



POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND POST 15TH GENERAL ELECTION

IN MALAYSIA

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A RESEARCH PROJECT
SUBMITTED IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE AWARD OF
BACHELOR OF COMMUNICATION (HONS) JOURNALISM
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN

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MAITHILLI A/P KALAISELVAN


DECLARATION

I declare that the material contained in this paper is the end result of my own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the bibliography and references to ALL sources be they printed, electronic or personal.

The word count of this research report is 14,274 words.

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APPROVAL FORM

This research paper attached hereto, entitled Political Polarization and Post 15th General Election in Malaysia prepared and submitted by Maithilli A/P Kalaiselvan in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Communication (Hons) Journalism is hereby accepted.



Supervisor

Date: 20th September 2023

(Mr Edwin Michael A/L N. Muniandy)

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Abstract

The 15th General Election has been an important ballot in Malaysian political history due to the influence of political polarization. The purpose of this study is to identify the reasons behind political polarization, and its impacts on the country's development. For the purpose of conducting our research, eight informants with different ethnical backgrounds and exposure to various cultures were chosen as our samples. Future leaders will benefit from this research's ability to add to the model of the causes and effects of political polarisation. Using our data analysis and conclusions, we looked into the following two study goals: The factors of political polarization in Malaysia on 15th General Election and the impacts cause by political polarization to the society and the country's development. The four primary themes that have been identified for all the findings are connected to the political polarisation in the GE-15. All information gathered has declared to add to the corpus of knowledge for further use.

Keywords: Political polarization, 15th General Election, Impacts of political polarization in Malaysia

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1) Background summary

“A weak government constantly under threat of losing office may be particularly sensitive to the need of pleasing lobbyists and pressure groups, thus leading to a more direct effect of rent-seeking activities on policy decisions (Murphy, K., A. Shleifer and Vishny (1991). This quote about instable politics explains that an administration would keep changing due to unbearable pressure in policymaking. Ever since the 14th General Election (GE-14) in 2018, Malaysia has changed three Prime Ministers before the next election comes.

According to the official website of Parliament of Malaysia, Malaysia is a parliamentary democratic country which also follows constitutional monarchy system. Based on Article 127 of Federal Constitution of Malaysia, the government is divided into three tiers which are executive, legislative and judiciary. Yang di-Pertuan Agong (YDPA) holds the highest position for all these three tiers (Laws of Malaysia, 2009). The Prime Minister of the country leads the Executive branch, with the help of his cabinet's ministers. Each ministry will be accountable to execute their department's public service to the citizens.

Next, Legislative is the parliament that branched into two, which are, House of Senate (Dewan Negara) and House of Representative (Dewan Rakyat). Parliament enacts new federal laws, amends existing federal laws, observes government policies, endorses federal spending, and enacts tax changes. Parliament also acts as a forum for public debate on national issues (Parliament of Malaysia, 2022).

In Malaysian governmental structure, Judiciary holds the highest position. It plays an important role in safeguarding and upholding the Constitution, as well as serving justice in compliance with the law (Othman, A., 1987). It leads by the Chief Justice of Malaysia.

However, Malaysia has been moulded into this well-structured governmental system, it meets racial and religious issues very often because some political leaders and commoners are not welcoming pluralism. For an example, during Pakatan Harapan's (PH) administration in 2018, United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) leaders protested International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) to stop the government from signing it. The purpose of the riot is they found ICERD as a hazard to Malay supremacy and their religious practice and called for opposing party to safeguard their rights (Temby, Q., 2020). As such events snowballed to the following general election in November 2022, the racial hatred has been thrown between the Malaysians by the political leaders. The former Democratic Action Party (DAP) member, Hew Kuan Yew, popularly known as 'Superman Hew' was arrested after a video of him for provoking a supporter at a Pakatan Harapan campaign that the Chinese community should capitalise on Malay disharmony blew up (Free Malaysia Today, 2022). On the other hand, a study done by Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) states the President of PAS, Tan Sri Abdul Hadi Awang as one of the primary propagators of "controversial, racist, closed minded, and hate-filled" discourses. He stated false statements like, "whoever voting PH or BN will be going to hell" and "the Malays should be united to fight against DAP (Chinese) and the Indian" (NST,2022). These kinds of racial and religious clashes made up by the politicians creates a gap between the people from different racial backgrounds.

As a democratic country, Malaysia follows electoral system once in five years term to choose their members of parliament and assemblymen. This is the first time ever; the 15th

General Election (GE-15) is about to be only based on the cabinet and not the state legislative assemblies. The former Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Ismail Sabri stated, he believes that holding state elections concurrently with parliamentary elections would mellow the democratic process, save money, and avoid upsetting the people with another ballot the year after (Free Malaysia Today, 2022).

On 10th October 2022, Malaysian parliament was dissolved after 4 years and 5 months since the previous general election by Ismail Sabri, the 9th Prime Minister of Malaysia. However, Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah expressed his view on the current government's urge to have the election now due to the country's wellbeing on its political and economic stability (Alizah Shah, 2022). According to the official portal of parliament of Malaysia, the election should be held withing 60 days of parliament dissolution and the next cabinet's first meeting should be taken up withing 120 days from the previous term.

For GE-15, the election is set to happen on 19th November 2022, 40 days after the termination of parliament. The duration between nomination of candidates and the election is 14 days. The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih), a Malaysian electoral reform group stated their disappointment on short period of campaigning duration because the candidates might not have enough time and opportunity to work on ground. Meanwhile, Dr G. Manimaran, an election analyst says that it is more than enough time to do their manifestos because Malaysia is getting warning alarms on possibilities of facing another round of flash flood and the risk of rising COVID-19 cases (The Star, 2022).

Apart from the concerns on flash flood and COVID-19 outbreak, the urge to conduct the election is also holding some political and economic factors. This paper will discuss more on those perspectives and how does it link with political polarization in Malaysia currently.

1.2) Problem Statement

“Tolerance is not about valuing diversity but rather about recognizing other people’s right to have different beliefs and practices, as long as these do not violate general moral values (Verkuyten, M., & Killen, M. (2021). Malaysia is a pluralistic nation that should be sustaining its harmony, but the racial and religious tensions triggered by some political misconduct during the GE-15 revolts unnecessary issues among the people. There is a possibility of facing a worse political and economic crisis if it could not be solved. To fix this issue, the people of Malaysia should be treated without discrimination and any kind of misleading information that could be a black mark of the unity of Malaysia should be avoided. Malaysians are politically divided into race, religion, and ideology for political purposes. When the people are being divided under these three elements, it does not need to have violent act, but it leads to silent act like a cold war. This thesis analyses the underlying political polarization on GE-15 that changes the present and future of Malaysia.

1.3) Research Question

The proposed study is to find the justifying answers for the following research questions:

RQ1. What cause political polarization on GE-15?

RQ2. How might the political polarization impact the future of Malaysia in both social contract and development?

1.4) Research Objectives

The research targets to reach its objectives:

RO1. To examine the factors of political polarization in Malaysia on 15th General Election

RO2. To discuss the impacts cause by political polarization to the society and the country's development

1.5) Limitation of the Study

In Malaysian context, several studies have been carried out about political polarization on racial, religious, and ideological basis. In the saying of Welsh, however polarization is still mostly restricted to the upper classes, it is becoming more pervasive throughout Malaysian society and undermining inter - racial peace and social stability. In other word, the elite Malaysian community enjoy this diverse for their own beneficiaries. Another study by the same author shows that both an independent variable that influences democracy and a dependent variable that is altered by democracy can be polarizing (Welsh & Chang, 2014). For a democratic country like Malaysia, political polarization could lead to both pros and cons depends on how the person uses the administration power.

The issue in this paper is to identify and explain the realistic framework of how polarization works in GE-15 and its influence on Malaysian politics. Since this research is being carried out exactly during the 15th General Election of Malaysia, there are some difficulties in finding and analysing the actual sources. This time, there are six coalitions being competed and the main three, Barisan Nasional (BN), Perikatan Nasional (PN) and Pakatan Harapan (PH) are actively campaigning their manifestos. Considering this research

is fresh to be done, there are some issues with finding scholarly journals and article about GE-15.

1.6) Significance of the Study

This research will provide new insights into the current political condition in Malaysia and how the post GE-15 administration works on solving the divided society here. Political polarization is important because it regularly threatens the judicial independence by accusing the courts of partiality or of being stacked with supporters. Legislative bodies are reduced their function. It frequently results in the misuse of executive authority in democratic system and fosters the harmful idea that the leader only speaks for his or her followers, not the country as an entire” (Carothers, T., & O’donohue, A., 2019). To press these impacts, this research will be following up on the performance of the new government on its way of handling polarization.

