A Study of Democracy and the Political Change in Malaysia

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Abstract

The 14th General Election held May 9, 2018 ended the 61 year of the ruling BN since its independence. Malaysia democracy remained monopolized by the ruling elite and dominated by strong state. This paper analysed at the historical and political change of Malaysia through different phases that characterizes Malaysia democracy. It was started during the colonial period. Then, the Post-1969 Political Structure and the New Economic Policy. Third is the Islam and its role in the government. Then the next section looks on how the process of democratization started to develop in Malaysia by new pattern of participation of the people such as through Reformasi Movement and how the Internet play its role. They started to challenge the government. Lastly, the assessment of the end of the ruling BN government and the manipulation in the government occurred. It remains in question whether the 2020 change of the government truly the change of Malaysian democracy.

Keywords
Democracy, Malaysian politics, election, and political change

1. Introduction
In the 14th General Election (GE) held on May 9, 2018, Malaysia unexpectedly ended the 61 year old the ruling BN. The regime demonstrated remarkable resilience prior to 2018. Many political analyst had predicted such as in early 2012, Larry Diamond identified Malaysia as one of several Asian countries that could form the "coming wave" of democratization. Pointing to high per capita income and Malaysia's good Human Development Index score, Diamond (2012) contends that "from the standpoint of modernization theory, Malaysia is ripe for a democratic transition". With the Asian Economic Crisis, the third wave of democratization and numerous internal conflict, the BN government still survive. However, in the 1999 GE, though the ruling BN maintained its two-thirds majority in the general election, the victory was a narrow one. The opposition parties increased three-fold their parliamentary seats. The BN's share of the vote dropped from 65 per cent in 1995 to 56.5 per cent in 1999 (Ping and Yean, 2007). Then in 2004, it came back with landslide victory, as its share increased to 64 per cent and the party won 91 per cent of the seats. In the 2008 and 2013 general election, the BN lost its two-thirds majority. Then in the 2018, the ruling BN lost its rule to its rival the opposition *Pakatan Harapan* (PH) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Percentage of votes for *Barisan Nasional*

General Elections	Percentage of Votes
1995	65.2
1999	56.5
2004	63.9
2008	51.4
2013	51.4
2018	47.4

Source: Compiled from Election Commission of Malaysia (www.spr.gov.my)

Starting the GE 2008, the political situation in Malaysia gradually change. In the concurrent state elections, the opposition Pakatan Rakyat gained control of five of thirteen states. Significantly, the opposition broke out of the heartland of the Islamic party, in the north-eastern states of Kedah and Kelantan. Victories in Penang and Selangor were particularly remarkable as Penang is the most economically developed state and is dominated by Chinese, and Selangor effectively surrounds the capital Kuala Lumpur. Anwar Ibrahim, a leader of PR, claimed "I don't think Malaysian politics will ever be the same again" (Fuller, 9 March 2008). Yet, elections are not the only site of political change in Malaysia. Public space in Malaysia has also become "more democratic...more open to new entrants, more accommodating the diverse (even if antagonistic) viewpoints" (Weiss, 2012:13). To some extent, this gradual transformation is a direct result of some of the UMNO regime's own policies, including the commitment not to censor the Internet. Intended to help speed up economic development, the non-censorship bill was introduced by Mahathir in 1996 and was meant to be a cornerstone of his endeavours to make Malaysia a globally recognized hub for IT-related industries. Little did he know that this bill would also pave the way for a remarkable transformation of Malaysia's political scene. Therefore, this article will review the major changes that Malaysian society has witnessed. It will discuss these changes with the practices of democracy and democratization in Malaysia through several phases – colonial period, post -1969 Political Structure and the New Economic Policy, authoritarianism and its tool, Islam and its role and democratisation – challenge to authorianism and also the post of the 2018 Malaysia General Election (GE).

This study is a descriptive qualitative study, a study based on literature study method Library Research. As Bennet et al (2005) noted that "the importance of understanding the history and context of a case makes the difficulties of critiquing qualitative research differ from those of assessing quantitative work. Readers cannot easily judge the validity of the explanation of a case unless they have a degree of independent knowledge of that case". This research will also utilize the theoretical arguments above using independent knowledge to provide an explanation of the study. This paper essentially started with the argument of democratization and political change in Malaysia was started in 1998 in the period of 1990- 2000 and this political change holds a potential for the same thing to happen in Malaysia in the following period, with the collapse of the BN regime under the Najib Razak Government in 2018 after 61 years hold the power.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Democratization Theory
The process of democratisation can be described as the movement between authoritarian rule and democracy. It is the transition to a more democratic political regime. It may be the transition from an authoritarian regime to a full democracy or transition from a semi-authoritarian political system to a democratic political system. Various terms have been used by scholars to describe the regime that lie between that of representative democracyand closed authoritarianism. For example "hybrid regime" (Karl, 1995), "semidemocracy"(Case, 1996), "electoral democracy" (Diamond, 1999), "illiberal democracy" (Zakaria, 1997), "semi-authoritarianism," (Olcott and Ottaway 1999), "semi-dictatorship" (Brooker, 2000),"soft authoritarianism" (Means, 1996), and "electoral authoritarianism" (Schedler, 2002b). Diamond et al (1989) attempted to identify the continuum of the 'less than democratic system'. From non-democratic to near-democratic with the position of hegemonic one party system placed at the centre. Semi-democracy or 'pseudo democracy' refer to a system that has a formal democratic institution such as frequent election in order to cover what is in reality authoritarian regime (Brooker, 2000). In reality the semi-democratic system limits citizen preferences during elections, restricts competition between political parties, demonstrates a lack of fairness during the conduct of election and limits political and civil liberties in terms of political party capabilities to organize and express themselves.

