

THIRTEENTH GENERAL ELECTIONS (GE13): CHINESE VOTES AND IMPLICATIONS ON MALAYSIAN POLITICS

Lee Kam Hing^{1*} and Thock Ker Pong²

¹Social and Behavioural Sciences Research Cluster, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

²Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: cckhlee@gmail.com

In their immediate reaction to the 13th General Elections (GE13) results, United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) leaders blamed lack of Chinese electoral support for the poorer results they obtained. This was despite the efforts of Najib Razak, the Prime Minister, in his campaign to win the Chinese over. That the Chinese largely voted against Barisan Nasional (BN) was evident in seats which were Chinese-majority. Nevertheless the opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) also did well in mixed constituencies where the Chinese were not the majority. Opposition leaders and many commentators argued that the voting pattern in GE13 reflected not an ethnic but a regional as well as a class divide. Urban votes and a significant proportion of middle-class Malaysians, they insisted, supported Pakatan Rakyat (PR), the opposition, which gained a majority of the popular votes. This paper looks at the voting pattern of the Chinese as reflected in the results, changes in the politics of the Chinese since GE12, and ascertains what issues and concerns influenced the way the Chinese voted. It would also consider the implications the results have on Chinese representation in government and in opposition.

Keywords: Barisan Nasional (BN), Democratic Action Party (DAP), Pakatan Rakyat (PR), Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)

INTRODUCTION

"A Chinese tsunami" was how the outcome of the keenly-contested Thirteenth General Elections (GE13) came to be described by Najib Razak and other Barisan Nasional (BN) leaders on the evening of 5 May 2013 (Tan, 2013). The imagery was a strong expression of disappointment by BN leaders of how the lack of Chinese support had led to a loss of seats by the ruling coalition. Of the 30 Chinese-majority seats, all went to the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR). Of these 29 were won by the largely Chinese-based although avowedly multi-ethnic

Democratic Action Party (DAP). The other seat went to the multi-ethnic though largely Malay-supported Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR). DAP also did well in mixed constituencies. In 12 of those constituencies where the Chinese votes were large but not a majority, the DAP won 9. The DAP emerged to be the party with the most appeal among the Chinese while the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and other Chinese-based parties in the ruling coalition were almost decimated. Overall, BN lost 7 more parliamentary seats in the elections. It also failed to regain the two-thirds majority and was unsuccessful in efforts to recapture the state governments of Selangor and Pulau Pinang despite waging what some commentators described as a very expensive campaign. Most significantly, BN did not win a majority of popular votes. BN obtained 47.38% of the popular votes with PR taking 50.87% (This was the first time since the 1969 general elections that the ruling coalition failed to get a majority of popular votes). GE13 was the most closely fought general elections ever in Malaysia's political history with the largest number of registered voters and the highest turnout rate (*The Star*, 2012b). Some 84.84% of 13,268,002 registered voters turned up to vote. And unlike past elections, for the first time ever, no seat was left uncontested. But it was also clouded by allegations of electoral irregularities both before and on polling day (*The Economist*, 2013).

Still, BN retained control of Putrajaya. It gained 133 parliamentary seats, recaptured the state government of Kedah and held on to Perak which it had wrested from PR through defections on 6 February 2009. BN also fended off strong PR challenges in Negeri Sembilan and Terengganu. Most importantly United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the coalition's dominant party, improved its position by obtaining 88 parliamentary and 241 seats compared to 79 parliamentary and 239 state seats in GE12 (*The Star*, 2013a). In the aftermath of GE13, there was much weakened Chinese representation in the ruling BN coalition. Within the BN, UMNO which represents Malay political interests is even more dominant after GE13. The MCA's position in the government is further enfeebled when the party decided not to accept government posts at all levels. Before GE13 the MCA held four ministerial positions. Except briefly after the 1969 elections when it pulled out of the government, the MCA had always been part of the cabinet. Thus, the enduring political arrangement of multi-ethnic power-sharing first formulated by the Parti Perikatan in 1955 is at risk. The MCA, as one of the three founding member parties of the Perikatan, represented the Chinese in government. Although Najib Razak has included two Chinese cabinet members in his new line-up in efforts to have multi-ethnic representation, the appointees do not represent any Chinese-based party. Paul Low, an MCA ordinary member was made senator and appointed Minister in the Prime Minister's Department and Mary Yap a Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) parliamentarian became Deputy Education Minister. More than ever before, BN is now UMNO-dominated and driven.

The GE results have led to what William Case observed as a re-communalising of politics in Malaysia (Case, 2013). In their immediate assessment of the poorer results compared to GE12, leaders of UMNO blamed this on the lack of Chinese support. Within UMNO ranks accusations surfaced that despite government policies that benefited the community the Chinese had betrayed BN. Indeed *Utusan Malaysia* in an article headlined "*Apa lagi orang Cina mahu*" asked what more did the Chinese want especially after Najib Razak had bent backwards to accommodate their demands during the election campaign (*Utusan Malaysia*, 2013). Pro-UMNO individuals and organisations subsequently called for the introduction of policies to further advance Malay economic and political interests. Others have called for abolishing Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools and to boycott Chinese business that supported the opposition. Case (2013: 518) in his conclusion wondered whether the Chinese had been wise to vote "en masse in ways that unleashed this tirade [of anti-Chinese rhetoric], however, disingenuous, in the hope of PR's winning an election that it could not?" He suggested that perhaps Mahathir was right that it was not the Chinese who betrayed the Malays but that DAP seriously misled the Chinese. Certainly, pro-opposition sentiments among the Chinese were stronger than those in GE12, reversing what James Chin had once argued: that Chinese support had swung permanently to BN as evidenced in 1999 and confirmed in 2004 (Chin, 2000). The paper will therefore address the question as to why the Chinese gave such overwhelming support to the opposition in GE13. It would address Case's contention that the Chinese might have been seriously misled by the DAP. Finally, it would discuss the implications of Chinese votes on their representation in government and how BN's post-GE13 assessment shapes its future political dealings with the Chinese. In addressing these questions, this paper would look at changes in the politics of the Chinese since GE12, and ascertain what issues and concerns influenced the way the Chinese voted.

POLITICS OF THE CHINESE BEFORE GE13

Najib Razak's remark about a Chinese tsunami should be seen within the context of a general election he as Prime Minister had to win convincingly. It was suggested that Najib Razak needed to improve on the GE results to ensure his survival as UMNO leader. He had seen how Abdullah Badawi was forced to retire on 3 April 2009 following BN's poor performance in GE12. While Malay and Indian support might ensure BN returning to power, Chinese votes were needed to help regain two-thirds of the parliamentary seats (Chen, 2013). In GE12, there had been a strong swing of votes against BN with Chinese-based parties of BN suffering major losses. The MCA lost 16 parliamentary seats of the 31 seats it contested while Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (GERAKAN) lost 8 of the 10 seats it fielded candidates in (Tew, 2011). Hence, Najib Razak embarked

on a campaign to win back Chinese support. The task appeared formidable for Najib Razak. Results of by-elections that took place after GE12 and opinion polls conducted during the period mostly showed further decline of Chinese support for BN. Since GE12, there had been 16 by-elections. Of these, the opposition PR won four parliamentary seats and four state seats while BN won two parliamentary and six state seats (*Free Malaysian Today*, 2013b; *Oriental Daily News*, 2013a).¹ In all the by-elections, the results showed low Chinese support for BN (Wong and Soon, 2012). The decline in Chinese support showed up further in two public opinion surveys carried out by Merdeka Centre, an independent agency. The first was conducted between 22 October and 20 November 2012 and the second between 23 January and 6 February 2013 (Merdeka Centre, 2012; 2013). In the two polls respondents were asked their views about the country's general direction and what they considered as issues affecting them most. The listed issues included inflation and the economy, quality of national leadership, crime, and corruption. The respondents were drawn from registered voters as well as those who had never voted before. The findings were broken down according to ethnic background, age group, gender, occupation and region.

