

ELECTIONS AND HEGEMONIC POLITICS: A MALAYSIAN CASE

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ABSTRACT

In today's modern democratic system, elections are considered one of the institutional ways to symbolize the citizens' participation in the system. Political scientists such as Lipset (1960), Dahl (1971), Held (1993) and others, recognize election as an important characteristic that must exist in any community or nation which practices democracy. This paper serves three main purposes. Firstly, it analyzes and debates issues pertaining to the practice of democracy in Malaysia with particular reference to Sarawak state election 2001. Secondly, it studies the extent to which election practices in Malaysia manifest the fundamental tenet of democracy i.e. a fair and just political competition. Finally, it presents a possible explanation on the unsuccessful attempts of the opposition parties to overpower the political hegemony of the Barisan Nasional.

Keywords: Democratic, symbol, election, fundamental, and opposition

ELECTION AND DEMOCRACY: DEFINING THE PARAMETERS

In any democratic system, peoples or citizens participation in political process is essential. The peoples' participation is manifested in various forms and means. The formal way is through the casting of votes in an election, participating in election campaigns to support contesting candidates or election manifestos. On the other hand, the informal way of exercising people participation is through ensuring continuous freedom to voice their appeals towards the ineffective government policies. What is pertinent in democratic practice is that the voice of the peoples should be heard.

In modern nation-state era, the ancient form of direct democracy that was once practiced in Athens is virtually impossible to implement. The majority of democratic countries today, undertake to carry out a system that is quite indirect i.e. through a parliamentary system, or presidency system, or a system that promotes federalism or republicanism. From the point of view of modern democracy, the citizens are not directly involved in the decision-making process. Nonetheless, they are involved in the selection of leaders who will legislate or formulate the policies laws and regulations of the ruling government. No party or regime or individual can maintain power without peoples' supports as much as no single political system can sustain its 'democracy' without peoples' participation. In the same vein, certain political scientists are of the opinion that democracy would not work well if political power is dominated by certain leaders or groups or parties for too long¹. Ideally speaking, democracy is supposed to be able to ensure that

there is no corruption in the leadership and more importantly democracy can ensure fair and justice in its political process and maintain a rotation of power and leaders.

As an example, the United States adopted a system that a person is not allowed to hold the presidency post for more than two terms. The election process in the United States runs well and the citizens fully participate in the electoral process. This is in line with the principle of democracy that there must be a mechanism to ensure that all parties are given a fair treatment and a fair chance to contest or to support the contestants and their manifestos. There should also be a mechanism to ensure that no one will stay in power for too long. This mechanism must be legitimate and “respected” to allow for it to be practiced fairly and without any fear or reservations.²

In today’s modern democratic system, elections are considered to be one of the institutional ways to symbolize, empirically or abstractly, the participation of citizens in the system. In fact, political scientists such as Lipset (1960), Dahl (1971), Held (1993), and others, in their debates on democratic system have listed election as one of the important characteristics that must exist in any community or nation which practices democracy. In fact, election institution has always been used as the most important yardstick in any study conducted to measure the level of democracy.³

Furthermore, election has been institutionalized as a ‘space’ that not only allows the citizens to select their leaders, but also for any entities, whether they are individuals, groups or organizations to compete for power. And the ‘space’ has to be freed from any control, influences and even political hegemony. The question is however, how true is the premise that indicates election as one condition of democracy that truly represents the notion of democracy; and to what extent the ‘space’ is intellectually or non-intellectually free?⁴ Taking Sarawak State Election in 2001 as the empirical source, these questions will be discussed in the following sections. The state election in 2001 is taken as a case study due to a major political setback in federal general election in 1999. Such analysis is pertinent as political setback experienced by the ruling party in the federal general election may have certain impacts on state election. This paper has three major purposes. Firstly, is to analyze and debate on the concept and practice of democracy, especially the election in Malaysia. Secondly, is to examine the role of election election as an indicator of democracy. Thirdly, is to provide an alternative explanation on the failure of the opposition to compete within the political hegemony of the Barisan Nasional.

DEMOCRACY AND ELECTION IN MALAYSIA

One of the factors with regards to democracy (and this includes the election institution) in many countries especially the former British colonies, including Malaysia is a type of democracy “introduced” by the colonials. In other words, the idea of democracy in some post-colonial countries did not grow or develop like how it did in the West. In the West, democracy was developed a result of social awareness in relations to the rights of citizens in the political process. The practice of democracy in the West was initiated by peoples’ movement that eventually led to the French Revolution or the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries which consequently changed the political landscapes of the Western European countries.

