

Roles of Political Parties in a Heterogeneous Country, an Examination of Malaysia in the Aftermath of the 15th General Election

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Abstract

Political parties play a crucial role in the promotion of democracy, as the outcome of elections holds considerable importance. In pursuit of electoral victory, political parties resort to exploiting racial and religious emotions as a means of garnering public support. The Malaysian general elections in 2018 and 2022 resulted in the ascension of four distinct Prime Ministers and subsequent governmental transitions within a span of four years. Consequently, the prevailing trend of power struggles and internal conflicts has engendered a state of political instability. While the presence of political party dynamics can be seen as a positive indication of a thriving democracy, it may not be suitable for a developing and heterogeneous country like Malaysia. This is because it can result in governance delays, narrow-minded policies, and negative ethno-religious implications. Therefore, the objective of this article is to highlight and examine the role of political parties in a heterogeneous country. Using a qualitative methodology, the researcher has conducted an extensive review of the scholarly literature pertaining to the domains of politics and heterogeneity. Four themes emerged from the investigation, encompassing the roles of representation, socialisation, stability, and check and balance within a heterogeneous society. The significance of political parties in a diverse nation is crucial for the advancement of a country's democratic system and societal progress. Consequently, further investigation is warranted to delve into and comprehend the intricacies of their interactions within society.

Keywords: General Election 15, Malaysian Politics, Political Party, Democracy, Partisan, Heterogeneous Country.

Introduction

The aftermath of the 15th Malaysian General Election (GE) was an interesting twist of democracy in Malaysia's democratic landscape (Ismail, 2022; Puyok & Naim, 2023). Notably, none of the political coalitions secured a simple majority in parliament to establish the government. Additionally, the electoral performance of *Barisan Nasional* (BN), which has been in existence for several decades, reached its lowest point in this election. The recent Malaysian GE was marked by a riveting interplay of racial, corruption, and religious concerns within the context of a diverse nation (Dzafri, 2022; Koh, 2022). Malaysia, as a diverse nation, is characterised by its heterogeneous makeup, which can be attributed to the presence of various races, creeds, and cultures. This diversity is evident in the population of over thirty million individuals, who are distributed between the regions of west and east Malaysia.

Malaysia, as a nation that embraces democracy as its chosen system of governance, has experienced notable political instability, particularly in the aftermath of the preceding two general elections held in 2018 and 2022. These elections witnessed shifts in government and the succession of four Prime Ministers within a span of four years. The *Barisan Nasional* (BN) coalition, led by its primary political party *Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Melayu Bersatu* (UMNO), has held power in Malaysia since the country's inception. Over the years, BN has consistently secured a significant majority, and on several occasions, even obtained a two-thirds majority in parliament, enabling them to form the government easily (Nadzri, 2018). However, in the 14th Malaysian General Election in 2018, *Pakatan Harapan* (PH) made history by defeating BN and assuming governmental control. At the start of 2020, a schism within the political hierarchy resulted in the dissolution of the governing body. Consequently, a new government emerged, comprising the BN, *Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia* (BERSATU), and *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS), with the backing of additional political parties and candidates, thereby replacing the PH administration (Welsh, 2020). Unfortunately, this collaboration also proved to be short-lived and exhibited governmental instability. The BERSATU party, under the leadership of the former Prime Minister, faced growing pressure to renounce power, resulting in their replacement by a Prime Minister from the UMNO party in the following year of 2021. The continuing state of instability resulting from the power struggle persisted despite the appointment of a new prime minister until the conclusion of 2022 (Medina, 2022). Subsequently, this would culminate in the premature commencement of the 15th Malaysian general election, wherein the establishment of the government was likewise impeded by the failure to forge coalitions (Puyok & Naim, 2023), as none of the political alliances succeeded in securing a mere majority of 112 seats in parliament for government formation. While the situation is not unique to Malaysia, as seen by similar challenges faced by the UK and other European nations in recent years (Astro Awani, 2017; *Berita Harian*, 2018), it is nonetheless significant to note that this issue has resulted in a fracturing of governance capabilities among countries.

