

Sarawak State Elections 2011: Litmus Test for BN?

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Abstract: In the 2006 Sarawak 9th state elections, Barisan Nasional (National Front) fondly known as BN win with a landslide victory. A majority of 62 seats won against a total of 71 contested. Within 5 years, many changes occurred and BN had to face numerous issues which were used as a political tool by the opposition parties. On the other hand, the opposition parties known as Pakatan Rakyat (People Front) or PR were trying to make inroads to improve their performance in the state elections channeled through various resources within the state. The state elections were seen by many as a bench mark to observe voting trends for the upcoming general elections then, especially among the Chinese voters. This study discusses in detail the 10th Sarawak state elections which took place in 2011 with an in-depth analysis of the issues and challenges faced, so as to understand the hurdles currently being faced by BN leading up to the state elections in 2015/6. The Sibü by-elections is also examined briefly in order to provide a comparative perspective to this study; at the same time to address the impact of the by-elections to BN and PR.

Key words: Sarawak state elections, Barisan Nasional (National Front), Pakatan Rakyat (People Coalition), electoral issues, voting patterns

INTRODUCTION

The Sarawak state elections is by far one of the largest displays of democratization in the context of political participation in Malaysia. It has been held separately from the national general and other state elections, since the 3rd state elections in 1979 with a mere 48 seats contested then. However, the constituencies have been further expanded to now include a total of 71 seats commensurate with a rapidly growing population and a myriad of other political exigencies (Anonymous, 2011a). It has been the norm that Barisan Nasional (National Front) or famously known as BN retains its two thirds majority, for it has ponly lost 1 seat to the Sarawak National Party (SNAP) in 1974 but SNAP joined the BN coalition soon after and the loss was statistically negated. Records also show that another 3 seats were lost to the opposition in 1987 when BN won 28 seats while the opposition controlled 20 (Jawan, 1993).

The 9th state elections in 2006 saw BN win with a majority of 62 seats against a total of 71 contested (a SNAP candidate joined the BN coalition in December, 2010, bringing the total to 63) with the Democratic Action Party (DAP) securing 6 seats (12 contested) whereas Parti Keadilan Rakyat or PKR (contested 25), SNAP (contested 28) and an independent candidate, respectively secured 1 seat each. The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party or more commonly known as PAS and the Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS) had both contested 1 seat each but failed to secure any, adding statistically to

losses also experienced by the Sarawak United Peoples Party (SUPP) which had itself contested 8 seats (Pandian, 2010).

This study shall seek to discuss in detail the 10th Sarawak State elections which took place in 2011 with an in-depth analysis of the issues and challenges faced, so as to understand the hurdles currently being faced by BN leading up to the state elections in 2016. Prior to this, the Sibü by-elections will be examined briefly, providing a comparative perspective to this study, as it attempts to fathom BN's political future.

THE SIBU BY-ELECTIONS: A PLATFORM FOR UNDERSTANDING THE SENTIMENT PRESENT IN THE 10TH SARAWAK STATE ELECTIONS

The results of the Sibü by-elections deviated from the status quo in being advantageous for DAP after 5 term Sibü BN assemblyman Robert Lau H oi Chew passed away peacefully on the 9th of April, 2010. It was also the 11th by-election within the 2 year period after the March, 2008 general elections; there were a total of 16 by-elections in the country throughout the term of 2008-2011 (Pandian, 2010).

The question remains as to whether DAP's victory in a by-election, since 2008 general elections showed a marked increase in trust by the voters toward the party.

It may also be questioned if the overt politicking throughout the campaigning period gained instead a

dysfunctional lack of interest among the voters whereby an ominous voter turnout of only 59.86% or 32742 people appeared almost condescending in contrast to the numbers predicted by the Elections Commission (EC). This view is a result of direct comparison with the much larger 68% voter turnout out of 53679 registered voters in the 2008 general elections. In 2004, voter turnout was 62.8%. Then, again in the 2006 state elections with a voter turnout of 63.7%, the statistical average voter turnout was then 64.7% (Kadam-Kiai, 2009). The 2010 Sibu by-election vote tally was low due to a variety of possible factors where voters became increasingly disconnected with the importance and functions of elections in their lives and the perception that elections have become a failed cause in bringing about any kind of change at all. Also, considered were factors of transportation from hard to reach residencies to the voting centers, the high number of voters working away from Sibu and indiscriminate voter dissatisfaction directed toward certain political factions.

