

Issues in 13th General Election: A Case Study of Kedah, Malaysia

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Abstract

This study was conducted to identify the issues that are expected or predicted in the 13th general election. The study was conducted in the state of Kedah, Malaysia as a case study. The population is comprised of people eligible to vote in the election to 13 in the state of Kedah and the sample of 500 respondents. The study took into account six focus areas in Kedah which cover four parliamentary constituencies and divided into six in the state of Kedah. They are Jerlun constituency (DUN Kota Siputeh) and Kubang Pasu (DUN Jitra and Bukit Kayu Hitam) which represent the ruling party-BN, while for the opposition, this study chooses the Parliament of Merbok (DUN Tanjung Dawai dan Bukit Selambau) and Pendang (DUN Tokai). The findings show that the quality and standard of living are the most important issues that are expected to be manipulated by the public during the election campaign as compared to other issues. Voters are so concerned by the rising cost of living in recent years due to the rising of prices, including fuel prices, and studies show they (people) feel pressured on the rising of living cost. As such, the contesting parties must update this problem and try to give priority to the development of physical infrastructure such as physical development, economic and social in one to match that quality of people's living standards and this should be done carefully.

Keyword: issues, general election 13, Kedah

1. Introduction

Many political observers and scholars described the results of the general election (GE) 12 in the past as a 'political tsunami' in Malaysian political landscape. This is because, for the first time, the ruling government of Barisan Nasional (BN), who has ruled Malaysia more than 50 years, suffered a huge defeat at the hands of the opposition and they did not obtain the two-third majority the Parliament. Even, the four states: Penang, Kedah, Perak and Selangor, which were once the stronghold of BN were defeated by the oppositions consisting of PAS, DAP and PKR. BN government failed to recapture Kelantan from PAS. Various arguments have been put forward in analyzing the defeat of the 'big' BN. Among these are the factors of the administration of Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the wrath of all walks of life due to the rising prices including fuel prices, rising of crime rates, also as a result of the popularity of Anwar Ibrahim's comeback that leads the opposition alliance.

While in the state of Kedah, many angers are focused on the leadership of the chief minister (MB) and the state administration. The slogan of "Kedah Maju 2010" turns into mockery and humor, not to mention the reluctance of the former MB withdrew from the reins of the state was also a major issue in the 12th general election. Furthermore, the price of fuel at the federal level also gave a maximum impact on voting patterns in Kedah (Hasnan & Yusri, 2008).

Various analyzes are presented, whether from within or outside the country, talking about the cause of negative impact on the general election ballot of BN 12th general election. Among them are government policies and actions, the question of the constitution and law, development and quality of life, and religious education, candidate selection, attitude of leaders of the BN's component parties as well as the leadership of the Prime Minister. Implications of voter dissatisfaction on the issues then had been translated in GE 2008. Even the diversity of issues that trigger people's dissatisfaction was not only posed and discussed by the GE-12, the

discussions are continued until the present day. So the question is, what are the problems and issues that coupled with new issues to be translated by voters in the 13th general election. Thus, this paper will discuss, explore and discover the answers to these issues.

2. The Concept of Elections

Election is conducted by an independent body called the Election Commission (EC). EC was established on 4 September 1957, in accordance with Article 113 and 114 of the Federal Constitution. It consists of a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman and three members. EC members are appointed by the King (Agong) after consultation with the Conference of Rulers. Among the objectives of the EC are to preserve, monitor and maintain the system of parliamentary democracy in Malaysia through fair elections. The other functions of the EC are;

- 1) The role of the people to choose and control their representatives. Although the process is very complex, and some argue that people far prefer candidates who have been determined by the political parties, but this function is still significant in the democratic system. In other words people can choose between alternative candidates. Control over these representatives also take the form of voting power to withdraw their support to the representative (or parties) in the upcoming elections.
- 2) As channels for political participation through community and can lead to a feeling of belonging and sharing, feeling part of a political system and ownership of the regulations, the policies and the way the political system.
- 3) As a form of communication between ruler and ruled and through allowing decision makers to feel sensitive and responsive to political demands.
- 4) To confirm those who hold power. Through the election, they could claim their rightful ruler in the sense that they are received by the people.