According to the Merdeka Centre 2012 survey, only 24% of Chinese respondents believed that the country was heading in the right direction compared to a high 69% of Malay and 53% of Indian respondents. A year later in the January–February 2013 survey, the Chinese approval rating dropped to 20%. The figures for Malays and Indians were 70% and 73% respectively i.e. figures higher than those in the 2012 survey. Furthermore, the Chinese gave lower approval compared to Malays and Indians on the state of the economy and on a number of other issues. In other words, the Chinese were more critical of government performance than the other communities.

Table 1: Direction of the country and perception on the economy (personal finances) by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Direction of the country		Household financial situation now			Expected household financial situation (one year from now)		
	Right	Wrong	Improve	Decline	Remained the same	Improve	Decline	Remained the same
Malay	69	29	67	21	12	61	17	9
Chinese	25	58	25	34	41	28	33	17
Indian	53	34	42	47	10	55	23	14
Overall	53	38	52	28	21	51	22	12

Source: Merdeka Centre (2012).

Table 2: Perception towards direction of the country, Najib Razak, Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Direction of the country		Performance of Najib Razak		Perception towards BN			Perception towards PR		
	Right	Wrong	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Positive	Negative	Unsure/Refused	Positive	Negative	Unsure/Refused
Malay	74	21	75	22	68	19	13	27	40	33
Chinese	21	51	31	45	13	55	31	45	6	49
Indian	69	26	68	24	51	27	22	43	14	43
Overall	58	31	61	29	50	31	20	34	27	39

Source: Merdeka Centre (2013).

Table 3: Perception towards direction of the country, Najib Razak, Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) by gender and setting

Gender/ Setting	Direction of the country		Performance of Najib Razak		Perception towards BN			Perception towards PR		
	Right	Wrong	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Positive	Negative	Unsure/Refused	Positive	Negative	Unsure/Refused
Male	55	35	58	35	45	38	17	40	27	33
Female	60	26	64	24	54	24	22	29	27	44
Urban	52	35	56	33	44	35	20	37	22	40
Rural	66	24	68	23	58	24	18	29	35	36

Source: Merdeka Centre (2013).

A further indication of continuing decline of Chinese support for BN was the 10th Sarawak state election held on 16 April 2011, some three years after GE12. In the Sarawak elections, the ruling BN won with a two-thirds majority. But BN's Chinese-based Sarawak United Peoples' Party (SUPP) lost 8 or half of the seats it previously held while the DAP doubled the number of its seats to 12. Among SUPP candidates defeated was the party's leader and deputy Chief Minister, George Chan. Deeply disappointed that the Chinese had rejected SUPP, the leadership announced that they would not accept positions in the state government. This decision led to the MCA taking a similar stand in the event that the party fared badly in GE13.

Why did Chinese support not return to BN? Some analysts have previously argued that Chinese support returns to the ruling coalition after voting for the opposition in a previous election. For instance, the MCA did poorly in 1969 but recovered in the next election in 1974. Then in the 1990 elections the non-Malays in the coalition regained seats lost in 1986. But this time after GE12, most political observers predicted that the swing against Chinese-based parties in BN would persist (Lee, 2013a; 2013b). There are several possible reasons to explain the continued decline in Chinese support for BN. Firstly, the Chinese see BN as dominated by UMNO. The balance of power within the BN has so shifted to UMNO since 1971 that it has the largest number of parliamentary seats and holds all the important cabinet portfolios. Finance and trade ministries which

were once held by the MCA had been taken over by UMNO. Furthermore, pro-Malay policies in business, education, employment, and culture weakened the standing of BN's non-Malay parties. Improved performance by BN Chinese-based parties in GEs of 1978, 1995, 1999 and 2004 had in fact led to introduction of government policies which many Chinese felt further disadvantaged the community.

Second, the efforts by Chinese-based BN parties to rebuild their support after GE12 were seriously hampered by internal problems. In the MCA there was a tussle to succeed Ong Ka Ting who resigned on 18 October 2008 after taking responsibility for MCA's poor performance. Ong Tee Keat became president while Dr. Chua Soi Lek was elected deputy president. In August 2009 Ong suspended Chua on disciplinary grounds, citing the sex VCD involving Chua said to have embarrassed the party (*Sin Chew Daily*, 2009). On his suspension, Chua fought back and was reinstated in an Extraordinary General meeting on 10 October 2009 called by his supporters. In fresh party elections called on 28 March 2010 Chua defeated Ong Tee Keat and Ong Ka Ting to become President. As MCA president, Chua however failed to get support and respect from the wider community mainly because of his leadership style and his sex scandal (Thock, 2012a). The party suffered further bad publicity when two senior MCA leaders, a former president and deputy president, were charged for allegedly misleading the cabinet in the Port Kelang Free Trade Zone corruption case (Ho, 2012).² GERAKAN and SUPP fared no better. Koh Tsu Koon who relinquished the Chief Ministership of Pulau Pinang before GE12 was defeated in the parliamentary constituency he contested in 2008. Soon after, he gave up his party leadership and accepted a senatorship and ministerial post. Koh's decision to accept the ministerial appointment despite losing in the parliamentary elections lost him a lot of respect within the community. His successor, Chang Ko Youn, was little known and held no government position. The SUPP is a Sarawak party and works closely with Chief Minister Taib Mahmud and Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu Sarawak (PBB). However, Taib Mahmud is unpopular among the Chinese. With the defeat of George Chan in the 2011 Sarawak state elections, Peter Chin took over as leader. Chin, although a federal minister, commanded little influence and support within the party and the Sarawak Chinese community (Faisal, 2013).

CHANGING CHINESE ELECTORATE

There is the wider change within the community that explains Chinese voter behaviour. There is today greater political interest and activism among the Chinese. More of them also see issues within a national rather than communal framework. To be sure, safeguarding the position of Chinese education, adequate funding and trained teachers for the national-types schools, and recognition of the

Unified Examinations Certificate (UEC) are still important to the Chinese. The Chinese see efforts by the BN government to address these issues as inadequate. For instance the Prime Minister only promised in principle to recognise the certificate of UEC by 2010, which did not go down well with the Chinese (*Oriental Daily News*, 2010). And so is concern over lack of equal access to public universities and opportunities in business and in the economy. The community now also wants the various state institutions, in particular the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), the judiciary, and the police, to be fair and impartial in carrying out their duties. Several scandals and events led the Chinese to be highly critical of the performance and integrity of state institutions. Reports on corruption cases made against individuals associated with the government were not acted upon promptly or were largely ignored by the MACC or the police.

Broad concerns especially corruption, crime, and free and fair elections seemed to have galvanised Chinese interests in the run-up to GE13. There was the Teoh Beng Hock case which many Chinese might have viewed through ethnic lenses, but for others it was a case of abuse of power by the authorities. Teoh was a political aide to a DAP Selangor state assemblyman and had been called by the MACC on 15 July 2009 as a witness over an alleged corruption case. He was found dead the next morning on the rooftop of a building next to the MACC offices. A subsequent Royal Commission of Inquiry concluded that Teoh had committed suicide and was not murdered as was widely suspected. There, however, remained many unanswered questions and the death of Teoh became an issue regularly raised by PR (Ayu et al., 2009).

