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Article

Clientelist and Programmatic Factionalism Within Malaysian Political Parties

Andreas Ufen[1]

Abstract

This article analyses factionalism within ruling and opposition parties in Malaysia, with a focus on party splits and/or the toppling or near-toppling of dominant factions at the national level. Political parties are either composed of clientelist or programmatic factions or represent hybrids that combine clientelist and programmatic factionalism. The strength and the type of factionalism depend upon policy space and the intensity of control over party groups. Programmatic factionalism is more probable if policy space is wide. Policy space is an effect of the positioning (relatively dependent or independent from other parties in the coalition) and the basic ideology of a party, that is, the major stance on religion, ethnicity, and the shape of the political system at large. If there is hardly any policy space, factionalism will be clientelistic rather than programmatic. Whether this type of factionalism arises is contingent upon the intensity of control over groups within the party and the availability of patronage goods. The control of party members is dependent upon the strength of the party leader and the centralisation of party organisation. This is demonstrated with reference to UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) (from programmatic to clientelist factionalism), some coalition partners of UMNO such as the MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) (clientelist factionalism), and the Islamist PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia) (programmatic clientelism).

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Moreover, a brief analysis of East Malaysian parties in Sabah and Sarawak helps to further elucidate the major dynamics of factionalism.

Introduction

Malaysia offers an interesting case for a comparative within-country analysis of political party factionalism. The electoral authoritarian system (Schedler, 2013) has authoritarian and democratic features and is characterised by a multi-party system, and semi-competitive elections. The electoral breakthrough in May 2018, when the opposition coalition Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope, PH) won for the first time, could be the beginning of a slow demise of electoral authoritarianism. This article focuses mostly on events before these elections.

Since then the dynamics of party politics have changed substantially. The former ruling coalition National Front, or Barisan Nasional (BN), for example, has lost many of its coalition member parties, especially those in East Malaysia. An analysis of the events in February 2020 with the downfall of the PH government would need an additional paper.[1]

In this article, I distinguish between programmatic and clientelist factionalism. Programmatic parties are quite inflexible in terms of coalition-building because they are not willing to sacrifice parts of their policy goals for the sake of gaining more seats. These parties are vote-seeking, but policy-seeking (or the achievement of lofty targets) is more important to them. If there are factional fights within such parties, it is usually about ideology. This is different in clientelist parties, where factional infighting is predominantly based on getting jobs or some material rewards.[2] Extreme examples of clientelist factionalism are to be found within junior BN member parties and within many East Malaysian parties.

To be sure, in most cases, political parties combine programmatic appeals with clientelist, materialist goals, but the distinction between two prototypes of factionalism helps to understand underlying dynamics. In Malaysia, factionalism has always been an important part of partisan politics, and, one might argue, factionalism lay at the heart of the fragmentation and collapse of the electoral authoritarian system that came with the 2018 national elections when the BN lost its majority for the first time (Ufen, 2020). The victory of the PH was the result of two splits of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and a split of Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS). These splits and the subsequent emergence of two new parties that joined the PH as well as an UMNO split in Sabah were instrumental for the historical defeat of the BN.

Political parties in Malaysia are either composed of clientelist or programmatic factions or represent hybrids that combine clientelist and programmatic factionalism. For example, clientelist groups often try to legitimate their intra-party opposition with

reference to programmatic ideas. Programmatic factions build linkages by promising material rewards once the factional infighting has been won. One major determinant for the type of factionalism is policy space, which itself is shaped by the positioning of a party within the two-level party system consisting of coalitions (that function also as political parties) and the coalition member parties. The determinant for the intensity of factionalism is the degree of organisational control by the central leadership and the intensity of competition for patronage goods. Organisational control is high when the party leaders have effective means to dominate intra-party elections and marginalise opponents.

   This article is structured as follows. After a short discussion of the factionalism literature and the approach chosen here, the empirical part analyses clientelist factionalism within BN junior member parties and in East Malaysia, the predominantly programmatic factionalism within PAS, and the development from a more programmatic to a more clientelist factionalism in UMNO. In the conclusions the main results are summarised.

Factions and Factionalism

A faction has been defined as "any relatively organized group that [...] competes with rivals for power advantages within the larger group of which it is a part" (Beller and Belloni, 1978: 419). Zariski (1960: 33) defined a faction "as any intra-party combination, clique, or grouping whose members share a sense of common identity and common purpose and are organized to act collectively – as a distinct bloc within the party – to achieve their goals." Among these goals are patronage, "the fulfilment of local, regional, or group interests," influence on party strategy or policy, and the promotion of specific values. Faction members are aware of the existence of the group and of common interests and goals. Interaction is formalised to a certain extent, faction members communicate, and the group usually exists longer than just for a short time (Zariski, 1960: 22). Factions differ in terms of their origins, institutionalisation, stability, size, function, linkages to civil society groups, and their effects on parties and the party system (Beller and Belloni, 1978; Köllner and Basedau, 2006). These effects can be beneficial because they provide opportunities for the party rank and file to influence policy-making and they help to represent different interests and sharpen the programmatic profile of the party. They may also offer an opportunity for the party to quickly adapt to a changing political environment. Thus, factionalism can be an expression of a democratic political culture, although this is dependent on the type of factionalism.

   With reference to David Hume, Giovanni Sartori (1976) made a distinction between "factions of interest" and "factions of principle."[3] Factions of interest are based on patronage and better organised than mere clienteles. They subsume "naked power factions" and "spoils factions." Factions of principle are based on policy beliefs and are more than simple "tendencies" (Rose, 1964). In this vein, the present article differentiates between clientelist and programmatic factions; that is, factions that intend to take over the leadership positions within a party because of power and/or spoils interests or factions wanting to fundamentally change the policy course and strategic objectives of

the party. I focus on these factions because they are much easier to detect and observe than smaller factions (or tendencies and clienteles).