This ongoing political instability can be attributed to internal conflicts and power struggles within political parties, resulting in divisions within the governing party and the subsequent collapse and decreased support of coalitions. The roles and functions of political parties have been extensively studied in previous scholarly works. These include representation (Heywood, 2013), the ability to garner public opinion and support on important issues such as public policies (Scarrow, 1967; Singh & Singh, 1950), the organisation of elections (Scarrow,

1967; Singh & Singh, 1950), socialization (Heywood, 2013), the provision of checks and balances (Fuzi, 2008; Scarrow, 1967), and the unifying of people (Ismail et al., 2018; Singh & Singh, 1950). Given the context of emerging populism and political instability, this paper aims to underscore the significance of these specific roles within a diverse country like Malaysia.

Conceptualisation of Political Parties

In order to explore the roles of political parties, it is important to establish a clear understanding of the concept of a political party. A political party is defined as “an organised and presumably durable association, either of individuals or of distinguishable groups of individuals, which endeavors to place its members in governmental offices to bring about the adoption of favored political policies or programmed” (Marume et al., 2016). Political parties have emerged as a prominent feature of political organisation throughout the past few centuries of human civilization (Heywood, 2017; Roskin et al., 2017). The formation of political parties, which has facilitated active citizen engagement, has played a crucial role in shaping governmental structures and state entities throughout history. Political support is the basis that constitutes the fundamental components of democratic nations and political parties (Webb, 2005). The process enables political parties to generate momentum for their cause, perhaps leading to the formation of a government or the establishment of a significant presence within a country's political landscape (Newton, 2006). Political support can start at the individual level and subsequently extend to others, ultimately involving groups of individuals, and on a broader scale, entire countries or regions.

Political support has been subject to exploration across various dimensions, encompassing ethnic, religious, identity, and regional factors. This has permitted interpretations of political support to be explored and identified (Adibrata & Khairi, 2019; Keith Searcy, 2019; Ordeshook & Shvetsova, 1994). This investigation has provided political scientists and sociologists with the opportunity to uncover the social and political dynamics that occur inside the framework of political support, which ultimately impacts election patterns, political coalitions, and overall political interactions. The political parties in Malaysia have displayed colorful histories and contexts, seeing distinct forms of political parties from the left to the far right on the political spectrum.

The primary political parties continue to centre around the BN coalition, particularly its main component party, UMNO, along with its affiliated parties. Furthermore, there has been a dynamic engagement and occasional cooperation between UMNO and its former political rivals in recent years. This phenomenon can be seen in the last two general elections in 2018 and 2022 where *Perikatan Nasional*, *Pakatan Harapan*, and other coalitions from Sabah and Sarawak have experienced significant growth and influence (Koh, 2022; Nadzri, 2018; Syed Anuar & Perman, 2023). Although these engagements of political parties are part of the spirit of democracy, they can be detrimental to a country such as Malaysia if they hamper the operation of a government as well as its effects on governance and ethnoreligious lines (Welsh, 2020). Political instability has been found to have negative consequences for governance and policymaking. It often leads to the development of short-sighted policies that fail to adequately address underlying issues. Moreover, within the realm of economics, ensuring stability in a country's investments can also yield benefits, particularly in attracting foreign investments (Aidt & Dutta, 2007; Medina, 2022; Newton, 2006). The presence of a

fragmented society creates an environment conducive to the emergence of chaos and instability. Therefore, examining the primary functions of political parties in Malaysia can provide a more desirable framework for their operation and engagement, matching them with the needs of a heterogeneous society.

Methodology

The research is done through a qualitative approach, where thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data. Thematic analysis refers to a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was done in a few phases, namely by phases are the familiarizing part of the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017). The researchers then have looked into the works of literature of politics and heterogeneity and later using thematic analysis to develop themes for political party roles. Four themes were developed through their roles in representation, socialization, stability, and check and balance in a heterogeneous context. A conceptual framework was developed to showcase the theme and their relationship within a heterogeneous environment.