There was also the protest to the building of the Australian-owned Lynas Advanced Materials Plan (LAMP) near Kuantan. Lower operating costs as well as the granting of a 12-year tax free status by the Malaysian government led to Kuantan in Pahang being chosen as the location for the plant. However on 18 November 2008, the Kuantan Member of Parliament (MP) Fuziah Salleh raised the matter in Parliament over the risks of having a rare earth processing plant so close to a major town. Opposition to Lynas grew and several anti-Lynas groups were formed. These groups organised signature campaigns, public talks, demonstrations and an appeal to the court to stop what was to be the world's largest rare earths refinery plant (Bradsher, 2011; Lee, 2011). There was a sense especially among the Chinese that in this, as with other cases, the government simply ignored the people's interest. This broader political awareness among the Chinese also has to do with the new media. A number of major stories on corruption and abuse of power not published in the mainstream press were carried in the alternative media such as the online portals *Malaysiakini* and *Malaysian Insider*. *Malaysiakini*, founded in 1999, developed its Chinese version in July 2005, and regarded as pro-opposition, now outranks *The Star Online* in the number of readers. *The Malaysian Insider*, believed to be funded by groups close to BN, offers a relatively more balanced news presentation (Wong, 2012).

More than during GE12, the alternative media and the Internet in GE13 created even greater political awareness among the Chinese.

There is also the emergence of new groups of Chinese, especially younger ones, which are more national in their concern and multi-ethnic in approach. These younger Chinese take up issues on the environment, human rights, and migrant workers' welfare. While many are inclined towards non-political organisations, others join parties in the opposition which seem more willing than those in BN to speak up on those issues. As a result the Chinese are seen as becoming politically emboldened. But this behaviour should rather be viewed as the discarding of a fear which has haunted the Chinese from being involved in public politics and protests. This change has been helped by the multi-ethnic character of protest movements and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM). Leaders of the Gabungan Pilihanraya Bersih dan Adil (BERSIH) protests were the former Bar Council president Ambiga Sreenevasan, an Indian and Samad Said, a Malay and national laureate. For many of these young Chinese, the demand for free and fair elections became an important issue which galvanised them. They see free elections as necessary for greater democratisation and a freer political system. Only then would the nation move away from race-dominated politics of which the Chinese are being marginalised. A broad-based civil society movement, BERSIH – formed in 2007, had directed complaints against an electoral system based on questionable voting rolls, gerrymandering in delineation of constituencies and bias of the Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya (SPR).

Since GE12, there have been three huge BERSIH rallies that drew tens of thousands of participants. Held in July 2011 and April 2012 the movement was supported by dozens of NGOs and opposition parties. The first two post-GE12 BERSIH rallies attracted an admixture of supporters with the majority being Malays. However, the last BERSIH rally drew a large number of Chinese. A rally in August 2012 held at Dataran Merdeka called "*Janji Demokrasi*" supported by NGOs and BERSIH leaders drew a large crowd of some 10,000. That large numbers of Chinese of all ages came out to join in public protests marked a new phenomenon in the politics of the community. The Chinese had in the past come out in large numbers only to attend public *ceramah* (talks), but to directly take part in protests against the establishment was something recent and new. The fear of violence as well as possible official retribution had always discouraged the Chinese from joining public demonstrations. The BERSIH rallies had important political impact on the Chinese. Just as in November 2007 when many non-Malays took encouragement from the Indian-led Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) rally, the Chinese drew political energies from the huge crowds and the multi-racial character of BERSIH gatherings.

A number of young Chinese political activists had a background of student politics in university. Student activism among the Chinese has always been evident in the past. But because some groups were accused of left-wing

politics as was the case with the Chinese language society of the University of Malaya which was proscribed in the 1970s, there had been a decline of political activism among the younger generations of Chinese. However since 1998, there has been a strong return of student activism among the Chinese. A recent paper traces the rise of young Chinese activism to the *reformasi* movement in 1998. The political career of a number of young Chinese activists could be dated to events of that period. This includes Liew Chin Tong and Anthony Loke Siew Fook who stood and won parliamentary seats in GE12. The *reformasi* seems to have been a very significant socialising process. Those who were socialised overseas included Chua Tian Chang – better known as Tian Chua and Steven Gan. Tian Chua is the vice-president of PKR and Steven Gan is a co-founder of *Malaysiakini*. Born in the same year in 1963, they studied in Australia where they met and were together in the Network of Overseas Student Collectives. The movement which included Premesh Chandran, later to be a founder of *Malaysiakini*, protested against the Australian government's introduction of university fees on foreign students in 1985. What is very significant about these Chinese activists is their multi-ethnic and national outlook, hence many of them worked alongside Malay activists (Thock, 2012b).

THE LONG CAMPAIGN

Najib Razak had been expected to call for elections a full year before the full term of Parliament ended so as to consolidate his position after taking over the reins of government from Abdullah Badawi. Political pundits and newspapers made one forecast after another of the likely date for GE13 (*The Star*, 2012a; 2012b; 2013j). Early elections did not happen and Parliament ran its full term. Consequently, the period when Najib Razak assumed office as Prime Minister until the dissolution of Parliament became one long election campaign. Early on, UMNO leaders decided that Chinese-based BN parties were incapable of mounting a campaign that could win back Chinese support. With opinion polls showing Najib Razak having higher approval rating than even UMNO, the BN's campaign came to be centred around the Prime Minister. Najib Razak adopted a presidential style campaign as the campaign went nation-wide with other leaders including those of Chinese-based parties taking supporting roles. The BN's campaign focused on Najib's leadership and transformation programmes. Furthermore, Najib Razak projected the message of inclusiveness when appearing before Chinese constituents. Equally important, Najib Razak tried to seize the initiative by appearing to embrace reforms. He and his advisers realised that society had changed. The middle class and middle ground of Malaysians wanted laws from an era that was markedly authoritarian to be repealed or revised. On 15 September 2011 Najib Razak announced the repeal of the Internal Security Act which allowed preventive detention of those deemed to be security

risks, and amendments to the 1971 Universities and University Colleges Act in April 2012 to allow students to take part in political activities. In July 2012, he announced changes to the Sedition Act, and in August 2012, he declared the relaxation of the Printing Presses and Publishing Act. These laws were replaced by the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act in June 2012, the Peaceful Assembly Act in June 2012, and the National Harmony Act in July 2012 (International Crisis Group, 2012).

While promising transformations and reforms, BN also campaigned on a platform of political and economic stability. The Chinese are averse to political uncertainty and have generally preferred to maintain the status quo and to equate the BN with stability. In the 1999 elections when there was Malay disaffection with Mahathir and UMNO over the Anwar sacking, the Chinese voted strongly for BN. This was against a backdrop of popular protests in Indonesia that forced out Suharto. Najib Razak's determination to wrest back Chinese support saw him take his campaign to the Chinese cultural heartland. On 17 February 2013, he attended the Chinese New Year Open House of Dong Zong, the United Chinese School Committee (*Sin Chew Daily*, 2013b). A visit earlier by an MCA leader to a Dong Zong function was disrupted by heckling and a generally hostile reception. The Dong Zong regarded itself as a defender of Chinese education in the country and had asked that the UEC be recognised by the government. It had also called for government recognition and support for the 60 independent Chinese secondary schools in the country. Najib Razak's presence at Dong Zong's event was a bold action, bearing in mind that there is strong resistance among conservative elements within UMNO to Chinese education in the country. On the other hand the issue of Chinese education resonates with the Chinese. An estimated 96% of Chinese parents send their children to national-type schools which use Chinese as the main medium of instruction. This number has increased since 1970 when Malay replaced English in the national schools. However while enrolment and demand for places in the Chinese schools have grown, there has hardly been any increase in the numbers of schools and trained teachers (Thock, 2012a: 30–33). The independent Chinese secondary schools receive little government support.