Upon gaining the independence in 1957, Malaysia, initially, had some doubts over its 'capability' to administer stately and social affairs without any assistance from the British. The suspicions were closely related the racial divide in Malaysia. The British imposed a condition that the local leaders representing these mixed cultures must be able to work together, before they can get status of an independent nation.⁵

The cooperation was successfully reached though "unintentionally" between UMNO (United Malays National Organization) and the MCA (Malayan Chinese Association) at the Kuala Lumpur Municipal Election in 1952.⁶ The cooperation was further strengthened especially in 1955 when UMNO, MCA and MIC (the Malayan Indian Congress) collectively formed a coalition called Perikatan to win the national election, the first election in the history of Malaysia. Perikatan which was led by the late Tunku Abdul Rahman (who later became Malaysia's first Prime Minister), won the election handsomely.

Since then, Perikatan (which from 1973 was known as Barisan Nasional or the National Front), became the only political party which not only controlled the helm of leadership, but also won all of the 11 general elections. Many attempts have been made to explain this phenomenon. Scholars such as Barraclough (1984), Case (1993), Jesudason (1995), Anne Munro (1996) and Crouch (1996) argued that the success of Barisan Nasional in dominating the country's administration and winning all of the elections were due to the purposive-depoliticization policies practiced by the Barisan Nasional government, such as the Internal Security Act (ISA) 1960, the Sedition Act, the Official Secrets Act, the Societies Registration Act and the domination of Barisan Nasional in various state apparatus such as the Election Commission, the Public Administration, the Information Department, the Security Forces and other related government agencies. Such policies had given many advantages to the Barisan Nasional to prevent possible political competition created by the Opposition especially during elections, allowing Barisan Nasional to maintain its status quo.⁷

The points raised by those scholars certainly carry some academic merits. However, in comparison, the arguments do not seem to satisfactorily explain the success of other political parties in other situations. For instance, during Mexico national election in 1997, Mexican National Action Party when it beat the Institutional Revolutionary Party (IRP) after its 67 years of political reign in Mexico during the national election in 1997. Similar situation can also be seen in Taiwan when the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) pulled off a stunning victory against the Kuomintang, the party which ruled Taiwan for more than five decades, in the island's presidential polls in 2000. Another more interesting case was the failure of the Golkar in sustaining its domination of Indonesia's administration during the reformasi (reformation) era in that country. The three illustrated cases could be used as an alternative debate (in the context of Malaysia in general and Sarawak in particular) because political parties such as IRP, DPP and Golkar were very strong and had controlled their respective state apparatus.⁸

In the general context of Malaysia particularly in Sarawak, the ability of the ruling parties to control political competition cannot be seen as a mere political process. One needs to carry out a social analysis that goes beyond perspective analysis which is institutional in nature as pointed out by particular scholars in their debates on Barisan Nasional political hegemony in Malaysia.

As clarified earlier, the idea of democracy (including that of elections and selection of candidates or representatives) was an administrative idea introduced by the West (read the British) into Malaysian politics. However, this does not mean that the exposure to the administrative idea, which was based on such democracy, had entirely changed the orientation of the feudal political culture, which had long been embedded in the values and the Malaysians' political norms up till today. In fact, the practice of Malaysia's democratic administration after the colonial era is seen to have been 'mixed' with feudal values and political norms.

This phenomenon can be observed clearly through the development of democracy in Malaysia under the political leadership of Barisan Nasional. For example, since the country's independence 1957, Barisan Nasional had always been promoting the patronage democracy idealism. Through this patronage democracy, the political elites who formed Perikatan (Barisan Nasional) had promoted the idea of a party vanguard which later became a prominent feature in the context of social political orientation. The United Malays National Organisation or UMNO, one of Barisan Nasional party components, clearly practices and become part of the Malay political culture. UMNO, in its strive to obtain the political support from the Malay community had put the party as a party that represents the political interests of the Malays in Malaysia. In other words, UMNO delivers a political message that the Malays' security, their rights, their socio-economic wellbeing and development depend on their loyalty and political support for UMNO.⁹

This demand for loyalty and political support not only highlighted the continuation of norms and values contained in the feudalism context of the Malays during the monarchy-ruled period, but it also exposed UMNO's intellectual hegemony over the Malay community in the context of democracy being practiced in the post colonial era. The intellectual-hegemony phenomenon¹⁰ practiced by UMNO has greatly influenced the development and expansion of the Malays cultural and political orientation in post-colonial times and this abstract factor has contributed to UMNO's ability to project the party's vanguard image to safeguard the political interests of the Malays. In turn, UMNO enjoys the political support of the Malays.

