based Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) and the Kadazan-based Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS or United Sabah People's Party) and the Parti Demokratik Sabah (PDS or Sabah Democratic Party). All these parties are led by former leaders of the PBS, most of whom defected from the party in 1994 when it became clear that the PBS was losing control over the Sabah state government. Although the PBS narrowly

won the 1994 Sabah state election, following the defection of some of its assemblymen to the Barisan Nasional, the coalition secured control of the state government and a member of UMNO – the party was making its electoral debut in the state – was appointed chief minister (Gomez, 1996b). These new parties established by former PBS leaders have limited support in Sabah, especially among the Kadazan, while UMNO, having made significant inroads in the state after 1990, appears to have consolidated Muslim *Bumiputera* support in the state.

The Opposition

The DAP is an offshoot of the People's Action Party (PAP), currently the ruling party in Singapore. After Singapore left the federation in 1965, the Malaysian branch of the PAP, led by Devan Nair, adopted the name Democratic Action Party in March 1966.

Much to the DAP's benefit, the party was formed in the same year that the Socialist Front coalition had begun to disintegrate. The Socialist Front comprised the overwhelmingly rural and Malay-based Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM or Malaysian People's Party) and the predominantly urban and Chinese-based Labour Party. The Labour Party is now defunct after many of its leaders were arrested in the 1960s and 1970s under the Internal Security Act (ISA) which allows for indefinite detention without trial, but had been an attractive alternative to the supporters of the banned Malayan Communist Party (MCP).¹¹ Although some prominent Labour Party leaders like Tan Chee Khoo later helped launch the Gerakan, much of the Labour Party's membership and support was slowly secured by the DAP, possibly as a consequence of the more strident stand adopted by the DAP on Chinese issues in contrast to the multiracial bias of the Gerakan which was then led by a Malay (Means, 1976, pp. 393-4). However, unlike the Labour Party, and despite having had among its leadership prominent trade union leaders like V. David, Ahmad Nor and Zainal Rampak, there is little evidence that the DAP has much support from trade unions.

In view of its historical links with the PAP, and despite the fact that its membership is open to all Malaysians above the age of 17, the DAP's identity as a 'Chinese' party has been strengthened by the common perception that the party raises primarily Chinese-based issues. The DAP, however, has some notable non-Chinese in its top hierarchy, including prominent lawyer Karpal Singh and trade unionist Ahmad Nor, and fields many non-Chinese candidates in federal and state elections.

The successful role played by the DAP in exposing corruption in government and promoting transparency and accountability has been a primary reason for the party's popularity among the middle class.¹² The DAP's effectiveness in uncovering scandals and conflict-of-interest situations involving senior Barisan Nasional politicians has meant that the party has been the target of some of Malaysia's more oppressive legislation. For example, many of the DAP's top leadership have been detained under the ISA, including the party's long-standing secretary-general, Lim Kit Siang, who was detained twice, in 1969 and in 1987, for as long as almost two years on each occasion, ostensibly for inciting racial tension. Apart from this, in view of the popularity of the party's newsletter, *The Rocket* – probably the most important and effective means of disseminating information about the DAP's programmes, and the primary avenue for exposing corruption – the government has limited the paper's circulation to party members.

The PRM, despite its small membership and limited influence, still functions actively under the leadership of former academic Syed Husin Ali. It was formerly known as the Parti

Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia (PSRM or Malaysian People's Socialist Party). Inaugurated in 1955 as Parti Rakyat, the PRM was led by the leaders of the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP), a leading left wing party with a strong rural base which was banned after the declaration of the Emergency in 1948. Despite its links to the MNP, which posed a threat to UMNO, PRM's influence has never been significant. Though it has historically derived its support from rural peasants, it has more recently made some inroads among the urban working class. The PRM secured two parliamentary and two state seats in the first general election it contested in 1959. In the following election of 1964, the PRM contested under the banner of the Socialist Front, which secured two parliamentary and eight state seats. The party has since not been able to secure a seat in parliament, although it did secure one state seat in the Penang State Assembly in the 1969 general election (Vasil, 1971, pp. 167-221; von Vorys, 1975, p. 169). The PRM's efforts to collaborate with other opposition parties during general elections in 1982, 1990 and 1995 have also failed to help secure the party representation either in parliament or any of the state assemblies.

The Indian-based opposition party, the All-Malaysia Indian Progressive Front (IPF), was formed by M.G. Pandithan, once a close protégé of MIC president, S. Samy Vellu. Pandithan, a former MIC vice-president, had at one time attracted so much support among working class Indians that he had emerged as a threat to Samy Vellu's position in the party. Pandithan led a huge following of his supporters out of the MIC to form an opposition Indian party, in an effort to undermine Samy Vellu's influence in the community. The IPF, however, has failed to emerge as an effective alternative for the Indians, despite becoming a member of the Gagasan Rakyat. In 1995, the IPF tried unsuccessfully to become a member of the Barisan Nasional, its inclusion thwarted by the MIC. Despite this, during the 1995 general election, the IPF played a prominent role in trying to secure Indian support for the Barisan Nasional in an effort to win favour with UMNO to secure admission into the ruling coalition (Gomez, 1996a). Pandithan was subsequently appointed a senator by the Barisan Nasional.

PAS, a breakaway UMNO faction, was formed in 1951 and is the main opposition party, with the capacity to undermine UMNO's influence among the Malays. Being Islamic-based, PAS's membership is open to all Muslims who have 'attained puberty', as defined by Islamic law (Sothi, 1993, p. 95). As in the case of the PRM, PAS was originally led by leaders of the left-leaning Malay Nationalist Party and comprised primarily rural teachers, some of whom were also associated with UMNO. Its objective at the outset was to secure mass rural-based Malay support (Roff, 1967; Khong, 1984; Funston, 1980). In 1982, following a radical change of leadership, PAS began adopting a predominantly Islamic posture.

Currently, PAS's main leaders and activists are primarily Islamic-educated *ulamas* (religious teachers) and the party's main area of influence is limited to the Malay heartland states of Kelantan, Terengganu and rural Kedah. PAS first secured a majority in the Kelantan state legislature in 1959 and governed the state until 1978. PAS also clinched control of the Terengganu state government after the 1959 general election, but had to secede control of the state in 1961 following defections from the party to UMNO. During the 1990 general election, PAS swept back to power in Kelantan with the aid of the newly-established Malay party, Semangat 46, led by a prince from Kelantan, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, the former finance minister and a long-standing UMNO vice-president (and treasurer), who had formed the new opposition party in 1988. PAS's 1990 electoral performance in Terengganu also improved appreciably following its collaboration with Semangat. Although PAS retained control of Kelantan in the 1995 general election, and obtained a marginal increase in its

support in Terengganu and Kedah, its continued emphasis on implementing an Islamic state has meant that the party's influence in the west coast of the peninsula and in Sabah and Sarawak is scant, even among Muslim *Bumiputeras*. Its aim of achieving power at the federal level is thus severely circumscribed. Semangat 46 has its roots in UMNO factionalism.

During the mid-1980s – when the Malaysian economy was still struggling to cope with a debilitating recession which had led to a negative growth rate being registered in 1985, with only a slight improvement in 1986 – UMNO politicians who had become accustomed to various forms of government patronage grew increasingly frustrated over their limited access to wealth-generating rents. As the struggle for access to state rents intensified, this contributed to growing factionalism within UMNO.¹³ In 1987, a faction in UMNO, led by Razaleigh, then the trade and industry minister, alleged that UMNO president Mahathir had formed a kitchen cabinet which had centralized decision-making powers, and that most government contracts and business opportunities were being distributed to members of this inner circle; such injustices justified his decision to contest the party presidency. In the election, Mahathir clinched a narrow victory by securing merely 51 per cent of the support of the delegates to the UMNO assembly (Shamsul, 1988; Kershaw, 1989).

The UMNO election results were disputed when 12 party members, reputedly aligned to the Razaleigh faction, filed a legal suit against UMNO, seeking to nullify the results on the grounds that delegates from 30 unregistered branches were present at the General Assembly. In February 1988, the High Court ruled that the presence of unregistered branches rendered UMNO an illegal society under the Societies Act. Mahathir immediately formed a new party, UMNO Baru (New UMNO), which provided him with the opportunity to deny his critics membership in the new party. Razaleigh and his loyalists formed another party, Semangat 46, and crossed over to the opposition. Refusing to recognize the legitimacy of UMNO Baru, Semangat announced that the party's primary objective was to revive the old UMNO through a retroactive amendment of the Societies Act in order to delete the particular clause that deemed UMNO illegal. Mahathir refused to use the Barisan Nasional's majority in parliament to make the amendment, claiming that the proposed cause of action by Razaleigh's faction was undemocratic and entailed an abuse of legislative power.

The emergence of Semangat in the opposition was noteworthy, as the party was able to mobilize other opposition parties to form two broad-based coalitions. More significantly, Semangat was able to put together two coalitions which were persuaded, for the first time since 1969, that they could collectively secure enough votes to win a general election. Semangat signed an electoral pact with numerous opposition parties, including the DAP, the PRM and the IPF, to form a Barisan Nasional-like multiracial coalition, Gagasan Rakyat Malaysia, to contest parliamentary and state seats primarily on the west coast of the peninsula, where the constituents are drawn from all ethnic communities. On the east coast, where the constituencies are dominated by Malay Muslims, Semangat combined forces with three Islamic parties – PAS, Barisan Jamaah Islam (Berjasa or Islamic People's Front) and Hizbul Musliman Malaysia (Hamim or Malaysian Muslim Party) – to form Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (APU or Community Unity Movement) (Khong, 1991).

Berjasa is a small, Kelantan-based party with some measure of influence over Kelantanese Malays. Formed in 1978 by the former PAS Mentri Besar of Kelantan (1974-78) Mohammed Nasir, Berjasa played a crucial role in helping the Barisan Nasional regain control of Kelantan from PAS in the 1978 state election. Later admitted into the Barisan Nasional, Berjasa left the ruling coalition in 1989 to join the Semangat-led APU; it was also a

member of the Gagasan Rakyat. Hamim, another minor, Kelantan-based Malay party, was also a former member of the Barisan Nasional which joined the APU and Gagasan Rakyat coalitions in 1990. Both parties have limited arenas of influence despite the parochial nature of their membership and activities, though Berjasa has displayed the ability to secure a state seat with the support of Semangat and PAS.

The chief reason for the establishment of two separate coalitions was the inability of the Islamic-based PAS and the DAP to find common ground in their policies (Khong, 1991). The DAP was particularly opposed to PAS's intention to form an Islamic state, while PAS was not willing to renounce this goal nor accept the DAP's stress on the call for more rights of the non-*Bumiputeras*. When both opposition coalitions were formed just before the October 1990 general elections – APU was formed on 5 June 1990 and the Gagasan Rakyat on 11 October 1990 – it was the first time in the history of Malaysian politics that opposition parties had been united in an organized form and led by an established Malay leader, Razaleigh. The Gagasan Rakyat was further strengthened midway through the general election when PBS, which then controlled the Sabah state government, joined the opposition.

The PBS was a multiracial party whose members were predominantly Sabahans, though it has recently cast a wider net over Sarawak and some parts of the peninsula. The PBS was formed in 1985 by dissidents from Berjaya, then a member of the Barisan Nasional that had control of the Sabah state government. Led by Joseph Pairin Kitingan, a Kadazan, another notable leader of the PBS was Yong Teck Lee, a Chinese; this had helped the party secure a strong base among these two communities. Almost 40 per cent of Sabahans are Muslims, 20 per cent are Chinese, while the remaining 40 per cent are indigenous non-Muslims, mainly Christians, the largest community of whom are Kadazans. The PBS came to power just a year after its inception, mainly with the support of the Kadazan community, when it narrowly defeated the then ruling Berjaya. Against this background, the PBS – led by a Christian Kadazan, Pairin Kitingan – had an uneasy relationship with other member parties of the Barisan Nasional, especially UMNO, between 1986 and 1990. The PBS did, however, attempt unsuccessfully in the late 1980s to merge with the similarly multiracial Gerakan to enable both parties to galvanize broad-based national support.

In 1990, midway through the general election, the PBS defected from the Barisan Nasional to the Gagasan Rakyat, claiming that it now identified with the manifesto of the new opposition coalition. Mahathir condemned PBS's defection – after nominations were over – as a 'stab in the back' (Khong, 1991). Subsequently, federal funds to the state were reduced, compelling some PBS leaders to advocate the need for closer ties with the Barisan Nasional, ostensibly to secure more federal funding for development, but probably also for vested reasons.¹⁴ After PBS's defection to the opposition, some party leaders alleged that they were being victimized by the government. A few PBS leaders, including Jeffrey Pairin, the brother of the chief minister, had been detained without trial under the ISA, the latter for almost three years. Pairin Kitingan was charged and found guilty of abusing his power to channel a RM1.4 million construction contract to family members. Although found guilty, Pairin was fined only RM1,800 for the offence, just RM200 short of the amount which would have disqualified him from running for office (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 January 1994; *Aliran Monthly*, 14 January 1994). Under these circumstances, PBS left the Gagasan Rakyat and attempted to return to the Barisan Nasional; the party's application was rejected by Mahathir and, by questionable means, the Barisan Nasional secured control of the Sabah state government following the 1994 state election, although the PBS had narrowly secured victory (Gomez, 1996b). Despite the PBS's reduced electoral support during the Sabah state election in 1994 and the defection of key leaders to the Barisan Nasional, the results of the 1995

general election clearly reflected that the party still commanded sizeable non-Bumiputera support, especially among the Kadazans and Chinese (Gomez, 1996a).