A Two-Level Party System

The type of factionalism (clientelist or programmatic) depends on the positioning of the party in the two-level party system. In Malaysia, party competition is characterised by a two-level organisation of political parties with usually two large coalitions (in 2018 there were three such coalitions); only a few, smaller parties do not belong to either of these coalitions. UMNO joined forces with the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) during local elections in 1952. The partnership proved so successful that, in 1953, the leaders of the two parties decided to found a lasting coalition: the Alliance. Shortly before the national elections in 1955, the Alliance was joined by the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). Consequently, the three largest ethnically based parties combined forces and won fifty-one out of fifty-two seats in the polls for the Federal Legislative Council. The Alliance (1952 until 1973, formally registered since 1957) was succeeded by the National Front, or Barisan Nasional (BN, founded in 1974), which is also registered as a party. UMNO was predominant within the party system at large as well as in the BN.[4] The prime minister and president of UMNO sometimes directly intervened in the internal affairs of BN member parties. These component parties are in a very precarious position because they have to represent the interests of their respective clienteles, mostly defined in terms of ethnicity, but have been restricted in doing this by UMNO. Thus, the existence of the BN has had a lasting impact on the structure of each component party and on the type of factionalism.

The coalitions coordinate the selection of candidates. In order to avoid three-corner fights, each coalition strives to nominate only one candidate per constituency. Moreover, coalitions organise their campaigns with common platforms and together they select office-holders after winning elections. The opposition has been organised under the umbrella of the Alternative Front or Barisan Alternatif, which comprises the Democratic Action Party (DAP), PAS and the Parti Keadilan Rakyat, People's Justice Party (PKR)[5] (1999 until March 2004; without DAP since 2001), then as People's Alliance or Pakatan Rakyat (2008 until 2015), and then as Alliance of Hope or Pakatan Harapan (since September 2015; without PAS, but with the Parti Amanah Negara or National Trust Party, PAN) (Table 1). Opposition coalitions have usually been rather fragile, but became increasingly cohesive in the first decade of the twenty-first century (Ufen, 2020). The BN, in contrast, was most of the time very stable and cohesive. The BN has indirect membership via component parties (approximately 450,000 members in total), a Supreme Council under Najib Razak, its logos, manifestos, regular meetings, and even youth and women's wings. During elections, candidates campaign under the umbrella of the BN, but also in the name of their respective coalition member party. This two-level organisation has a strong impact on the factionalisation of single parties because these are, in a way, themselves highly organised "factions" within their respective coalitions; for instance, they represent certain religious and ethnic groups. Thus, inter-party and

Table 1. Seats in National Parliament (1955–2018), Major West Malaysian Parties.

	1955	1959	1964	1969	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1995	1999	2004	2008	2013	2018
Alliance	**51**	**74**	**89**	**95**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
BN	-	-	-	-	**135**	**130**	**132**	**148**	**127**	**162**	**148**	**198**	**140**	**133**	**79**
UMNO	34	52	59	51	61	69	70	83	72	89	72	109	79	88	54
MCA	15	19	27	13	19	17	24	17	17	30	28	31	15	7	1
MIC	2	3	3	2	4	3	4	6	6	7	7	9	3	4	2
Gerakan[a]	-	-	-	8[a]	5	4	5	5	5	7	7	10	2	1	-
Opposition															
PAS[b]	1	13	9	12	14[b]	5	5	1	7	7	27	7	23	21	18[b]
DAP	-	-	-	13	9	16	9	24	20	9	10	12	28	38	42
PKN/PKR	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	1	31	30	47
Socialist Front	-	8	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PPBM (Bersatu)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13
PAN (Amanah)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	-	-	11
Semangat '46	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	6	-	-	-	-	-
Independents	-	3	-	1	-	2	8	4	4	-	-	1	-	-	3
Total	**52**	**104**	**104**	**144**	**154**	**154**	**154**	**177**	**180**	**192**	**193**	**219**	**222**	**222**	**222**

Abbreviations: BN, National Front or Barisan Nasional; UMNO, United Malays National Organisation; MCA, Malaysian Chinese Association; MIC, Malaysian Indian Congress; PAS, Parti Islam Se-Malaysia; DAP, Democratic Action Party; PKN, Parti Keadilan Nasional , National Justice Party; PKR, Parti Keadilan Rakyat, People's Justice Party; PPBM, Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia; PAN, Parti Amanah Negara or National Trust Party.
Source: Malaysian Election Commission.
[a]Gerakan was part of the opposition in 1969, but moved to the BN in the early 1970s.
[b]PAS was part of the BN in 1974. In 2018, PAS was independent from Pakatan Harapan and BN.
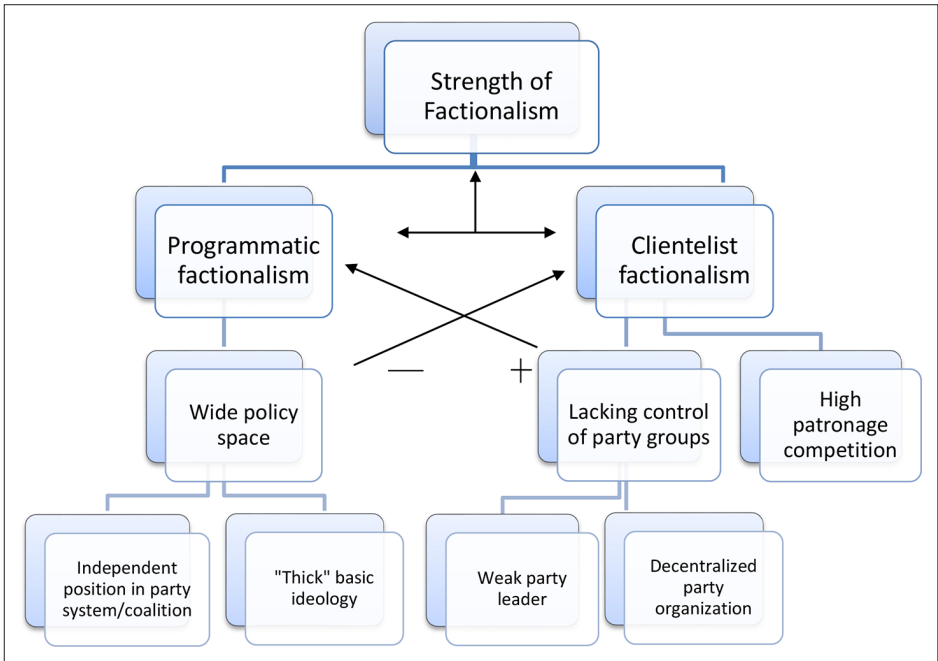
Figure 1. Strength and Type of Factionalism.

inter-coalitional competition have a direct, albeit complex effect on intra-party competition.