In the 2008 general elections, the BN candidate won with a majority of 3235 votes (total tally of 19138 votes), as compared to DAP candidate Wong Ho Leng and PKR candidate Lim Chin Chuang who both obtained 15903 and 812 votes, respectively. All 3 State Legislative Assembly (SLA) seats under the Sibu parliamentary seat, which are Bawang Assan, Pelawan and Nangka saw overwhelming BN victories as well in the 2006 state elections (Pandian, 2010).

On the other hand, the BN candidate who failed to secure a seat, Robert Lau Hui Yew was prior to the elections, very strong competition to DAP candidate Wong Ho Leng (who was also the State Legislative Assemblyman for Bukit Assek and had contested in the 2008 Sibu elections). This particular by-election also witnessed an independent candidate, Narawi Haron renew his candidature since his last participation as a candidate in 1995. Voter composition in Sibu according to racial distribution was at the time of elections, 67% Chinese, 10.5% Malay/Melanau and 22% Sarawak Bumiputera.

There were various issues that were specifically brought up and debated throughout the campaigning period to garner support from the voters. Both the incumbent and opposition parties had tried to influence voter decision by expounding local state issues, as well as national issues from the peninsula. However, political clashes that occurred in Sibu never could put to test Datuk Seri Najib Abd. Razak (Prime Minister and BN Chairman) and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (Opposition Leader and De Facto leader for People Justice Party) personalities as were previously observed in many

other elections. Instead, Sibu became the grounds for obtaining support from the Chinese voters which the DAP whose members are mainly of Chinese descent, saw as a clear advantage. This had proved to be in DAP's privilege as the Chinese voter turnout on the day itself far outnumbered voters from other ethnicities. DAP's triumphant victory may also be attributed to the turnout of fence-sitter voters who are by nature more prone to vote based on current issues which at the time revolved around voter rights to peacefully protest their dissatisfactions. Though voters were well aware that a DAP win in Sibu will not entirely ensure significant change in the government, the failure of BN to counter the perception brought about by the opposition factions has rendered, its political strategies to a state of mere stagnancy.

Ethnicity and religious issues had tainted the entire campaigning period leading up to the elections. A professional rivalry ensued between the SUPP and the DAP, as both parties sought to represent the Chinese communities in Sibu. Having lost 6 state seats to the rather well performing DAP in 2006, the SUPP had no choice but to stand out and prove itself, as most relevant to the interests of the ethnic Chinese voters (Anonymous, 2011b). Commonly considered a safe deposit for the DAP the ethnic Chinese voters constitute 67% of the voter demography in the area and are the deciding factor between any party's win and loss. For example, the Palawan area itself saw the DAP win a total of 11000 votes as compared to BN which secured only 5000. Furthermore, it is acclaimed that ethnic Chinese votes have increased by at least 10% in support of the DAP, since the 2008 elections due to a variety of issues mobilized during the campaigns such as religion, culture, education, justice, wrongful conduct such as nepotism, cronyism, corruption, the economy, availability of jobs and even flash floods (Pandian, 2010). Character assassination attempts on Tan Sri Taib Mahmud (now Governor of Sarawak state) who already had 29 years of service as the Chief Minister of Sarawak (at the time) and other BN candidates were not exempted. The perception on Chief Minister's family's domination of the state economy and the PBB's hegemony on state politics were controversies which the DAP openly capitalized on. It was even reported that the Chinese community in the state no longer placed much emphasis on development issues as was the norm before (Anonymous, 2010a).

The Allah issue which at first was a political innuendo without much consideration of interethnic sensitivity, escalated rapidly to inflame more provocative measures, such as the burning of 5000 bibles in the Peninsula (Anonymous, 2010b). The SUPP was seen by

some failed to prevent such blatant interethnic or interreligious hostility and instead had allowed it to become a public matter. On the other hand, the DAP carried out their elections agenda as had been publicized earlier in previous by-elections, such as the Sibu4Change and Jom Ubah (Lets change) taglines, even though BN had actively pursued and proven its ability to adapt and to change. DAP's strategy was similar to their March, 2008 initiative where it put an end to the Gerakan stronghold in Penang via strong use of populist sentiment and protest based support seeking alternatives in the last few moments of campaigning. Just as the ethnic Chinese voters had crowded the Chung Hin building in Penang on the 7th of March, 2008, the Paramount Hotel saw a similar spectacle on the 15th of May, 2010, magnifying the ethnic Chinese voters role as kingmakers in any one election. The ethnic Chinese voters had taken the liberty of obliterating the BN strategy by being stoically rigid in their demands soon after realizing their role as the deciding factor in the context of national leadership and administration. Generally, the ethnic Chinese voting patterns have brought significant gains to the opposition party candidates while at the same time weakening the strength of BN.

