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Understanding Electoral Manipulation in Hybrid Regimes: An Analysis Based on
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Abstract

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When hybrid regimes hold elections, the playing field is typically structured to benefit the incumbent government. Different forms of electoral manipulation have proven effective in maintaining or expanding power. While the topic of electoral manipulation has been studied extensively, less attention has been paid to the conditions under which specific forms of manipulation occur. This thesis investigates the circumstances under which hybrid regimes choose specific methods that alter the electoral process by asking: “*When hybrid regimes resort to electoral manipulation, what are the key conditions that influence their choice of manipulation methods?*” By analyzing consecutive elections across the entire electoral cycle, this study aims to examine strategic considerations that shape the choice of manipulation. To answer the research question, a framework that considers legal, institutional, individual, and operational types of electoral manipulation has been developed. A comparative approach has been chosen, in which the framework is applied to Singapore and Malaysia. The findings reveal that hybrid regimes rely on legal and institutional forms of electoral manipulation as a baseline strategy due to their cost-effectiveness and consistency. Beyond that, other forms of electoral manipulation are more situational and are implemented based on factors such as the level of legitimacy, financial resources, or electoral threat. The results highlight that electoral manipulation is both adaptable and flexible, with hybrid regimes opting for low-risk or high-risk manipulation methods depending on the political context. This study combines both temporal and typological dimensions of electoral manipulation and can be applied to other hybrid regimes outside of Asia for future studies on electoral integrity.

Wenn hybride Regime Wahlen abhalten, sind die Bedingungen oft so gestaltet, dass sie der amtierenden Regierung zugutekommen. Unterschiedliche Formen der Wahlmanipulation können ein wirksames Mittel sein, um politische Macht zu erhalten oder auszubauen. Obwohl das Thema Wahlmanipulation in der Literatur bereits umfassend behandelt wurde, sind die Bedingungen, unter denen bestimmte Formen der Manipulation auftreten können, nicht immer eindeutig. Im Rahmen dieser Arbeit wird daher untersucht, unter welchen Umständen hybride Regime sich für spezifische Methoden entscheiden, um den Wahlprozess zu beeinflussen. Die Forschungsfrage geht somit folgender Frage nach: *„Welche Bedingungen und Faktoren bestimmen, zu welchen Formen der Wahlmanipulation hybride Regime greifen?“* Durch die Untersuchung von aufeinanderfolgenden Wahlen über den gesamten Wahlzyklus hinweg soll erforscht werden, welche strategischen Überlegungen Regime treffen, bevor sie sich für bestimmte Formen der Wahlmanipulation entscheiden. Zur Beantwortung der Forschungsfrage wurde ein theoretischer Rahmen entwickelt, der rechtliche, individuelle und operative Formen der Wahlmanipulation berücksichtigt. Weiterhin wurde ein komparativer Ansatz gewählt, der auf die Fallstudien Singapur und Malaysia angewendet wird. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass hybride Regime rechtliche und institutionelle Formen der Wahlmanipulation als grundlegende Strategien nutzen, da diese sich als kosteneffektiv und verlässlich erwiesen haben. Darüber hinaus werden andere Methoden situativ angewendet, basierend auf Faktoren wie Legitimität, finanziellen Kapazitäten oder der Gefahr einer Wahlniederlage. Die Resultate verdeutlichen weiterhin, dass Wahlmanipulation ein flexibler und anpassungsfähiger Bereich ist, in welchem hybride Regime je nach politischem Kontext zwischen risikoarmen und risikoreichen Lösungen schwanken. Diese Studie verbindet sowohl chronologische als auch typologische Dimensionen der Wahlmanipulation und lässt sich in zukünftigen Untersuchungen zur Wahlintegrität auch auf hybride Regime außerhalb Asiens anwenden.

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List of Abbreviations

1MDB	=	1Malaysia Development Berhad
BN	=	Barisan Nasional
EBRC	=	Electoral Boundaries Review Committee
EC	=	Electoral Commission
EMB	=	Electoral Management Body
GE13	=	2013 Malaysian General Election
GE14	=	2018 Malaysian General Election
GE2011	=	2011 Singaporean General Election
GE2015	=	2015 Singaporean General Election
GRC	=	Group Representation Constituency
PAP	=	People's Action Party
PAS	=	Malaysian Islamic Party
PH	=	Pakatan Harapan
PR	=	Pakatan Rakyat
SMC	=	Single Member Constituency
UMNO	=	United Malays National Organization

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1. Introduction

The year 2024 was an important year for elections. A total of 67 countries held national-level elections, affecting almost half of the world's population (The Economist 2024). When observing electoral processes and outcomes, the manner in which elections are conducted and how they are perceived largely vary. Countries that hold elections often do so out of different motivations, for example out of legal requirements or to gain national and international credibility. Generally speaking, the quality of elections corresponds to the type of political system that organizes and holds them. For example, it would be expected that a democracy would hold elections that are mostly considered free and fair, while an authoritarian regime might organize elections in which political competition is restricted. However, there are states that cannot be classified into either category. According to the Democracy Index from 2023, those systems are defined as “hybrid regimes” or “flawed democracies”. Within hybrid regimes in particular, the “elections have irregularities that often prevent them from being both free and fair” (Economist Intelligence Unit 2024, 66). Out of the 167 countries that were included in the report, about 20% were of a hybrid nature (Economist Intelligence Unit 2024, 4), meaning that they are quite common and deserve scholarly attention. Hybrid regimes are generally characterized by possessing both features of democracies and authoritarian states, where the institutional environment theoretically allows for free and fair elections, but oppressive mechanisms ultimately restrict them (Riaz and Parvez 2021, 802). The case of hybrid regimes therefore offers a different perspective from which electoral quality can be studied. Where the existence or absence of free and fair electoral methods is much clearer in democracies and authoritarian regimes, hybrid regimes have shown their reliance on strategies and goals that are harder to detect and comprehend.

A key term for the study of hybrid regimes is therefore “electoral manipulation”. Electoral manipulation can be understood as “means by which political leaders tamper with election results to deviate from public vote preferences in favor of the regime” (Higashijima, Kadoya, and Yanai 2024, 473). Hybrid regimes may limit the freedom and fairness of their elections for multiple reasons, and their methods differ based on factors such as political stability or resources available. Some popular methods of electoral manipulation would include irregularities in the voting and counting process, intimidation and coercion of political opponents, the control of the media landscape, and many others that can be implemented on a case-by-case basis. Regimes use these tools to hold onto power, expand their power, or to project a positive image of their government. At the same time, harsh methods of manipulation can also create a backlash and negative public perception (Higashijima, Kadoya, and Yanai

2024, 473; Higashijima 2022, 35–37), which is why hybrid regimes need to find a balance of safely and efficiently implementing them into the electoral process in order to reap the benefits.

Recent developments in the study of electoral manipulation have created approaches and frameworks on how to detect and measure such practices. However, the literature suggests that election observation and monitoring efforts lack a standardized method that accounts for both the forms and timing at which manipulation can occur (Yukawa and Sakamoto 2023, 2). While the forms of electoral manipulation have been explored more, the reasons why a regime chooses a specific type have been addressed less. When hybrid regimes decide to influence electoral processes and election outcomes, the conditions such as the timing or context remain underexplored. Existing research has often focused on individual manipulation strategies, without keeping in mind the whole electoral cycle and the various political and institutional conditions. Therefore, this thesis raises the following question: *“When hybrid regimes resort to electoral manipulation, what are the key conditions that influence their choice of manipulation methods?”*.

The goal is to understand not only how hybrid regimes influence electoral outcomes, but also to uncover how factors such as political stability, institutional control, legitimacy, and opposition strength affect the choices of manipulation. This will include an analysis of the electoral cycle, including the pre-election period, election day, and the post-election period. For this study, a comparative approach has been chosen to examine electoral manipulation and its underlying conditions both along the temporal dimension (across elections) and along the typological dimension (across manipulation types). The countries chosen for the comparative case study are Singapore and Malaysia due to their similarities in terms of historical development, regime type, and implementation of electoral manipulation methods. To cover the whole electoral cycle, two back-to-back elections per country case will be analyzed along four different categories: These are the “I: Legal and Institutional Context”, “II: Manipulation of Individuals”, “III: Manipulation of Voting Operations” and “IV: Outcomes and Consequences of Manipulation”. The categories will be able to cover the broad spectrum in which electoral manipulation can occur, aligning them with the different stages of the electoral cycle to detect patterns, strategic decisions and conditions of electoral manipulation in hybrid regimes. Through the application of the framework to both country cases, this study further aims to contribute to common concepts within the literature such as “direct vs. indirect effects” (Simpser 2013) and the cost-effectiveness of electoral manipulation (van Ham and Lindberg 2015; Harvey and Mukherjee 2020). Furthermore, the formulated framework attempts to create a model that can be applied to other hybrid regimes inside and outside of Asia, helping to create

datasets that can explain the conditions under which electoral manipulation may occur.

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 will review the literature on hybrid regimes and electoral manipulation. In Chapter 3, the methodology and analytical framework will be established, while Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings from Singapore and Malaysia. In Chapter 5, the findings will be discussed, followed by a summary of this study and an outlook for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction to the Literature Review

The literature review aims to showcase the current state of research on electoral manipulation. To understand why elections are manipulated, it is helpful to examine how the concept of hybrid regimes developed and how electoral manipulation is used and implemented. The various advantages and disadvantages, as well as the costs and benefits of electoral manipulation, will then be compared and analyzed. This can reveal the underlying motivations and goals behind electoral manipulation.

Next, various frameworks developed to measure electoral manipulation will be analyzed. Scholars have created manuals applicable to country cases, which will be explored to understand which methods and approaches are preferred by leaders and regimes. Elections can be influenced by many different factors, processes and mechanisms. A regime therefore has a large menu to choose from, though the criteria for this selection are not always clear. Here, the literature provides insights into the effectiveness of specific types of manipulation and their implications for regime stability and legitimacy, which are key concepts for hybrid regimes. Those insights will be utilized to create a framework that helps determine under which conditions hybrid regimes choose and implement specific methods of manipulation within the electoral process.

2.2. The Concept of Hybrid Regimes

The concept of hybrid regimes has received significant attention during the last two decades. Before scholars started to analyze the features of hybrid regimes, political systems were often classified into either democracies or autocracies, meaning that the difference between these two systems was quite distinct and clear (Gagné and Mahé 2020, 785–86). This began to slowly change with the introduction of the so-called “third wave of democratization”, defined by Samuel P. Huntington during the late twentieth century. According to Huntington, many states in developing countries that formerly were non-democratic or known as dictatorships transitioned to a form of democracy in which leaders are chosen through recurring elections.

However, Huntington recognized that elections are only a minimal requirement rather than a sufficient condition for a regime to be fully classified as a democracy (Huntington 1993, 3–10). These new types of political systems that formed during this “third wave” were labeled as “pseudodemocracies” by Diamond, as they could not easily be categorized as democracies yet did not share the typical characteristics of authoritarian regimes (Diamond 2002, 21–25). Diamond et al. further described this unknown territory as “blurred” due to the obstacles of clearly defining what lies between democracies and non-democracies (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset 1989, xvii).

Building on that, much of the literature has attempted to explain what defines hybrid regimes and how this new type of regime can be classified. Schedler, for example, uses the term “electoral authoritarian” to describe a regime that regularly holds elections to gain a variety of benefits from it (Schedler 2002, 36). At the same time, however, these elections are neither free nor fair, so political leaders and their parties are never in danger of losing their powerful positions. Similar to Diamond et al., he describes the situation as a “foggy zone” in which democratic and authoritarian characteristics are mixed together within a single political system (Schedler 2002, 37). Elections in particular must fulfill several conditions in order to be meaningful, such as allowing voters to choose their preferred candidate while ensuring they can freely acquire knowledge about the voting process and the candidates’ campaigns (Schedler 2002, 40–44). Besides elections, there are several other factors that must be considered when trying to classify regimes and see through this “foggy zone”: the freedom of expression, the right to participate, and the freedom to form organizations, among many others, must be considered (Dahl 1971, 1–3).

Another approach to classifying hybrid regimes has been formulated by Wigell, who places regimes with both democratic and authoritarian features in a “grey zone”. He created two separate dimensions, “electoralism” and “constitutionalism”. For the dimension of electoralism, he suggests analyzing whether elections are fair, competitive and inclusive in order to understand and categorize the hybrid regime in question (Wigell 2008, 230–37). Another approach, proposed by Merkel, classifies democracies into “embedded democracies” and “defective democracies”. Within an embedded democracy, there are multiple “partial regimes” that together form a functioning democracy. According to Merkel, the most important of these partial regimes is the electoral regime, as it can be viewed as the key feature distinguishing democratic from authoritarian systems (Merkel 2004, 36–38).

It is therefore evident that a wide range of aspects must be considered when analyzing and classifying different hybrid regimes. One of the key aspects is, without a doubt, elections: by

analyzing their quality and their execution, it is often possible to distinguish between democracies and non-democracies. Furthermore, elections are not a traditional tool of authoritarian regimes, which is why the concept of competitiveness is of importance. Gilbert and Mohseni describe hybrid regimes as “competitive regimes with unfair competition”, suggesting that the quality of elections plays a vital role (Gilbert and Mohseni 2011, 280). In comparison to democracies, hybrid regimes create elections that seem fair but most of the time favor the current incumbent. Moreover, elections with unfair competition can originate from institutional structures and regulations that are not inherently unfair or undemocratic, yet create an environment that makes it very difficult for the opposition to win (Gagné and Mahé 2020, 786). Therefore, the concept of elections with unfair competition must be analyzed further.

2.3. The Concept of Electoral Manipulation

The literature offers a wide range of definitions for the concepts of fair elections and manipulated elections. The OSCE, for example, describes elections as free when they “will be held at reasonable intervals by secret ballot or by equivalent free voting procedure, under conditions which ensure in practice the free expression of the opinion of the electors in the choice of their representatives” (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 2005, 29). Free and fair elections are then protected in the law and guaranteed for all citizens of voting age to cover the rights of participation. It does become more complicated when determining whether and how these rules were potentially violated. As Wang and Hall point out, conducting a successful analysis of electoral quality is often dependent on data that may be provided by states and governments. In cases of inconsistent data availability, or when data access is limited or not publicly available, simply observing the election day itself will not suffice to evaluate an election adequately. Rather, one needs to analyze the whole “electoral cycle” to find factors that create an unfair or uncompetitive environment (Hall and T. A. Wang 2008, 41–42).

The electoral cycle, as illustrated in Appendix, *Figure 4*, consists of three stages, namely the pre-electoral stage (planning and preparation), the electoral stage (voting and official results), and the post-electoral stage (evaluation). Each of these stages is important for assessing electoral quality because instances of manipulation could occur at any time and completely change the result of an election. At the same time, even manipulation that does not alter the final outcome may significantly affect future elections. For example, a reduction in voter turnout can impact voter participation in subsequent elections (Bogdan 2013, 100–104). Given that electoral manipulation can occur at any stage of the electoral cycle, the question remains what falls under its definition.

Over the past decades, studies of electoral quality have often used terms such as “manipulation”, “fraud”, and “malpractice”. In most cases, the terms “manipulation” and “fraud” point in a similar direction, meaning that an individual or entity (e.g. a candidate or political party) is deliberately violating electoral rules to win or alter an election outcome. According to Bogdan, manipulation can further be categorized into three groups: “the manipulation of rules (the legal framework), the manipulation of voters (preference-formation and expression), and the manipulation of voting (electoral administration)” (Bogdan 2013, 96). On the other hand, “malpractice” suggests that inaccuracies occurred within the electoral cycle, for example in the case of oversights or errors by polling officials or other public servants. Therefore, the key difference between the terms fraud and malpractice lies in whether there was an intent to cheat or not (Bogdan 2013, 96–98). Another definition of electoral fraud has been provided by Schedler, who stated that it “involves the introduction of bias into the administration of elections” (Schedler 2002, 44). Here, the current incumbent is not only able to undermine basic democratic principles at any stage of the electoral cycle but can also influence the voting behavior of the public, which can function as a protective mechanism for the regime (Schedler 2002, 44–45). Another point has been raised by Simpson, who gave attention to the topic of electoral manipulation and legality. Fraudulent activities, depending on context and country, may remain within legal boundaries even though an election outcome had been altered in several ways (Simpson 2013, 32–33). This implies that even when the election process does not break the law, observers must remain attentive and critical.

There are many strategies for gaining unfair electoral advantages through the means of electoral manipulation. This can include more detectable methods such as buying votes, manipulating voter registries, or tampering with ballot boxes, as well as more sophisticated strategies such as gerrymandering or the regulation of campaign financing (Cheeseman and Klaas 2018, 6–7; The Heritage Foundation n.d.). The difficult part usually revolves around how electoral observers can detect such practices. There are several principles to assess electoral integrity which have been defined by the Ace Project, a comprehensive encyclopedia that has been launched at the United Nations: these include “Transparency” (holding perpetrators accountable for the actions), “Security” (free and fair environment without intimidation or restrictions), “voting mechanisms” (secret and accurate) or the “Electoral Management Bodies” (independent and within the legal framework) among other elements (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network n.d.).

Concluding this chapter, it can be observed that despite the existence of a consensus on what defines electoral manipulation, it can remain difficult to spot and further analyze it. Also, when

it comes to manipulating elections, incumbents have a wide range of options to choose from. Even some small inaccuracies or abnormalities can have major consequences on current or subsequent elections. Therefore, following the electoral cycle from start to finish remains essential as it lays the foundation for electoral integrity and prevention mechanisms (Bogdan 2013, 94–95).

2.4. Why do Hybrid Regimes Manipulate Elections?

While the previous chapters have discussed the concepts of hybrid regimes and electoral manipulation, it is equally important to understand why hybrid regimes engage in such manipulation in the first place. One common reason would be so a regime can hold onto its power. This enables them to create their own long-lasting legacy without having to worry about a strong opposition that might force them to concede power. In other words, a regime and its leaders can avoid losing an election if they engage in electoral manipulation. However, as Magaloni pointed out, this explanation can be insufficient in certain cases. There are authoritarian and hybrid regimes that do not face a strong opposition and are in no immediate danger of having to yield power. Interestingly enough, forms of electoral manipulation can also be observed quite frequently in such cases (Magaloni 2006, 4–6). This suggests that regimes manipulate elections for reasons that go beyond mere political survival.

A similar observation has been made by Simpser, who recognized that regimes would sometimes engage in fraudulent methods even when there was no danger of losing an election. Therefore, he theorized that incumbents must gain other benefits from altering election outcomes. For example, electoral manipulation can make an election appear as one-sided, presenting the regime as significantly more dominant than it possibly is. Those strategies can have beneficial effects, including “to discourage opposition supporters from turning out to vote or to protest; to convince bureaucrats to remain loyal to the government; to persuade potential financial backers of parties and candidates[...]; to deter political elites from opposing the ruling party or from even entering the political fray; to increase the manipulator’s post-electoral bargaining power” (Simpser 2013, 3).

Based on his observation, Simpser has categorized the reasons for electoral manipulation into two types: direct and indirect effects. The direct effects would refer to the general understanding of electoral manipulation, meaning that it will be implemented when a regime wants to survive and hold onto power. The indirect effects of electoral manipulation, however, refer to more complex reasons such as the influence it can have on the population, the opposition, elites or the media. This, in turn, enables the current regime to gain more political room for maneuver, pursue more ambitious policies and further consolidate its power for future elections

(Simpser 2013, 4–5). Simpser accurately characterizes the direct and indirect effects of electoral manipulation as “manipulation for winning versus manipulation for more than winning” (Simpser 2013, 6).

There is another crucial side effect of electoral manipulation. If an incumbent government resorts to a wide range of fraudulent activities without adequately hiding them, there is a reasonable chance that the opposition, elites, or the population may reject the unfair conditions. Under these circumstances, forms of resistance such as public movements or demonstrations can seriously endanger the survival of the regime. This danger is further enhanced when a regime lacks sufficient resources or infrastructure to control the general public, increasing the probability of post-election demonstrations (Harvey and Mukherjee 2020, 552).

However, under certain conditions, electoral manipulation may also increase the stability of regimes. The literature suggests that there is a connection between electoral manipulation and regime legitimacy. If a regime were to hold no elections entirely, public dissatisfaction and external pressure would likely increase. However, by holding elections, a regime can make it seem like it is playing by the rules while complying with democratic norms. When an incumbent government is then re-elected despite employing methods of manipulation, a situation is created in which the ruling party can officially and rightfully claim victory. This may silence the opposition and can be interpreted as popular consent, ultimately increasing regime legitimacy (Morgenbesser 2015, 164–67).

However, as Norris points out, there is a very fine line between how electoral integrity can enhance or undermine a regime’s legitimacy. If fraudulent activities within the electoral cycle are too blatant or are discovered by the public, the initial strategy may backfire. The key in this case is public perception and how voters and observers are interpreting the electoral process and the election results (Norris 2014, 14–15). Therefore, as noted by Birch, leaders must find a balance when applying methods of electoral manipulation: otherwise, they risk losing legitimacy and potentially provoke public protest. Birch also argues that regimes often refrain from violent measures to achieve their goals, as these can lead to internal (domestic) and external (international) destabilization, which further has negative implications on legitimacy (Birch 2020, 31–32).

Elections can also serve as an institutional tool for regimes. When a ruling government has held elections and emerged as the clear winner, it will find it easier to co-opt both elites and the opposition. The reason is that members of the elite are less likely to cooperate with the opposition if they wish to maintain their lucrative political and economic position. At the same time, the opposition might end up weakened during the electoral process and split into several

groups or movements. In those cases, holding formal elections and winning them decisively gives incumbents even greater control over the political sphere (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009, 405). As Gandhi and Buckles rightly point out, this strategy can be described as “divide and rule” and is mostly possible because a ruling government possesses immense resources that enable it to control the electoral cycle. Co-optation can therefore be seen as a transactional exchange, in which monetary resources, lucrative contracts, or political positions are traded for regime support and stability (Gandhi and Buckles 2016, 6–13).

Lastly, electoral manipulation can function as a mechanism to exert bureaucratic control. As Gehlbach observes, incumbent governments must rely on the bureaucratic apparatus to follow their orders, which is a crucial aspect of regime survival. However, bureaucrats who are uncertain about the future winner of an election may hesitate to follow orders if they fear personal losses. In those cases, electoral manipulation can influence public perception, creating the impression that the regime will be triumphant once again. This may lead bureaucrats to comply with instructions, as they tend to side with the expected winner of the upcoming election (Gehlbach and Simpser 2015, 213).

To conclude, this chapter has shown that the motivation to manipulate elections goes beyond simply winning an election. Electoral manipulation can have an enhancing effect on the legitimacy of regimes while keeping elites and opposition parties in check. Nonetheless, incumbents must be cautious not to overreach, as the consequences of manipulation may ultimately threaten regime stability.

2.5. The Cost-Benefit Factor of Electoral Manipulation

Electoral manipulation, as it has been defined in the previous chapters, is a concept that can appear in any type of political system. Not only dictatorships, authoritarian regimes, or hybrid regimes make strategic use of elections to gain an advantage, but it can also be observed in democracies. However, the magnitude and scope of manipulation methods vary significantly across regime types. Within an authoritarian system that has tight control of the political landscape and public institutions, opportunities for electoral manipulation are likely greater than within an advanced democracy (Simpser 2013, 21–22). Still, authoritarian regimes must carefully manage how they exert control over the population and the electoral process. For example, a regime with firm control over the military could easily use force to shut down critics or political opponents. However, those methods may be interpreted as costly and dangerous, as the use of force could lead to wide-ranging demonstrations and instabilities within the regime (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007, 1280–82).

In democracies, the situation is quite a bit different. Especially in long-established

democracies, when institutions are independent and the public emphasizes the importance of free and fair elections, instances of electoral manipulation can lead to a rapid decline in public trust. However, levels of democratic consolidation may vary widely. If the pre-election period indicates that there will be a very close finish on who will emerge victorious, the incentive to engage in manipulation increases, particularly in less consolidated democracies. And, because electoral manipulation methods are often sophisticated and subtle, they are often difficult for observers to detect (Dawson 2022, 794–98).

The key point is that every political system engaging in electoral manipulation must assess the costs and benefits individually. Since regimes vary in their available resources, the tools used to influence the electoral process must be selected on a case-by-case basis. Simpson refers to this as a “supply curve of electoral manipulation”, in which those methods that will provide the best cost-benefit will most likely be implemented first (Simpson 2013, 28). Bailey supports this notion, stating that “for fraud to be worthwhile, its expected benefit must exceed its expected cost” (Bailey 2008, 89). This can be critical information for any election observer since it can provide insight into where electoral manipulation is likely to occur.

It is important to note that if manipulation goes undetected, the cost is basically non-existent while the benefit is immense. An interesting observation has been made by Beaulieu and Hyde, who noticed that regimes often invite international election observers to their home turf while continuing to practice electoral manipulation. The applied strategies are then however very well hidden or are not necessarily classified as fraudulent by observers, for example when a regime introduces small changes to bureaucratic sequences (Beaulieu and Hyde 2009, 392–400).

In general, the cost-benefit assessment of electoral manipulation depends heavily on how it will be perceived at both domestic and international levels. Therefore, it can be concluded that hybrid regimes that aim to practice electoral manipulation need to find an appropriate balance between potential advantages and disadvantages. Regimes need to be aware of the domestic political situation, the strength of the elites and the opposition and the resources that are available to successfully implement their strategy.

2.6. Frameworks for the Assessment of Electoral Manipulation

2.6.1. How can Electoral Manipulation be measured?

Measuring electoral manipulation may seem difficult, given that its very nature and intent is to remain hidden from the public. However, the literature offers a variety of approaches and frameworks aimed at making elections quantifiable. Leeman and Bochsler, for example, developed a systematic approach to analyzing elections and argued that a key factor in

successfully studying electoral manipulation is a thorough understanding of the electoral process. If an observer is familiar with the entire process, relevant circumstances, and actors involved, it becomes significantly easier to understand what to identify and where to focus attention. Furthermore, electoral manipulation cannot only occur at any stage of the electoral cycle, but it can also take many forms. There are both the more blatant or harsh forms (e.g. ballot rigging) and the more subtle and sophisticated forms (e.g. campaign financing). Since there is a possibility that various forms of manipulation may have been employed by a regime, it requires observers and scholars to apply a comprehensive methodology in order to detect the manipulation (Leemann and Bochsler 2014, 33–37). Another important consideration is raised by Cavdar, who argues that any study on electoral quality must account for the broader context in which elections take place. For example, an analysis of the electoral process may have limited significance if the country's institutional framework is fundamentally flawed (Cavdar 2008, 52–53). A similar perspective was offered by Simpser (2013), as discussed in Chapter 2.3.: the electoral process can be lawful and neither free nor fair at the same time.

2.6.2. Chronological Approach

The idea that electoral manipulation can occur at any stage of the electoral cycle has become widely accepted and served as a foundation for developing criteria that aim to detect forms of fraud. For example, Hyde compiled a comprehensive list of criteria that indicate when electoral manipulation had occurred, organizing them chronologically (pre-election period, election day, post-election period). Regarding the pre-election period, common indicators include the suppression of the opposition or certain candidates, the lack of an independent electoral management body or issues regarding voter registration, among others. On election day and in the post-election period, signs of manipulation may include irregularities at the polling stations or during the counting process. (Hyde 2008, 203–11). Tan and Templeman, who studied electoral malpractice in Asia, adopted a chronological framework based on the works of Birch and Carlon's findings (see 2.6.4.) and categorized manipulation both by targets (rules, voters, voting process) as well as chronological order (pre-election, election day, post-election) (N. Tan and Templeman 2023, 3–4).

2.6.3. Systematic Approach

Another approach to measure electoral manipulation was developed by Elklit and Reynolds, who created a comprehensive framework for systematically analyzing the electoral process. Their model has one key advantage: it is universal and designed to be easily applicable to any case study. The authors formulated performance indicators for eleven different subjects, for

example the legal framework, electoral management, and voter registration, which are expressed as questions (e.g. “Are independent candidates allowed and registered if they fulfil legal requirements?”). Additionally, they provided guidelines for measuring and weighing these indicators (scoring system from 0-3; very poor - very good). By choosing this approach, electoral observers and experts conducting an analysis of a specific country will be able to collect data efficiently while distinguishing which areas were affected by electoral manipulation. Furthermore, this method facilitates cross-case comparisons, highlighting both similarities and differences across countries. However, the authors acknowledge a limitation of their framework: it assesses whether the formal rules have been applied, but not whether those rules were of a fair or democratic nature (Elklit and Reynolds 2005, 149–55).

2.6.4. Typological Approach

Another framework for analyzing electoral manipulation was developed by Birch and Carlson. Initially, the authors decided to create a survey that was distributed to selected academic experts and electoral observers. The survey respondents were drawn from different continents and regions to ensure a broad representation. The advantage of this approach is that it provides an efficient means of gathering information on the types of electoral manipulation that occurred globally, while also showing the extent and severity of these practices. The results were then separated into four categories: 1. Failures or Refusals to Act (e.g. untrained polling staff, campaign finance abuses); 2. Acts of Deception (e.g. media bias, voter impersonation); 3. Acts of Coercion (e.g. vote buying); 4. Acts of Destruction (e.g. violence and intimidation) (Birch and Carlson 2012, 3–7). Furthermore, the four categories are further divided chronologically according to when during the electoral cycle a form of manipulation occurred. Lastly, the authors also collected data on which forms of manipulation were considered the most severe or most problematic. According to the surveyed experts, the “election campaign” along with “voting day operations” and “vote count & tabulation” were identified as major issues, although every category was found to be problematic and affected by acts of manipulation (Birch and Carlson 2012, 5). For this study, the comprehensive approach of Birch and Carlson is particularly useful as it provides a guideline on which types of manipulation will have to be covered or considered.