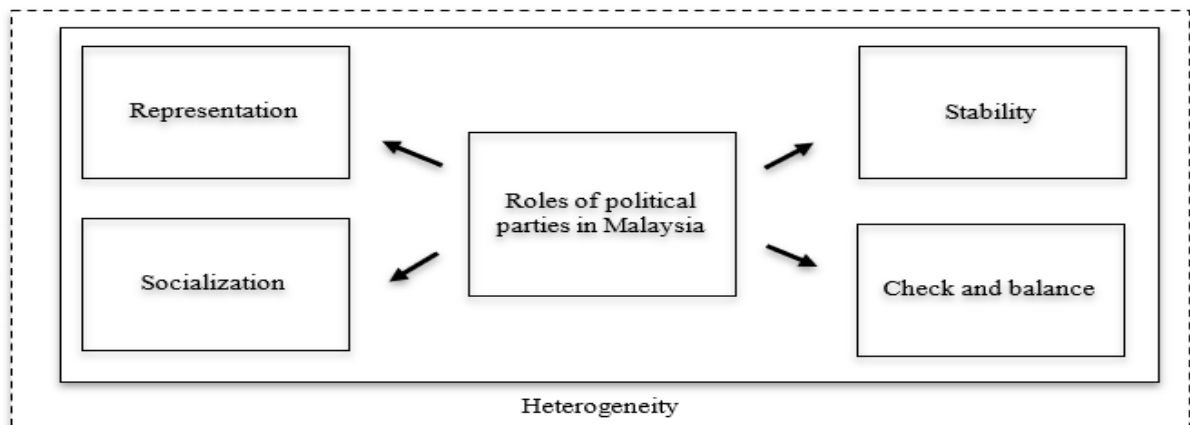


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Roles of Political Parties in Malaysia Within a Heterogeneous Context

Roles of Political Parties in a Heterogeneous Country (Malaysia)

Representation

A key factor for the successful development of democracy is the vital role of representation. Democracy is a political system characterised by the inclusion of individuals in the process of government creation, wherein the populace's opinions are acknowledged, and choices are afterwards entrusted to the majority. The political party serves as a platform for the representation of individuals' opinions (Ordeshook & Shvetsova, 1994). However, it is important to acknowledge that in certain instances, the minority may cast their votes for a party that did not emerge victorious in an election. Disregarding their concerns, particularly in a culturally varied nation such as Malaysia, can lead to feelings of exclusion among these individuals (Ismail et al., 2018). In Malaysia, individuals are delineated by various factors, including their ethnicity, religion, philosophy, and geographical location, such as the Borneo states, peninsular, or other states (Tajudin et al., 2021). Democracy encompasses two main forms: direct democracy and indirect democracy. In both versions, the key element is the inclusion of the people as the primary factor in its establishment and functioning (Heywood,

2013). Direct democracy is when the people's voice and votes are considered directly in making a decision, and this usually encompasses everyone in the said population. On the other hand, indirect democracy involves the selection of representatives from a large population (Hoffman, 2014; Matsusaka, 2005). These representatives, who are chosen to act on behalf of the people in their respective locations, make decisions to the best of their ability in accordance with the interests of those they represent. Democracy can be conceptualised as a process in which individuals either directly represent themselves or are represented by a person or a group of people (Hoffman, 2014). The judgements taken, though subject to debate, might be perceived as the most favourable for the populace as they originate from them. As the size of a population increases, the application of democracy becomes more complex. In response to this complexity, this is where political parties emerge as a means to navigate the intricacies of democratic governance (Webb, 2005).

The presence of political parties within modern and progressive democratic nations is essential for the purpose of scrutinising the wide range of perspectives held by individuals (Brahim et al., 2013; Kölln, 2015). Hence, establishing a democratic system that effectively channels the collective thoughts of individuals will facilitate the best possible outcomes. The term "efficient" is employed in a broad sense in this context to illustrate the intricate nature of millions of persons involved in making the most effective choices for a nation. The presence of political parties has eased the process of reaching a consensus, particularly in the realm of public policy formulation (Kölln, 2015). The absurdity of having direct democracy in a country that has millions of people may create long bottlenecks in decision-making, thus making the democratic process to be ineffective in its establishment. The task of role or representation is a complex one, particularly due to the fragmented nature of those being represented. However, this challenge has been addressed at times through the formation of "coalitions" during elections, which aim to secure a majority and establish a governing body. This approach is commonly employed in numerous countries, including Malaysia (Nadzri, 2018), where it has been utilised to ensure that the ruling party possesses the necessary support to form a government. Nevertheless, recent years have demonstrated that political coalitions can disintegrate, leading to the emergence of new ones (Puyok & Naim, 2023; Syed Annuar & Perman, 2023). If not effectively managed, such shifts can result in political instability.