Levistky and Way (2003) identified between these two extreme terms as "competitive authoritarianism". This is because the regime not fulfilled the minimum standard of democracy such as executive and legislative are chosen through appropriate elections, citizens have the right to vote, protection of civil and political liberties and elected authorities also autonomous from the control of military or clerical leaders. According to Levistky and Way (2003: 5), competitive authoritarian is 'frequent and often severe violations of democratic procedure, such that the playing field between government and opposition is markedly uneven'. Malaysia has been described as 'pseudo democracy', 'semi democracy' and 'quasi democracy' (Case, 2001). Even though, if the government does not fully democracy, Malaysia's Constitution guarantees the basic civil right and human rights of the people. The regime also tolerates the opposition parties more openly than in other countries and they hold elections regularly.

Further, Johan Saravanamuttu (2009), there are a lot of evidence shows that the new middle class in Malaysia 'revolts' against government since 1980s. NGOs particularly ABIM opposed the government policy on the Official Secret Act (OSA) which allowed for jail terms of two years for journalists and others who revealed materials obtained from government sources. The government under so-called 'Operation Lalang' arrested 107 activists and opposition

leaders (2009). Another crisis was in 1988 by the sacking of the lord president Mohammed Salleh Abas and suspension of five Supreme Court judges. Most of the people protested against that decision. Most democratization theorists also argue that the socioeconomic modernisation fosters democratisation. Lipset (1959) there is a positive correlation between the level of socioeconomic modernization and level of democracy. As he also summarized "the more well –to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy" (p 48-50). Some theories claim the socioeconomic development has the relation with the capitalist development and it also reaches the same conclusion with the democratisation. As Abbott (2000) notes that due to the capitalist development, the balance of power shifted from authoritarian government to the society may leads for democratisation.

Democracy and its Practises in Malaysia

Similar to other countries, democracy in modern-day Malaysia is a product of various intersecting situation, namely its history over the years from independence to the recent development.

British Colonial Legacy

Democracy which derives from a Greek word "demos' or "people" is defined; basically a government which is supreme power is rested in the people. There are seven core characteristics of democracy; the power and civic responsibilities are exercised by all adult citizens, the principle of majority rule and individual rights, protection of basic human rights- freedom of speech, right to equal protection and opportunity to organize and participate in politics, economic and cultural, regular and fair election and also freedom of justice (Zaini, 2006). In theory, Malaysia fulfilled all the core characteristic of democracy and can be label as a democratic country. However, in practice Malaysia is different. Various terms have been used by scholars to describe Malaysia as neither democratic nor authoritarian such as "hybrid regime" (Karl, 1995), "semi democracy"(Case, 1996), "electoral democracy" (Diamond, 1999), "illiberal democracy" (Zakaria, 1997), "semi-authoritarianism," (Olcott and Ottaway 1999), "semi-dictatorship" (Brooker, 2000),"soft authoritarianism" (Means, 1996), and "electoral authoritarianism" (Schedler, 2002b). The scholars situated Malaysia in between neither democratic nor authoritarian. Even though the government does not meet the conditions of a democracy, Malaysia's Constitution guarantee the basic civil right and human rights of the people. The regime also tolerates the opposition parties and holds elections regularly.

This could be trace through the British colonial rule over what is now known as Malaysia lasted from the late 18th century until 1957. The legacies from this period for the Malaysian political system have been lasting. Primary among them are a strong state and weak civil society. The British created a strong state for economic benefit, but left an ethnically divided society (Foley, 2001).The British needed labour for economic extraction so they imported labourers from China and India to work in the tin mines and on the rubber plantations. In order to avoid Malay nationalism spreading to the Chinese and Indians, the British kept the different ethnic groups in different areas: the Chinese lived in towns, the Indians lived on estate plantations, while the Malays were kept in rural areas except for the elites (Farid Alatas, 1997). The British also excluded the Chinese and Indians from administrative and political office, in order to preserve the power of the Malay elite and the British colonialists (Munro-Kua, 1996). This also enable them to control the Malay elite as well as the feudal system.

The consociational model collapsed after a bloody riot in May 1969. The riot occurred after the 1969 general election in which the opposition political parties unexpectedly won parliamentary seats while the BN and particularly UMNO lost many seats in parliament. The opposition parties' celebration of victory turned into a riot. An estimated 196 people were killed, most of them Chinese Malaysians (Crouch, 1996). Martial law was declared and remained in effect for nearly two years. According to Crouch (1996), the tension between Malays and Chinese had been growing because of economic and social imbalances. Before that, many assumed that political and social stability would be achieved in Malaysia if political power was in the hands of the Malays and economic power in the hands of the Chinese. However, such a view was too simplistic: not all Malays benefited from the Malay political privileges and not all Chinese benefited from the Chinese economic power. Former Prime Minister, Abdul Razak Hussein, stated that "on that day [13 May 1969] we were jolted into a sharp realisation that the racial problem in this country is a serious one and measures taken in the past to cope with it have not proved adequate" (in Gibbons, 1971). So, various policies were formulated, the most significant of which was the New Economic Policy (NEP).