Additionally, the analysis that is presented in this study will provide important data for future studies that explore about GE-15 and the political dilemma during this election. Since this research is fresh, it examines the current updates on the political polarization in Malaysia and how the new government is solving this. For the readers, this research paper will give a clear picture on the new phase of Malaysian politics after the 2022 election.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1) Political Polarization

Christina Boswell (2020) defines politics is much about as much about culture and identity as it is about physical resources. She considers election as a ‘bidding-war’ process, where the politicians promise their manifestos and the votes are the reward for that. In this administration of politics, there is diversity caused by the political parties. Behind the set-up of this administration, the society is being diverse for political purposes. Political polarization causes policy deficits, hinders policy making, and obscures governance, according to policymakers (Weber, T. J., Hydock, C., Ding, W., Gardner, M., Jacob, P., Mandel, N., Sprott, D. E., & Van Steenburg, E., 2021). The game of this politicians is being played based on the diversity of the people. This diversity will be turned turn as a strength for the partisan to move their agenda.

In political science, there is not a solid meaning for political polarization because different scholars have different perceptions on this. According to Grechyna, political polarization defines the level of diversity toward political issues in a social spectrum and it might be changed according to the economic evolution. The reason behind this diversity might be a historical, social, or economic factor (Grechyna, D., 2016). In American context, polarization is often referred to the differed political ideologies such as liberalism and conservatism (Hare, C., & Poole, K. T., 2014). When the partisans get divided by different ideologies, it will impact a nation’s vision and governmental system through the ballot results. On the other perspective, European concept of political polarization has been categorized into two, which are ‘Left VS Right’ and ‘Ecology VS Industrial Growth’ (Lauber, V., 1983). The first category is more like the American context of ideologically divided community and the governance based on it. The second category states the

polarization during the industrial revolution, where the ecologists were opposed to the capitalists because they monopoly natural resources for money making. This led to polarize the social class and economic system, where the social stigma of businessmen and labours born. From another perspective, political polarization is being defines as the degree to which partisans oppose one another as an outside group (Iyengar, S., Sood, G., & Lelkes, Y., 2012). The authors defined this based on the partisans' behaviour from Democratic and Republican parties in America arguing by criticizing one another. According to Hetherington and Roush, characterising polarisation as the degree to which a person notices differences between the values and objectives of political rivals (Hetherington, M. J., & Roush, C. E., 2013). This is similar with the perception of Iyengar, as mentioned previously. In sum, polarization in political aspect has been divided mainly on the ideology and individual interests or beliefs which also could be factored from the historical and economic reasoning.

With the proviso, political polarization in Malaysia is being categorized into three elements, which are, ethnicity, religion, and ideology. This situation is challenging for a multiracial country like Malaysia because, the more it diverges, the more complicated it will become. A case study on political polarization in Southeast Asian countries sets up five themes to research the depth of this division. The themes are roots, trajectory, drivers, consequences, and remedial actions (Carothers, T., & O'Donohue, Andrew, 2020). Roots is about the historical reasonings that led to the polarization now. Trajectory explains when and how this recent stage of polarization started and how intense it got as time passes. It highlights the range of diversion and the socio-political demonstration. Next is drivers, the factors that cause polarization, such as, political authority, economic changes, and media influence. This part analyses whether the primer cause behind this issue is just the prejudiced community or the society itself has been designed this way. Following that, consequences can be counted as one of the important themes since it is about the political and social

impacts of polarization. It also explains the social conflicts and its effect on political system. Lastly, remedial actions come up with the solutions and suggestions for the issues the polarization causes. The challenges of how if it could not be fixed also being discussed under this theme. Using these five themes, ease the understanding of the background of political polarization said, the authors.

2.2) Polarized community in racial and religious basis

Multiracial countries are usually being idealized as the icons of unity and Malaysia is one among them but, we cannot promise that it will be a good thing all the time. According to the statistics by Department of Statistics of Malaysia on citizen's population by ethnic group, the total population of Malaysia in year 2019 is 29.7 million people. Bumiputera holds the highest percentage of 69.3, Chinese as the second highest by being 22.8%, Indians at 6.8% and the others are 1% of the total population. Malays as the majority, under the roof of Bumiputera community is the dominant community (Department of Statistic, 2020). This dominancy is not just in population but also in other every sector such as, political power, economic status, education sector and many more by giving prioritize for them. Based on Article 153(1) under the Federal Constitution of Malaysia states, the YDPA is accountable for securing the special positions of the Malays and natives of Sabah and Sarawak under Bumiputera term. The term Bumiputera defines 'the people of the land', which means these people are originated to this land and they are the countries priority. Following that, Article 153(2) highlights the Bumiputera community are privileged and should be given special facilities and positions in public service, scholarships, exhibitions and educational or training opportunities (Laws of Malaysia, Federal Constitution, 1957). Meanwhile, the other two main ethnicities, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia do voice out for their equal rights in this country. These other two ethnicities have the historical background of migrating here

even before British's rule as traders during Malacca Sultanate era. The Chinese were serving the Malayan economic at most during British Malaya through tin mining sector (Zakaria, M. F., & Ibrahim, A., 2020).

Anagha A Kamble (2007) states, South Indians from the Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam communities migrated to Malaya as labourers in the second half of the 19th century. The British brought them there to work on plantations, roads, railways, and ports. Sikhs and Punjabis from North India were working in the security and police services at the same time. The role and contribution of the Indians in the construction of Malaya have merited recognition, sometimes lavish (Kamble, A. A., 2007). The average annual GDP growth of rubber exportation is 8.5% early 19th century, and it was one of the very important sectors that contributed to the country's economic development, driven by Indian community (T. G. Ramamurthy., 1989).

According to Tan Chee-Beng (1997), Chinese Malaysians have a variety of perspectives on nation-building due to their varied social behaviours and conceptions of their Chinese cultures. Chinese-educated people, particularly Chinese cultural conservatives, are extremely worried regarding Chinese education. This is because they believe it as an essential for preserving the origin of Chinese identity. A source states, the country's economy formerly benefited greatly from the tin mining industry with the contribution of Malaysian Chinese community. Malaysia produced over 63,000 tonnes in 1979, which was 31% of the global total. It hired more than 40,000 people and was the top manufacturer in worldwide (Mooi, L. S., & Khean, H. L., 2007).

The privileged Malay people concerned about losing their special position within the Malay union when Chinese and Indian residents were granted equal treatment as a result. Following these occurrences, UMNO was founded in May 1946 to advocate for Malay

benefits and rights (Kumar, P., 2012). This is how the Malaysians were racially polarized even before the nation's independence. As this issue being continued for decades and now, it affects the Malaysian educational system, especially the higher education. The race-based selection process used in the students' recruitment quota for higher education, which is set at 90% Bumiputeras and 10% non-Bumiputeras, has constantly raised questions. The enormous ratio disparity is seen as discriminatory and further limits accessibility options for the most underprivileged students (Muhamad Nasir, N. A., Yaacob, N. H., Mohd Nor, Noraini, & Ab Rashid, R., 2021). Although the most of the non- Bumiputera people respect and understand the Article 153 of Malaysian Constitution, they express their view on educational limitations based on racial factor and not the quality or results of their public examinations like SPM and STPM. This is a form of racial discrimination too because as per Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to education" (UN General Assembly, 1948).

When it comes to religion in Malaysia, it does not make many differences with the racial polarization that has been discussed in this paper earlier. As per quoted in the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, "Malay means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language". In this case, Malays will be counted as Muslims by birth in Malaysia. Following the race riots in May 1969, a group of Malay-centric Young Turks in the dominant Malay party UMNO led to a political downturn, pressuring Tunku Abdul Rahman to step down in 1970 and be overtaken by Tun Abdul Razak Hussein. This new leadership manages the implementation of an ethnically constructive economic strategy aimed at creating positive discrimination against the nation's Bumiputeras (People of the Land) as outlined in the constitution. Besides the New Economic Policy (NEP), a less-discussed National Cultural Policy (Dasar Kebangsaan Nasional), was also initiated. The goal of this policy was to foster a dominant national identity (Hunter, M., 2021). The term

‘Ketuanan Melayu’ (Malay Supremacy) leads to discrimination towards the minorities and weakens the nation’s politics through conservative Malay-centric ideology. This ‘Ketuanan Melayu’ is being applied everywhere, such as, education, public service, job offers, and welfare allocation.

This racial tension will be expressed every year after the declaration of budget. According to the News Straits Times, 2023 Budget allots RM1.5 billion for the maintenance and improvement of Islamic religious matters. Meanwhile, only RM345 million for the Chinese and Indian communities in total, so they must utilize them for all the cultural, religious, educational, and other welfares. The chairman of DAP, Lim Guan Eng raised question on this to the Prime Minister Ismail Sabri for the unfairness of allocating just 3% of Bumiputera’s portion to the Chinese and Indian community. He stated, even the Malay economists do remark this imbalance on 2023 Budget has been planned in racial and religious basis (FMT, 2022).