Similar idealism also became the practice of the other Barisan Nasional party components such as the MCA, MIC, Gerakan Party, Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB), Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS) in Sarawak and Umno-Sabah. All of these parties practice the vanguard party idealism through intellectual hegemony towards their political supporters in their efforts to gain political loyalty. Hence, the practice of democracy through the election process during the post-colonial period relied heavily on the community's intellectualism.

This phenomenon does not only occur in the political sphere but also take place in other areas including economic and businesses. In the acclaimed mission to create a peaceful and stable society, the Barisan Nasional leaders especially after the May 13 1969¹¹ incident had carried out an economic developmental based on the developmentalist state idealism. The program in question is a policy known as the New Economic Policy (NEP). The implementation of NEP has allowed the government to play a significant role in shaping the country's economic development based on national interest, ethnic preferential and social coerciveness.

In fact there was a kind of notion as indicated by Green (1974) that the role and intervention played by the government in the implementation of economic development policies was crucial for a nation that has a complex social structure,

either from the different racial mix or the wide disparity in the development of the different races¹². As a result, we can observe, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a certain kind of optimism towards this approach i.e. to develop the economies of developing countries including Malaysia through its NEP.

THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY (NEP) AND THE RULING PARTY'S POLITICAL HEGEMONY

The NEP was launched during the Second Malaysia Plan (1971-1976) as a strategy to improve participation of the Malaysians from different races in the economic development. The Barisan Nasional government, especially UMNO, has stated that the main reason for the May 13 incident was due to the alienation of the Malays in the country's economic activities. The NEP had two objectives, first, to eradicate poverty and the income gap among Malaysians; and second to restructure Malaysians based on economic balance. NEP is the brainchild of the Barisan Nasional-led government to serve these purposes.

After the launch of the NEP in 1971, the role played by the government (read Barisan Nasional) became more evident especially in Malaysia's economic and political development. Empirical evidence can be seen through the inceptions of various economic development agencies such as The Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority (FAMA), Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA), etc. At the state level, economic political institutions were established as the investment arms for the State Governments such as Perbadanan Iktisad or Perbadanan Ekonomi Negeri (State Economic Development).¹³

The setting up of such institutions portrayed the important roles played by the Federal Government in the political economic development of Malaysia. From the socio-political viewpoint, the Government's intention was to bring the Malaysian community (especially the Malays) into the competitive capitalist economic system. And the main objective was to reduce the economic gap between races in Malaysia. Indirectly, this had helped to mobilize the Malaysian community to become more interactive in the political and economic development in Malaysia.

In the early and up to the mid 1980s, the Malaysian leaders shifted its economy from agriculture base to import-substitutions and manufacturing base. Since the shift, the Malaysian economy has experienced a remarkable growth, in fact among the fastest in the world. Although, such change of approach may have help to protect the people and the nation's interest, it had also left certain impacts on the development of democracy and cultural and political orientation among the community.

The prevailing involvement of the government in the political and economic development has provided the Barisan Nasional an influential political force since 1957 particularly in the construction of the populace ideology, especially the Malays. With such an approach, the government was able to instill a kind of cultural and political orientation asserting that only the ruling government has the ability to maintain economic and political stability in Malaysia. Economic development programs such as FELDA, FAMA, the Federal Land Consolidation and the Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA) and the Heavy Industries Corporation of

Malaysia (HICOM) for example had successfully suppressed any possible political resistance and political boycott from the population's majority.¹⁴

Evidently, the populace ideology has always been commendably manipulated by the Barisan Nasional in the course of political competition during elections. Election campaigns are always looked upon as an image display of the 'government'. If we analyze the series of elections held in Malaysia since 1955, the populace ideology approach has been used as a kind of mechanism for the Barisan Nasional to win political support. More often than not, elections in Malaysia were not only the medium for the citizens to practice their democracy rights but as a platform for Barisan Nasional to announce the Government policies and programs.