Post-1969 Political Structure and the New Economic Policy

After the 1969 riot, parliament was suspended and a National Operation Council was formed to take control of the country. The council decided to return to the constitutional contract to implement Malay primacy more vigorously. The council recognised the rights of non-Malays to citizenship and to participation in the economy and administration. The council also decided that sensitive issues should be removed from public discourse concerning citizenship,

national language, Malay special privileges and the sovereignty of the Malay rulers. Realising that the economic and political situations could not be separated, the council introduced the New Economic Policy in 1971 with two major goals. The first was to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty, by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians, irrespective of race. The second goal aimed at accelerating the process of restructuring Malaysian society to correct economic imbalances, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic functions (Crouch, 1996). It aimed to give Malays and *bumiputera* more economic power. For example, the NEP contained a number of measures to help *bumiputera* acquire capital and land, and improve their education and employment patterns, and it imposed a requirement on companies to restructure their corporate holdings to ensure at least 30 per cent *bumiputera* ownership (Crouch, 1996).

The role of the ruling BN, especially UMNO, became more dominant following the NEP, especially in terms of economic development. Various economic development agencies were established at the federal and state levels to help people, particularly Malays, including the Federal Land Development Authority, Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority, Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority and *Perbadanan Ekonomi Negeri* (State Economic Development) (Torii, 1997). The establishment of these institutions for the benefit of Malays demonstrated the importance of the role played by UMNO in the development of the Malay community. The NEP appeared to achieve its targets, particularly in reducing poverty (see Table 2). Indeed, the identification of the ethnic group label with economic function also decreased. The percentage of *bumiputera* professional and technical staff rose from 47 per cent in 1970 to 63.2 per cent in 1993. The administrative and managerial bumiputera employment category also increased from 24.1 per cent in 1970 to 32.5 per cent in 1993 (Abdul Rahman, 1996). By 1990, Malaysian society was recognised as an advanced, middle-income country. At the same time, the implementation of the NEP resulted in a sharp increase in Malays' participation in both middle- and urban-based, working-class occupations (Crouch, 1996). The stereotypical image of the Malays as a community predominantly based in rural and agricultural areas was largely abandoned (Crouch, 1996).

Table 2. Percentage of incidence of poverty in Peninsular Malaysia

Area(s)	1970	1990
Peninsular Malaysia	49.3	15.0
Rural	58.7	19.3
Urban	21.3	7.3
Bumiputera	65.0	20.8
Chinese	26.0	5.7
Indians	39.0	8.0
Others	44.8	18.0

Source: Roslan (2003)

Shamsul (1999), the NEP was mainly intended for economic and social purposes; however, the economic purposes became more dominant than the social ones. The situation was obvious especially during the administration of Mahathir, who used a different style from his predecessors. Mahathir's administration introduced many new ideas and ways of implementing them. Hilley (2001: 62) describes Mahathir as a politician who had a philosophy of blending nationalism and capitalism, and a distinctly authoritarian method. He implemented various new policies under NEP (1971-1990) later followed by the New Development Policy (NDP) (1990-2010). His immediate challenge was to ensure that development programs were compatible with state policies and visions such as privatisation, heavy industrialisation, "Malaysia Inc." and "Vision 2020". With these policies, Malaysia moved into a new phase of development, away from an agriculture base towards an import-substitution and manufacturing base.

During this later phase of development, privatisation and corporatisation encouraged the dominance of *bumiputeras,* but favoured only certain groups of them (Gomez & Jomo, 1997). As a result, the 1980s witnessed the emergence of a powerful Malay capitalist class called the "new rich". Corporate and political figures such as Daim Zainuddin, Halim Saad and Tajuddin Ramli held billions of dollars of equity ownership, often under the trusteeship of UMNO (Gomez & Jomo, 1997). The close link between business and politics is described by Gomez and Jomo (1997) as "political patronage". Verma (2002) describes how this phenomenon "increased the function of the Prime Minister in a political system based on patronage and reward…and under Mahathir it became an institutionalised system of rewarding loyalty and political support". Though traditional institutions and judicial systems gradually disappeared with the rise of modernisation in the twentieth century, feudal culture maintained a profound effect on the outlook of Malaysians (Kessler, 1992).

In the Malay feudal system, the bond between the ruler and the ruled was a patron-client relation. The people were bound to obey the King, who demanded absolute loyalty, and opposition of authority was considered treacherous (Rashid, 2011). In modified form, this relationship is still prominent in modern Malaysian political culture (Kessler, 1992). It is reflected in UMNO's image as the protector of Malay interests and, in turn, its expectation of Malay support (Singh, 2001). This attitude can be seen in many examples. For example, after losing in the 1999 general election, UMNO lost much support from the Malay community. In response, Mahathir scolded Malays for their lack of support for UMNO and the BN which had after all reduced the economic disparities between the Malays and Chinese, and provided Malays with university scholarships and other privileges (Funston, 2000).