Najib's initiatives at not only approaching the voters but also in being honest about his efforts on developing Sarawak since taking over the helm in 2009, were clearly not sufficient to win the support of ethnic Chinese voters. Though many questioned his decisions on spending BN fund money and the allocation of RM18 million to Chinese vernacular schools, he remained supportive by continuing to campaign for his party candidates (Chan, 2010). However so, it was apparent that ethnic Chinese voter support for DAP was practically immovable with BN having to rely on support from the Iban and Melanau Malay voters. Nevertheless, it was a good opportunity for BN to review and analyze the consequential drop in support which had not only influenced voting patterns but also affected voter turnout. In a direct comparison of the elections results of March, 2008 and May, 2010, it could be observed that support for DAP had increased by 2942 votes whereas BN took a fall of 691 votes (Tan, 2010).

This comes to show that without the support of the ethnic Chinese voters, BN which had all this while relied on a solid support base consisting of ethnic Iban and Melanau Malay voters will continue to be in critical state. BN's lackadaisical performance raises certain questions which are necessary in understanding the Chinese voting patterns would the ethnic Chinese voters persist in their current voting patterns and will Pakatan Rakyat (People

Coalition) or famously known as PR continue to take advantage by mobilizing ethnic Chinese support for political gain? In light of BN's transformation to win back the ethnic Chinese support will PR instead attempt to secure lost ethnic Malay votes? Machiavelli (2001) as it may sound, politics in Sarawak having lost sensitivity among the many ethnicities is pretty much still tied along racial lines where in winning votes and support, the end inevitably justifies the means.

In similar perspective, the campaigning strategy and results obtained were scrutinized by both the incumbent and opposition parties, as to understand the win/lose factor in the approach mentioned previously. The same strategies with similar results were known to have been used in the 2011 elections campaign as well.

In retrospective, BN should be advised to weaken its fixation with conventional political practices based upon old successful track records and concentrate instead on making the Najib factor a catalyst for future development. The party has to also be more meticulous in planning and executing, its strategies with proper teamwork to be able to match variable approaches with different target groups in accordance with current issue requirements. For example, the tendency for the younger generation who are seemingly better educated to influence their parents and other members of the senior group is now higher, as they are also well equipped with knowledge of current happenings in national politics. A loss for the SUPP was not unusual and a win for the DAP may not be considered a comfortable win either.

The question remains as to whether the Sibu voting trends could inspire party movement at the state level in their efforts to instill better confidence and bring about smooth change in party leadership transitions. Such a strategy could do wonders for restoring voter trust which would lead to increased votes. The Sibu elections results may not be concluded, as a form of rejection toward the Najib administration but more of a protest toward the state leadership which was at the time, still capitalizing on previous contributions in past elections as means of proving capability. This victory for the DAP helped provide moral legitimacy for the party when it faced troubled leadership issues within the opposition coalition. Far from being shaken with the results of 16 May, 2010 BN's safe deposit in Sarawak could have used those results to assess strengths and weaknesses in preparation for the state elections which took place not long after (Anonymous, 2010b). The signs of protest were well projected and many had even predicted the recreation of history at the Sarawak state elections 2011. Did it happen? This study will seek to materialize a valid conceptual framework with a thorough analysis of the results of the 2011 state elections.

PRELUDE TO THE STATE ELECTIONS: CANDIDATE, CAMPAIGN, ISSUE

The Sarawak State Legislative Assembly (SLA) was dissolved on the 21st of March, 2011. Election day itself was set for the 16th of April, 2011 after the nomination of candidates 10 days earlier with a limited campaigning period of 10 days (Anonymous, 2011c).