In the Malaysian context, constitutional democracy is observed, wherein the people exercise their right to elect the government through democratic elections (Hamil et al., 2014). Given the country's heterogeneity, the significance of representation is acknowledged, ensuring that different parts of society are proportionately represented at both the state and national levels (Tajudin et al., 2021). The representation of people from various areas of the country will allow for policies to be made that would be inclusive of all the members of society (Segawa, 2017; Westlake, 2018). This representation will also permit for the diversification of decision-making in the parliament, providing ideas and conversation to start to tackle a public policy problem that may not only be made using a 'blanket' policy without looking into the finer details. The presence of political parties in Malaysia that are organised along racial and religious lines serves as an indication of the country's heterogeneous diversity (Annuar & Perman, 2023; Welsh, 2020; Yaakub, 2021). The political parties in a heterogenous country will appeal to and represent their community and together foster policies and making collective decisions for the entire country. The diversity in the representation of the people would foster a sense of unity across various regions, encouraging the establishment of an inclusive government (Tajudin et al., 2021; Segawa, 2017). However, the division of a

community based on racial or religious politics has the potential to undermine the representation of minority races or religions, leading to the exploitation of ethno-religious concerns for electoral gains (Dzafri, 2022; Yaakub, 2021). In such issues, communal-based parties at times can be a problem if they only serve part of the population rather than the entire populace (Hairom, 2021; Segawa, 2017; Singh & Singh, 1950). Therefore, in such a delicate situation, a political party must exhibit awareness of the sentiments that they play upon and its consequences in the future. This conscious effort to understand their actions in a multi-cultured and diverse society is important for their representation of the people as the ruling party to foster a perception of equity and concern for the welfare (United Nations, 2022). Even in the event of a victory by a political party that is founded on the principles of a specific race or religion, they must comprehend their responsibilities in fostering a cohesive society within a diverse nation (Bano et al., 2021; Ismail, 2022). Rather than casually formulating policies that solely cater to their core supporters, they should prioritise the broader interests of the entire populace (Wonka & Haunss, 2020).

Political parties serve as a link between institutions through which the populace's interests are channelled and represented within the governing structure (Mahadee Ismail et al., 2018). A more mature political party would strive to represent everyone in the country regardless of their political leanings when they have formed the government. This approach will guarantee that individuals belonging to minority groups or those who did not support the elected representatives are given an opportunity for representation, so ensuring that their interests are adequately taken into account during the decision-making process. Rather than punishing people who did not vote for them, it is imperative that a political party in Malaysia assume the role of representing everyone in the country and exhibit rationality in the governance and treatment of the heterogeneous people in Malaysia. By doing so, the party can genuinely reflect the notion of being a representative body for all citizens within the nation.

Socialisation

In any modern society, the interplay among various sections of the populace continues to be the cement that binds the country. This process of bonding becomes possible through socialization (Jackson et al., 1993) and has particular significance in the context of a heterogeneous nation (Tajudin et al., 2021; Priest et al., 2014; Segawa, 2017). The process of socialisation facilitates intermingling within a diverse society, enabling individuals to develop familiarity and comprehension of one another's perspectives, lifestyles, beliefs, and cultural practices (Juang et al., 2016; Owen, 2008; Owens & Settersten, 2002). The lack of understanding and engagement through socialisation would make room for assumptions to exist leading to problems (Prabawani et al., 2018). In a society characterised by heterogeneity and limited social interaction among its communities, there exists the potential for a rise of racial and religious sentiment-driven dynamics, which may be marked by the presence of prejudices stereotypes, and even hostility.

Democracy believes in the utmost sovereign power of the people in deciding on the country. The intricacy of people's lives and culture is intertwined in the many coatings of societal organization including diverse elements and quantities (Owens & Settersten, 2002; Wiarda, 2014). This complexity in society means that different people are coming from diverse groups who may not engage with one another due to disparities in their cultural backgrounds, views, and perspectives, among other factors (Brahim et al., 2013; Ismail et al., 2018). The process