Authoritarianism and its Tools

Modernisation theorists, development and economic growth would create the conditions for liberalisation and democratisation, but this did not occur in Malaysia. Despite remarkable economic growth, the ruling BN consolidated its power and strengthened authoritarian rule. The BN government used various tools to ensure political stability and maintain majority support. The electoral systems, the nature of political contestation, the NGOs, the media and even the laws and regulations were changed several times to ensure that the BN retained political power. Although elections were held every five years, they were not always fair. Opposition parties could compete, but there were means by which the government could ensure its dominance. Indeed, Mahathir himself declared, 'elections were not intended to produce turnovers but instead to provide feedback, registering fluctuations in support so that the governments might adjust their policy course but never leave office' (Case, 2006).

The BN amended many electoral boundaries to favour its ruling coalition (Heufers, 2002; Brown, 2005). Though most of the constituencies were determined on the principle of equality of size, for the rural constituency, particularly the Malay constituency, smaller boundaries were drawn (Brown, 2005). This gerrymandering favoured the native Malay population, traditionally strong supporters of UMNO, at the expense of the large Chinese and Indian constituents (Brown, 2005). For example, the state of Penang, where most of the voting population was Chinese and the opposition parties had done well in the past, averaged 50,838 voters per district; Perlis, on the other hand, which had typically Malay voters and supported the ruling party, averaged only 33,032 voters per district in 1990 (Aliran, 2000). Similarly, Putrajaya, a new federal constituency consisted of only 5,000 voters. Putrajaya was entirely populated by civil servants and their families and 98 per cent Malay voters, who were pressured to vote for the BN. Selayang which had more than 120,000 voters and was traditionally represented by Chinese and opposition seats was also considered just one constituency (Brown, 2005).

Continuously gaining a two-thirds majority in parliament enabled the ruling coalition to amend the constitution to meet its interests (Hwang, 2003). (See Table 2.2). Mahathir used this constellation to consolidate his power. In the late 1980s, for example, UMNO faced a power struggle in which the prime minister almost lost his position to another faction in the party. Simultaneously, the Federal Court ruled against the government in a number of cases (Milne & Mauzy, 1999). Consequently, the federal constitution was amended several times at the will of the executive. Heufers (2002) shows how Mahathir pushed through the passing of Article 121, in which the power of the judiciary was no longer embedded in the constitution but would be referred to the parliament. He limited the power of the judiciary and suspended judges who had ruled against his wishes, including Lord President Salleh Abas, who was sacked by a tribunal on an accusation of misconduct (Hwang, 2003).

Mahathir also used his power to roll back royal power. He clashed several times with the monarchy over the distribution of power. In the constitution, the Malay monarchy (the sultans) was protected against civil action or criminal prosecution. In 1983, a constitutional crisis occurred when the Constitution (Amendment) Bill was passed by parliament but the king refused to give his royal assent to it. Mahathir applied pressure until assent was given. In 1993 Mahathir further curbed the power of the sultans by removing their immunity from civil action and criminal prosecution (Crouch, 1996). Most non-government organisations remained silent during Mahathir's rule, refraining from open political criticism and debate about the government. Any political confrontation with the BN was to be avoided; the confrontation was to be based on goodwill and co-operation. Hence, no channel of public debate and open discussion in relation to sensitive issues such as ethnicity was permitted. Therefore, public pressure on the government has been limited. In fact, some NGOs collaborate with the government. Such collaboration shows a weak civil society, one in which the state is able to neutralise any challenge from civil society. According to Weiss and Salina (2003). Civil society in Malaysia does not fit the theoretical ideal of democratic, grassroots-oriented, politically transformative organisations for building social capital and keeping the government in line. Too few of them are truly independent, self-financing, and racially and linguistically inclusive. There are also several legal constraints restricting the development of NGOs and civil society in Malaysia. Saravanamuthu (2000) identified a range of restrictions on human rights and freedoms in Malaysia, as set out in Table 3.

Table 3 : Restrictions on human rights and freedoms

Constitutional Provision	Right or Freedom	Legislative Restriction
Article 5	Liberty of the person	Internal Security Act, 1960: Restricted Residence Enactment (CAP. 39); Sec. 117, Criminal Procedure Code (CAP. 6)
Article 6	Protection against slavery and forced labour	Essential (Self-Reliance) Regulations, 1975; National Service Ordinance
Article 9	Protection against banishment; freedom of movement	ISA 1960; Banishment Act, 1948; Immigration Acts, 1959 and 1963
Article 10(1)(a)	Freedom of speech and expression	Sedition Act, 1948 (and Amendments, 1971); Official Secrets Act, 1972 (and Amendments, 1986); Printing Presses and Publishing Act, 1948 (Amendment 1988); Control of Imported Publications Act, 1959
Article 10(1)(b)	Freedom of peaceful assembly	Public Order (Preservation) Ordinance, 1958; Police Act, 1967 (and Amendments, 1988)
Article 10(1)(c)	Freedom of association	Trade Unions Act, 1959 (and 1980 and 1989 Amendments); Societies Act, 1966 (and 1981 Amendments); University and University Colleges Act, 1971 (and 1975 Amendments), discipline of Student Rules and Discipline of Staff Rules
Article 10(1)(c)	Freedom of association and right to industrial action, including strikes	Essential (Prohibition of Strikes and Prescribed Industrial Actions) Regulations, 1965; Industrial Relations Act, 1967, Amendment, 1971 and 1975
Article 121	Principle of judicial review	Amendments to Article 121, 1988; Amendments to ISA, 1988; Amendments to ISA, 1989