This 10th state elections a total of 213 candidates registered as contestants with an additional 41 independent candidates having similar intentions. Two thirds of the seats contested saw multiple angled competition, some 2-5 and even 6 way contests among candidates from various parties. However, only 27 areas saw a one on one political clash between BN and PR candidates, even though PR Sarawak (PKR-DAP-PAS-SNAP) had agreed earlier to contest all 71 state seats the same way (Anonymous, 2011d). In the end, PKR and SNAP saw heightened competition for votes in 25 constituencies, as SNAP had wanted rights over the traditional ethnic Dayak constituencies which were already being monopolized by its own opposition coalition partner.

Interestingly, there were no candidates who had won seats without contesting and the fact that there were 16 female candidates in the mix (4 female candidates from BN, DAP and PKR, 2 candidates from PAS and 1 candidate each from PCM and an independent party) added a certain vibrancy to the entire process. The rather large number of candidates contesting primarily showed a heightened sense of belief in the elections, as a reliable method of democratic practice, though there were other contributing factors which helped shape the outcome of the elections itself.

BN which was represented by component parties PBB, SUPP, PRS dan SPDP, faced competition with DAP (15), PKR (49), PAS (5), SNAP (26), PCM (6) and independent candidate (41). All in all, there were a total of 213 candidates contesting in the 2011 Sarawak state elections.

A few constituencies were expected to have become hot seats (seats that are won with a slim majority, a vote difference of under 1,000 may be labelled as such) though in the context of today, there seems to be less and lesser mention of incumbent or opposition party home grounds where political clout is greatest. Examples of such constituencies would include Kota Sentosa (DAP-531 votes), Sadong Jaya (BN-858 votes), Repok (BN-576 votes), Pelawan (BN-263 votes), Belaga (BN-227 votes) and Ba'Kelalan (BN-475 votes).

Other seats that drew attention include the 3 way contest at Balingian (where the BN candidate was in fact

the Chief Minister at the time, Taib Mahmud), the pending battle between Professor Sim Kui Hian against DAP candidate Violet Yong Wui Wui and Batu Kawah where the young and inspiring DAP candidate Christian Chiew Wang See bravely took on Tan Joo Phoi. Satok drew the limelight instead as PBB's Deputy President, Datuk Abang Abd Rahman Zohari Abg Openg was opposed by PKR Sarawak's Youth Chief, Ahmad Nazib Johari. One other constituency with similar political suspense would have been the Padungan seat where independent candidate Dominique Ng Kim Ho faced a fierce 3 way battle royal with new BN candidate Sim Kiang Chiok and DAP candidate Wong King Wei (Anonymous, 2011e).

The observable fact was that there existed a healthy combination of young and experienced candidates participating in the entire process. A third of all PBB candidates were new, complementing the 40% of fresh faces from SUPP and one each from PRS and the SPDP. These candidates were also from the varied ranks of civil servants, academicians, traders and other professionals. In contrast, the BN candidates were aged between 38 and 66 years old whereas the average age of a DAP candidate was 39.

The winnable candidate strategy, strongly endorsed by BN Chairman, Najib and his deputy, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, saw efforts which tried to match the candidate in general to elements of locality, voter distribution such as gender among other factors. This was a crucial decision, especially when male voters composed almost 49.8% (50.7% in 2006) and female voters consisted about 50.2% (49.3% in 2006). Age was also an important factor as mentioned previously where the number of voters under the age of 55 was around 65% of the entire voter turnout.

The 18 new BN candidates who contested in the elections proved BN as flexible and concerned for the future of its party administration, allowing a smooth transition for new leadership, as to avoid any occurrence of a void present in the party administration in any future restructuring processes. In short, there is a vibrant and ready line up of future leaders in BN for replacement or assimilation purposes which is not only beneficial but also necessary in present circumstances. The ethnic composition of the constituencies were also prioritized as Sarawak's demography consisted of 30% ethnic Ibans, followed by 28% ethnic Chinese, 28% ethnic Melanau, 6% Orang Ulu, 8% Bidayuh and a mix of 28 other ethnic groups. The class factor was highlighted, as well as it is an aspect imperative and most descriptive in explaining elections results and voting behaviour. It was observed that votes contributed by the middle and upper class

voters in the urban settlements had more or less balanced out the staunch support rural voters had for the incumbents.