Najib Razak made no concession to Dong Zong during his historic visit except to promise a formal meeting with the Chinese educationists after the elections. The chairman of Dong Zong, Yap Sin Tien, was satisfied that Najib Razak had come to the Open House – the first time a Prime Minister has visited the organisation in its 58-year history. In the past Dong Zong's dealings with the government had been largely through submission of memoranda. Najib Razak attended several large *ceramah* that targeted Chinese voters. He attended two huge gatherings in Pulau Pinang, a state where Lim Guan Eng and PR seemed politically well entrenched. The first was a Chinese New Year Open House where the Korean pop singer Psy was brought in to attract a large crowd with his famous Gangnam style dance (*Sin Chew Daily*, 2013c). Then just days before

polling day Najib Razak returned to Pulau Pinang where he promised to provide 50,000 affordable houses. The rising costs of houses in Pulau Pinang affected the young of all ethnic groups. In Port Klang Najib Razak joined the largest dinner gathering sponsored by some Chinese businessmen and which was attended by some 100,000 guests. In the course of the evening, Michelle Yeoh, a celebrity actress called on Malaysians to support Najib Razak (*Sin Chew Daily*, 2013a).

Chinese-based BN parties, principally the MCA, directed two messages to the Chinese constituency through *ceramah*, newspaper advertisements, and bill-boards. The first of these played on Chinese unease with Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) and warned that a vote for the DAP was in fact a vote for the Islamist party. A PAS-dominated PR taking power would, it was claimed, turn the country into an Islamic state. The second message was a warning that voting for the DAP and the decimation of Chinese BN candidates could result in a largely UMNO/Malay-led government with no non-Malay representation (*The Star*, 2012c; 2013d; 2013f).³ Even as Najib Razak sought to win over non-Malay support with his inclusive "1Malaysia" slogan, the majority of the Chinese noted conflicting political signals from the ruling coalition. The most disturbing to them was the increasingly strident notes struck by Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa Malaysia (PERKASA). Formed after GE12 by Ibrahim Ali, a former UMNO MP who won the Pasir Mas parliamentary seat in GE12 on a ticket sympathetic to PAS, and with the former Prime Minister Tun Mahathir Mohamad as patron, PERKASA's declared objective is to safeguard the special rights of the Bumiputera. Registered as a NGO, most of its supporters are believed to be UMNO members or supporters. At the same time there were emotionally-charged commentaries and editorials in *Utusan Malaysia* against non-Malays. These articles were written by the newspapers' own writers and by lecturers of local universities. Police reports were made by opposition members against what they described as inflammatory statements by PERKASA and *Utusan Malaysia*. In particular, Ibrahim Ali and Zulkifli Noordin regularly made what were regarded as derogatory remarks directed at non-Malays and non-Muslim faiths. Ibrahim also called for the burning of the Malay Bible claiming it used words that were exclusive to Islam. Suspected PERKASA members were reported to have disrupted events organised by opposition parties and other NGOs. But neither the police nor Najib Razak and UMNO leaders made any efforts to rein in PERKASA and *Utusan Malaysia*.

Although many Chinese conceded that Najib Razak might be sincere in advancing a truly fair and just multi-ethnic nation the suspicion was that there were powerful factions within UMNO taking a more pro-Malay line. Thus while Najib Razak presented an inclusive "1Malaysia" image to non-Malays, UMNO seemed to have outsourced the more striding communal and religious rhetoric to PERKASA and *Utusan Malaysia*. PERKASA and *Utusan Malaysia* certainly undermined Najib Razak's efforts among non-Malays. Meanwhile, PR entered GE13 confident of doing much better than GE12 and expecting increased non-

Malay support. They were encouraged by the huge public rallies for free and fair elections. Their pre-campaign *ceramah* attracted capacity attendance. While large crowds at opposition rallies are not a reliable indicator of voter support as have been shown in past elections, the donations collected this time during PR dinners and *ceramah* were substantial, suggesting that those who attended those events were committed supporters.

What boosted the opposition in GE13 as a credible alternative to BN was its control of four state governments. With this, PR had the chance to demonstrate its capacity to govern. Indeed two of the states, Selangor and Pulau Pinang, are the most advanced in the country with sustained economic growth. The two PR states also showed a willingness to be more open and transparent as well as to tackle problems of corruption. This was despite the two state governments having initially to deal with a civil service unused to an opposition coalition taking over power. There was also greater cohesion among the three PR parties this time. The DAP joined PKR and PAS in drawing up a common slate of candidates to avoid pitting their candidate against one another, thus splitting the votes. The three parties also put up a joint election manifesto and campaigned as a team. Thus in DAP events this time as in GE12, its speakers' platform was opened to other PR parties. In the past each opposition party mounted its own election events. Finally, more than in previous general elections, the opposition found the ruling coalition, dogged by a series of scandals and allegations of corruption, electorally more vulnerable. Allegations of corruption were leveled at Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, the head of the powerful Wanita UMNO, the Chief Minister of Sarawak who controls a secure bank of seats for BN, and other BN leaders. Thus, while in past elections, the rallying call of those challenging the ruling coalition had been for a stronger parliamentary opposition in Parliament and more recently to deny BN a two-thirds majority there was in GE13 a belief that PR could actually win power in Putrajaya (Chin, 2013b).

NOMINATION

It is difficult to judge whether the prevailing Chinese political mood that shaped voting behaviour in GE13 was one of disenchantment with BN or support for the opposition. For not a few Chinese, it was a mix of sentiments. Whatever it was, the audience at *ceramah* gatherings of PR was huge. Several developments and events made just before and on nomination day could have further swung Chinese voters further to the opposition. First, the presidents of the three Chinese-based parties did not contest in GE13. This was the first time ever that such a situation happened in post-independence Malaysian elections. Koh Tsu Koon of GERAKAN, Peter Chin of SUPP and Dr. Chua Soi Lek of the MCA, for different reasons were not fielded (*New Straits Times*, 2013c; Lee, 2012; *Borneo Post Online*, 2013). Koh had indicated that he was retiring from politics while

Chin was not fielded by his party. As for Dr. Chua, analysts believed that there was no safe seat for him and he was probably hoping to remain electorally unscathed so as to continue leading the party.

Secondly, the MCA was given three fewer parliamentary seats to contest compared to GE12. The number of state seats it was allocated remained unchanged (*The Star*, 2013e). The giving up of three Malay-majority parliamentary seats previously contested by MCA to UMNO dismayed MCA grassroots leaders.⁴ It further undermined MCA's standing within the community. Critics pointed this as further illustrating the enfeebling of the party for it could not even defend its own seats, let alone the community's interests in the face of UMNO's demands (Lu, 2013). Parti Gerakan gave up one parliamentary seat to the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and two state seats to the MCA (*Malaysiakini*, 2012). Thirdly, the selection of MCA candidates reflected the fractious situation in the MCA. Ong Tee Keat, former president and rival to Chua was dropped while Gan Ping Sieu the vice-president and deputy minister was not fielded. Several incumbents were not selected while candidates said to be aligned to Chua were named.