Source: Saravanamuthu (2000)

Another notorious case was the detention of opposition MP, Theresa Kok, Sin Chew reporter, Tan Hoon Cheng and blogger Raja Petra Kamaruddin in September 2008 under the ISA. These detentions were criticised not only by the opposition parties but also within the BN: the MCA, one of the BN factions, criticised the action (Vinesh, 2008). These detentions led to the resignation of the Law minister, Zaid Ibrahim, who wrote an open letter to the government declaring that "the government had time and time again failed the people of this country" further stating that: The Government and the law have mistakenly allowed the Minister of Home Affairs to detain anyone for whatever reason he thinks fit. This subjective discretion has been abused to further certain political interests (The Star Online, 30 September 2008: 9). The government's use of laws keeps the opposition parties silent and too weak to challenge the ruling party. This keeps competition between political parties at a low level. As this description makes clear, the ruling BN used various means to maintain the status quo. This can also be seen in the role the ruling BN played in Islamisation policy in Malaysia.

Islam and its Role

The role of Islam in Malaysian politics is complex. Due to the close association between Islam and Malays, it has been considered that "to undergo conversion to Islam was in fact to 'masuk Melayu', 'become Malay'" (Roff, 1980: 67). Through the "social contract" in the constitution, ethnic Malays were given special privileges as a condition of granting citizenship to Chinese and Indians. With that, the Malay elites have become more defensive and worried about losing dominance in Malaysian politics. In the 1970s, the global Islamic resurgence had an important influence on Malaysian politics. The emergence of Islamic revivalism happened in response to events in the Muslim world such as the Arab-Israel War (1967), the Arab oil embargo (1973), the Islamisation program in Pakistan (1977-88) and Iran's Islamic Revolution (1978-79), all of which gave rise to popular Islamic sentiment around the world (Verma, 2002). It created a great awareness and understanding of Islam among Malay-Muslims and, thus, Islam began to play a greater role in the public sphere (Liow, 2004). Since then, there has been a new consciousness among Malays looking for "true Islam". Since the 1970s, religious revivalism and the Islamic movement have become major elements in Muslim politics (Verma, 2002).

Islamic organisations were created, including *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement, ABIM) in 1972, whose members were mostly from the opposition party, the Malaysia Islamic Party (*Parti Islam Se-Malaysia*, PAS). PAS rose to popularity and with it, was able to strengthen its power in the 1980s as a legitimate opposition party, through its appeal to an authentic form of Islam comprised of political, economic and social activity. PAS also targeted the rural areas that had suffered from the uneven development of the country despite it being resource-rich. It was supported mostly by traditional villagers who were largely conservative. Indeed, in general, PAS was able to link Islam and the Malay community, and it "contributed to changes in Malay political identity by defining it as a religious community in a multiracial society" (Verma, 2002: 108). UMNO became worried about the rising popularity of PAS, so in the early 1980s, Mahathir took steps to show that his party was also sensitive to Islam. Mahathir convincingly used "Islam" to legitimise his administration. He portrayed Malaysia as a moderate Islamic state in which the twin processes of Islamisation and modernisation were means to pursue political, cultural and economic development, and he suggested that this was different from the Islamic faith purported by PAS.

In this way, UMNO gained the endorsement of Muslims as well as non-Muslims, since Mahathir managed not to alienate the latter despite his administration's strong Islamic tone. Observers questioned the genuineness of the UMNO Islamisation policy, seeing it as a response to the rival PAS, with the result that the Islamic character in policy became more pronounced in the 1980s and 1990s (Farish Noor, 2003). Abdullah Badawi, prime minister after Mahathir, promoted his own "Islamic ideology", through the concept of *Islam Hadhari* (civilised Islam). Islam Hadhari echoed the concept of modern Islam devised by Mahathir. In this view, Islam served the government's goal of economic growth and development. On the political front, Islam was seen as able to produce a strong ruling party and through Islam the party was able to co-operate with Islamist forces to ensure state power.

Democratization period; Challenges to Authoritarianism.
Reformasi Movement
All the obstacles to democratic reform in the past were swept away when Mahathir fired his deputy Anwar Ibrahim in 1998. It was Mahathir who had brought Anwar into the government and Mahathir who groomed Anwar until he became deputy president of UMNO and then deputy prime minister. Although Anwar was a likely successor to Mahathir, he had developed his own political following and in the late 1990s there was a clear split of ideas between these two leaders (Hilley, 2001). Their differences became evident during the economic crisis of 1997, during which the two proposed their own ideas for remedying the situation. Anwar's reluctance to follow Mahathir "led Mahathir to the conclusion that Anwar was attempting to undermine him" (Hilley, 2001).