2.3) Ideologically polarized Malaysian community

Following the previous issues, Malaysians are also divided in racial, and religion driven parties’ ideologies which has been a barrier for the country’s development for the past six decades. The simplest way to describe Malaysia's electoral system from the time of its independence in 1957 until February 2008 is "electoral authoritarianism" (Schedler, A., 2006). The coalition of BN as the oldest and strongest in Malaysian political history, conducts the three major ethnocentric parties, UMNO, Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). They were ruling this nation ever since the independence until the previous election on 2018 and recently during Ismail Sabri’s cabinet from August 2021 until November 2022 along with PN. This multiracially connected

coalition's motto is to serve the people under the racial based politics. UMNO focuses on Malay, MCA for Chinese and MIC for Indian communities' development respectively but they do work together on it.

Following that, as an Islamic country, some of the leaders do feel that the country should be functioned by following the guidance of Islam studies. Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) is completely on the fundamental ideology of creating a much more Islamic Malaysia was unmatched among non-Malaysians. On another phase, DAP being misled as a Chinese party that spreads communism among some of the strong PAS and UMNO supporters. According to the party's official website, among the objectives of DAP are, to advance and broaden democratic at all stages, with a focus on bringing back elections that adhere to the ideals of a free, impartial, and independent democratic system (1), to promote economic growth and equal opportunity for all (2), and to combat any type of discrimination based on a person's gender, ability, age, colour, or religion (3).

With this ideology, DAP collided with of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and they formed PH along with AMANAH and MUDA now. Unlike PAS and UMNO, AMANAH provides a Maqasid Shari'ah approach in contrast to the traditional Islamic orders, which centres around the enforcement of moral precepts and strengthening of Islamic law (Malik, M., 2017). This party's vision is to follow political Islam is different approach with ideals like social justice, sound government, and racial harmony are highlighted by this idea. This different viewpoint of political Islam has been accepted by some non- Muslims too, where they do not label AMANAH as a pro-Islam party.

On GE-15, six coalitions were elected and the main three were the target among the people, which are, PH, BN and PN. PN is a recently formed coalition of BERSATU, PAS, Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (GERAKAN), Parti Solidariti Tanah Airku (STAR) and

Parti Maju Sabah (SAPP) in early 2020. This election was very challenging and manipulative than the previous ones because of the heavy competition. The results of a survey done by the Merdeka Centre showed that PN attracts the Malay community more than BN now. “Voter sentiment was characterised by the idea that PN was a much ‘cleaner and uncorrupted’ substitute to BN, which stood up for the rights and expectations of Malays” said, Ibrahim Suffian, the program director of Merdeka Center (Azhar, D., 2022). PN used TikTok as a strategy to gain the Malay votes as the majority to win this election through Malay and Islamic sentiments. Since TikTok videos are frequently quite candid and straightforward, they appear as authentic. That is the appeal of TikTok, which PN has been able to capitalise on. (Ragu, D., 2022). The recent posts on TikTok regarding 13th May 1969 riot and racial hatred towards the non-Malays and PH government reflects misled ideology of PN on Malay community.

Apart from PN, some of the DAP leaders also have triggered ‘Islamophobia’ warnings during their campaigning. Nga Kor Ming, the vice chairman of DAP stated, Malaysia might end up like how Taliban captured Afghanistan, if PN wins the election. He added, PAS might put extremist policies that will affect by upsetting the multiculturalism of Malaysia and the foreign investors would not be investing here anymore (NST, 2022). Although his talk on the impacts is logical and acceptable, it is not right to deliver an open statement like that because it makes people to fear on the religion directly. Conflicts on holding different ideologies based on ethno-religious factor divides the Malaysians easily and that is why the results of GE-15 ended up on 5 days of ‘hung parliament’. Last time, it was easier to discover BN as the right-wing and PH as the left-wing but, since there are more coalitions on the track, it is confusing to understand the current Malaysian politics. The ‘hung parliament’ is the results for the conflicting political scenario on the GE-15.

PH as the leading coalition with 85 seats along with Warisan won in a hopeless number of seats because, it needs 112 seats in total to form a government with simple majority. This was a golden opportunity for PN with 73 seats to beat PH's record. Meanwhile, BN as the third highest coalition with 30 seats were opened to join any of these two leading coalitions at first. After negotiating, BN decided to back a unity government that was not headed by PN, according to UMNO's Supreme Council. With more than 140 MPs under PH-led unity government, Anwar stated there is no problem with the stability for now (Chua, S., 2022). The outcome of this unity government with different political ideology is soon to be known since, this is the first time of this formation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1) Qualitative Method

Qualitative methods have both inherent and instrumental value, and they have the possibility of making a significant contribution to the creation of purposeful "quantities." When one develops the ability to quantify some phenomena, such as historical facts, they have already changed or vanished (Sofaer S. 1999). For this method, small, purposefully chosen samples that are chosen based on significant priority. Data collection techniques for qualitative method usually require close interaction between the researcher and research participants, are engaging and structural, and enable the exploration of newly emerging issues so that, the findings will be in-depth, comprehensive, and information-rich data (Moriarty, J. 2011). After the dialogic or textual turn in the social sciences, the predominance of oral approaches in qualitative research is understandable. However, a recent key trend is a gradual shift from interpreting texts and toward viewing them as active participants (Crang, M., 2003).

This research is to examine the factors of political polarization in Malaysia during the 15th General Election and to discuss the impacts cause by political polarization to the society and the country's development.

The responses that make up usual questionnaires or tests attempt to categorise people's perspectives or institutional events into deterministic, standardised categories, but this is not the case here (Patton, M. Q., 1982). By conducting this research in qualitative method, the opinion, and perspectives on polarization in Malaysia from political aspect and how it affected before and after this 15th General Election from politically active professionals can be collected. Interviewing them can help this research to get in-depth information on how political division affects the Malaysians and the country's development.

That being the case, qualitative research method is the suitable for this study to get to know more data through interviews with professionals as Malaysian voters and politically involved intellectuals. This will help this research to analyse this topic on different perspectives about political polarization in Malaysia and the politics behind the recent general election on how the polarization affected it.

3.1.1) Qualitative Research Design

The central focus of phenomenology is on how people construct meaning for themselves as the fundamental aspect of the experience. A phenomenological study's main goal is to understand and define the respondents' innermost thoughts as they process a shared experience. An explanation of the phenomenon's principle is the result of a phenomenological investigation (Patton, M. Q., 2002). By conducting phenomenological study, we can track the evolution of change processes. It aids in decoding people's intentions easily since it is based on people's experience. As the outcome, the assembled information will be appeared to be natural unlike, artificial like quantitative research (Easterby-Smith, M, Thorpe, R. & Jackson, P., 2008).

A sample size of between six and ten would be suitable for phenomenological studies. (Kumar, S., Kumar, R. S., & Prabhu, M. G. N., 2020). In that case, six informants from three different political backgrounds will be interviewed in this research. So that, this research will be covering multiple viewpoints of political polarization in Malaysia thoroughly.

The goal of the semi-structured interview is to elicit subjective perceptions from respondents about a specific phenomenon they have encountered. Comparing participant responses to each item is how the semi-structured interview is distinguished analytically.

The similar questions are posed to each participant in the same arrange, resulting in reliable data that can be measured and altered (McIntosh, M. J., & Morse, J. M., 2015).

3.2) Data Collection Method

Intensive one-on-one interviews are conducted with a small number of respondents using the qualitative research technique known as "in-depth interviewing" to better understand their perspectives on a given concept, plan, or circumstance (Boyce, C., & Neale, P., 2006). It becomes a semi-structured interview if the interviewer has a set of recommendations or topics to cover rather than specific questions. In this kind of interview, there is no set order that must be followed. As the conversation progresses, new questions continue to be raised about a particular topic (Showkat, N., & Parveen, H., 2017). The aim of this study is to examine the factors of political polarization in Malaysia during the 15th General Election and to discuss the impacts cause by political polarization to the society and the country's development.

By interviewing deeply about this topic, valid data can be collected from the respondents. The data collection will be started from the mid of February to end of April 2022. A lot of thought is given to informed consent. Its particular importance in interview research is attributed to the privacy and confidentiality concerns (Allmark, P., Boote, J., Chambers, E., Clarke, A., McDonnell, A., Thompson, A., & Tod, A. M., 2009). To keep the interviewees comfortable, the ethical principles of interview protocol will be explained earlier to make sure with their consent and the privacy is protected. The responses that were recorded during the interview session were used to analyse the data.

3.3) Sampling Design

In qualitative studies, most research questions result in either within-case analyses or cross-case analyses. Within-case analyses, as defined by Miles and Huberman (1994), involve examining, justifying, and interpreting data that shed light on "phenomena in a bounded context that make up a single 'case,' whether that case is an individual in a setting, a small group, or a larger unit such as a department, organisation, or community" (Miles, M., & Huberman, A. M., 1994).

