

**In BN win Najib faces tug-of-war between two Malaysias**  
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**By Leslie Lau**

MAY 6 — As a fragmented Malaysia emerged this morning in the wake of Barisan Nasional's (BN) slim victory in Election 2013, Datuk Seri Najib Razak identified the biggest challenge he faces — national reconciliation in a country divided.

But an analysis of how the vote went shows a country with rural-urban and class divisions that will make any reconciliation and necessary reforms even more difficult to implement.

The need to continue dismantling the Bumiputera policies and to introduce the controversial bitter pill of a Goods and Services Tax (GST) — steps necessary to make Malaysia more competitive and lift it out of a middle-income trap — appears to be even more daunting because of the conflicting tug-of-war between the two Malaysias that have emerged.

Najib is now faced with a public seemingly addicted to easy money and handouts, and in winning GE13 he may have committed his government to a continuation of such policies.

Corruption also remains a major challenge for Najib, with BN's popular vote loss presenting him with a tricky path to negotiate.

Initial analysis of this morning's election results shows BN had won the polls on the back of votes from a largely conservative rural Malaysia as well as Umno voters with an interest in the continuation of affirmative action policies that critics say benefit an elite associated with the party.

But Pakatan Rakyat (PR) appears to have won the consolation prize of a popular vote secured on its campaign to push the message that graft and the government's tendency to award lucrative contracts to Umno interests were squeezing out the middle class and the Malay working class.

Najib suggested a "Chinese tsunami" saw BN ceding more ground to the opposition, but BN will be well advised to also notice the Malay shift, especially from a growing middle class and a disenchanting urban working class.

"Intra-ethnic inequality is startlingly high. There has been a lot of disproportionate access [to economic privileges] by the few," Meredith Weiss, an associate professor at the State University of New York, told the Financial Times in remarks published this morning.

"The underlining trend seems to be that interests are defined now by socioeconomic class rather than ethnicity."

While Chinese votes clearly swung to the opposition in greater numbers than ever before, PR's securing of the popular vote suggests that the Malay vote swing would be potentially more alarming.

The federal vote aside, yesterday's elections saw the opposition make ground in many of the state assemblies — winning 230 seats to Umno's total of 275.

In urban Selangor, PR increased its mandate.

While BN regained Perak, PR's increased majorities in Penang and Selangor tell a story of a middle class and urban electorate from all races moving away from BN.

The right-wing factions within Umno are already trying to shape the narrative of GE13 by suggesting the Chinese were being racial in the way they voted, but a deeper analysis of the election results will suggest the minority was backed by large quarters of the Malay majority.

Yesterday's elections saw Umno and BN dealt a major blow in urban Johor, and losing in Selangor and Penang — with largely urban and multi-racial votes.

PR also made inroads into Sabah, significantly in urban areas.

With a mandate from rural conservatives and Umno elites, the big question will be how Najib addresses the need for reforms.

To be fair Najib did win the elections in part by "stealing the opposition's clothes" as the Financial Times said this morning in an analysis of the GE13 results.

He has started watering down Bumiputera policies and has repealed the Internal Security Act.

But he has also allowed Umno leaders to play on race and religious fears, which may have entrenched not just Chinese but many urban voters of all races against what they see as an Umno of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir pragmatically balanced the interests the Malays, Chinese, Indians and other races with policies that saw compromise and a united goal of developing Malaysia.

But while he has taken credit for Malaysia's economic growth, the country is no longer the country Dr Mahathir may have known.

It is a changed country, moving away from racial divisions into one of class and wealth divides.

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