Strength and Type of Factionalism

The strength and the type of factionalism depend upon policy space and the intensity of control of party members (Figure 1). Programmatic factionalism is more probable if policy space is large. If there is hardly any policy space, factionalism will be clientelistic rather than programmatic. Whether factionalism arises at all, is contingent upon the intensity of control over groups within the party. Policy space is an effect of the positioning (relatively dependent or independent from other parties in the coalition) and basic ideology of a party. "Basic ideology" denotes the major stance on religion, ethnicity, and the shape of the political system at large (whether democratic, authoritarian or an Islamic State à la PAS) and is relatively stable over time. A "thick" ideology denotes an enduring commitment to an elaborate system of values and policy goals. In contrast, a "thin" ideology (Stanley, 2008) is merely an unsystematic, broadly formulated compilation of ideas.

Many political parties in Malaysia, particularly those in East Malaysia and the junior BN parties, have been organised from the beginning as interest groups representing

ethnic groups in fragile positions, that is, ethnic Chinese, Indian, Kadazandusun, Dayak, and so forth. Party ideology is thus not grounded in one of the traditional party families. An exceptions to this "thinness" of ideology is the DAP, a supposedly socialist (or social democratic) party, but the core ideology has lost much of its strength over the years, thus following a global trend. The strongest ideological commitment is characteristic of PAS, even increasingly so since the early 1980s, although with some breaks during times when PAS was part of the opposition coalitions. UMNO's platform is ideologically relatively "thick" because the party has had the opportunity to formulate the policy outlines over decades. UMNO was always forced to come up with detailed political programmes and to adapt to an environment with wide policy space, in contrast to MCA, MIC and the like, that is, parties who mostly followed UMNO. A wide policy space nurtures programmatic factionalism, but tends to subdue clientelist factionalism (Figure 1).

The control of party groups is dependent upon the strength of party leaders and their ability to stifle factionalism because of their charisma and/or their deftness in power politics and the centralisation of party organisation. Moreover, the competition for disposable patronage goods nurtures clientelist factionalism. If the party leader lacks charisma, does not dispose of large patronage resources on his own and has to deal with a party organisation that always allows for open contests, factionalism will be part of the organisational DNA. With reference to programmatic factionalism, policy space is decisive. Programmatic and clientelist factionalism may strengthen or weaken each other. It is thinkable, although difficult to show, that two factions based on different programmatic platforms are interlinked via clientelist networks in a way that subdues this factionalism and vice versa. But it is also possible that clientelist networks run more or less parallel to programmatic factions and thus amplify rifts within a party.

Factionalism is prevented from leading to a party split or a fundamental policy switch if the party is centralised to such a degree that the party leader has the ability to quash revolt by using repressive measures or patronage. This is usually the case after the party performs badly at elections, during an economic crisis (which may also affect patronage sources), or because of scandals involving the party leadership.

If the power is concentrated in the hands of a single leader, the oppositional faction is likely to lose against the dominant faction (see Musil and Bilgin, 2016). Decentralised party organisation is not meant in a strictly geographical sense, but denotes the centrifugal forces in a party resulting in a central leadership that always has to bargain and compromise with branches, leaders at the state level, interest groups within the party, and so forth. A fully centralised party would be led by one leader who controls the finances and is able to decide ahead of party elections who will get which position. Factionalism can hardly strive in such political parties. Lacking control leads to clientelist factionalism but can also promote a programmatic one.

Decision-making is strongly centralised within BN parties. Nevertheless, elections within BN parties were often hard-fought battles between different candidates who are supported by rank-and-file party members. The degree of centralism has changed over time. The presidents were most powerful after the party system was stabilised in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The very long tenures of party presidents such as Mahathir

(1981–2003), Samy Vellu (MIC, 1979–2010), Ling Liong Sik (MCA, 1986–2003), Lim Keng Yaik (Gerakan, 1980–2007), and Abdul Taib Mahmud (PBB, Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu, United Bumiputera Heritage Party, 1981–2014) are testimony to this.[6]

Personalism and centralism are also typical for many opposition parties. It is most obvious within the DAP, which was controlled from an early stage by Lim Kit Siang, who is still the respected senior leader in the background. His son, Lim Guan Eng, who was also Chief Minister of Penang and is now Minister of Finance, holds the position of secretary-general, the most important post in the party. Since a major split of the party never materialised, and competitors within DAP were quickly marginalised, long-standing factionalism or ideological divides never evolved. There are factions within the party, but not of the type analysed in this article. However, the centralism in the DAP, which has dynastic tendencies and Lim Kit Siang's allegedly "dictatorial" leadership style, was criticised on occasions (Chin, 2000: 286f; Kua, 1996). In 1997, for example, the DAP Perak branch was divided into two factions. In 1998, a campaign under the label KOKS ("Kick Out Kit Siang") was led by the National Publicity Secretary, the National Vice-Chairman, and the National Treasurer, and represented a direct attack on Lim Kit Siang. However, at the DAP delegates' conference in August 1998, only one supporter of the faction was elected into the Central Executive Committee. The three rebels then founded the unsuccessful and-since 2008-defunct Malaysian Democratic Party (MDP).

Dynastic features are also observable within the PKR reminiscent of many East Malaysian parties and, of course, UMNO.[7] The PKR is overshadowed by the former Deputy Prime Minister, the charismatic Anwar Ibrahim, whose arrest in 1998 was the reason for the establishment of the party. His wife and his daughter are in top leadership positions in the party. Factionalism within the PKR has been a direct result of the party's origins in the *Reformasi* protest movement. It consisted of NGOs (moderate Islamist organisations, but also left-wing organisations and trade unions) and students, but also of people close to Anwar Ibrahim ("Anwaristas"), many of whom were former UMNO members. Once a political party is established, the groups that have formed the party sustain their existence as factions. This was obvious within the PKR at the party congresses in the early firstdecade of the twenty-first century, but these pre-parties (or smaller, integrated parties) have since, arguably, slowly vanished as distinct groups. Only after the elections in 2018, when PKR has become part of the new ruling coalition, a strong factionalism emerged with the minister of economic affairs, Azmin Ali, on one side and Anwar Ibrahim on the other.