The decision of the PBS to withdraw from the Gagasan Rakyat probably precipitated the latter's decline, despite the serious electoral threat that this Semangat-led opposition coalition (and APU) posed to the Barisan Nasional. In fact, in the 1990 general election, both the coalitions almost succeeded in preventing the Barisan Nasional from securing a two-thirds majority in parliament for the first time since the ruling coalition's formation in 1974. They had also secured control of the Kelantan state government, and only narrowly lost the opportunity to wrest the power to rule over the Penang state government (Khong, 1991). By 1995, however, Semangat was increasingly unable to sustain cooperation among the opposition parties thanks to ideological differences, while the DAP, Semangat and IPF were themselves encumbered by internal problems. The latter two were further rocked by defections to the Barisan Nasional. In 1995, the IPF, languishing in opposition, attempted to return to the Barisan Nasional, while the DAP exited from the Gagasan Rakyat, claiming that its continued membership in the coalition was being construed by its supporters as tacit support for PAS's idea of an Islamic state.

During the 1995 general election, these opposition parties contested under their own banner, with some even competing against each other – particularly the DAP and PBS in Sabah and in Penang. In some cases, the votes were split sufficiently to enable the Barisan Nasional to secure victory (Gomez, 1996a). Meanwhile, Semangat itself was struggling to sustain support among the electorate, turning in a dismal performance in the 1995 general election.¹⁵ As Semangat's problems with PAS mounted in the Kelantan state government, Razaleigh voiced his intention in May 1996 to return to UMNO, although there had been preliminary talks among the opposition parties about the reformulation of a new grand coalition. It was obvious that the deeply ambitious Razaleigh was aware that he would be unable to secure the premiership outside UMNO by trying to secure the cooperation of opposition parties which profess extremely disparate ideologies. Moreover, given the deep rifts within UMNO, Razaleigh was hopeful of securing his own chances of making a bid for UMNO's presidency, and hence the premiership of the country, by transferring Semangat's almost 400,000 membership to the party. The Gagasan Rakyat and APU remain intact despite the demise of Semangat. However, since the loyalty of most of the smaller parties in these coalitions – particularly APU – is to Razaleigh rather than to PAS, both are unlikely to sustain themselves much longer.

Political Parties: Programmes, Aims and Philosophy on Democracy

The Barisan Nasional. In 1996, the constituent number of parties in the Barisan Nasional stood at 14. The Barisan Nasional's objectives are broad, ranging from the fostering and maintaining of a united Malaysian nation to striving for a fair and just society to the promotion of material as well as spiritual development. The closest that the ruling coalition comes to an ideological stand, one could argue, is in its professed commitment to the national ideology, the *Rukunegara* (Principles of the State) which was introduced by the government in 1970 as part of the response to the racial riots of 1969. Yet, in spite of the occasional rhetoric of the Barisan Nasional leaders for the need to uphold the principles of the *Rukunegara*, the national ideology has never really emerged as a rallying point for the population or as a strong symbol for national identity or unity. The *Rukunegara* is a value-based creed which reads:

Our Nation Malaysia is dedicated to achieving a greater unity of all peoples; to maintaining a

democratic way of life; to creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably shared; to ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural traditions; to building a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology;

We, her people, pledge our united efforts to attain those ends guided by these principles:

Belief in God
Loyalty to King and Country
Upholding the Constitution
Rule of Law
Good Behaviour and Morality

The broad objectives of the Barisan Nasional and its subscription to the *Rukunegara* are inevitable, given that none of the three leading parties in the coalition possessed a strong ideological orientation when they were established. As mentioned, in view of the reasons for the formation of UMNO, MCA and the MIC, all three parties acknowledge that they are not ideologically-based parties. Furthermore, with the incorporation of more parties into the Barisan Nasional, particularly the Gerakan and PAS, which had more clearly defined ideologies, the need for the coalition to draw up objectives that could be accepted by all parties became imperative. Inevitably, the programmes and aims of the Barisan Nasional, usually only laid out in its manifesto before an election, normally reiterate the coalition's call for the promotion of peaceful ethnic coexistence to enhance economic development and material wellbeing.

In 1991, however, Prime Minister Mahathir outlined the Barisan Nasional government's long-term goals for Malaysia. Succinctly entitled 'Vision 2020' and containing nine central strategic challenges, the plan's main goal is for Malaysia to achieve 'fully developed country' status by the year 2020. Vision 2020, which has become the rallying cry of the Barisan Nasional, contains nine main objectives, that is, to establish:

1. a united, peaceful, integrated, and harmonious Malaysian nation;
2. a secure, confident, respected, and robust society committed to excellence;
3. a mature, consensual, and exemplary democracy;
4. a 'fully moral' society with citizens strongly imbued with spiritual values and the highest ethical standards;
5. a culturally, ethically, and religiously diverse, liberal, tolerant, and unified society;
6. a scientific, progressive, innovative, and forward-looking society;
7. a caring society with a family-based welfare system;
8. an 'economically just' society with inter-ethnic economic parity; and
9. a 'fully competitive, dynamic, robust, resilient, and prosperous' economy.

Vision 2020's explicit commitment to forging a Malaysian nation (*bangsa Malaysia*), transcending existing ethnic identities and loyalties and the attainment of 'an "economically just" society with inter-ethnic economic parity' has been enthusiastically received, especially by the non-*Bumiputeras*, demonstrated most convincingly in the results of the 1995 general election (Gomez, 1996a). Moreover, the government's emphasis on accelerating industrialization, growth and modernization as national economic priorities and its promise of a good life in the future as well as of sociopolitical stability has captured the imagination of a large segment of the middle class, which has expanded swiftly in the last two decades.

However, despite its goal of achieving 'a mature, consensual, and exemplary democracy', the Barisan Nasional's conception of the term 'democracy' in the Malaysian

political system is not compatible with Western models of liberal democracy. In fact, Mahathir has often publicly derided the procedural messiness and sluggishness of (Western and Indian) democratic institutions, claiming that a working majority in parliament – by this he means a more than two-thirds majority – is needed to ensure effective governance, political stability and sustained economic development. Thus, for Mahathir, Malaysia's political system is based on a different kind of democracy – an 'Asian' form of democracy – although he fails to define or interpret this particular version of democracy. It may be surmised, however, that the basic tenets of such a system encompass the arguments forwarded by Lucien Pye (1985): in particular, that since Asian political culture emphasizes collective, rather than individual, freedom and needs, and since it tends to favour order over conflict, Western practices of liberal democracy are inapplicable to the Asian experience. Such an argument, however, fails to take into account the fact that Malaysia's long-standing historical tradition of the suppression of political rights has stifled political participation and competition. It can justifiably be argued that the spirit of democracy hardly prevails in the country. Indeed, as Malaysians slowly become conditioned by restrictive inscriptions and structures, authoritarian rule seemed less unattractive in the late 1980s than it had at any other time in the past.

Since almost all member parties of the Barisan Nasional are ethnically-based, their aims and objectives, devoid of a strong ideological orientation – Brown (1994, pp. 206-57) refers to these as 'ethnic ideologies' – are rather narrowly-centred. Among the three major parties – UMNO, MCA, and MIC – the adoption of such an 'ideology' was the basis for their formation. In particular, in view of the bourgeois nature of the party leadership, the use of such an ethnic 'ideology' served to camouflage class dominance and aided in representing the leadership as racial patrons, even though such an ideology has seldom been of much significant material value to the working classes of these communities (Brown, 1994, p. 216; Hua, 1983). Under the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman, UMNO had subscribed to the view of 'ethnic balance'. In the post-1969 period, the hegemonic position of the new, more Malay-oriented leadership in the Barisan Nasional led to the creation of a pronounced Malay perception of policies by the party leadership. This was represented in the term 'Bumiputeraism', reflected especially in the New Economic Policy (NEP) which – apart from the intention to eradicate poverty irrespective of race – was devoted to the creation through positive discrimination of a *Bumiputera* capitalist class (Brennan, 1982). Meanwhile, the now even more emasculated MCA and MIC found it very difficult to promote the cause of the Chinese and Indians, despite continuing to emphasize their role as protectors of the interests of these communities in the Barisan Nasional.

The Gerakan is currently the only party in the Barisan Nasional with an ideological orientation, premised on a strong socialist philosophy. Professing its belief that a large proportion of Malaysia's ills stem from the ethnic nature of its politics, the Gerakan has stressed the need to view the nation's problems from a class perspective. The core ideological tenets of the Gerakan are thus based on non-communalism, ethnic, religious and cultural tolerance, a mixed economy involving public ownership of key means of production and a liberal democratic system. Such an orientation meant that the Gerakan advocated equal opportunities for all communities in political, economic and educational issues, denouncing the endowment of special rights to anyone particular community.

At the time of its formation, the Gerakan had also adopted a pro-labour stand which reflected the Labour Party origins of much of its senior leadership. Informed primarily by the idea of a socialist labour movement, the Gerakan attempted to secure the support of trade

unions which, at that time, still wielded considerable influence, with some of the major unions having the capacity to marshal substantial working class support (Vasil, 1971, pp. 304-5; Means, 1976, pp. 393-4; Lee, 1987, pp. 71-93; Brown, 1994, pp. 206-57). While this had a bearing on its performance in the 1969 general election, following the departure from the party of most of the former Labour Party leaders, the Gerakan failed to secure significant support from trade unions. The split in the party also signalled the loss by Gerakan of much of its reformist identity, which further diminished its influence over and endorsement by trade unions. Moreover, since the Gerakan's leadership is very much in the hands of former MCA leaders, the party does not emphasize – or even publicize – its socialist ideals, even within the ranks of the Barisan Nasional.

One of the Gerakan's primary objectives was to encourage Sino-Malay dialogue and cooperation, a goal which was threatened by the enfeeblement of the MCA and the strident Chinese stand adopted by the DAP. Despite this, there is an obvious ambivalence between the communal attitudes of the other Barisan Nasional parties and the non-communal position professed by the Gerakan. Yet, in the aftermath of the 1969 race riots, many opposition politicians were expressing the view that effective Chinese representation within the government was a favourable alternative to trying to effect change from the outside. Among these were members of the DAP, some of whom left the party to join the MCA (Lee, 1987, pp. 80-1). Yet, as Lee (1987, pp. 73-4) has noted:

Of all the Chinese-based parties, the Gerakan has come closest to calling on the Chinese to avoid identifying themselves as a separate political community and to make efforts towards a fuller integration into Malaysian society... but given the strong primordial sentiments that prevail it is one which the Gerakan has had difficulty in being consistent in maintaining.

Although the Barisan Nasional has now begun to adopt a more pronounced multiracial stance in its policies, this appears to be due to political expediency rather than any impact the Gerakan might have had on the outlook of the ruling coalition.

The Opposition. As an opposition multiracial coalition, Gagasan Rakyat's objectives, like those of the Barisan Nasional, are broad, and include the creation of national and racial unity, the advocacy of democracy and basic human rights and the upholding of Islam as the official religion while maintaining freedom for other religions. The Malay/Muslim-based APU coalition, while stressing the need to endorse Islam as a way of life, also emphasizes objectives similar to those of the Gagasan Rakyat.

Among individual opposition parties, PAS has the most strongly defined ideological objective. As a party ideologically motivated by Islam, PAS is principally devoted to the formation of an Islamic state in Malaysia. Accordingly, it espouses policies and ideas that are rooted in that religion. Adopting this preponderant Islamic posture, PAS has been offering Malaysians, Muslim *Bumiputeras* in particular, a vision of the reformation of society through legislative changes based on religious tenets. The establishment of an Islamic state, according to the party, will bring about spiritual regeneration and lead to the development of a more just, democratic, moral, principled and socially conscious society, devoid of repressive legislation and unhealthy economic activities such as gambling. Thus, all PAS's ideas and motivations stem from its Islamic foundation as the party perceives it. Democratic ideals, the party believes, are acceptable only within a secular context since within an Islamic theocratic state such ideals would automatically be a feature of a system which is inherently just. Yet, it has been observed that PAS will, in all likelihood, reject the concepts of majority rule and individual choice, since these allow for the possibility the implementation of morally wrong

tenets, in the case of the former, and embody, in the case of the latter, the assumption that individuals are all-knowing (Jesudasan, 1996).

Most urban-based Malaysians, including many Muslims, find PAS's policies, particularly its social policies, profoundly rigid and inflexible. For example, in view of PAS's strict interpretation of Islam, the party not only has denounced as evil the numerous forms of Western culture adopted by Malaysians, such as music and dance and fashion, but has also seen fit to ban any performance in Kelantan of the *joget*, a traditional Malay dance. Nevertheless, the party has been able to muster the support of rural Malays through active propagation of its conviction that religion and politics are inseparable in Islam and that religion should be thought of as a world view, a value system, a code of ethics, even as ideology. The reason for PAS's strong influence is also partly due to the respect commanded by its leaders' rigorous Islamic training, some of whom are graduates of the esteemed Al-Azhar University in Cairo. The party's current leadership comprises many *ulamas*, with the leader of the Kelantan state government, Nik Aziz Nik Mat, being one of the state's leading and most respected religious teachers.