The nomination of two PERKASA leaders, Zulkifli Noordin and Ibrahim Ali, to stand – one as a BN candidate and the other as BN—friendly independent in Shah Alam and Pasir Mas respectively troubled many Chinese voters about BN's claim of inclusiveness. Many Chinese regarded the statements by Ibrahim Ali and Zulkifli Noordin on ethnic and religious issues calculated to be offensive and out to undermine multi-ethnic understanding and cooperation. As posed by sociologist Clive Kessler, it became difficult for the Chinese to vote for a BN which by putting them up as its candidates was effectively endorsing the political positions of Ibrahim Ali and Zulkifli Noordin. As nomination day approached, the DAP decided to mount an electoral attack on Johor which had long been regarded as a stronghold of BN. The DAP calculated that the opposition needed to win most if not all of the seven seats there held by the MCA if PR was to have any chance of capturing power in GE13 (*The Malay Mail*, 2014). It was in Johor also that MCA holds nearly half of its remaining parliamentary seats. It further expected the momentum to carry over to seats held by UMNO especially if Chinese votes go to Malay PR candidates. In deciding that Johor was now the frontline battle state for PR, several DAP leaders moved from relatively safe seats they held elsewhere to stand in Johor constituencies. Leading the charge was Lim Kit Siang who decided to stand in Gelang Patah (Boo and Md Izwan, 2013). Others were Liew Chin Tong, the MP for Bukit Bendera in Pulau Pinang and Teo Nie Ching the MP for Serdang in Selangor (*The Star*, 2013d; 2013i). These were leaders better known than local Johor DAP personalities.

The decision to field in Johor several strong DAP leaders from outside the state boosted the party's chances in the state's Chinese-majority seats. However, although DAP's challenge was to the MCA, the move took on an ethnic edge. This came when BN fielded Ghani Othman the outgoing Johor Menteri

Besar in Gelang Patah. Ghani was expected to do well against Lim who left his safe Ipoh Timur seat. Moreover, the constituency had 34.3% Malay and 12.5% Indian voters. But it had now become a battleground pitting a strong UMNO candidate against a DAP leader. Moreover, some newspaper columnists portrayed DAP's foray into Johor as a challenge to UMNO and to the Malays. Johor is regarded as an UMNO bastion for it was in its capital of Johor Baharu that the party was founded (*Oriental Daily News*, 2013b; Ho, 2013a).

A notice sent by the Registrar of Societies (ROS) to the DAP headquarters just days before nomination that it did not recognise the results of the party's recently-held Central Executive Committee (CEC) elections further boosted support for the opposition among Chinese voters. In December 2012 the DAP, admitting that it had made an error in the tabulation of the CEC election results, revised the list of new CEC members. In the new list, the name of Zairil Khir Johari was included (*The Star*, 2013c; 2013g). Critics alleged that the results were fiddled so as to include Malay in the CEC. In the event, if the CEC was not recognised by the ROS then the party secretary Lim Guan Eng or for that matter any other DAP official could not be authorised to sign the nomination papers for the party's candidates. It also meant that the party could not use the party symbols. For many Chinese, ROS's notice seemed yet another harassment of the PR especially DAP. In response to ROS's directive, DAP announced that in the event that its candidates could not use the party affiliation and symbol in the elections, it would adopt those of its PR partners. DAP candidates in Peninsular Malaysia would use PAS symbols and in Sabah and Sarawak those of PKR. In the end, both the SPR and ROS assured DAP that it could continue to field candidates under its name and symbol. But the episode further alienated Chinese voters from government institutions and at the same time gave PR parties the opportunity to demonstrate political solidarity between them.

A point worth noting in GE13 was the stand taken by some Chinese businessmen. Chinese businessmen in the past avoided taking a public political stand and if they have to, they would be pro-BN. Many Chinese businessmen depend on contracts which flow from larger government programmes. These businessmen are also anxious that there should be stability and continuity of government. Even in GE13 pro-BN *ceramah* and dinner gatherings including the ones in Pulau Pinang and Port Klang were reportedly sponsored by Chinese businessmen. There were also allegations made by Lim Guan Eng that some big Chinese tycoons were funding campaigns against him and the DAP in Pulau Pinang. However, in the GE13 campaign some Chinese businessmen openly supported PR. Stanley Thai of Supermax Corporation, one of the world's largest producers of rubber gloves sponsored a lunch forum to which PR leaders were invited to speak (Ho, 2013b). Thai had also joined PKR's think-tank, the *Institut Rakyat*. The other Chinese businessman was Phua Khein-seng, a young Malaysian Chinese who through his company Phison Electronics Corporation, developed the thumb-drive technology in Taiwan. Phua returned to Malaysia to

campaign for a number of PR candidates (Din Merican, 2013). Those Chinese businessmen who publicly supported PR favoured the opposition's election manifesto rather than that of BN.

RESULTS: THE CHINESE VOTES AND PERFORMANCE OF CHINESE-BASED PARTIES

The large majority of Chinese votes went to the opposition. Of the opposition's 89 parliamentary seats won, representing 40% seats at federal level, the largely Chinese-based DAP obtained 38 parliamentary seats compared to 30 for PKR and 21 for PAS. DAP has also the largest number of state seats with 95 compared to 85 for PKR and 49 for PAS. In contrast, the three BN Chinese-based parties performed very badly. The MCA won only 7 parliamentary and 11 state assembly seats. GERAKAN won only one parliamentary seat while the SUPP retained one parliamentary seat out of the six it contested. These three BN parties performed even worse than in GE12. The seven seats won by the MCA were in constituencies where non-Chinese voters were in the majority. In the four Malay-majority seats of Tanjung Malim, Alor Gajah, Ayer Hitam and Tanjong Piai, MCA candidates won comfortably.

This was DAP's best electoral performance in all the general elections so far. It won in all the 29 seats where non-Malays were in the majority. In each of these constituencies the margin of victory was substantial. Furthermore, DAP contested in 12 of what may be described as mixed seats where there was neither a predominant number of Chinese nor of Malay voters. In winning nine of these the party showed a capacity to expand beyond a mainly Chinese-centric appeal. In Serdang which has 39.57% Malay and 11.04% Indian voters, the size of DAP's Ong Kian Ming's win of a 42,206 majority in an electorate of 94,877 suggests that he received substantial non-Chinese votes. In this election, three important features are evident in DAP's performance. Firstly, the DAP fielded two parliamentary candidates and one in the state who were Malays. DAP has fielded Malay candidates in the past. However the three candidates are party leaders who have distinguished themselves. Zairil Khir Johari who won the Bukit Bendera parliamentary seat is son of former UMNO leader Khir Johari while Mohd Ariff Sabri who won the parliamentary seat of Raub was a former UMNO state assemblyman. At the state level Tengku Zulpuri Shah Raja Puji who is from the Terengganu royalty wrested Mentakab from the MCA. Second, the DAP entered Johor which had long been a BN stronghold and in making it a frontline state in its campaign, successfully made major inroads. Third, in mounting an attack on Johor, the DAP ventured into semi-rural constituencies generally thought to be BN-friendly.