Finally, a different framework was developed by López-Pintor. The author attempted to create a model that can assess under which circumstances electoral manipulation can flourish and how it is typically carried out. According to his understanding of electoral fraud, there are two types: those that directly impact the outcome and result, and those that do not. This is particularly relevant to this study, as the literature review has already indicated that electoral

manipulation can serve many purposes beyond merely winning an election. These purposes can take two distinct forms: a material component, for example when ballot boxes or voter lists are affected; or a psychological component, which covers aspects such as media control or threats against opposition members (López-Pintor, 4–11). López-Pintor’s framework is divided into four categories to assess the scope and scale of electoral manipulation: “The Underlying Framework”, “Free and Fair Elections”, “Right to Franchise” and “Right to Participate”. Each category is further divided into specific criteria that define essential components of a well-functioning electoral system. Breaches of these criteria would then indicate potential signs of electoral manipulation. For example, the categories cover voting and counting operations, the role of electoral observers and independent electoral management bodies, the political rights of candidates and voters, as well as the influence of media and campaign financing (López-Pintor 2011, 15–18). Although the author acknowledges certain challenges in measuring the precise impact of specific criteria on a final election result, López-Pintor’s approach remains well-structured and enables scholars to investigate and compare instances of electoral manipulation across different countries effectively.

2.6.5. Evaluation of Electoral Manipulation Frameworks

Frameworks designed to assess electoral quality display a variety of similarities and differences. In most cases, their structure resembles a catalogue of questions that can be applied step by step to develop a detailed understanding of irregularities and manipulation within a given country. The main differences between the frameworks typically concern the organization of their categories, which may be arranged in chronological order or by specific targets of manipulation (individuals, groups, entities). A chronological approach covering the entire electoral cycle is useful for analyzing how regimes favor certain types of manipulation methods over others. This can be complemented by a typological approach that classifies the targets of manipulation into specific groups. The combination of these approaches facilitates a comparison of manipulation methods while also revealing how regimes prioritize their selection.

2.7. Electoral Manipulation and Regime Stability

2.7.1 Why does Regime Stability matter?

One of the primary concerns of hybrid regimes is regime stability. Ultimately, the ruling party or incumbent seeks to consolidate power through electoral manipulation while taking necessary precautions to avoid conflicts that could destabilize the regime, such as mass protests. Several scholars have conducted case studies on elections in hybrid regimes and analyzed their impact on regime stability, which will be presented in this chapter.

One contribution has been made by Grishin, who examined the role of elections in Russia. The author emphasizes the distinctive role of elections within hybrid systems, noting that they serve a different purpose compared to elections in democracies. In the case of Russia, Grishin observed that elections may have limited influence on the political system itself. Rather, it is the elite or the ruling party who take advantage of elections to accumulate power, treating them as a tool that can be exploited, rather than an institution that reinforces the political system. Therefore, even when elections are held regularly, a hybrid regime may move neither towards democratization nor towards greater authoritarianism. In some cases, shifts in both directions can even occur simultaneously (Grishin 2015, 195–196 and 205).

Nonetheless, elections themselves may be seen as a nuisance to leaders of hybrid regimes. In the absence of elections, potential national or international backlash may result in a loss of power, while allowing elections to be genuinely competitive could produce similar outcomes. Riaz, who analyzed the case of elections in Bangladesh, pointed out that the role of the opposition and the political climate would determine the extent to which elections within hybrid regimes can and will be manipulated (Riaz 2019, 49–50). Leaders must find creative and sophisticated strategies on how to incorporate electoral manipulation into their agenda, minimizing the risk of losing power. In a way, many hybrid regimes maneuvered into a position of dependence on the existence of elections, and they are dissatisfied with both their presence and absence. It can be argued that leaders of hybrid regimes may even aspire to establish a form of democracy, moving beyond the ambiguous institutional structure of hybrid regimes - provided they continue to win electoral contests and secure victory (Petrov, Lipman, and Hale 2014, 21–22).

However, since those scenarios are unlikely to become reality, leaders of hybrid regimes are withholding democratization initiatives. To maintain the status quo, many hybrid regimes rely on an unwritten agreement in which elites and citizens receive benefits and goods to preserve peace and maintain balance. These goods may grant liberties or economic advantages and can serve as a tradeoff that allows incumbents to maintain power and stability (Flikke 2018, 434). In many scenarios, maintaining this balance between manipulation and concessions is the only viable strategy. Even if leaders of hybrid regimes agree to a peaceful democratization process, there is a significant risk that the newly elected winner may immediately reverse these efforts. Furthermore, leaders who previously ruled in an unfair manner are often harshly punished despite conceding on their own terms, meaning that concessions can result in their economic ruin and even imprisonment (Birch 2020, 26–27).

Considering these aspects, it is crucial to understand precisely how electoral manipulation can improve regime stability. Three key factors will be examined in the following chapters.

2.7.2. What is the Relationship between Legitimacy and Regime Stability?

The concept of legitimacy was briefly introduced in the previous chapters, and this section will explore its connection to “regime stability” in greater detail. Elections and legitimacy have a complex relationship. Generally, legitimacy refers to the satisfaction or acceptance of the regime by citizens. For incumbents, winning an election does not automatically increase their legitimacy, although it can. Voters often care about the rules of elections and tend to perceive winners as legitimate if the process is free and fair. However, this is not always the case: many voters prioritize performance and accomplishments of their government, such as the state of the economy, which can increase perceived legitimacy (Lierl 2021). In hybrid regimes characterized by electoral manipulation, achieving legitimacy through genuinely free and fair elections is impossible. Therefore, incumbents must either create elections that are perceived as free and fair or persuade the public that it is in their best interest for the current rulers to remain in power. A common strategy is to scapegoat the opposition by emphasizing that a change in government would inevitably lead to a decline of the country (Patane 2019, 3–5).

In the best-case scenario, incumbents apply electoral manipulation tactics and succeed in getting away with it. When citizens are unable to detect unfair circumstances, the result translates into consent for the rulers. The regime can take this victory as a moral high ground, claiming a rightful rule based on the outcome of the elections. As Morgenbesser points out, the timing of elections is crucial for many authoritarian regimes and hybrid states. Since an election outcome can ensure a long period of stability and longevity, rulers are keen to push for early elections or delay them until the circumstances are favorable (Morgenbesser 2017, 207-209 and 218). However, concealing the manipulation of the electoral process is no easy task. There is often a high price to pay once fraud is discovered by the public, typically resulting in a decline in confidence in both the regime and its institutions. In the worst case, the exposure of electoral manipulation and the resulting perception of the regime as illegitimate may trigger mass protests or incidents of violence (van Ham and Lindberg 2015, 525–26) (Kerr and Lührmann 2017, 51 and 59).

There is another aspect to be considered. Generally, the opposition will almost always be critical and perceive the elections as neither free nor fair, and there is little that can be done to change this perception. However, it is of significance to convince those who support the government of the fairness of elections, as a shift in sentiment among regime supporters may greatly impact legitimacy and regime stability (Aarslew 2024, 1981–82). Also, Fortin-

Rittberger et al. identified that voters in newer democracies are often less concerned with free and fair elections. Even when voters become aware of fraudulent activities, they might remain satisfied with the government's performance and tolerate such fraud, especially when the election outcome is being prioritized over the initial fairness of the electoral process (Fortin-Rittberger, Harfst, and Dingler 2017, 351 and 364).

Unquestionably, legitimacy is a crucial aspect for regimes to achieve stability and the support of the masses. However, the relationship between voters and legitimacy appears ambiguous. A voter can be strictly committed to free and fair elections with a very low amount of tolerance. Conversely, a voter might accept electoral manipulation if they regard the current regime as the best option. For hybrid regimes and their leaders, finding the delicate balance between both sides is key to maintaining stable and prolonged rule.

2.7.3. What Enables or Restricts the Implementation of Electoral Violence?

The second factor closely connected to regime stability is the implementation of electoral violence. Essentially, this refers to the room for maneuver available to incumbents and is determined by constraints imposed by voters, opposition and institutions. Governments can employ both physical and non-physical forms of violence to interfere with the electoral process, whether in the pre-electoral period, post-electoral period or even between elections. In the pre-electoral period, incumbents are primarily concerned with winning the election and do not have to fear resistance and protests from the population, unlike the post-electoral period. Since public reactions are often triggered by the government's actions during the pre-electoral period, incumbents are cautious about the extent to which they can implement manipulation methods. Their room for maneuvering is often determined by their control over public institutions, as well as the support of ruling elites and patronage networks. If the government's hold on public institutions is strong, the likelihood of violence and continued rule significantly increases (Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski 2014, 151–58).

Certainly, acts of violence that are revealed can lead to protests, though it is not always clear under which circumstances this will occur. One notable point, raised by Sedziaka and Rose, is that post-election protests are often linked to whether a voter was on the winning or losing side, rather than to an assessment of the election's fairness (Sedziaka and Rose 2015, 58–59). To reduce the risk of mass protests, regimes have several options at their disposal. One method revolves around the strategic use of financial incentives: as Rød argues, mass protests can potentially be avoided if the whole population, supporters and opponents alike, can sense an economic benefit (Rød 2019, 19). Therefore, the scope for implementing electoral violence broadens when a government manages to accumulate financial resources. Interestingly,

electoral violence may become redundant since voter support can now be secured through financial means. Therefore, when state resources are limited and economic benefits fail to reach a broader population, electoral violence becomes both more necessary and more risky for incumbents of hybrid regimes (Higashijima 2015, 65–66).

Another important aspect to consider is the strength and cohesion of the opposition, which can influence the implementation of electoral violence. During the electoral process, opposition parties may assess whether it is worthwhile to participate and run for office. If the chances of winning are low or non-existent, they might opt to boycott the elections. On the other hand, participation itself can serve as a platform to highlight misconduct and government repression (Riaz 2019, 45–46 and 51). Even when prospects of winning are slim, running for office and revealing electoral fraud can spark public mobilization and protest. Furthermore, the type of electoral manipulation that was discovered can provide the opposition with insights into structural weaknesses of the ruling regime (Harvey and Mukherjee 2020, 552). In contrast, when the opposition is weak or fragmented by internal disputes, incumbents can resort to electoral violence with a lesser risk of negative consequences.

As discussed, the scope for implementing electoral violence varies depending on institutional factors, the strength of the opposition, and public perception. When the outcome of an election is uncertain or ambiguous, the implementation of electoral violence can be the most effective short-term solution for leaders of hybrid regimes (Harish and Little 2017, 250). However, in terms of regime stability, employing electoral violence in such an environment also carries significant risks.

2.7.4. How do Manipulation Tactics Differ in Effectiveness?

Finally, it is worth examining the impact that various manipulation methods can have on regime stability. Not only can some methods yield better results than others, but they can also vary significantly in the resources they consume. Harvey and Mukherjee, who studied the effectiveness of electoral manipulation, identified three categories: “administrative fraud”, “extralegal voter mobilization”, and “voter intimidation”. “Administrative fraud” refers to the use of state institutions such as electoral management bodies to alter voting processes or results. This method is highly effective, as it requires only a small network of people to operate and can be implemented even without large financial resources. Moreover, administrative fraud can be applied on both a small and large scale and can therefore be utilized flexibly (Harvey and Mukherjee 2020, 538). In contrast, “extralegal voter mobilization” is a rather costly form of electoral manipulation. This tactic involves exchanging money for votes, such as when a regime bribes individuals to abstain from voting. It demands a large network to function properly, since

a regime must monitor whether these investments translate into an electoral advantage. If paid voters end up supporting another party, the cost-effectiveness of extralegal voter mobilization decreases significantly (Harvey and Mukherjee 2020, 539). The third category, “voter intimidation”, also requires a strong network supported by financial resources. A regime may use organizations such as the police or the military to threaten, harass, or physically harm opposition members and voters, potentially increasing the support for the incumbents. However, compared to “administrative fraud”, both “extralegal voter mobilization” and “voter intimidation” require more resources, are costly and harder to sustain over longer time periods. They also threaten political stability, as they are visible restrictions on personal freedom and may increase awareness of electoral manipulation among voters. Should a regime be successful in implementing all of the aforementioned categories during the electoral cycle, it can be assumed to hold substantial resources and strong control over networks loyal to the government (Harvey and Mukherjee 2020, 538–41).

These observations are supported by van Ham and Lindberg, who argued that the choice of manipulation is closely tied to the resources available. They argue that administrative fraud, which is a form of manipulation carried out through state institutions or organizations, is not only the most cost-effective but also among the hardest to detect and reveal. In contrast, vote buying can be considered as the least cost-effective, as it requires large financial resources while carrying greater risks (van Ham and Lindberg 2015, 525–26).

Examining elections in Asia, Tan and Templeman identified three categories of electoral manipulation and analyzed their effectiveness: these are “Manipulation of Electoral Rules”, “Manipulation of Voters” and “Manipulation of Voting and Counting”. In line with the findings of Harvey and Mukherjee, they argue that vote buying cannot be considered cost-effective, as it consumes large financial resources while carrying considerable risks. They further note that manipulating voters through violence is the most drastic measure available to a regime. While such tactics can secure electoral victories, they also pose risks and uncertainties for incumbents, as prolonged use may lead to a backlash and mass protests. Consequently, Tan and Templeman conclude that subtle forms of electoral manipulation, such as altering the electoral rules or the counting process, are both more advantageous and more cost-effective for a regime (N. Tan and Templeman 2023, 4–13).

Returning to the concept of hybrid regimes and regime stability, it can be assumed that regimes will generally favor administrative fraud over other methods of electoral manipulation. Alternatives to administrative fraud tend to be not only costlier but also riskier. The primary objective of most incumbents is to remain in power as long as possible or to implement electoral

manipulation to secure a decisive victory. When strategies such as “voter intimidation” potentially undermine legitimacy or prove difficult to implement due to limited room for maneuver (e.g. weak patronage networks or a strong opposition), incumbents are likely to avoid them. The situation becomes critical when a regime faces uncertainty about its ability to win the election in the first place. In those cases, incumbents must carefully weigh their options before deciding on how to proceed with electoral manipulation.

2.8. Summary and Evaluation of the State of the Art

The literature review examined key aspects of electoral manipulation. The concepts of hybrid regimes and electoral manipulation have been introduced and explained, highlighting the dynamic role of elections and the complexity of the electoral cycle. Hybrid regimes, in their current form, have multiple incentives to manipulate elections: in some cases to stay in power, in others to expand it. This distinction has been conceptualized as the direct and indirect effects of electoral manipulation. The implementation of such manipulation, however, is not always straightforward, as it depends heavily on the resources and networks available to the regime. Moreover, the manipulation of the electoral process often carries risks and has the potential to undermine regime stability. The review has further shown that elections may be a nuisance for regimes: despite the risks, manipulation may be necessary for the maintenance of long-term rule. In such cases, incumbents must weigh the costs and benefits, avoid being caught, and retain positive relations with the public, patronage networks, and both national and international election observers to increase the chances of success.

Some questions remain after analyzing the current literature on the topic of electoral manipulation. Even though studies have shown that manipulation can bring significant risks to regimes and their leaders, hybrid regimes continue to implement fraudulent methods even in situations where their victory is practically guaranteed. This raises the question under which conditions the incentives outweigh the risks when the likelihood of electoral defeat is already minimal. In addition, when a regime engages in electoral manipulation under such circumstances, it will be important to examine the specific types of manipulation that are likely to occur.

Staying on the topic of manipulation methods, it is also important to understand the conditions that enable or restrict them. Hybrid regimes generally adopt strategies tailored to their own needs. However, even when two hybrid regimes implement the same manipulation strategy, it can lead to different outcomes - enhancing legitimacy in one case while undermining it in another. The political system, political culture, and available resources all appear to play a role, sometimes strengthening regime stability and at other times causing instability. There are

even cases in which hybrid regimes manipulate elections but still lose, ultimately having to concede power. This raises the question of what prevents incumbents from manipulating to an even greater extent to secure victory.

Identifying the circumstances under which a manipulation method increases or decreases legitimacy, and the conditions under which it triggers a backlash, appears as a key element in the study of hybrid regimes and elections. Furthermore, understanding the rationale behind the adoption of specific manipulation tactics remains another central aspect. With these considerations in mind, the following chapter introduces the analytical framework designed to address the research question:

“When hybrid regimes resort to electoral manipulation, what are the key conditions that influence their choice of manipulation methods?”

3. Analytical Framework

3.1. Relevance of the Research Question

The research question presupposes that “hybrid regimes resort to electoral manipulation”. Numerous explanations exist for why electoral manipulation is common in hybrid regimes, as discussed in the literature review. For example, it has been argued that hybrid regimes may hold elections that appear democratic but are neither free nor fair. Moreover, regimes take advantage of electoral manipulation to constrain voters and the opposition, thereby weakening their status and power while trying to maintain political control and regime (Levitsky and Way 2012, 350–51; López-Pintor 2011, 12–13; Schedler 2002, 36–38). Simpser further emphasized the direct and indirect effects of electoral manipulation, stressing the strategic importance of both winning elections and expanding dominance in institutional or economic spheres (Simpser 2013, 4–6).

Despite these insights, it remains unclear why specific tactics of electoral manipulation are adopted in one country while avoided in another. If a regime could retain power even under free and fair elections, it is ambiguous why it would continue to manipulate, given that doing so extensively risks long-term destabilization and a loss of legitimacy. Hybrid regimes generally attempt to conceal activities of electoral manipulation, yet their choice of strategy depends on context, internal and external pressures, and concerns regarding stability and legitimacy. The question of why regimes initially employ manipulation methods therefore remains highly relevant for understanding elections in hybrid regimes.

The second part of the research question addresses the issue of “what are the key conditions that influence the choice of manipulation methods?” Schedler’s “The Menu of Manipulation” suggests that leaders can choose from various domains and methods (e.g. voting and counting

processes, media control) to strategically organize elections (Schedler 2002, 39–41). Generally, regimes weigh their options and determine strategies based on factors such as their popularity or available resources. Other scholars have highlighted enabling or constraining factors: López-Pintor noted that the control over institutional bodies facilitates electoral manipulation (López-Pintor 2011, 15), while Levitsky and Way showed that a strong opposition reduces the likelihood of employing harsher methods (Levitsky and Way 2012, 339 and 354-357). Regimes also typically favor subtle over blatant manipulation to avoid domestic or international backlashes (Birch 2020, 31–32). This logic aligns with Simper’s concept of “cost-benefit” in the selection of manipulation methods (Simpser 2013, 28).

Nevertheless, several questions remain. Why do regimes sometimes adopt harsher tactics despite facing a strong opposition or international pressure? Which factors influence the timing and sequencing of manipulation? Regimes seem to continuously assess political conditions and calculate short-term and long-term benefits, requiring constant adjustments throughout the electoral cycle. Therefore, the choice of manipulation methods is not fixed but subject to change across the different stages of an election. This dynamic is particularly relevant when incumbents are uncertain about securing an electoral victory or when a landslide victory becomes a necessity. Finally, the aspect of economic benefit may also shape the choice of manipulation: regimes that derive legitimacy from economic growth might adopt strategies that enhance stability, for example by ensuring the support of elites and patronage networks. These aspects will be further explored in the case studies.

3.2. Introduction of the Framework

As the literature review has demonstrated, several frameworks exist that define categories and indicators to measure the scope and range of manipulation in elections. While these frameworks share certain similarities, they also exhibit differences. One common approach is to structure categories and indicators into a catalogue form, formulating questions to detect and measure fraud, as seen in the work of Elklit and Reynolds (2005). Other approaches classify manipulation based on the chronological stages of the electoral process (Hyde 2008), the potential targets of electoral manipulation (N. Tan and Templeman 2023), or the forms through which fraud is carried out (Birch and Carlson 2012). López-Pintor (2011) adopted yet another approach: he defined categories that are fundamental for free and fair elections and specified how these categories should ideally function in a best-case scenario. When applying his categories and indicators to case studies, deviations from these best practices serve as an indicator of manipulation.

For the purpose of this study, each of these frameworks offers particular advantages. It is

therefore possible to combine selected elements in order to create a framework tailored to the research question at hand. To develop a comprehensive understanding of the case studies and their electoral systems, this study's framework systematically analyzes how hybrid regimes choose and implement forms of electoral manipulation. This includes an assessment of the legal and institutional framework, the various stages of the electoral cycle, the targets of manipulations, and the strategic considerations shaping manipulation (such as available resources, domestic and international pressure). Through the application of these dimensions, the framework provides deeper insights into the role of electoral manipulation in hybrid regimes and contributes to understanding how regimes sustain or expand their power through elections.

This study relies on a combination of primary and secondary sources, though it necessarily places greater emphasis on secondary sources. This reliance is unsurprising, as electoral fraud is typically concealed by regimes. Nevertheless, observer reports and academic literature can be used to assess electoral quality, while official documents provide valuable evidence on legal frameworks and institutional standards.

Four categories are defined as part of this framework: "I. Legal and Institutional Context", "II. Manipulation of Individuals", "III. Manipulation of Voting Operations", and "IV. Outcomes and Consequences of Manipulation". The categories are derived from the frameworks discussed in the literature review and are designed to contribute to research on electoral quality by offering a multifaceted understanding of hybrid regimes. The first category evaluates the fairness of electoral laws and the independence of institutions, while the second category examines how electoral manipulation constrains voters and candidates. The third category considers irregularities on election day itself, which can alter outcomes and results. Together, these three categories correspond to the "pre-election period" and "election period" and aim to identify the conditions under which hybrid regimes resort to electoral manipulation. The fourth category assesses the aftermath of the elections ("post-election period"), measuring the success or failure of manipulation, its impact on regime stability, and potential consequences for the government's legitimacy. This final category is significant in revealing whether manipulation functioned as a tool to secure victory or as a strategy for consolidating power, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the costs, benefits, and underlying motivations of electoral manipulation.

This approach provides a comprehensive basis for analyzing electoral quality when applied to case studies, while also addressing gaps in the existing literature. Through the inclusion of the fourth category and an analysis of consecutive elections (covering pre-, election- and post-election stages), this framework highlights patterns in the choice of manipulation tactics, as well as their short- and long-term effects. The analysis of two consecutive elections per case

study is intended to expand knowledge on the dynamics of manipulation and its implications for the legitimacy and stability of hybrid regimes. The findings of this study may also provide valuable for the analysis of future elections in similar contexts.

The four categories, their indicators, and their theoretical origins will be further elaborated in the following chapters.

3.3 Category I: Legal and Institutional Context

The first category, “Legal and Institutional Context”, analyzes the established set of electoral rules and the role of institutions in the electoral process. The effectiveness of institutions in ensuring free and fair elections depends heavily on a regime’s level of control over them. The likelihood of electoral manipulation increases when institutions are poorly regulated or when regulations are biased in favor of the incumbent regime. Conversely, when the institutional sphere is neutral and independent, it can play a critical role in detecting and deterring electoral manipulation (López-Pintor 2011, 6 and 10). Moreover, not only the probability but also the form, objective, and timing of electoral manipulation may vary depending on the structure of the institutional environment (Birch, Daxecker, and Höglund 2020, 5). Tan and Templeman highlight the importance of timing, noting that the “manipulation of the rules typically occurs well before election day” (N. Tan and Templeman 2023, 3). For regimes, the institutional sphere is therefore primarily a matter of the pre-election period, laying the foundation for subsequent implementation of electoral fraud. Furthermore, Levitsky and Way observed that many regimes and incumbents present themselves as democratic while deliberately weakening or limiting the influence of state institutions (Levitsky and Way 2012, 359). Thus, understanding electoral rules and the electoral system is an essential first step to identifying the origins and forms of electoral manipulation.

Several institutions directly shape how electoral processes are managed and implemented. Among the most important are the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs). The EMB is a central actor in any election, overseeing the organization, implementation, and execution of the voting process. For example, EMBs oversee voter registration and vote counting while determining who is eligible to vote and who may run for office. In some cases, EMBs may also handle election-related disputes (e.g. regarding constituencies) and provide voter education (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network n.d.). Importantly, EMBs also have the responsibility of preventing and addressing activities related to electoral manipulation (López-Pintor 2011, 5). Given these high-stakes obligations, the neutrality and independence of EMBs are imperative for free and fair elections.

Another key institution is the judiciary. Ideally, an electoral tribunal independently resolves

electoral disputes without interference from the supreme court, ensuring neutrality and impartiality. While such tribunals are of limited relevance if the electoral laws are inherently flawed, under conditions of an equal playing field, they can act as a safeguard for free, fair, and legitimate elections (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network n.d.).

While institutions are entrusted with overseeing compliance with electoral laws, the legal framework itself is equally crucial. Electoral laws can be crafted to inherently favor incumbents, placing the opposition at a major disadvantage. For instance, campaign financing laws may restrict opposition spending while allowing incumbents to use unlimited resources for campaigning and advertising. Such practices may theoretically be within the electoral rules but can hardly be considered as free or fair (López-Pintor 2011, 18). Another common issue is gerrymandering, defined as “the practice of (re)drawing electoral district boundaries to advance the interests of the controlling political faction” (Guest, Kanayet, and Love 2019, 119). Well before elections take place, regimes may change and redraw constituencies to distort representation. These cases of gerrymandering often result in imbalances in constituency size or seat distribution, potentially predetermining electoral outcomes or rendering them insignificant. Therefore, any changes to constituencies should be transparent, proportionate and accessible to both the public and election observers in order to enable free and fair elections (Elklit and Reynolds 2005, 152). A visualization of gerrymandering can be found in Appendix, *Figure 5* and *Figure 6*.

Another challenge revolves around voter registration and voter lists. These should be inclusive, avoiding restrictions or limitations on specific social groups, such as minorities. Moreover, voter registration must be accurate and executed meticulously to prevent cases of multiple voting or other irregularities that could alter the election outcome (López-Pintor 2011, 17).

In summary, the first category, “Legal and Institutional Context”, primarily reflects the pre-election stage of the electoral cycle and is fundamental to understanding factors that enable and constrain electoral manipulation.

3.4. Indicators for Category I

For Category I, the selected indicators aim to explain why and how electoral manipulation can occur and evolve within hybrid regimes. Analyzing any case study requires an examination of electoral laws and institutions, with close attention to imbalances that create uneven conditions between incumbents and the opposition.

Electoral Framework

The “Electoral Framework” refers to the overall design of electoral laws. This indicator assesses whether governments comply with formal requirements for elections, including the holding of periodic elections and adherence to timetables and schedules without delays. In addition, it evaluates whether the framework upholds international standards such as universal suffrage and inclusive voter registration.

Electoral Management Body (EMB)

The “Electoral Management Body” represents the most critical institution in the electoral process. This indicator examines whether the EMB is independent and impartial. Furthermore, it evaluates whether election-related disputes and the management of organizational tasks such as voting and counting of ballots are conducted without bias or favoritism towards a specific candidate or party.

Campaign Financing

The indicator “Campaign Financing” examines whether electoral laws grant unwarranted financial advantages to specific candidates or parties. Laws and regulations that favor the government create an uneven playing field, undermining any chances for free and fair elections. Moreover, this indicator analyzes whether public resources are misused to support the incumbent regime.

Gerrymandering

The final indicator of Category I concerns “Gerrymandering”. This involves analyzing whether there have been sudden or significant changes to electoral constituencies prior to an election, particularly when such changes benefit the incumbent regime. In addition, all information concerning constituency changes should be transparent and accessible to the public.

3.5 Category II: Manipulation of Individuals

The second category, “Manipulation of Individuals”, examines how regimes employ electoral manipulation to influence, control, or restrict voters and the population. For elections to be free and fair, voters must be able to join political parties, form associations, educate themselves about the electoral process, and freely express their voting preferences (Schedler 2002, 39). Importantly, it is not sufficient for voters to merely possess the formal right to participate, as their participation must also be equal and free from inherent unfairness. Assessing the right to participate in a given country therefore requires a deeper analysis of the political system and political culture itself in order to determine whether restrictions imposed on participatory rights can be considered justifiable or inappropriate (López-Pintor 2011, 17).

When regimes manipulate voters during the electoral process, individual rights and personal freedoms are typically targeted and constrained.

As previously highlighted by Harvey and Mukherjee, voter manipulation is generally a less efficient strategy than changes to the legal framework as a method of electoral control. It requires substantial manpower and financial resources, making it less cost-effective. Moreover, implementing such strategies often requires large networks and control over key institutions to function properly and successfully. Manipulating voters also carries several risks: limiting individual freedoms and rights through coercive means might lead to a backlash. When individuals are threatened or subjected to pressure, their awareness of the integrity and quality of the electoral process increases (Harvey and Mukherjee 2020, 538–41). However, the risks associated with manipulating individuals may vary depending on the type of manipulation employed. For example, harsher strategies such as vote buying, if revealed, can lead to a decline in legitimacy, trigger mass protest, and carry severe consequences (van Ham and Lindberg 2015, 525–26). As a result, regimes seeking political stability and popular support are more likely to employ subtle and sophisticated methods of manipulation, provided they possess the infrastructure to sustain and maintain them.

A prominent strategy is the control of media channels (television, radio, newspapers). When regimes hold tight control over public media, they can easily promote their own candidates and parties during the elections. These problems worsen when private media channels are affected, leaving opposition voices with minimal exposure while potentially subjecting them to cases of defamation, such as being blamed or maligned (López-Pintor 2011, 18). In such cases, elections take place on a fundamentally uneven playing field. Media control not only has the potential to alter election outcomes but also creates the illusion of overwhelming public support for the incumbent regime.

This strategy is closely connected to voter education and participation. When media coverage is biased, it hinders voters from informing themselves about the elections, political parties, and candidates. Elections conducted under such conditions cannot be regarded as fair, as voters' choices are likely to be biased towards certain candidates. Another way for voters to obtain information about the elections, aside from media channels, is through public settings such as rallies, speeches, or events organized by parties and candidates. By restricting these activities, regimes can further hinder voters from engaging in the ongoing elections. Limited access to information may also impact voter turnout, as less educated voters might disengage and refrain from casting their ballots. The significance of voter education further varies across social groups, depending on levels of education or the economic situation of individuals (Elklit

and Reynolds 2005, 152; López-Pintor 2011, 15). Thus, free and fair elections require governments to ensure proper voter education and to create an equal playing field for all political parties.

