

## **The ghost of elections past**

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"Elections belong to the people. It's their decision. If they decide to turn their back on the fire and burn their behinds, then they will just have to sit on their blisters."

- Abraham Lincoln

COMMENT Pro-establishment forces in this country pick at the scabs of May 13 in an effort to warn voters that their choice determines if violence is the fate that awaits us if we make the wrong choice.

As always this conflict revolves around the Malay/Chinese dynamic with the latter (pro-opposition Chinese) demonised for abandoning the racial formula that kept us safe for so long and the former (pro-opposition Malays) traitors to the cause of their religion and race.

The threat of violence, although very real, is nonetheless a morally bankrupt idea. If the only reason why you are in power is fear of reprisals then we might as well make it a law(s) that there will be no opposition parties, no freedom of speech, no freedom of assembly or whatever else is deemed a threat to peace and stability but more importantly, there will be no elections.

Because this is essentially what all these threats of violence means. Vote for us or else. If you really subscribe to this, what you should do is skip the "vote" part and get to work on maintaining the "or else" part.

The reality of course is that there is that, looking at the racial groupings of both alliances and the underlying themes of their manifestoes, there is very little that differentiates them from each other.

If the only thing keeping you in power is the threat that the Malay majority would react violently if their "position" as "master" of this land is endangered, then by all means establish a set of laws that would bar non-Malays from entering politics.

If the best you can offer is that the electorate should be "grateful" for all that has been given to them and that believing otherwise is a sign of "corrupt" Western thinking, then this charade of attempting to be "the best democracy in the world" should end.

If the best you can offer is that voting "wisely" means voting for an entrenched failing system, then what you should do is not only think for us but also ensure that we never attempt to exercise our judgement.

### Shift of power

If anything the sub-theme in all my articles is an emergence of an alternative racial formula or a reshuffling of the racial deck. Although there are numerous issues that have been exploited by the establishment and the opposition which range from class, race and religious preoccupations, the only people who would stand to lose if there is a shift of power, are the ones who have benefitted economically from the system of cronyism and patronage.

kuala terengganu by election voting day 170109 voters queue  
In other words for the average Joe Rakyat, unless Pakatan Rakyat sincerely carries out its system-wide reforms, there will be very little overt change from the way of life they are used to. And this is a reasonable proposition as far as I am concerned.

Then why vote, an extremely intelligent young Malaysiakini subscriber (who is a registered voter and often spars with me concerning my partisanship and a range of other issues) asked in an email.

I replied with this quote from the late David Foster Wallace, a writer whose essays I prefer rather than his works of fiction:

"If you are bored and disgusted by politics and don't bother to vote, you are in effect voting for the entrenched establishments of the two major parties, who please rest assured are not dumb, and who are keenly aware that it is in their interests to keep you disgusted and bored and cynical and to give you every possible reason to stay at home doing one-hitters and watching MTV on primary day.

"By all means stay home if you want, but don't bullshit yourself that you're not voting. In reality, there is no such thing as not voting: you either vote by voting, or you vote by staying home and tacitly doubling the value of some Diehard's vote."

### May 13 narratives

The claim is that young people have forgotten all about May 13. Well, my argument is that most people do not know jack about May 13 with the exception of the pro-establishment or pro-opposition narratives.

Umno has made it clear that there would be no national debate on the subject because who knows what skeletons and present-day walking cadavers would be implicated in such collective soul searching.

So besides the young ignorant people, the Chinese community is also blamed for enabling the split in the Malay vote. It all goes back to gratitude and the racial formula. If BN was serious in maintaining the utilitarian value of this precious formula, they would not have spent the last decades creating a bureaucratic class which is not only a strain on the system but also inadvertently exacerbated class tensions within the Malay community.

NONEThe opposition has always been blamed for the violence in street demonstration but this canard that was obliterated in the Himpunan Bangkit march earlier this year. What this march demonstrated is that if the security apparatus did their jobs as opposed to taking orders from who knows where, a mass gathering of Malaysians who oppose the present regime could be a peaceful affair.

Take the cow's head protest for instance. The only problem I had with the protest was the manner in which the authorities dealt with them. Not only had they an understanding police escort, they later had the home minister sitting with these protesters and asking right-thinking Malaysians to "understand" their motives, men who were later charged with sedition.

If anyone from the opposition had done such a provocative display of discontent, I can assure you the response would have been very different.

Or how about the spitting out of the Holy sacrament by reporters who went undercover in an attempt to expose religious conversions. Whatever happened to them? If we look close enough, we will always discover that provocations made by people supportive of the agenda of Umno are coddled as part of the unspoken social contract that non-Malays should always remember to fall in line.

We're not scared any more

Then we come to the politics of hate. As an Indian or Hindu, why should I be offended by the comments of Perkasa vice-president Zulkifli Noordin?

I expect such racism as the natural consequence of a system predicated on separating us along racial/religious lines. People who should take offence are the Malays who he supposedly represents or wants to represent and they should make known their disdain for his statements in the ballot box.

NONE By the way, it is brilliant counter programming on the part of Umno fielding a candidate like Zulkifli (right) against PAS' Khalid Samad in Shah Alam. It would not have made strategic sense to field another "moderate" candidate against Khalid, the impeccable gentlemen politician and articulate spokesperson for his cause.

No, the better Hail Mary option would be to field a character that could stoke the racial and religious insecurities of the Malay demographic there and hope the so-called silent majority subscribes to what Umno is offering.

What does offend me are the comments of my "side", which I will elaborate in a post-election article when my position would change to that of a pro-establishment partisan, if my side emerges victorious.

So the reality is that all these "ghost" from our past don't really scare us any more, not because we have not learnt from them but because there are more than enough monsters in our present to give us pause.

If we discount the bravado of those who would make light of these threats of violence and those who would propagate such threats, what we are left with, is the certainty that the only option we have is to vote our conscience and let the chips fall where they may.

Personally, I always take comfort in the motto of one of my favourite American generals, Joseph 'Vinegar Joe' Stilwell - Illegitimi non carborundum (Don't let the bastards grind you down).

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