Table 4: Popular votes won by political parties in GE12 and GE13 (parliamentary seats)

	Votes		% of vote		Seats		% of seats	
	2008	2013	2008	2013	2008	2013	2008	2013
Barisan Nasional	4,082,411	5,237,986	50.27	47.38	140	133	63.1	59.91
United Malays National Organisation	2,381,725	3,252,484	29.33	29.45	79	88	35.6	39.64
Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu	131,243	232,390	1.62	2.1	14	14	6.3	6.31
Malaysian Chinese Association	840,489	867,851	10.35	7.86	15	7	6.8	3.15
Parti Rakyat Sarawak	33,410	59,540	0.41	0.54	6	6	2.7	2.7
Malaysian Indian Congress	179,422	286,629	2.21	2.59	3	4	1.4	1.8
Parti Bersatu Sabah	44,885	74,959	0.55	0.68	3	4	1.4	1.8
Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party	52,645	55,505	0.65	0.5	4	4	1.8	1.8
United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation	58,856	53,584	0.72	0.48	4	3	1.8	1.35
Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia	184,548	191,019	2.27	1.73	2	1	0.9	0.45
Sarawak United People's Party	119,264	133,603	1.47	1.21	6	1	2.7	0.45
Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah *	–	9,467	–	0.08	1	1	0.5	0.45
Liberal Democratic Party	8,297	13,138	0.1	0.12	1	0	0.5	0
People's Progressive Party	16,800	7,530	0.21	0.07	0	0	0	0
Sabah Progressive Party †	30,827	–	0.38	–	2	–	1.4	–
Pakatan Rakyat	3,796,464	5,624,011	46.75	50.87	82	89	36.9	40.09
Democratic Action Party	1,118,025	1,736,601	13.77	15.71	28	38	12.6	17.12
Parti Keadilan Rakyat	1,509,080	2,254,211	18.58	20.39	31	30	14	13.51
Parti Islam Se-Malaysia	1,140,676	1,633,199	14.05	14.77	23	21	10.4	9.46
Independents and others	65,399	192,890	0.81	1.75	0	0	0	0
Total	7,944,274	11,228,548	100	100	222	222	100	100

Notes: * Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah won its only seat uncontested on nomination day; † Sabah Progressive Party left the Barisan Nasional after the 2008 election.

Source: Compiled from newspaper reports.

Table 5: Comparison of performance of Chinese-based parties in Peninsular Malaysia in GE12 and GE13 (parliamentary and state seats)

Name of Party	GE 2008		GE 2013	
	Parliament	State seats	Parliament	State seats
Malaysian Chinese Association	15 (40)	30 (89)	7 (37)	11 (88)
Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia	2 (12)	4 (31)	1 (11)	1 (29)
Democratic Action Party	26 (35)	72 (92)	31 (36)	91 (95)

Note () = Seats contested.

Sources: *New Straits Times* (2013b); Tew (2011).

Table 6: Parliamentary seats won by MCA in Peninsular Malaysia in GE13

Code	State	Constituency	Ethnic composition of voters (%)				Candidate	Majority
			Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others		
P077	Perak	Tanjong Malim	53.49	27.25	14.02	5.24	Ong Ka Chuan	4,328
P135	Melaka	Alor Gajah	58.49	27.80	12.87	0.85	Koh Nai Kwong	11,597
P089	Pahang	Bentong	44.61	43.88	9.12	2.4	Liow Tiong Lai	379
P142	Johor	Labis	36.53	46.46	15.08	1.94	Chua Tee Yong	353
P148	Johor	Ayer Hitam	57.91	37.96	3.96	0.17	Wee Ka Siong	7,310
P158	Johor	Tebrau	47.42	38.19	13.26	1.14	Khoo Soo Seang	1,767
P165	Johor	Tanjong Piai	52.11	46.50	1.07	0.32	Wee Jeck Seng	5,457

Source: *New Straits Times* (2013b).

The extent of electoral losses suffered by Chinese-based BN parties was reflected in the defeat of several MCA leaders. These included Kong Cho Ha, Chor Chee Heung, Hou Kok Chung and Lee Chee Leong. Kong and Chor were respectively Transport Minister and Minister of Housing and Local Government while the others were deputy ministers. Kong's loss while a shock was not entirely a surprise as he was associated with the move to introduce the very unpopular Automatic Enforcement System (AES) for traffic offences. The enforcement of the AES was outsourced to private companies and the fines imposed were substantial. In Pulau Pinang, the BN candidates for the state seats of Berapit and Pengkalen Kota were not only defeated but they also lost their deposits for failing to get a minimum number of votes. BN candidates' losing their deposits is unprecedented. Of the seven seats retained by MCA two were won very narrowly. These were in Labis with 353 and Bentong with 379 majority votes. That the largest party in the opposition coalition is Chinese-based and that Chinese-based parties in BN suffered widespread losses have given the impression of a GE13 Chinese tsunami. Nevertheless, opposition leaders and many commentators in immediate reaction to the Chinese tsunami comments of Najib Razak and other UMNO leaders pointed out that the voting trend in GE13 reflected not only an ethnic but also a regional as well as a class "tsunami" (Chin, 2013a; Choong, 2013). Urban votes and a significant proportion of middle class Malaysians, they argued, went to the opposition. They contended that the pro-opposition support of urban and middle class voters was over issues such as crime, the economy, and corruption that cut across ethnic lines and which they felt the ruling BN had failed to address (Mohsin, 2013). Furthermore, the margin

of votes in seats won by the opposition including those of the DAP could not have been that wide had it not been for substantial Malay support for the opposition.

Table 7: GE13: Election results of Chinese majority parliamentary seats in Peninsular Malaysia

Code	State	Constituency	Ethnic composition of voters (%)				Won	Majority
			Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others		
P043	Pulau Pinang	Bagan	15.48	69.53	14.68	0.32	DAP	34,159
P045		Bukit Mertajam	18.91	71.16	9.64	0.30	DAP	43,063
P046		Batu Kawan	20.59	55.70	23.32	0.38	DAP	25,962
P048		Bukit Bendera	13.99	73.74	11.12	1.15	DAP	32,778
P049	Pulau Pinang	Tanjong	5.21	85.23	9.19	0.36	DAP	28,645
P050		Jelutong	21.86	66.51	11.22	0.42	DAP	25,750
P051		Bukit Gelugor	14.48	74.49	10.56	0.48	DAP	41,778
P064	Perak	Ipoh Timor	14.17	79.32	5.48	1.03	DAP	34,000
P065		Ipoh Barat	13.58	62.18	23.59	0.65	DAP	29,038
P066		Batu Gajah	10.71	73.89	14.99	0.41	DAP	38,596
P068		Beruas	32.72	52.25	14.88	0.15	DAP	5,057
P070	Selangor	Kampar	28.77	60.40	9.57	1.26	DAP	5,400
P106		Petaling Jaya Utara	14.16	77.16	7.38	1.29	DAP	44,672
P114	Wilayah Persekutuan	Kepong	4.52	88.43	6.38	0.67	DAP	40,307
P117		Segambut	33.24	52.75	12.05	1.96	DAP	19,199
P120		Bukit Bintang	14.38	73.13	10.77	1.72	DAP	19,399
P122		Seputeh	5.32	87.98	5.84	0.86	DAP	51,552
P123		Cheras	10.32	81.79	7.25	0.64	DAP	37,409
P138	Melaka	Kota Melaka	35.73	59.09	3.65	1.54	DAP	20,746
P145	Johor	Bakri	44.07	53.21	2.25	0.47	DAP	5,067
P162		Gelang Patah	34.27	52.41	12.49	0.84	DAP	14,762
P163		Kulai	33.12	56.13	10.27	0.48	DAP	13,450

Source: *New Straits Times* (2013b).