of socialisation is a critical component in the development of a nation's national culture and unity (Owen, 2008), particularly when individuals from diverse demographic backgrounds are involved. Socialisation facilitates the establishment of communication channels, interactions, and interpersonal connections, enabling individuals residing in different regions of a country to engage in meaningful exchanges and cultivate relationships (Owens & Settersten, 2002; Prabawani et al., 2018). This will enhance the ability for people to come together and make peaceful and harmonious co-existence, especially in this age of division and segregation (Micheal G. Roskin et al., 2017). However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in political sentiments towards racial and religious divisions. As a result, political parties now concentrate only on a specific segment of society rather than the entire population (Chin, 2022). This results in the formation of a segregated society that is deeply divided through race and religious lines. The promotion of such sentiments by political parties has the potential to create tensions within the complex social fabric of a diverse nation such as Malaysia (Welsh, 2020).

The involvement of political parties in fostering socialisation within a nation can manifest through their efforts to engage individuals in political activities and promote collaboration (Poliana Ronnie Sidom, 2016; Priest et al., 2014). Being a heterogenous country, political parties need to practise inclusivity in their work as well as provide a platform for cooperation. Consequently, this will facilitate the opportunity for different communities to collaborate and coexist harmoniously. Political parties must be committed to ensuring societal stability by looking at the right policy to foster social engagement and socialisation platforms that would be accessible and inclusive for all parts of a diverse population (Ismail, 2022; Prabawani et al., 2018; Welsh, 2020). The political party's role in facilitating socialisation within a heterogeneous population presents a promising platform for individuals from varied backgrounds to unite under a common roof and in some sense made through the structure of the government (Prabawani et al., 2018). This can be regarded as an example of how *Barisan Nasional* or *Pakatan Harapan* in Malaysia serves as a political coalition platform, facilitating individuals from diverse racial and religious origins to collectively participate in political affairs inside the nation (Tajudin et al., 2021; Yaakub, 2021). This is then seen as a socialisation role from the political parties, even though the patterns set are seen in the political coalition that they provide. This means that the different parties that make up the coalition attract different voters, but these voters are later channelled into the formation of a political coalition (Puyok & Naim, 2023). A coalition that only focuses on members that are largely the same voter base would likely create a polarising society that can be exploited for political games.

The formation of political parties and their coalitions can be understood as a reflection of the diverse and complex nature of Malaysian society (Segawa, 2017). Hence, it is vital to recognise the significance of endeavours aimed at fostering social cohesion across various groups within a community (Priest et al., 2014). Such initiatives are crucial in cultivating a unified society as opposed to one that is divided. Furthermore, it is crucial for political parties, regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliations, to comprehend and embrace their role in this process. Government representation can be regarded as a kind of socialisation, encompassing the inclusion of individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds and geographical areas within the government. This sort of representation enables the voices of the populace to be

authentically expressed through their elected representatives. As seen in Malaysia, the government's ministerial positions are distributed through races and locations (west and east Malaysia). The government can also develop and improve policies to promote socialisation in the country, and this can be done through education and societal policies (Juang et al., 2016; Prabawani et al., 2018; Priest et al., 2014). By fostering open communication and mutual understanding, political parties can become the bridge to a fully unified and harmonious diverse society. Therefore, it is paramount for political parties to recognise the influence they have on society (Bano et al., 2021; Fuzi, 2008) and be much more accountable in their actions and policies within a diverse society rather than leveraging on skin-deep provocations to ensure their survival.

Stability

In the context of a heterogeneous society, demands the multitude of expectations can be overwhelming. Attempting to meet the needs of every segment of society can prove to be extremely challenging (Tajudin et al., 2021; Ait & Dutta, 2007; Hamil et al., 2014). The level of satisfaction experienced by individuals has the potential to have an influence on the overall stability of a government. This phenomenon is seen as such because to its alignment with the objectives of a well-structured political system, which facilitates the formulation and maturation of policies, as well as the establishment of effective government (Medina, 2022). Without continuity, within the context of government plans, policies can be altered or terminated and will hinder efforts in achieving their initial objectives (Ait & Dutta, 2007), as well in the context of economy (Duasa, 2007; Meyer, 2019). The shift in policies can be attributed to political conflicts and a demonstration of competence in implementing improved governance (Wonka & Haunss, 2020), related to the preceding political entity, through the creation or modification of policies aligned with its political ideology. History is a testament to how race and religious-based sentiment is a common mantra used to rally support in elections and wars, hence establishing stability (Chin, 2022; Chin, 2018). In some instances, the role of nationalism and its association with the struggle for independence has been of great significance. However, when considering a society characterised by diversity and a variety of cultural backgrounds, a distinct perspective emerges.