In most cases, the declaration of the Government policies or programs via the election "platform" has been seen by the peoples as party program of Barisan Nasional. For example, in the Indera Kayangan by-election in Perlis on 19th January 2002, a number of announcements were made by Barisan Nasional including allocation of an additional RM100 million to upgrade the construction of a Tamil-medium university as announced by the MIC president Dato' Seri Samy Vellu in Kedah together with a few other small allocations.¹⁵

Such populace orientation did not only aim to capture political support from voters in the short-term period, but also to strengthen the Government's intellectual hegemony over the citizens in a longer-term. Through such economic policy and political control, the ruling party was able to construct a false understanding regarding differences between the Government's policies and the party's programs. This aspect – the control and use of the economic and political factors to obtain mass political support – was carefully detailed and debated by Frey (1978)¹⁶. Frey explained that within any political system -specifically in developing or poor countries whereby a majority of the population still has very low level of education - there exists confusion among the community regarding the philosophy and function of a political system, of which they are associated with. It is quite common among this society to look at the political system as one that is protected by the activities and programs organized by political parties competing for power to rule.

The confusion becomes more serious during election campaigns. The incumbent party as the caretaker government makes use the Government's agencies to strengthen its populace ideology and later control the intellectual hegemony within the society. In relation to this, Frey's (1978) views through his political economy model can be used to explain the democratic practice and the election in this country. However, we must also bear in mind that there is another factor that must be taken into account i.e. the feudal values commonly known as neo-feudal. The combination of a Government-party model (political economy model) and neo-feudal values, in the end demonstrate that the patron-client phenomenon in a democratic system – specifically during the elections, or what is now defined as patronage democracy - had really reinforced the Government's intellectual hegemony over the majority of the people.

ELECTION AND THE RULING PARTY'S HEGEMONY: THE SARAWAK STATE ELECTION 2001

Federalism is Malaysia model of political administration. The political control at the state-level by a party that shares the same ideology or objectives with the ruling party at the federal level is important to ensure sustainable control of power and

ideology. Therefore, the practice of patronage democracy was brought to state level politics. This can be observed from the politics and election practices in Sarawak.¹⁷ However it has to be clarified that patronage democracy which existed in the context of the development of democracy in Sarawak is not an “exported” ideology from the Federal Government in Kuala Lumpur. In fact, it was already firmly established during the time when Sarawak was under the influence of the Brooke-British family (1841-1946).¹⁸

The patronage democracy became obvious when political parties began to formalize in Sarawak in the 1950s. This can be observed from the emergence of political parties controlled by the aristocrats or leaders from their respective groups. The idealism of patronage democracy in Sarawak was dominantly seen during the formation of Malaysian Federation in 1963 and after 1970s the idealism has widely spread within the political culture of the Sarawak community. Through the level coalition known as Barisan Nasional+3 (BN+3), led by Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB), the patronage democracy had successfully planted the image as vanguard party in Sarawak. This image became more dominant and hegemonic when Tan Sri Taib Mahmud took the helm of the BN+3 Sarawak as Chief Minister, replacing Tun Abdul Rahman Ya'kub in 1981.

The image of BN+3 leadership as a vanguard for the socio-political prosperity of the community gained its impacts when in 1992, Tan Sri Taib Mahmud announced his vision to stimulate the growth of Sarawak's economic and political development through a policy called the “politics of development” (PoD). The PoD as the umbrella policy for the state's political economic development is in fact a complementary to the Vision 2020 launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1990. According to Tan Sri Taib Mahmud, the politics of development is the backbone policy to other policies implemented by the leaders of BN+3 in Sarawak. He later explained in detail the idealism behind the policy;

The PoD (politics of development) is a total commitment to development objectives. In other words, we put development objectives as paramount in our political actions. If at one time or another, our political interest is in conflict with the development objectives, the former should by all means give way to the development objectives in as far as politics allow us to do so. In other words, our politics must be subservient to the demands of development, and that means, we who are the leaders, whether at the top or grassroots level must be aware of our vital role as the representatives of the people.¹⁹

It is apparent that the objectives of PoD were primarily aimed to provide physical development of the Sarawak community. In the PoD framework, the party leaders in Sarawak strengthened its intellectual hegemony as an asset to dominate the state's politics, especially after 1992. The spread of intellectual hegemony through the PoD policy has brought about various shapes of political culture that are synonym with the patronage democracy ideology. For example, within the framework of the PoD policy, wealth-generating resources for development such as timber concessions, business and infrastructure development contracts are channeled to the people by means of political elitists. This gave rise to the patronage image and later generates a new political mindset whereby a community depends on the state's intellectual hegemony to guarantee loyalty and support for the party in power.