The DAP has, since its inception, espoused a commitment 'to the ideal of a free, democratic and socialist Malaysia, based on the principles of racial equality, and social and economic justice, and founded on the institution of parliamentary democracy' (quoted in Means, 1976, pp. 393-4). Despite this espousal of economic justice, the DAP has failed to deliver viable or well-received economic policy alternatives. On most other issues, the DAP's proffered ideas are similar to those of the Gerakan, but in view of its past links with the PAP, the party has consistently couched its ideals in its commitment towards creating a 'Malaysian Malaysia'. This policy entailed the denunciation of the supremacy of one particular race in favour of the creation of an identity based on the synthesis of all the country's cultural elements. The programme also spoke of the need for a level playing field for all ethnic communities in the areas of politics, business and education. Not only was the PAP's propagation of this policy a primary factor in the secession of Singapore, the emphasis of 'Malaysian Malaysia' on racial equality and cultural pluralism – which helped the PAP secure a strong non-Malay base – is one reason why the DAP has been not been able to muster the support of the *Bumiputeras*, who perceive such an orientation as enhancing the party's basically Chinese-based identity. This is also why, although this concept featured prominently in the DAP's programmes, more recently the party has been seen to exercise greater caution in its propagation of a 'Malaysian Malaysia'.

The DAP places great emphasis on the need for greater democratization, arguing that this would constitute the primary means for establishing unity among the various ethnic communities in Malaysia. For the DAP, the true spirit of democracy in a multi-ethnic society is expressed through racial equality, mutual respect, and tolerance. A strident, and consistent, critic of authoritarian rule in Malaysia, the DAP objects to the Barisan Nasional contention that majority rule and restrictions on freedom of the press, assembly and expression are essential to maintaining ethnic harmony and promoting economic growth. To the contrary, the DAP claims that Malaysian history is reliable witness to the fact that majority rule has contributed to the denial of basic human rights and the creation of greater social injustice; the party has also argued that concentration of power has contributed to significant inevitability in the distribution of wealth (Lim, 1978). The DAP therefore contends that to secure greater democratization in Malaysia, the structure of the state would first need to undergo substantial reform.

Semangat 46 maintained that the party's primary objective – indeed, the very reason for its existence – was to resuscitate the 'old' UMNO. By the early 1990s, however, in the face of deteriorating support and subsequent moves to stress its Malay credentials in order to entice Malay support, Semangat affixed the adjective *Melayu* (Malay) onto its name. The party also claimed that it was taking on a more ideological orientation which was centred on the idea of *perjuangan Melayu* (Malay struggle) to protect the rights of the Malays in the face of what the party perceived to be dwindling Malay rights brought on by the cultural liberalization promoted by the Barisan Nasional. In spite of its emphasis on Malay nationalism, the party was not able to build on its support base, even in the predominantly Malay states of Terengganu and Kelantan. Rather, Semangat's new orientation increasingly alienated it from the non-*Bumiputeras* and even the new middle class *Bumiputeras* (Gomez, 1996a). Its declining support and inability to offer an acceptable ideological creed eventually contributed to the decline of the party.

Target Groups and Support by the Public

Since most political parties are ethnically-based, the formation of coalitions has helped to gather under one umbrella parties which represent the interests of a cross-section of the Malaysian population. The primary reason for the development of broad-based multiracial coalitions in the Malaysian political system is historical. The proposal forwarded by UMNO's inaugural president, Onn Jaafar, to extend the party's membership to the other races – congruent with his propagation of a Malayan, as opposed to a purely Malay, identity – was fiercely opposed by the party. Onn subsequently resigned from UMNO to form the multiracial Independence of Malaya Party (IMP), which, however was not very well received and eventually became defunct (Means, 1976). Malay rejection of Onn's proposal was based on the community's fears that pursuing a multi-ethnic line of politics within a multiracial organization would mean that their interests would be subsumed by those of the other communities. This sentiment is also felt by the other ethnic communities.

Since it is manifest from Malaysian history that a single multiracial party would be unable to secure broad-based support, the system of consociationalism offered by multiparty, multi-ethnic coalitions, such as the Barisan Nasional, emerged as an effective means of consolidating the electoral support of the main ethnic communities. This formula has, in the case of the Barisan Nasional, enabled it to draw support on the basis of both ethnicity and class. For example, by the early 1990s, the main bastion of support for UMNO was still the peninsula's rural Malays and Sabah's rural Muslim-*Bumiputeras* (the party does not yet have a base in Sarawak). The MCA helped the Barisan Nasional to marshal urban, upper middle class – and business class – Chinese support, while the MIC has consistently been successful in mobilizing Indian working class support. The multiracial Gerakan was able to elicit the vote of large segments of the non-Malay middle class, which found itself uncomfortable with the pronounced ethnic politics of the MCA and the MIC, or the extreme left position slowly being adopted by the Labour Party, or the pronounced Chinese orientation of the DAP. Yet, in view of their decision to join the Barisan Nasional and their support, both professed and implicit, for the policies of a government which endorses Malay hegemony, the Gerakan, MCA and MIC are parties not commonly perceived as representing the views or interests of their ethnic or class communities. Most of the electoral victories of the MCA, MIC and the Gerakan are usually credited to UMNO's influence, even during the 1995 general election when all three parties performed well, even in urban constituencies (Gomez, 1996a). However, to conclude that these three parties are politically impotent would not be entirely accurate (although it is a fact that the parties' urban support is negligible, except in the case

of Gerakan on the island of Penang), though both parties have shown a capacity to draw Chinese support during periods of an economic boom. The inclusion of most of the key ethnically-based Sarawakian parties in the Barisan Nasional has equipped the coalition with a semblance of a national identity which has helped it draw strong regional support in the Borneo state. In Sabah, although the results of the 1995 general election reflected that the three new Kadazan-based parties in the ruling coalition had not been able to summon strong support from the community, UMNO's collaboration with the Chinese-based SAPP and LDP in the state proved immensely helpful in enlisting heavy Chinese and Muslim-*Bumiputera* support (Gomez, 1996a).

Among the opposition, the founding of the multiracial Gagasan Rakyat was also predicated on the knowledge of its component members that they would be unable to draw broad-based class and ethnic support independently. Thus, the leaders of the DAP, a party professedly multiracial in its outlook, had found it imperative to work with the Malay-based Semangat and Indian-based IPF, whose heads were former leaders of the Barisan Nasional, with whom they differed greatly in terms of political orientation. Although the Gagasan Rakyat fared rather well in the 1990 general election, the disparate ideological stands of its component parties eventually contributed to the collapse of the coalition. Similarly, although the cooperation between PAS and Semangat through APU was crucial for the coalition to secure control of the Kelantan state government, it seemed unlikely that the working relationship between the Islamic-oriented PAS and the secular-based Semangat could be sustained in the long run.

However, it was apparent from the outset that the party that stood to gain most from the formation of a grand opposition coalition was Semangat. Led by Razaleigh, a recognized Malay leader who, in addition, hailed from the royal house of Kelantan, it appeared that only Semangat could have established some kind of viable working relationship between PAS and the DAP, in spite of their vastly differing ideologies. Semangat leaders were aware that in view of the subservient position in the Barisan Nasional of parties such as the MCA and the Gerakan, their party stood to gain from the Chinese support elicited by the DAP through its emphasis on issues affecting the Chinese, including those pertaining to business, education and culture. For example, during the 1970s and 1980s, the controversial Merdeka University (a Chinese-language private tertiary institution) issue, the proposed development of Bukit China (an ancient Chinese burial ground) and assorted business scandals highlighted by the DAP won the party massive broad-based Chinese support. The DAP has consistently been able to draw 15-20 per cent of the votes cast during elections, most of which are from urban Chinese. The party, however, has not been able to translate this support into a significant number of seats in parliament, in view of the extensive gerrymandering that prevails.

The DAP has been successful in securing the backing of large segments of young, Western-educated, urban middle class non-*Bumiputeras* by consistently reminding them that power is concentrated in the hands of the executive branch (at the expense of the judiciary and the monarchy). They are told, too, about the extent of corruption and the wealth concentrated among senior UMNO leaders through policies such as privatization, the extensive abuse of power by the Barisan Nasional through laws like the ISA, which allows for indefinite detention without trial, and the abuse of the media and government machinery by the governing coalition, practices which are especially conspicuous in the run-up to, and during, election campaigns. Such practices, however, suggest that much of the urban-based, middle class support that the DAP attracts are protest votes rather than actual support for its policies. In fact, a persistent conflict faced by the DAP is whether to seek to be agents of

social transformation exclusively among the working class or to rely on multi- or even non-class support (Kua, 1996).

PAS's influence is limited to the Malay heartland states of Kelantan, Terengganu and rural Kedah. In the two former states especially, PAS has consistently enjoyed the staunch support of the Malay peasantry which is estimated at 35-40 per cent of the electorate (Funston, 1980; Gomez, 1996a). With the electoral support mobilized by Semangat, PAS was able to secure control of the Kelantan state legislature in 1990 and retain control of it in the 1995 general election. Moreover, in view of its negligible support in the west coast of the peninsula, as well as in Sabah and Sarawak, it was also politically expedient for the party to sustain a working relationship with Semangat, then the leader of the Gagasan Rakyat.

Nevertheless, it is increasingly evident that, as a party ideologically motivated by Islam, PAS has experienced a steady increase in support during the 1990s. This has been credited to PAS's vigorous promotion of traditional lifestyles and its espousal of the role played by religion in sustaining values upon which a just and humane society can be built. The propagation of such a programme has begun to have an impact on an electorate concerned that rapid economic growth has contributed not only to the development of inter-ethnic inequality, but also to numerous social ills. Furthermore, PAS has also been able to tap into the growing disillusionment of rural Malays over the impact of modernization, as well as their mounting fears that economic liberalization and privatization of the public realm are leading to society's abandonment to evil market forces. Since numerous social afflictions (among them the problem of teenage vagrancy and promiscuity, rising divorce rates and increasing drug dependency) have emerged preponderantly within the Malay community, PAS's Islamic appeal has been bolstered. As the growing wealth of the newly-emergent middle class has also given rise to crass materialism, which in turn is partly responsible for social ills such as the disintegration of the family unit, PAS has even secured the new-found support of urban-based Muslims, including middle and upper middle class Malays. Thus, by the middle of the 1990s, PAS was no longer the party through which only rural, tradition-bound, aggrieved peasants channelled their protests over the UMNO-led Barisan Nasional government's heady modernization programme. In fact, so much of a threat has the party posed that the Barisan Nasional has been compelled to counter its rising influence through short-term tactics such as the denunciation of PAS's interpretation of Islam, while trying to get PAS to shed the marker 'Islam' from its name and moving towards banning the party for its allegedly deviant interpretations in the long term (Gomez, 1996a).

What this suggests is that in spite of the limited political participation permitted by the Malaysian political system, which has inhibited Malaysians from voicing their views openly and in a manner that can influence the agenda of political parties, politicians are sensitive to the changes taking place in society and capitalise on these to consolidate their power base. Thus, the multi-ethnic politics actively articulated by the Barisan Nasional since the early 1990s were obviously due to the worrying rift emerging in the Malay community tellingly reflected in the 1990 general election results – and the consequent need to compensate for this by making appeals to the non-*Bumiputera* vote. Although such a tactic worked well enough for the Barisan Nasional to register one of its finest electoral victories to date in the 1995 general election, the results at the same time pointed to the gravity of the government's problem in maintaining its *Bumiputera* support (Gomez, 1996a).

Party Structure

Although the Barisan Nasional is the governing party in the country, it cannot be construed as an actively functioning body. The activities of the component parties within the Barisan Nasional are individually-based and geared towards their particular target groups. The limited importance of the Barisan Nasional as a consultative organization and decision-making body was most manifest in March 1995 when the coalition organized a convention for the first time in its almost 22-year history. The purpose of the convention, held less than two weeks before parliament was dissolved for a general election, was to convey to the electorate, particularly the non-*Bumiputeras*, the multiracial unity prevailing within the Barisan Nasional. Even the Barisan Nasional's Supreme Council meetings, comprising leaders of all component parties, are held infrequently and even then only before a federal or state election. This suggests that discussions on policy matters between members of the Barisan Nasional were kept to the minimum, while major decisions were made by a select group of leaders, mainly from UMNO, before being passed down for endorsement, usually at cabinet level. Thus, the role of the Barisan Nasional's Supreme Council as the main governing body is merely perfunctory, although it is presented as the medium through which consultations are held to maintain ethnic cooperation and harmony.

Since the leaders of most of the main Barisan Nasional component parties are represented in the cabinet, this forum is promoted as the main avenue through which inter-ethnic consultations are regularly held and differing viewpoints expressed. However, in view of UMNO's hegemony in the executive and the fact that representation in the cabinet is the sole prerogative of the prime minister, and given the heavy reliance of most component parties on UMNO to secure their victories in elections, it is highly doubtful if these inter-party consultations are conducted on an equal footing. The situation is similar within the APU and the Gagasan Rakyat opposition coalitions. Each party within these coalitions runs its activities individually, while discussions at coalition level are usually held only before a general or state election, and then also only to decide on matters such as the distribution of seats and campaign strategy.

The party machinery of most of the major political parties is usually very active and run along similar lines. UMNO boasts the best organized party machinery, probably due to its easy access to extensive funds. The party structure is organized hierarchically, with the branches forming the base, followed by the divisions, the State Liaison Committees and the Supreme Council. UMNO has established branches in all parliamentary constituencies in the peninsula and has also been actively setting up branches in Sabah since 1990. The party's national headquarters, a sprawling million-dollar ringgit edifice in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, serves as the centre where the party's operations are monitored; UMNO also has state headquarters based in each major city in the peninsula.

