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# The Sarawak Dayaks' Shift in Malaysia's 2018 Election

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines Barisan Nasional's (BN) surprise defeat in six rural constituencies in Sarawak, namely Selangau, Lubok Antu, Julau, Saratok, Puncak Borneo and Mas Gading, in Malaysia's recent election in May 2018. Interestingly, all these are Dayak-majority constituencies, with the Dayak Iban dominating Selangau, Saratok, Julau and Lubok Antu, and Dayak Bidayuh outnumbering others in Puncak Borneo and Mas Gading. Four of these were won by the new federal ruling coalition, Pakatan Harapan (PH), and two others by independent candidates representing dissenting voices in the BN. While not comparable to the 'Malay tsunami' on the Malaysian Peninsula in scale and impact, the electoral shift of the Dayaks may shed light on some long-standing issues in Sarawak politics such as patronage, native customary rights land, the inter- and intra-coalition conflicts among the BN component parties as well as PH's appeals to the people of Sarawak.

## KEYWORDS

Malaysia's GE14; Sarawak; Dayak politics; native customary rights; patronage politics; constituencies

## Introduction

Malaysia's 14th general election (GE14), where only 31 federal constituencies were contested in Sarawak, was the first election for the state under the leadership of Chief Minister Abang Johari Tun Abang Haji Openg after his succession to the late Adenan Satem on 13 January 2017. The opposition coalition, Alliance of Hope (Pakatan Harapan, PH), increased its seats from six in 2013 to 10. Its locally Dayak-dominated component, the People's Justice Party (Parti Keadilan Rakyat, PKR), added two Dayak Iban constituencies, P205 Saratok and P214 Selangau, and the Dayak Bidayuh-majority P198 Puncak Borneo to its sole urban constituency first won in 2013. Meanwhile, the predominantly Chinese Democratic Action Party (DAP) expanded from its five Chinese-majority urban constituencies to win a Bidayuh one, P192 Mas Gading, while two independent candidates triumphed in P203 Lubok Antu and P209 Julau, both dominated by the Iban voters.

The loss for Abang Johari's National Front (Barisan Nasional, BN) coalition was spread among its three native-dominated parties, three seats the Sarawak People's Party (Parti Rakyat Sarawak, PRS), two from the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), and one from the Dayak wing of Abang Johari's United Bumiputera Heritage Party (Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu, PBB). The coalition's fourth component, Sarawak United Peoples' Party (SUPP), which lost all its Chinese constituencies, managed to retain its sole Bidayuh constituency,