It will also be important to consider the relationship between media freedom, public support, and regime legitimacy. As demonstrated by Kerr and Lührmann, legitimacy declines once voters become aware of electoral manipulation, particularly in cases where media freedom is affected (Kerr and Lührmann 2017, 59). Similarly, Coffé finds that greater internet access enhances a voter's ability to evaluate the fairness of elections (Coffé 2017, 292–93). Therefore, in the case studies of this thesis, the connection between media freedom, voter education, and legitimacy will be closely monitored.

Another strategy targets individuals more directly through coercion or intimidation. These practices may be targeted at voters or at candidates who are running for office. Compared to media control or voter education, coercion and intimidation are harsher methods, as they are associated with violence and other forms of harm. Voters subjected to intimidation may fear severe consequences for their health or financial status, pressuring them either to abstain from voting or to cast their ballot for a specific candidate. Similarly, opposition candidates may withdraw from the elections due to the potential physical or psychological consequences. These forms of electoral manipulation can function as tools of (de)mobilization (affecting voters) or exclusion (affecting candidates) and rely on organized patronage networks such as militias or police (López-Pintor 2011, 10; Birch, Daxecker, and Höglund 2020, 5 and 8; Harvey and Mukherjee 2020, 539; Daxecker, Deglow, and Fjelde 2024, 18).

In terms of the electoral cycle, “Manipulation of Individuals” primarily occurs during the pre-election stage. However, since coercion and intimidation may also take place at or near polling stations, this category can also be considered part of the “election period”.

3.6. Indicators for Category II

For Category II, the indicators are designed to enhance understanding of how regimes target voters, candidates, and the broader public through methods of electoral manipulation. This requires an examination of political rights and civil liberties, such as freedom of expression and the right to assembly.

Media Impartiality

“Media Impartiality” refers to the objectivity and neutrality of media channels throughout the electoral cycle. To guarantee free and fair elections, both state and private media outlets must remain impartial, avoiding favoritism toward any party or candidate. Media coverage

should not deliberately promote the ruling party or negatively portray the opposition without justification. Another important consideration is whether private media channels are owned by the regime, which can have implications for media independence and neutrality.

Voter Education and Participation

“Voter Education and Participation” examines the fundamental right of citizens to educate themselves about elections and to actively engage and participate in all stages of the electoral process. Governments may restrict these rights through media censorship or by prohibiting public gatherings or rallies, which can limit individual rights and distort election outcomes. To ensure free and fair elections, governments should not only allow but actively encourage voter education and participation.

Coercion and Intimidation

“Coercion and Intimidation” addresses the use of violence by the government against individuals, particularly opposition members or potential candidates. This indicator will assess whether regimes employ physical or psychological threats, which contradicts the concept of free and fair elections. It is of further importance due to its connection to voter participation: while citizens may formally possess the right to educate themselves about the elections, intimidation can discourage them from assembling, voting, or running for office.

3.7 Category III: Manipulation of Voting Operations

The third category, “Manipulation of Voting Operations”, examines how regimes can alter election outcomes on the day of the election itself. In comparison to Categories I and II, the third category is situated within the “election period” of the electoral cycle. During this stage, votes are cast and counted at polling stations, usually followed by the announcement of the election result. An important question to consider is whether regimes that manipulate voting operations on election day pre-planned their actions, or whether their decisions were shaped by developments occurring in the pre-election stage.

In many cases, there is an interplay between the two electoral stages. If manipulation decreases in one period, it is highly likely to increase in the other, and vice versa (Schedler 2002, 45–46). However, studies of electoral quality indicate that manipulation on election day has become less prevalent. On the one hand, Harvey and Mukherjee argue that administrative manipulation, which primarily occurs during the pre-election stage, is safer and more cost-effective for incumbents (Harvey and Mukherjee 2020, 538–39). On the other hand, both domestic and international observers have shifted away from focusing solely on election day,

recognizing instead that the quality of elections must be assessed across the entire electoral process. These developments have made manipulation on election day not only more difficult but also riskier, thereby encouraging regimes to concentrate more heavily on the pre-election stage (Daxecker 2012, 505; Chernykh 2014, 1359–60).

In the broader context, the election period can be regarded as one of the final stages of the electoral process. Given the potential manipulation that may already have occurred beforehand (e.g. gerrymandering, media control, campaign financing, etc.), it can be argued that many elections are effectively decided before ballots are even cast. Particularly in cases involving coercion and intimidation, the pre-election stage has significant influence on both voter turnout and election outcomes. Nevertheless, regimes may still choose to implement electoral manipulation on election day. Such decisions will then depend on the success of shaping and engineering the pre-election period and how concerned they are about losing power (Levitsky and Way 2012, 350–51; Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski 2018, 465). For example, unfavorable opinion polls may instill a feeling of fear among incumbents by signaling a realistic possibility of losing power. Then, despite the risks associated with election day manipulation, regimes may choose manipulation strategies out of necessity. In such cases, incumbents may be willing to employ harsher methods of manipulation to create a sense of security, rather than having to deal with the uncertainty of an unfavorable election outcome (Daxecker 2014, 233; Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski 2014, 150–51; Dawson 2022, 799).

There are several methods of electoral manipulation specific to election day. A common tactic involves interfering with the voting and counting process, such as creating fake votes, altering cast votes, or permitting multiple voting. While these methods are less disguised and stand in contrast with the assumption that hybrid regimes lean towards subtle methods of manipulation, they can serve as a safety measure to guarantee victory. Complicating matters further, technology now plays an increasingly significant role in the electoral process, making the detection of irregularities even more complex and concerning (López-Pintor 2011, 11–12). To successfully manipulate voting and counting operations, regimes must exercise control over the administration of polling stations and staff. Under such conditions, voting procedures can be designed to be non-transparent and difficult to follow, enabling incumbents to introduce last-minute changes. Furthermore, polling stations may be designed to limit access for certain groups, compromising the secrecy of the ballot or undermining proper voter identification. Acts of intimidation can also occur on election day itself, including near or inside voting booths (Elklit and Reynolds 2005, 153; López-Pintor 2011, 15–16; ACE Electoral Knowledge Network n.d.).

However, one of the primary reasons why election day manipulation has declined in popularity is the presence of domestic and international observers. Election observers play a crucial role in monitoring the electoral process, from the pre-election stage through to the post-election period. If manipulation is detected, observers can inform both the public and the international community, placing the regime in a potentially costly situation. Consequently, observers are a key aspect for the prevention and detection of electoral manipulation on election day (López-Pintor 2011, 16; ACE Electoral Knowledge Network n.d.). For those reasons, regimes are often advised to shift their focus to the pre-election period, where manipulation is more difficult to track and detect. For instance, coercion and intimidation are easier to carry out in the earlier stages of the electoral cycle, as observers face difficulties in documenting and publishing such incidents (Hyde 2008, 203; Daxecker 2014, 233–34). We can therefore assume that the presence of domestic and international observers reduces the likelihood of manipulation on election day, while any attempts by regimes to ban or restrict election observers should be paid close attention to.

3.8. Indicators for Category III

For Category III, the indicators aim to assess how regimes interfere with the electoral process by manipulating voting and counting operations on election day. This requires an examination of polling station procedures, the neutrality of staff and observers, and the identification of irregularities that deviate from international standards.

Counting Processes

“Counting Process” refers to the integrity and accuracy of voting and counting on election day. Free and fair elections cannot permit practices such as multiple voting, ballot stuffing, or other forms of manipulation that alter election outcomes. Moreover, election results should be announced in a timely and appropriate manner, rather than prematurely or after undue delay.

Irregularities at Polling Stations

“Irregularities at Polling Stations” assesses the administration and organization of polling stations, where citizens cast their ballots. Governments seeking to manipulate elections on election day may create artificial barriers for voters by limiting the number of polling stations, changing opening times, or placing stations in geographically inaccessible locations. In addition, polling staff should be impartial and adequately trained to ensure that voter identification and the casting of ballots can take place in a secure environment that safeguards the secrecy of the

vote. Finally, election observers should be granted access to monitor and report any incidents and irregularities.

3.9. Category IV: Outcomes and Consequences of Manipulation

The fourth category, “Outcomes and Consequences of Manipulation”, examines the post-election period, understood as the aftermath of the electoral process. Several perspectives and factors can be considered when analyzing results and outcomes. The previous chapters introduced the concepts of legitimacy and regime stability, which often serve as major motivations for regimes to engage in electoral manipulation. Following an election, both the legitimacy and the stability of the government are shaped by citizens’ perceptions and their evaluations of the electoral process. Voters who perceive elections as free and fair are more likely to accept an election outcome. Similarly, citizens are inclined to support the newly elected government when it demonstrates competence, for example through economic development and higher levels of prosperity (Williamson 2021, 1498; Lierl 2021).

By contrast, the absence of free and fair elections can generate post-election protests if citizens become aware of manipulation. Trust in government may decline when restrictions during the pre-election and election periods are perceived as significant, which in turn can undermine regime stability. Although post-election protests are not always common due to the high levels of organization and mobilization they require, their occurrence can significantly disrupt rule and, in some cases, even lead to a change in government (Harvey and Mukherjee 2020, 552; Fortin-Rittberger, Harfst, and Dingler 2017, 364). Post-election protest in general is a complex phenomenon, as discoveries of electoral manipulation may not necessarily alter voters’ perceptions negatively when factors such as public spending provide benefits to those individuals. In such cases, personal gain may be prioritized over democratic integrity, which consequently will not weaken the stability of regimes (Rød 2019, 12 and 19). Conversely, the presence of international observers has been shown to increase the likelihood of post-election protest by raising public awareness of electoral irregularities (Daxecker 2012, 515). Thus, linking electoral manipulation directly to regime stability remains a complex task.

Taking legitimacy and regime stability into account, the outcomes and consequences of the electoral process are strongly dependent on citizen responses. Public opinion and subsequent reactions determine whether manipulation can be regarded as successful, strengthening or weakening a regime. Consequently, even an overwhelming electoral victory may be perceived as a failure if public reactions disrupt social stability and the overall regime control (Kern and Kölln 2022, 997). At the same time, citizens may remain satisfied with the government’s performance despite flaws in electoral quality, which can neutralize potential negative effects

of manipulation. Therefore, a major point of interest in analyzing the post-election period is to identify which forms of manipulation were employed and how citizens responded to them.

3.10. Indicators for Category IV

For Category IV, the indicators assess the reaction of the public to the electoral outcome. This requires an understanding of citizens' satisfaction with both the electoral process and the government, in addition to any unusual occurrences during the post-election stage, whether violent or non-violent.

Perceived Legitimacy

“Perceived Legitimacy” refers to the extent to which voters accept and recognize the newly elected regime. Polls and surveys can provide insights into the confidence citizens place in the new government. Their perception of a fair electoral process is further reflected, at least in part, in the election outcome (regime survival vs. turnover).

Public Reaction

Manipulated elections may lead to a response from the public if citizens are significantly dissatisfied with the government. Such reactions can include organized protests, opposition movements, or other forms of resistance, which negatively impact regime stability and continuous rule. It is important to note that regimes that have previously engaged in electoral manipulation may possess the tools and mechanisms to shut down public movements even during the post-election period.

3.11. Summary of the Framework

The framework for this thesis seeks to answer the following research question: “*When hybrid regimes resort to electoral manipulation, what are the key conditions that influence their choice of manipulation methods?*” It has been emphasized that hybrid regimes may manipulate elections for multiple reasons. On the one hand, a regime might manipulate the electoral process to maintain power. On the other hand, electoral manipulation can serve additional purposes, such as positive effects on the legitimacy or stability of regimes. The framework is designed to capture both the direct and indirect effects of electoral manipulation, illustrating the motivations behind its implementation.

The categories are structured to cover the entire electoral process, including the pre-election, election, and post-election stages. Furthermore, the categories highlight the various objectives regimes may pursue, for example through the rules of the game (Category I), restrictions imposed on voters (Category II), or last-minute changes to voting procedures (Category III). The integration of all four categories provides a comprehensive understanding of the electoral

process from start to finish, thereby contributing to the answer to the research question. The framework identifies the conditions and motivations behind regimes' engagement in electoral manipulation, while highlighting the methods through which these actions are carried out. Another advantage is that the framework is adaptable and can be applied to any election, allowing for both single-country (over time) analyses and cross-case comparisons.

However, the framework has certain limitations. First, there is a reliance on secondary data and election observer reports. Because regimes try to conceal manipulation methods, accessing data for specific cases may be challenging. However, the selection of indicators is designed to partially mitigate this issue, for example by analyzing government documents and rulesets that create unfair voting conditions. Second, it is difficult to isolate the specific impacts of individual manipulation methods. While each category is assumed to have distinct consequences for regime stability, an exact attribution remains difficult. Despite these limitations, applying the framework to country cases enhances the understanding of the factors and circumstances that enable or restrict electoral manipulation, while shedding light on why regimes adopt specific electoral strategies.

The framework is built upon established models that were introduced in the literature review. It combines elements that account for chronological and objective-based manipulation, followed by an assessment of post-election outcomes. In doing so, it evaluates the success or failure of elections from the regime's perspective while identifying preferred strategies and conditions. By combining these elements, the framework enables a systematic analysis of the role of electoral manipulation in hybrid regimes. The analytical framework is outlined in detail on the following page.

Figure 1: Overview of the Analytical Framework

Analytical Framework for the Assessment of Electoral Manipulation in Hybrid Regimes		
Based on works of: Elklit and Reynolds (2005), López-Pintor (2011), Birch and Carlson (2012)		
Main sources of data for analysis: Secondary literature (e.g. peer-reviewed articles), reports of election observers, newspaper articles, official government documents		
Possible limitations: When applying this framework to country cases, it may be difficult to determine the precise influence of each category on the overall election outcome		
Category	Indicators	What to measure?
I: Legal and Institutional Context	- Electoral Framework - Electoral Management Body (EMB) - Campaign Financing - Gerrymandering	- Does the electoral framework comply with international standards? - Is the EMB independent and impartial? - Are campaign finance regulations fair and transparent? - Are constituency boundaries managed fairly and transparently? Timeframe: Pre-election period
II: Manipulation of Individuals	- Media Impartiality - Voter Education and Participation - Coercion and Intimidation	- Do media outlets provide neutral and balanced coverage of candidates? - Do voters have access to unbiased electoral information? - Are voters or candidates subjected to threats or pressure? Timeframe: Pre-election – election period

III: Manipulation of Voting Operations	- Counting Processes - Irregularities at Polling Stations	- Is the vote counting process accurate and transparent? - Are polling stations accessible, and is the secrecy and security of the vote ensured? Timeframe: Election period
IV: Outcomes and Consequences of Manipulation	- Perceived Legitimacy - Public Reaction	- How do civil society and opposition respond to the results? - Are post-election protests observed, and is institutional stability affected? Timeframe: Post-election Period

Source: The author

4. Case Study: Singapore

4.1. A Brief Introduction to Elections in Singapore

Elections in Singapore are characterized by the long-standing dominance of the People's Action Party (PAP), which has won every election since 1959, often doing so decisively. Initially, Singapore's electoral system was influenced by former colonial power Great Britain, which slowly changed throughout the 1950s and 1960s. After gaining independence from the British Empire in 1963 and briefly merging with Malaysia, Singapore separated again in 1965 due to ideological differences, now becoming a fully sovereign state. Since then, the PAP has maintained tight control over both the electoral process and its outcomes. At its peak, the PAP was able to win every parliamentary seat, most notably in the 1980 general elections (Singh, Abdullah, and F. Tan 2020, 5–9). An overview of parliamentary election results in Singapore is provided in Appendix, *Figure 7*.

There are several reasons for the PAP's consistent dominance. On the one hand, the PAP has succeeded in promoting prosperity within the country. Singapore has developed into a modern state with high living standards, which helps to explain the party's popularity. On the other hand, political restrictions have contributed to its decisive election results. The PAP has a history of weakening the opposition, pressuring candidates or discrediting them via media channels. With

opposition parties in Singapore unable to show meaningful resistance, the PAP gradually consolidated its control over the entire country, including major institutions, organizations, and the economic sphere (Singh, Abdullah, and F. Tan 2020, 11–13). By the early 1980s, the government had also intensified its efforts to manipulate the electoral process. Several mechanisms have been introduced that hinder the opposition's ability to meaningfully challenge the PAP. One prominent example is the Group Representation Constituencies (GRC) system, which increases the PAP's electoral advantage by requiring candidates to contest constituencies as a team. Originally, the concept of GRC was introduced to promote more multi-ethnic representation. However, GRCs also help PAP candidates to secure victories in highly contested constituencies while posing a significant challenge for the opposition, as smaller parties struggle to field the required number of candidates (Hwee 2002, 206; Tjin 2020).

For these reasons, Singapore has been described as a 'hybrid regime' due to its combination of democratic and authoritarian aspects (Mauzy 2006, 47). Moreover, the literature suggests that, at least from a Western interpretation of democracy, elections in Singapore have historically never been fully free or fair (Hwee 2002, 203; Tjin 2020). This chapter has only briefly highlighted a few practices that give the PAP an unfair advantage, and many more exist. The following chapters will provide a comprehensive analysis of Singapore's general elections from 2011 and 2015, applying the framework along with its categories and indicators.

4.2. 2011 Singaporean General Election: Legal and Institutional Context

In the 2011 General Elections (GE2011), the PAP achieved one of the worst results in its history. The party received about 60% of the total votes, while conceding eight seats in parliament to the main opposition party, the Workers' Party. This outcome was partly due to ongoing public debates surrounding issues such as immigration and housing, which lowered the overall popularity of the PAP (Ong and Tim 2014, 749–50; N. Tan 2014, 376). Despite the comparatively weak result, the PAP's dominance in the political sphere remained largely intact. The electoral system is built on plurality voting, also known as "winner takes it all". This creates a disproportionate advantage for the PAP, since even a substantial share of votes may not translate into parliamentary seats for opposition parties (N. Tan and Grofman 2016, 3).

The voter turnout in GE2011 was high, reaching 93%. This is unsurprising, as voting is compulsory for Singaporean citizens. Each citizen receives a letter containing instructions on when and where to vote on polling day. If a citizen fails to vote, they are automatically removed from the register and cannot vote again unless they reapply (N. Tan 2014, 376; Elections Department Singapore 2011a). The same rules apply to overseas voters. Voting for citizens abroad is clear and transparent, though the number of polling stations is limited. Ballot papers

are marked with a serial number, which theoretically allows a connection between any ballot paper and the corresponding voter. However, the government states that serial numbers are intended to prevent activities that could undermine the fairness of the electoral process (Elections Department Singapore 2011a).

For candidates intending to run for office, registration involves higher hurdles. Each candidate must submit a deposit of 16,000S\$, which is comparatively high and can create artificial barriers for participation. In Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs), where candidates run as a team of six, the deposit can amount to 96,000S\$. If a candidate does not receive the defined minimum support from voters (12.5%), the deposit is forfeited. Indeed, there have been instances where candidates have lost the entire deposit, which can deter potential candidates from running (N. Tan 2014, 374 and 377; Ufen 2015, 580–81). In addition to the deposit requirement, campaign financing generally favors the PAP over opposition parties. During GE2011, the PAP spent more than double the amount of all opposition parties combined, partly due to strict regulations on party donations. Meanwhile, the PAP has found alternative means of funding campaigns, such as reinvesting salaries and fees of their members and staff into political advertising (N. Tan 2013, 636; Ufen 2015, 579–80).

There were no major unusual occurrences prior to the election. The time between the announcement of electoral boundaries and the dissolution of parliament was eight weeks, which can be considered neither particularly short nor long (Appendix, *Figure 8*). However, controversies arose regarding the so-called “cooling-off day”, which was observed on the day before voting. On this day, all forms of campaigning and advertisement were prohibited, including “wearing, carrying or displaying any political insignia or propaganda” and the “holding of election meetings” (Elections Department Singapore 2011b). This rule tended to benefit the PAP, which could continue to gain popularity from favorable coverage in state-controlled media. In addition, the overall campaign period was relatively short, lasting only nine days. This is also the minimum campaign period permitted by law. Such a restriction can be interpreted as a disadvantage for the opposition, which has very limited time to prepare strategies or reach out to voters (Tung 2020)

Electoral districts in Singapore are managed by the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee (EBRC), whose role is “to review the boundaries of the present electoral divisions, and to recommend the number and boundaries of Group Representation Constituencies and Single Member Constituencies” (Electoral Boundaries Review Committee 2011, 1). Single Member Constituencies (SMCs) are represented by one Member of the Parliament (MP), while Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs) are represented by three to six MPs, with at least one

member required to belong to a minority community (Elections Department Singapore 2011a). The formation and adaptation of SMCs and GRCs have been criticized due to the EBRC's lack of independence. The committee operates under the authority of the prime minister, and while changes to electoral boundaries are announced in a timely manner, no explanations or justifications are provided for major changes (N. Tan and Grofman 2016, 16; Tung 2020). In addition, the "winner takes it all" system has the potential to create disproportionate electoral outcomes. Formally, the EBRC provides for a range of 20,000 to 36,000 voters per MP. As shown in Appendix, *Figure 9*, there were significant deviations from the electoral quota of 27,022 in Singapore's GE2011. The lack of EBRC independence can thus produce advantages for the PAP through malapportionment, whereby certain constituencies are engineered to have a disproportionately large impact on electoral outcomes (Electoral Boundaries Review Committee 2011, 2; N. Tan 2013, 636–38; N. Tan and Grofman 2016, 16–17).

The absence of an independent election commission has also enabled instances of gerrymandering in Singapore's GE2011. A total of 12 SMC (12 seats) and 15 GRCs (75 seats) accounted for 87 parliamentary seats, a distribution that can be considered a mismatch. Given the central role of GRCs in determining electoral outcomes (Appendix, *Figure 10*), altering electoral boundaries carries significant implications. In GE2011, changes to boundary layouts meant that nearly one-third of voters were reassigned to a different district compared to the previous election (George 2012, 205–6; N. Tan 2014, 374). Several examples of gerrymandering were evident. For instance, the district of Kaki Bukit had been modified in almost every general election since 1988, consistently being shifted or attached to different neighborhoods (Appendix, *Figure 11*). Because the EBRC can introduce changes to boundary layouts without having to comply with a minimum waiting period, as is common in many other countries (Tung 2020), the redrawing of electoral constituencies may appear arbitrary and ultimately creates an environment that favors the PAP.

4.3. 2011 Singaporean General Election: Manipulation of Individuals

The GE2011 is often described as an election heavily influenced by the rise of the internet and social media. Unlike in previous years, citizens increasingly relied on online platforms to discuss issues and educate themselves about current affairs. Nonetheless, mainstream media such as television or newspapers remained the most popular source of information about parties and their candidates. Compared to the internet, however, mainstream media was subject to much tighter government control, making biased coverage and censorship common (K. P. Tan 2012, 224–25; N. Tan 2014, 376; Ufen 2015, 578). The Singapore Press Holdings, which had indirect ties to PAP officials, enabled regulation over how content was produced and published

(Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2012). There were numerous instances in which the PAP benefited from this situation, as mainstream media often portrayed the opposition negatively by highlighting mistakes and shortcomings. In contrast, PAP members were consistently presented positively and received a significantly greater coverage, for example through newspaper articles (Maruah 2011; K. P. Tan 2012, 223–24). As the 2011 Freedom House report notes, government control over all major media channels also introduced a tendency of self-censorship, constraining the ability of journalists to provide an unbiased and impartial opinion (Freedom House 2011, 595–96; Refworld 2011).

As noted in the previous chapter, voter turnout for GE2011 was high. Participation prior to the election was also substantial, driven in part by the new trend of social media platforms as tools for political communication and discussion. Nonetheless, censorship across media channels remained common, including in the online sphere. Citizens publishing political or religious content could face government action if their statements were deemed to disrupt the “harmony” (Freedom House 2011, 596). Moreover, content creators were required to obtain approval from government institutions to operate websites with political content, leaving them susceptible to regulations and sanctions (Refworld 2011). Prior to the election, there were several instances in which the government enforced censorship and limited the freedom of speech. Notable examples include the cases of Martyn See and Vincent Cheng, whose works and ideas were restricted on the grounds of being “against public interest” (Freedom House 2011, 596). Restrictions and censorship were not limited to Singaporean citizens, as foreign journalists and media outlets were also subjected to constraints (Freedom House 2011, 596).

Freedoms of speech and assembly have generally been restricted by law. The government enforces these restrictions through several mechanisms, including the Newspapers and Printing Presses Act (NPPA) or Defamation Act. Groups and Organizations must obtain government permission to hold meetings or gatherings when discussing political issues. Although freedom of speech and assembly is constitutionally guaranteed, the government retains the authority to decide which topics or content may be interpreted as disruptive to public order or national security, thereby providing grounds to restrict gatherings (Freedom House 2011, 597; Refworld 2011; C. Sim 2011, 327–28). There have been instances in which opposition members were severely fined for holding small assemblies without permission, demonstrating the strict enforcement of these laws by the PAP (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2012). The Internal Security Act (ISA) is another tool that can be applied to individuals categorized as national threats, allowing for temporary detention without trial (Foo n.d.). Such legal constraints make campaigning difficult for opposition members, as their activities are closely monitored

and attempts to hold gatherings can have severe consequences. Consequently, voter education and participation are inherently biased in favor of the PAP.

Defamation has been another significant challenge faced by opposition members in Singapore. Laws governing free speech and restrictions on assembly have created an atmosphere of caution, as individuals may fear repercussions for their beliefs and political views, potentially discouraging active participation. During Singapore's GE2011, overt coercion or violence was not a widespread issue. However, the playing field between PAP and opposition parties remains uneven due to the silencing effects of defamation suits and legal action (Refworld 2011; C. Sim 2011, 330–31; N. Tan 2013, 634). Rather than relying on physical intimidation, opposition members are frequently targeted through financial penalties designed to limit their participation in the electoral arena. A notable example is the case of Chee Soon Juan, who, although not during GE2011, was fined for 20,000S\$ for speaking in public without official government permission (Ufen 2015, 580). Such instances have significant implications for the fairness of future elections.

4.4. 2011 Singaporean General Election: Manipulation of Voting Operations

The voting and counting operations during GE2011 were structured and efficiently organized. There were no obvious problems or indications of irregularities. The voting and counting procedures are clearly defined and made publicly available by the Elections Department Singapore (see Elections Department Singapore n.d.a). Counting begins immediately after the closure of polling booths, and the results are announced in a timely manner. For GE2011, the official results were released on the 7th of May, the same day the elections were held (Elections Department Singapore n.d.a; Yahoo Singapore 2011).

There have, however, been complaints from attendees regarding the counting procedure. All counting operations are supervised by counting agents, whose role is to “ensure that it is carried out in accordance with the law” (Elections Department Singapore n.d.a). Candidates themselves are also permitted to observe the counting process, although their attendance is not required. Likewise, the presence of counting agents is also optional, as they are appointed by political parties and therefore have partisan affiliation. The Returning Officers, who are appointed by the Elections Department, bear primary responsibility for organizing the counting process and for determining the validity of ballot papers (Elections Department Singapore n.d.a). During the GE2011, some ambiguity arose concerning how ballot papers were counted. Figure 12 (see Appendix) illustrates notable inconsistencies in what counting agents reported from their observations. For instance, in example number 4, the vote was counted for the “Christmas Tree” symbol, as marks are generally expected to take the form of an “X”. Similarly, in the case of

example 10, the ballot was also counted for the “Christmas Tree” because it contained the only visible mark. However, returning officers remained consistent in their counting procedures, as the example of ballot paper 12 was counted for the “Stick Figure” symbol (Au 2011). In addition, complaints were raised regarding perceived favoritism towards PAP counting agents. In some cases, PAP agents were permitted to enter polling stations without the proper authorization documents that opposition agents were required to provide (The Online Citizen 2015).

While the voting operations were conducted without major irregularities, it is noteworthy that neutral observers were not permitted to attend the process. For instance, Maruah, a human rights NGO, applied for access to polling stations but was denied by the Elections Department (Maruah 2011). This does not necessarily suggest that the voting operations were compromised or involved illegal activities. However, the absence of neutral and international observers does reduce accountability to a certain extent.

4.5. 2011 Singaporean General Election: Outcomes and Consequences of Manipulation

The perceived legitimacy of the government following the elections can be interpreted through the analysis of public opinion surveys. Particularly, those conducted by the Asian Barometer employ extensive questionnaires that capture the atmosphere and sentiments of the public. These surveys are typically conducted in person (G. Koh et al. 2024, 4). Between 2010 and 2014, findings indicate a gradual but modest decline in citizens’ trust in political institutions. At the same time, perceptions of the general elections themselves remained largely unchanged, with approximately 77% evaluating the electoral process as free and fair (Appendix, *Figure 13* and *Figure 14*). This suggests that while citizens expressed growing dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the political system, they did not necessarily perceive the elections as fundamentally unfair.

Similarly, trust in the prime minister and the government declined slightly between 2010 and 2014, yet approval rates remained above 70% after GE2011 (*Figure 15* and *Figure 16*). These findings are further supported by survey data on attitudes toward the current system of government, with most respondents indicating that the system either functions very well or requires only minor changes (*Figure 17*). Moreover, Singaporeans consistently placed a higher value on economic development than on the concept of democracy. In both 2010 and 2014, over 50% of the respondents indicated that economic development is either more important or at least equally important as democratic principles (*Figure 18*). This emphasis on economic performance may help to explain why overall trust in electoral institutions has remained relatively high.

After GE2011, growing dissatisfaction and public debate emerged on issues such as

inequality, which had already been prominent prior to the election (L. Z. Rahim and Barr 2019, 204). When comparing survey data from 2010 and 2014, citizens' concerns about wages and salaries increased, while worries regarding housing declined slightly (*Figure 19*). Nevertheless, GE2011 did not trigger strong public reactions in the form of public protest or demonstrations. This is unsurprising given that surveys suggested relatively high levels of trust in the government. Moreover, larger demonstrations or rallies are unlikely in Singapore due to legal constraints. Under the "Public Order Act", organizers and participants of protests can be held liable. Demonstrations require official permits, and failure to comply with the regulations may result in imprisonment or other forms of punishment (Han 2022, 34–35). That being said, the way Singaporeans perceived the election through the media and participated in the electoral process did undergo some changes. Younger citizens in particular were more active on online platforms and social media, with nearly half believing that excessive rules limited political participation (*Figure 20*). Compared to older generations, they also showed higher participation in GE2011 and were more supportive of opposition parties. By contrast, older and less-educated citizens tended to favor the PAP (Lin n.d., 22–25). Interestingly, survey results also revealed that if voting had not been compulsory, 39% of respondents would have refrained from voting altogether (*Figure 21*).