Although the MCA, MIC and the Gerakan have rather similar organizational structures, with the last two parties also having their national headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, their respective party machinery, although active, is much less superior to that of UMNO; this is due primarily to their much smaller membership base and financial power, particularly in the case of the MIC and the Gerakan. This is most conspicuous during elections, when most parties in the Barisan Nasional depend on UMNO's extensive party machinery to run an effective campaign to secure electoral support. Moreover, the MCA and Gerakan's influence in the east coast of the peninsula is not extensive, while their influence in Sabah (and Sarawak) is negligible, despite efforts to establish a base in the state.

Of the major opposition parties, Semangat's machinery had appeared to be the least active. The party structure, although similar to UMNO's, was seen to be lacking in terms of an active membership and easy access to funds. Moreover, since most of its members were former UMNO members who were accustomed to a strong patronage system, and in the absence of a powerful ideological influence, Semangat's projects at grass roots level were not consistent, with its activities concentrated around election periods. These factors were probably instrumental in Semangat's leadership's decision that the party should cease functioning in the opposition camp and join UMNO instead.

In view of its historical links with the PAP, the DAP practices a cadre system in its selection of the party leadership. Its membership, though open to all Malaysians, is significantly Chinese, yet the DAP's machinery is quite extensive, not only in the peninsula, but also in Sabah and Sarawak, making it the only truly national party in the country. The party's grass roots base is active and plays a significant role in highlighting issues at local level while offering itself as a forum for those citizens affected by government policy and human rights violations.

PAS's membership is predominantly Malay Muslim and the party structure is organized similarly to that of the other Malay-based parties. However, in view of its strong ideological orientation, this probably best enables PAS to function effectively. Since its main leaders and activists are primarily Islamic-educated *ulamas* who convene regular public teachings, this has enabled PAS to exert a strong as well as consistent influence on rural Malays. Moreover, since the party's main area of activities are concentrated in Kelantan, Terengganu and rural Kedah, this facilitates the smooth running of its activities.

The decision-making process of all political parties in the Barisan Nasional is similar in that it can hardly be seen as democratically conducted. Despite claims to the contrary, the extent of distribution of authority within the UMNO hierarchy has been considerably diminished by Mahathir. For example, when UMNO was reconstituted as UMNO Baru in 1988, Mahathir made sure that the party constitution rendered the position of the party's top two leaders practically unassailable – ten bonus votes were to be awarded to every nominee for the post of president and deputy president by each division, which would then be added to the total votes secured by the candidate during elections at the party's general assembly. Similarly, within the MCA and the MIC, following the power struggles and faction disputes of the proceeding decade, power has been increasingly centred in the top leadership (Gomez, 1994). Thus, while members are allowed to voice their views during the annual general assemblies, and the leadership of these parties is allowed to become the target of criticisms at these meetings, members are still seen to be cautious in view of the repercussions that might follow such public criticisms of the party leadership. There is always the possibility that such criticism could affect their chances of securing a candidature for general or state elections.

Within the opposition, decision-making powers are similarly centred in the parties' top hierarchy. In the case of PAS, decision-making is normally the responsibility of its top leadership. Although the DAP is most vocal of the need for greater democratization in Malaysia, its decision-making powers are heavily centralized in the hands of its executive committee (Kua, 1996). In fact, DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang has persistently been criticized for his allegedly authoritarian manner.

Selection of Candidates for Elections

Although the rank and file members of all Barisan Nasional parties exercise little or no power over the choice of candidates, and despite the elitist nature of the selection of candidates by the ruling coalition, local party support is crucial during the selection process. In the case of UMNO, for instance, party president Mahathir came under intense pressure during the 1995 general election over the choice of party and Barisan Nasional candidates in Terengganu, Kelantan, and Kedah (Gomez, 1996a). This suggested not only that the support of both the local and national leaderships is crucial for securing nominations, but that party members with personal links to party elites have a better chance of being selected as candidates. The choice of Barisan Nasional candidates from the MCA, MIC, Gerakan and other component parties is left entirely to the individual party leadership, though nominations are secured from leaders from lower rungs of the hierarchy. However, the UMNO president, in his capacity as prime minister, has the final say on both the selection of candidates and the number of seats to be contested by each component party in the Barisan Nasional. There is seldom much dispute over this arrangement, since the component members of the Barisan Nasional are heavily reliant on UMNO to be given safe seats to contest. This is particularly true of the MCA, Gerakan and MIC, all of which tend to perform unsatisfactorily in non-*Bumiputera*-majority constituencies. During the general elections of 1986 and 1990, for instance, even the leaders of the MCA, Gerakan and MIC acknowledged that their electoral victory was due primarily to the Malay support that UMNO had managed to secure for them.

Even among the opposition, the selection of candidates and the constituencies in which they are to contest is determined by the parties' top leadership, although leaders at divisional and state levels are allowed to make their recommendations. For example, the central issues influencing the selection of DAP candidates in the 1995 general elections were the urgency in capturing a state government, factionalism within the party at state level and increasing the representation of women candidates in its electoral list (Kua, 1996; Gomez, 1996a). As for the component parties in the Barisan Nasional, the centralization of the selection of candidates in the parties' top leadership has occasionally led to the resignation of party activists at local level, the crossover of members to the Barisan Nasional and even to the covert support of rival candidates; in many instances, disgruntled members within the opposition – and the Barisan Nasional – have stood as independent candidates. Thus, in most opposition parties, the support of the national leadership has proved crucial for securing nominations of a federal or state seat. More importantly, in both the Barisan Nasional and the opposition, the decision-making process involved in the selection of candidates for elections is far from democratic.

Indeed, a common denominator of both the Barisan Nasional and the opposition parties, particularly the DAP, is the presence of what have been described as 'parachute candidates'. Here, prominent people are chosen to stand as candidates in constituencies that are new to them; in some cases, such people are not active members but prominent personalities in other fields, for example, in non-governmental organizations or academia. In 1990, for instance, two professors from the University of Malaya were selected by the MCA and the MIC as parliamentary candidates to contest the general election. In 1990, prominent Chinese educationalist Kua Kia Soong, was selected by the DAP to contest a parliamentary seat. Probably, the most famous 'parachute candidate' is Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who, when first chosen by UMNO to contest in the 1982 general election, had been a prominent government critic and leader of a major non-governmental organization. As

politics in Malaysia becomes increasingly sophisticated, the trend of bringing in more professionals and intellectuals into the parties is becoming more pronounced.

Party Finances

The influence of money in the political system has emerged as one of the most controversial aspects of Malaysian politics. Yet, the manner in which most political parties derive funds to finance their activities still remains rather opaque, although political campaigns have incurred escalating costs due to their increasing sophistication while traditional sources of political party funding, such as membership dues and private donations, have become inadequate to meet these expenses. Moreover, as already mentioned, since political parties come under the purview of the Societies Act, which also covers all non-political societies, the requirements for the disclosure of sources of party funding are minimal.

Despite repeated calls for separate legislation to govern the activities of political parties, especially on the disclosure of funding and the excessive expenditure on electoral campaigns, new regulations on such activities have not been introduced, nor have existing ones been effectively implemented, since the parties with greatest access to funds are those from the Barisan Nasional; most of these parties, including the MIC and the Gerakan, have had access to funds on a regular basis from corporate figures and business entities (Gomez, 1990, 1991 and 1994). Since major political parties and politicians also own or control business concerns which influence the manner in which political parties are funded, the need for the promulgation of such an electoral legislation has not been viewed with urgency.

The rise of political patronage and networks of clientele within the three major parties in the Barisan Nasional have so institutionalized the abuse of funds in order to climb the party hierarchy that the epithet 'money politics' had become, by the 1980s, a common metaphor of Malaysian politics. Money politics in UMNO, for example, has been so debilitating that even Mahathir had to speak out strongly against its influence in 1985, citing as examples those who had distributed cash to members to secure support – one aspiring politician was willing to spend RM600,000 in his bid to become division chairman – and others who offered expenses-paid overseas trips in exchange for votes; meanwhile, then Deputy Prime Minister Musa Hitam expressed fears that UMNO might soon become a 'get-rich-quick club' (*Asian Wall Street Journal*, 17 June 1985; *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 10 October 1985). Despite these criticisms by the UMNO leadership, the problem of money politics had escalated to such proportions by 1993 that allegations abounded that RM200-300 million had been spent by just one faction that year during the highly divisive party election when the UMNO deputy presidency was contested. By 1995, one candidate reportedly had to spend almost RM6 million to secure the post of division chairman. This compelled Mahathir to propose an amendment to UMNO's constitution banning the money politics which was in danger of destroying the party (*New Straits Times*, 20 October 1994).¹⁶ Despite this, UMNO has not been able adequately to check money politics, and by 1996 it had become so divisive that during the run-up to the party election Mahathir attributed this as his reason for banning campaigning for party posts (*The Star*, 22 August 1996).

Of the major opposition parties, only the DAP has established a cooperative. The cooperative, however, failed to emerge as a business enterprise of any significance and appears to have become moribund since the late 1980s. Semangat, while in the opposition fold, and although led by Razaleigh who pioneered UMNO's business involvement, did not

display any interest in participating actively in the corporate sector.¹⁷ Instead, the party had become a major critic of money politics.

Despite the magnitude of funds purportedly utilized and distributed during the elections by the Barisan Nasional and UMNO in particular, there have been no disclosures as to how its campaigns were financed. While there have been instances when shares of publicly-listed companies owned by UMNO have disappeared and party leaders have publicly admitted that UMNO went into business to raise funds and achieve financial independence, there has been no evidence in company accounts – these require annual independent audits which then have to be publicly disclosed – of fund transfers to the party by any of its corporate holdings. However, since UMNO has also acknowledged that much of its corporate assets are held in the name of the party's business nominees, it is probably through them that funds from the corporate sector are channelled to the party (Gomez, 1990, 1994).

Big businesses controlled or owned by Chinese and foreign interests have also probably been funding UMNO, since party-linked companies have managed to obtain significant control of key sectors of the economy, especially the construction, media and banking industries. Most of these non-*Bumiputera* entities have hoped to benefit from business opportunities accruing from UMNO companies. Furthermore, since UMNO leaders also control important cabinet portfolios, particularly those of finance, and international trade and industry, there are numerous other economic benefits that these non-*Bumiputera* companies can open themselves up to by directly funding the party.¹⁸

Malaysian opposition parties do not appear to have much access to large sources of funds. Leaders of the DAP and PRM claim that their funds are still provided primarily by their members or through donations from private individuals. In the case of the DAP, party members who have been elected as state assemblymen or parliamentarians are expected to contribute a portion of their allowance to the party. Another significant source of funds was profits from the sale of the DAP's popular news organ, *The Rocket*, until the government restricted the sale of the newsletter to its members. Semangat had enjoyed some access to funds from corporate entities, since the party was led by a former finance minister. Although the party obtained funds from some business interests before the 1990 general election, it is unlikely, given its waning influence, that it would be able to continue soliciting funds from them. Semangat leaders claimed that a huge portion of party funds was generated through party members and private donations. When Semangat, DAP and PRM belonged to the Gagasan Rakyat, each component party was responsible for raising its own funds.

The Electoral System

Elections in Malaysia

In Malaysia, two kinds of elections are held on a regular basis: the parliamentary and state elections. Municipal elections were also conducted regularly until 1964 it became apparent to the ruling Alliance coalition that it was in danger of registering embarrassingly high losses in most urban areas. Federal and state elections are conducted through the first-past-the-post system in single member territorial constituencies. The costs incurred for conducting an election are borne by the government, although individual candidates or parties are responsible for funding their own campaigns. Voting is not compulsory, but the principle of universal suffrage applies to all Malaysians above the age of 21.

This single member system of election for the *Dewan Rakyat* and the state assemblies has been used in every election from the time of the first federal election in 1955. Since then, parliamentary elections have been conducted without fail as constitutionally required and electoral participation of citizens has been consistently high. In the federal elections held between 1959 and 1990, voter turnout ranged between 70 and 78.9 per cent, while the turnout in state elections during the same period ranged between 71.7 and 78.9 per cent (*NSTP Research and Information Services*, 1994). The conduct of elections is regulated by various election acts including the Elections Act 1958, Election Offences Act 1954, Election Commission Act 1957, Elections (Registration of Electors) Regulations 1971 and the Elections (Conduct of Elections) Regulations 1981.

Elections in Malaysia are competitive in that there are a number of parties which compete in the electoral process – any party registered with the Registrar of Societies is eligible to contest an election – and the outcome of an election can bring about a change of government. By subjecting the choice of government to the electoral process at regular intervals under such conditions, the Barisan Nasional has been able to claim much legitimacy to its right to rule. The fact that it is possible for the Barisan Nasional to be voted out of office – and this has transpired on a few occasions during state-level elections – has enhanced their leaders' claim over their right to rule. However, some federal-state disputes have occurred in Kelantan (in 1977), Sarawak (in 1966) and Sabah (in 1994), resulting in the rather undemocratic or questionable removal of elected governments from office; in the case of Kelantan and Sarawak, a State of Emergency was declared by federal government leaders to topple recalcitrant leaders of these state governments, while in Sabah the re-elected PBS government was toppled following the crossover of some of its members to the Barisan Nasional, allegedly because of substantial monetary favours and the promise of ministerial appointments at the federal or state level (see Means, 1976; Gomez, 1996b).