Table 8: GE13: Election results of Chinese majority parliamentary seats in Sabah

Code	Constituency	Ethnic composition of voters (%)				Won	Majority
		Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others		
P172	Kota Kinabalu	4.77	70.28	21.64	3.31	DAP	18,959
P186	Sandakan	13.61	53.48	25.21	7.70	DAP	1,088

Source: *New Straits Times* (2013b).

Table 9: GE13: Election results of Chinese majority parliamentary seats in Sarawak

Code	Constituency	Ethnic composition of voters (%)				Won	Majority
		Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others		
P195	Bandar Kuching	4.48	90.93	3.86	0.72	DAP	19,642
P196	Stampin	10.70	73.24	14.71	1.35	DAP	18,670
P208	Sarikei	3.87	65.67	30.12	0.33	DAP	505
P211	Lanang	2.44	72.11	25.15	0.31	DAP	8,630
P212	Sibu	11.18	64.64	23.46	0.72	DAP	2,841
P219	Miri	16.01	57.39	25.67	0.92	PKR	1,992

Source: *New Straits Times* (2013b).

Table 10: GE13: Performance of DAP in parliamentary mixed-seats in Peninsular Malaysia

Code	State	Constituency	Breakdown according to race (%)				Won	Majority
			Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others		
P060	Perak	Taiping	37.13	47.92	13.52	1.42	DAP	11,745
P076		Teluk Intan	38.58	41.93	19.05	0.44	DAP	7,313
P078	Pahang	Cameron Highlands	34.15	32.29	12.48	21.08	BN (MIC)	462
P080		Raub	49.82	40.33	6.49	3.36	DAP	2814
P089		Bentong	44.61	43.88	9.12	2.4	BN (MCA)	379
P102	Selangor	Serdang	39.57	48.63	11.04	0.76	DAP	42,206
P103		Puchong	39.36	43.52	15.91	1.21	DAP	32,802
P110		Klang	32.94	45.78	19.82	1.46	DAP	24,685
P128	Negeri Sembilan	Seremban	43.67	41.08	13.69	1.55	DAP	12,553
P130	Rasah	27.84	48.34	22.16	1.67	DAP	23,485	
P142	Johor	Labis	36.53	46.46	15.08	1.94	BN (MCA)	353
P152		Kluang	39.57	49.26	9.79	1.39	DAP	7,359

Source: *New Straits Times* (2013b).

GE13 AND CHINESE POLITICS

In the immediate aftermath of GE13, some observers contend that the results have exacerbated the ethnic divide in the country. In presenting the GE13 results

as a Chinese tsunami there has been a backlash from certain factions within UMNO against the non-Malays (Muzaffar, 2013). Statements and commentaries coming out of the pro-UMNO media described the Chinese votes for the opposition as a betrayal. Some claimed that the Chinese, not being content with control of the economy are intent on seizing political power. They warned of Malay retaliation and suggested that those not happy with BN migrate elsewhere. Such calls were first made by Ahmad Zahid Hamidi in response to mass rallies organised by PR to protest against the election results under the banner of "Black 505". Still others called for a boycott of Chinese companies that had supported the opposition. Within UMNO there is a clamor for tougher and more authoritarian response to critics of the government and the opposition. Indeed, arrests were made soon after GE13 against those organising rallies and protest gatherings. Rafizi Ramli, the PKR strategy director who had brought to public attention the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) scandal was charged under the Banking and Financial Institutions Act for disclosing information related to the NFC. Government critics saw this as an attempt to intimidate those seeking to expose wrongdoings in government. Meanwhile, copies of three opposition newspapers were seized for violating the Printing Presses and Publications Act. Some months later, a new weekly *The Heat* was suspended, apparently for its front-page story on the extravagant lifestyle of the Prime Minister and his wife (*The Malaysian Insider*, 2013a).

The UMNO leadership, realising that it was Malay support especially those in the rural areas that had helped the party to survive GE13 immediately moved to give more attention and economic rewards to this constituency. On 14 September 2013, Najib Razak announced the formation of the Bumiputera Economic Empowerment Council. The council would introduce new measures and strategies to economically empower the Bumiputera (*New Straits Times*, 2013a). Targets towards the council's objectives would be set for all chief executive officers of government-linked companies (GLCs). To enhance Bumiputera equity ownership in the corporate sector, the Skim Amanah Saham Bumiputera 2 would be launched by Permodalan Nasional Bhd with 10 billion units. Shahrir Abdul Samad, an UMNO veteran leader and MP for Johor Bahru, took a broader view in his assessment of why non-Malays voted for the opposition. He acknowledged that the principle of equality advocated by the DAP was a factor that drew many non-Malay votes for PR. Not only are non-Malays seeking equal opportunities and access, Shahrir believed that non-Malays are committed to preserving Malaysia as a secular state. If BN hopes to regain support in GE14, Shahrir held that there has to be better governance under UMNO and BN (*The Malaysian Insider*, 2013b; *Free Malaysia Today*, 2013a).

To non-Malays, a palpably a less tolerant approach had been adopted by the post-GE13 government in religious matters. This has led to serious religious fissures in the country. Most worrying is the ban on the use by non-Muslims of the word "Allah" together with another 34 terms deemed to be exclusive to

Muslims in Malaysia. In early January 2014, the Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor (JAIS) raided and confiscated over 300 copies of the Malay and Iban Bible (*The Star Online*, 2014). An appeal by the Herald against the ban on the use of "Allah" is still pending in Malaysian courts. Religious cleavages are hardening racial differences. In the light of a re-communalisation of Malaysian politics, did the DAP in fact, as suggested by William Case, mislead the Chinese by raising unrealistic expectations of a PR win, thus resulting in an overwhelming Chinese vote against BN? Did this in turn lead to a Malay backlash and strident rhetoric against non-Malays? And would the drift of Chinese support for BN continue or would it return to the 1995 and 1999 level of support as observed by James Chin?

At the same time though, GE13 demonstrated PR's success in gaining cross-ethnic support. Otherwise how could PR have gained more than 51% of the popular votes? That there was high expectation before GE13 of a PR win was not merely a DAP campaign propaganda but was what many analysts likewise thought could be the outcome (Welsh, 2013). Polls conducted by Merdeka Centre and the University of Malaya Centre of Democracy and Elections (UMCEDEL) just before GE13 showed a tightening up of the electoral race (*Sinar Harian*, 2013; *The Malaysian Insider*, 2013c). At no other election was the ruling coalition so vulnerable, given the allegations of corruption in government or an opposition that was so cohesive. But was there concern within the Chinese community that an enfeebled non-Malay political representation in BN was damaging to its overall interest? Did the risk of ethnic violence in the event of a weakened or defeated BN worry the Chinese? For the Chinese, there is a general realisation that non-Malay effectiveness in BN is limited irrespective of how they performed in the elections. The relatively better results in 1995, 1999 and 2004 had not brought about policy changes desired by the Chinese (Chin, 2013a). Indeed despite Chinese support for BN in 1999 at a time of wide Malay disaffection with UMNO following the sacking of Anwar Ibrahim and again in 2004, the Chinese were treated to a display of unsheathed kris and Malay supremacy slogans by UMNO Youth leaders during the party's annual general meeting (AGM) in 2006. The threat of another May 13 ethnic riot always looms but conditions have so changed that it no longer raises the extent of fear as before. Furthermore, there is a new generation born after 1969 that see such wielding of May 13 threats as a political bully tactic.