It can therefore be concluded that the general population largely perceived the GE2011 as legitimate, with the government and political system continuing to enjoy substantial levels of support and approval.

4.6. 2015 Singaporean General Election: Legal and Institutional Context

After its comparatively weaker result in GE2011, the PAP made a strong comeback in the 2015 General Election. The circumstances of the election were unique: former PAP leader and founding father Lee Kuan Yew passed away, and the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence was celebrated. Ultimately, the PAP improved its performance by about 10%, securing 69.9% of the total vote and winning 83 out of 89 seats (Brookings Institution 2015; Izzuddin 2016, 193). To a significant extent, the PAP was able to capitalize on these events, creating an atmosphere that highlighted the party's accomplishments (Welsh 2016, 122). At the same time, the PAP sought to address some of the shortcomings revealed in GE2011 by introducing new policies that targeted public concerns such as public transportation, inequality, and the cost of living (K. P. Tan 2016, 108–10). Conversely, the opposition parties appeared less organized and more fragmented than in GE2011, which contributed to their weaker results in both SMCs and GRCs (Izzuddin 2016, 178 and 191–192). Finally, the PAP's dominant result in parliamentary seats can also be attributed to the "winner takes it all" plurality voting system

that was in place for both GE2011 and GE2015.

Voter turnout in GE2015 was once again very high, reaching a total of 93%. As in 2011, voting was compulsory, and failure to do so resulted in removal from the electoral register. Individuals who wished to participate in the subsequent elections were required to reapply to regain their voting rights (Elections Department Singapore 2015h, 2015b). Particular attention during GE2015 was directed toward the issue of overseas voting. The voter turnout among overseas voters was considerably lower in comparison to that of residents in Singapore, arguably due to the limited number of polling stations abroad. In response, the Elections Department addressed the issue (see Elections Department Singapore 2015i) and opened a new polling location in Dubai, bringing the total number of overseas polling stations to nine (Elections Department Singapore 2015g). Nonetheless, overseas voters played only a minor role in the overall election result, as they accounted for only about 0.1% of the eligible electorate (Elections Department Singapore 2015j). Still, the Elections Department demonstrated efforts to improve accessibility and transparency. For example, adjustments were made to the design of the ballot paper to reduce errors in marking votes, an issue that had already been noted in GE2011 (Elections Department Singapore 2015d).

In comparison to GE2011, the time between the announcement of new electoral boundaries and the dissolution of parliament was reduced to only five weeks (*Figure 8*), leaving opposition parties with even less time to organize and nominate candidates. The “Cooling-off Day” was again implemented in GE2015, banning all forms of campaigning, advertisement, and the display of political symbols on the day preceding the election (Elections Department Singapore 2015c). Some exceptions to this rule exist, however, as media outlets are still permitted to continue reporting “in the newspapers, on radio and television relating to election matters” (Elections Department Singapore 2015c). The Election Department emphasized that Cooling-off Day was to be taken seriously, as “candidates should be mindful of how they conduct themselves in public and exercise due care to avoid any action that may be perceived as campaigning” (Elections Department Singapore 2015c). Given the strict media control evident during GE2011, it can be inferred that such regulations are an advantage for the PAP. An infographic on the proper conduct during Cooling-off Day is provided in Appendix, *Figure 22*.

Similar to GE2011, campaign financing in GE2015 was heavily tilted in favor of the PAP. During the campaign, the PAP spent approximately 5.3S\$ million, whereas all opposition parties combined spent only about 1.8S\$ million (Yap 2020). Although the Elections Department raised the maximum spending limit for campaigning, it remained relatively low compared to limits in other countries and was not reached by most candidates (Elections

Department Singapore 2015d; Weiss, Loke, and Choa 2016, 870–71). Opposition parties generally face greater challenges in securing funds, as donations are restricted and foreign funding is prohibited. As a result, they often resort to selling publications and reading material such as newspapers to fund their activities (Brookings Institution 2015). While the election deposit for candidates was lowered from 16,000S\$ to 14,500S\$, it remained comparatively high and could serve as a barrier for running for office, particularly given the risk of losing the deposit if a candidate fails to secure the required minimum share of votes in their constituency (Weiss, Loke, and Choa 2016, 861).

By contrast, the PAP enjoys greater flexibility in reallocating party funds to support its campaigns. For example, a notable advantage is the People's Association (PA), which is an organization under the Ministry of Culture and plays a significant role in community engagement. With an annual budget of approximately 500\$ million, the PA has been able to invest in programs and initiatives that indirectly advance PAP interests through public funding (Goh 2015). Moreover, the PAP has the capacity to provide material benefits to citizens, which can enhance its electoral support. It has been noted that certain constituencies received significantly reduced funding after electing an opposition candidate, despite previously receiving strong financial support under PAP representation (Weiss, Loke, and Choa 2016, 866–67). In addition, the PAP has been observed to increase benefits for citizens shortly before the election, for example in the form of tax rebates or transportation vouchers (Welsh 2016, 125–26). Finally, with greater financial resources and higher campaign spending per voter than the opposition, PAP candidates are typically more visible in public spaces, for example through posters and banners (Liang and Au-Yong 2015). An overview of campaign spending per district during GE2015 is provided in Appendix, *Figure 23*.

As in 2011, Singapore's Electoral Boundaries Review Committee (EBRC) was responsible for organizing electoral districts in 2015. Several SMCs and GRCs were added, while districts that had relatively close results in 2011 were adjusted or removed (N. Tan 2015b, 169). The EBRC continued to operate under the supervision of the Prime Minister, which can be interpreted as potential bias in boundary adjustments. Moreover, the committee has been criticized for frequently implementing changes to boundaries in almost every election without providing sufficient reasons or explanations (N. Tan 2015b, 177–78). Unlike in some other countries, the EBRC can make boundary changes behind closed doors and is not required to obtain approval from any institutions other than the Prime Minister's office, resulting in limited transparency in the process (N. Tan 2015b, 180–83).

Malapportionment remained another factor in GE2015. While the 30% tolerance limit for

the voter-to-MP ratio was maintained (Electoral Boundaries Review Committee 2015, 5), it was exceeded in certain cases, creating disparities in which voters in some districts were more influential than others (N. Tan 2015b, 185–86) (see *Figure 9*). Nonetheless, reports indicate that overall electoral disproportionality decreased slightly between GE2011 and GE2015 (Appendix, *Figure 24*). For comparative purposes, the rules and criteria for boundary and district changes in Singapore relative to other countries are provided in Appendix, *Figure 25*.

As observed in GE2011, instances of gerrymandering were also reported in GE2015. One example is Joo Chiat SMC, where the opposition managed to nearly win in GE2011. Subsequently, Joo Chiat SMC was dissolved and merged into a GRC, which was dominated by the PAP (N. Tan and Grofman 2018, 283; Tung 2020). Another case is Sengkang Town, which was extensively redrawn and divided into four separate parts following the 2011 elections (Appendix, *Figure 26*). Boundary changes have sometimes been combined with the recruitment of new voters who recently acquired Singaporean citizenship. These voters, often perceived as loyal to the PAP, may be added to specific districts to secure the PAP's chances of winning (Goh 2015). It should be noted, however, that despite constituency changes over the decades, the overall difference in vote shares between PAP and opposition parties has remained relatively stable (Appendix, *Figure 27*). A comprehensive map of all electoral district changes between GE2011 and GE2015 is provided in Appendix, *Figure 28*.

4.7. 2015 Singaporean General Election: Manipulation of Individuals

As noted in the previous chapter, both the passing of Lee Kuan Yew and the celebrations of Singapore's 50th year of independence shaped the context of GE2015, even becoming a central element of the PAP's campaign strategy (K. P. Tan 2016, 111–12). In contrast to GE2011, however, GE2015 was less influenced by the internet and social media, as participation on online platforms was lower and most voters relied on mainstream media channels for information (N. Tan 2015a). Surveys further indicate that citizens expressed high levels of trust in public media (Soon and S. N. Samsudin 2016, 177).

The major media channels, such as the Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) and Media Corp, operated under state supervision. Both were largely government-owned, with board members appointed and recruited by the state, effectively granting the PAP extensive control over Singapore's media landscape (Freedom House 2015c, 2015b, 366). According to Reporters Without Borders, a non-governmental organization monitoring press freedom, Singapore ranked 153rd out of 180 countries (Goh 2015). This lack of press freedom was evident during the GE2015 campaign, as PAP candidates received significantly greater coverage than their opposition counterparts (Soon and S. N. Samsudin 2016, 177). Moreover, self-censorship

remained a common issue. Given the state ownership of media channels and the potential repercussions for reporting critically on the PAP, journalists were inclined to adopt a favorable stance toward the ruling party and its candidates (Freedom House 2015b, 366, 2015a).

During GE2015, freedom of speech was restricted in several ways. The Newspaper and Printing Presses Act granted the government authority to oversee and regulate the distribution of newspapers and other publications. In addition, the Internal Security Act (ISA) allowed the government to arrest without warrant, which could be used against individuals critical of the government (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2015, 11; Freedom House 2015a). Defamation laws further enabled the government to exert pressure on journalists, with lawsuits brought against individuals who criticized the party or its officials (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2015, 9). Beyond the chilling effect on self-censorship, government-initiated censorship was also evident. The Media Development Authority (MDA) actively blocked websites and removed online content, while its authority also extended to television, music, and the arts. In 2013, an Online News Licensing Scheme was introduced, which required news websites, particularly those publishing political content, to obtain a license in order to publish. Not only was acquiring such a license costly, but the MDA also reserved the power to require website owners to remove their content at any time. (Freedom House 2015b, 365–66; Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2015, 13). During GE2015, the government enforced new regulations, including the withdrawal of a website's license for publishing political content (Freedom House 2015c, 2).

Singaporeans also face restrictions on their freedom of association. Even small organizations cannot be established without government approval, and the government authorities reserve the right to dissolve them at any time. Public gatherings and discussions are strictly regulated and require official permission, with the sole exception of the “Speakers’ Corner” in Hong Lim Park. However, even within this designated space, where discussions are tolerated to an extent, speakers must register in advance to inform the government of their chosen topic (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2015, 9 and 14-15; Freedom House 2015a). There have also been instances around GE2015 in which opposition members were denied permission to speak at the Speakers’ Corner (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2015, 15). Furthermore, the Elections Department specifies that “under the Parliamentary Elections Act, any person who conducts activities to promote or procure the election of a candidate, must be individually authorized in writing by the candidate or his election agent on and from Nomination Day” (Elections Department Singapore 2015a). Although these regulations technically do not forbid public speaking or campaigning activities, the ruleset established by

the government makes it difficult for opposition members to hold rallies or engage with citizens. By contrast, the PAP is able to utilize the People's Association to gain the favor of voters, whose official role includes "connecting to government" and "explaining policies to residents" (Welsh 2016, 123). This enables the PAP to circumvent restrictions on public speaking and leverage grassroots organizations for campaigning activities, a powerful tool which is not available to the opposition (Brookings Institution 2015).

Pressure on opposition members or individuals critical of the government was also common in the lead-up to GE2015. Several bloggers, for instance, were targeted through defamation charges and legal action. One prominent case involved Roy Ngerng Yi Ling, who discussed a potential corruption case and subsequently lost his job. He was directly sued by the Prime Minister, ordered to pay 150,000S\$ in damages (Freedom House 2015a; Global Freedom of Expression n.d.). Another example is Alex Au, a blogger who also served as a counting agent during GE2011 (see chapter 4.4.). In 2013, he was charged with "contempt of court" and fined 8000S\$ for statements published on his personal blog (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2015, 12). Similarly, cartoonist Leslie Chew faced charges of "scandalizing the judiciary" after her work questioned and criticized the neutrality of judges (Human Rights Watch 2014).

Opposition politicians were also targeted. For example, Daniel Goh of the Worker's Party became the subject of a scandal after Singapore Press Holdings and Media Corp, which are both under the control of the government, published letters implying that he was involved in an affair, thereby creating a scandal surrounding his name (Mathi and Tung 2015).

Elections in Singapore demonstrate that, while individuals are generally protected from physical harm, they may nonetheless face various forms of pressure that can result in financial penalties or legal consequences, which ultimately increases self-censorship. Moreover, given that the press and judiciary generally align with the government, the PAP has been able to publicly criticize and ridicule opposition members during election campaigns with minimal risk of repercussions (K. P. Tan 2017, 5; Freedom House 2015b, 365).

4.8. 2015 Singaporean General Election: Manipulation of Voting Operations

There were no major incidents reported regarding the voting operations of GE2015. Polling stations were well organized, and the voting and counting processes were carried out without significant problems. As in GE2011, the roles of polling and counting agents were clearly defined, and the rules were made publicly available by the Elections Department (see Elections Department Singapore 2015e, 2015f). One notable change compared to GE2011 was the introduction of the so-called "sample count". The sample count provided a preliminary

projection of election results by sampling a portion of ballot papers from each polling station. Given that GE2011 had seen incidents in which preliminary results for specific districts were publicly discussed and speculated about, the PAP may have introduced the sample count to avoid a similar situation (W. Sim 2015; G. Koh 2015). While the sample count procedure existed prior to GE2015, the information had previously not been released to a broader audience (M. Tan). The sample counts proved to be relatively accurate during GE2015, as illustrated in Appendix, *Figure 29*. Ultimately, the release of the sample count can be interpreted as a precautionary measure by the PAP.

Prior to election day, several articles were published concerning ballot secrecy, as the serial number imprinted on each ballot had raised concerns among voters (Utomo 2015). While there have been no reports of ballot secrecy being violated, it has been argued that the presence of the serial number may have, to some extent, discouraged voters from casting their ballots freely (Ostwald and Rimbau 2023, 857). Besides those concerns, polling stations were generally accessible, including for the more than 3400 overseas voters (W. Sim).

As in GE2011, a major concern during GE2015 was the absence of independent election observers. Polling agents tasked with overseeing the voting process and ensuring ballot secrecy are ultimately appointed by the candidates themselves (Elections Department Singapore 2015f, 2; K. A. Lim 2020). During GE2015, the NGO Maruah once again applied for access to polling stations, highlighting the lack of independent election observers who can oversee the voting procedures. Maruah also noted that during GE2011, “a number of respondents felt that there was insufficient privacy when marking their ballots” (Mathi and Tung 2015). Correspondence with Shih Tung, the president of Maruah, confirmed that the Elections Department of Singapore did not grant any access to independent election observers in both the 2011 and 2015 general elections (see e-mail correspondence with Maruah, *Figure 30*).

Furthermore, individuals shared their experience as counting agents during GE2011, as discussed in Chapter 4.4. However, the blogger Alex Au, who had previously provided such insights, was fined for his blog activities in 2013 (see Chapter 4.7.). Maruah has noted that Singaporeans working as counting agents often share their impressions of election day on the online platform “Reddit”, which may provide a comparatively safer space than personal blogs. Although polling stations in general are intended to function as a neutral space, one user with prior experience as a polling and counting agent reported that “frequently (especially in the past), polling stations will be dominated by PAP representatives wearing the party color - white. While the opposition party contesting in that ward will not have enough volunteers and therefore be unrepresented” (Raistanient 2020).

Ultimately, there were no reports of major misconduct, violations of ballot secrecy, or incorrect counting procedures during GE2015. Nevertheless, the PAP created an atmosphere at polling stations that reinforced its position as the dominant party.

4.9. 2015 Singaporean General Election: Outcomes and Consequences of Manipulation

Similar to GE2011, public opinion surveys were analyzed to assess the perceived legitimacy of the PAP following the 2015 general election. Between 2014 and 2020, trust in both the Prime Minister and the government increased by approximately 10% (Appendix, *Figure 15* and *Figure 16*). At the same time, a growing number of Singaporeans indicated a need for adjustments to the current system of government, including a stronger focus on economic development policies (Appendix, *Figure 17* and *Figure 18*). It should be noted, however, that the long-term study by the Institute of Policy Studies, from which these data are drawn (see G. Koh et al. 2024), was conducted after GE2020. Consequently, it is difficult to determine whether these sentiments accurately reflect public opinion immediately following GE2015.

Other polls suggest that social welfare was a major motivation for voters to support the PAP in GE2015 (Welsh 2016, 126), consistent with the strong public interest in economic benefits. This is further supported by scholarly observations that “Singapore voters are pragmatic, self-interested and risk-averse. They have responded to electoral rewards and voted for the PAP with a track record of delivering the economic goods.” (N. Tan 2015a). Additionally, Singaporean voters reported that their primary considerations at the polling booth were “party leadership” and the strength of individual candidates (Appendix, *Figure 31*). Overall, the public appeared to be satisfied with the outcome of GE2015, particularly insofar as the role of a strong government in ensuring continued economic development had been fulfilled (Oliver and Ostwald 2018a, 141). In the end, 41% of Singaporeans reported feeling “happy”, while 43% indicated feeling “relieved” with the outcome of GE2015 (Welsh 2016, 127).

In comparison to GE 2011, surveys indicate that Singaporeans were less active on the internet and social media platforms during GE2015 (Ho 2020, 503; Welsh n.d., 3). Beyond casting their vote, overall political participation remained relatively low (Appendix, *Figure 32*). Furthermore, when voters did engage with social media, it was primarily to stay in touch with others or to gather information, rather than to post or publish their own content (N. Samsudin 2016, 3). Considering this moderate level of participation and the widespread satisfaction with the outcome of GE2015, it is unsurprising that no organized protests, public unrest, or other forms occurred after the elections. Additionally, laws such as the Public Order Act (2009) enable the government to regulate and shut down any potential protests (Han 2022, 34–35). While no such cases were reported in the post-election period of GE2015, it is important to note that the

PAP mechanism is in place to maintain control.

In conclusion, GE2015 was a significant success for the PAP and appeared to also be positive for most voters. Among all political parties, the PAP was considered the most credible and reliable (Appendix, *Figure 33*). The majority of Singaporeans reported that, under the PAP, the country was heading in the right direction (Appendix, *Figure 34*). Many voters had benefited financially under PAP rule (Appendix, *Figure 35*) and may not have perceived other parties as ready to lead the country (Appendix, *Figure 36*). While the public may desire adjustments to the electoral process, the outcome of GE2015 and the continued leadership of the PAP were both expected and supported by the majority of citizens (N. Tan 2015a; Welsh n.d., 35).

5. Case Study: Malaysia

5.1. A Brief Introduction to Elections in Malaysia

In comparison to Singapore, Malaysia's political sphere has not been dominated by a single party but rather by a strong alliance of parties aligned with specific ethnic groups. Ethnic voting is a major feature of Malaysian politics that must be considered in order to understand the electoral process. The Federation of Malaysia gained independence from British rule in 1957 and became Malaysia in 1963, when additional states were integrated (initially including Singapore) (H. H. Lim 2002, 101). Malaysia is a diverse country, with Malays making up about 60% of the population, Chinese about 20%, and Indians around 7%. Historically, the strongest party has been the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), which, together with the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), formed an alliance in the 1950s. Within this coalition, each party's role was to represent its respective ethnic group. While this arrangement was distinctive, it also created imbalances. As UMNO was the dominant party from the beginning, Malays were granted several advantages and privileges in society compared to minority groups (Ostwald 2017, 3).

To remain in power, the electoral system was tilted in favor of the UMNO. Plurality elections had already been established in the 1950s, limiting the opposition's ability to win seats in parliament, which in turn reinforced the representation of UMNO and its alliance. *Figure 37* illustrates the discrepancy between votes received and seats won from 1959 to 1999, highlighting the disproportionality of representation. Another mechanism to strengthen UMNO's position was rural weightage, whereby the individual value of rural votes was greater when compared to those in urban areas. Since most Malays resided in rural areas, this measure bolstered UMNO's political strength (H. H. Lim 2002, 104–5). From the 1960s onward,

Malaysia's Election Commission came increasingly under the influence of the ruling alliance, with members appointed who were more favorable to the government. Over time, the Commission stopped functioning as an independent body, enabling changes to electoral laws or constituency boundaries with little resistance (H. H. Lim 2002, 124–126). *Figure 38* highlights the electoral advantage of the Malay population, which has diminished over time but remained significant. In this context, the enfranchisement advantage has been defined as “the difference between the percentage of Malays in the electorate and the percentage of Malays in the population”, whereas the delineation advantage refers to “the difference between the percentage of Malay-majority constituencies and the percentage of Malays in the electorate” (H. H. Lim 2002, 129).

A turning point for UMNO's dominance was the riots and ethnic conflicts of 1969, which had several consequences for the electoral system. The events were used to justify policies that channeled economic wealth and political power predominantly to the Malay population. For example, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was intended to bring prosperity to all citizens, but primarily benefited the Malay community. In 1973, the former ruling alliance was expanded with the formation of Barisan National (BN), in which UMNO was the dominant party, consolidating its control over parliament and other state institutions (Funston 2018, 61–62). Despite UMNO's strong position in Malaysian politics, elections did not always proceed smoothly. In 1999, for instance, Barisan National lost a substantial number of parliamentary seats, and UMNO did not secure even half of the Malay community's votes. In 2008, BN failed to secure a two-thirds majority, highlighting that the ruling government was not uncontested despite its institutional advantages in the electoral arena (Funston 2018, 59–61).

To conclude, elections in Malaysia have historically been neither free nor fair, as the rules were gradually shaped to favor the UMNO. Overall, the UMNO had created a “strong, stable and secure government in Malaysia” that “continues to command widespread electoral support and even legitimacy” (H. H. Lim 2002, 138). Due to its continued dominance throughout the 20th century and the opposition's limited ability to meaningfully contest elections, scholars have described Malaysia as having the characteristics of a hybrid regime (Ostwald 2017, 4–5).

5.2. 2013 Malaysian General Election: Legal and Institutional Context

The 2013 General Election (GE13) resulted in a victory for Barisan National, which secured 133 out of 222 seats. GE13 was by no means an easy triumph for the BN, as the election has been described as “unarguably the most severely contested election in Malaysian history” up to that point (Suzuki 2013, 1). In that year, the opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) was able to significantly challenge the BN, enjoying particular popularity among voters who resided in

urban areas. Notably, PR even received a higher share of the popular vote than BN, gaining slightly over 50% in total. Nevertheless, this translated into only 89 seats due to Malaysia's plurality voting system (first-past-the-post) (B. T. Khoo 2013a, 6).

Several factors contributed to the decline of BN's dominance in 2013. Ideologically, the BN adhered to an ethnicity-focused agenda of "religion, race and ruler", leaving no space for so-called "traitorous Malays" (B. T. Khoo 2013a, 30). Even its economic policies and decision-making continued to be shaped by ethnicity, whereas the PR emphasized the allocation of wealth across the whole population. These restructuring measures, combined with a strong push for clean elections, motivated many Malaysians to support the PR (Suzuki 2013, 11–12).

The significance of ethnic voting has long been a central feature in Malaysian politics, and this remained evident in GE13. A pronounced disparity remained between Malay and Chinese voters. As BN faced difficulties in securing support from Chinese voters, the term "Chinese tsunami" became associated with GE13. Najib Razak, the Prime Minister at that time, created the expression on polling day, explaining how Chinese voters were responsible for the relatively modest success of BN. Consequently, the already dominant UMNO, which primarily represents the Malay community and its voters, became even more powerful and influential within the BN coalition (K. H. Lee and Thock 2014, 25–26). An overview of the General Election results in Malaysia, including the percentage of total votes received by BN and opposition parties, is presented in Appendix, *Figure 39*.

Voter turnout for GE13 was high, in fact, the highest the country had ever recorded. Over eleven million voters participated, representing approximately 85% of all registered voters (B. T. Khoo 2013a, 3). At the time, the voting age was 21, which changed in 2019. When the voting age was lowered to 18, almost six million people were added to the potential voter list (Chai 2022). Considering that approximately 450,000 Malaysians reach voting age each year (Osman 2013), a significant number of young adults were not granted the opportunity to vote in GE13.

Overall, the issue of electoral rolls has been quite controversial. Numerous reports highlighted irregularities and unusual practices in voter registration during the 2013 election. It is important to note that Malaysian citizens must submit an official application in order to participate in general elections, and the deadline for GE13 was the 31st of December 2012 (Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs 2013, 13). Examples of irregularities include voters who reported being previously registered but later removed from the list without their knowledge or consent. Other citizens stated how they never registered yet still appeared on the electoral roll. Furthermore, deceased persons were also listed, and there were numerous cases

of voters with similar names appearing in multiple constituencies, often without accurate address or residence information (Bersih 2015, 20–22). Another common issue involved constituency assignment, with registered voters unexpectedly placed in districts or even states where they had never resided before (Subramaniam 2014; Bersih 2013). Such irregularities can affect election outcomes by enabling practices such as double voting or gerrymandering, while simultaneously disqualifying certain voters from participating. The percentage of new voters in GE13 is presented in Appendix, *Figure 40*.

While the overall voter turnout was high, participation among overseas voters was quite low. Of the 700,000 Malaysians living abroad, fewer than 1% were registered to vote (Ufen 2013, 7–8). The government had imposed restrictions on overseas voting, such as removing the option of postal voting for Malaysians residing in Singapore. At that time, most Malaysians living abroad were in Singapore, with many more commuting to Singapore for work (J. Gomez and Omar 2013, 106–7). It should be noted, however, that from 2013 all overseas Malaysians were granted the right to cast their vote at embassies, a privilege which previously was available only to specific groups, such as public servants (J. Gomez and Omar 2013, 108–9). As the change was introduced shortly before the election, overseas voters were often unfamiliar with the process and encountered administrative or technical difficulties during their registration (Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs 2013, 28). Notably, exit polls indicated a strong support for the opposition among overseas voters, reaching up to 70% in many regions (J. Gomez and Omar 2013, 106–7). This factor is particularly relevant given the restrictions on the voting process.

In terms of scheduling and organization, over 8,000 polling centers were made available to facilitate voter access, and the campaign period was extended from 13 days in GE12 (2008) to 15 days in GE13. Voter participation was taken seriously, and regulations were enforced on companies so that “employers who, directly or indirectly, refuse to allow their employees to vote can, upon conviction, be fined RM5,000 or sentenced to one year’s jail” (ABC News 2013). The time between the dissolution of Parliament (3rd April) and Nomination Day (20th April) was also relatively long, totaling 17 days. Officially, campaigning is not permitted before Nomination Day, when candidates submit their applications to the Election Commission. However, the BN utilized this 17-day period to their advantage by promoting their coalition and candidates extensively (Loh 2013).

In terms of campaign financing, the BN held a clear advantage over its competitors. Reports indicate that the BN spent over \$24 million even before the campaigning period began (Weiss 2013, 1149–50), an amount that opposition parties could not match. Throughout the entire

electoral cycle, the BN was able to spend significantly more resources on campaigning and advertising, partly due to the existing rules and regulations. In 2013, Malaysia had no restrictions on political donations, allowing the BN to pool substantially more funds than smaller parties through its connections with major corporations. Although financial limits on spending existed for individual candidates, these were inadequately monitored and enforced (Weiss 2013, 1157; Ufen 2013, 8).

The BN further leveraged its financial advantage by offering benefits directly to the population. Treating and distributing rewards was a common practice, which was partially funded with public resources to gain voter support (Kessler 2013). Examples include payments to public servants, local communities, and ordinary citizens (Welsh 2013b, 142). In many constituencies, particularly villages, individuals were promised cash or food if they promised to vote for BN on polling day (Aliran 2013). During public events, the BN was frequently seen to distribute free drinks, food, and merchandise as part of its campaigning (Bersih 2015, 32–33). Companies received favorable contracts and conditions and, in return, encouraged employees to cast their vote for the BN (Welsh 2013b, 143). For young voters, the prices of tech gadgets were reduced, and large music events were organized (Osman 2013). Overall, no election in Malaysia's history saw higher campaign spending than GE13 (Welsh 2013b, 143), as the BN placed considerable emphasis on bribery and treating to secure electoral victory (see Appendix, *Figure 41* and *Figure 42*).

The organization and execution of the electoral process is the responsibility of the Electoral Commission (EC), which oversees voter registration and the campaigning process. Malaysia's EC is often regarded as lacking independence, as its members are civil servants who operate under the office of the Prime Minister. Consequently, the EC's decisions have frequently been criticized for being non-transparent or biased in favor of the BN, a criticism that also applies to the review and drawing of electoral boundaries (Welsh 2013b, 140; Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs 2013, 6 and 20-21). According to the Electoral Integrity Project (EIP), Malaysia ranked "as the worst of 66 countries in terms of fairness and integrity of its electoral boundaries" (Subramaniam 2014).

Malapportionment was a significant issue during GE13, as votes for the BN were approximately 1.6 times as impactful as votes for the PR (Subramaniam 2014). Constituencies varied greatly in the number of eligible voters, with the smallest constituency having about 15,000 voters, while the largest contained around 145,000 voters. The BN was particularly successful in smaller constituencies, winning all seats within the smallest 20%. On average, BN candidates only needed about 26,000 votes to secure a seat, while PR candidates required about

42,000 (Suzuki 2013, 6). Smaller constituencies in Malaysia were therefore disproportionately influential, a situation reinforced by the first-past-the-post system. Overall, the BN was able to secure about 50 seats solely through strategic engineering of electoral boundaries (Oliver and Ostwald 2018b, 14). To illustrate the extent of malapportionment during GE13, it has been suggested that the election could theoretically be won by acquiring only 17% of the total votes (Tam 2013). An overview of the impact of malapportionment is presented in Appendix, *Figure 43* and *Figure 44*.

Gerrymandering was also evident during GE13, with numerous cases of voters being assigned to new districts without explanation. In more extreme cases, citizens from the same neighborhood, and sometimes even from the same household, were assigned to separate constituencies (Aliran 2013; Welsh 2013b, 140–41).