The strength of party leaders also depends substantially on their control over the finances of the party (Ufen, 2015). Sartori (1976) shows how decentralised party financing has encouraged multifactionalism in Japanese political parties. Governing parties in Malaysia have had direct access to state resources. Hence, UMNO and, to a lesser degree MCA and MIC, have built their own companies. Within these parties, the fight over these resources has intensified clientelist factionalism. Particularly within UMNO, the development of an opaque business empire in parallel with the pro-Bumiputera[8] policies of

the New Economic Policy (NEP) has enhanced the formation of factions that each have access to specific spoils and are connected to certain cronies (Gomez, 2002). This was obvious in 1987 and 1998. The opposition parties are generally rather poor. Only as governing parties at the state level do they gain access to patronage resources, but these are restricted because the Malaysian administrative and fiscal structure is strongly centralised. According to this logic, factions may emerge in order to demand a greater share of spoils or to gain direct access to financial resources.

Political parties face constraints in determining policy positions. There are "very real limits to the absolute size of the issue agenda available to politicians in any one time and place to differentiate themselves in the eyes of inattentive voters" (Lowery et al., 2013: 386). The policy or agenda space "is itself to a considerable degree exogenously determined, temporally sticky, and likely limited in scope" (Lowery et al., 2013). In Malaysia, this policy space is largely dependent on the position within the party system.[9] Most parties clearly sided with the BN or the opposition, especially in West Malaysia. Exceptions have been Gerakan and PAS (from 1973 until 1977), which switched to the BN after the riots in 1969. Ethnic and religious cleavages have been softened by a "bargain" among BN parties, but also to a lesser extent among opposition coalition partners. These cleavages have not divisive *within* all these parties. The need to nominate only one candidate by each coalition at the constituency level have had centripetal, bonding effects. Different parties need to agree on one candidate and to support him or her during the campaign. Grand coalitions straddle ethnic, religious and other social divides. Therefore, ideological factionalism is often weak because it is reflected as competition *between* parties. Programmatic work is subdued, particularly if a party is a component member of BN.

Clientelist Factionalism Within Dependent BN Parties

Within MCA, Gerakan and MIC, clientelist factionalism has always been strong. As junior partners of UMNO within the ruling coalition, these parties have been dependent upon UMNO. UMNO leaders have even intervened on occasions to ensure obedience by their fellow BN members. The three partners have always been in an awkward position because they defined themselves as champions of minorities, even though they almost always had to toe the BN line and were therefore portrayed by opposition parties as traitors.

The Malayan Chinese Association was formed in February 1949 with the support of the British colonial administration (Heng, 1988: 54ff). The first MCA members belonged predominantly to the Chinese bourgeoisie. At that time, MCA was a welfare organisation that helped the British, for example, in relocating half a million Chinese to the New Villages as part of the campaign against the Communist guerrillas. In 1952, MCA worked together with UMNO at municipal elections in Kuala Lumpur. The success of this cooperation inspired political leaders to form the Alliance. The new coalition then won with a wide margin in the first general elections in 1955. In 1958, Lim Chong Eu replaced Tan Cheng Lock as party president. This resulted in a party split

when Lim attempted to strengthen the role of MCA within the Alliance with reference to the allocation of candidacies in elections. Lim finally resigned as president, left the party in 1960, founded the unsuccessful United Democratic Party, and was later instrumental in the formation of Party Gerakan in 1968. The emergence of the DAP in the 1960s narrowed the voter base of the MCA. In addition, MCA's position within the Alliance was profoundly undermined by the electoral losses in 1969, the establishment of the BN and the entry into BN by Party Gerakan, which also had a large Chinese following (Heng, 1988: 265ff). Moreover, in the wake of the NEP the MCA lost its function as campaign funder and had to forego strategic cabinet positions such as the finance, trade and industry ministries. The MCA had to situate itself between UMNO and DAP. It had to be pro-Chinese and pro-government at the same time, but could never raise more radical demands. In this situation, it was very difficult to sharpen an ideological profile.

Competition within the BN increased and in the early 1970s a group of dissidents left the party and joined Gerakan. Another factional struggle occurred in 1979 when Michael Chen lost in elections for the presidency. Chen later left the party with some of his supporters and also joined Gerakan. This easy exit option within the competing Chinese parties has arguably promoted factionalism. The period between 1983 and 1985 saw a fierce intra-party feud with expulsions, legal suits, extraordinary general meetings, electoral fraud, and so on. The next major factional tussle occurred in 1999 when the party was divided into a "Team A" and a "Team B." Following mediation by Mahathir, Ong Ka Ting became new party president in 2003, but he resigned in the wake of the disastrous 2008 elections. Ong Tee Keat then assumed the post of president. His deputy Chua Soi Lek was suspended after being implicated in a sex VCD in 2009. In party elections in 2010 he became the new party president, defeating Ong Tee Keat (Lee and Pong, 2014: 30). In 2013, MCA was not represented in the cabinet, for the first time, in accordance with a prior resolution that the party would not take a ministerial position in case of electoral defeat. Although the new party president Liow Tiong Lai abrogated this decision, the incident demonstrated the reduced role of the MCA in the BN. The fierce struggles for the top position in the party were only shallowly based on programmatic differences.

According to Chin (2008: 160), in the 1980s "all the component parties in the ruling BN […] became impotent" and the MCA "decided to move into non-policy areas such as welfare work. […] The party did not bother with issues such as institutionalised racism against the non-Malays through the NEP." The same is true for Gerakan and MIC. The MIC was founded in 1946 to mobilise for Indian independence, then to counter British colonialism.[10] The party was divided by factionalism for most of its history. Especially in the 1970s, party congresses were notorious for ruckus, but not for programmatic debates. The Gerakan party was founded in 1968 by the ex-MCA politician Lim Chong Eu and some former Labour party members. It won the state election in Penang in 1969 and Lim Chong Eu became chief minister. However, after the riots in 1969 and the declaration of emergency, the party chose to become a member of the BN. The moment Gerakan switched into the camp of the ruling coalition in the early 1970s, it lost

its autonomy and independence. Finally, when the party lost its power base in Penang in 2008, it was rendered almost meaningless within the BN.

The BN junior partners exemplify the transition of parties in which serious policy questions between differing intra-party factions were discussed at the start to parties which have been fully tamed by UMNO and restricted in their activities by the BN framework of formal and informal rules. This also means that factionalism, which was initially often programmatic to some extent, was increasingly built only on the infighting of clientelist networks because policy space was strictly limited. The dependent BN parties are currently almost insignificant within the BN because of electoral defeat in 2008, 2013 and 2018.