During elections, the electoral-patron image became clearly visible when the ruling party announces major development projects to a certain group of society as an 'exchange of votes' and 'political support' to the ruling party's contesting candidates. During the 1996 state election, the ruling party declared a development project worth RM50 million in its election campaign. Indirectly, this was some kind of a display to the Sarawak community of the capability of BN+3 to lead the political and economic development of Sarawak. As a result, the BN+3 won more than 90 percent of the seats contested that year.²⁰

The results indirectly showed how patronage democracy practiced by the state has accomplished a chain of patron-client relationship within the framework of a democratic system. The distinct display of the patron-client value implicitly puts democratic idealism delicately entwined within the neo-feudal value reconstructed by the political elitists in their practice of democracy in Malaysia in general and Sarawak in particular. Realizing the ability of the idealism to sustain the status quo of the party, the ruling political party had manipulated its intellectual hegemony through patronage democracy in the 2001 Sarawak state election.

In that particular election, the initial expectations of several political observers was that something interesting would happen. The assumption was based on a few general and specific factors, prevalence at both the national and state levels. Firstly, at the national level, patronage democracy as supported by Barisan Nasional has faced a stiff competition from the opposition whom since 1998 had formed an opposition alliance in the name of democratic-justice idealism. Together, they established Barisan Alternatif or the Alternative Front led by the Parti Islam se-Malaysia (PAS), Democratic Action Party (DAP), and Parti Keadilan, whose leader is the wife of the former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Datin Wan Azizah Ismail.²¹

The formation of Barisan Alternatif, if studied explicitly is not new as far as the opposition parties in Malaysia are concerned. Even before this, there have been similar alliances called Barisan Sosial in the 1960s and the Gagasan Rakyat-Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah in 1990. However, this time around Barisan Alternatif is seen to have the ability to give a tough challenge to Barisan Nasional. Barisan Alternatif, as seen by political observers at that time was not just an ad-hoc pact that has no clear idealism; but an alliance that has a concrete political course and idealism striving for democracy and fairness.

The Barisan Alternatif's ideals of democracy and fairness was believed to have the ability to challenge the hegemony of patronage democracy which has been firmly rooted in Malaysian politics. This optimism was further strengthened when during the 1999 national election in Sanggang, Pahang; Teluk Kemang, Negeri Sembilan; and also Lunas, Kedah, the Barisan Alternatif Opposition performed fairly well where it was able to compete with the hegemonic domination of the Barisan Nasional patronaged democracy. In fact in Terengganu and the by-election in Lunas, the "new" political ideals of democracy and justice have "overpowered" the Barisan Nasional political domination. This development put the Sarawak election in an interesting situation for study, given the fact that Barisan Alternatif was also contesting in the election.

Furthermore, Tan Sri Taib Mahmud as chief minister of Sarawak and in his capacity as the PBB president had announced that he was not defending his Asajaya seat, which he had represented for so many years. Instead he wanted to contest for the Balingian seat, situated in Mukah. This development had caused various

speculations among political observers; and the most obvious was related to the presumably erosion of Tan Sri Taib Mahmud's domination among his voters in Asajaya. Both of the issues had led the academics to assume that 2001 state election on Sarawak would be an interesting case for study.

The Sarawak State Legislative Assembly was dissolved on 13th September 2001 to make way for the 8th state election. The election involved eight political parties and 173 candidates. On the nomination day, four seats were won uncontested by the Barisan Nasional candidates in N11 Batu Kawa, N25 Batang Ai, N49 Katibas and N62 Ba'kelalan. Such victories however could not be taken as an indication that other Barisan Nasional candidates would have an easy task ahead. This was evident from the optimum deployment of the Barisan Nasional campaign machinery to ensure the party's victory since the nomination day well into polling day.²²

As indicated above, the biggest test for any party in power is the ability to sustain its dominance. For the Sarawak Barisan Nasional, this eighth election is seen as the most challenging election that should not be taken lightly. This is because the recent political development has indicated that the Barisan Nasional's political ideology would be facing hard political competition from the merged opposition parties. In Sarawak, the opposition party criticized the PoD ideology championed by Chief Minister Tan Sri Taib Mahmud since 1992.²³