5.3. 2013 Malaysian General Election: Manipulation of Individuals

Taking a closer look at election campaigning, it becomes evident that the BN enjoyed a stronger media presence than its competitors. Many broadcasting stations, including television and radio, were under the control of Media Prima Berhad, which, while not directly state-owned, was closely linked to the government through coalition members and major corporations aligned with the BN. Since major newspaper outlets were also owned by Media Prima, the government maintained a strong monopoly over the media landscape and was able to create storylines and advertisements in its favor (Lumsden 2013, 5–6; Freedom House 2013b; Sani 2014, 128–29).

During GE13, the broadcasting time revealed a significant imbalance, with the BN receiving extensive and favorable coverage. Several institutions, such as the Centre for Independent Journalism, conducted media monitoring prior to the election and observed that “BN received the highest level of positive coverage, while PR received the highest level of attacks and negative coverage” (Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs 2013, 19). Similar findings were reported by Watching the Watchdog, another project that analyzed the media coverage during GE13 (Lumsden 2013, 6–7). This one-sided coverage was particularly impactful for voters in rural areas, who often lacked access to alternative media sources via the internet and therefore relied primarily on traditional media (Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs 2013, 19; Tapsell 2013). An overview of the tone of coverage during GE13 is provided in Appendix, *Figure 45*.

Turning to the online sphere, the BN was more determined than in previous years to establish a stronger presence. Prime Minister Najib Razak even labeled GE13 as the “first social election” (Sani 2014, 124), personally becoming active on social media platforms such as Twitter and

Facebook to communicate with citizens (Sani 2014, 132–33). The strong media presence once focused on traditional media was extended to the internet, where BN advertisements became increasingly common. The coalition went so far as to hire and train bloggers with the support of the Department of Special Affairs, demonstrating the BN's commitment to dominate cyberspace (Welsh 2013b, 143; Ufen 2013, 8–9). Nevertheless, the internet remained a more contested space, featuring several independent news outlets and websites that reported more critically on all political parties. A content analysis of online media during the campaign period revealed that coverage on supposedly independent websites was comparatively balanced and impartial (Lumsden 2013, 9–11).

Citizens who sought to inform themselves about parties and candidates faced several restrictions during GE13. Content published in media channels was often censored or restricted if the government deemed it inappropriate. Individuals who published critical articles could be held accountable and face legal consequences (Freedom House 2013b), producing a chilling effect on the freedom of expression. For instance, one newspaper author stated that “We can’t say that we were completely neutral during the GE13; we were slanted towards the government” (Tapsell 2013, 54). The online sphere, in particular, was closely monitored by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), which led to the punishment of bloggers, some of whom were even jailed for several months in more severe cases (United States Department of State 2013, 15–16; Sani 2014, 139–40; Freedom House 2013b).

Furthermore, assembly rights were restricted, limiting citizens’ participation in the electoral process. Street protests were generally banned (Suzuki 2013, 24), making it difficult to express criticism of the government in public. One year prior to the election, the NGO Bersih, whose objective is to improve the quality of elections in Malaysia, organized a major rally of about 100,000 participants to demand free and fair elections for GE13. In addition to violent conflicts between demonstrators and police, the organizers of the rally were prosecuted under the Peaceful Assembly Act and faced criminal charges as well as fines up to \$40,000 (Freedom House 2013a; United States Department of State 2013, 19–20). Other laws, such as the Security Offenses Act, permitted prolonged detention before trial (Freedom House 2013b), contributing to a climate of fear surrounding participation in larger rallies.

In terms of freedom of speech, the government may impose restrictions “in the interest of the security of the Federation... [or] public order” (United States Department of State 2013, 13). During the campaigning period, there were cases in which individuals were held legally accountable under the Sedition Act for criticizing the government (United States Department of State 2013, 13). NGOs often faced barriers, as the government either refused to grant them

operating licenses or later invalidated their official registration (United States Department of State 2013, 20–21). Restrictions were also common in the academic sphere, as most civil servants, including university staff, were required to express loyalty to the government. This led to silencing effects, particularly on those dependent on public funding (United States Department of State 2013, 18–19). Political activities on campus, especially by students, were further restricted, since the Universities and University Colleges Act prohibited such involvement (Suzuki 2013, 24; Freedom House 2013a).

Coercion and Intimidation of individuals were also a common practice during GE13. The weeks leading up to election day witnessed a sharp increase in violence compared to prior elections. Reports indicate that there were between 1,200 and 2,000 cases of election-related violence, including attacks against individuals and property (Anfrel 2013; Moniruzzaman 2013, 61). Witness accounts further highlight that BN followers displayed aggression against opposition supporters, including harassment, intimidation, and assaults (Aliran 2013). Opposition candidates in particular were subjected to violence, such as property damage (Bersih 2015, 61–63), as well as defamation in public. BN leaders frequently portrayed opposition members and candidates as incompetent, or falsely associated them with rumors to hurt their image and provoke violence (Suzuki 2013, 14; Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs 2013, 16). Finally, there were cases in which the BN pressured voters into unethical situations: for example, single mothers were told they would continue to receive government financial support only in exchange for their vote (Aliran 2013).

5.4. 2013 Malaysian General Election: Manipulation of Voting Operations

Election Day itself was controversial during GE13, as documented by both election observers and citizens who reported unusual activities. The Election Commission appointed both domestic and international election observers to oversee the voting procedures on the 5th of May. At the domestic level, several organizations, including the Institute of Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS), were present, operating in nearly two-thirds of all electoral constituencies (Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs 2013, 14 and 29). Bersih also deployed a total of 2,000 election observers to monitor electoral quality. Despite the number of election observers, reports indicated that they faced several limitations. Not every organization was accredited by the government, limiting the space in which they could observe the over 8,000 polling stations (Anfrel 2013; Bersih 2015, iii). Several domestic observers further encountered difficult conditions, including harassment, threats, and even arrest (Bersih 2015, 44–48). In contrast, international observers were criticized for lacking impartiality and sufficient critical engagement, often serving a largely formal role rather than actively

contributing to the monitoring process (M. T. Ismail and Mohd Noor 2020, 321–23).

However, not all reports were negative, as some accounts noted that “although there were certain disputes during the counting of votes, observers noted that such incidences were mostly dealt with fairly and competently by the EC official on duty” (Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs 2013, 30).

When it comes to the casting of votes at polling stations, a variety of irregularities were reported. Multiple voting was a significant issue, as some individuals were able to use several ballot papers. In addition, voter identification was often inadequately verified, leading to impersonation and cases in which individuals were prevented from casting their ballot because they were reported as having already voted (Aliran 2013; Bersih 2015, 34–35). Other reports highlighted an unusual number of foreign voters attempting to vote using different sets of identification cards (Houghton 2013).

In the case of postal voting, the opposition was not granted the opportunity to oversee the procedures. When the counting process concluded, the BN secured almost 90% of all postal votes (Ufen 2013, 7). Another area of concern was the high number of spoilt votes, which were invalid due to unclear markings or multiple selections. These spoilt votes appeared primarily in constituencies where the BN won closely contested races, and in many cases, the margin of victory corresponded closely to the number of spoilt ballots (Tam 2013). Such circumstances raise questions about the legitimacy of the counting process and the standards used to determine ballot validity.

Another controversial issue faced by BN leaders was the use of indelible ink. The purpose of the ink was to prevent double voting, clearly indicating which individuals had already cast their ballots. However, the ink did not function effectively, as it could be easily removed by washing hands or faded even without deliberate removal (Aliran 2013; Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs 2013, 30–31). This contributed to a disorganized registration process at polling centers, reducing the ink’s effectiveness in preventing voting irregularities.

Outside the polling centers, on election day, GE13 saw campaigning activities conducted by both BN and opposition parties. Although campaigning is officially prohibited on election day, both the BN and PR set up booths and camps to communicate with voters or offer them incentives on their way to the polling stations. In some instances, parties even transported voters personally to polling centers, using cars or planes, to gain an advantage (Bersih 2015, 37–41; ABC News 2013). Also, on the evening of the 5th of May, several blackouts were reported, occurring during the time when votes were counted. Moreover, although opposition members were initially present at polling centers, many ballot boxes were delivered to counting centers

without their knowledge (Houghton 2013; Welsh 2013b, 141; Aliran 2013). In combination, these factors raise questions regarding the neutrality and transparency of the counting process and may have contributed to suspicions of irregularities.

5.5. 2013 Malaysian General Election: Outcomes and Consequences of Manipulation

After the general elections concluded and the BN emerged as the winner, public discourse and debate quickly unfolded. The government faced accusations of manipulation due to irregularities leading up to the election, a perception reinforced by the fact that the BN won only narrowly while receiving less than 50% of the total votes. The BN attributed their relatively weak election result to the Chinese community (B. T. Khoo 2013b, 24–25), and data from 2013 indicate a clear ethnic divide in voting preferences. According to the Merdeka Center, a research institution focused on data collection and public surveys, approximately 74% of Malay citizens believed Malaysia was heading in the right direction. In contrast, only 21% of ethnic Chinese interviewees expressed confidence in the government's direction, as shown in Appendix, *Figure 46* (K. H. Lee and Thock 2014, 28).

In addition to the ethnic divide, a spatial divide was also apparent. The BN performed better in rural areas, attracting votes from citizens who followed more traditional media and were generally less educated than those in urban areas (B. T. Khoo 2013b, 23–24). Data from the Merdeka Center further highlighted that 58% of rural voters supported BN prior to the election, compared with only 44% of urban voters (K. H. Lee and Thock 2014, 48). Consequently, the government was heavily dependent on the support of rural voters and, as noted in previous chapters, actively maintained positive relations with these communities. BN leaders, when asked about the quality of the electoral process, emphasized that the government made efforts to provide free and fair elections, while strictly rejecting allegations of electoral fraud (Malaysia Today 2013).

The outcome of GE13 provoked a strong public reaction, resulting in several demonstrations and rallies. Even before GE13, such movements were not uncommon. The NGO Bersih, whose goal is to promote free and fair elections in Malaysia, initiated several movements beginning in 2006 (Bersih 1.0). In 2011 and 2012 (Bersih 2.0 and Bersih 3.0), thousands of citizens gathered to demand changes to the electoral system as well as address ongoing government corruption, as illustrated in Appendix, *Figure 47* and *Figure 48* (Smeltzer and Paré 2015, 123–26).

Shortly after election day in 2013, large-scale protests occurred to contest BN's narrow victory. Due to restrictive laws on street protests, the Kelana Jaya Stadium (see Appendix, *Figure 49*) served as the gathering place for approximately 60,000 to 120,000 Malaysians dissatisfied with the newly formed government (Palatino 2013). A few weeks later, another

movement, “Blackout 505”, which was named after the date of the election and the electrical outages on that day, emerged. Thousands of protestors dressed in black gathered at rallies to challenge the electoral process, demand investigations into irregularities, and call for reforms to public institutions, including the Election Commission (Han 2013; Al Jazeera 2013). The government responded quickly, attempting to suppress these protests. Organizers were specifically targeted, facing charges under the Peaceful Assembly Act or the Sedition Act to deter future initiatives. Individuals accused of violating the law were arrested and required to pay fines (Human Rights Watch 2013; Han 2013). The impact of Bersih and its movements cannot be understated, as they raised public awareness that remains relevant for future elections and the legitimacy of the regime.

Staying on the topic of legitimacy, surveys conducted before and after GE13 provide insights into Malaysian citizens’ perceptions. Although administration and leadership were relevant considerations for voters, the most important factor when casting their vote was the economic performance of the government (Weiss 2013, 1140–41). In 2012, 54% of Malaysians believed that the country was heading in the right direction, citing the state of the economy and the quality of leadership as the main reasons. At the same time, those dissatisfied with the government highlighted inflation, the costs of living, and political instability as their primary concerns, as shown in *Figure 50* and *Figure 51* (Merdeka Center 2012, 6 and 8). One year later, in 2013, after the elections had concluded, only 41% of Malaysians believed that the country was moving in the right direction. Notably, dissatisfaction remained closely tied to economic issues, with the cost of living and economic conditions cited as the main concerns. This pattern aligns with broader perceptions of democracy in Malaysia: in recent years, Malaysians have tended to prioritize economic development over democratic values, as illustrated in Appendix, *Figure 52*, *Figure 53*, and *Figure 54*.

More data provides insights into the support for leaders and the perception of the regime in general. From 2012 to 2013, Najib Razak’s public support declined by 12%, with 52% of Malaysians stating that they were satisfied with their prime minister (Merdeka Center 2012, 17, 2013, 13). This trend is illustrated in Appendix, *Figure 55* and *Figure 56*. The survey results were even worse for the government as a whole, as only 38% of Malaysians reported being “happy with the government” after GE13 (Merdeka Center 2013, 17), as shown in Appendix, *Figure 57*. Interestingly, in the period leading up to the elections, perceptions of government legitimacy remained relatively high. Although corruption was one of the issues that citizens wished the government would address more seriously, survey results for Malaysia, as well as for many other countries in Asia around GE13, indicate that more authoritarian states often

enjoyed higher levels of perceived legitimacy (Chu n.d., 28; Merdeka Center 2012, 14). This pattern is reflected in Appendix, *Figure 58*.

Lastly, the Merdeka Center conducted opinion polls on Bersih, asking the public about their support for the organization and its activities. In 2015, 43% of respondents held a favorable view of Bersih, while 47% held an unfavorable view of its activities (Merdeka Center 2015, 4). These findings are presented in Appendix, *Figure 59*. Overall, most of the polls highlighted in this chapter reveal a deep divide within the public, with positive and negative perceptions of the government's performance closely balanced. Even when comparing the younger generation with the broader population, levels of regime support remained fairly similar (Chu n.d., 25).

Without a doubt, electoral irregularities provoked a strong public reaction, weakening the former dominance of the BN. While awareness of the importance of free and fair elections had grown, factors such as ethnic divisions and economic considerations continue to play a decisive role in sustaining support for the BN and its government.

5.6. 2018 Malaysian General Election: Legal and Institutional Context

For this study, the case of the 2018 Malaysian General Election (GE14) is a particularly noteworthy one, differing from the three elections analyzed previously. What makes GE14 unusual is that it was the first time in the country's history that Barisan National failed to win the election. Prior to 2018, BN was in control since Malaysia's independence, a dominance that came to an unexpected end. While Najib Razak's coalition secured around 47% of votes in 2013, this number dropped to only 36% in 2018, translating into 79 out of 222 parliamentary seats. By contrast, the newly formed Pakatan Harapan (PH) won 113 seats, while the Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) secured 18 (Chong 2018, 111–12; Nadzri 2018, 156–57).

The outcome came as a surprise to many domestic and international observers, though it was not entirely unforeseen. The BN had gradually lost its former dominance over the years, and the experience of GE13 demonstrated the extent to which the “first-past-the-post” system allowed it to remain in power. Records indicate that Razak was in a “state of total disbelief when the results of each constituency were announced” (Nadzri 2018, 157), demonstrating that the loss came as a shock to many BN leaders. After Razak and the BN acknowledged defeat, a prominent figure in Malaysian Politics returned as prime minister. Mahathir Mohamad, a former UMNO member who had served as prime minister from 1981 to 2003, took office in 2018 at the age of 92. He represented the PH coalition together with Anwar Ibrahim, a former minister of finance. During the 1990s, the two had clashed over ideological differences and engaged in disputes regarding corruption cases, which led to the imprisonment of Anwar. However, in 2016, they set aside their differences in order to challenge Najib Razak and the dominance of the BN

(Weiss and Hazis 2020, 3; Moten 2020, 393).

Several factors contributed to the collapse of Barisan Nasional during Malaysia's GE14. A major factor was the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal, which involved former Prime Minister Najib Razak. Originally established as a government fund to promote economic development projects, it was revealed that approximately \$4.5 billion had been embezzled, with substantial sums used to purchase properties and luxury goods (Weiss and Hazis 2020, 4; Al Jazeera 2024). Beyond the 1MDB scandal, widespread public discontent was evident, driven by economic factors, high living costs, and ethnic cleavages (Weiss and Hazis 2020, 1).

Reflecting on GE13, the BN had labeled the election outcome as a “Chinese Tsunami”, as discussed in the previous chapter. Observers of GE14 interpreted the results as a potential “Malay Tsunami” (Rahman 2018b), due to declining support for the incumbent government among Malay voters. Although Malay voters still favored the BN more than the other main contenders, a significant portion shifted their support to the Malaysian Islamic Party. At the same time, Pakatan Harapan performed strongly even in constituencies with over 70% Malay voters, while dominating districts with fewer than 70% Malay voters. The difficulties for BN were even more pronounced when examining Chinese voter behavior: support for the opposition increased from approximately 84% in 2013 to 93% in 2018 (Suffian and De 2020, 21 and 24-26). Consequently, the BN adopted a strategy focused primarily on securing Malay voters (Hazis 2020, 49), employing various measures that will be examined in the subsequent chapters. A detailed overview of the performance of political parties and their share of popular votes is provided in Appendix, *Figure 60* and *Figure 61*.

During GE14, voter participation remained fairly high, although it did not reach the level observed in GE13. Whereas approximately 85% of eligible voters cast their ballots in 2013, about 82% did so in 2018, showing a slight decline (Suffian and De 2020, 24). Within the electorate, the largest groups of voters were Malay (54%), followed by Chinese (28%) and Indian (7%) (Hazis 2020, 48–49). While the period between the 2008 and 2013 elections saw a total of four million newly registered voters, the number fell to only two million new registrations for GE14 (Suffian and De 2020, 20).

Reports indicate that, prior to the election, several issues emerged concerning voter registration and the organization of electoral rolls. For example, some voters were reassigned to new constituencies without their knowledge, while others were removed from the rolls entirely. In other cases, voters were registered under addresses at which they did not reside or were assigned to districts that were still under construction. Some individuals were deregistered on the grounds of being deceased, although still being alive, while others appeared on the voting lists despite

never having registered for the elections in the first place (Bersih 2018b, 38–41; Chong 2018, 118). Interestingly, individuals who filed objections against false registrations were often of Chinese ethnicity, raising questions about potential bias or systematic targeting (Bersih 2018b, 38).

In previous elections, the voter registration process had been supported by so-called Assistant Registrar Officers (AROs), who assisted citizens in applying for and obtaining voting status. Following GE13, however, the Election Commission removed this function, reducing the number of AROs from 5,720 in 2011 to only 205 in 2017 (Bersih 2018b, 37). Certainly, this move did little to encourage electoral participation, leading Bersih to launch its “Undi” campaign in 2017, which helped approximately 100,000 individuals to complete the registration process in order to participate in GE14 (Chong 2018, 121). At the same time, it was estimated that around another 100,000 voters were denied participation after the Electoral Commission refused to grant them voting status (Funston 2018, 71).

There were also controversies concerning the schedule of GE14. First, the government allowed a campaigning period of only eleven days. While this adhered to the legal framework, which requires a minimum of eleven days, it nevertheless left voters with limited time to inform themselves about candidates and policies. With election day set for the 9th of May 2018, Nomination Day was held on the 28th of April. On that day, when candidates formally register to compete in the elections, several opposition members were denied the opportunity to apply and run for office (Funston 2018, 70; Bersih 2018b, 49–50). Moreover, the Election Commission scheduled the election on a weekday, which, while not against the rules, is still an unusual decision. Although an official explanation was not provided as to why the election was scheduled on a weekday, it can be assumed that this was due to the likelihood that higher voter turnout would favor the PH (Bersih 2018b, 45).

The election timetable also created difficulties for overseas voters. Of the more than 200,000 individuals eligible for postal voting, about 8,000 were overseas voters (Zack 2018). These voters faced a variety of obstacles, as many did not receive their ballots in time or faced issues regarding their voting status. In numerous cases, these problems could not be resolved due to the strict timeline leading up to election day (Bersih 2018c; Lourdes 2018).

When analyzing the aspect of campaign financing during GE14, it becomes evident that the playing field between the BN and opposition parties was unequal. Officially, each candidate was allowed to spend a total of 100,000RM or 200,000RM, depending on whether they were state assembly or parliamentary candidates (Bersih 2018b, 62–63). These limits were likely exceeded, as party financing in Malaysia was neither transparent nor properly regulated.

Although individuals are theoretically limited in their spending, these limits do not apply to political parties. Furthermore, there are no restrictions on anonymous donations, from which the BN heavily benefited. Donations came from companies closely tied or affiliated with the government as well as from foreign sources, such as Saudi Arabia, and were used to finance the BN's political campaign (Bersih 2018b, 43; Reuters 2016). Under these circumstances, there are no precise figures for the amount of money spent by parties during GE14. Estimates, however, indicate that the BN spent approximately RM2 billion in GE13, while spending after the 1MDB scandal increased to around RM4 billion (Welsh 2018a).

There are numerous examples of how the government used these funds to gain the favor of citizens, particularly through treating and rewarding. For instance, there were cases of cash handouts to taxi drivers and fisherman, payments to voters participating in official BN campaigning events, direct financial aid to lower-income citizens under the Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia (BR1M) program, visits and cash handouts in smaller villages, funds allocated to local communities and religious institutions, and distribution of food and drinks at events (Nadzri 2018, 156; Bersih 2018b, 52–55, 2018a). These efforts were presented under the guise of welfare and citizen support programs, although they can be interpreted as measures of vote buying. In total, the amount of handouts during GE14 is estimated at approximately USD 1,25 billion (United States Department of State 2018, 21; Chong 2018, 119). An overview of cases of treating and rewards can be found in Appendix, *Figure 62*.

The irregularities outlined in this chapter are closely connected to the state of Malaysia's Electoral Commission. During GE14, the EC did not function as an independent institution, as it reported directly to the department of the Prime Minister. Moreover, the Prime Minister's Office was also responsible for allocating the EC's budget (Nadzri 2018, 154; Bersih 2018b, 22), a situation that created strong bias and partiality. During GE14, the EC made several decisions that favored the BN while constraining opposition parties: for instance, several PH members were prevented from contesting, while other candidates were restricted from displaying their images on public posters and banners (Nadzri 2018, 155; Bersih 2018b, 46–47). The EC even went so far as to delay the recognition and registration of PH as an official party until late in the electoral process. Although the PH had applied for registration in 2017, one year before the election, the delay meant that the coalition could not contest under its own logo, an obstacle that the BN did not encounter (Bersih 2018b, 43–45; Funston 2018, 72).

Another major topic concerning the legal and institutional context was the EC's decisions on electoral constituencies and district delineation, as both malapportionment and gerrymandering were evident during GE14. According to the "Perceptions of Electoral Integrity"

(PEI) score, Malaysia ranked 158th out of the 158 countries assessed in terms of government bias (Oliver and Ostwald 2018b, 6). Since BN depended on the support of ethnic Malay voters in the 2018 elections, the number of constituencies with a Malay majority had been artificially increased (Funston 2018, 70–71). Furthermore, the new electoral boundaries were only announced five weeks before election day, leaving the opposition little time to prepare adequately (Moten 2020, 396).

Malapportionment, which is the practice of creating constituencies that are heavily imbalanced in terms of voter numbers, was a persistent issue. In some states, the number of voters per constituency varied by more than 400%. For example, in the state of Selangor, Bangi had 178,790 electors, compared to Sabak Bernam with 40,863 electors (RSIS 2018). Bangi was also nine times larger than the country's smallest constituency, Igan in Sarawak, which had 19,592 electors. As Huat (2020) observes, "the largest 112 parliamentary constituencies contained 68 percent of voters while the smallest 112 comprise only 33 percent. Theoretically, a party or coalition could win a simple majority in Parliament with a mere 16.58 per cent of the popular vote [...]" (Huat 2020, 219). Between 2015 and 2018, the EC introduced several proposals for boundary delineation but failed to address the problem of malapportionment (see Appendix, *Figure 63*). The disparities in vote value are further illustrated in Appendix, *Figure 64*.

Lastly, gerrymandering, which is the redrawing of electoral constituencies to secure more votes and seats, was commonly observable. For example, smaller neighborhoods and residential areas were arbitrarily split and separated without further explanation by the EC, as shown by the curious zig-zag lines in *Figure 65* and *Figure 66* (Ooi 2018). Other constituencies, such as Sungai Siput in Perak, were expanded between GE13 and GE14 without any prior notice by the EC, as illustrated in *Figure 67* (Huat 2020, 223). Numerous other cases of constituency manipulation seemingly emphasized rural areas and areas defined by ethnic composition in order to secure Malay voters for the BN, as shown in *Figure 68* (Ooi 2018; Ostwald 2019, 101).

In conclusion, GE14 demonstrated that, despite the BN falling short of winning the election, both the government and the Electoral Commission allocated substantial resources and time to shift electoral procedures in their favor.

5.7. 2018 Malaysian General Election: Manipulation of Individuals

Taking a closer look at the media landscape and campaigning during GE14, many of the patterns from GE13 reappeared. The BN, for the most part, maintained control of media channels, including television and radio stations, as well as major newspapers. Broadcasting channels were not only restricted in their freedom by the Home Ministry but were also partly

owned by BN members, creating an uneven playing field (Funston 2018, 72; Bersih 2018b, 42). This imbalance was reflected in the tone of coverage in the weeks leading up to election day, where traditional media in particular leaned toward praising the BN.

The University of Nottingham Malaysia monitored media coverage of all major parties from the dissolution of parliament until three days after election day. The study revealed that government-affiliated media outlets were heavily favorable to the BN, both in national and regional broadcasts (Koshy 2020, 4–5). Out of the more than 270,000 data points collected from television, print, and online media, the BN received approximately 55% of coverage, followed by the PH with 32%. Even in those cases where a media outlet covered the PH more frequently than the BN, the coverage often created a negative atmosphere (Koshy 2020, 6 and 11-12). Moreover, media channels placed little emphasis on presenting policies or party programs. Instead, they focused on constructing narratives around politicians, with Najib Razak predominantly portrayed in a positive light compared to his rival, Mahathir (Koshy 2020, 24–26). A breakdown of coverage by both television and newspaper is provided in Appendix, *Figure 69* and *Figure 70*.

Besides the media landscape, the opposition also struggled to keep up with the strong presence of the BN in terms of on-site campaigning. The BN was able to utilize government institutions to fund its campaign program, including the production of booklets and other campaign materials (Nadzri 2018, 156). The government also issued strict regulations on the distribution of campaign materials, while public posters of PH's candidate Mahathir were, in many cases, removed or vandalized (Malaymail 2018; Reuters 2018). Consequently, opposition parties had to rely on the internet as an alternative channel of communication. With the internet penetration rising between GE13 and GE14, approximately 85% of Malaysians were connected to the internet, with most users relying on their smartphones to access information (Refworld 2018; Tapsell 2018, 13).

A new phenomenon of this election was the use of so-called “big data” companies, employed effectively by both the BN and the PH. These companies primarily collected and analyzed voter information, which could then be used to adapt campaign strategies and increase their electoral appeal (Tapsell 2020, 111–14). Originally, data collection had been an inherent advantage of the BN apparatus, but this circumstance had changed: the PH launched a campaign under the name “Invoke”, in which substantial resources were invested to win over voters through the use of big data (Tapsell 2020, 115 and 119). Furthermore, Facebook and WhatsApp emerged as major tools during GE14, providing a fast and efficient way to connect with citizens (Tapsell 2018, 16-17 and 25-26).

Still, the internet space could not be considered free or without restrictions, as the government was not only monitoring but also censoring online activities. The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) was authorized to remove content deemed inappropriate, which had consequences for several bloggers, social media users, and website owners. Multiple reports document websites being taken down, with individuals in some cases facing defamation charges. In particular, those who published material critical of the government or political leaders frequently faced hefty fines or prison sentences (Freedom House 2018; Refworld 2018).

Also controversial was the introduction of the new “Anti-Fake News Bill”, passed on the 2nd of April 2018, only one month prior to the election. Even though “fake news” was never clearly defined, the bill enabled the government to further punish individuals who criticized it. Notably, the new bill applied to both national and international news outlets and, in theory, allowed for penalties of up to 10 years in prison or fines of approximately \$120,000 (Oh 2018; Bersih 2018b, 42). Legal instruments to control the online space were also employed in the context of the 1MDB scandal, where websites or individual posts that mentioned 1MDB negatively were swiftly flagged as “fake news” (Venkiteswaran 2020, 38). Unsurprisingly, the potentially severe punishments faced by individuals for expressing their thoughts online created an atmosphere of self-censorship (United States Department of State 2018).

Citizens further faced restrictions on their rights to assembly, freedom of expression, and freedom of movement. For instance, the government impeded the work of NGOs, either by refusing to recognize their status or by revoking previously granted registrations. A more extreme case occurred in 2016 with Bersih, whose offices were raided and officials arrested for “attempts to commit activities detrimental to parliamentary democracy” (Amnesty International 2018, 5). Street protests generally were restricted, and although they continued to occur regularly, participants often faced arrests and resistance from the police (Freedom House 2018; United States Department of State 2018, 15–16). Hosts of legally organized rallies were required to notify the police at least ten days in advance, and they were often unable to freely determine factors such as time or location (Amnesty International 2018, 5).

Individuals also faced restrictions on freedom of speech, as comments on public matters or on political and racial topics were frequently punished under the Sedition Act. In 2016, for example, an artist was initially sentenced to jail time and fined \$7,500 for a caricature of Najib Razak, highlighting the BN’s intentions to punish government critics (United States Department of State 2018, 10–11). Human rights activists often faced restrictions on freedom of movement, with travel bans imposed both within and outside the country as a means to obstruct their work

(Amnesty International 2018, 6). Furthermore, academic freedom was likewise limited under the University and University Colleges Act (UUCA), which prohibited freedom of speech and assembly on campus. Students who violated these rules through political activities were swiftly punished, as in the case of six students who organized a press conference at the University of Malaya (Melayu 2016). University staff, such as professors, were also constrained in what they could publish, as their job security depended on maintaining allegiance to the government (United States Department of State 2018, 14–15).

Lastly, there were cases of intimidation surrounding GE14. Opposition members were specifically targeted, facing lengthy arrests and other forms of psychological pressure (United States Department of State 2018, 7). Journalists encountered restrictions in their work due to harassment, while government critics often faced defamation or slander cases as a means to shut down their activities (United States Department of State 2018, 12–13). Opposition members also reported frequent instances of hacking, targeting phones and emails (Lourdes 2018). It should be noted, however, that BN politicians also reported cases of hacking (Refworld 2018). Defamation and slander were also not exclusive to the BN, as “negative campaigning” had been a common strategy employed by Mahathir and the PH (Moten 2020).