Case (2013) rightly points out that after GE13, the ethnic polarisation has helped UMNO. The narrow electoral victory has created anxiety and insecurity among sections of the Malays and the threat of DAP is used by UMNO to mobilise continued Malay support. The ethnic dimension of the two coalitions' format will come to dominate the coming political discourse and set the national agenda. Should ethnic polarisation continue Chinese votes are likely to drift away from the BN. The major BN parties seemed unable in the immediate aftermath of GE13 to arrest this drift. Both UMNO and MCA had been preoccupied with party elections. Those seeking party positions were reluctant to take the middle and

moderate ground in Malaysian politics and to speak up boldly against those advocating narrow interests whose intent is to marginalise and exclude Malaysians on the basis of religion or race.

For the Chinese, the post-GE13 situation resembles somewhat the aftermath of the 1969 elections. Tan Siew Sin had pulled MCA out of government because he felt the Chinese community had rejected the party. The decision led to heightened political tension and this was one contributing factor to the outbreak of ethnic violence in Kuala Lumpur. The pull-out under Tan Siew Sin led to a suspension of ethnic political cooperation. The events in 1969 led to groups of young Chinese including professionals all over the country to rally around the MCA. Under Alex Lee, a Chinese Unity Movement was started in Kuala Lumpur to mobilise support to strengthen the MCA. A similar movement called the Perak Task Force led by Lim Keng Yaik and Paul Leong sought support for the MCA in towns and in the New Villages. The two movements led to a brief reinvigoration of the MCA (Loh, 1982).

This post-election scenario is not happening in 2013. This has to do with the question of leadership and with how the MCA is presently being perceived. The MCA suffered serious losses in 1969 because the party was seen as ineffective within the Alliance coalition. But its leaders such as Tan Siew Sin and Lim Swee Aun were regarded as men of integrity and therefore highly respected. They had held the important positions of Finance as well as Trade and Industry. Hence many young Chinese then believed that the MCA could still be an effective voice of the community within the ruling coalition provided it was supported by younger members including the professionals. Second, the MCA was then one of three parties in an Alliance where there was considerably more consultation than in the BN. The MCA today is 1 of 14 parties in a coalition where power is concentrated in UMNO leaders and in the executive branch of government. Given the continuing trend of population decline of the Chinese, the MCA will remain a minor player. In 1969 Chinese MPs formed 37.5% of parliamentarians while in 2008, this figure dropped to 24.3%. There are those in UMNO who after GE13 believe that Chinese votes are now dispensable and the party could form the government without the MCA or Chinese support. Hence, the bargaining position of the Chinese in the BN is very much weaker than before. Since GE13, there has been a change in the MCA leadership following party elections in November 2013. Liow Tiong Lai has been elected the new President in a contest where Dr. Chua Soi Lek did not take part. However, the leadership is not seen by the wider community as able to bring about meaningful change, given the dominance of UMNO.

Finally, the young Chinese are today more concerned with broader issues that go beyond communal interests. Equal opportunities in education, employment and business are issues that are still important to them. But the young Chinese set these within the larger national framework of inter-ethnic cooperation, justice and human rights, and safeguarding of the environment (Lee,

2011). Hence many young Chinese professionals are drawn to NGOs and civil society movements. And if they participate in politics they join multi-ethnic parties. Furthermore, some supporters of PR contend that the three parties of DAP, PKR and PAS offer a better semblance of political parity and that each heads a Pakatan-led government in Pulau Pinang, Selangor and Kelantan.

Table 11: The percentage of Chinese MPs in Malaysia

Year	1959	1964	1969	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1995	1999	2004	2008
Perlis	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kedah	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Kelantan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Terengganu	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pulau Pinang	4	4	3	5	4	5	5	4	5	7	7	6
Perak	8	8	9	9	8	9	9	10	10	10	9	9
Pahang	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	2
Selangor	5	6	7	5	4	4	4	4	6	6	8	6
Kuala Lumpur	–	–	–	3	3	4	5	5	7	7	8	7
Putrajaya	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0	0
Negeri Sembilan	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Melaka	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Johor	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	6	6	9	9
Labuan	–	–	–	–	–	–	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sabah	–	–	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4
Sarawak	–	–	6	6	6	6	6	7	8	7	7	7
Total Chinese MPs	29	30	39	43	41	43	46	47	55	56	61	54
Parliament seats	104	104	104	144	154	154	177	180	192	193	219	222
%	27.9	28.8	37.5	29.9	26.6	27.9	26.0	26.1	28.6	29.0	27.9	24.3

Source: Compiled from newspaper sources.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that non-Malays and especially the Chinese largely voted against BN in GE13 as they did in GE12. As a result there is disappointment and even anger within UMNO that despite what they consider as Najib Razak's generous concessions offered to the Chinese the community had turned against BN (Ramakrishnan, 2013). The Chinese-based parties in BN, in admitting that Chinese voters had mostly voted against the ruling coalition made the argument

that the community had simply been misled by the opposition. The opposition on the other hand argues that it was not a Chinese but a broad-based multi-ethnic tsunami. It pointed out that a majority of those in urban areas and among the middle-class had voted for the opposition. The view that it was an urban and middle class vote for the opposition is supported by most observers. The Klang Valley which is mostly urban and where Malays form half the voters may be a case to support this contention. Here a majority of seats went to PR parties (Fernando, 2011). It is contended that in the Klang Valley issues such as crime, the economy, and corruption cut across ethnic lines. The ruling BN was seen as not having addressed voters' current sentiments. It has also been pointed out that popular votes for PR was 51% of those who voted. Chinese voters accounted for some 23% of total eligible voters. Even assuming that all the Chinese had voted for the opposition, this would not amount to what had been described as a tsunami. But in fact a number of Chinese voters, though not as significant this time, still supported Chinese-based BN parties (Boo, 2013). Finally, the Merdeka Centre survey of February 2013 revealed a very interesting urban divide. That survey showed that 44% of those in urban areas interviewed were positive towards BN with 35% negative. In the rural areas 58% were positive and 24% were negative. On the other hand 37% of those in urban areas interviewed were positive towards PR with 22% negative. This compared to 29% positive and 35% negative. The Merdeka Centre survey therefore showed that the urban-rural divide was just as important a feature.

GE13 consolidated the two coalition system in Malaysian politics. But the politics in the country appears more polarised than before. This is likely to persist until GE14 (Saravanamuttu, 2012). Leaders of BN and PR nevertheless realised the need for continuing multi-ethnic political cooperation to ensure stability and economic development in the country. Foreign investors would not be drawn to a country where the ruling government is dominated by one ethnic group and the others marginalised. Furthermore although there are those who contend that UMNO can win power without non-Malay support, given the fact that Chinese-majority parliamentary seats form some 20% of total number of parliamentary seats, these seats would be crucial if the results of the general elections are close. Furthermore Chinese votes are still important in mixed constituencies and their support can also tip the balance in closely fought Malay-majority seats.

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NOTES

1. For a detailed discussion on the campaigns and results of these 16 by-elections, see the work of Wong and Soon (2012).
2. Dr. Ling Liong Sik and Chan Kong Choy, the former president and deputy president of MCA respectively, were charged in court in 2010 and 2011 on allegations of cheating the cabinet on the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) issue.
3. MCA President Dr. Chua Soi Lek put forward the idea of this dual-race system in order to address the decline in the Chinese support for BN and to counter the discourse of a two-coalition system as popularised by PR.
4. The three parliamentary constituencies were Wangsa Maju, Gelang Patah and Kuantan and the candidates were Mohd. Shafei Abdullah, Abdul Ghani Othman and Mohamed Suffian Awang respectively. All three UMNO candidates lost in GE13.

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