



The Round Table

The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs

ISSN: 0035-8533 (Print) 1474-029X (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ctr20>

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To cite this article: Arnold Puyok & Piya Raj Sukhani (2020) Sabah: breakthrough in the fixed deposit state, The Round Table, 109:2, 209-224, DOI: [10.1080/00358533.2020.1741888](https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2020.1741888)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2020.1741888>



Published online: 04 May 2020.



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Sabah: breakthrough in the fixed deposit state

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ABSTRACT

The Malaysian General Election 2014 (GE14) was one of the most anticipated in Malaysia's political history as it was to determine the fate of Barisan Nasional (BN) under the leadership of the scandal-hit Prime Minister, Najib Razak. As in the 2008 and 2013 general elections, the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak once again became the frontline – or 'fixed deposit' – states as their support was crucial for BN's survival. There were multiple claims that BN would return to power in Sabah once again, albeit with a reduced majority considering the strong anti-BN sentiment that was felt across all strata of society. The chances of Parti Warisan Sabah (Warisan), the key opposition party in the state, were downplayed as it was assumed that the party's strength was only concentrated in the East Coast of Sabah. Hence, to comprehend BN's defeat in the GE14, it is significant to turn towards the particular affinities and affiliations, particular commonalities and connections, particular stories and self-understandings, particular problems and predicaments of the socio-political dynamics in Sabah. Contrary to the claims that national politics were disconnected from Sabah, 'problems and predicaments' emanating from Peninsular Malaysia did indeed have a 'connection and commonality' upon the way they impacted people's voting decision. The external factor of the strong tide of the anti-BN sentiment, fortified with the internal particularities of the political dynamics in the 'stories and self-understandings' of constituencies, illustrates how a jolt was caused in BN's power bases.

KEYWORDS

Sabah; Kadazandusun; Malaysian General Election (GE14); Malaysian Agreement 1963; autonomy; federal-state relations

Introduction

The Malaysian General Elections 2014 (GE14) was one of the most anticipated in the country's political history as it was to determine the fate of Barisan Nasional (BN) under the leadership of Najib Razak. As with the 2008 and 2013 general elections, the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak once again became the frontline – or 'fixed deposit' – states as their support was crucial for BN's survival in Putrajaya.

Sabah, in particular, helped BN secure power in 2008 and 2013, winning 24 and 22 parliamentary seats respectively in the two general elections. Sarawak, on the other hand, contributed 30 and 25 parliamentary seats. East Malaysia collectively represented more than 20 per cent of the seats obtained by BN in 2008 and 2013.