All the ten federal-level elections that have been held since 1955 have been won by the UMNO-led Barisan Nasional/Alliance coalitions. On each occasion except for 1969, a two-thirds majority was secured in parliament – this majority was to enable the Barisan Nasional to amend the constitution at will – although the coalition came dangerously close to losing this majority in the 1990 general election (Table 6.1). The Barisan Nasional cannot claim, however, that its consistent electoral support proves its continued popularity.

The Barisan Nasional's strength is to be found in the consolidation of the support of the component parties behind single candidates. This unity, however, has eroded to some extent owing to the acute factionalism that has emerged within UMNO, while the long-standing dispute between the MCA and Gerakan has led to attempts by both parties to undermine the other's candidates, particularly in Penang. It is rare for opposition parties to agree to cooperate during elections, and their tendency to contest each other along with Barisan Nasional has helped the ruling coalition comfortably to secure success in general elections. When the opposition unified in 1990, the Barisan Nasional faced its strongest challenge, since in almost all constituencies the contest was only two-sided (Khong, 1991).

Approval of Candidates

The constitution stipulates that any citizen above the age of 21 is eligible to stand as a candidate for the *Dewan Rakyat*. To qualify to contest for a seat in a state assembly, in addition to fulfilling the same age requirement, a candidate is also required to be a resident of the state. Thus, the only three criteria to stand for election are citizenship, residence and the

attainment of at least 21 years of age. A parliamentary candidate cannot contest more than one seat, but can simultaneously contest for a seat in a state assembly; s/he cannot, however, be a member of the senate. A candidate can be disqualified from contesting a seat in parliament or a state assembly if s/he is bankrupt, or of unsound mind, or if s/he has been convicted for an offence in a Malaysian court – within a period of five years preceding nomination day – which carries a penalty of not less than RM2,000 or a prison term of not less than one year, or if s/he has been convicted under the Sedition Act. After the election, a successful candidate to parliament or a state assembly can be disqualified if s/he fails to submit a list of election expenses within the stipulated period (Sothi, 1993, pp. 115-9).

Table 5.1 Malaysia: Federal Election Results, 1955-95

Year	1955	1959	1964	1969	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1995
Alliance	51	74	89	74						
BN*					135	130	132	148	127	162
PAS **	1	13	9	12		5	5	1	7	7
DAP				13	9	16	9	24	20	9
Socialist Front		8	2							
PPP***		4	2	4						
P. Negara	1									
P. Malaya	1									
UDP		1								
PAP		1								
Gerakan ***			8							
USNO			13							
SCA			3		1					
SNAP ***			9	9						
SUPP***			5							
Pesaka			2							
S46									8	6
Pekemas				1						
PBS									14	8
Ind.		3		1		2	8	4	4	
TOTAL	52	104	104	144	154	154	154	177	180	192

* The Alliance was enlarged and renamed the Barisan Nasional.

** PAS was part of the Barisan Nasional during the 1974 general election.

*** These parties joined the Barisan Nasional.

Source: *New Straits Times*, 23 April 1995.

On nomination day, the nomination papers of a candidate for a federal or state seat must be submitted to the returning officer, appointed by the Election Commission, at the nomination centre in the constituency where the election is to be held. The nomination must be supported by an elector from the constituency who also has to be proposed by the electors. The candidate, however, need not be present to submit the nomination papers. Along with the nomination papers, a deposit of RM5,000 is required from a parliamentary candidate and

RM3,000 from a candidate in a state election; the deposit is refundable if the candidate secures more than one-eighth of the total votes cast in the constituency where s/he stood for election. A nomination can be rejected by another candidate or a voter in the constituency on only four grounds: that the candidate's particulars are insufficient to identify him or her as a candidate; that the nomination papers are not filled as required; that the contents of the nomination papers reveal that a candidate is not capable of being elected; or that there are grounds for disqualification as stipulated under the constitution. The returning officer has the final decision on the validity of a nomination, but need not make a decision on nomination day itself (Sothi, 1993, pp. 123-34).

Campaigning

The manner in which campaigns are conducted tend to favour the Barisan Nasional heavily, thus undermining government claims that elections in Malaysia are conducted on a fair and competitive basis. The major factors at play during a campaign period which have helped the Barisan Nasional retain control of the government have been commonly termed as the '3Ms' – money, media and machinery. This has involved complaints about the ruling coalition's excessive use of funds, abuse of its control of the country's leading newspapers, television and radio networks and misuse of the government machinery (see, for example, Mauzy, 1979; Chandra, 1982; Sakaran and Hamdan, 1988; Khong, 1991; Gomez, 1996a).

In the case of the media, legislation to control the press has been effective in curbing dissent and criticism of the Barisan Nasional government's performance in office. The indirect and direct control by some of the Barisan Nasional's component parties over the private media – the private television network, TV3 and the major Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English newspapers – and the government's direct control over the electronic media – TV1, TV2 and the radio networks – have also been flagrantly abused to cast the opposition in an unfavourable light. UMNO, for example, has a direct majority stake in Utusan Melayu Bhd which publishes the influential Malay newspaper, *Utusan Malaysia*. Through its holding company, Fleet Holdings Sdn Bhd, UMNO also had a controlling stake in TV3 and The New Straits Times Press Bhd, which publishes the English newspapers, *The New Straits Times* and *Business Times* and the Malay newspaper *Berita Harian*. TV3 and The New Straits Times Press are currently controlled by businessmen closely associated with UMNO Deputy President Anwar Ibrahim (Gomez, 1994). The MCA's investment arm, Huaren Holdings Sdn Bhd, has a controlling interest in Star Publications Bhd, which publishes the popular English tabloid, *The Star*, while *The Sun*, another English tabloid, is controlled by Vincent Tan Chee Yioun, a businessman with strong ties to the UMNO elite. Most of the Tamil press is controlled by leaders of the MIC, while some of the leading Chinese newspapers, including the *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *The China Press*, are controlled by the Hong Leong Group which has close business ties with UMNO-linked companies. The *Shin Chew Jit Poh*, the country's best-selling Chinese newspaper, is controlled by a Sarawak-based tycoon who is also a Barisan Nasional senator (Gomez, 1994).

In view of such ownership patterns of the mainstream media, it is not surprising that opposition members have repeatedly complained that not only are they unable to get their manifestos advertised during campaign periods, but, on those occasions when the press does carry articles on them, their statements are either taken out of context or falsified. Major newspapers are, however, used to carry full page – usually coloured – advertisements on the Barisan Nasional's manifestos and accomplishments, while the views of government leaders are given wide coverage (Sakaran and Hamdan, 1988; Khong, 1991; Gomez, 1996a).

The Barisan Nasional abuses the government machinery in several ways. The opposition has argued that, since the timing for the dissolution of parliament is the sole prerogative of the prime minister, provided that the general election is called for within the five-year period, the Barisan Nasional is given an undue advantage. Although the Election Commission decides the length of the campaign period, by ensuring that it is kept very short – normally just over a week – apparently in the interests of ethnic harmony, this has proven of greater benefit to the Barisan Nasional. Since the banning of open rallies following the 1969 general election, campaigns have been restricted to the indoors. Yet Barisan Nasional leaders give overt campaign speeches at huge rallies while ostensibly making an official address at a government-organized function or when opening government projects. Through their control of the federal government, Barisan Nasional leaders often make promises of funding for development projects and threats of financial cuts, which are reinforced through their distribution of state largesse to the electorate during the campaign period.¹⁹

Compared to the opposition parties, the Barisan Nasional's campaign machinery (especially that of UMNO) is efficiently and effectively run during elections. The effectiveness of the Barisan Nasional's machinery can, however, be attributed to its easy access to funds. Since public rallies are banned, door-to-door canvassing is the most common form of campaigning and this is labour-intensive; most Barisan Nasional campaign workers are remunerated, while the opposition relies heavily on unpaid voluntary help. Since the number of campaign posters and vehicles is not limited by law, this tends to benefit parties with greater access to funds, invariably the Barisan Nasional parties.

Following the election, although all candidates are required to file with the Election Commission the total amount of funds used during the campaign, they are not required to divulge information on the sources of their funding. However, despite the requirement to disclose how funds were spent during the campaign, there have been numerous allegations that the amount of money spent has usually far exceeded that permitted under the electoral regulations (see, for example, Gomez, 1996a).

Election Procedures and Requirements

The constitution provides for an independent election commission to permit the conduct of free and fair elections. To ensure this, the members of the Election Commission, comprising a chairman, deputy chairman, and three other members, are appointed by the king after consultation at the Conference of Rulers. Members of the Election Commission cannot be removed from office, except under very specific conditions, similar to those for the removal of a member of the judiciary. Members of the commission, who can remain in office until the age of 65, are paid through a consolidated fund; matters pertaining to this fund are not subject to parliamentary debate.

The Election Commission is also responsible for reviewing the division of parliamentary and state constituencies, normally undertaken every eight to ten years. The original intent of the constitution was that the Electoral Commission would be responsible for the delineation of electoral boundaries. In 1962, however, when the Alliance decided that the formation of the newly-redrawn constituencies would not be to its favour during a general election, the constitution was amended to abrogate the Election Commission's right to enforce another delineation. With the amendment, the Election Commission could only make

its recommendations to parliament, which had the right to accept or reject the newly-delineated constituencies (Sothi, 1987, pp. 57-9).²⁰

The electorate in parliamentary constituencies has always been disproportionately smaller in rural, predominantly *Bumiputera*, areas compared to the mainly Chinese-majority, urban constituencies. Thus, although the Malays accounted for just 55.2 per cent of the total electorate in 1990, such a division of the electoral boundaries – which amounts to almost one rural vote for every two urban votes – favours the Barisan Nasional, especially UMNO, whose main support base comes from the rural Malays.²¹ This, in fact, has been explained as a key factor in the Barisan Nasional's consistent victories in federal-level elections (Crouch, 1993; Gomez, 1996a). In the 1960s, *Bumiputera*-majority constituencies constituted 57 per cent of the total number of parliamentary seats; by the early 1980s, this figure had risen to 65 per cent. The over-representation of Sabahan and Sarawakian *Bumiputeras* helped enhance *Bumiputera* dominance in parliament. In 1990, for instance, although only 16.5 per cent of the population resided in Sabah and Sarawak, the 48 constituencies in these two states constituted 27 per cent of the seats in parliament; more importantly, *Bumiputeras* in the Borneo states, particularly Sarawak, tended to support the Barisan Nasional (Crouch, 1993). This meant that any party in the peninsula which could command the support of most *Bumiputeras* would be able to control the federal government, and if it collaborated with the *Bumiputera* parties of some influence in Sabah and Sarawak, it would also be able to command a comfortable majority in parliament (Crouch, 1993). By 1994, UMNO had already secured a strong base in Sabah in Muslim *Bumiputera*-majority constituencies, while its relationship with PBB, Sarawak's long-standing ruling party, was particularly strong. Such a situation also meant that even if the opposition garnered strong electoral support in terms of the total number of votes cast, the number of seats it secured in parliament would not necessarily be significant. In the 1990 general election, although the opposition obtained 48 per cent of the total votes cast, it secured only 29 per cent of the 180 parliamentary seats.

Even though the final decision on the acceptance of newly-drawn constituencies is the prerogative of parliament, the Election Commission's impartiality in the redrawing of electoral boundaries has been questioned by opposition parties. The only avenues through which the opposition can question or protest the redrawing of parliamentary and state constituencies is parliament or the state assemblies. However, due to its minority status in the federal and state legislatures, the opposition can seldom do very much to stop the Barisan Nasional from securing the required two-thirds majority in parliament or to make the state assemblies enforce the new electoral boundaries. One exception was in 1993 in Penang, when the Barisan Nasional did not command a two-thirds majority in the state assembly. The Election Commission's proposed redrawn boundaries in the state were not accepted when the DAP refused to support the change. Despite allegations of extensive gerrymandering and abuse of money, media and machinery during the campaign period, the actual conduct of elections on polling day has been subject to fewer criticisms. The only two requirements for eligibility to vote is that a citizen must have attained the age of 21 and must reside within one constituency; if s/he does not reside within a constituency, s/he is known as an absent voter. A voter is not allowed to vote in more than one constituency during the same election. To be able to vote on polling day, a voter must have registered as a voter in their constituency during a voter registration exercise conducted by the Election Commission. Such registration exercises are periodically carried out at the discretion of the Election Commission – normally at least once a year – to update the electoral roll which will be used during a general or state election. A person is only allowed to vote on polling day if their name is listed on the electoral roll.

On election day, polling is normally carried out in schools, which allows the Election Commission to use classrooms as polling centres; there is a provision for mobile polling stations in rural areas. Senior civil servants are usually employed to serve as the chairperson (or presiding officer) of each polling station; three polling clerks are also employed, two to handle the electoral roll of the constituency to check the particulars of voters when they present themselves to vote and the third to ensure that the ballot papers are put in the correct ballot box; that is, one for the state-level election and another for the federal-level election. One representative of each candidate, known as the election agent,²² is allowed to be present in each polling station to watch the balloting. Before the voting begins at 8.00 am, the presiding officer will confirm with the candidates' election agents that the ballot box is empty before it is locked and sealed in their presence; ballot boxes are made so as to ensure that, when locked, ballot papers can be put in but cannot be taken out. The ballot papers – printed by the government's national printing department and delivered under police escort to the returning officer – and the serial numbers of the ballots are also indicated to the election agents. Each election agent is also allowed to have at the polling station one copy of the electoral roll of voters registered in that particular constituency and is also provided with a desk and table to watch the polling.