To ensure that the state ideology remained fixated in the mindset of the people, election campaigns became the appropriate platform for leaders to propagate this message to the people. In the Sarawak eighth state election, Barisan Nasional launched its election motto 'Moving Forward in Unity for a Better Sarawak.' The phrase 'moving forward' is to reflect the state ideology which means development along with Barisan Nasional, while 'unity' is defined as solidarity that is parallel to Barisan Nasional coalition concept.²⁴

With such a motto, the Barisan Nasional attempted to give a strong message to the Sarawak voters that only a party like Barisan Nasional coalition is able to change and improve the living standard and wellbeing of the people. This message is carried by all of the Barisan Nasional candidates in their political appeals. As an example, in a press statement made by Lily Yong, a Barisan Nasional candidate contesting for the Padungan seat said that her main objective was to ensure the Barisan Nasional's responsibility as development driver for the Padungan remains at it is. From political point of view, such a statement is certainly to inculcate in the voters' minds that development could only be materialized if they are loyal to the Barisan Nasional. Lily Yong's victory in the election was evident that such a statement in one way or another has to a certain extent influenced on the voters.²⁵

During the election campaign (from 18th September 2001 to midnight of 26th September, 2001), the rite of patronage democracy was once again displayed. It was at the nomination day in Mukah, the then Deputy Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi accompanied Tan Sri Taib Mahmud and later officiated the opening of a new school, Sekolah Kebangsaan and Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Bandar Baru Mukah. To the voters, this clearly symbolizes the support of the Federal Government towards the vision of the State Government showing the picture of patronage democracy in practice²⁶. In fact the Deputy Prime Minister's visit was given a grand welcoming ceremony displaying another facet of political feudalism at work.²⁷

A similar phenomenon can be observed in the Barisan Nasional campaigning programs. Tan Sri Taib Mahmud, in a political campaign in Lawas, stated clearly that the BN+3 in Sarawak was in the midst of allocating RM400 million to develop Lawas' infrastructure, including developing 100,000 hectares of land for palm oil cultivation for a period of six years beginning 2001.²⁸ Apart from Tan Sri Taib Mahmud as head of the caretaker government, the other state political leaders also utilized their 'official duty' time to announce various development projects. For example, Datuk Sim Kheng Hui, Assistant Minister of Social Development and Urbanisation, at an official function in Pending has announced the allocation for a small rural project worth RM113,000 to 23 associations around Kuching.²⁹ Meanwhile, Datuk Abang Johari as Tourism Minister and state assemblyman for Satok also presented financial assistance to 84 Bumiputera entrepreneurs in Kuching.

Apart from this, other state apparatus were also mobilized to fortify state intellectual hegemony. The State Forestry Department, Petroleum Nasional Malaysia (PETRONAS), Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) and Welfare Department Malaysia made several announcements on development projects worth millions of ringgit where they are made patrons. The mass media also played their roles to further strengthen the state intellectual hegemony while the election campaign took place.³⁰

One of the glaring examples of the media involvement is the talk show program with state leaders called 'Untukmu Sarawak' (For You Sarawak). In this televised program, Sarawak's top leaders such as Tan Sri Taib Mahmud, Datuk Adenan Satem, Datuk Haji Awang Tengah and Datuk Taha Ariffin were invited as guests or panelists, offering the viewers the opportunity to hear the rapid development achieved by Sarawak under the Barisan Nasional leadership. The Government-controlled television through TV1 also broadcast speech by the then Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad a day before polling day. Among the crucial points raised by the Prime Minister in his political appeals were the need for Sarawak people to vote for Barisan Nasional for their own interests, well-being, development and prosperity.³¹

The program had indirectly strengthened the state intellectual hegemony among the Sarawak community. Beside the electronic media, national print media also took part in intensifying the state intellectual hegemony during the campaign period. Throughout the month of September 2001, the national print media had run news stories and articles aimed to propagate and strengthen the state intellectual hegemony. For example, *Utusan Sarawak* on 19th September 2001 published an important news story focusing on the rural community of Sarawak particularly in Mukah regarding the Barisan Nasional development programs to supply water and electricity to all schools in Mukah. The then deputy prime minister himself announced the project that is valued at RM23.5 million and will benefit 463 rural schools in Sarawak.³²

