



INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

MALAYSIA'S GENERAL ELECTION 1990

Continuity, Change, and Ethnic Politics

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I	Introduction	1
II	Background to the Polls	2
III	The Barisan Nasional's Campaign	5
IV	The Opposition: Problems and Campaign	8
	Forging the Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah	8
	Gagasan Rakyat	10
V	Results of the Elections	13
VI	The Barisan Nasional Coalition	15
	UMNO Baru in Peninsular Malaysia	22
	MCA: Unable to Recover Lost Ground	27
	The Gerakan and the MIC	32
	The Barisan's Performance in West Malaysia	34
	The Barisan in East Malaysia	35
VII	The Opposition Results	36
	DAP: Maintaining Its Ground	36
	Parti Islam: The Rising Moon	39
	Semangat '46	41
	PBS: The Surprise Opposition	43
	PRM, AMIPF, and the Independents	45
VIII	Conclusion	47
	Notes	50

LIST OF TABLES

CONTENTS

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1.	Number of Parliamentary Seats Won by the Parties in Each State, 1982, 1986, and 1990	16
2.	Number of State Assembly Seats Won by the Parties in Each State, 1982, 1986, and 1990	19
3.	Number of State Seats Contested and Won by the Major Opposition Parties in the 1990 Elections	38

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VI	The Barisan Nasional Coalition	41
	UMNO Bar in Peninsular Malaysia	41
	MCA: Unable to Recover from Ground	42
	The Gerakan and the MIC	43
	The Barisan's Performance in West Malaysia	44
	Malaysia-Malaysia	45
	2. Malaysia, Politics, Dewas Rakyat—Sarawak	46
	Malaysia—Politics	47
	DAU: Maintaining its Ground	48
	Part Islam: The Rising Moon	49
	2. Sarawak	50
	FRS: The Sarawak Opposition	51
	FRM, AMIPF, and the Independents	52
VII	Conclusion	53

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Notes

I INTRODUCTION

If there is one legacy for which the British can claim credit in Malaysia, it is the parliamentary and electoral system which they left behind. Though the system has been modified, and the rules of the game may have been changed, with more restraints and restrictions being added, the system still allows an element of choice. Since 1957, Malaysia has regularly conducted national elections to determine who should form the government. The 1990 general election, the eighth since independence, is of special interest because it was the first time that a credible, multi-ethnic coalition had emerged to challenge the ruling coalition that has been in office for the past thirty-three years. There were suggestions that with the election, the political system was being and would be transformed -- from the dominance of a single party, to a two-coalition system. The opposition was expected to win enough seats to play a more effective role and to become an alternative government in the future, even if it could not take over the reins of government immediately. The results, however, did not confirm the earlier expectations. The ruling coalition was returned to power with more than a two-third majority, closing another chapter to Malaysia's electoral history. This paper discusses the events and issues leading up to the 1990 elections, the political parties involved, the alignments they made, the strategies they deployed, the manifestos that were published, and the issues they raised in the campaign. There is also a detailed analysis of the results.