In the current political landscape, when racial and religious feelings are being exploited for political gain, the attainment of stability has emerged as a crucial objective (United Nations, 2022). This stability serves as a fundamental reference point for effective governance and social cohesion in a diverse nation (Ismail et al., 2018; Segawa, 2017). Within the framework of politics, political stability happens when the political parties or coalition can form a majority or able to cooperate as a political coalition(s) (Ahmad Tajudin et al., 2021; Puyok & Naim, 2023; Segawa, 2017). Additionally, societal perception of fair and adequate representation by the governing political parties plays a significant role in fostering political stability. However, when the political actors and parties are unable to reach an agreement or a win-win situation to form, it will lead to gridlocks as seen explicitly right after the 15th Malaysian general election, where the political coalitions were unable and reluctant to form a government due to ideological differences and unwillingness to work together (Welsh, 2020). This condition indicates a societal division and manifests as a lack of cohesive political collaboration. This is however not unique to Malaysia, as other countries have also seen similar situation (Astro Awani, 2017; Harian, 2018), hence examples can be drawn from those countries to provide a clear image of stability in governance. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that this is a

relatively novel occurrence for Malaysia, as previous elections were able to establish a government within a 24-hour timeframe following a general election.

The initial phase of the conclusion of the 15th Malaysian general election showcased the significant role played by political parties in ensuring stability (Ismail, 2022). This for many was rather unexpected, occurrence of unexpected events has been observed in situations where governing entities lack the necessary maturity to engage in constructive dialogue. This lack of maturity often leads to conflicts among these entities, which can further escalate into political infighting, the collapse of regimes (Welsh, 2020; Yaakub, 2021), or even more severe outcomes such as full-fledged civil wars and armed conflicts, as witnessed in certain developing nations. These conflicts arise when the interests of these entities are not effectively represented within the democratic framework, particularly in matters related to racial and religious sentiments, as well as nationalistic elements. Hence political parties in existence in heterogeneous countries should be aware of their roles in establishing stability or contributing to its absence.

In the context of Malaysia, the society exhibits a significant amount of heterogeneity, characterised by the coexistence of diverse ethnic and religious groups. Political parties with varying ideologies converge and converge to represent the individuals they appeal to, so facilitating the continuity of stability throughout the past five decades (Ismail et al., 2018; Meyer, 2019; Nadzri, 2018). This stability would allow for more effective policymaking that would overall affect the country's development within the context of social, economic, and political domains (Malik, 2017; Meyer, 2019). The utilisation of democracy as a means of representation is perceived as a mechanism for facilitating the expression of concerns, including those of minority groups, at the national stage (Mahadee Ismail et al., 2018). However, it is important to acknowledge that this ideal form of representation may not always align with practical realities (Aidt & Dutta, 2007; Henisz, 2004; Wojczewski, 2020). Nevertheless, from a theoretical standpoint, democracy enables individuals to be represented, even if they lack substantial influence within the system (Roskin et al., 2017; Wonka & Haunss, 2020). Therefore, it is imperative for any political party operating within a multicultural country to be mindful of its membership makeup and the respective duties of its members. This awareness is crucial in order to facilitate the achievement of stability through political mechanisms (Meyer, 2019).

The importance of stability in Malaysia lies in its capacity to prevent policymakers from being perceived as short-sighted, allowing enough time for effective policies to develop and have impact on society (Aidt & Dutta, 2007). It is argued that one of the reasons for Malaysia's rapid development after independence was the relative stability that Malaysia enjoyed for years, it has allowed for policies to mature and improved over the years (Malik, 2017; Meyer, 2019). Thus, one of the biggest roles a political party should provide is in terms of stability and continuing this precedence that Malaysia has. The maintenance of stability can manifest through effective governance, constructive engagement with the opposition, and resolution of internal factional conflicts (Ismail et al., 2018; Meyer, 2019; Fuzi, 2008). Additionally, ensuring good governance is crucial to mitigate any significant disruptions to political or societal stability in the event of a change in government. Enhancing stability can be achieved through the implementation of a transparent operational framework that is easily visible by stakeholders, hence fostering accountability among all individuals for their respective responsibilities. Establishing a culture characterised by political maturity and logic, wherein a

political party prioritises serving the people rather than engaging in questionable political games would facilitate the growth of political parties within a diverse community.