Clientelist Factionalism in East Malaysia

Sabah and Sarawak have party systems markedly different from the federal one because parties tend to be more personalised and based on clientelist links (Faisal, 2015; Loh Kok Wah, 2005). Many parties in Sabah and Sarawak only have branches in one of these state and not in the rest of Malaysia. The relationship between the federal and the Sabah and Sarawak state governments has often been tense. Political parties emerged later than on the peninsula and are usually not well institutionalised. The main cleavages are ethno-religious: "Malay/Melanau versus Dayak versus Chinese" in Sarawak, and "Malay versus Kadazandusun versus Chinese" in Sabah. A kindred distinction in the literature is between Muslim Bumiputera, non-Muslim Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera.

Governing parties at the state level have had, and still partly have, direct access to natural resources and party leaders could establish clientelist networks based on patronage to buy off competitors within the party and stifle factionalism. In Sabah, the federal BN established successively its hegemony over sometimes insubordinate proxy parties. In the early 1970s, the headstrong Chief Minister Mustapha (United Sabah National Organisation, USNO) was replaced by Harris Salleh and his new Sabah People's United Front or Berjaya that had been established with the help of the federal government (Yusoff, 2006: 210ff). But afterwards, a burgeoning Kadazandusun ethno-nationalism, spurred by a new middle class, led to the establishment of the Parti Bersatu Sabah (United Sabah Party or PBS). It was admitted into the BN in 1986 after it had won state elections, but the relationship between the federal and the Sabah governments was difficult from the start. The PBS even chose to join the federal opposition led by Semangat'46 ahead of the 1990 national elections. The PBS was finally toppled. The federal government detained some PBS leaders, provided for party defections (probably by bribery), withheld development funds, re-delineated constituencies and registered illegal immigrants as voters (Yusoff, 2006).

Because of the tense relationship between the federal and the Sabah governments for most of the time, Kuala Lumpur decided to federalise the state government by bringing in UMNO. From 1999 until the defeat in the 2018 elections, UMNO was the hegemonic party in Sabah. The hegemony was much less built on the traditional form of personalised, timber-based patronage and more on regularised networks within and connected

to UMNO. At the same time, ethnic Chinese parties and those representing indigenous groups such as Kadazandusun increasingly split into many rivalling parties.[11]

In Sarawak the first parties emerged late, that is, shortly before elections to the District Council in 1963 (Milne and Mauzy, 1978: 167: 167ff). Since 1970, the party system was essentially dominated by the Sarawak BN consisting of the PBB, the predominantly ethnic Chinese Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) and some political parties that mostly represented Dayaks. But the role of extreme wealth of the political elite, especially by the Chief Minister Rahman Yakub (1970–1981) and billionaire Abdul Taib Mahmud (1981–2014) of the PBB, were instrumental in forging clientelist networks down to the village level (Aeria, 2005, Aeria, 2013).

Following the 1991 elections, the party system was clearly dominated by the PBB which won always almost half of the seats, but increasingly bolstered its position within the BN because the other parties tended to fragment. The continuing success of the party was based on money, but also on the re-delineation of constituencies, on the weakening of the SUPP due to DAPs successes in urban areas, and on the widespread factionalism within the Dayak parties. Following internal disputes, the SPDP (Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party) split from SNAP in 2002. The PBDS (Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak) had already separated from SNAP in 1983 and split yet again into two competing wings that were eventually declared invalid by the Registrar of Societies. Subsequently, a new Dayak party was founded by a wing of the PDBS, namely the PRS (Parti Rakyat Sarawak, Sarawak People's Party). In 2016, to give another example, the Parti Tenaga Rakyat Sarawak (*Teras*) (a splinter from SPDP) contested for BN, but did not officially join the coalition, and gained three seats in the state elections.

The governing coalitions at the state level were often much less cohesive than the BN. Therefore, the BN found two different solutions to the principal-agent problem. First, they fostered proxy parties. These proxy parties were prone to factionalism because of extreme clientelism. Second, they brought UMNO to Sabah.

Generally, the West Malaysian party system logic has been increasingly exported to East Malaysia. The best example is UMNO in Sabah (with always at least half of the total seats from 1999 until 2013), but also other West Malaysian parties increasingly succeeded. PKR and DAP got eleven and eight seats together in 2013 and 2018 in Sabah as well as fifteen and eleven seats together in 2013 and 2018 in Sarawak (thus forming the core of a slowly emerging opposition bloc). Even Gerakan (two seats in 2013) and MCA (with one seat in 2004 and 2008) entered Sabah. This was also a sign of weakening indigenous parties that were subordinate to the PBB and UMNO in Sabah within the state BN coalitions. Even more than at the federal level, the BN junior coalition parties could from time to time raise certain issues, but because of the stronger clientelism in East Malaysia in general, they were prone to strong clientelist factionalism. Parties such as Berjaya which had forcefully stressed indigenous rights were largely sidelined in the 2000s. Ironically, the relative weakness of the federal opposition coalitions in East Malaysia, and the extreme hegemony by UMNO in Sabah could have ignited the defeat of the party in 2018 elections against the Sabah Heritage Party (Parti Warisan Sabah or: Warisan) that had formed an electoral pact with the Pakatan Harapan. Warisan was able

to portray itself as a trustworthy indigenous alternative to the West Malaysian import (Chin, 2018).

Programmatic Clientelism: PAS and the Predominance of Ideology

PAS is the only party in Malaysia with a long history of marked programmatic factionalism. The party "emerged from the womb of UMNO" (Noor, 2014: 40) in 1951 when, at an UMNO-led *ulama* congress, the participants decided to form the Persatuan Islam Se-Malaya (officially registered as Pan-Malayan Islamic Party in 1955) under the leadership of the head of UMNO's Religious Affairs Bureau, Ahmad Fuad. This move was obviously a reaction to the rather secular approach of UMNO. The promotion of Islam was amongst the goals of UMNO, yet PAS aspired to more, namely the creation of an Islamic state (Mutalib, 1990: 22f). However, this aim still lacked a concrete programmatic explication.

The first major factional strife erupted in 1953 (Liow, 2009: 26ff; Noor, 2014: 42f). Ahmad Fuad, who supported UMNO's ex-president, Onn Ja'afar, was forced to leave the party together with other party members who then joined UMNO. Afterwards, double membership in UMNO and PAS was banned. Ahmad Fuad was succeeded by Abbas Elias who later invited Burhanuddin al-Helmy, a radical nationalist and once a prominent activist in the anti-colonial movement, to take over the party leadership in 1956. Burhanuddin also had leftist, socialist inclinations and was believed to be the best choice to revive the party after a dismal performance at the 1955 national elections. Under him, the party followed a rather Malay-nationalist path without giving much leeway to dogmatic religious scholars.