3. Issues and Election

Referring to the *Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* third edition (1998), issue is the tree question of something. Issue is an element of interest and attention of many. Something means a lot to give the meaning because the results will determine the future of all the people.

Several studies on the use of mass media and current issues were conducted and discussed by researchers in the 1980s. Such studies intensified from 1986 until 1990. In 1987, studies were conducted to determine the views of the public on issues that cause the disintegration of UMNO (Arabi & Safar, 1993).

One element that often grabs so much attention is the study of the issues arisen in the election. Such studies are abounded in Western countries with many companies are keen to conduct research on public opinion. Research is used by all parties, whether in public or in limited (Arabi & Chang, 1991).

Syed Arabi (1994) highlights that issue raised during the election are more on the political problems, abuse of power by political parties, political party workers, political caricatures, racial or religious problems, leadership, Malay unity, party migration the threat from the party, development, security and crime, moral, social, economic, candidate personalities, education, representation in elections occur and the mass media (Arabi, 1994).

The study of elections and politics in Malaysia is carried out by the researchers and scholars either within or outside the state. Mauzy (1983), for example, stated how the strength of coalitions (Coalition) among BN component parties have produced impressive victory in the 1986 election. Means (1970; 1976; 1991) also deals a lot about politics and elections in Malaysia. Means also regards the cooperation between people, especially Malays, Chinese and Indians is contributing to the success of the BN in every election that they participate.

Meanwhile, scholar who focuses exclusively on elections is Hussain (1987) with his book titled 'Developing Democracy: Elections in Malaysia'. Apart from talking about general questions on elections and voting as voters, candidates and nomination, the role of representative people and so on, Hussain (1987) also commented at length on the issues of general elections in 1986. Hussain stated that many issues raised by the opposition in the 1986 election as the reforms carried out by the newly-appointed Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (now Tun) specifically on the Look East Policy, the National Car Project, Privatization Policy and many more. Issues such as the crisis of the Constitution Amendment, 1983, BMF loans scandal, and resignation of Mamali Events by the Deputy Prime Minister Musa Hitam were among the hottest issues that had been manipulated by the oppositions.

Khong (1991) who studied the use of issues of race, religion and language in the 1990 general election stated that the issues that were manipulated in the 1990 election gave the advantage to the opposition parties. PAS stood up with the religious issues, "Semangat 46" pointed few the issues of race and language, while the DAP projected so much on the issues of race and the concept of "Malaysian Malaysia". This way has led the opposition parties won several seats in the state assembly and parliamentary elections in 1990.

The study by Mohd Yusof and Azlan (2002) focused on the 1999 election and the finding on the racial issues is still relevant Malaysian election. However, the 1999 general election suggests that the issue may be reduced in the future and become one of the important elements in the new political developments in Malaysia. In addition, territorial issues also influenced voting patterns, such as in the northern, central and southern which were pioneered by UMNO and PAS directed in the east. Hottest issues were also discussed also regionally including in Kuala Lumpur, Sabah and Sarawak in the 1999 election. Among the issues discussed was the economic downturn, the case of Anwar Ibrahim, religion and so on.

Studies conducted by Jamaluddin, Mohamed Fauzi, Muhammad Fuad and Zaheruddin (2003) focusing on the participation of the community in the electoral politics and a survey of the level of public understanding about the political system, particularly in Malaysia, was made. There was a meaningful shift towards maturity. The study found that although there are various issues that have been manipulated by the opposition during the campaign until polling day, a sense of loyalty and faith in the electorate to the government still did not budge. Although respondents felt sympathy and anger to the ruling party on the issue of removal of Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim and cronyism issue, but this does not manifest a sense of frustration at the ballot box.

However, in the 2008 elections, his party (opposition) won a majority of votes and managed to form a government in few states. PAS earned 16 seats of the total 36 seats and won 8 seats out of the total 15 parliamentary seats. According to Ahmad Athory (2008), Kedah BN's defeat was due to many candidates defending abortion as well as other factors such as weakness or national issue administration of Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, rising of prices, crime and so on. Table 1 and 2 below show the results of the elections in the state of Kedah in the 2008 elections.