It seems that Mahathir had not anticipated the political effects of sacking Anwar and had underestimated the extent of Anwar's support. The "reformasi wave" began immediately following Anwar's sacking and arrest in September 1998 on charges of corruption and sodomy. Anwar returned to his former movement – the urban youth and professionals among whom he had made his mark as a student leader in the 1970s and 1980s. Protests erupted in Kuala Lumpur, with demands for Mahathir to resign and for Anwar to be released. Hundreds of people were arrested. The government revealed its authoritarian nature, which was further confirmed in the treatment of Anwar during his trial and his sentence to six years in prison for corruption and nine years in prison for sodomy, to be served consecutively (Hilley, 2001). The dismissal of Anwar Ibrahim, who was a symbol of Islamic resurgence within UMNO, further eroded the party's reputation as the upholder of Islam. Many people, especially in the Malay community, reacted with disbelief to the allegations, which contrasted with Anwar's pious image. This created sympathy for him and outrage about his case.

The *reformasi* movement facilitated the formation of several ideologically different groups in opposition to the government. The most significant was the coalition opposition, the *Barisan Alternatif* (BA, Alternative Front), whose main components are PAS, the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the newly formed *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (People Justice Party [PKR]). The BA could take a strong stand against the BN because it was a united opposition, but the ideologies of PAS and DAP were so different that it was difficult to reach agreement. DAP was a democratic socialist party supported by Chinese voters, while PAS is an Islamic party whose ultimate aim is to establish an Islamic state. Hence, co-operation between these two was superficial and the alliance was merely a marriage of convenience than a marriage of love (Hilley, 2001).

In the 1999 general election, the BA failed to unseat the BN. The latter maintained its usual more than two-thirds majority in the parliament, by winning 72 of 193 seats. It was able to form government in all states except in Kelantan and Terengganu, which fell to PAS. Yet, UMNO did suffer a setback, losing many seats in the Malay-majority constituencies. This was mainly due to "dissatisfaction among the Malays" regarding Mahathir's treatment of Anwar (Maznah, 2003). The resentment saw UMNO's vote share drop from 36.5 per cent in 1995 to 29.5 per cent in 1999 (Maznah, 2003). The 1999 election results indicated that the BN had lost support among the Malay community. So, for the next election, in 2004, the BN focused its efforts on winning back Malay voters in particular. This was a great

test for Abdullah Badawi as new prime minister, to lead UMNO, a dominant Malay party in Malaysia. By promising to lead a clean administration and stressing the need for great transparency, accountability and increased bureaucratic efficiency, combined with moderate, "modern and progressive" Islamic message, his government secured a massive victory, winning 90 per cent of the parliamentary seats.

In the 2008 general election, the BN suffered its second worst result ever. Badawi had made many promises during his administration, but his reforms had not met people's expectations (Abdul Rashid, 2011; Case, 2010). He promised more strongly than any previous prime minister to clean up corruption, strengthen civil liberties, uphold justice and overhaul the civil service, judiciary and police force, but failed to deliver on the promises. Public dissatisfaction with rising crime, corruption scandals, and increases in the price of fuel and food was apparent. Dissatisfaction among the Chinese and Indian communities was also obvious, and led to series of protests such as the Coalition for Clean and Fair Election and Hindu Rights Action Force demonstrations (Rashid, 2009). Badawi admitted that "the result of the election was a strong message that I have not moved fast enough in pushing through with the reform that I had promised to undertake".[1]

Civil society collaborated with the opposition parties in the 2008 election and without this collaboration those parties would have found it difficult to make such large gains (Lee, J. et al., 2010; Giersdorf & Croissant, 2011). Both capitalised on public anger with the government through their campaigns on the Internet. Many areas of policy failure, including rising crime rates, consumer-price inflation and government corruption were highlighted on the Internet. Since the major newspaper and television stations were partly owned by the ruling coalition, NGOs and the opposition parties fully utilised the Internet during the campaign period. They highlighted the weaknesses of the government through technologies such as YouTube, blogging, Twitter and mobile phones. Civil society activities provided an alternative source of information to the public in forums such as the online newspaper, *MalaysiaKini,* thereby enabling them to challenge the authoritarian rule in Malaysia. Political bloggers like Raja Petra Kamaruddin and Jeff Ooi[2] were among the civil society figures who attracted wide readership in their blogs, giving them significant political influence.

The Internet and its role
Prior to the emergence of the Internet, Mahathir could control virtually every crisis or political event through traditional news and information sources. The BN used the mainstream media to convey its messages to the public. Scholars who have written on elections and politics in Malaysia often note the obstructive role of the local media. Most claim that the performance of the mainstream media during elections demonstrated that they consistently portrayed the ruling BN in a positive light and provided limited coverage of the political opposition (see, for example, Zaharom, 2000; Wang, 2003; Mustafa, 2003). The mainstream media praised in particular the role of UMNO in preserving Malay dominance and defending the community from ethnic violence (Wong, 2000). It was not until 1998 that the Internet began to emerge as a political threat to the government, after the sacking and arrest of Anwar Ibrahim (Bahfen, 2009; Abbott, 2000). As mentioned, in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, increasing differences emerged between Prime Minister Mahathir and Anwar (Wong, 2004). Anwar's sacking led to large public protests, and the BN swiftly thwarted the reform movement by imprisoning Anwar along with other prominent civil society activists. In opposing the government, Anwar brought together the opposition parties for the first time into one coalition, known as the Alternative Front. The media began to portray the Alternative Front negatively, especially by emphasising its internal disputes (Kim W.L, 2001).