5.8. 2018 Malaysian General Election: Manipulation of Voting Operations

After analyzing the pre-election period of GE14, this chapter now examines how election day itself unfolded on the 9th of May 2018. First, the Election Commission (EC) appointed both domestic and international observers to oversee the elections, granting this status to several NGOs, universities, and groups from ASEAN and Commonwealth countries (Bersih 2018b, 48–49). According to the EC, “every one of these observers are the persons who are involved in the elections in their own country”, while “the purpose of [...] inviting these foreign observers is to prove the transparency of the election process” (Azmi and Nantha 2018).

However, there were controversies surrounding the selection of election observers. For instance, institutions such as the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam), an independent body established by the government, were not granted observer status (Aziz 2018). Additionally, no Western countries were allowed to oversee the election procedures (Azmi and Nantha 2018), raising questions about the credibility of the observers chosen by the EC. In many cases, observers only attended on election day itself, whereas a comprehensive evaluation of the whole electoral cycle would include the pre-election period. Furthermore, while established NGOs were denied observer status, others founded just shortly before the election were selected by the EC (Nadzri 2018, 154; Azmi and Nantha 2018). Nonetheless, the EC stated that “as a free and fair body with integrity, entrusted by the King to manage the general election,

EC will ensure [that] every GE14 process conducted by 250,000 public members will be carried out in a fair and transparent manner [...]” (Azmi and Nantha 2018).

Once again, Bersih played a key role in monitoring electoral procedures and exposing several irregularities that occurred during the electoral cycle. In 2017, one year prior to the election, Bersih launched an initiative called “Pemantau”, training hundreds of volunteers on how to properly conduct election observation. Furthermore, a reporting system was created to enable citizens to report any electoral misconduct online (Chong 2018, 120–21; Bersih 2018b, 15–16).

Similar to GE13, several issues were reported on election day during GE14. For instance, the electoral roll contained numerous inconsistencies. Approximately 15% of all voters had inaccurate or missing addresses next to their name, while others had been removed from the electoral roll entirely (Tay 2018). In some cases, voters cast their ballots but were not crossed off the list. Some citizens reported that upon arriving at polling stations, they were denied the right to vote because they had allegedly already voted that day (Bersih 2018b, 73–74). These irregularities created opportunities for multiple voting while excluding certain voters from participating in the election altogether.

Furthermore, issues surrounding postal voting were reported. Postal voters often received their ballots late, sometimes even after the election had concluded. In some instances, postal voters received multiple ballots or appeared on the list of postal voters several times (Bersih 2018b, 65 and 67–68). The secrecy of votes was another concern, as both “BN and PAS were recording down the ballot paper serial numbers next to the names of postal voters in violation of [...] Election Offences Act” (Bersih 2018b, 68). In addition, the transportation and safekeeping of postal ballots were violated, granting access to unauthorized personnel (Bersih 2018b, 68–69).

On the other hand, some improvements regarding the secrecy of votes were observed. The indelible ink, which had caused controversies in the previous general election, was now more reliable and did not wear off shortly after application (Katkazman 2018).

Another issue was the number of spoilt votes that were detected. Several ballot papers had been prepared incorrectly, missing the serial number or the official stamp (Bersih 2018b, 71–72). Other voters received ballot papers with markings, which could affect voting procedures (Bersih 2018b, 72–73). Ballot papers that did not adhere to the standards could potentially be regarded as “defective” by counting agents, as illustrated in *Figure 71*. When voters asked for new ballot papers, the polling staff sometimes denied their requests (Chow 2018).

Overall, the number of spoilt votes was approximately 217,000, which is less than 2% of the

total votes cast (J. L. Koh 2018). However, it is difficult to determine how many of these spoilt votes resulted from unclear counting rules or defective ballot papers, as a movement called “UndiRosak” emerged during the 2018 elections, promoting the intentional spoiling of votes as a form of protest against the incumbent government (Nur 2018).

In addition, the status and functionality of polling stations are another important factor in analyzing election day. Many polling stations were difficult to access, particularly for the elderly. Citizens who required assistance with the voting procedures, such as people with disabilities, were sometimes denied help (Bersih 2018b, 74–75). Another issue was the long waiting times: polling stations were overcrowded, with citizens occasionally having to wait for hours before being able to cast their votes. Furthermore, many voters were denied entry for wearing shorts or other allegedly inappropriate clothes, despite the EC previously stating that there would be no dress code on election day (Lourdes 2018; Hamilton-Hart 2018). Campaigning near polling stations was also commonly observed, even though it is officially prohibited on election day. According to reports, BN politicians, organizations such as the Malaysian Youth Council, and even electoral observers appointed by the EC engaged in campaigning and advertising (Bersih 2018b, 76, 2018a).

Irregularities in the counting process were also reported. The “Form 14” is a key document in the electoral process, recording the number of votes counted at each polling station. There were instances in which officers appointed by the EC delayed or even refused to sign the Form 14, while simultaneously restricting polling agents from attending the vote count (Bersih 2018b, 75–76). Complaints also arose when ballot boxes were transferred to different locations, as wrong labelling and mix-ups led to votes being placed in incorrect ballot boxes. This appeared to be especially common for Parliamentary and State ballots (Bersih 2018b, 71; Wong 2022).

While power blackouts had been a controversy that slowed the counting process in the 2013 Malaysian General Election, the government took measures to prevent this issue during GE14. Mobile generators were set up to ensure an “uninterrupted power supply during the electoral process in the 14th general election [...]” (Malaysiakini 2018b). Instead, a “blackout” occurred in the internet space, with several websites, including the website of Bersih, being inaccessible during voting hours (Malaysiakini 2018c). Many of the aforementioned incidents do not necessarily fall under the category of manipulation and could also be interpreted as the result of poor organization and inadequate staff training.

The counting process continued into the early hours of the 10th of May, with BN officials becoming aware of the inevitable change in power. The announcement of the results was slow, while social media channels such as WhatsApp or Twitter reported updates at a faster pace than

the EC (Hamilton-Hart 2018). On election night, Najib Razak did not attend a previously scheduled press conference, while the PH accused the government of deliberately delaying the release of official election results (Hamilton-Hart 2018), raising questions over the final outcome. Finally, at 11:30 am on the 10th of May, Razak announced that “I and my colleagues accept the verdict of the people” (Barnes 2018), confirming the PH as the winner of GE14.

5.9. 2018 Malaysian General Election: Outcomes and Consequences of Manipulation

Without a doubt, the 2018 Malaysian General Election was a historic moment in the country’s history, as it was the very first time an opposition coalition succeeded in defeating Barisan Nasional. It is not possible to attribute the change in power to a single factor, as several played a role. Malaysia had long been a polarized country, particularly in terms of ethnic conflicts and political debates. Even prior to GE14, it was evident that the BN was beginning to struggle, steadily losing votes and the loyalty of its core voters. Between 2008 and 2018, the BN lost approximately 30% of its loyal supporters, reflecting a consistent decline (Welsh 2018b, 98–99).

Furthermore, Welsh emphasized that “political polarization, anger, economic vulnerability, nationalism, and populism were integral socio-political features contextualizing GE14” (Welsh 2018b, 95). Already in 2013, BN had fallen short of securing half of the total votes, and scandals such as 1MDB, the framing of Chinese voters as a negative “tsunami”, as well as persistently high levels of unemployment and inequality, only accelerated the BN’s decline (Welsh 2018b, 91–93; C. Lee 2019, 16).

After the elections, the new government led by Prime Minister Mahathir introduced several changes to Malaysia’s political system. For example, the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18, and several institutions were restructured. The Election Commission, previously under the control of the Prime Minister, was placed under the supervision of the Parliament. In addition, the decision-making power and budget of the Prime Minister were reduced in an effort to create an environment promoting democratization (Ostwald and Oliver 2020, 674–75). At the same time, the PH targeted the former government, launching crackdowns on institutions and initiating prosecutions against former high-ranking leaders (Ng 2018; R. Rahim 2024).

However, an internal conflict developed within the PH, particularly between Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim, while the overall performance of the new government was considered disappointing. After Mahathir had returned to office and served as Prime Minister for 758 days, his government had fulfilled only 26 out of the 556 initiatives that were promoted during the election campaign (Moten 2020, 398–400).

Within the population, perceptions of the election outcome were mixed. On the one hand,

many people were satisfied with the result, gathering in the streets to celebrate the unexpected outcome (Malaysiakini 2018a). On social media, the reception was largely positive, although ethnic Malays were more critical of the election results (Balakrishnan et al. 2021, 179–80). The youth in particular expressed dissatisfaction with the previous government, mainly voting against the BN due to the coalition's weak economic performance (Welsh 2018b, 101).

On the other hand, there was a clear rural-urban divide in sentiments about the election. While urban voters tended to be satisfied with the result (Rahman 2018a), many rural voters were shocked by the outcome. Many rural voters had traditionally been strong supporters of the BN but chose to vote against the coalition in GE14. However, reports indicate that some of these rural voters later regretted their decision: they did not expect a possible change in government and stated, “[...] there is nothing wrong with UMNO. The problem was Najib. If he had stepped down, none of this would have happened.” (Rahman 2018b, 674). Despite the mixed reactions within the populations, there were no significant protests or organized movements following election day.

Other than public reactions, the perceived legitimacy of the government before and after the election can also be analyzed. Both the Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS) and Merdeka Center closely monitored the 2018 elections, providing insights into the thoughts and views of the Malaysian population. First, it has been highlighted that Malaysians are not fully aware of the roles and responsibilities of electoral institutions (Ting 2021, 24). When being asked about their perception of the Electoral Commission, voters were least satisfied with redelineation exercises as well as the voting and counting processes, as illustrated in *Figure 72* (Ting 2021, 43–44).

Furthermore, levels of trust in partisan institutions (e.g. Parliament, Cabinet) and non-partisan institutions (e.g. EC, police, judiciary) differed: Non-partisan institutions were considered more trustworthy and reliable, as shown in *Figure 73* (Ting 2021, 30-32 and 41). Regarding the perceived freedom and fairness of GE14, 67,4% of respondents considered the election as “very free” or “free with problems”, while only 6,7% considered it as “not free” (Appendix, *Figure 74*). For the rationale behind these perceptions, positive views referred to correct procedures and the election outcome itself, whereas negative views emphasized issues with election management (Appendix, *Figure 75*). Overall, the ISEAS study highlights that “Malaysians by and large expressed a cautious, moderate affirmation of the state of democracy in Malaysia” (Ting 2021, 56).

Furthermore, the public's support for the government and its leader can be analyzed. *Figure 76* provides insights into the popularity of BN's Najib Razak and PH's Mahathir, while *Figure 77* illustrates public satisfaction with the government in 2018. Overall, the Merdeka Center

reported that 82% of respondents were satisfied with the results of GE14 (Merdeka Center 2018a, 28). Looking at the individual approval ratings, Najib Razak's popularity declined sharply around the time of the 1MDB scandal and never fully recovered. In contrast, Mahathir's popularity peaked around the election period and then steadily declined over the following months (Merdeka Center 2019b, 9). The initial euphoria following the regime change did not last for long, as there was a notable difference in government approval ratings between 100 days after the election and one year later, dropping from 67 to 39% (Merdeka Center 2018a, 18, 2019a, 1).

When analyzing the voting behavior of citizens, respondents indicated that their main concerns were anti-corruption, ethnic and religious issues, and the economy (Appendix, *Figure 78* and *Figure 79*). Many voters did not believe that the BN should continue to govern the country, as only about one-third of citizens felt that BN was leading Malaysia in the right direction (Appendix, *Figure 80* and *Figure 81*). The importance of the economy cannot be overstated, since individual struggles such as inflation, employment, and income were top priorities for many voters (*Figure 82* and *Figure 83*). As seen in *Figure 54*, Malaysians also prioritized economic development over democratization.

Therefore, the surveys suggest that voters were partly aware of shortcomings in the freedom and fairness of the electoral process but remained strongly focused on ethnic and material concerns. Furthermore, considering the approval ratings before and after the election, voting patterns indicate a strong sentiment against BN, particularly against former Prime Minister Najib Razak, rather than a strong confidence in PH's election program and policies.

6. Discussion

This thesis has addressed the following research question: "*When hybrid regimes resort to electoral manipulation, what are the key conditions that influence their choice of manipulation methods?*" The aim of this research was to examine how legal, institutional, and strategic factors adopted by governments shape the ways that hybrid regimes engage in electoral manipulation. To investigate this issue, a framework was developed that covers the entire electoral cycle, including the pre-election period, the election period, and the post-election period. The framework consists of four categories (1. Legal and Institutional Context, 2. Manipulation of Individuals, 3. Manipulation of Voting Operations, 4. Outcomes and Consequences), which correspond to the different stages of the electoral cycle. This framework was applied to two hybrid regimes, namely Malaysia and Singapore. These countries share a similar history and preconditions, making a comparative analysis both feasible and meaningful. In the preceding chapters, the framework and its categories were applied to two consecutive

elections in each country case in order to identify patterns and strategic considerations of electoral manipulation in hybrid regimes. This chapter now summarizes, interprets, and compares the findings across the four elections.

Beginning with the case of Singapore, a strong institutional bias in favor of the PAP can be observed. In both elections, the Electoral Management Body (EMB) was under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office, creating an unfair advantage in managing electoral boundaries. The ability to redraw and adjust constituencies, combined with the GRC system, enabled the government to significantly weaken opposition strongholds, further limiting their ability to meaningfully contest parliamentary seats. The absence of an independent EMB also allowed the PAP to control and dictate the schedule and timing of elections. Furthermore, the lack of campaign financing regulations meant that the PAP was able to spend significantly more money during the electoral process than the opposition. The PAP also maintained tight control over the media landscape through ownership of several media organizations, which consistently provided it with favorable coverage. By contrast, regime critics faced restrictions on both freedom of speech and freedom of association. Such restrictions extended into the online sphere, where content was frequently blocked or censored. On election day itself, no major irregularities occurred, although the counting process lacked transparency. This was partly due to the absence of independent election observers, who were not permitted to oversee polling and counting stations. Once the elections in Singapore had concluded, the results were widely accepted, and the overall freedom and fairness of the process were not substantially questioned. Even when the 2011 elections proved more competitive than in the past, the PAP was able to secure strong majorities in both 2011 and 2015 and remained largely unchallenged.

In the case of Malaysia, the institutional bias in favor of the BN coalition has arguably been exploited even more extensively. The government maintained control of the EMB, creating several advantages. Malapportionment and gerrymandering reached extreme levels in 2013 and 2018, with electoral constituencies engineered based on factors such as ethnicity and geography. Communities and neighborhoods were split and restructured so that, in theory, only a fraction of the electorate was needed for victory. The electoral roll also experienced various issues in the voter registration process. Moreover, the BN enjoyed significant financial advantages due to the absence of financial regulations, utilizing its connections to state-linked companies and foreign investors. These advantages were further used to practice widespread forms of vote buying, including treating, rewards, and cash handouts. Opposition parties faced additional restrictions on their campaign activities and were portrayed negatively across many media outlets. Most traditional media channels were tightly controlled by the government, while the

online sphere experienced content removal, blocking, and filtering. Defamation, slander, and harassment were commonly used against government critics, supported by laws restricting freedom of expression and the right to assembly. Election day itself remained eventful and biased due to the lack of independent election observers. Instances of voting irregularities, such as multiple voting, were frequent, alongside issues regarding the secrecy of the vote during the 2013 General Elections. The counting process also faced interruptions, including ballot box mix-ups, power outages at polling stations, and delays in the announcement of results during the 2018 General Elections. A major turning point in Malaysia was the regime change in 2018, an event that had never occurred since the country's independence. After the 2013 elections, the BN coalition faced strong public criticism and resistance due to winning with a minority of popular vote, which led to post-election protests and debates over legitimacy. By contrast, the 2018 elections were largely celebrated, perceived as legitimate, and moderately free and fair. Overall, low public trust in both public institutions, the Barisan National, and former Prime Minister Najib Razak was a major factor contributing to this outcome. A summary of the key findings based on the analytical framework is provided in the following pages, *Figure 2* and *Figure 3*.

Figure 2: Key Findings Based on the Analytical Framework (Singapore)

Summary of Key Findings based on the Analytical Framework, Singapore		
	Singapore 2011	Singapore 2015
I: Legal and Institutional Context	- No transparency in changes to electoral boundaries - GRC system favors the PAP - Lack of independent EMB - No transparency in campaign financing	- Electoral boundary and redistricting issues persisted - GRC structure remained unchanged - EMB remained under the control of the Prime Minister - No reforms in campaign financing
II: Manipulation of Individuals	- Media biased in favor of PAP - Disproportional coverage of political parties - No evidence of voter coercion	- Media remained under PAP control - Online space provided some balance in coverage - No documented cases of coercion
III: Manipulation of Voting Operations	- No major irregularities during the voting process - Counting process occasionally lacked transparency - Lack of independent election observers	- No major irregularities or disruptions reported - Lack of independent election observers
IV: Outcomes and Consequences of Manipulation	- PAP secured a strong majority - The public perceived the election as mostly free and fair - No protest or government crisis	- PAP secured a strong majority and maintained electoral dominance - Outcome did not provoke disputes over legitimacy - No records of public protest

Source: The Author

Figure 3: Key Findings Based on the Analytical Framework (Malaysia)

Summary of Key Findings based on the Analytical Framework, Malaysia		
	Malaysia 2013	Malaysia 2018
I: Legal and Institutional Context	- Severe cases of malapportionment and gerrymandering - Electoral boundaries were manipulated in favor of the ruling coalition - EMB under the control of the Prime Minister - Irregularities in the electoral roll - Campaign financing laws favored the BN	- Malapportionment and Gerrymandering remained issues, partly worsening compared to 2013 - EMB remained biased - Irregularities in the electoral roll persisted - No reforms in campaign financing
II: Manipulation of Individuals	- Media biased in favor of BN - Cases of vote buying, treating, and material incentives - Civil servants pressured to support the ruling coalition - Instances of violence and threats against individuals	- Media remained biased in favor of BN - Online space offered more balanced coverage - Frequent cases of vote buying, treating, and rewards - Fewer cases of coercion and violence
III: Manipulation of Voting Operations	- Allegations of multiple voting and personation - Limitations, harassment, and restricted access for election observers - Lack of secrecy in the voting process - Irregularities in the counting process and at polling stations	- Persisting allegations of multiple voting - Restrictions on and bias of electoral observers - Cases of defective ballot papers and spoilt votes - Delay in election results - Improvements in the secrecy of the vote - Improvements in the overall process on election day

IV: Outcomes and Consequences of Manipulation	- Discussions of legitimacy, as the BN won the election with a minority of the popular vote - Backlash from the opposition and civil society - Large post-election protests	- Unexpected, peaceful regime change - Generally positive public perception of the election result - The public exhibited low trust in public institutions but moderate trust in the free- and fairness of the election - No protests or public unrest
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Source: The Author

Knowing which types of electoral manipulation were applied in both countries, the next step is to identify which types were used more frequently across the four elections. With reference to the framework and its categories, the examination of both country cases shows that “Category I: Legal and Institutional Context” was applied most consistently overall. Two main factors appeared to serve as the starting point of manipulation: the control of the EMB, and the state of campaign financing regulations. In both Singapore and Malaysia, government control of the EMB facilitated several forms of manipulation. The advantages of controlling the EMB are numerous, as this institutional body defines most of the rules governing the electoral process. Since the Prime Minister’s Office regulated the EMB’s actions, elections could be tilted in favor of the incumbent government well before election day. Moreover, because election planning begins in the pre-election phase, often behind closed doors and with low-visibility, manipulating the electoral process at the institutional level proved strategically effective. With the EMB responsible for tasks such as maintaining the electoral roll, managing electoral boundaries, and scheduling and conducting elections, incumbent governments enjoyed a major advantage even before the opposition could begin to plan and prepare.

The second factor, the state of campaign financing regulations, also served as a powerful tool for incumbent governments. Due to a lack of regulations or the presence of loopholes, both the PAP and the BN had significant financial advantages over their adversaries, which facilitated the creation of patronage networks. This imbalance of resources further enabled biased media coverage, unequal campaign advertisement, and, in the case of Malaysia, practices such as vote-buying and treating.

For the second and third categories, “II: Manipulation of Individuals” and “III: Manipulation of Voting Operations”, the frequency of use differed between the countries. In both cases, governments aimed to control the media landscape and imposed strict restrictions on freedom of expression and the right to assembly, which influenced how citizens perceived both the government and the elections. Voters were limited in how they could inform themselves about parties and candidates, and the media outlets accessible to them generally portrayed the incumbent leaders in a positive light.

In Singapore, however, manipulation largely ended at this point. While the PAP was diligent in its censorship and occasionally employed defamation lawsuits, there were no systematic cases of coercion, intimidation, or vote-buying. Moreover, aside from a few ambiguities that do not necessarily fall under the category of electoral manipulation, election day in Singapore was free from irregularities.

This stands in contrast to Malaysia, where the atmosphere during both the pre-election period and on election day is notably more tense. In Malaysia, manipulation extended until after the polling booths had closed, with cases of coercion and intimidation, pressure on civil servants, and vote-buying being more common. The BN also remained active on election day itself by undermining the secrecy of the vote, allowing multiple votes, or denying citizens the opportunity to vote.

As highlighted in “IV: Outcomes and Consequences of Manipulation”, this tension carried into Malaysia’s post-election period, where legitimacy disputes, public mistrust in the government, and protests were common. In comparison, Singaporeans demonstrated a greater acceptance of electoral outcomes and an absence of large-scale public movements. Taken together, the patterns across the four elections highlight that legal and institutional manipulation in the pre-election period was the most consistently employed and the preferred strategy in both hybrid regimes. With regard to the manipulation of individuals and voting operations, these practices were employed more conditionally in Malaysia and were often avoided in Singapore.

Now that it has been established which manipulation methods were applied in both countries, the question arises as to why these methods were preferred, or under which conditions they were chosen. Beginning with the case of Singapore, it has been shown that the PAP primarily relied on electoral manipulation within the legal and institutional sphere. As highlighted in Chapter Two of this thesis, this form of “administrative fraud” is an effective and flexible manipulation method that is arguably less risky and less costly than most other forms (Harvey and Mukherjee 2020). After analyzing two general elections in Singapore, it was observable that the PAP was never truly challenged within the electoral process. Despite facing criticism

or experiencing a temporary, minor decrease in popular votes, the government did not face any existential threat capable of undermining its dominance. Due to its control of the EMB and substantial financial advantages over opposition parties, the PAP was able to manage the electoral process comfortably and emerge as the winner. In both GE2011 and GE2015, the government enjoyed high levels of legitimacy and public support, which translates into political stability. *Figure 84* highlights the sentiments of Singaporeans toward the electoral process, with almost 80% of respondents stating that the election system is fair to all political parties (Ong 2018, 166).

Under those conditions, it is logical for the PAP to stick to manipulation methods that are both cost-effective and relatively safe, particularly those occurring early in the electoral cycle. Other forms of manipulation, such as the manipulation of individuals (Category II) or of voting operations (Category III) on election day, would be considered high-risk strategies, as they are more easily detectable, costly, and could directly threaten both legitimacy and political stability. Overall, the PAP's actions in tampering with elections serve as a tool to secure and consolidate power.

As was highlighted in Chapter Two by Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009), Simpser (2013), and Gandhi and Buckles (2016), there are reasons for electoral manipulation beyond simply winning. These so-called “indirect effects” of manipulation remain beneficial for the PAP, as strong electoral outcomes further reinforce political stability. Consolidating electoral dominance can create patronage networks in which elites, industries, and voters develop favorable positions toward the government. The resulting economic advantages can then be invested in local development programs or used to provide direct financial support to citizens, as was evident in the case of GE2015. Simultaneously, adjustments to electoral boundaries, as observed between GE2011 and GE2015, can discourage the opposition from meaningfully contesting future elections. Therefore, the safety net created by predictable electoral outcomes allowed the PAP to pursue electoral manipulation strategies that were both low-cost and high-reward.

In Malaysia, the situation was quite different. Certainly, the BN also heavily relied on methods that fall under the category of legal and institutional electoral manipulation, maintaining tight control over the EMB and possessing substantial financial resources compared to its competitors. While this created an uneven playing field in favor of the incumbent government, an analysis of Malaysia's general elections in 2013 and 2018 shows that, unlike in Singapore, relying solely on this form of manipulation was insufficient to secure victory. Over the years, a strong opposition had formed, winning more than half of the popular

vote in the 2013 elections and thereby making a strong argument for regime change. The BN, therefore, found itself in a situation where both its dominance and political legitimacy were being meaningfully challenged.

In addition, the civil society and NGOs also play a major role in Malaysia's political culture, with Bersih being an influential institution dedicated to detecting and educating about electoral fraud. Combined with scandals and corruption cases such as 1MDB, as well as widening ethnic cleavages across the country, public perceptions of the BN were mixed and no longer predominantly positive. Facing the possibility of losing power, the BN expanded its manipulation strategies to include vote-buying and intimidation, which remained visible until election day. Compared to "administrative fraud", which operates within the legal and institutional sphere, Harvey and Mukherjee note that these forms of manipulation require significant amounts of resources and are therefore more costly. Practices such as vote-buying, intimidation of political opponents and voters, and irregularities at polling stations demonstrate the resources and capacities of a regime (Harvey and Mukherjee 2020, 538–40), but are also more easily detected by the public and therefore undermine legitimacy (van Ham and Lindberg 2015, 526).

In employing these methods, the BN was focused primarily on the "direct effects" of electoral manipulation (Simpser 2013, 5-6 and 83-84), namely to secure an electoral victory. While the government under former Prime Minister Najib Razak would have preferred to avoid manipulation strategies that fall under the categories of "manipulation of individuals" (Category II) or "manipulation of voting operations" (Category III), pressure from civil society and the opposition made the expansion of these tools a necessity for political survival. In the 2018 general election, declining trust in public institutions led the BN to utilize financial resources for widespread vote-buying, often without attempting to conceal these activities. The associated risks and costs reduced the cost-effectiveness of these strategies and may have suggested to the public that the government was under pressure and encountered difficulties.

Therefore, the case of Malaysia highlights that, despite authority over the EMB, institutional control was no longer sufficient to deal with the strength of the opposition. At the same time, the visibility and inherent risks attached to other forms of manipulation inevitably led to a decline in legitimacy and political stability, placing the BN in a dilemma. In this sense, Malaysia's case illustrates how the political environment created a necessity for widespread manipulation, where high risks and the possibility of a backlash were accepted as the price of remaining in power. Furthermore, financial resources were less a tool for achieving political stability than a means of securing short-term results in the form of voter support. From a long-

term perspective, the widespread use of costly and risky manipulation ultimately failed to prevent regime change in Malaysia in 2018.

While different forms of electoral manipulation certainly affect the legitimacy and political stability in hybrid regimes, surveys in both countries indicate that a central concern for voters is the state of the economy. In the case of Singapore, the PAP has not been meaningfully challenged during elections, and economic success helps to explain why this is the case. As Abdullah highlights, Singapore's government achieved "[...] spectacular economic growth and has ensured high standards of living for Singaporeans" (Abdullah 2020, 1130–31). Economic policies have been a key factor in the PAP's success, granting it popularity and legitimacy not only from voters but also from parts of the opposition. In Singapore, the opposition often aligns with the vision and principles of the PAP, taking on a role focused less on challenging its dominance and more on keeping the government in check (Abdullah 2017, 501–2). By contrast, the opposition in Malaysia has pursued regime change. It has directly challenged the BN's ideology, particularly in relation to ethnic debates, a major issue affecting a large share of the population (Abdullah 2017, 495–96). This distinction highlights a key difference in voter concerns: in Singapore, the PAP successfully created an "ideological hegemony" that is "extremely successful in shaping voter preferences" (Abdullah 2020, 1133). In the elections examined, Singaporeans were generally content with the existing liberal values and punished the government more severely only when it failed to prove its success in the economic sector (Abdullah 2020, 1133).

Concluding the findings of this chapter, this thesis has raised the following question: *"When hybrid regimes resort to electoral manipulation, what are the key conditions that influence their choice of manipulation methods?"* The findings indicate that hybrid regimes prefer to rely on the legal and institutional context as a baseline for manipulation, as these methods are considered the most cost-effective and appeared consistently. Furthermore, the choice of electoral manipulation in hybrid regimes depends on the levels of legitimacy and the perceived threat faced by the incumbent government. These factors, combined with control over institutions and available financial resources, determine whether a hybrid regime opts for low-risk or high-risk manipulation methods. When legitimacy levels are high and the threat of losing power is low, hybrid regimes can focus more on the indirect effects of electoral manipulation, such as by consolidating and expanding their power. Conversely, when the electoral threat is high, the opposition is often strong, and legitimacy levels are declining. In such cases, hybrid regimes may resort to riskier, short-term solutions to avoid regime change. These findings align with the current research showing that more blatant and risky forms of manipulation, such as

vote-buying and intimidation, are methods used to hold onto power, whereas more complex legal and institutional forms of manipulation are more difficult to detect and allow for greater flexibility in their use (Higashijima, Kadoya, and Yanai 2024, 477–78). Therefore, electoral manipulation is a highly adaptable approach, determined by the political stability and current environment of hybrid regimes.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed the role of elections in hybrid regimes, political systems in which elections are neither free nor fair. More specifically, the aim was to understand why, how, and when these regimes resort to electoral manipulation, as they often prefer less obvious strategies that are harder for observers to detect. Electoral manipulation is employed by governments to influence electoral outcomes and gain an advantage in the electoral process. Since these strategies can appear at various stages of the electoral cycle, electoral manipulation is highly versatile and can take on multiple shapes and forms. Accordingly, the following research question has been raised: *“When hybrid regimes resort to electoral manipulation, what are the key conditions that influence their choice of manipulation methods?”*

The purpose of this research was to explore how hybrid regimes adjust the use of electoral manipulation methods based on the institutional or political environment. To answer the research question, a comparative approach was adopted to analyze the hybrid regimes of Singapore and Malaysia. These countries were selected due to similar conditions in terms of historical development and patterns of electoral manipulation. To examine both hybrid regimes and two elections for each country, a four-category model was created, aligning with the different stages of the electoral cycle (pre-election period, election period, post-election period). The first category, “Legal and Institutional Context”, was employed most frequently and consistently in both countries and can be understood as a baseline mechanism for electoral manipulation through the control of the Electoral Management Body. The second and third categories, “Manipulation of Individuals” and “Manipulation of Voting Operations”, are more situational methods, implemented by hybrid regimes only under specific conditions. Compared to the first category, these forms appear later in the electoral cycle, are more visible to citizens and election observers, and are therefore inherently riskier and more costly to apply. In both country cases, the analysis of the fourth category, “Outcomes and Consequences”, revealed levels of legitimacy and public perceptions toward the government, providing insights into why and when regimes opted for strategies falling under categories I-III. The application of manipulation methods in hybrid regimes is often tied to the goals of the incumbent government: when the aim is to secure and consolidate power, as in Singapore, cost-effective methods are

preferred. Conversely, a government facing strong opposition and pressure by civil society, as in Malaysia, may rely on high-risk strategies requiring substantial financial resources in order to avoid regime change and maintain power.