To conduct this research, the researcher will be approaching informants will be Malaysians who have been witnessing political polarization in Malaysia and have voting rights in the 15th General Election. The selected sample represent the population to support this research that able to provide data. In total, this research will be acquiring 6 informants to be sampling elements which will be divided based on the races to represent the three main races of Malaysia, which is Malay, Chinese and Indian communities. Two respondents from each race will be participated in this interview. Selecting samples from different background of political interest would lead to significant differences in their perspectives on Malaysian politics during GE-15 and their viewpoints on political polarization in this country. By recording the differed perceptions from the informants on this topic, this research will be analysing the effects on the electoral result of GE-15.

3.3.1) Sampling Techniques

According to Kelly, it is "used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information" to use purposeful sampling (Kelly. S., 2010). Purposive sampling techniques steer clear of random sampling and ensure that types of cases of people who might be included are also included in the research study's final sample. The rationale

behind using a purposive method is based on the presumption that given the goals and objectives of the study, certain types of people may have unique and significant opinions about the theories and problems under consideration, necessitating their inclusion in the sample (Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., & Walker, K., 2020).

A non-representative subset of a larger population known as a "purposeful sample" is one that has been created to meet a very specific need or objective (Rai, N., & Thapa, B., 2015). Thus, purposive sampling accommodates this research to collect data from various perspectives from the informants representing the view of Malaysians with political understanding during the GE-15. For this research, the samples are Malaysians who have voted before and have basic political knowledge about this country, especially regarding the latest general election in 2022 and the political polarization in Malaysia. The selected informants are chosen upon their interest and difference in the races. Two respondents from each of the major Malaysian ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) will be interviewed for this research so, data from different aspects will be collected.

3.3.2) Sampling Size

The number of participants or observations included in a study is referred to as the sample size. Two statistical properties are influenced by the sample size. Firstly, the accuracy of our estimates and following that is the ability to define conclusions from the study. (Dickie, Caroline, Dubey, A., & Kiff, P., 2008). According to Kadam and Bhalerao (2010), studying more people than is necessary will expose more people to the risk of the intervention, which is also ethically wrong. We also waste vital resources, such as the time of the researchers.

To avoid this issue, there will be 6 informants from 3 different races will be interviewed as the samples of this research. The selected informants will be Malays, Chinese, and Indian citizens who have voted on GE-15. Each of the categories will be having 2 informants, so different opinions from the Malaysian citizens from different races who had voted on the recent election on November 2022 will be recorded for this research. Although the number of the informants is limited yet, it is fine to analyse and carry on with this research to structure and plan the one-to-one interview sessions as an individual project. Additionally, it gives enough time to effectively transcribe and record the vital information.

3.3.3) Sampling Criteria

This study is focused on the Malaysians with political interest from different racial backgrounds. As everyone have different perspectives and ideologies on politics, the respondents will be asked about the GE-15 and the post-election events as the voters. The following requirements must be met in order for our informants to be eligible for our interview session:

- Informants should be Malaysians.
- Informants should have been voted during the 15th General Election of Malaysia.

These criteria were implemented to accomplish the objectives, which are is to examine the factors of political polarization in Malaysia during the 15th General Election and to discuss the impacts cause by political polarization to the society and the country's development.

3.4) Interview Protocol

POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND MALAYSIA'S 2022 GENERAL

ELECTION:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Time of interview:

Date:

Venue:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Questions:

Section A: Demographic and general questions on GE-15

1. What is your age?
2. Are you a first-time voter of GE-15?
3. Where are you living? Urban or rural area?
4. Under which parliamentary area did you vote?
5. What is your opinion on politics before and after GE-15?

Section B: Polarization in GE-15

1. Based on your knowledge, what is political polarization to you?
2. Do you think, political polarization is an issue for a multi-cultural country like Malaysia? Justify your answer?
3. What is your view on multiple coalitions during this general election in 2022?
4. Do you think the polarization among Malaysians impacted the GE-15's results?

5. In your opinion, do you think that unity government can fix the polarized Malaysian community?

Section C: Social Change

1. How do you view the impact of political polarization on the development of Malaysia now and in the future?
2. Is there any possibility to turn this political diversity into a positive way? If yes, how?
3. Do you think the government play an important role in maintaining the political polarization in Malaysia?

(Thank you for participating in this interview session. All information retrieved and private and confidential, to be used only for research purposes.)

3.4.1) Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR) Framework

Researchers can understand participants' experiences, how they are described, and the meaning that participants assign to those experiences through interviews, which provide rich and detailed qualitative data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), organizing an interview protocol to foster an inquiry-based conversation, getting the protocol reviewed by others, piloting it, and ensuring that interview questions correspond with the study's research questions make up IPR's four phases.

Researchers can improve the quality of the data they collect from research interviews by making interview protocols more reliable. Structured or semi-structured interviews can be improved the most using the IPR framework. The creation of non-

structured interview guides, however, that include discussion topics or a condensed list of general questions to help the conversation along, may also be supported by the IPR framework (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

To support this point, the questionnaires for the interview sessions were based on the research questions of this study, which are, what cause political polarization on GE-15 (1), and how might the political polarization impact the future of Malaysia in both social contract and development (2) with the guide of IPR framework. Section A, Section B, and Section C of the interview questions are categorized based on the research questions regarding GE-15 and political polarization in Malaysia respectively.

3.4.2) Type of Interview Questions

For this research, semi-structured question is the only method that has been conducted to collect the data from the informants. According to Alison Doyle (2022), The semi-structured interview format promotes dialogue on both sides. Questions can be asked by both the interviewer and the candidate, allowing for a thorough discussion of important subjects. The candidate might feel more at ease discussing strategies and experiences that will highlight the qualities that make them a good fit for the position because of the conversational tone (Doyle. A., 2022).

All the interview questions were standardised and well-researched to guarantee a coherent method of examining details and a wider coverage of opinions. Although the interview itself is formal, the use of semi-structured questions helped by eliciting detailed information about the questions in a more conversational manner rather than through formalities. Additionally, it made switching between questions easier and allowed the

interviewer to understand the interviewee's responses in greater detail. As a result, the interviewer was able to infer the importance of the study from the informant's viewpoint.

Semi-structured questions were used in this study for another reason: they work best when you only have one opportunity to conduct an interview with a subject. However, during the interview, the interviewee can provide the interviewer with trustworthy information and opinions, allowing for the collection of more trustworthy qualitative data.

The interviews for this research are conducted to completely about GE-15 and political polarization in Malaysia. All the interviewees will be asked the similar questions as been prepared as only one set. The informants are welcomed to share their viewpoints and any additional information on this topic.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS & FINDING

4.1) Introduction

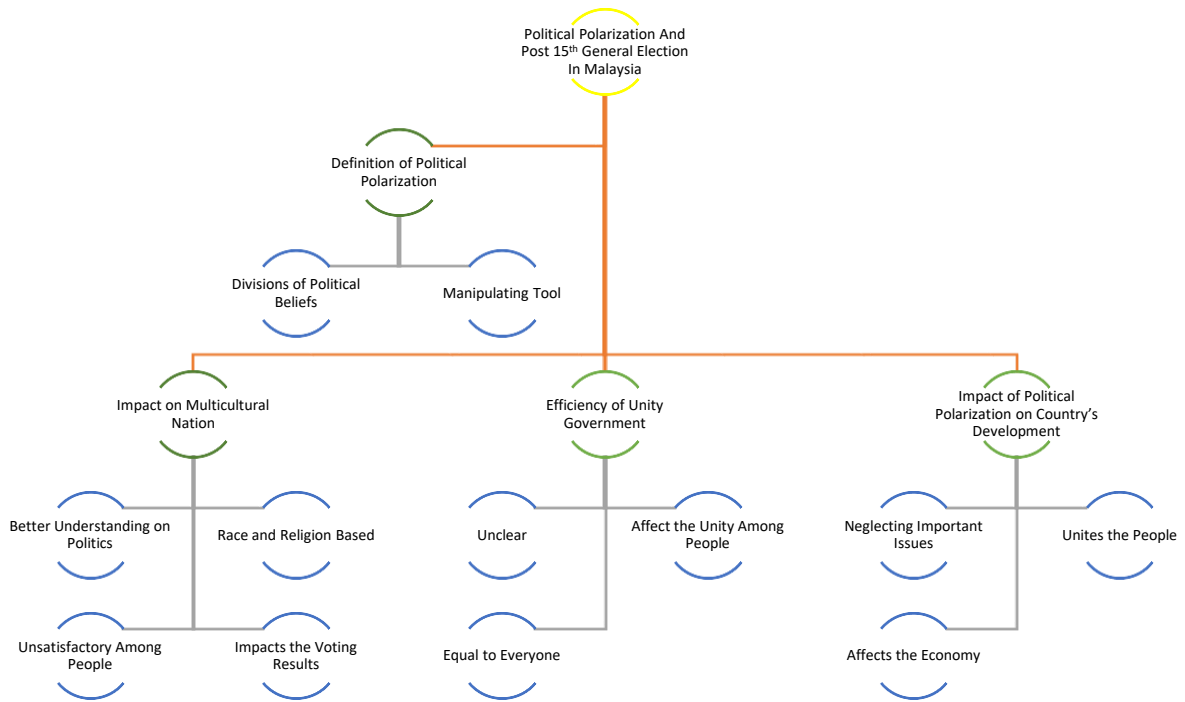


Figure 4.1.1 Political Polarization and Post 15th General Election in Malaysia

This study investigates two research questions. First, finding the causes of political polarization on GE-15. Secondly, to discuss how the political polarization impact the future of Malaysia in both social contract and development. The results of the finding obtained by interviewing 6 informants from different races and religions of Malaysia who have the voting rights in GE-15 in 2022. The results of this study rely on a set of interview questions on Malaysian politics before and after GE-15 and their political understandings of Malaysia from their respective racial viewpoints which linked to the political polarization in the local politics.