All voters must produce their National Registration Identity Card – all citizens above the age of 12 are required to have one – to the Election Commission's polling clerks at the polling station, who crosscheck it with his or her particulars in the electoral roll. If the particulars match, the voter is provided with a ballot paper and their name and number on the electoral roll are called out so that the candidates' election agents can note their attendance in their own electoral roll. The voter is then allowed to mark the ballot paper behind a collapsible metal screen before placing it in the ballot box.

At 6.30 pm, the polling centre is closed and each polling station locked; the election agent of each candidate is allowed to remain in the polling station at all times. The seal to the ballot box is then broken and counting of the votes commences. A recount is permitted if an election agent requests one. The total number of votes secured by each candidate is then listed, the ballot papers placed back in the ballot box and sealed, and the results and the ballot box taken, under police escort, to the main polling centre for the constituency. There, total votes from each polling station are tabulated and the results announced by the returning officer. If a candidate is not satisfied with the manner in which votes have been counted, s/he can request a recount, which is then conducted in the main polling centre.

Irregularities and the Provisions to Prevent Them

Among the most common complaints by voters regarding the voting procedure is that their names are inexplicably dropped from the electoral roll. Although voters now have the facility of calling a 'hot-line' set up by the Election Commission before the election to confirm that their names are on the electoral roll, as well as to receive information on the location of their polling station, the matter of missing names on the electoral roll remains a problem.

Another common complaint of the opposition is that, since the counting of votes is done at the polling station itself before the results are taken to the main counting centre where the total from all the polling stations are tabulated, this means that the voting pattern at the district level can be established, which can be a determining factor when delineation of electoral boundaries is conducted.²³ Many allegations have been made that areas which are

opposition strongholds are carved out and integrated into areas controlled by the Barisan Nasional, to its favour. For example, following the 1995 general election, Razaleigh, Semangat's president, claimed that the Barisan Nasional's only two parliamentary victories in Kelantan were the result of postal votes from resident military encampments in these two constituencies; these military encampments had been included in these two constituencies following the new delineation of the constituencies in 1993.²⁴ Postal votes normally refer to the votes by police and armed forces personnel and their spouses who vote prior to an election: these votes tend predominantly to favour the Barisan Nasional. In the 1990 general election, the number of such eligible postal voters totalled 193,365 (Sothi, 1993, p. 182).

Double-voting is possible under the current system and has come under some criticism. Since it is possible for a voter to have a change of address recorded on his or her National Registration Identity Card on the same day, it is possible to be registered in two different constituencies. It has been alleged by members of both the opposition and the ruling coalition that some parties register voters in two or more constituencies and ferry them between constituencies on election day. In one attempt to curb this practice, the Election Commission stopped allowing political parties from registering voters on its behalf in 1972 (Sothi, 1993, pp. 100-4).

Probably the most common allegation made during elections is that funds are used to buy votes, causing the expenditure during campaigns to far exceed the stipulated maximum of RM50,000 for a parliamentary constituency and RM30,000 for a state seat. Though such allegations usually come from the opposition, the Barisan Nasional have on occasion made similar complaints against the opposition. Following the 1990 general election, a Barisan Nasional member filed a case in court alleging that a Semangat parliamentary candidate in Terengganu had used funds to secure votes; the court deemed the allegation to be valid.

Despite confirmation of the practice of vote-buying, the practice was apparently again rampant during the 1995 general election. There were numerous allegations that votes were secured through the distribution of funds and gifts by the opposition in the states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah, and in some urban constituencies in Perak and Kuala Lumpur. In Kelantan, for example, PAS alleged that there were candidates who spent almost RM5 million to secure support, with voters paid between RM500 and RM1,000 each. In the Batu constituency in Kuala Lumpur, a police report filed by the PRM against the Barisan Nasional candidate for overspending during his campaign is still under investigation (Gomez, 1996a).

While complaints of such irregularities can be made to the Election Commission, most parties, particularly those in the opposition, tend to seek redress through the courts. In 1995, in one case filed in court, PAS alleged not only that the Barisan Nasional used money to buy support in Kelantan, but that there were also irregularities in the conduct of the postal votes in two parliamentary constituencies which were both won by the ruling coalition and in some of the state constituencies within these two parliamentary constituencies. However, the case was dismissed on the grounds that PAS had not provided sufficient evidence to prove that vote buying had occurred and that there were irregularities in the postal votes. In another case, a voter in the Lembah Pantai constituency in Kuala Lumpur filed a case in court alleging that the Barisan Nasional candidate who won the seat had obtained voter support by distributing 'gifts' (*New Straits Times*, 2 September 1995). One key allegation was that the Barisan Nasional candidate had benefited from an offer made by Kuala Lumpur City Hall through its mayor to sell land titles at a reduced price – from RM4 per square foot to RM2.60 per square foot – to those occupying an area in the constituency. Although the candidate

admitted that the offer had been made in her presence during a *ceramah* (political gathering), she claimed that she had no prior knowledge of the mayor's intention to make the offer (*New Straits Times*, 2 September 1995). The court ruled in favour of the defendant.

Another alleged irregularity is that voters are transferred between constituencies. Before the 1995 general election, for example, both APU and the Barisan Nasional accused each other of transferring voters between constituencies in Kelantan. PAS and Semangat alleged that UMNO had brought in 71,000 Muslim Thais and dispatched them to key constituencies to vote in the impending election. In its turn, UMNO lodged a complaint with the Election Commission that PAS had ferried in voters from other states to ensure victory in marginal seats (Gomez, 1996a).

Political Culture

Despite the existence of a multiparty system in Malaysia, and although the ruling coalition comprises more than a dozen political parties, most analysts view Malaysia's political system as being dominated by one party: UMNO (see Hua, 1983; Means, 1991; Chee, 1991; Crouch, 1992; Zakaria, 1993; Mauzy, 1993; Case, 1993). In fact, two major features of the Malaysian political system are the extent of authoritarianism within the state and the impact of Malay hegemony.

The enfeeblement of Malaysia's civic culture and the gradual heightening of authoritarianism from the post-Independence period commenced notably with the banning of local-level elections in the early 1960s. When state and federal elections results also began to swing in favour of the opposition in the late 1960s, the rules were changed, primarily through amendments to the constitution. It was, for example, prohibited, even in parliament, to question 'ethnically sensitive' issues, which included any reference to Malay special rights, non-Malay citizenship, the status of the national language, Islam and the constitutional provisions pertaining to the sultans. Meanwhile, recognizing the ethnically-divided nature of the electorate, an enlarged Barisan Nasional coalition was formed, which has been an effective means to consolidate the electoral support of other ethnically-based parties under one umbrella. This attempt at power-sharing within the Barisan Nasional, as Mauzy (1993, pp. 110-1) noted, was in effect 'accommodation on essentially Malay terms'; UMNO leaders have openly asserted that the party could rule alone, but prefers to 'share' power in the interests of national unity. Ironically, the government has asserted that it is precisely this system of consociationalism, or power-sharing, within the Barisan Nasional which has enabled them to manage and resolve ethnic problems, thus contributing to ethnic coexistence. Malay hegemony within this political arrangement, however, has been justified on the grounds that it represents the interests of the largest ethnic community (Chee, 1991).

Under these circumstances, Malay hegemony has become very pronounced within the political system. On this point, Zakaria (1993, p. 1553) has noted that:

[a] very significant feature of the post-1971 political system is the primacy of Malay political power, in contrast to the more multiracial leadership that had been a characteristic of the 1957-69 period. The post-1971 system is still at least in semblance a parliamentary democracy, but since 1969 its basis is that of 'Malay political hegemony' within the context of a multiracial coalition government. 'Malay political hegemony' refers to the dominance (Malay politicians are quick to note it is 'dominance' and not 'domination') of the aspirations and wishes of the coalition's senior partner, UMNO, in its format of decision making and the resolution of demands made by its non-Malay components. Malay political dominance in the post-1971 system seeks to ensure as well 'Malay' symbols of state and nation, the filling of

critical posts with Malays in the bureaucracy, police, and armed forces, increasing participation in the public and private sectors, and the promotion of a Malay-based national consciousness – all of which provides a sense of indigenous achievement. It could be argued, of course, that a Malay-based nation-state and political system had been the prevailing notion of governance from the beginning in 1957 and even before that, but it is the post-1971 system that made such a conception, perhaps once and for all, unassailable.

Thus, most studies characterize the Malaysian state as semi-authoritarian (Crouch, 1992), semi-democratic (Case, 1993) or quasi-democratic (Zakaria, 1989). Although these qualified terms on the state of authoritarianism in Malaysia suggest that some democratic forms still prevail, most of the minimal conditions necessary for the practice of democracy in the Schumpeterian sense, particularly fair elections, adequate opportunities for political opinion-making and political organization and minimal protection for the individual from arbitrary state power, hardly prevail in Malaysia. Further, as Crouch (1992) points out, even the minimal democratic procedures that exist are permitted only provided the power of the ruling elite is not undermined and are ‘quickly modified or abolished when elite interests were threatened’; this has been true both in the case of amendments to UMNO’s constitution and the federal constitution as well as other legislation.

In 1987, for example, when Mahathir nearly lost the presidency because of a struggle within the factions in UMNO, government leaders dismissed genuine grievances against state policies by opposition parties and non-governmental organizations as mere communal agitation. This kind of high-handiness was often employed to justify authoritarian measures so that the government could stay in power. Using the ISA, 119 Malaysians were detained without trial in late 1987, most of them accused of having incited racial tension. Subsequently, the already docile press was further intimidated, with the suspension of the publishing licences of several leading English and Chinese newspapers. When even the judiciary posed a threat to the ruling elite, the Lord President and two Supreme Court judges were removed from office under unprecedented and suspicious circumstances (Das and Salleh, 1989). Later, the power vested in the executive arm of the government was also increased through constitutional amendments which further circumscribed the powers of the judiciary and the monarchy (Lee, 1995). The impact of these actions was severe; the independence of the judiciary, for instance, has been so significantly compromised that it has led to growing scepticism about the capacity of the judicial system to administer justice. Yet, through such oppressive measures, Mahathir was able to check a serious erosion of his power within UMNO. The ascendant position of the executive has also hindered the bureaucracy from functioning independently to check unproductive practices that have arisen in society, for example the concentration of wealth in the corporate sector (see Gomez, 1990, 1991 and 1994).

This suggests that a distinction should be made between co-option and power sharing within the Barisan Nasional (McGarry and O’Leary, 1993, pp. 39-40). Although Prime Minister Mahathir, like his predecessors, has stressed that power sharing prevails within the ruling coalition – Mahathir has said for instance that, ‘[p]ower sharing in Barisan Nasional means giving our power to the minority groups so they can have a meaningful part to play in all our deliberations and decisions’ (*Business Times*, 24 March 95) – this is not entirely true; rather, UMNO co-opts other major parties mainly to project the image of multiracial appearance, as this has been found to be an effective means of perpetuating its power.

Thus, although some political participation enabling the emergence of new opposition parties is permitted, freedoms of expression and assembly are severely curtailed. The

mainstream press has remained under such tight control that the tradition of investigative reporting is very weak, particularly if it affects the interests of the ruling elite, while reports on political news are generally very cautious, unless they apply to the opposition.²⁵ Even though the political environment has become more pluralistic, and although multiparty elections are held at regular intervals, the Barisan Nasional government's introduction of numerous electoral and extra-electoral restrictions has severely disadvantaged the opposition, preventing it from posing too much of a threat to the ruling coalition. Though some of these political and electoral controls have been justified on the grounds that a stable political system is a prerequisite for economic development and harmonious ethnic coexistence in a multiracial society, the limited democratic space undermines the Barisan Nasional's contention that democracy prevails in the country.

Main Shortcomings of the Party System

The major shortcomings of the political system in Malaysia are probably conspicuous from the foregoing discussion. Although regularly contested elections are held on the basis of a universal franchise, a core set of civil rights is not respected. This has impeded fairness in the struggle among opposition political parties not just to acquire power, but even to articulate widely the vision, ideology or substance of their policies.

These shortcomings are exacerbated by the declining independence and influence of the bureaucracy, judiciary and monarchy; the balance of power in the state has been shifting in favour of an increasingly centralized executive. The system of consociationalism offered through the Barisan Nasional coalition, though an effective means of consolidating the electoral support of ethnically and ideologically-based parties under one organization, diminishes open debate in the political arena as parties are co-opted into the ruling coalition. The ineffectiveness of the system of consociationalism is especially pronounced in view of the inequitable distribution of power within the Barisan Nasional and since it does not allow for the resolution of ethnic problem in a just manner. Limited political competition has also not helped to set the parameters of government intervention, which has increasingly managed to centre economic power in the hands of the political elite.