The Internet provides a means for information to be disseminated publicly without government interference. The Anwar crisis, along with his reform agenda, mobilised grassroots support for him. Many websites previously critical of Anwar during his position in the government turned into mouthpieces for his struggle for justice, reporting his statements, showing photos and providing up-to-date news. While slow Internet connections limited the dissemination of news, it was still possible to download, print and distribute news among friends and relatives. Now, with the new combination of traditional media and alternative media, the *reformasi* groups managed to rally their supporters and organise mass gatherings in Kuala Lumpur on a few occasions.[3] Dozens of websites sprang up immediately after Anwar's arrest, posting the latest news and rumours, as well as links to foreign news sources. The estimated number of websites rose to up to 50 (George, 2006; Zaharom, 2002), a significant number considering that the Internet in Malaysia was still new then. Popular sites such as MalaysiaKini.com, Laman Reformasi, Freeanwar.com,

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1 Speech by Abdullah Badawi at the Invest Malaysia 2008 conference, Kuala Lumpur, 25 March 2008. See http://www.investmalaysiaconference.com/media/pdf/IM2008_keynotes.pdf
2 Jeff Ooi contested the 2008 general election and won a seat in Jelutong. He is one of the Malaysian bloggers who became a politician.
3 For analyses and details of the *reformasi* movement, see Hiller (2001), Brown (2004), Steele (2009) and Weiss (2006).

harakahdaily.com and FreeMalaysia.com offered alternative news and information about the crisis, and received a significant number of hits per day (Anil Netto, 2002). Some of these websites were owned by popular webmasters, for example Sabri Zain (Reformasi Diary) and Raja Petra Kamaruddin (MalaysiaToday).

The first online news portal to emerge before the 1999 general election was *MalaysiaKini*, founded by Steven Gan and Premesh Chandran, who were joined by journalists concerned about the credibility of the news (Tong, 2004). *MalaysiaKini* quickly became the most popular news portal in Malaysia and its readership reached half a million hits during its first month of operation (Anil Netto, 2000). The readership continued to achieve high figures after the election, averaging 100,000 hits per day – more than the circulation of the top daily newspapers, The Sun and The Star (Nain, 2000). Not only were civil society agencies active online, but opposition parties also used the net for public outreach, especially during the 1999 general election. For instance, PAS set up its first website in 1999 (details are discussed in Chapter Four below). PAS launched the first Net TV (Harakah web TV) in May 1999 (Woodier, 2008) and also turned its weekly newspaper *Harakah* into an online journal when the government restricted its sale from twice a week to once a fortnight (Woodier, 2008). The new *KeADILan* party was refused permission to publish any printed material to promote its platform, so it, too, turned to the Internet to reach wider audiences. It should be noted that publishing news online was helpful for opposition parties because it meant that they no longer had to comply with the Printing and Publication Act. However, at this time, the Internet was not as sophisticated as it is today. At the beginning, most of the online platforms disseminated news one-way only. For political parties, the Internet was a way to present information about office holders and candidates, to disseminate press releases and to make public announcements. There was no way for readers to provide feedback or to add any information to what was available. Nonetheless, the combination of the online presence of civil society and opposition parties, the growth of websites, chat rooms, listservs and emails was significant in the lead-up to the election.

As a result, and as already noted, though the BN maintained its two-thirds majority, it was a tough victory. It is evidence that the Internet had become a new space for political activists and opposition voices to disseminate political information and news. Taylor (2004) analysed the 1999 election result and noted that the result was still significant in term of seats won by the opposition parties even though the number of seats won was small. Many of the seats won by the BN were won only narrowly. Moreover, in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, where the Internet had the largest impact, the opposition coalition gained the largest margin. This period also witnessed the arrival of more independent online news. In addition to *MalaysiaKini*, other independent news sources such as Nut Graph, The Malaysian Insider, Malaysia Mirror, Free Malaysia Today arose. As a result, during the 2008 general election campaign, Malaysians had easy access to a large amount of free, alternative information produced by professional journalists as well as citizens and amateur journalists (Gomez & Chang, 2010). The political web campaign during the 2008 general election period was dominated by opposition groups and those who were dissatisfied with the Badawi administration. Though the BN also had a web campaign, it was "miniscule, despite investing in improved websites" (Suffian, 2008: 20). The opposition groups focused their web campaigns on highlighting the weaknesses of the BN such as corruption, criminal activities and the prime minister's credibility (Rashid, 2009). They took the opportunities made available by the Internet to discuss, debate and disseminate information to ordinary people without any filtering. As many observers have noted, these activities in cyberspace affected the result of the 2008 general election (Ufen, 2008 and 2009; Weiss, 2008; Abbott, 2000; Mohd Azizuddin, 2009; Abdul Rashid, 2011).

The Unexpected Transition

The 2018 election on 9 May 2018 result was unexpected and also probably not shocking to the expert in the political scenario in Malaysia. This period was marked by its first election represent a democratic breakthrough. The opposition PH captured 48% of the popular vote and 121 of the 222 lower house seats, well above the 112 seats required to form a government. The BN managed just 79 seats on vote share of 34%. PAS, which contested widely as a third party, secured only 18 seats. After the Election Day, Mahathir was sworn in as Malaysia's seventh Prime Minister by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, formally ending 61 years of uninterrupted UMNO rule. The Opposition PH success in the GE 14 due to many factors such as public anger, unemployment , economic inequality, nationalism and also the role of social media (Rashid, 2020). Rashid (2020) also added the reason also was due to the political manipulation played by the political party to ensure the success in the election.