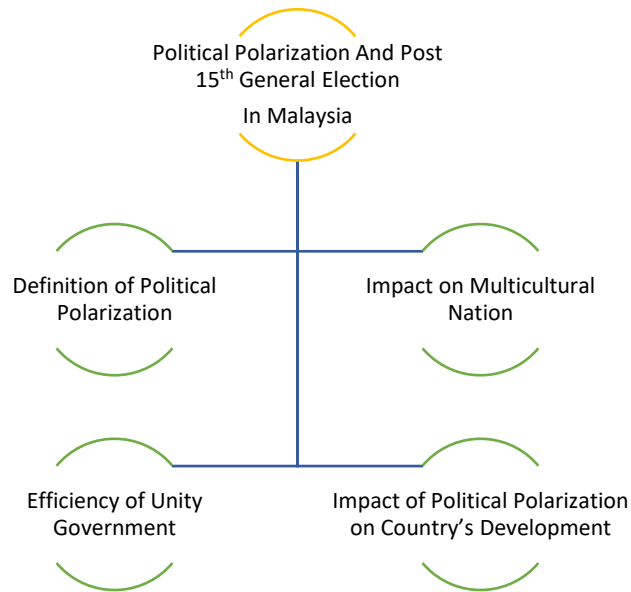


Figure 4.1.2 Political Polarization and Post 15th General Election in Malaysia

Based on the data analysis, there are four main themes which explained the political polarization and the post 15th general election in Malaysia, which are, **Definition of political polarization, impact on multicultural nation, efficiency of unity government, and impact on political polarization on country's development.** These four main themes have provided an in-depth understanding on the impact of political polarization in the country and the efficiency of newly formed, unity government. It also provides researchers ample information regarding the impact of political polarization on voter's decision making on the GE-15 and how it might impact on the country's future.

4.2) Definition of Political Polarization

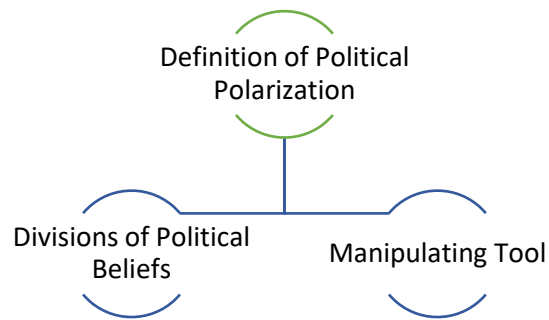


Figure 4.2 Definition of Political Polarization

Definition of political polarization can be explained through two nodes that has been identified in the figure above which are **divisions of political beliefs and manipulating tool.**

4.2.1) Divisions of Political Beliefs

Almost all the informants, except Informant 2 have the similar viewpoint on political polarization as a division of political beliefs. They find it as a thing that divides the people based on different ideologies on politics. This is evident in the following transcript:

Informant 1:

“Political polarization is the sharp division of political beliefs and ideologies within a society, leading to extreme and distinct positions on various issues. Requires promoting understanding, open dialogue, and constructive debate among citizens with diverse viewpoints”.

Informant 3:

“I think it is divergence of political attitudes to ideological extremes. It might be based on racial, religious sentiments that make the voters to support for the party that “protects” their rights and culture. That is how political polarization works in Malaysia”.

Informant 4:

“Political polarization makes political opinions, values, and viewpoints within a society more divergent and divided, which promotes pluralism among a country”.

Informant 5:

“I find political polarization as a term that says the people of a country being divided with different political viewpoints. They could be right-wing or left-wing, but it is dependent on how the political parties inject their ideologies to the people and divide them according to their different thoughts on politics”.

Informant 6:

“I think political polarization is where different political views and ideologies from different parties. For example, America has republican and democrats while Malaysia has different political parties with their own ideas and views”.

4.2.2) Manipulating Tool

Meanwhile, Informant 2 finds political polarization as a manipulating tool used by politicians to attract supporters and gain votes. The evidence is shown below:

Informant 2:

“In my opinion, I believe that political polarization is a tool used by politicians to manipulate people, and it is necessary. They (politicians) just want to grab some

votes, so they use some racial and religious sentiments to manipulate the people by overshadowing the actual national issues like economics and social problems. It is a benefit for them when they divide people by manipulating this way”.

4.3) Impacts on Multicultural Nation

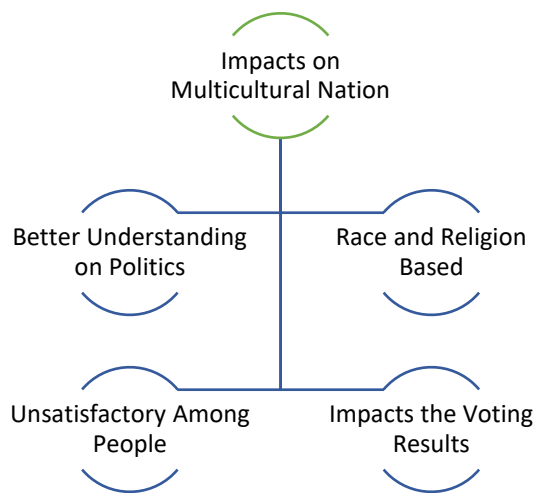


Figure 4.3 Impacts on Multicultural Nation

The practice of political polarization in a multicultural country like Malaysia impacts in various ways such as, **causing problems, giving better understanding on politics, practising race and religion-based politics, creating unsatisfactory among people, and impacting the voting results.**

4.3.1) Better Understanding on Politics

Somehow, political polarization makes people to understand politics better by differentiating their ideas among one another. Informant 2 opines this helps the people on decision making when it comes to voting as well as they also learn the errors made in politics. This is shown in the following transcript:

Informant 2:

“Political polarization helps people to think to take right decision. Okay, what if there are more than 2 parties, people start to think out of the box, which creates more ideology people and more wise thinking people throughout the country. Slowly helps people to understand political error”.

4.3.2) Race and Religion Based

As a multicultural country, Malaysia has been encountering racial and religious based politics, say the informants. Based on the interviews, the informants find racial and religious influence in politics as a negative impact. Informant 1 finds that this influence will overshadow the important issues which should be solved and creates unnecessary tension among the people of this multiracial country. Informant 3 understands that it leads to conquering certain regions based on racial support given by the public with the politicians’ influence on their campaigns. Informant 6 mentions that too many racial or religion-based parties with similar concept, but with minor differences confuse people as it widens up the options. This is portrayed in the transcript below:

Informant 1:

“Political polarization can be an issue when the leaders be more focused on their own ideologies and party interests that can lead to neglect of certain communities needs and exacerbate social tensions. In a multicultural country like Malaysia, political polarization can be problematic as it intensifies social divisions and hinders effective governance. Different ethnic and religious groups may align themselves with specific political parties or ideologies, leading to an "us versus them" mentality and increased tension between communities”.

Informant 3:

“Malaysia is a home for Malays, Chinese, Indians, and other ethnic groups, each has own cultural and religious backgrounds. These differences can lead to varying perspectives on social, economic, and political issues, which may contribute to political polarization as the politicians stress it so much in their campaigns. For an example, we know that some regions like Penang and Kelantan have been showing strong supports based on racial supports, despite voting based on the development and potential of the candidates”.

Informant 6:

“A lot of political parties are divided based on religion and seniority. Most of their views and ideas are generally same so if there’s a lot to choose for people, they generally be confused”.

4.3.3) Unsatisfactory Among People

An informant feels that political polarization in a multicultural country creates unsatisfactory feelings among the people. Informant 4 understands that political polarization may marginalize certain groups, making it difficult to address citizens' needs. The evidence is as below:

Informant 4:

“It (political polarization) may lead to the marginalization of certain groups or communities, making it difficult to address the needs and concerns of all citizens due to racial based treatment”.