Liberalization of political controls is necessary if there is to be a genuine attempt to increase participation. The climate of fear that prevails because of the existence of Draconian legislation such as the ISA needs to be allayed through the repeal of this act. In addition, stringent regulations under the Police Act which, among other things, do not permit assembly of more than five people, need to be relaxed, and the practice of issuing publishing licences on a yearly basis under the Printing Presses and Publications Act has to be discontinued to encourage open debate. Greater independence has to be given to important bodies such as the Election Commission and the office of the Attorney-General, while the extensive domination of the executive arm of government has to be attenuated to curtail abuse of power and help promote democratization of the political system. Since the legislative assemblies can be dominated by one party or coalition – even in Kelantan, the opposition had total control of the state assembly in 1990 – other parliamentary systems, based, for example, on proportional representation, need to be considered. In the long-run, this may lead to the formation of governments based on multiparty coalitions where power is more evenly distributed and which may serve as a check on excessive executive power.

Moreover, despite the representation of numerous political parties in parliament, legislators do not play a meaningful role in drawing up new legislation or proposing policies.

This function is left almost entirely to the bureaucracy, dominated by the UMNO-led executive. Indeed, in view of strict party discipline, Barisan Nasional parliamentarians usually endorse new legislation and policies, customarily with minimal or no protests. Thus, there is hardly any parliamentary involvement in explicit policy decisions (Musolf and Springer, 1979, pp. 33-4). Following a steady erosion of the time and grounds for debate in parliament among the opposition, for example during adjournment speeches and when oral and written questions are presented, this has meant that its impact in the legislature has also diminished. Indeed, where amendments to legislation have been forwarded by the bureaucracy, it is usually due to pressure mounted from outside parliament.

The main forum, then, where policy issues are suggested and debated is the UMNO general assembly. The views generated here, however, tend to represent the opinions of key party leaders. Thus, a new phenomenon that has emerged in the 1980s is the establishment of numerous think tanks, apparently promoted by Mahathir as a means to undermine the bureaucracy's dominance over policy-making (Noda, 1996, pp. 408-9). Most of these ostensibly independent think tanks were reputedly linked to UMNO leaders. For example, although the notable and long-established Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) is seen as an independent think tank, the organization is believed to have some influence on policy research for Prime Minister Mahathir. The Institut Kajian Dasar (IKD or the Institute for Policy Research) is led by UMNO leaders close to Deputy Prime Minister Anwar, while the Malaysian Strategic Research Centre (MSRC) is linked to Education Minister Najib Razak. Both leaders belong to different factions within UMNO. Although the main Barisan Nasional parties all have unofficial and loosely-based think tanks comprising academics, businessmen and leaders of social organizations, many of whom are not party members, their impact on policy decisions is minimal in view of the subservient positions occupied by these parties in the Barisan Nasional.

Possible Trends for Democratization and Stabilization

As political and economic patterns of behaviour become increasingly similar in the case of the *Bumiputeras* and the non-*Bumiputeras*, and as the class structures of the two races are steadily bridged, greater ethnic problems among the Malays have, ironically enough, surfaced. One example is the UMNO split which led to the formation of Semangat and the current factionalism within UMNO. This split has a distinct class dimension and may be the factor that will bring about greater democratization, since the growing class differences among *Bumiputeras* may prove to be a serious threat to Malay hegemony. Already the *Bumiputeras*, primarily but not exclusively rural Malays, are assessing the Barisan Nasional government's performance not only in terms of economic growth, but also by its capacity to prevent or deal with social ills and maintain a more decent level of probity and transparency.

UMNO's hegemony over the state has facilitated concentration of political and economic power at the top of the party hierarchy, contributing to increased friction among leading politicians over access to lucrative state rents. The ever growing ties between capital and politics and the rent-seeking activities of politicians have also contributed to growing conflicts within the business class, not only between old – particularly the pro-MCA Chinese – and newly-emerged entrepreneurs, but among a breed of new (predominantly *Bumiputera*) capitalists that have emerged through extensive state patronage. Such rivalries have transpired despite the admission by government leaders that although *Bumiputera* capitalists have been created through state policies and patronage, genuine and competent indigenous entrepreneurs have failed to emerge in satisfactory numbers (see *New Straits Times*, 28 June

1994).²⁶ Thus, the business class is hardly autonomous relative to the state. This has hindered the consolidation of this class as a group and constrained its ability to elicit concessions from the state or even function as an effective check against the abuse of state apparatus by the political elite for its vested interests. Moreover, the political ambitions of senior UMNO leaders continue to create a momentum that encourages greater political patronage, thereby consolidating the linkages between the business class and the political elite. Without much transparency, the abuse of power for vested interests is not obvious to the public – unless exposed by members of the ruling elite themselves in an attempt to discredit their opponents²⁷ – and will continue to prevail even though the rapidly burgeoning middle class is increasingly concerned over such issues.

Under these circumstances, the question that arises is why, despite the rapidly changing socioeconomic conditions (such as the growth of a multi-ethnic middle class, the resentments of less-favoured business interests and growing cultural and lifestyle disparities among *Bumiputeras*), these factors have not brought about tensions between the authoritarian state and civil society that can contribute to the development of more democratic measures and institutions.

Academics such as Samuel Huntington have tried to explain this lack of democratization from a modern perspective, arguing that with rapid economic development, a middle class will emerge which will demand greater political participation, leading to greater democratization. But when Huntington realized that the emergence of a middle class in this region was not leading to greater democratization, he revised his thesis to bring in a ‘cultural factor’. In his opinion, while Protestantism (in the European tradition) allowed for compromise and equality, thus making it conducive to democratic transformation, Islam and Confucianism (in the Eastern tradition) were more hierarchical in character, therefore providing obstacles to change (Robison et al., 1993). Another culture-based argument posited that ‘whereas the experience of liberal capitalism helped to nurture an entrepreneurial middle class grounded in a culture of competitive individualism in Western Europe, in East Asia the experience of static economic paternalism has produced a middle class grounded in a culture of dependence. These cultural traits in turn produce a middle class constantly anxious about instability and insecurity’ (Bell and Jayasuriya, 1995, p. 13).

The ‘civil society’ factor was raised by Crouch and Morley (1992) as another explanation for the limited democratization in this region. According to them, economic growth precipitates social mobilization, which in turn facilitates political mobilization, which is required to effect a change of regime. Democratization, thus, is the outcome of the emergence of a civil society. That democratization had not emerged in some countries was, in their opinion, due to the resistance of a strong state.

Despite the validity of much of these arguments, it is evident that democratization has not been achieved in Malaysia because the Barisan Nasional government still enjoys a high degree of popular support. The government’s commendable economic performance, relative success in eradicating poverty, raising real incomes and reducing wealth disparities among ethnic communities, have all helped to shore up the regime and even legitimize authoritarian rule. Thus, despite the emergence of a significant middle class and the growth of civil society, there has been the absence of a correspondingly growing demand for a share of power through democratic reforms. Attempts at promoting democratization have been strongest when the economy was in recession (for instance, during the mid-1980s) but these efforts at pursuing greater democratization were stymied on the grounds that restrictions on civil

liberties were required to protect the supposed fragility of Malaysia's multi-ethnic community. Ironically, it was members of the Barisan Nasional who were primarily responsible for stirring up racial unrest.

The argument that the middle class possesses a reformist potential is justifiable, even in the Southeast Asian context, given that it was this class that led the movement to topple authoritarian rule in Thailand and the Philippines, both of which have a proportionately smaller middle class than Malaysia. However, in the absence of a middle class-led democratization movement in Malaysia, the relative size of the middle class does not explain why some countries have democratized while Malaysia has not. One probable explanation is the ethnic factor: the still limited cooperation among middle class Malaysians, due to the still relatively undiminished ethnic polarization, has, to date, inhibited such mobilization within this class. Another reason is that the bulk of the middle class in Malaysia is de-politicized and materialist, and therefore hardly reformist. It is, however, still too early to predict whether the increasing access of young Malaysians to higher education will lead to a steady increase in democratic values and practices, as is the case in Taiwan, South Korea and Thailand. This process is heavily hampered by the rather oppressive University and University Colleges Act, which strictly forbids students from entering into any form of political participation.

At the moment, the limited reformist orientation that has emerged among the Malaysian middle class, despite its exposure to higher education, may be due to the fact that the access of most *Bumiputeras* to higher education was facilitated through state scholarships and grants. Furthermore, much of the *Bumiputera* middle class is either still employed by the state or views the bureaucracy and UMNO as rungs on the social ladder; many also still conceive of the UMNO-led state as protector of their interests, both politically and economically. Since the major threat to the interests of most of the middle class, especially the urbanized Western-influenced Malaysians, is the development of Islamic and ethnic fundamentalism, the ostensibly moderate multiracial platform offered by the Barisan Nasional is favourably received (Robison and Goodman, 1996).

Thus, if change leading to greater democratization is to come about, it may depend primarily on machinations within UMNO; democracy is possible if UMNO becomes open and internally democratic, which may force the government to be more responsive and accountable. What has emerged in UMNO, however, is not a split between Mahathir and Anwar but the development of very pronounced pro- and anti-Anwar factions.²⁸ While the anti-Anwar faction comprises senior politicians who are chary of Anwar's meteoric rise in the party, the pro-Anwar faction constitutes a younger breed of politicians who are ready to displace senior politicians. Mahathir's position itself seems under little threat, since he has taken steps to ensure that his position is almost unassailable. The return of Razaleigh to the UMNO fold, a comeback reputedly manoeuvred by Mahathir's supporters, will instead perpetuate the struggles currently being waged within the second echelon. Semangat, and Razaleigh in particular, have evidently realized that there is little political future for them in the opposition. Moreover, another attempt to unite opposition parties with very different ideologies may only prove to be a further exercise in futility.

However, since the 1987 UMNO election revealed how the centralization of power in the party and overt practices of patronage could bring about a change of leadership, and since the breakaway faction which led the opposition in the 1990 general election had posed a serious threat to the Barisan Nasional, the current leadership may have calculated that its interests are

best served (or risks best minimized) by some measure of political liberalization. Apart from this, it is unlikely that much reform will occur within the Malaysian political system.

Notes

1. The four 'Yang DiPertuan Negeri', being non-hereditary heads of state, are excluded from some functions of the Conference of Rulers.
2. Federalism in Malaysia dates back to 1896 when four states – Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang – were persuaded by the colonial British administration to form the Federated Malay States (FMS). Through the FMS, the political, financial and administrative powers of these states were centralized in the British government's local administrative centre, Kuala Lumpur. Although the five other Malay states – Johore, Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, Perlis – also came under British protection after 1909, the rulers of these states, having seen the effect of the federation upon the sovereignty of their colleagues in the FMS, resisted any form of inter-Malayan federation; these states were thus known as the Unfederated Malay States (UMS). Penang, Singapore and Malacca, the remaining three states that constituted part of the Malayan peninsula, but which did not have Malay rulers, were known as the Straits Settlement States (SS).

In 1948, the Federation of Malaya Agreement was signed, comprising all the states in the peninsula except Singapore, which remained as a separate colony. Singapore's exclusion meant that its overwhelmingly Chinese population was not to be included in the new federation, enabling the indigenous Malays to remain the majority ethnic community in Malaya.

3. Although this entailed the incorporation of the huge Chinese community in Singapore into the Malayan populace, the large number of indigenous communities in Sabah and Sarawak – most of them, however, are not Malays – helped to maintain a favourable proportion of indigenous in the new federation.
4. This was largely due to the inability of Malaysian leaders to get along with Lee Kuan Yew, leader of the People's Action Party (PAP) and Prime Minister of Singapore. Malaysian leaders were also worried that PAP policies, in particular its 'Malaysian Malaysia' policy, which denounced the supremacy of one particular race, were heightening racial tension.
5. Although historical events, such as the secession of Singapore, would suggest that federalism in Malaysia was introduced to take into account various ethnic or communal considerations, the impact of ethnicity traverses state boundaries (Shafruddin, 1987; Shafruddin and Iftikhar, 1988). Even the Chinese, for instance, are too widely disseminated (except in Singapore, which eventually seceded from Malaysia) to be considered as a cause for federal treatment.
6. *Bumiputera*, which means 'sons of the soil', is the term used in reference to ethnic Malays and other indigenous peoples.
7. Malaysia's ethnic pluralism was a consequence of British colonialism which commenced in 1786. In pursuit of their economic interests in the peninsula dominated by peasant-based Malays, the British encouraged the mass migration of Chinese and Indians to provide labour for their fledgling tin and rubber industries. By the mid-1930s, the population ratio of non-Malays to the indigenous community was almost even, while the Chinese had also emerged as an economic force, though their economic interests were not as extensive as that of the British and were based primarily on small-scale trade and middleman business ventures; some Chinese, however, had emerged as rubber barons and prominent tin miners (Puthucheary, 1960).
8. The British were also aware that the quick rejection of the Malayan Union was due to Chinese apathy and lack of support for it even though the scheme had provisions that would have legitimized their political rights in Malaya (Heng, 1988).
9. Tan Cheng Lock was also the chairman of the Malacca Chinese Chamber of Commerce. A Straits-born Chinese with a family heritage stretching back several generations in the country, members of his community – known as Babas, or Peranakan Chinese – were quite well-assimilated compared to the more recent Chinese migrants to Malaya.

Another influential MCA leader was H.S. Lee, a Kuomintang official and the founding chairman of the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce, established in 1947. Lee later became Malaya's first finance minister (Means, 1976, pp. 107-8).