Burhanuddin was arrested under the Internal Security Act and died in 1969. The party leadership switched to Asri Muda (1969–1982), an ethno-nationalist who decided to bring PAS into the ruling BN coalition at the beginning of 1973 (Mauzy, 1983; Noor, 2014). For him this was an opportunity to promote "Malay unity," all the more so because PAS was in a difficult situation in the wake of the 1969 unrest and the following emasculation of the opposition. However, after a prolonged crisis in Kelantan the BN membership ended in 1977. After a motion of no-confidence, unrest in Kelantan, federal intervention, and fresh elections, PAS reached its historical nadir (Kamlin, 1980; Noor, 2014: 91ff).[12]

"Young Turks" Take Over

Within PAS, a confluence of internal, national and international factors in the late 1970s and early 1980s led to the first major split and decisive programmatic change (Liow, 2009: 33ff). The first was the disappointing leadership of Asri Muda and especially the decision to enter the BN. The second was the Islamisation within UMNO, which was accelerated with Mahathir's co-optation of the extremely popular Islamist Anwar Ibrahim. The third factor was the international revival of political Islam and the parallel

advent of young radicals within PAS. To this faction, the programmatic radicalisation seemed to be the only option to strengthen the party and to win back the states of Terengganu and Kelantan. Eventually, the "Young Turks" (Fadzil Noor, Nakhaie Ahmad, Abdul Hadi Awang, Nik Aziz, etc.) took over the PAS leadership in 1982.[13]

From then on, the party turned against the pro-*Bumiputera* NEP and the alleged ethnic chauvinism propagated by the BN. Under Yusof Rawa, president from 1983 to 1989 and "spiritual leader" from 1987 to 1995, PAS instead stressed the need to widen the scope of Islamic law, to increase the role of religious scholars (*ulama*) and to finally transform Malaysia into an Islamic State. In this vein, PAS set up a new executive committee, the Majlis Syura, to consolidate *ulama* power. Therefore, at least from the 1980s onwards, PAS consisted of at least two factions at the leadership level. One was made up of urban *dakwah* (missionary) activists, many of whom had received a Western education; the other was led by *ulama*, often with a Middle East or South Asian educational background. The rather pragmatic faction was represented for a long time by Fadzil Noor, the president from 1989 until his death in 2002. He pursued an accommodative approach towards religious and ethnic minorities and stressed issues such as social inequality. Under his leadership the party forged a smaller coalition with the UMNO split Semangat '46 in 1990 and 1995. In 1999, PAS toned down its views on the Islamic state issue and signed a reformist manifesto of the new opposition coalition, the Barisan Alternatif (Hilley, 2001: 196ff). This cooperation was also due to the rise of new party members who were socialised in an urban, multi-ethnic, and middle-class environment with a more secular education. Many of these reformers rose to prominent positions.

However, strong programmatic factionalism between *ulama* and professionals (or: between conservatives and reformers) was again ignited despite the electoral success of the opposition in 2008 and 2013. Especially after the death of the highly adored former chief minister of Kelantan, Nik Aziz, in February 2015, the conservative *ulama* faction around Abdul Hadi Awang grasped the opportunity to question the compromises agreed upon in the opposition coalition. In March 2015, PAS amended legislation to allow for the *hudud* penal code[14] to be imposed in Kelantan where the party rules. Moreover, UMNO encouraged PAS to go ahead with a similar bill at the federal level, probably to manufacture the split Pakatan Rakyat. In mid-2015, during the party congress, almost all reformers were voted out (Mustafa, 2015). The opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat came to an end. In September 2015, the reformist, non-*ulama* faction within PAS then established Amanah.

In sum, PAS had to find a balance between its Islamist ideology and the opportunity to be part of a strong opposition coalition that made it mandatory to tone down the Islamist approach. In the end, programmatic factionalism prevailed. In contrast, other opposition parties such as the DAP, PKR, Bersatu and Amanah were, arguably, much less driven by ideologies.

UMNO: From Programmatic to Clientelist Factionalism

UMNO is an example of a predominant party that was the locus of recurring factionalism, a feature of the party since its inception. It was "not only chronic but had become systemic" (Khoo, 2003). The clientelist factions sometimes evoked wider, long-term policy objectives, which resulted in the hybridisation of clientelist and programmatic factionalism.

In 1946, UMNO emerged out of a Malay nationalist movement dominated by aristocrats with British education and orientation and was comprised of a range of Malay associations and political organisations that mobilised large sections of Malay society. Within UMNO, the struggle over different programmatic visions was still alive and eventually triggered the defection of a faction around the first UMNO president, Onn Ja'afar, and the foundation of the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP), which was expressly based on a non-communal approach to politics.[15]

Since independence in 1957, UMNO representing Malay interests was the dominant party within the Alliance. On May 13, 1969, after opposition parties had gained considerably more votes in the national elections, clashes broke out. According to official reports, in the following weeks, 196 people died and 6,000 people, mostly ethnic Chinese, lost their homes (Means, 1991: 6ff). The government declared a state of emergency that lasted for twenty-one months until 1971. The 1969 riots resulted in infighting between the old UMNO leadership under Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman and the so-called ultras or "ultra-nationalists" around Mahathir (Lee, 2005ff). The "ultras" viewed the clashes as a result of the compromising policies of the Tunku towards the ethnic Chinese minority. In 1970, he was able to sideline a faction around Mahathir Mohamad and Musa Hitam, but later gave way for Abdul Razak as the new prime minister and party president (Mauzy, 1983f). The new government formulated and implemented the NEP, which encompassed "affirmative action" for *Bumiputera*. In this way, it was a substantive change from a more accommodative to a Malay–communalist, nationalist policy (Hwang, 2003: 99f).

Factional infighting again erupted in the mid-1970s, first against Prime Minister Abdul Razak, then against his successor Hussein Onn who had been perceived as relatively weak. The faction leader was Harun Idris, but he was sidelined, offered an ambassador post and, after he rejected this, finally imprisoned because of corruption. When Mahathir followed Hussein Onn as prime minister in 1981, he struggled to achieve unity in the party. One way to do this was to ignite an extent factionalism by allowing open contests for the deputy presidency in order to play off some UMNO leaders against each other (Hwang, 2003: 128f). Within a few years, this lessened organisational party control led to a major factional schism. In 1987, the party was divided from the bottom to the top between two teams: "Team A" under Mahathir and "Team B" under former Finance Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah. At the national party congress, Mahathir and his team won with a small margin, but the results were contested. Mahathir formed a new party, "UMNO Baru," and provided for its quick official registration. Afterwards, members of "Team B" also formed a new party, Semangat '46 ("Spirit of '46"). Semangat '46 took part in national elections in 1990

and 1995, but large sections of the party turned back to UMNO in the following years (Weiss, 2006: 107ff).