4.3.4) Impacts the Voting Results

Political polarization in a multiracial country impacts the elections' voting results due to more choices of parties and coalitions. Informant 1 opines that political parties effectively appeal to undecided voters by addressing a broad range of issues, influencing the results of GE-15. Informant 5 feels that small support parties caused votes split in elections, making it difficult for major coalitions to win, causing delays in results. While others gain from voting for different parties, people chose unsuitable candidates, which had an impact on daily life and did not enhance it, mentions Informant 6. This is portrayed in the transcript below:

Informant 1:

“When voters hold diverse views and priorities, political parties and candidates have addressed a broad range of issues to appeal to different segments of the electorate. This did impact the results of GE-15 by PH when they successfully mobilizing their supporters and persuading undecided voters with different perceptions”.

Informant 5:

“This differed political ideas from 6 different coalitions made a huge impact by opening the race to many other small parties like PEJUANG, GPS and GRS by forming their very own as coalitions. This “pecah vote” (splitting votes) thing happened by these parties with small support and the newly formed PN made the election hard for parties like PH and BN with major supports. This is why we had delay on knowing the results with minor changes in the parliament seat counts between the major coalitions”.

Informant 6:

“People missed to see the right candidate for them and voted for the wrong ones and the impact can be seen on daily life. I didn’t see any improvement in my place while other people who are under different parties get a lot of benefits”.

4.4) Efficiency of Unity Government

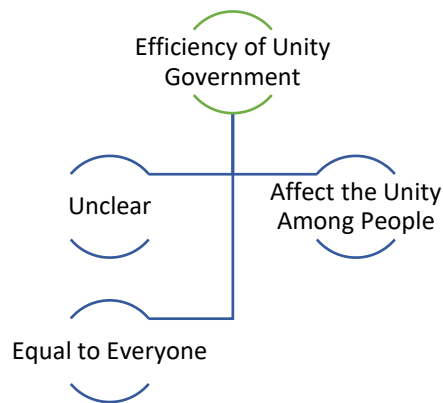


Figure 4.4 Efficiency of Unity Government

Based on the interviews carried out for this research, the efficiency of the newly formed unity government has been divided into three categories, which are **unclear**, **affect the unity among people** and **being equal to everyone**.

4.4.1) Unclear

According to some informants, the post GE-15 government seemed unclear. Informant 1 says that coalitions and leaders can cooperate to accomplish shared objectives, but dealing with polarised governments, particularly in Malaysia, remains challenging. Meanwhile, Informant 5 understands that the unity government in Malaysia represents diverse cultures and morals, but management and adjustments

remain unclear among members of the government itself. This is shown in the transcript below:

Informant 1:

“It is possible if the coalitions or leaders be willing to set aside their ideological differences and work together towards common goals, but from my point of view, it is still complex to solve the polarized by government especially Malaysia”.

Informant 5:

“The term “unity government” sounds great as if it represents the unity among Malaysians and our varied cultures and morals but, even among the unity government they are still managing and adjusting certain things among themselves, which remains unclear”.

4.4.2) Affect the Unity Among People

Based on the interviews, the informants feel the unity government affects the unity among the Malaysians. Informant 2 feels, while the equality may result from a unity administration, Malaysians may no longer be united, which might lead to unrest and polarization. This has been supported by Informant 5. Due to the racist comments from some political leaders, Malaysians face polarization following the GE-15, which lead to conflict, and these problems cannot be solved by the unity government, says Informant 5. This is displayed in the transcript below:

Informant 2:

“Don’t you think, the unity government can bring new trouble and more polarized Malaysian community? And yeah, it will bring equality for all Malaysian, and I agree to that. But unity among people will be lost”.

Informant 5:

“For me, I think this just make it more polarized then before to function unequally in a multiracial country. At the other hand, Former Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohammed’s recent racist and religious remarks on social media and PAS’ religious statements just making it worse by triggering the political and racial tension among the public, which might make the Malaysians to stay divided, as the unity government could not solve these issues”.

4.4.3) Equal to Everyone

Meanwhile, some informants hope the unity government will treat every citizen equally. Informant 3 states that rebuilding trust and encouraging collaboration and national common good are three benefits of unity government. Informant 6 mentions it will have an effect when the same government performs the task, and the unity government will also be just for everyone to receive the same advantages as everyone else. This is portrayed in the transcript below:

Informant 3:

“A unity government can help to rebuild trust among different communities and demonstrate a commitment to working together for the common good of the nation”.

Informant 6:

“I think yes because when the same government does the job it will be impactful. It will also be fair for every to get the same benefits as others”.

4.5) Impact of Political Polarization on Country’s Development

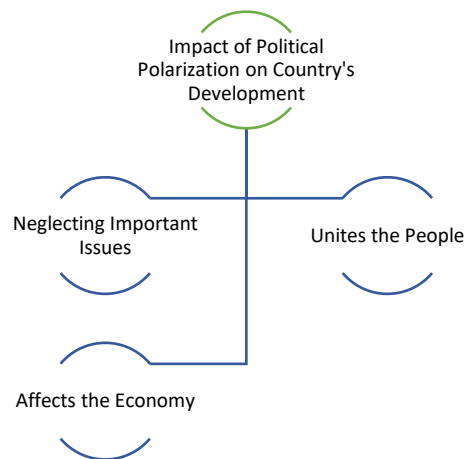


Figure 4.5 Impact of Political Polarization on Country’s Development

Political stability of a country does contribute to the nation’s development. In that case, the informants of this research say that the political polarization in Malaysia gives several impacts on the development of the country, which are, **neglecting important issues, uniting the people, and affecting the economy.**

4.5.1) Neglecting Important Issues

Being too focused on polarized political structure will be overshadowing the important issues of the country. Informant 1 finds this polarization has a detrimental effect on Malaysia's development by impeding agreement on social and economic reforms, weakening trust, and possibly igniting societal unrest that could impede economic

growth. Informant 5 opines that politicians should avoid overreacting to sensitive issues and instead concentrate on economic growth and pressing issues. Informant 6 adds that some people may feel this is unfair because they may gain from one party's majority while others do not as the lawmakers are not making good use of their power. The statements have been shown in transcript below:

Informant 1:

“Political polarization has several negative impacts on the development of Malaysia. It makes it difficult for the government to reach consensus on important issues, such as economic reforms and social policies. It also undermines trust in government institutions and leads to social unrest. If Malaysia is unable to address the issue, it could become a major obstacle to development such as reduced economic growth”.

Informant 5:

“The politicians should think about strengthening the economic growth without wasting their time by delivering triggering talks on 3Rs (Race, Religion, Royal) or LGBTQ kind of things way too much. It is disappointing to see that the MPs fighting over unnecessary topics in the Parliament instead of debating on useful things and real problems of the people, because we did not vote and make them represent us to talk about things that does not benefit the people”.

Informant 6:

“For now, it’s quite messed up but in future hopefully the parliament will do something to unify the parties. When we see Malaysian parliament live, it is always arguments and fights and some of the politicians are obviously seen as illiterate. It will be also unfair for some people where when one party that won

the majority in a place does a lot to the people while people who fall under governance of other party that does nothing for them because of the different ideologies of those parties”.

4.5.2) Unites the People

Informant 2 understands that political polarization promotes intelligent decision-making, which may lead to greater societal cohesion despite a unified government.

The transcript is as below:

Informant 2:

“Political polarization helps people to think wisely before vote for parties, and in future, maybe, even though there’s no unity among government, but there will be unity among people”.

4.5.3) Affects the Economy

The development of a country is mainly being measured based on the nation’s economic stability. In that point, some informants stated that this polarization affects the economic growth of the country. Informant 3 says, polarized political settings have an impact on economic stability in developing regions, resulting in tensions and potential budgetary difficulties as it is preventing regional inequities requires balancing development and equitable opportunity. Following that, Informant 4 finds this polarization might risk attracting investors to the country. Informant 5 understands that political polarization impedes a nation's growth by resulting in unequal access to economic assistance and educational opportunities. The informant

adds, the development of the multiracially united nation is hampered by poor and unstable politics, which also have an impact on the economy and currency exchange. The evidence is as below:

Informant 3:

“A polarized political environment can deter foreign investors and affect economic stability. Lack of consensus on economic policies may lead to reduce on investments, slower economic growth, and potential fiscal challenge. Ensuring balanced economic development across regions is vital to prevent regional disparities that could fuel tensions. Politicians should prioritize to uplift underdeveloped areas and provide equal opportunities for all citizens”.

Informant 4:

“I think it will impact the economic sector of Malaysia. Uncertainty and instability arising from political polarization can deter investments and economic growth”.

Informant 5:

“It (political polarization) becomes a barrier for the country’s development, I think. We say that we are multiracially united nation and still do fight for unequal treatment in education and economic supports. When the good talents flew out of the country due to poor and instable politics, it does affect our economy too through currency exchange. I find this political division and the following impacts of this are not giving a way to develop the country now and even in the future”.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this research had answered the two research questions. In this chapter, the findings will be discussed based on the method used. The first research question is to examine the factors of political polarization in Malaysia on 15th General Election and the second research question is to discuss the impacts cause by political polarization to the society and the country's development.