In its issue dated September 20, 2001, *Utusan Sarawak* ran a special column to focus on the achievements and the state development planning of the Barisan Nasional in Sarawak. The column named 'Development Style' published facts and information about the infrastructure and development built by the Barisan Nasional government for the convenience of the people in Sarawak. This included the construction of roads, more schools in rural areas and increasing the number ferry services. A similar article was also published in the *Sunday Tribune* newspaper dated September 30, 2001, which implicitly aimed at strengthening the state

intellectual hegemony particularly among the Bidayuh community. The statement by Sarawak's Assistant Finance Minister Michael Manyin ak Jawang, published in the Borneo Post showed the significant role played by the media on strengthening the state intellectual hegemony.³³

When the election results were announced on the night of 27th September 2001, once again the Sarawak BN+3 party took control of the state leadership. Various assumptions were put forward to explain the almost 99 per cent winning of the state assembly seats. Referring to the notion of political hegemony advanced by Gramsci (1971), patronage democracy as apparently practiced in Malaysia politics particularly in the case of Sarawak election 2001, it is quite obvious that the state not only controls the existing agencies and institutions but also to a certain extent shapes the community's mindset and political culture. In this case, it seems that the state party has succeeded in creating an image as a vanguard and protector, which is a new concept, or neo-patron that is to protect and safeguard the community's interests.

The Malaysian community is so complex and diverse in nature, especially those in Sarawak (where the community's structure is much more complex and heterogeneous as compared to the Peninsular Malaysia), patronage democracy is seen as an effective and workable political idealism. In other words, patronage democracy has been successfully practiced in maintaining the political hegemony of the ruling coalition in Malaysia, particularly in Sarawak, and this is evident in Sarawak election 2001.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has observed several facets of democracy, its values and practices in elections in Malaysia with a particular case study in Sarawak election 2001. Based on the notion of political hegemony, this paper has attempted to elucidate the ability of Barisan Nasional to maintain its political hegemony and domination and to sustain the support of the voters at the national as well as at the state level. This paper suggests a possible explanation to this situation by referring to the notion of patronage democracy. This paper takes a stance that Barisan Nasional political hegemony needs to be seen from a wider perspective. This includes the complementary relations between the economic and political factors such as the practice and propagation of patronage democracy and as a vanguard party. The propagation of such idealism is meant to further strengthen the hegemonic intellectualism between the state and the people as suggested by Gramsci (1971). In other words, the ideal form of democracy that supposedly ensures freedom, participation, justice and transparency is also subjected to certain values, interpretation and practices. Practically speaking, democracy as a political doctrine is incapable of preventing the prevailing of hegemonic and patronage politics, as portrayed in the previous discussion. The Sarawak state election 2001 clearly illustrated that the political hegemony of the coalition party could be maintained through the practiced of patronage democracy and patron-client politics.

ENDNOTES

¹ Dahl in Polyarchy stated that for any political system, which had been controlled by a certain individual or a group, whether or not it is democratic, has the tendency to move towards dictatorship. For more details, please refer to Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

² For more details on this aspect, please refer to Lipset, Seymour Martin, *Political Man*, (London: Heinemann, 1960).

³ A group of political scientists from the University of Stanford, led by Diamond in their study in relation to the development and the practice of democracy in Asia had put election as one of the barometer to determine the degree of democracy in any state. For a more detailed study, please refer to Diamond, Larry. *How People View Democracy: Findings from Public Opinion Surveys in Four Regions*. Paper presented at the seminar on Democratization, Stanford University, 11 January, 2001. Held, David. *Prospects for Democracy: From West to the East*, (London: Polity Press, 1993): See also Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political man*, (London: Heinemann, 1960).

⁴ By this, the non-intellectuals in the context of this writing were referring to the roles played by the bodies responsible to conduct the election process. For example in Malaysia, the Election Commission is regarded in the non-intellectual context as a body that is independent in handling the election process.

⁵ See Bedlington, Stanley, *Malaysia and Singapore: The buildings of New States*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978).

⁶ See Zakaria Hj Ahmad, "Malaysia: Quasi-Democracy in a Divided Society", Linz, Diamond & Lipset, (Eds.), *Democracy in Developing Societies: Vol. Asia*, 1989.

⁷ This aspect was discussed at length by Kua, Anne-Munro, *Authoritarian Populism in Malaysia*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1996).

⁸ For more details please refer to the series of reports published in Newsweek from September 1998 until July 1999.