Recently, several authors have examined the role of electoral manipulation in Singapore and Malaysia. For example, Tan argues that the PAP in Singapore generally focuses on low-risk strategies early in the electoral cycle, while Teo et al. highlight that the PAP derives its legitimacy from its strong economic performance (N. Tan 2023, 108; Teo, E. S. Tan, and Z. Wang 2025, 157–58). In the case of Malaysia, Ostwald argues that the BN relied on a wide range of electoral manipulation methods that proved insufficient to save the government in the 2018 elections (Ostwald 2023, 142). Compared to Singapore, the BN employed inherently riskier and more publicly visible forms of manipulation to avoid electoral defeat. However, factors such as the formation of a strong opposition, active civil movements, and economic unrest ultimately proved too impactful (Ong 2018, 167; Welsh and Lopez 2022, 289 and 293–294).

Broader research on elections and electoral quality further shows that electoral manipulation can produce both direct and indirect effects, as regimes use such practices either to secure electoral victory or to consolidate and expand their power (Simpser 2013, 4–6). Moreover, the strength of the opposition is a key factor in determining which forms of electoral manipulation regimes ultimately adopt (Riaz 2019, 50–51). When the opposition is relatively strong and political stability and legitimacy are low, a government is more likely to rely on less cost-effective methods, such as vote-buying. This can be considered an emergency measure, as regimes prefer to rely on “cheaper”, more cost-effective strategies, such as controlling elections through state institutions (van Ham and Lindberg 2015, 525–26).

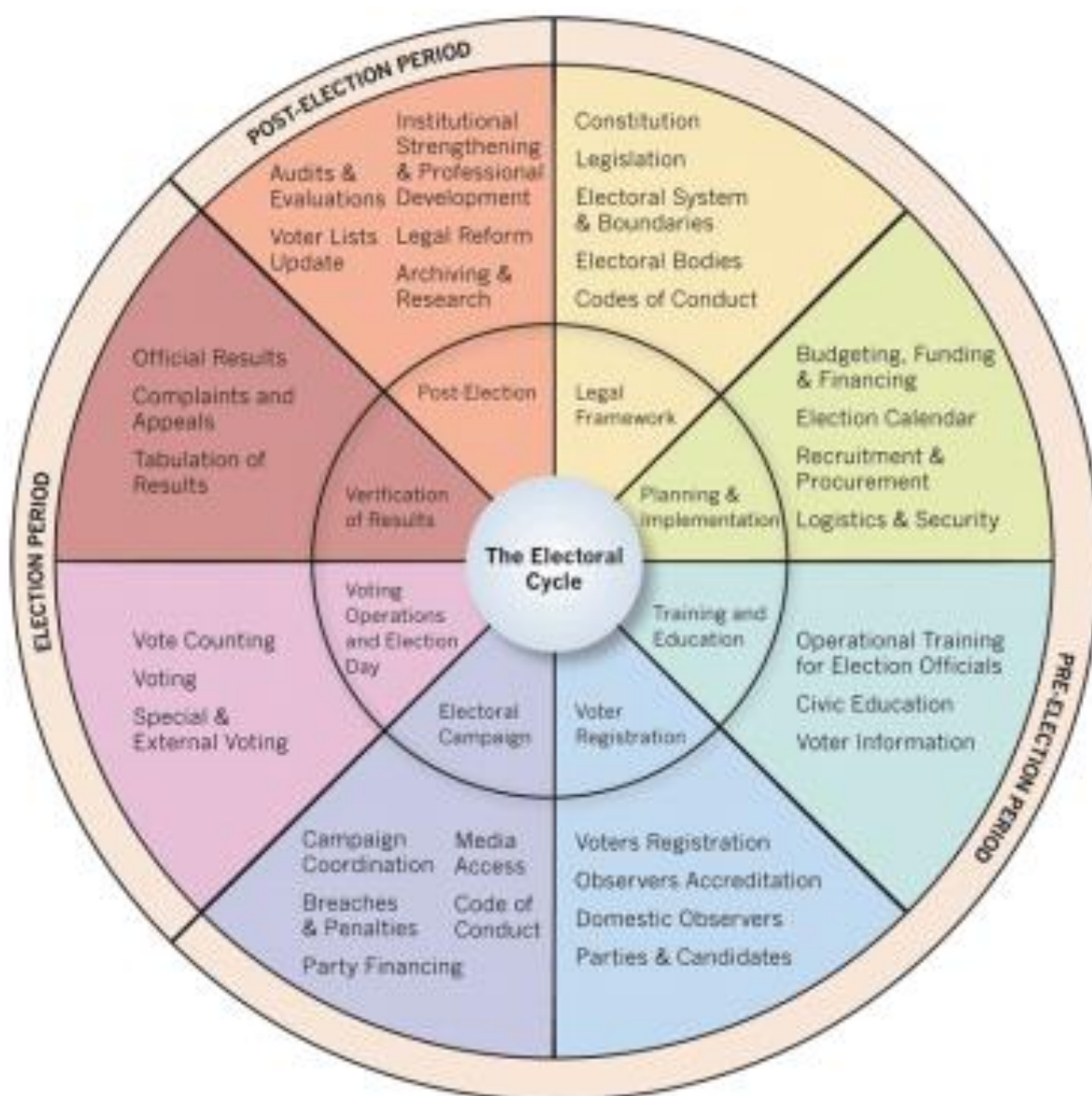
The findings of this thesis confirm theories regarding the direct versus indirect effects of manipulation, the logic of cost-effectiveness, and the role of legitimacy and political stability as key drivers for the implementation of different manipulation methods. At the same time, this study contributes valuable insights through its holistic approach. The established framework tracks elections across the entire electoral cycle while accounting for legal, institutional, individual, and operational types of electoral manipulation, including their outcomes and consequences. By analyzing two consecutive elections in each country case, it was possible to compare shifts and trends side by side and to observe how forms of manipulation unfold similarly or differently under specific conditions and over time. While previous frameworks have addressed the temporal or the typological dimensions of electoral manipulation, studies have often focused only on specific timings or types of manipulation. This study combined both

dimensions, offering detailed insights into when and how electoral manipulation in hybrid regimes typically occurs. Moreover, the framework applied in this study provides insights into the toolkits of hybrid regimes, highlighting what methods exist, which methods can be selected, and how patterns and changes emerge along the temporal and typological dimensions. Therefore, the approach presented here can be valuable for analyzing any hybrid regime to gain a broad understanding of how electoral manipulation has occurred in the past and how it may occur in the future, particularly when a regime enjoys high levels of legitimacy or faces intense public pressure. For example, a summary of findings as illustrated in *Figure 2* and *Figure 3* could be developed for a larger set of countries, creating a detailed and comprehensive database that enhances the generalizability of the conditions under which, and the forms in which, electoral manipulation may occur in hybrid regimes.

There are also limitations to the methods chosen in this study. Since only two countries and two elections per country were analyzed, the sample size remains relatively small. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings may be limited, and the results should be interpreted as potentially indicative of trends in hybrid regimes rather than accepted as definitive proof. Consequently, the next step would involve both the addition of new country cases and an increase in the number of election cycles observed, as this would provide further insights into long-term developments and trends. Moreover, while the approach adopted in this study offers an explanation of the conditions under which electoral manipulation in hybrid regimes occurs, it is essential to consider the political, social, historical, and economic circumstances of each country case. Without a deeper understanding of these contextual factors, the prediction and interpretation of electoral manipulation will remain limited. For future research, the framework could be applied to cases outside of Asia to create a more comprehensive dataset on hybrid regimes. Considering the emergence of new forms of manipulation, such as the use of artificial intelligence to influence campaigning or social media, new indicators could also be developed to expand the framework. Furthermore, rather than focusing solely on national-level elections, the framework could be adapted to observe and analyze electoral manipulation at the local level in order to explore how these practices may differ by region, demography, or other factors. To conclude, electoral manipulation remains a highly versatile and dynamic field in which further research is essential to anticipate the strategies of hybrid regimes and to contribute to the security and integrity of electoral processes.

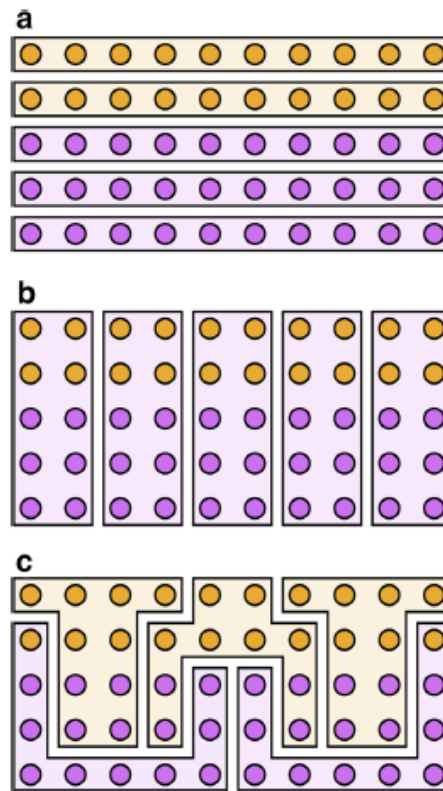
Appendix

Figure 4: The Electoral Cycle



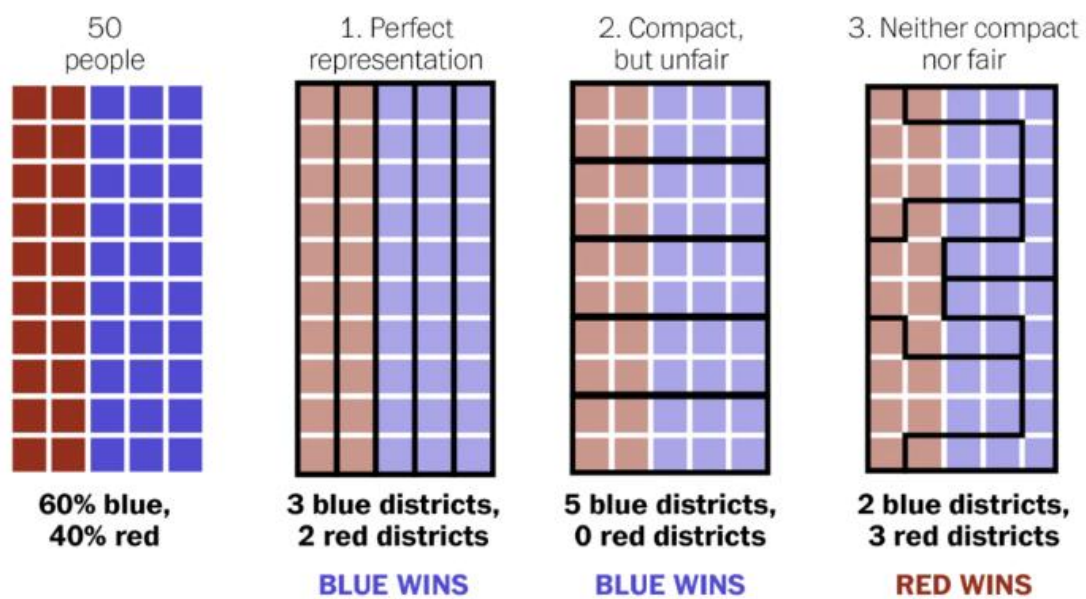
Source: Bogdan 2013, 102

Figure 5: Illustrative Example of Three Redistricting Plans



Source: Guest, Kanayet, and Love 2019, 120

Figure 6: Three Different Ways to Divide 50 People into Five Districts



Source: Tung 2020

Figure 7: Singapore Parliamentary Elections from 1968 – 2015

Year	Parliamentary Seats	Political Party	Seats Won	% of Votes
1968	58	PAP	58	86.7
1972	65	PAP	65	70.4
1976	69	PAP	69	74.1
1980	75	PAP	75	77.7
1984	79	PAP WP SDP	77 1 1	64.8 12.7 3.7
1988	81	PAP SDP	80 1	63.2 11.8
1991	81	PAP SDP WP	77 3 1	61.0 12.0 14.3
1997	83	PAP WP SPP	81 1 1	65.6 14.2 2.3
2001	84	PAP SDA WP	82 1 1	75.3 12.0 3.0
2006	84	PAP WP SDA	82 1 1	66.6 16.3 13.0
2011	87	PAP WP	81 6	60.1 12.8
2015	89	PAP WP	83 6	69.8 12.5

Source: Singh, Abdullah, and F. Tan 2020, 8

Figure 8: Interval Between the Announcement of Revised Electoral Boundaries and the Calling of Elections in Singapore

Announcement of new boundaries	Writ of Election	Lead Time
31 Oct 1967	8 Feb 1968	14 weeks
19 Oct 1971	16 Aug 1972	43 weeks
23 Jul 1976	6 Dec 1976	19 weeks
15 June 1980	5 Dec 1980	23 weeks
28 Jun 1984	4 Dec 1984	23 weeks
14 Jun 1988	17 Aug 1988	9 weeks
8 Aug 1991	14 Aug 1991	1 weeks
6 Nov 1996	16 Dec 1996	4 weeks
17 Oct 2001	18 Oct 2001	1 day (!!!)
16 Feb 2006	20 Apr 2006	7 weeks
24 Feb 2011	19 Apr 2011	8 weeks
24 Jul 2015	25 Aug 2015	5 weeks

Source: Tung 2020

Figure 9: Distribution of SMC and GRC Seats in Singapore (1984-2015)

General Election	Total Seats	Total Electorate	Electoral Quota (EQ)	Largest Constituency	Deviation from EQ (%)	Smallest Constituency	Deviation from EQ (%)	Ratio
1988	81	1,669,013	20,605	33,824	64	7,248	-65	4.7
1991	81	1,692,384	20,894	31,246	50	11,998	-43	2.6
1997	83	1,881,011	22,663	31,358	38	17,981	-21	1.7
2001	84	2,036,923	24,249	33,329	37	16,616	-31	2.0
2006	84	2,159,721	25,711	32,586	27	15,888	-38	2.1
2011	87	2,350,873	27,022	35,814	33	17,327	-36	2.1
2015	89	2,462,926	27,673	34,466	25	17,407	-37	2.0

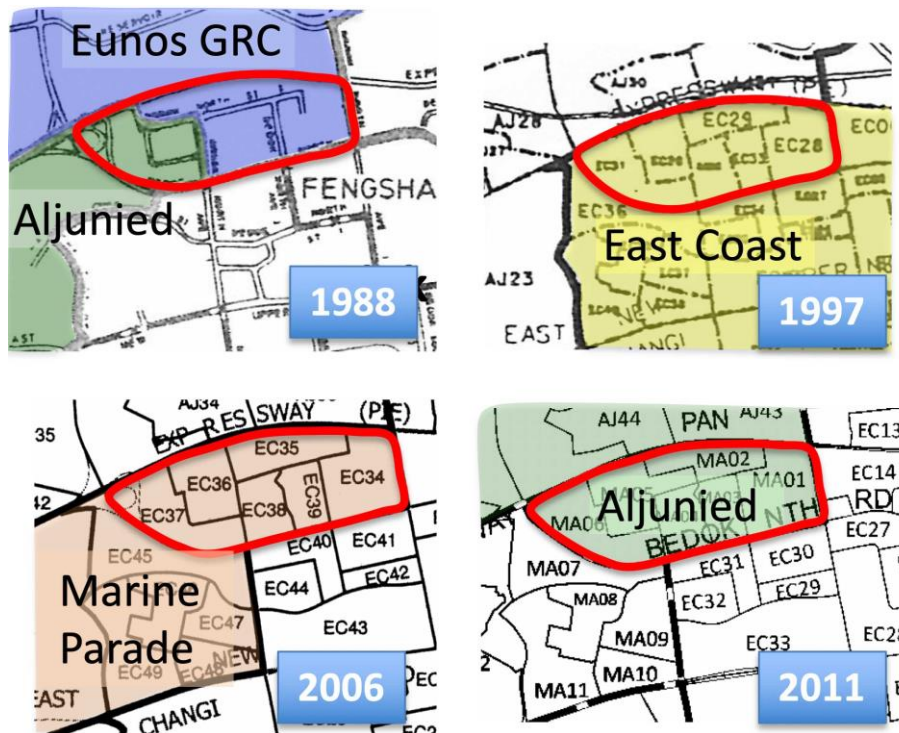
Source: N. Tan and Grofman 2016, 17

Figure 10: Distribution of SMCs and GRCs in Singapore (1988-2020)

General Election	Total Seats	SMC Seats (\$)	GRC Seats	GRC Magnitudes
September 23, 1988	81	42 (51.9)	39 (48.1)	13 × 3-MP GRCs
August 31, 1991	81	21 (25.9)	60 (74.1)	15 × 4-MP GRCs
January 2, 1997	83	9 (10.8)	74 (89.2)	15 5 × 4-MP GRCs 6 × 5-MP GRCs 4 × 6-MP GRCs
November 3, 2001	84	9 (10.7)	75 (89.3)	14 9 × 5-MP GRCs 5 × 6-MP GRCs
May 6, 2006	84	9 (10.7)	75 (89.3)	14 9 × 5-MP GRCs 5 × 6-MP GRCs
May 7, 2011	87	12 (13.8)	75 (86.2)	15 2 × 4-MP GRCs 11 × 5-MP GRCs 2 × 6-MP GRCs
September 1, 2015	89	13 (14.6)	76 (85.4)	16 6 × 4-MP GRCs 8 × 5-MP GRCs 2 × 6-MP GRCs
July 10, 2020	93	14 (15.1)	79 (84.9)	17 11 × 5-MP GRCs 6 × 4-MP GRCs

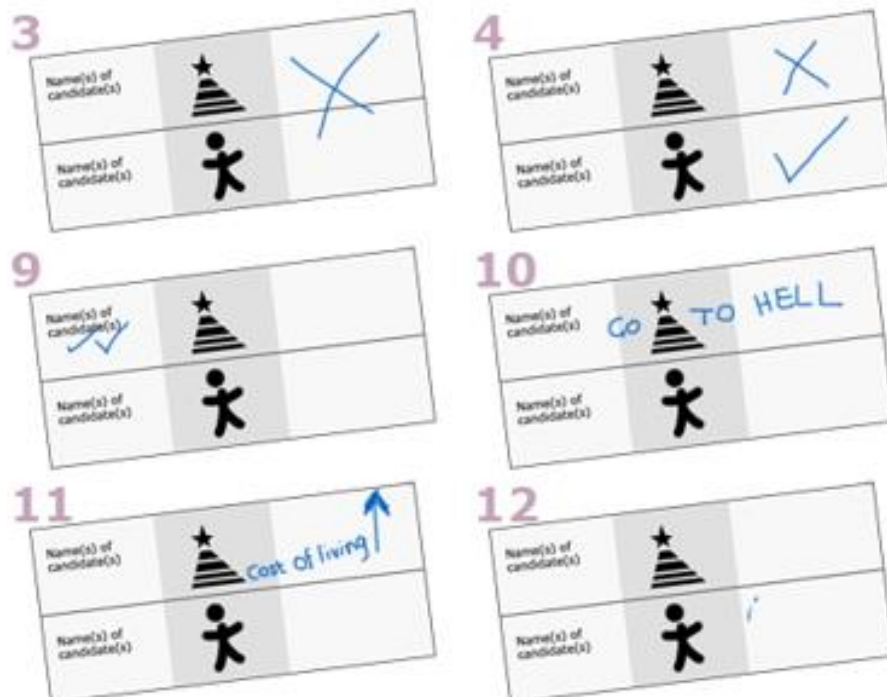
Source: N. Tan and Templeman 2023, 118

Figure 11: Changes to Kaki Bukit, Singapore (1988-2011)



Source: Tung 2020

Figure 12: Example of Different Ballot Papers during GE2011



Source: Au 2011

Figure 13: Trust in Political Institutions in Singapore, 2010-2014

<i>Political institution</i>	<i>2010</i>			<i>2014</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>High</i>
Prime Minister	88.8	62.6	26.2	78.2	55.6	22.6
Courts	89.1	67.9	21.2	85.3	60.5	24.8
Parliament	85.9	69.0	16.9	77.5	57.4	20.1
National government	77.7	67.1	20.6	81.2	57.1	24.1
Civil services	79.8	63.8	16.0	81.1	58.4	22.7

Source: L. Z. Rahim and Barr 2019, 201

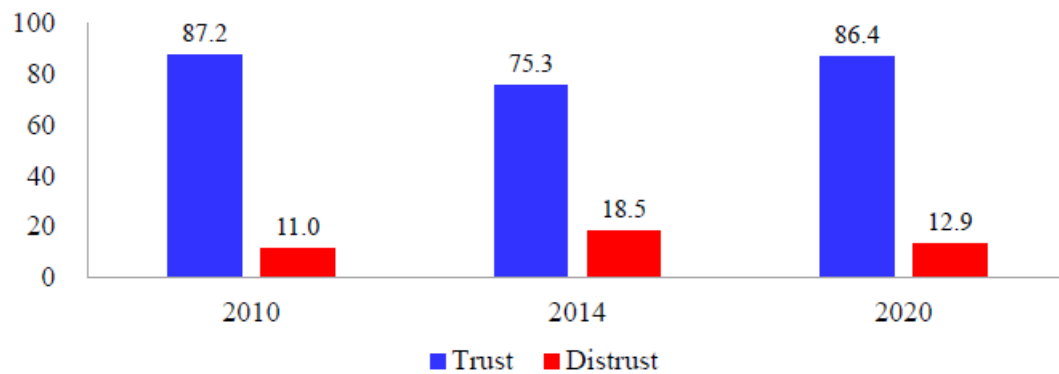
Figure 14: Trust in Elections and Electoral Institutions in Singapore, 2006-2014

Question	Cumulative Responses	2006 (%)	2010 (%)	2014 (%)
1. Trust in the Election Commission	A great deal of trust; Quite a lot of trust	76.5	43.6	n/a
	Not very much trust; None at all	21.8	30	n/a
2. Freeness and fairness of the last national election	Completely free and fair;	85.3	77.8	77.4
	Free and fair with minor problems			
	Free and fair with major problems; Not free and fair	6.9	5.8	8.1
3. Elections offer a real choice between different parties/candidates	Always; Most of the Time	48.6	35.3	42.9
	Sometimes; Rarely	43.8	58.9	46.5

Source: N. Tan and Templeman 2023, 121

Figure 15: How Much Trust Do You Have in the Prime Minister? (Singapore, 2014)

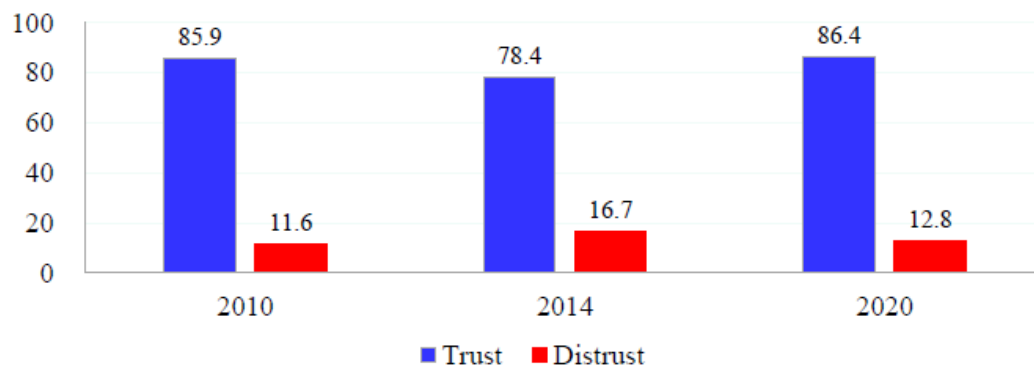
The Prime Minister; Please tell me how much trust do you have in them? (Percent)



Source: Huang 2020, 14

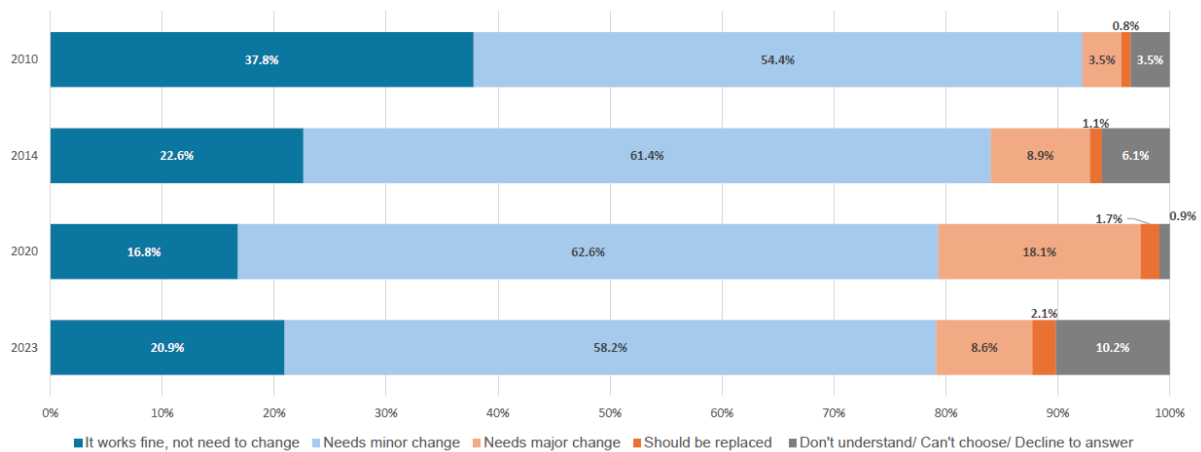
Figure 16: How Much Trust Do You Have in the Government? (Singapore, 2014)

The Singapore government; Please tell me how much trust do you have in them? (Percent)



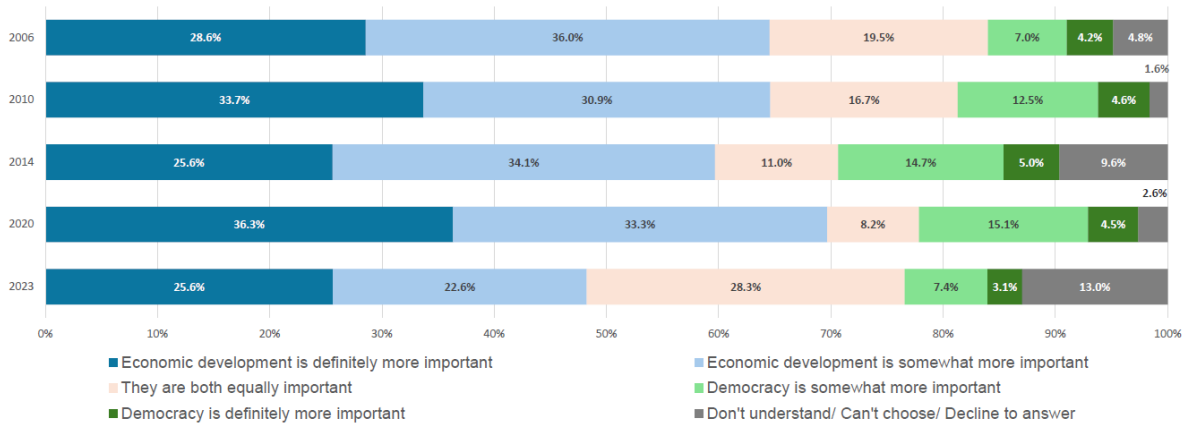
Source: Huang 2020, 15

Figure 17: Support for the Current System of Government, Singapore (2010-2023)



Source: G. Koh et al. 2024, 35

Figure 18: Relative Importance of Democracy to Economic Development, Singapore (2006-2023)



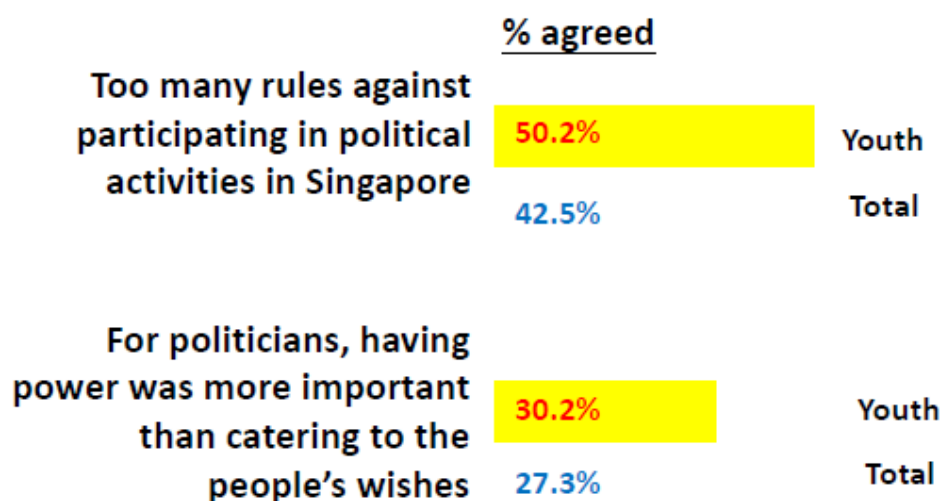
Source: G. Koh et al. 2024, 29

Figure 19: Most Important Problems Identified Facing Singapore, 2010-2014

<i>Identified problem</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2014</i>
<i>First</i>	Wages, incomes and salaries (16.6%)	Wages, incomes and salaries (24.8%)
<i>Second</i>	Unemployment (16.1%)	Management economy (14.3%)
<i>Third</i>	Management economy (13.8%)	Transportation (9.6%)
<i>Fourth</i>	Housing (8.4%)	Unemployment (8.7%)
<i>Fifth</i>	Rates and taxes (8.1%)	Housing (7.3%)

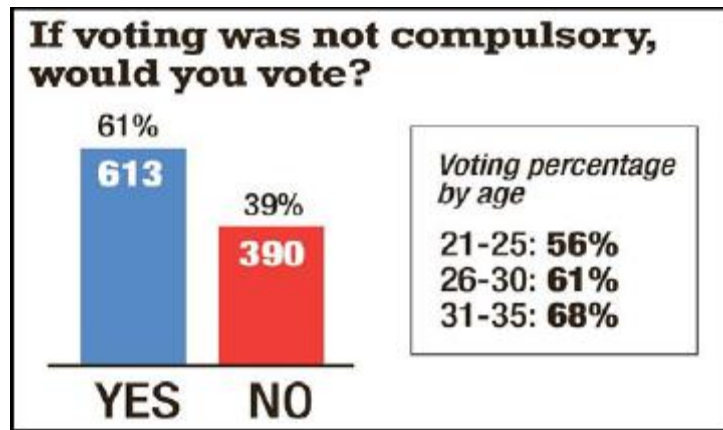
Source: L. Z. Rahim and Barr 2019, 205

Figure 20: Are There Too Many Rules Against Participation? (Singapore, GE2011)



Source: Lin n.d., 12

Figure 21: If Voting Was Not Compulsory, Would You Vote? (Singapore GE2011)



Source: Lin n.d., 5

Figure 22: Do's and Don'ts of Elections in Singapore

ELECTIONS DO'S AND DON'TS FOR ONLINE CONDUCT

Online Election Advertising (OEA)

Any content published online to:

- (a) promote or prejudice the electoral success of a candidate or
- (b) enhance or undermine the standing of a candidate in the election.