5.1) Political Polarization Conception

Based on the findings, the concept of political polarization understood by the informants as divisions of political beliefs and as a manipulating tool to gain votes. The ideas of "affective" and "ideological" polarisation are against one another. Beneficial versus detrimental polarisation subtypes develop without a clarification of their borders or values. The analytical connections between polarisation notions and their causal relevance for democratic politics, however, continue to be unclear (Schedler, 2023).

According to the informants' responds, the most preferred concept of political polarization is **divisions of political beliefs**. When the politicians promote the multiple ideologies and political beliefs, the people attract to it according to their beneficial and preferences. Other than ideology differences, the informants also feel that the political game is being operated based on racial and religious sentiments. According to Bridget Welsh, the conventional theories about race, religion, and modification are simpler to communicate than a clear policy programme, and inflaming unrest is easier than embracing Malaysia's diversity (Welsh, 2020). This is how some parties plays with racial and religious sentiments among the majorities

to gain majority of the votes. It does not matter if those parties are politically right, but they do have their targeted voters from certain race and religions to make them win in the election.

Other than that, political polarization also has been viewed as a manipulating tool. Based on the findings, political polarization has been carried out as a necessary thing to manipulate the people's mind to gain votes. Despite accusations of manipulative practises being widespread in political life, manipulation is still regarded as immoral. This has been supported by Chilton and Schaffner (2002), where it says, "a struggle for power between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it". The manipulation has been made to maintain the political power.

5.2) Impacts on Multicultural Nation

The word "impact" in this discussion, does not mean just the negative impacts but also some beneficial outcomes through diverse politics in a multicultural nation. One's personal political identity influences, among other things, how one feels about the nation's healthcare system, the economy, the safety, career satisfaction, natural environment and how they feel about their own personal situation (Newport, 2023). Based on the findings, the informants observed the impacts of political polarization in a multicultural nation like Malaysia are, **having better understanding on politics, operating race, and religion-based politics, creating unsatisfactory among people and impacting the voting results.**

Based on the findings from the informants, they claimed that political polarization helps the people to have **better understanding on politics.** Having more than two parties as options will help the people to think beyond, which brings

more ideologies to think wise, says the informants. This will make them to understand the political error and let them to think about what is right for the people and the nation. In multiparty, parliamentary systems, the creation of a government is crucial because it affects a political system's ability to reconcile or at least defuse conflicting social, political, and economic demands and to develop cohesive, sensible policies. Governments with a single-party majority are an exception to this rule (Luebbert, 1983). Somehow, the multiple coalition helps to solve national issues with parliamentary debates and to understand politics far better.

According to the informants, polarization impacts some political parties to be functioned in racial and religious based methods. Informants said that race and religion-based politics will be causing social tension among each other. Moreover, in a multiracial country, having varied political perspectives influenced by religions and races will affect to find solutions on social, economic, and political issues. Sentiment can have both good and bad effects. The impacts of racial conservatism may be exacerbated by sentiments of dread, worry, and anger, while they may be lessened by feelings of optimism, pride, and enthusiasm (Redlawsk, Tolbert, & McNeely, 2014). In other hand, having multiple parties with more similarities such as religious beliefs and political understandings but not being together due to some misunderstandings and past incidents will make the people confused to choose one party among them.

Following that, the informants find this polarization will cause unsatisfactory feelings among the people of the multicultural country. As we look back at the country's history, the 1969 riots gave the Malay community more confidence in their efforts to obtain benefits for Malays through different government measures, including the New Economic Policy, New Cultural Policy, and New Education

Policy. The riots not only made Malaysian society's cracks more obvious, but they also set the stage for future animosity between the various ethnic and religious groups (Kumar, 2012). The informants observed that polarized politics in a multicultural nation will be difficult when it comes to decision making for all the citizens because of racial based treatment.

The voting results will be impacted too when the people are given too many options of political perspectives. Ethnicity continues to be a major determinant of electoral outcome, according to the results of Malaysia's 15th general election, held on November 19, 2022. Even though racial issues were not the main emphasis of the election campaign, pre-election polls and voting trends indicate that Malaysian voters still tend to make their decisions based on ethnicity (Mohamad & Suffian, 2023). Based on the findings, informants finds that too many coalitions, which are six coalitions competing on the GE-15 in 2022 split the votes of the mainstream parties like PH and BN. The malapportionment, which means where one group has a lot of power than another was what happened in GE-15. This statement has supported by ISEAS, where it says, the percentage of votes a party received does not always correspond to the percentage of seats it ultimately wins in an election because of malapportionment. The incumbent has benefited for a very long time from malapportionment (Mohamad & Suffian, 2023).

5.3) Efficiency of Unity Government

For the first time in Malaysia's history of politics, unity government was formed as the outcome of the 15th general election's weak result. Unity government will be formed when the parties from opposing sides of the political spectrum can unite and establish a unity

administration. When no one group can secure a large enough majority to establish a government, a unity government, a special kind of power-sharing, is created (The Star, 2022). According to the findings of this study, the informants have opined about the efficiency of this unity government as unclear, affecting the unity among people and also as being equal to everyone at the meantime.

Based on the findings, the informants say that the concept of unity government is remained unclear. Since the unity government has been allied by parties from varied ideologies, it is complex for the government to work together towards common goals. The informants find that the current unity government is not a strong administration and still adjusting among themselves to govern better. As supporting this statement, ISEAS has stated that the unity government is made up of odd bedfellows with a long history of political hostility, and its constituent parties don't have many overtly comparable policies that could help them get along (Ostwald, 2023).

Although the term of “unity government” sounds optimistic, the informants say that it will be affecting the unity among the people as it makes the Malaysian community more divided than before. Since ethnocentric party like UMNO works together with reformative PH, it will be functioning unequally and more polarized in a multiracial country. According to ISEAS, its vulnerability is real, and occasionally unsettling headlines are unavoidable given its make-up, as in the recent "war of words" between party officials over issues in the UMNO-DAP "forced marriage" (Ostwald, 2023). While there are conflicts and instability within the unity government itself, it is quite an issue to sustain the unity among the people too.

Some informants say that the unity government has been treating everyone equally. They hope the unity government helps to rebuild trust among the various communities of

Malaysia. The unity government is trying to treat all the Malaysians in good way as well as trying to work together for the country's future despite functioning as an ethnocentric government. The revised Budget 2023 is the best evident to prove this. In order to achieve its three primary goals of promoting an inclusive and sustainable economy, restoring faith in institutions and governance, and reducing imbalance, the budget for 2023 focuses on 12 key measures (Malay Mail, 2023).

5.4) Impact of Political Polarization on Country's Development

A nation's development is very important and the foundation of that is a stable politics. Polarization in terms of income, race, or religious beliefs may not accurately reflect the underlying amount of political polarization if political ideas do not directly result from economic self-interest or group affiliation (Lindqvist & Östling, 2010). From the findings of this study, the impacts of political polarization on the country's development are **neglecting important issues, unites the people and affecting the economy.**

In the findings, the informants stated that political polarization impacts the country's development by neglecting important issues that should be solved. The polarization has been a barrier to the country's development as it makes the government difficult to identify which issue is important to be solved first, as there are too many problems. The informants also say that the quality of parliamentary debates has been weakened after the GE-15, as we can see there are unrelatable debates on LGBTQ and unnecessary talks attacking other parties instead of debate on important topics like economics, education and the rising cost of living in Malaysia.

Following that, the informants find political polarization will be aiding for the development on uniting the people. According to Ding Choo Ming, the security and national unity are intimately related, and national growth may determine whether it forms the foundation for everyone's continued prosperity. As a result, every citizen of Malaysia has a responsibility to contribute actively and positively to eliminating racial strife and fostering togetherness (Ding, 2005).

After all, the most important impact that political polarization has on the country's development is by affecting the economy. Malaysia has been struggling to recover from the massive pandemic hit which affected the livelihood and the country's economics in the midst of instable politics before the edge of endemic period in 2022. The informants opined that polarized political phenomenon deters foreign investors from investing in our country. To makes things right, the federal and state governments should be cooperating on balancing economic development in both urban and rural areas, making sure there is no region left behind and stay underdeveloped despite different political opinions. A study stated, businesses in the product market are at greater danger when political polarization is rooted in emotion and identity, or what political scientists refer to as affective political polarization. Political polarization causes bigger investment cuts when businesses lack the flexibility to make investments across state boundaries (Zhu, 2021).