The events in 1987 were the result of a clientelist factionalism with bounded programmatic differences, though probably larger socio-economic causes (Khoo, 1995: 261ff; Lee, 2005: 110ff; Milne and Mauzy, 1999: 39ff; Shamsul, 1988). One of the triggers of the factionalism was the recession in the mid-1980s, which resulted in fewer patronage resources and the loosening of clientelist ties. Mahathir, once a fiery nationalist and strong advocate of the New Economic Policy, realised during the 1980s as prime minister that an overly rigid pro-*Bumiputera* promotion would endanger the country's impressive economic growth. For politicians such as Razaleigh, this slight renunciation of the NEP was anathema. Seen from this perspective, the factional strife has its origins in divergent political strategies and perceptions (Hilley, 2001: 87). Moreover, an economic crisis "definitely played an important role, by exaggerating the tensions both within and outside UMNO" (Shamsul, 1988). There was also a strong connection to the political financing of UMNO because Razaleigh's criticism was directed at the financial wizard of UMNO, Daim Zainuddin (Wain, 2009ff).

The next fundamental and momentous factional infighting occurred within UMNO at the height of the Asian financial crisis. By 1998, Mahathir and his deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, were disagreeing more and more about crucial policy decisions (Hilley, 2001: 105ff).[16] The disputes were mostly shaped by differing interpretations of the causes of the Asian crisis. Anwar Ibrahim pursued strategies according to IMF prescriptions and challenged Mahathir's leadership and his promotion of policies designed to rescue his cronies. It is not clear whether Anwar aimed to take over the party leadership. His arrest was a pre-emptive step by Mahathir to hinder the emergence of a major factional feud within UMNO. Finally, Anwar was sentenced to jail after a show trial and his followers were purged from UMNO.

Different policy strategies were initially of secondary importance, but the feud between Mahathir and Anwar got out of hand. When Anwar was sacked as deputy prime minister and threatened with arrest, he asked civil society groups to come to his rescue capitalising on his popularity (and the increasing unpopularity of Mahathir). This was the first time in the history of UMNO that such a conflict had triggered a social movement for political liberalisation, that is, the *Reformasi* movement. The factionalism also had repercussions that fundamentally changed the party system (Ufen, 2009). In April 1999, *Reformasi* gave rise to the new PKN or National Justice Party (Weiss, 2006ff). In June 1999, the PKN allied with PAS, the DAP, and the leftist PRM (Parti Rakyat Malaysia, Malaysian People's Party) to form the Barisan Alternatif or Alternative Front.

After the ouster and defection of the Anwaristas, UMNO regained a certain unity. Mahathir gave way to his chosen successor Abdullah Badawi, who himself was forced to resign in 2009. The replacement was the logical result of UMNO's poor electoral performance in 2008. The new prime minister and UMNO president Najib Razak began as a supposed reformer but came under pressure following the disastrous 2013 elections. In 2015 it emerged that under his control, the state investment company 1MDB (1Malaysia Development Berhad) lost billions of US$ in financial transactions.

Moreover, it transpired that he had received bank transfers of US$681 million into his private accounts ahead of the 2013 elections (Gabriel, 2018). The subsequent rift within UMNO saw Najib and his followers on one side, and Mahathir and his followers, inter alia the sacked Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin as well as the toppled chief minister of Kedah, Mukhriz Mahathir, on the other. In March 2016, Mahathir and an array of opposition politicians signed a 37-point People's Declaration calling for the resignation of the prime minister. In September 2016, he formed the United Pribumi Party of Malaysia (Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia, PPBM) or Bersatu that became part of the Pakatan Harapan in March 2017. From July 2017 onwards, Mahathir was official chairman of the PH and later became its candidate as prime minister for the 2018 elections.

The 1MDB crisis was a vindication of a commercialisation of party politics as well as the centralisation within UMNO itself (Gomez, 2009, Gomez, 2017). The prime minister was at the same time UMNO president and finance minister and held sway over the Prime Minister's Office with its myriad of ministers, agencies and commissions. The complete lack of checks and balances within UMNO and the coalition denoted a fundamental weakness. Welsh (2018: 98ff) speaks of a deinstitutionalisation of UMNO. Patronage "moved from party coffers to government funds[…] and became more concentrated directly within the prime minister's office[...] On the ground, party organs were starved of funds[...] party elections were heavily manipulated in 2013 through the use of money – and delayed altogether until after GE14" (Welsh, 2018: 100). This again contributed to increased infighting and the split of the party.

To sum up, the first party split based on programmatic differences occurred in 1946 when Onn Ja'afar intended to transform UMNO into a multi-ethnic party. After the 1969 riots, Tunku Abdul Rahman was pushed out of office by a faction of politicians willing to introduce affirmative action for Malays. These measures and the widening of patronage resources resulted in an increasing impact of business interests within the party. Hence, UMNO factionalism in 1987 was strongly driven by clientelist networks, but was also to some extent connected to national policy strategies. Indeed, with the entry of businesspeople since the 1970s, incentives to distribute money in order to get elected by the party rank-and-file were increasing. This type of "money politics" is a natural breeding ground for clientelist factionalism. The 1987 split was, arguably, mostly a fight for patronage resources. In 1998, clientelist factionalism was just starting, but it ended in a bitter rift between two factions with opposing political concepts for the future of Malaysia (Hwang, 2003). At the end, UMNO was split because of the ubiquity of clientelism.

Concluding Remarks

The model presented earlier (Figure 1) has identified the factors determining programmatic and clientelist factionalism. If a party is based on a "thick" ideology and if this party is relatively independent from other partners within the coalition, policy space, that is, opportunities to re-define programmatic incentives for voters- is wide. This, together with a weak party leadership, facilitates programmatic factionalism. If a political party

has weak leaders and/or the party organisation is rather decentralised, party groups are hardly controllable. If, at the same time, large patronage resources are available and thus patronage competition is high, clientelist factionalism is usually rising. If, moreover, policy space is narrow, programmatic distinctions between party groups are blocked. The result is intense clientelist factionalism.