Table 1. Parliamentary seats won by political parties in Kedah

KEDAH	BN	PAS	DAP	PKR
Langkawi	√			
Jerlun	√			
Kubang Pasu	√			
Padang Terap	√			
Pokok Sena		√		
Alor Setar	√			
Kuala Kedah				√
Pandang		√		
Jerai		√		
Sik		√		
Merbok				√
Sungai Petani				√
Baling		√		
Padang Serai				√
Kulim Bandar Baru				√
Total	5	5	-	5

Table 2. State seats won by political parties in Kedah

KEDAH	BN	PAS	DAP	PKR	BEBAS
Air Hangat	√				
Kuah	√				
Kota Siputeh	√				
Ayer Hitam		√			
Bukit Kayu Hitam	√				
Jitra	√				
Kuala Nerang	√				

KEDAH	BN	PAS	DAP	PKR	BEBAS
Pedu	√				
Bukit Lada		√			
Bukit Pinang		√			
Derga	√				
Bakar Bata	√				
Kota Darul Aman			√		
Alor Mengkudu		√			
Anak Bukit		√			
Kubang Rotan		√			
Pengkalan Kundor		√			
Tokai		√			
Sungai Tiang	√				
Sungai Limau		√			
Guar Chempedak	√				
Gurun	√				
Belantek	√				
Jeneri		√			
Bukit Selambau					√
Tanjong Dawai		√			
Pantai Merdeka		√			
Bakar Arang				√	
Sidam				√	
Bayu	√				
Kupang		√			
Kuala Ketil		√			
Merbau Pulas		√			
Lunas				√	
Kulim				√	
Bandar Baru		√			
Total	14	16	1	5	1

However, a study conducted by Ismail, Ngu and Saraswathy (2008) that related to the 2008 general election found that most of the purpose of a material news or issue displayed is much to tell and slam their opponents. This is in line with the news media over the election as to introduce and "promote" the negatively candidates, slammed, criticized and attacked. The findings also showed that most of the news tends to be positive, negative and neutral. While the issue somewhat less balanced with the news available.

Ku Hasnan and Yusri (2008) in their study also tried to peeling issues at the federal and local level found a significant change to the political landscape in the state of Kedah in general and Parliament of in particular. Despite the political tsunami happened and change of domination of the status quo of BN has been ruling for 51 years since independence. According Ku Hasnan and Yusri (2008), the majority of other areas fall into the hands of Parliament for the opposition because the constituents affected by the issues at the federal and local, but the voters in Parliament Langkawi between the remaining areas are still capable defended by Barisan Nasional which has ruled Kedah for 51 years still remain and feel comfortable with the status quo to continue to give victory to the candidate of the Barisan Nasional.

The study conducted by Junaidi, Mohd Fuad, Abdul Halim & Noor Aziah (2010) focuses on the youth politics in the constituency of Bagan Pinang, Negeri Sembilan also found that political parties are fighting for the issue of development and poverty became the preferred choice of the voters. They also argued that political parties could not touch personal issues during the campaign. In the same time, the concept of "1Malaysia: People First, Performance Now" is also supported, internalized and manifested by the youth. This study also found that the

majority of respondents supported the policies and leadership of the Prime Minister and his deputy in leading the development of the country today.