5.5) Model of Factors and Impacts of Political Polarization

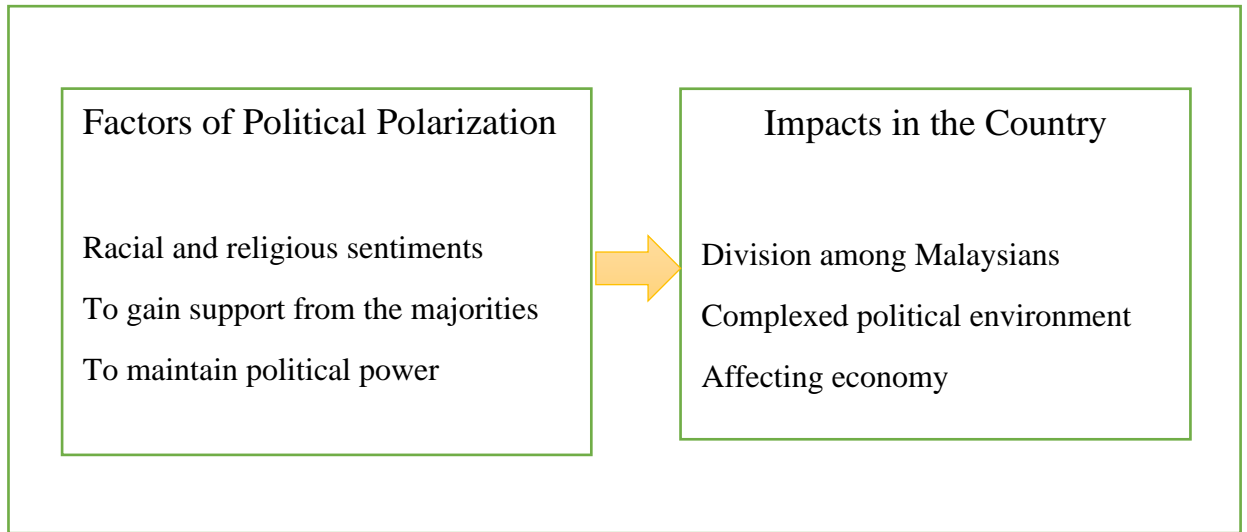


Diagram 5.5 Model of Factors and Impacts of Political Polarization

Political polarization in Malaysia has its own agendas to be achieved, meanwhile the impacts are not always good. This case study has been made based on the 15th general election in 2022 to explore the factors of political polarization during the latter election which brought a huge impact on Malaysian politics. Racial and religious sentiments, gaining support from the majority community, and sustaining political power are the key factors of the political polarization in Malaysia.

As the summarized output of this research, the model above shows the key factors of polarization being applied in Malaysian politics are because of racial and religious sentiments, to gain support from the majorities, and to maintain political power. The informants have shared their views and opinions on the polarization case in this research. However, the main impacts of political polarization that have been analyzed as common in this research are creating division among Malaysians,

resulting in a complex political environment, and most importantly affecting the economy.

As stated in the model above, racial and religious sentiments in politics will be creating an unnecessary chaos in the country which results in internal racism among each other that becomes a threat to Malaysia's harmony. The politicians who encourage political polarization to gain votes from the majorities are not aware that they are making a complexed political environment. Their desire to maintain the political power along with some political scandals such as, corruption and abuse of power also affects the economy of the country that becomes a barrier to the country's development.

This model displays how political polarization impacts a multicultural country like Malaysia, and it aims to be a guideline for the politicians to understand the implications of polarization better. By referring to this model, politicians will acknowledge what are the things that bring changes to the country through polarization. This model could guide the politicians to remind the seriousness of handling politics gently in multiple ethnics living nation.

This study has successfully interviewed 8 informants from different cultural backgrounds, who have voted on the GE-15. The finding of this research has been carried out from multiracial perspectives to understand how politics has been understood by Malaysians from different racial groups and to review their opinion on this polarized politics in the country. Additionally, this model will be useful for upcoming research on how to conduct research on related topics. This model can be used by researchers in the future to do further study on a related subject. When they are studying the same issue, they will grasp it more clearly.

As a result, anyone with a similar interest in becoming a politician or future researcher in the political science field may find this model to be a valuable reference.

5.6) Contribution

The results of this investigation have produced a few noteworthy contributions. The public and politicians benefit from both theoretical and practical contributions. Future leaders can use the model of the causes and effects of political polarization as a roadmap for improved leadership in conducting politics in a multicultural country and successfully bringing about social change for the society by studying it. For the advancement of the country and society, the body of knowledge surrounding political polarization can be increased by putting a theoretical focus on it. Following the study model, the aspect of political polarization can also be developed further, adding to the body of political science literature.

5.7) Limitation of Study

This study is not exempt from the constraints that plague all research articles. In this study, it is assumed that all informants were chosen based on their sincere reflection. By conducting the interviews, a variety of viewpoints and information from various sources and educational backgrounds were produced. There is no way to tell, though, if the informant was being truthful when providing this information. Instead of offering their own opinions, they can be offering information that is biased towards the study in order to fit the theme or information that was widely disseminated in the

public. The assumption and confidence in the informant's honesty is the only foundation upon which the conducted interviews can be translated into transcribed. As a result, it can have a detrimental effect on the findings' quality.

The second limitation of conducting this study is the context of discussion. Since the research is regarding the 15th general election held in November 2022, which has not even been a year yet, it was hard to find strong case studies and discussions to support some statements. The formation of unity government is still a new term being practised in Malaysian politics, so there was a limitation in finding valid points on this topic. This study also focuses on the impacts of unity government whereby the findings are just based on the government's way of handling the politics, economics and social issues based on this less than a year. In this case, the pre- and post-GE-15 setting was used to generate the conversation and not another context that would not be appropriate in other circumstances.

5.8) Suggestion of Future Research

It was discovered after performing this study that there are a few areas in which future researchers on related subjects might improve. The first recommendation is to produce a larger sample of data. Finding a few examples from various backgrounds or educational levels may not yield the most complete statistics because public opinion regarding political polarization and developments in the nation varies.

Next, it is suggested that scholars in the future develop a model that other leaders can use. This study places a lot of emphasis on the effects political polarization had on the 15th general election and the unity government that followed afterwards. It can be used by other scholars and leaders, although its applicability can be limited. The study's model may not always be appropriate for a

given circumstance or context. As a result, future academics can construct a general model for understanding the pros and cons of political polarization for other leaders using this model as a reference.

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APPENDIX I: FYP PROPOSAL FORM

FYP Student Name	ID: 20AAB06587	HP Number: 011-33985446
1. Maithilli A/P Kalaiselvan		

FYP TITLE

Political Polarization and Post 15th General Election in Malaysia

ABSTRACT

In Malaysian context, it has enough freedom in politics by following democratic system but the diversity in this multiracial country leads to polarized political structure in the aspects of race, religion, and ideologies. After witnessing what has happened in February 2020, the country has seen the damages caused by political disassembly through the 'Sheraton Move'. This paper will be discussing about the background of political diversion in Malaysia and the impacts it causes. The objectives of this research are to analyse the factors of political polarization in Malaysia (1) and to discuss the impacts it causes in the society and the country's development (2). The method will be used in this research paper is qualitative where, the findings will be based on interviews, document study and observation. At the end of this research, the current condition of Malaysian politics and suggestions to solve this polarization will be discussed based on the findings and analysis.

(If there is not enough space for your answers, please use a separate sheet of paper and attach it to this form).

Potential FYP Supervisor (Refer to Annex 111)








1. Mr Edwin Micheal A/L N. Muniandy
2. Mr Afi Roshezry bin Abu Bakar
3. Mr Chang Yi Chang

Received by:

FYP Coordinator : Mr Afi Roshezry bin Abu Bakar

Date : 14 October 2022

APPENDIX II: FYP MEETINGS WITH SUPERVISOR

FYP Student Name		ID: 20AAB06587	HP Number: 011-33985446
1. Maithilli A/P Kalaiselvan			
Date	Attended by	Progress	Signature
1.	Maithilli	FYP 2 discussion	
2.	Maithilli	Discussion on sample selection	
3.	Maithilli	Discussion on themes	
4.	Maithilli	Draft checking	
5.	Maithilli	Amendments on model	
6.	Maithilli	Draft checking	
7.	Maithilli	Finalized draft	

APPENDIX III: STUDENT DECLARATION FORM
Department of Journalism
Academic Honesty Regarding Final Year Projects

The following are examples of academic dishonesty extracted from “Student Handbook” that are more applicable to final year projects.

- plagiarism, i.e., the failure to properly acknowledge the use of another person’s work;
- submission for assessment of material that is not the student’s own work;
- collusion, i.e., obtaining assistance in doing work which is meant to be solely the student’s own work;
- use of fabricated data claimed to be obtained by experimental work, or data copied or obtained by unfair means;

It is important that the student reads the Student Handbook and understands the seriousness of academic dishonesty. The student should pay particular attention on how to avoid plagiarism.

Student Final Year Project Declaration

I have read the student handbook and I understand the meaning of academic dishonesty, in particular plagiarism and collusion. I declare that the work submitted for the final year project does not involve academic dishonesty. I give permission for my final year project work to be electronically scanned and if found to involve academic dishonesty, I am aware of the consequences as stated in the Student Handbook.

FYP Title:

POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND POST 15TH GENERAL ELECTION
IN MALAYSIA

Student Name:

Student ID:

MAITHILLI A/P KALAISELVAN

200AAB06587

Signature

Date:



20/09/2023