It was important that the candidates be equipped with a smooth, organized and complete party machinery and agenda with minimal or no internal sabotage or conflicts. BN Sarawak candidates and the issues that they brought forward faced daunting threats via internal differences in opinion which in other cases could have seriously affected the credibility of the candidates themselves. The commitment displayed by the grass root level leaders may have helped to stabilize their position in the party, if they were shown the proper respect and appreciation, especially in the longhouses. Understanding the culture and fundamental needs of the voters is essential as most of them have always wanted peace, harmony and stability in their constituencies, values which are clearly incorporated in the BN manifesto secure your future with BN (Pandian, 2011).

Leaders from the Peninsula, on the other hand should have equipped themselves with knowledge of the culture of the Sarawak people which is rich in traditions, beliefs, rituals and generational values, so that they could have been better accepted as a part of their party's campaign agents there. Heritage and traditional values are very important to the people of Sarawak and generally these attributes have to be well understood, so as to not offend or lose voter support during the campaigning period. Even so, current issues are just as important when brought to the attention of voters. Sarawak is a state unique due to its ethnic based value systems and its current issues almost always revolve around them. Which is why the one Malaysia values have much gravity in Sarawak and if expounded on creatively and systematically, they may as well become BN's plus point in winning voter confidence.

Attending to varied perceptions on nationalism matters which are also influenced by predetermined autonomy in making and carrying out decisions relating to national and local issues, the opposition party's stance on these issues regarding the state and country may have actually backfired on their own strategies. This could have been because their philosophy on nationalism itself may have appeared attractive to only a small group of voters. However, the majority of them had the liberty to see and judge for themselves, if such a perspective is merely rhetorical or if there has been significant change at all throughout the period of 2008-2011. It should also be understood that the political culture in the Peninsula is very much different than the kind practiced in either Sabah or Sarawak.

Dominant nationalistic issues in Sarawak constantly revolve around state, district or locality matters. Most of the issues are not predominantly new, such as state leadership, personality, Native Customary Rights land (NCR), resource allocation, logging concessions, poverty, corruption, transparency, abuse of power, nepotism, cronyism, basic rights, petroleum royalty, price increases, the media, infrastructure, amenities, facilities and other daily life issues. The opposition as an alternative state government but without the proper political literacy and clout is also an issue strongly linked to nationalism in Sarawak. Issues related to Christianity had also taken prominence this time with a focus on the usage of certain words, interpretations of the bible and also its publications and distribution. However, there were some issues that were a little too abstract to be understood clearly by the voters as these issues did not revolve around factors which directly involved them.

What was apparent, however was that BN continued its assurances of providing a far better delivery system for development to the people, for example in the areas of low infrastructure and amenities accessibilities. PR tried to assuage its insatiable hunger for power by attacking the Chief Minister instead with issues of inherited land rights and claims of staying far too long in office via corrupt activity (Anonymous, 2011f) to the extent that Baru Bian would replace the current CM should PR win. SNAP too failed to find compromise with PKR, labelling it as a party from the Peninsula which had almost disturbed the peace of the Dayaks in Sarawak.

This time the campaigning period was flooded with issues as mentioned earlier, including others such as the invitation of a local singer to attract the attention of the ethnic Chinese voters and even give aways of party merchandise as souvenirs. The opposition took pride in their Ubah (change) mascots which were distributed widely with a campaign tag of vote for change against BN's tag which was vote for transformation (Pandian, 2010).

The issues propounded by BN were factors which a majority of Malaysians could relate to and have enjoyed under the BN administration. Among them were stability, harmony, peace, investment, rural achievements and ethnic security, factors which were not directly accommodating of inter-ethnic harmony but nevertheless had allowed the BN to defend state autonomy and its own contributions throughout its administration. These factors were and have been known to be used as references and indicators to their campaign manifestos.

The Najib factor coupled with Taib's powerful state leadership could have worked miracles during the campaigning period and should Taib's replacement be

Table 1: Sarawak 10th state legislative assembly elections results

Variables	No. of votes	Percentage from total votes	Seats won	Percentage from total seats	+/-
Barisan Nasional	372,379	55.36	55	77.46	-8
Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB)	192,785	28.66	35	49.30	-
Parti Rakyat Bersatu Sarawak (SUPP)	111,781	16.62	6	8.45	-6
Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS)	35,120	5.22	8	11.27	-
Parti Demokratik Progresif Sarawak (SPDP)	32,693	4.86	6	8.45	-2
Pakatan Rakyat	277,329	41.23	15	21.13	+8
Parti Tindakan Demokratik (DAP)	138,847	20.05	12	16.90	+6
Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR)	117,100	17.41	3	4.23	+2
Parti Kebangsaan Sarawak (SNAP)	15,663	2.33	0	0.00	-
Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS)	9,719	1.44	0	0.00	-
Parti Cinta Malaysia (PCM)	2,895	0.43	0	0.00	-1
Independents	20,064	2.98	1	1.41	-
Total	672,667	100.00	71	100.00	-