4. Methodology

This section touches on the study design selected in this research which is quantitative methods of questionnaires. In conducting this study, the first step taken is to select the population to be studied. To achieve the objectives, the voters were selected. The studies focus on the four parliamentary constituency which are divided into six in the state of Kedah, which is in the constituency of Jerlun (DUN Kota Siputeh) and Kubang Pasu (DUN Jitra and Bukit Kayu Hitam) which represented the ruling BN, while for the opposition, this study chooses Merbok constituency (DUN Tanjung Dawai and Bukit Selambau) and Pendang (DUN Tokai). Questionnaires were distributed to voters in the constituency specified below:

Table 3. Sample study

Parliament	State (DUN)	Number of Respondents
Kubang Pasu	Bukit Kayu Hitam	50
	Jitra	100
Jerlun	Kota Siputeh	100
Pendang	Tokai	100
Merbok	Tanjung Dawai	100
	Bukit Selambau	50
Total		500

The data obtained in this study will be analyzed using the computer package Statistical Package For The Social Sciences (SPSS) Windows version 16.0. Demographic information about respondents will be analyzed through descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages for evaluating answers provided by the respondents through the Likert scale is presented.

5. Result

5.1 Issues of Quality and Living Standards

Research on the quality and standard of living of the respondents indicates their perceptions on this issue and ranked to be at a high level of agree with the following statement. The results showed that 51 percent or 257 respondents expressed a high level. This shows the quality and standard of living of society now is very cumbersome.

Table 4. Issues of quality and living standards

Level	f	%
Low	5	1
Moderate	238	48
High	257	51
Total	500	100

5.2 Leadership and Political Issues

Table 1.5 shows the overall findings for leadership and political issues. Based on the analysis that has been carried out, it shows that the respondents' perception of this issue is high at 91 per cent or 453 respondents agreed on that. This shows that most people nowadays are not satisfied with the current leadership and the current government as well as in terms of federal or state level.

Table 5. Issues on political leadership

Level	f	%
Low	7	1
Moderate	40	8
High	453	91
Total	500	100

5.3 Policy Issues and State Action

The findings of Table 1.6 shows the public perception of policy issues and the state government is at an average level of 74 per cent or 368 respondents chose to stand agree. This indicates dissatisfaction with society for the actions made by the state government in terms of policy or other their overall insignificant.

Table 6. Policy issues and state action

Level	f	%
Low	10	2
Moderate	368	74
High	122	24
Total	500	100

5.4 Policy Issues and Actions of Federal Government (Federal)

The findings of the policy issues and actions in the central government to rule the perception of the respondents were at the medium level. This result is proven by the analysis that indicates 47 per cent or 233 respondents stood strong for the statement. This shows that government policies and actions made during the rule was still satisfied even if not comprehensive.

Table 7. Policy issues and actions federal government (Federal)

Level	f	%
Low	192	38
Moderate	233	47
High	75	15
Total	500	100

5.5 Physical Development Issues/Social and Economic

The findings for the issue of the physical, social and economic demonstrate the community is satisfied with development that has been carried out by the government. This result is proven by the findings of the study that show 82 per cent or 410 respondents expressed a high level status. It can be concluded that most respondents agreed that they are satisfied with the development made by the present government of the federal or state level.

Table 8. Physical development issues/social and economic

Level	f	%
Low	9	2
Moderate	81	16
High	410	82
Total	500	100

6. Discussion

Based on the findings, the following are a few guidelines to political parties that want to compete in the 13th general election in electoral areas studied.

- a) Give priority to the physical development such as infrastructure development, economic and social in one to match (so the quality of people's living standards can add-good).
- b) Add-good image and credibility among the party people.
- c) Promote the party or in other words to be actively campaigning for the state party's wishes and preferences of the people.
- d) Offering clean, good, competent and high credibility candidates as the representative.
- e) The governments of the ruling, the State or the Centre should try their best to realize the manifesto promises.
- f) Conduct, organized and committed in listening to the people's problems.

7. Conclusion

Political is course of a political nature. Sometimes it can be predictable and expected, but sometimes it is difficult to predict at all. Similarly, it depends on the expectations and perceptions of voters. It can be influenced by a thousand and one reasons and things. If today, it is possible to support BN, the next day they might turn to support PR. But what important is, especially for the political parties, they should be firm to do the very best for the hearts of voters. Kedah-the State of Rice Bowl, is having so much rural voters that live in the villages, but they are very vulnerable to a variety of information, in line with the information explosion that occurred in our country, They are unpredictable. Hence all the issues should be raised or taken seriously because there will be a consideration in the selection of party and candidate.

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