10. The MCA's funds were obtained primarily from a lottery it initiated in 1949 which was so lucrative that it was banned by the British in 1953 following protests from other parties. Since the one-million ringgit prize lottery was open only to party members, it had also helped to increase significantly the MCA's membership (Heng, 1988; Khong, 1984). Despite the loss of its lottery revenues, with the support of the Chinese business elite, the MCA was kept flush with funds, crucial for financing the Alliance's political campaigns.
11. The Socialist Front also included the now defunct National Convention Party, founded by a former UMNO minister. For a detailed account of the Socialist Front, and the Labour Party in particular, see Vasil (1971, pp. 93-221).
12. Some of the most serious scandals involving Barisan Nasional parties or leaders have been exposed by the DAP. The most prominent scandals highlighted by the DAP include the RM2.4 billion Bumiputra Malaysia Finance (BMF) scandal involving senior UMNO leaders who allegedly abused funds of this Hong Kong-based company controlled by government-owned Bank Bumiputra Bhd; the conflict-of-interest involved in the award of the multi-million ringgit privatized north-south highway contract to an UMNO-controlled company; the Deposit-Taking Cooperatives (DTC) scandal involving MCA leaders who abused funds of cooperatives controlled by them; and the Maika-STM scandal involving MIC president S. Samy Vellu, who allegedly channelled the shares of the privatised Sykt. Telekom (M) Bhd (STM) allotted by the government for the MIC-controlled investment holding company Maika Holdings Bhd to companies owned by his associates (Lim, 1986, 1987 and 1992).
13. The commencement of such political patronage is linked to UMNO's hegemony over the newly-formed Barisan Nasional which provided the party with sufficient leverage to enforce affirmative action plans in favour of the *Bumiputeras*, ostensibly to correct economic injustices that had emerged during the colonial period. This was executed through the implementation in 1970 of the New Economic Policy (NEP), a 20-year 'restructuring' programme which entailed partial abandonment of the laissez-faire style of economic management for greater state intervention to accumulate capital on behalf of the *Bumiputeras*. The NEP's objectives were to achieve national unity by eradicating poverty, irrespective of race, and to restructure society to achieve inter-ethnic economic parity between the predominantly Malay *Bumiputeras* and the predominantly Chinese non-*Bumiputeras*. The attention given to the eradication of poverty ensured minimal political opposition as well as legitimacy and broad support for the policy, especially since the keenest interest in NEP implementation was on wealth restructuring, particularly on creating a Malay business community and achieving 30 per cent *Bumiputera* ownership of the corporate sector by 1990. To meet the NEP objectives, state intervention in the economy and public sector expenditure were increased.

The growth of the public sector, which augmented power in the hands of UMNO government leaders and the bureaucracy, led to the development of patronage networks in the party. This political-bureaucratic power, coupled with UMNO's growing hegemony over the state – this quickly confused the boundaries between public, government and party interests, which had already been blurred – was exploited by some party leaders who found it politically expedient to use the expanded state machinery and the party's access to economic resources to patronize groups and individuals in return for support within the party. The mushrooming of patronage networks in UMNO was facilitated by the encouragement of a 'subsidy mentality' among Malays, who viewed the state as a protector of their interests (Chandra, 1979; Mehmet, 1986). With the UMNO-led state regressing to a system of patronage which contributed to the emergence of a group of politically influential Malays, inter-ethnic inequality grew. This in turn resulted in the emergence of what some critics termed 'cronyism', or the distribution of rents to companies controlled by politicians, retired bureaucrats, politically well-connected businessmen and parties in the ruling coalition (Yoshihara, 1988; Clad, 1989; Adam and Cavendish, 1994; Gomez, 1990, 1991 and 1994). The most prominent of this group of Malay businessmen who emerged quickly with much government patronage is former Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin, currently economic advisor to the government and treasurer of UMNO. As such patronage networks increased, the state came under much criticism for limited transparency and accountability within government policy-making and implementation.

14. Government statistics in the *Mid-Term Review of the Sixth Malaysia Plan, 1991-1995* indicated that the amount of funds channelled by the federal government to Sabah for development was one of the lowest on a per capita basis among the states. These figures revealed that the federal government reduced finances to Sabah after the PBS left the Barisan Nasional in 1990 (*Aliran Monthly*, 14, 1, 1994). See Gomez (1996b) for a detailed account of the 1994 Sabah state election.
15. In the 1995 general election, Semangat lost all the parliamentary and state seats it contested in the west coast of the peninsula and the sole seat it controlled in Terengganu. In Kelantan, the only state where Semangat secured electoral victories, the party lost two of the eight parliamentary seats it contested; PAS, meanwhile, won all of the six parliamentary seats it contested. In the state-level election, Kelantan was the only state where Semangat managed to pick up seats, capturing 12 of the 15 seats it contested. See Gomez (1996a) for a detailed account of Semangat's performance in this general election.
16. Funds were also abused during electoral contests by the MCA. Mauzy (1983, p. 515) claims that when MCA president Lee San Choon took on and narrowly defeated DAP chairman Chen Man Hin in the latter's parliamentary constituency of Seremban during the 1982 general election, the MCA apparently spent between RM2 million and RM6 million to secure the victory. During the power struggle between Tan Koon Swan and Neo Yee Pan in 1985 for the MCA presidency, numerous allegations were made that Koon Swan's faction relied heavily on money to buy support, while his eventual victory was attributed to a 'money-in-every-direction' fight (Clad, 1989, p. 48). Soon after the election, Koon Swan was arrested and was jailed in Singapore after pleading guilty to fraud and other business malpractice. He later also served a jail sentence in Malaysia for attempting to abuse funds of Multi-Purpose Holdings Bhd (MPHB), a company controlled by the MCA and established to promote the economic interests of the Chinese with funds accumulated from them. As MPHB stumbled precariously close to bankruptcy, the MCA was forced to assure the Chinese that the party would cease to mix politics with business. Yet, in 1990, another equally intense battle over the MCA leadership revealed the continued business involvement of MCA leaders (Gomez, 1994).
 In the MIC, when Deputy President S. Subramaniam challenged S. Samy Vellu for the presidency in 1989, both factions made numerous allegations of fraud involving business entities controlled by the party. These allegations were confirmed when two cooperatives controlled by MIC leaders were put under receivership by Bank Negara in 1989. Later, Samy Vellu alleged that the funds of Maika Holdings Bhd, an investment holding company established by the MIC to advance Indian economic interests, was abused for political purposes; there was indisputable evidence that Maika was sullied by malpractice and a growing reputation for commercial misjudgements (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 May 1991; Gomez, 1994).
 Other parties within the Barisan Nasional have also been involved in business through cooperatives. The Gerakan, for example, had control of one cooperative, Koperasi Rakyat Bhd (Korakyat), formed in 1973. Along with the numerous cooperatives controlled by the MCA or its leaders, Korakyat was one of almost two dozen cooperatives involved in the Deposit-Taking Cooperatives (DTCs) scandal, which broke out in August 1986. The scandal involved RM1.4 billion in savings belonging to over 588,000 Malaysians, mainly lower middle class Chinese (Gomez, 1991, pp. 45-104). Apart from this, in 1983 there were revelations of a scandal involving Malaysia's fifth largest bank, the Development and Commercial (D&C) Bank, and a senior Gerakan leader, Alex Lee, whose family controlled the bank, founded by his father H.S. Lee, the former MCA leader and Malaysia's first finance minister. Funds from the business community were apparently funnelled into Lee's party for election campaigns in the early 1980s through the D&C Bank. Following investigations, although no charges were filed, Lee was forced to resign from the board of directors of the D&C Bank. Despite the embarrassing exposé, and although his family eventually relinquished control of their stake in the D&C Bank, Lee later contested and won a parliamentary seat as a Gerakan candidate and was appointed a deputy minister in the federal cabinet (Gomez, 1991, pp. 41-3).
17. Although Semangat leaders had control of a listed firm, Idris Hydraulic Bhd, a legacy from their involvement in UMNO, the company was eventually taken over in January 1991 by businessmen closely associated with the party's deputy president, Anwar Ibrahim (Gomez, 1994).

18. Since funding for UMNO from private sources has not been openly disclosed nor readily traced, allegations of kickbacks from government contracts, pay-offs and bribes are common. For example, *The Observer* (19 June 1989) of London alleged that UMNO received kickbacks and payoff amounting to RM450 million for a RM4.5 billion arms deal in late 1988 between the Malaysian and British governments, apparently to fund UMNO for the 1990 general election. The allegation was not refuted by the Malaysian government.
19. During the 1994 Sabah state election, in its attempt to muster the support of the Chinese who made up 20 per cent of the electorate, the Barisan Nasional made an allocation of RM2 million to 30 Chinese-medium schools and promised a further allocation of RM30 million for the development of Chinese-medium schools if it came to power (Gomez, 1996b).
Before the 1995 general election, while campaigning in his Sungei Siput constituency in Perak, MIC president Samy Vellu presented a primary school with a government cheque for RM56,000 to construct a new school wing (*The Star*, 22 April 1995). After the dissolution of parliament and before nomination day for the election, while opening the annex of a Chinese-medium school in Seremban where his party was expecting a tough contest with the DAP, MCA president Ling Liong Sik claimed that he had been 'given the [government] approval on April 10' (after parliament had been dissolved) to 'help the school grow' (*The Star*, 13 April 95).
20. After the last delineation of electoral boundaries was completed in 1993, the number of parliamentary seats was increased from 180 to 192, of which 145 were in Peninsular Malaysia, 20 in Sabah, and 27 in Sarawak. The number of state seats was increased from 447 to 498; of these, there were 394 seats in Peninsular Malaysia, 48 in Sabah, and 56 in Sarawak.
21. The disparity in the number of people between constituencies can, in fact, be much larger. The smallest parliamentary constituency to date is Kurong Anai (in Perlis during the 1990 general election) with only 5,216 voters, while the largest constituency was Petaling (in Selangor during the same general election) with a massive 114,704 voters (*NSTP Research and Information Services*, 1994, p. 134).
22. Apart from an election agent, candidates are allowed to have a polling agent and a counting agent. While an election agent can also act as a polling agent and a counting agent, the latter two cannot act as an election agent. A polling agent can only witness the poll, while the counting agent is only allowed to witness the counting of votes (Sothi, 1993, p. 185).
23. During all elections held until the 1986 general election, the ballot papers from each polling station were taken to a common counting centre for tabulation. The new practice of tabulating the results at the polling station was implemented for the first time during the 1990 general election.
24. Following the same election, the APU coalition also claimed that the delineation exercise in Kelantan benefited one constituency won by the Barisan Nasional since it involved the transfer of a large number of UMNO supporters to the parliamentary constituency when it was reconstituted. Another opposition contention was that the delineation exercise had managed to split its support in several other parliamentary constituencies in Kelantan (Gomez, 1996a).
25. Since the leading Malay and English newspapers, that is *The New Straits Times*, *Berita Harian* and *Utusan Malaysia*, are controlled by allies of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar, there have been allegations by these newspapers of scandals involving some of his rivals in UMNO. In 1994, when the press alleged *khalwat* (close proximity) involving UMNO vice-president Najib Razak, statutory rape involving UMNO Youth president Rahim Tambi Chik and conflict-of-interest involving Rafidah Aziz, president of UMNO Wanita, the party's women's wing, these exposés were attributed to attempts by Anwar's faction to discredit these leaders and pave the way for the ascendance of his allies. The prime minister criticized these reports as 'press sensationalism' (Gomez, 1996a). Despite these allegations, all three UMNO leaders still retain their party posts, presumably to keep Anwar supporters in check. Although Rahim had resigned as Malacca Menteri Besar and UMNO Youth president, he was reinstated to his party post when charges of corruption – he was not charged for statutory rape – were dropped for lack of evidence midway through his trial in late 1995; this only transpired after a general election and an UMNO general assembly had been held.

In view of this capacity of the press to embarrass second echelon UMNO leaders, a covert struggle for control of the mainstream newspapers is apparently developing between members of the UMNO elite.

26. These rivalries have also ensued since most politically-connected businessmen have tended to concentrate their rent-appropriating activities in the relatively protected import-substituting manufacturing, services and other non-tradables, such as property, construction and infrastructure, while others have primarily gained from often complex paper shuffling, asset stripping and other similar corporate manoeuvres, rather than from significant gains in productivity or international competitiveness (Gomez, 1990, 1991 and 1994).
27. One example is the case involving Rafidah Aziz, international trade and industry minister and a well-known critic of Anwar Ibrahim. In late 1994, prominent coverage was given by most of the mainstream press, particularly those reputedly controlled by Anwar allies, to the controversial allocation of publicly-listed shares to Rafidah's son-in-law by her ministry under the government's *Bumiputera* share-allocation scheme, introduced as part of its attempt to redistribute wealth among ethnic communities. Under pressure to admit conflict-of-interest on her part, Rafidah suggested in parliament that Anwar's Finance Ministry had also been involved in similar acts of patronage involving his family members (*Asiaweek*, 10 February 1995).
28. Anwar had rapidly climbed the party ranks with Mahathir and Daim's support. Although an outspoken critic of the Barisan Nasional government in the 1970s which led to his detention for almost two years under the ISA, Anwar had been courted by Mahathir and Razaleigh to join UMNO in 1982. Soon after winning a parliamentary seat in Penang in the 1982 general election, Anwar contested and narrowly won the UMNO Youth leadership, thus also becoming an ex officio vice-president of the party. In the severely 'factionalized' 1987 party election, Anwar was voted in as one of UMNO's three directly elected vice-presidents. By late 1993, two years after taking over the influential finance ministry, Anwar had managed to displace Ghafar as deputy president, to also become deputy prime minister.

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