announced at the time, it would have allowed BN to dominate the elections results. Such a strategy was thought clever to counter DAP's artillery at the time which was 1 vote for BN, 1 vote for Taib followed by 1 vote for SUPP, 1 vote for Taib at the Sibu elections (Anonymous, 2010c, d).

Though BN in Sarawak had successfully defended its two thirds majority, over confidence would unnecessarily precipitate inappropriate sentiments. Instead BN Sarawak should try to understand the political flips that occurred in Selangor, Penang, Kedah and Perak in March, 2008 so that a better strategy may be formulated in facing DAP and PKR in the future. In similar perspective, BN should begin formulating solutions as to how it will have to penetrate the black and gray areas which are predominantly ethnic Chinese areas for future political expediency. The national political landscape has seen so much changes and alterations when taken into consideration the 2006 elections and the Sibu by-elections in 2010 and so must BN evolve its enterprise to ensure survival.

The results of the Sarawak state elections are imperative in understanding, if the state could retain its safe deposit status in overcoming challenges for the next state elections. It still remains the norm in thought, however that a drastic shift in results will be close to impossible, as the media and its relative development in rural areas have yet to be urbanized and also the aforementioned rural and semi-rural areas are still majorly Bumiputera occupied. Somehow these factors deem BN's political prowess and influence in Sarawak almost impenetrable. Nevertheless as witnessed in 2008, a political tsunami gives no warning beforehand and may occur again, if the party appears to have become overindulgent with its own prior achievements.

The state election is important to Sarawak's post Taib leadership era. It is important that the voters understand the rationality of their support and act practically without allowing emotion to obscure judgment. They need to also comprehend the high levels of responsibility that Najib

has taken on in carving out new directions for the state and in undertaking transformative initiatives within and without the party. In the next part of this study (Table 1), it may be understood if all this did influence the elections results in any way at all.

STATE ELECTIONS RESULTS

Though, there was the expectation that the surprise in Sibu would continue to afflict the state elections in 2011 with wildcard propensity but such predictions remained as they were. Barisan Nasional did lose 8 seats in addition to the seats already lost in the 2006 state elections but managed to retain, its two thirds majority nevertheless. SUPP on the other hand had lost all its seats and President George Chan Hong Nam lost his Deputy Chief Minister's position as well. DAP emerged bright eyed as it doubled its amount of seats from 6 in 2006 to 12.

A 55 seat victory compared to the 15 seats secured by the opposition parties (DAP: 12, PKR: 3) and 1 seat by an independent candidate has ensured BN a safe position in governing the state for another 5 years.

Support for the DAP in a certain sense mirrored the expectations generated from the support gained in the Sibu by-elections, however PKR's performance was disappointing as the seats won were not due to the party's strength but a host of other factors. Among those factors were DAP's political clout in Padungan, weak candidates and campaign strategy in Kerian and the emergence of Baru Bian who was subsequently named the PR Chief Minister in Ba'Kelalan.

Even with a comfortable victory, Barisan Nasional has to be vigilant with the outcome of the 2011 state elections. The two third majority it secured sweetly covers the chaotic distribution of support by ethnicity. In perspective, support for BN among the ethnic Malay voters saw an increase of 4.6% from 77.1% in 2006 to 81.7%, seeing to a drop of 15.3% among the ethnic Chinese voters from 40.4% in 2006 to 24.6%. The ethnic Dayaks also reduced their support for Barisan Nasional this time with a 6.3% reduction from 67.5% in 2011 to 61.2%.

The decrease in the strength of support for the BN among the ethnic Chinese and Dayak voters was compounded by a number of issues which may build gradually into a basic voting trend in the next elections. This included the NCR and religious issues, such as the confiscation and holding of bibles at the Kuching airport for 2 years which incited much anger and frustration among the ethnic Dayak voters. When BN had tried to re-approach the ethnic Chinese voters after some harsh rejections during the Sibu by-elections, the situation remained the same. Character assassination on Taib kept its pace and confrontations on sensitive issues as mentioned earlier continued to dot the frontline of party politics.