After been a government, the PH need to fulfill their manifesto as promised. The PH's manifesto mainly to reduce power concentration that been practise by the BN government. In the cabinet, the PH had reduced the ministers and also cut its budget. The PH government also promised to reform the Parliament to make it more effective in counterbalance. Several committees have been formed such as Budget, Major Public Appointments, Defence and Home Affairs, and Federal State Relations. The PH's manisfesto also included a two-term limit for the prime minister and state chief minister to hold the position. However, it created doubt among the people about the change. Instead

the change in government, many thing remain the same. For example in term of cost of living among people. People demand for their betterment in their economic hardship, unemployment and also low income. The PH government still taking no drastic action in handling the people's main problem. There was also no reform in changing the unpopular good and services tax (GST). Instead, they are still blaming the previous government as the result of the life of Malaysian people and more on the politicking.

As Mahathir become the 7th Prime Minister in a new government, he still wanted to exercise the power during his previous tenure as the Prime Minister from 1981 to 2003. His style of governance is most on the personalization and party institutionalization. However, due to his party is the smallest party in the coalition, he had to followed the voice of his alliance – People's Justice Party headed by Anwar Ibrahim, the Democratic Action party (DAP) and the moderate Muslim National Trust Party (AMANAH) (Abdul Rashid, 2020). As Mahathir noted, 'Malaysia has always been ruled by a coalition of parties, the last coalition was 13 parties. But it was dominated by one very powerful party, so making a decision was much easier…We now have five political parties each equally powerful and we need to do things which are supported by all the five." (Abdul Rashid, 2011). As such, Mahathir unable to perform well as the Prime Minister and also after 758 days in office, he only fulfilled 26 out of 556 promise made in the PH manifesto. In fact, Mahathir further stated that he no longer obliged to fulfil the PH's manifesto (Loheswar, 2020). There was also internal conflict between Mahathir and his long-time rival – Anwar Ibrahim for the post of prime minister. The Anwar supporters insisting Mahathir to fix the date for the replacement of the prime minister. But Mahathir did not want to commit to a time frame. As such conflict lead to the media reported as " Sheraton-Move"- a backdoor move to resolve the conflict. The Sheraton move comprised UMNO, PAS, BERSATU and a fraction of PKR. With the move and hidden agenda, Mahathir resigned as the 7th Prime Minister and also led to dissolution of the Cabinet. The Bersatu and 12 members of PKR also withdrew from the coalition, making the PH coalition lost its majority in the 222-seat parliament. Along with that, Muhyiddin and his supporter had convinced the King on their new coalition – Perikatan Nasional had enjoy majority support in parliament, he then sworn as the 8th Prime Minister in Malaysia. As the new Prime Minister with minimal majority support in parliament, Muhyiddin been challenge by his rival – Anwar and Mahathir to submit no-confidence motion in parliament. However, along with the political coup, the explosion of the Covid-19 outbreak in Malaysia making those political rival of Muhyiddin government need to silence as the new government need to tackle the Covid-19 first. With the time given, the Muhyiddin government need to prove on his governance in the pandemic Covid-19 in order to garner support from the public as well as in Parliament.

5. Conclusion

Although democracy in Malaysia is weak due to the control of the ruling elite over the country, the country is also not immune to various pressure internal and external for political change. Malaysia experienced various progress and regression with the 1969 racial riot, the 1998 Asian economic Crisis, *Reformasi* Movement in which shaped and changed the people participation in Malaysia. The experienced of Malaysia's democracy can be traced since the colonial period whose legacy still greatly affects Malaysian politics today. The elites had to find a balance between exploiting communal nationalism and working together to build a stable society. The BN's consociational democracy was the perfect formula to unite all ethnic group interests into one ruling party. The second period encompasses the events of 1969 and the NEP. This period is not only about the riot but also about Malaysian structural politics in the form of the NEP. This period saw a new emphasis on race relations as well as Malay dominance as the base of national politics. Despite economic growth, the state consolidated its power through various repressive laws and regulations, and controlled the media, judiciary, legislature and electoral system in order to limit political dissent.

The third period was the Islamisation period, which began with the co-option of Anwar Ibrahim into UMNO and the BN government, giving the party more credibility on Islamic issues. Since then, Islam has been an important influence in government as well as in public discourse. UMNO incorporated Islam into its policies while maintaining its moderate stance on religion in order to counter the popularity of PAS and to avoid alienating the other ethnic groups in the country. The fourth period encompasses the 1999 general election and aftermath. Malaysian society started to show signs of revolt against the government, especially after of the dismissal of Anwar. A reform movement arose and since then, dissenting voices have been vibrant. These voices were heard in the 2008 general election, when the BN lost its two-thirds majority in parliament for the second time, and for the first time the opposition parties won control of five states. Lastly, the period of the end of the ruling BN legacy. This period require more than a change of government. The new ruling PH many reforms that been promised during its election campaign. However, the PH's inability to produce change as been expected by people, resulting a new coalition – Pakatan Nasional took the power. It remains to be seen whether the 2020 change of government is truly point for Malaysia democracy.

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