Check and Balance

One of the most defining factors in establishing clear transparent governance is through applying checks and balances (Henisz, 2004; Fuzi, 2008). Political parties play a crucial role in upholding checks and balances within a pluralistic society by holding the government accountable, actively participating in the legislative process, and using their authority in the selection of government personnel. The concept of checks and balances holds significant importance within the framework of the separation of powers (Bano et al., 2021; Roskin et al., 2017). Moreover, this principle can also be extended to encompass the diverse range of entities that engage with the government. The presence of checks and balances in a system ensures that any sides that are involved can be scrutinised and at the same time examine others in their framework to ensure that everyone is doing their jobs right (Henisz, 2004; Asrani & Kusrin, 2016; Salman et al., 2011). In a democracy, the legislative process includes the creation and adoption of legislation that represent the society's beliefs and top priorities. The standard procedure includes several steps, such as the presentation of a bill, committee examination, discussion, and voting. Political parties can have a substantial impact on the legislation's content during this process. While political parties that find themselves in the minority have the ability to put out proposals for changes and alternatives (Fuzi, 2008; Wonka & Haunss, 2020), parties that hold the majority have the authority to introduce policies that align with their objectives and principles. The presence of checks and balances is crucial in order to prevent the influence of authoritarian and corrupt forces from compromising the effectiveness of decision-making and implementation processes (Nazaruddin & Yusoff, 2021).

Within the context of a heterogenous country, checks and balances allow for political parties to invigilate the other parties in the way they promote themselves and the way they carry themselves as observed in the deliberate actions taken by opposition parties subsequent to the 15th General Election (Kuan & Solhi, 2022). Political parties are essential for preserving checks and balances that ensure that people that are underrepresented or issues that may only focus on certain segments of the population can be discussed and done properly. Political parties serve as instruments for representing diverse social groupings in a democratic system (Ordeshook & Shvetsova, 1994) and give people a way to express their political preferences and take part in decision-making, and in a heterogenous country, this may include their opinion that will reflect their ethnicity, culture, religion, and beliefs (Ghazali et al., 2011; Ismail et al., 2018; Din et al., 2017; Sidom, 2016). Ensuring governmental accountability to the general public constitutes the basic responsibility of political parties. Opposition parties have the capacity to hold the government accountable through the use of critical discourse and the presentation of counterarguments (Nazaruddin & Yusoff, 2021; Fuzi, 2008). This is particularly pertinent in instances where governmental activities lack cultural sensitivity or have a negative impact on diverse cultural backgrounds. This serves to ensure that the government is responsive to the interests and concerns of the people and prevents the ruling party from amassing excessive power. In the context of a heterogeneous society, it is imperative to effectively manage demographic diversity and establish a robust administration that is well-aligned with societal progress and engagement.

Political parties contribute to the legislative process by formulating and supporting legislation that aligns with the concerns and principles of their respective base of support (Tajudin et al.,

2021; Fuzi, 2008; Puyok & Naim, 2023). The passing of legislation is typically determined by the majority within political parties, while minority parties have the ability to propose changes and alternative measures. The process of bargaining and compromising ensures that the law adequately reflects the diverse range of opinions available within society (Izzuddin Nazaruddin & Agus Yusoff, 2021; Fuzi, 2008). When parties differ on the specifics of a measure, the negotiation and compromise processes regularly come into play. In order to reach a consensus and formally support the legislation, it may be necessary for the parties involved to engage in negotiations and reach an agreement on specific aspects. The process of exchanging ideas can facilitate the development of legislation that includes the diverse priorities and perspectives present within a multicultural nation such as Malaysia. This exchange of ideas can ensure that the legislation ultimately reflects the various priorities and points of view of society in a multicultural nation like Malaysia.