Presumably, the ethnic Dayak and Malay voters have allowed themselves to be influenced by the controversial DAP persuasion that they have the capability to turn around the election outcome and construct a new government. However, the fact that the support from these ethnic groups remain considerably a major contributing factor to BN's winning performance as compared to PKR's leader, Anwar who is more warmly accepted by the ethnic Chinese (Anonymous, 2011g). The voting patterns of the ethnic Chinese in the Sarawak state elections may be used as functional indicators in recognizing similar trends in the Peninsula for the May, 2013 general elections due to the strong ethnic Chinese rejection of BN. Also, the voting trends in Sarawak appeared to have been more state-based and highly localized rather than territorial.

CONCLUSION

BN had been successful in maintaining its two thirds majority in Sarawak and bravely refers to the state as its fixed deposit, a goal that is dreamed about by almost every democratic political party in the new global politics context. Even so, there are a few elements that should be taken into account in its preparation for the 11th State elections. Among these are:

- The good results obtained in 2011 are due to public acceptance of Najib's leadership and the promises made in the 10th general elections manifesto
- It was Taib Mahmud's leadership and not Baru Bian that was acknowledged in 2011
- In the absence of Taib Mahmud who would the opposition parties direct their political attacks on or rather will they be able to continue bringing up old issues in the campaigns?

- After Taib Mahmud has announced his retirement as Chief Minister and appointed as Sarawak's Governor, can BN under the leadership of Tan Sri Adnan Satem bring necessary changes to defend BN's fixed deposit?
- Can the victory at the Balingan by-elections April, 2014 be made a lesson or a yardstick for future elections?
- The unprecedented decline in support by the ethnic Chinese and Dayak voters have rendered Sarawak no more a presumed fixed deposit for the elections in the future
- DAP's 12 seat victory over PR total of 15 seats contested was a 100% increase in votes with a huge effect on the performance of both the opposition and incumbent parties
- The President of SUPP George Chan's loss to new candidate Ling Sie Kiong was a display of voter sentiment towards Barisan Nasional
- The presence of a large number of leaders from the Peninsula at this particular election in 2011, may be said to be the same sentiment displayed at the 2013 general elections
- The message brought across by the opposition parties from the Peninsula was rejected and the measure of its effects on PKR and PAS
- Could the DAP have achieved anything substantial without PKR's meager assistance and PAS's irrelevant political presence in Sarawak?
- Issues of racial polarization where ethnic Chinese voters were labelled as pro-opposition compared with the other ethnic groups and DAP's stereotype, as a party that caters more to the needs of the ethnic Chinese than the Malays and Indians
- The 11th state elections is crucial in the construction of a general analysis for political activity in Malaysia, as its results may appear functional for an impact assessment should voting patterns remain static and unchanging

With a Short Term Universiti Sains Malaysia research grant, the researcher evaluated the perceptions that the youth have on elections in Malaysia, comprising 615 respondents and 71 of them were from Sarawak. Karl Mannheim, from the field of political sociology once emphasized the generation theory and how the different generations represent a sort of social instrument that promotes historical change. In his perspective, political study is where the structural situation of decisive social impulses and also the differentiation between generations is at the clearest (Mannheim, 1974). When connected to the findings of this study, most of the respondents who were fence-sitters were of the opinion that the elections

were not entirely free and fair but were instead biased against the opposition parties. They also agreed to a rise in popularity of the Prime Minister among the general population. Younger voters insinuated criteria such as keeping promises, being honest, understanding the problems of the people and even trustworthiness as integral in the selection of a leader. On the other hand, issues prioritized by the Sarawakian respondents were more practical, such as the rise in the price of goods, unemployment and lesser job opportunities. The background offered by this study is integral in understanding the young voters and their voting patterns for the upcoming state elections.

Early preparation is indeed vital as a failsafe for the 11th Sarawak state elections, as the litmus test for BN is this particular election and not the ones prior to it. Should ignorance be accentuated, then the outcome could have a very lasting effect on this state which is still for now labelled BN's fixed deposit. If there is anything certain at all for the future, it is that PR shall have no reservations whatsoever in coming at BN with its entire arsenal, no holds barred or at the end, it is going to be anti-climax affair after all under the new state leadership?

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