⁹ See, Chandra Muzaffar, *Protector*, (Penang: Aliran, 1970).

¹⁰ The intellectual-hegemony concept was introduced and developed by Gramsci Antonio. See Hoare, Q. & Smith, Nowell G, (eds.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, (London: Lawrence 1971). He used this concept to explain the failure of the revolutionary proletariat launched by a group of farmers in Southern Italy around 1900.

¹¹ For a fuller account on the background of the May 13 incident and the implementation of NEP, see Selvaratnam, "Towards National Harmony" in a Year of Political Transition", *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (Singapore: ISEAS, 1982).

¹² See e.g., Green, R.H, "The role of the state as an agent of economic and social development in the least developed countries", *Journal of Development Planning*, No. 6, (1974), 1-40.

¹³ See e.g., Lette, Richard, *Malaysia's Demographic Transition: Rapid Development, Culture and Politics*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ See, Kua, Anne-Munro, *Authoritarian Populism*.

¹⁵ *Berita Harian*, 17 January 2002.

¹⁶ For further details on Frey's political economy model, see Frey, B.S, *Modern Political Economy*, (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1978).

¹⁷ Sarawak, situated in the western part of the Borneo Island has a geographical area of 724,450 per square kilometre. It is the largest state in the Malaysian Federation. The state's population comprised various ethnic backgrounds such as Iban, Bidayuh, Malay, Melanau, Kayan and Kenyah. Unlike the composition of the population in the Peninsula comprising 55% Malays, 34% Chinese, 11% Indians and others, in Sarawak there were no ethnic group who forms the majority. According to the 1998 census statistics, the population of Sarawak was 1.99 million; whereby 5.6% are Melanaus, 21.4% Malays, 28.6% Ibans, 8% Bidayuh, 6% represented the various other ethnic Bumiputra (indigenous) groups, 27% Chinese and 3.9% of other ethnic groups. For a detailed figure, please refer to Statistics Department Malaysia, 1998.

¹⁸ For a comprehensive discussion on Sarawak's political history, see Sabihah Othman, *Malay-Muslim Political Participation in Sarawak, 1952-1987*, (Singapore: ISEAS, 1987); Jayum Jawan, *Iban Politics and Economic Development: Their Patterns and Change*, (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Press, 1994).

¹⁹ For further observation see Abdul Taib Mahmud, 'The Politics of Development: Roles of the Challenges for the Elected Representative', *Jurnal Azam*, VIII, (1992), 2-15.

²⁰ For a more interesting discussion, see Aeria, Andrew, 'The Politics of Development and the 1996 Sarawak Elections', *Kajian Malaysia*, vol. XV, (1997), 57-83.

²¹ For further details, see Shamsul A.B. *The Redefinition of Politics and the Transformation of Malaysian Pluralism*, Research Workshop on Southeast Asian Pluralism, August 5-6, Shah Village Hotel, Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1999.

²² For more details, please refer to *Utusan Sarawak*, 19 September 2001.

²³ This is evident during the national election campaign in 1999 in Sarawak where the opposition strongly criticized the PoD ideology especially on the nepotism, corruption and non-transparency practices. However the result of the 1999 election in Sarawak did not clearly portray the strength of the Barisan National Government at the state level, which has been in power since 1963.

²⁴ Interviews with the PBB party workers for the Pantai Damai seat in relation to the meaning of the Barisan Nasional election motto on 27th September 2001.

²⁵ *Sarawak Tribune*, 13 September 2001.

²⁶ See reports in *Utusan Sarawak*, 19 September 2001.

²⁷ See a chapter written by Hanapi Dollah & Mohd Rizal Yaacob entitled Traditionalism in Sarawak Politics.

²⁸ *Utusan Sarawak*, 20 September 2001; please see *New Straits Times*, 19 September 2001 which clearly reported Tan Sri Taib Mahmud's statement as follows: 'Taib: I'm contesting to bring development in Balingian'.

²⁹ For more details, please refer to *Borneo Post*, 6 September 2001.

³⁰ See media reports from dailies such as the *Borneo Post*, the *New Straits Times* and *Utusan Sarawak* between 13 September 2001 and 26 September 2001.

³¹ The program 'Untukmu Sarawak' was aired at 7.30pm on TV1 throughout the entire campaign period of the Sarawak election.

³² For more details, see *Utusan Sarawak*, 19 September 2001.

³³ See *Borneo Post*, 12 August 2001.

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