Political parties that are made up of a coalition must ensure that the intricacy of the coalition is also put into perspective in making policies (Wonka & Haunss, 2020) and at the same time anticipate counterarguments from the rival political parties for the policy. This can be done by understanding the issues addressed by the policy and the subsequent impact on the stakeholders (Meyer, 2019). Particularly in light of the recent government coalition formation in Malaysia subsequent to the GE15, wherein disparate political paradigms converge, perhaps harbouring divergent perspectives on a given subject, the imperative arises for these factions to collaborate harmoniously as a new coalition (Ismail, 2022). This mechanism will function as an internal system of verification and control within the coalition. Hence, the implementation of a clear and inclusive policy that addresses the needs and concerns of both governmental and opposition parties. In the context of the nation's political landscape, there exists an economic motivation to actively seek out and highlight any instances of fault or lack of accountability among political rivals. This approach seeks to attract political support from the populace in subsequent elections by capitalising on the public's condemnation of these identified weaknesses (Chin, 2022; Wojczewski, 2020). The emphasis on scrutinising the governance of opposition or competitor political parties under democratic systems can significantly enhance the parties' awareness of their actions and the ensuing effects.

The act of observing and evaluating the manner in which individuals govern and conduct themselves within a nation serves as a mechanism for maintaining balance within the system (Asrani & Kusrin, 2016). The phenomenon of regime shifts and government transitions is apparent in the manner in which political parties are leading the people in their try to examine and balance the existing rulers, with the ultimate goal of establishing an improved governance system for the nation. In the context of the 13th General Election, the mismanagement associated with the 1MDB controversy served as a significant political factor that contributed to the downfall of the Barisan Nasional party (Hamil et al., 2014). Political parties have the ability to influence public opinion and employ this influence to shape political strategy, therefore securing electoral success or preserving their existing political standing.

In Malaysia, political parties should undertake the role of monitoring internally (Saiful & Jan, 2018) and each other to ensure that good governance is observed and practiced. Overall, the function of a democratic system and the preservation of checks and balances within the society depend on the roles that political parties play in a diversified community. The act of mutually monitoring one another will result in increased awareness and accountability for both parties involved in assuming leadership responsibilities (Izzuddin Nazaruddin & Agus

Yusoff, 2021; Saiful & Jan, 2018). This check and balance would additionally serve as a voice of reason when an issue requires further understanding and thought before being implemented (Asrani & Kusrin, 2016). The presence of checks and balances are not only important for political parties but to society in general as well, to ensure that the political parties are accountable to the people of the country. When a governing body or opposition party exhibits a growing lack of coherence in their actions, the process of checks and balances between them and the public at large serves as a mechanism to direct them towards self-correction in response to criticism and concerns expressed. Therefore, it is imperative for an ethnically diverse nation such as Malaysia to exercise careful scrutiny in its efforts, with a special focus on the implementation of effective governance (Ismail et al., 2018), which is an essential requirement for every nation.

Conclusion

Malaysia, as a nation characterised by its heterogeneity, faces governance issues. While diversity can serve as a valuable asset, inadequate management thereof may give rise to underlying weaknesses. The importance of ensuring inclusivity in the policy-making process of political parties cannot be overstated, as it is crucial for effectively guiding a diverse nation towards the appropriate trajectory in the long term. Political parties contribute significantly to a varied community by giving people an opportunity to unite and promote their common ideals and ideas. Political parties serve as a fundamental mechanism for fostering social cohesion and mobilising individuals to actively engage in the political process, hence influencing the development of policies. Political parties play a crucial role in forging unity amongst people from diverse origins and experiences within a diverse community, allowing them to work together harmoniously in achieving common objectives. Political parties serve as the foundation for the establishment of democracy within any democratic nation. They serve as the main means through which the opinions and interests of the public are represented, making sure the establishment of government reflects the will of the people. The continuous interrelationship between political parties and society in the 21st century demonstrates the enduring intrigue around political organisations, particularly in the context of emerging populism that occasionally stirs controversial views. It is anticipated that political parties in Malaysia that are founded on racial or religious affiliations would continue to maintain their popularity in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, it is crucial to comprehend the functions undertaken by these parties within the context of a diverse nation like Malaysia, in order to foster genuine progress and unity. Further studies should explore the heterogeneity within democratic systems on and its effect on political regimes in the new age of populism and the internet. In the setting of nation-building, society must come as one, and political parties in Malaysia play an integral role in forming the society today and the future we want, therefore, the roles of a political party are paramount in guiding the country to a better democracy.

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