How exactly do we draw the line between clientelism and "real" policy issues? The two types of factionalism are Weberian ideal types. If, for example, patrons distribute club goods to members of an ethnic or religious group (as is the case with the NEP), and if this distribution is part and parcel of a kind of party philosophy, this type of clientelism is already programmatic in nature. But when, at the same time, a party like UMNO hands out material resources based on personal links, it is pure clientelism. Although there is no clear-cut distinction between clientelist and programmatic factionalism, there is a palpable difference between MCA-like personal feuds and the bitter acrimony between the reformers and *ulama* of PAS who represent different social milieus and have distinct worldviews.

Until the late 1960s, there were more programmatic choices, even among the smaller Alliance members. The authoritarian system allowed for more policy options, and many political parties were not as centralised as they would become. A narrowing of policy space occurred with the institutionalisation of the party system, the increasing authoritarianism of the political system at large, and the expansion of the ruling coalition in the 1970s. Programmatic factionalism was increasingly subdued. Clientelist factionalism was also intensified within BN parties because of the NEP with its wide opportunities for patronage. Especially in the 1980s, this business-driven factionalism undermined UMNO; however, as the ruling party, it has always had more room for programmatic manoeuvres. Therefore, the 1987 battle had an ideological dimension. But it was the Mahathir–Anwar schism of 1998 that morphed into a fight not merely directed at securing patronage sources.

Since the late 1990s, Malaysian party politics has become more diversified; an end of electoral authoritarianism has become conceivable. Because of this, factionalism has been partly based on programmatic differences. Examples of this trend are the schisms in UMNO in 1998/1999 and 2015, and between conservatives and reformers within PAS since *Reformasi* times which finally provoked the party split in 2015. As the dominant party, UMNO has had more leeway to change policies, but at the same time, the increasing commercialisation of politics has affected the emergence of clientelist networks based on patronage. One could say that UMNO still shuns programmatic debates within the party and sidelines anyone who dares to take programmatic initiatives. Nevertheless, wider policy issues such as during the Asian crisis or in connection to the 1MDB scandal have a direct impact on the party. Especially since *Reformasi*, PAS has changed its policy objectives and strategies frequently, and has oscillated between having a neutral or even pro-government stance and being part of the opposition that aims at regime change. However, it is exactly this very wide policy space that leads to programmatic factionalism. The PAS members who have now formed PAN are not simply disgruntled detractors, but represent a substantially different understanding of political Islam and approach to politics.

The control of patronage resources stabilises the central leadership, but can also easily lead to increased factionalism because the stakes are very high. It was precisely the involvement of BN parties in political business that contributed to clientelism and, thus, clientelist factionalism. In the same vein, strong central leaders usually contain factional fights, but autocratic party leadership gives rise to movements by disappointed followers. The most explosive mixture seems to be weakened autocratic leadership in the face of disappointing electoral performance. If this is connected to relatively open intra-party elections, factionalism is almost guaranteed. A specific case was UMNO prior to the 2018 elections. Although Najib was able to control this distribution in an unprecedented manner, it was exactly this which led to an overstretching of "money politics," to public outrage over obvious corruption on a grand scale, and finally to his downfall. Another reason for clientelist factionalism could be the shrinking of patronage resources. The Team A/Team B factionalism within UMNO in the late 1980s was due to different views on the question "who gets what."

If a chief patron such as Abdul Taib Mahmud (PBB) in Sarawak is in a very powerful position, protected by the federal government, and with a local civil society too weak to scandalise "money politics," factionalism can be stifled. At times, the hegemonic UMNO promoted factionalism within junior partners. This was especially the case in East Malaysia because UMNO had to manufacture a party system with one hegemon. UMNOO in Sabah could only take over a predominant position within the Sabah party system because other parties were split and substantially weakened.

But the federal UMNO was for a long time interested in a cohesive coalition without much factionalism in order to guarantee electoral success. MCA, MIC, and Gerakan were important allies against non-Malay opposition parties, and factionalism within these parties always helped parties such as DAP. The junior partners within the BN have had a range of patronage goods and at the same time not much policy space. Therefore, internal fights have been focused on distribution issues and not so much on policies. The factional strife within parties such as MCA, MIC, and Gerakan was only subdued in times of very strong leadership.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Notes

1. In February 2020, the significance of factional strife in Malaysian politics was substantiated when the PKR faction led by Azmin Ali left the party and joined Bersatu, which had left the PH.
2. On forms of clientelism, see Tomsa and Ufen (2013).

3. See also Bettcher (2005).

4. On the classification of party systems, see Sartori (1976: 240ff).

5. At that time still under the name PKN (Parti Keadilan Nasional, National Justice Party).

6. Meanwhile, many parties had introduced term limits for their presidents (or within the DAP: for the secretary-general).

7. For example, the former Prime Minister Najib Razak is the son of the Second Prime Minister Abdul Razak.

8. *Bumiputera*, the "sons of the soil," are officially composed of Malays (approximately five-sixths of the *bumiputera*) and other indigenous groups (Iban, Melanau, Bajau, etc.). With the NEP, *bumiputera* are privileged in terms of business licenses, ownership structures, employment relations, and educational opportunities

9. On collective action problems of individual parties within Malaysian opposition coalitions: see Dettmann (2018).

10. On the MIC: see Ramasamy (2001); Loh Kok Wah (2003).

11. The vote was split by three ethnic Chinese parties as well as the ethnic Chinese wing of the PBS.

12. Nasir and his newly founded BERJASA party (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Front, or Barisan Jemaah Islamiah Se-Malaysia) joined the BN and in subsequent elections BERJASA won more seats than PAS in Kelantan. The party later disappeared.

13. The faction of Asri Muda was sidelined, and he founded the Parti Hizbul Muslimin Malaysia (or Muslim People's Party of Malaysia, HAMIM), which was part of the BN until 1989.

14. *Hudud* usually refers to the class of punishments (capital punishment, amputation of hands or feet, and flogging) that are fixed for certain crimes such as drinking alcohol, theft, robbery, illegal sexual intercourse, rebellion, and apostasy (including blasphemy).

15. The IMP failed at elections. Onn Ja'afar then founded the National Party, or Party Negara, which also turned out to be moribund.

16. To Lee (2005): 227ff, it was a conflict between a collectivist-authoritarian and an individualist-libertarian nationalism.

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