

Schumpeterian Democracy and the Winnability of Barisan Nasional: Voting Behavior and Political Markets Distortions in Malaysia

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Abstract

Barisan Nasional (and its predecessor Perikatan) has won all Federal Elections and most of the state elections since the Independence of Malaya and the formation of Malaysia. Why is this so? In this paper I conceptualize possible reasons why BN won. I begin with Newman and Sheth's (1985) static model of primary voting behavior and then adapt this model to fit into the Malaysian context, in particular by identifying distortions in the markets of information and impediments in the market of political positions. More importantly, I will incorporate the dynamic major political processes outside of elections into that model, whilst seeing the voter to be the consumer of public services from political markets. From this model, the tentative conclusion of the winnability of BN lies in its ability to distort the markets of information, besides being able to impede the political markets. However, due to changes, this explanation cannot be sustained; I therefore suggest a new way of thinking about voting behavior in Malaysia that puts the voter as the central component.

1. Introduction

I define the term 'winnability' to mean likelihood of winning elections. Voting behavior means the behavior of voters during elections. Political market distortions are distortions that impede what will otherwise be a truly fair electoral process – a process following the concept of Schumpeterian Democracy. Political markets include the markets of information and the markets for political positions. Barisan Nasional (BN) and its predecessor Perikatan has won all Federal Elections and most of the state elections since the Independence of Malaya and the formation of Malaysia. In this regard there are two questions that I would like to explore: Why is this so and would the conditions that sustain BN victory be sustainable? I believe that there are many articles in the press and academic circles that analyses on various aspects of the reasons why this is so; but I have come to the conclusion that these are rubbish and nonsense. Particularly the main-stream newspapers- in my opinion offers superficial, one-sided and biased analysis; and even before the elections, those newspapers acted more like one sided opinion makers rather than giving critical analyses. And worse some academicians also offer more or

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