Who can publish OEA?

Candidates and their election agents, and authorised third parties.

Singapore citizens:

- ✓ Can publish unpaid OEA in their personal capacity.
- ✗ Can't publish paid OEA, i.e. where product and/or publishing of content has been paid for.

Cooling-Off Day and Polling Day

"Blackout period" for voters to reflect on issues before voting

- ✗ Don't publish paid and unpaid OEA.
- ✗ Don't republish (include share) existing OEA.

Election IQ Related Surveys

During the election period

- ✗ Don't publish survey results of how voters will vote or which candidate they prefer.
- ✗ Don't publish exit poll results or forecasts based on how voters have voted.

Online Falsehoods & Fake Content

- ✗ Don't post or share falsehoods and fake content.

When unsure, do not forward or repost messages. Check with official sources.

Beware of fake content (e.g. deepfakes) that aim to deceive, mislead and influence election outcomes.

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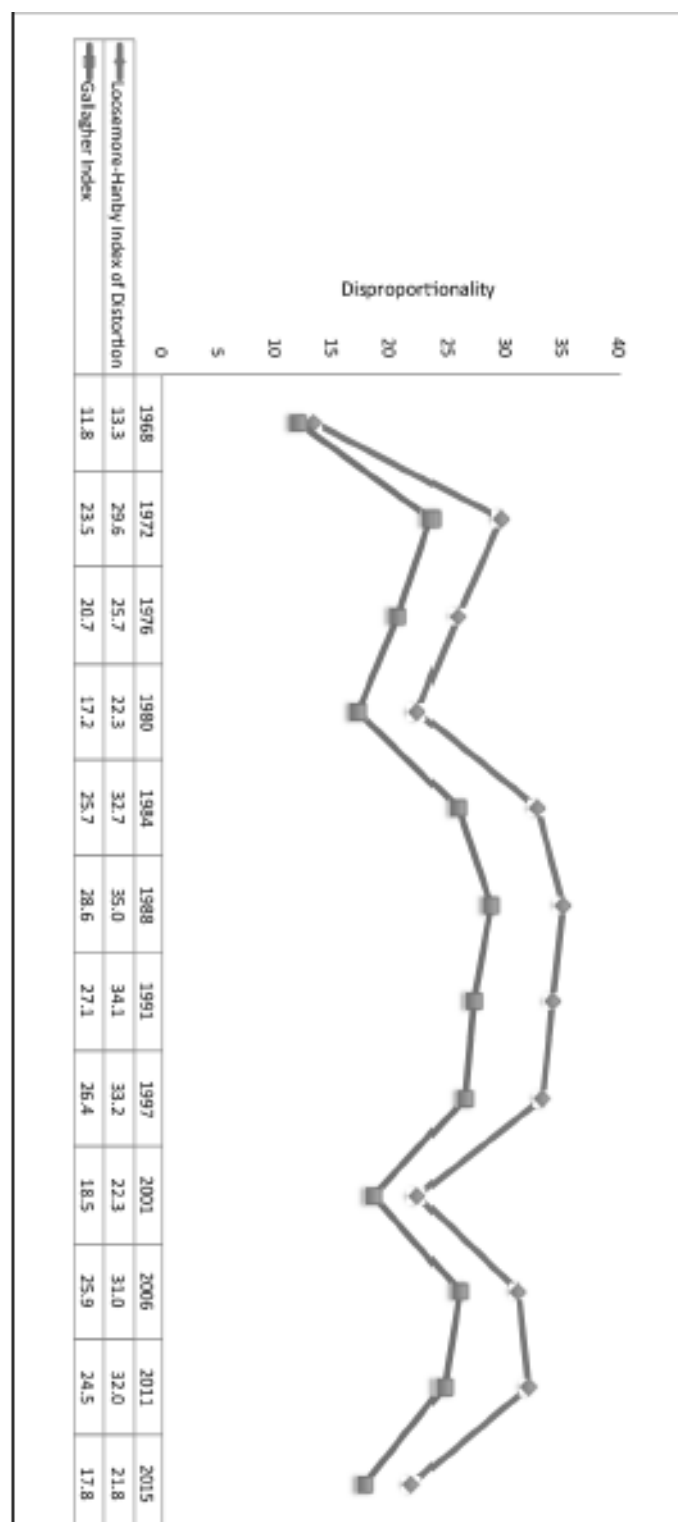
Source: Elections Department Singapore n.d.b

Figure 23: Spending per District in Singapore's GE2015

GRC	PAP election expenses	Amount per voter	Opposition party/ Independent election expenses	Amount per voter
Aljunied	\$305,946	\$2.07	WP \$140,350.05	\$0.95
Ang Mo Kio	\$317,545	\$1.69	RP \$26,068.86	\$0.14
Bishan Toa-Payoh	\$329,620	\$2.54	SPP \$42,780.55	\$0.33
Chua Chu Kang	\$273,330	\$2.28	PPP \$37,648.25	\$0.31
East Coast	\$238,815	\$2.41	WP \$126,143.05	\$1.27 3
Holland-Bukit Timah	\$272,296	\$2.61 3	SDP \$137,960	\$1.32 1
Jalan Besar	\$209,396	\$2.04	WP \$72,736.60	\$0.71
Jurong	\$263,212	\$2.02	SingFirst \$67,435	\$0.52
Marine Parade	\$314,732	\$2.15	WP \$131,329.73	\$0.90
Marsiling-Yew Tee	\$286,116	\$2.66 2	SDP \$140,740	\$1.31 2
Nee Soon	\$371,887	\$2.81 1	WP \$105,294.65	\$0.80
Pasir Ris-Punggol	\$366,990	\$1.96	SDA \$112,830.46	\$0.60
Sembawang	\$309,128	\$2.14	NSP \$89,072.77	\$0.62
Tampines	\$289,510	\$2.02	NSP \$84,802.34	\$0.59
Tanjong Pagar	\$218,574	\$1.67	SingFirst \$67,435	\$0.52
West Coast	\$184,132	\$1.85	RP \$18,607.16	\$0.19
SMC				
Bukit Batok	\$76,714	\$2.83 3	SDP \$34,410	\$1.27
			Samir Salim Neji \$2,171.65	\$0.08
Bukit Panjang	\$71,896	\$2.10	SDP \$34,517	\$1.01
Fengshan	\$44,815	\$1.91	WP \$29,907.11	\$1.28
Hong Kah North	\$71,615	\$2.54	SPP \$19,212.58	\$0.68
Hougang	\$46,275	\$1.92	WP \$28,218.76	\$1.17
MacPherson	\$81,165	\$2.85 2	WP \$31,690	\$1.11
			NSP \$19,104.45	\$0.67
Mountbatten	\$64,723	\$2.68	SPP \$52,547.69	\$2.18 1
Pioneer	\$36,136	\$1.42	NSP \$8,111.80	\$0.32
Potong Pasir	\$45,731	\$2.63	SPP \$22,744.83	\$1.31 3
Punggol East	\$54,592	\$1.58	WP \$33,261.38	\$0.97
Radin Mas	\$48,579	\$1.68	RP \$18,962.04	\$0.66
			Han Hui Hui \$28,400.50	\$0.98
Sengkang West	\$55,011	\$1.83	WP \$33,903.77	\$1.13
Yuhua	\$67,114	\$2.97 1	SDP \$35,960	\$1.59 2
PAP People's Action Party WP Workers' Party NSP National Solidarity Party PPP People's Power Party RP Reform Party SDA Singapore Democratic Alliance SDP Singapore Democratic Party SPP Singapore People's Party SingFirst Singaporeans' First				
Total amount spent				\$7,136,943
Total PAP spending				\$5,315,595
Total opposition spending (excluding independents)				\$1,790,776

Source: Liang and Au-Yong 2015

Figure 24: Electoral Disproportionality in Singapore, 1968-2015



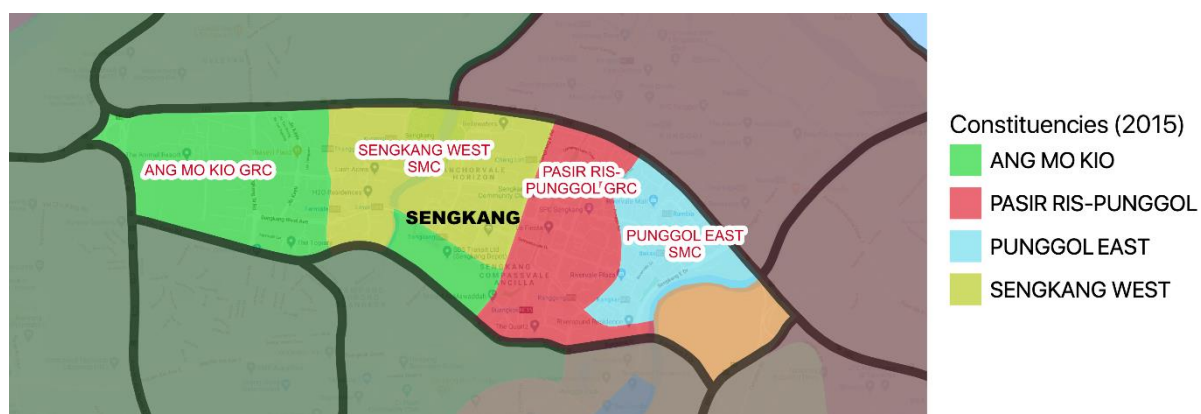
Source: N. Tan 2015b, 185

Figure 25: Boundary Delimitation Rules and Criteria; Comparison between Singapore, Malaysia, Canada, and the United Kingdom

Questions	Canada	Malaysia	Singapore	United Kingdom
Authority responsible for delimitation	Boundaries Commission (BC for each province)	Election Commission (EMB)	Electoral Boundaries Review Commission (EBRC)	Boundaries Commission
Number of members in each Commission	3	7	5	4
Background of Commission Members	Academics, members of judiciary (exclude political appointees), appointed by Speaker of the House	Chair, Deputy Chair and 3 others, appointed by Head of State	Civil servants appointed by the Prime Minister	Senior judge and two others (Chair elected, others appointed by head of judiciary of state)
Delimitation criteria	- Population equality - Respect for natural barriers - Respect for local administrative boundaries - Communities of interest/cultural concerns	- Population equality - Respect for natural barriers - Population density (measure of weightage given to rural constituencies) - Respect for local administrative boundaries - Continuity with previous electoral district boundaries	- Population deviation - Communities of interest/cultural concerns	- Population equality - Respect for local administrative boundaries - Geographic size/remoteness - Communities of interest/cultural concerns
If population is a criterion, which population figure is used?	Total population	Registered voters	Registered voters	Registered voters
If equal population is a criteria, what is the tolerance limit?	+/-25%	None	+/-30%	None
Final authority for adoption over plan	Legislature passes Act; but final authority rests with BC	Legislature	Executive	Legislature passes Delimitation Act
Does the Legislature play any role?	Legislature can consider plan but final authority rests with BC	Yes, approve, reject but not vary Delimitation Act	No	Yes, approve, reject but not vary Delimitation Act
What role does the court play?	Court can play a role but rarely been called upon to make a ruling	NA	None	Court can play a limited role; decisions of the commission subject to judicial review, but not the delimitation act
Time between boundary report and election	About two years or at least seven months after the boundary report has been published	No more than two years upon commencement of elections	No legislation in force	Submitted every 5 years
Delimitation Prompts	Redrawn every 10 years following decennial census	Redrawn every 8 years	No specific requirement, delimitation precedes every election to date	Redrawn every 8-12 years, changes in number of registered voters; administrative boundaries

Source: N. Tan 2015b, 190

Figure 26: The Example of Sengkang in Singapore Between GE2011 and GE2015



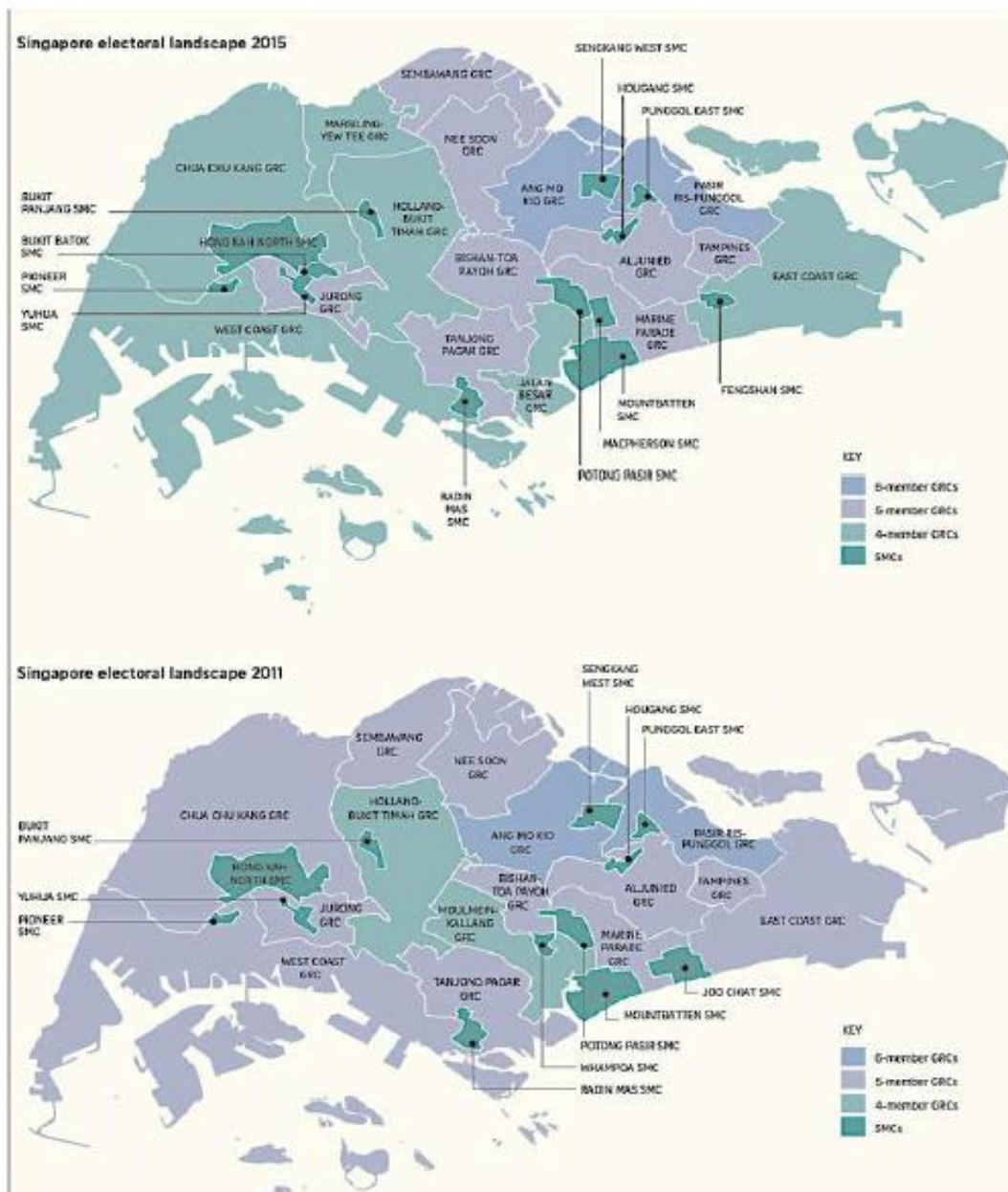
Source: Tung 2020

Figure 27: Average Vote Shares of the PAP in Newly Created Constituencies and Dissolved Constituencies since 1988–2015

	Dissolved GRCs (%)	Newly created GRCs (%)	Difference	Dissolved SMCs (%)	Newly created SMCs (%)	Difference
Average total PAP vote share	62.7	64.6	+1.9	64.9	66	+1.1
Average total Opp. vote share	37.3	35.4	-1.9	34.8	33.4	-1.4

Source: (N. Tan and Grofman 2018, 283)

Figure 28: Singapore's Electoral Landscape in GE2011 and GE2015



Source: N. Tan and Grofman 2016, 15

Figure 29: Accuracy of Sample Counts in Singapore's GE2015

Division	Seats	Voters	Party	Candidate(s)	Votes	Votes %	Sample counts
Bukit Batok SMC	1	27,077	People's Action Party	David Ong Kim Huat	18,204	72.99 / 100	74 / 100
			Singapore Democratic Party	Sadasivam Veriyah	6,585	26.40 / 100	26 / 100
			Independent	Samir Salim Neji (Loses deposit)	150	0.60 / 100	0 / 100
Bukit Panjang SMC	1	34,317	Singapore Democratic Party	Khung Wai Yeen	10,143	31.62 / 100	31 / 100
			People's Action Party	Teo Ho Pin	21,935	68.38 / 100	69 / 100
Fengshan SMC	1	23,427	People's Action Party	Cheryl Chan Wei Ling	12,398	57.52 / 100	57 / 100
			Workers' Party	Dennis Tan Lip Fong	9,158	42.48 / 100	43 / 100
Hong Kah North SMC	1	28,145	People's Action Party	Amy Khor Lean Suan	19,612	74.76 / 100	74 / 100
			Singapore People's Party	Ravi Philemon	6,621	25.24 / 100	26 / 100
Hougang SMC	1	24,097	People's Action Party	Lee Hong Chuang	9,543	42.31 / 100	42 / 100
			Workers' Party	Png Eng Huat	13,012	57.69 / 100	58 / 100

Source: Thet 2016

Figure 30: Correspondence with Maruah About Independent Election Observers in Singapore

In this article: <https://maruah.org/2015/08/28/2022/>

You state that you "requesting for a meeting and to offer MARUAH as independent, non-partisan election observers" to Singapore's ELD

You have also done the same for Singapore GE2011 and if I remember correctly, you didn't get the permission. Did you get the permission for GE2015? Or were neutral observers allowed at polling stations during 2015? I could not find any confirmation on that topic and hope to get some clarification from you.

I appreciate any help and would like to thank you in advance.

Kind regards from Austria,
Joachim

Sent with [Proton Mail](#) secure email.

From maruahsg@gmail.com

To joachim.maciejewski@protonmail.com

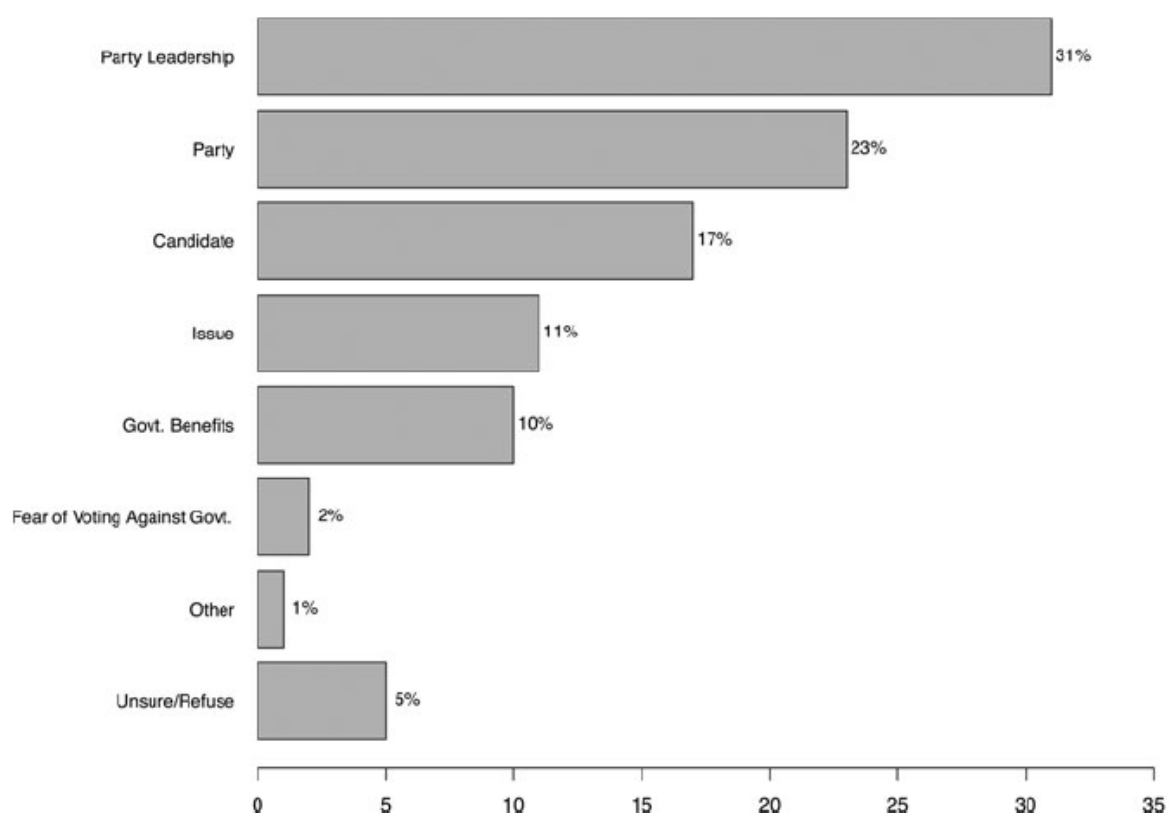
Joachim,

Thanks for getting in touch. Singapore law does not provide for independent election observers, and the government does not seem to have any inclination to change its position. Candidates do appoint polling agents and counting agents, however, and several have written of their experiences on Reddit.

Shih Tung
President

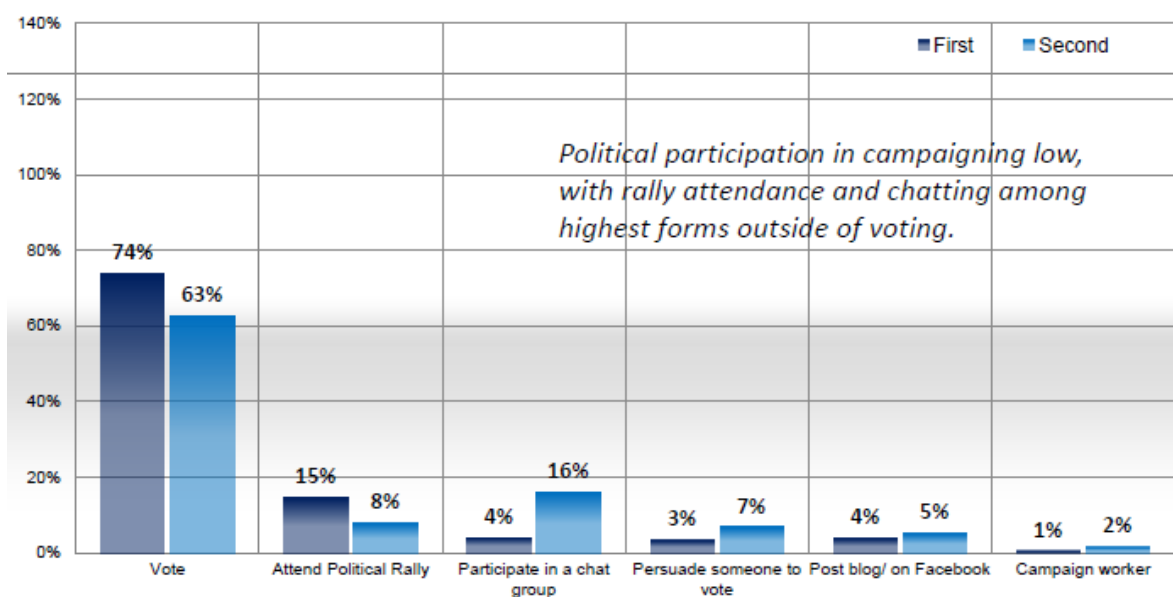
Source: The Author

Figure 31: Voter's Main Considerations When Voting in GE2015



Source: Oliver and Ostwald 2018a, 142

Figure 32: Which of the Following Did You Participate in During the GE Campaign 2015?



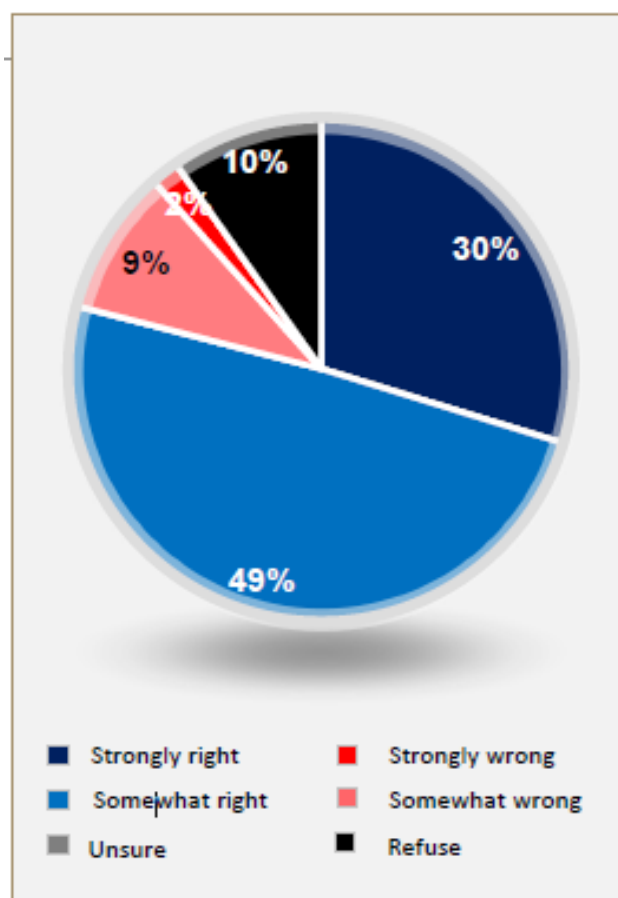
Source: Welsh n.d., 13

Figure 33: Credible Political Parties in Singapore, 2011 vs. 2015

Credible Political Parties		
	2011	2015
PAP	73%	93%
WP	56%	71%
SDP	24%	46%
SingFirst	---	29%
NSP	23%	26%
RP	16%	22%

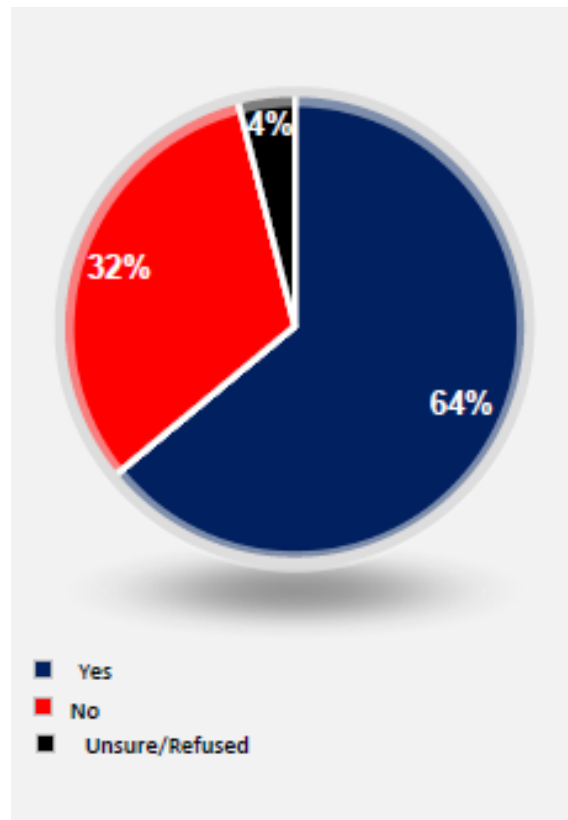
Source: Lam 2015, 257

Figure 34: Would You Say That Things Are Heading in the Right or Wrong Direction?
(Singapore, GE2015)



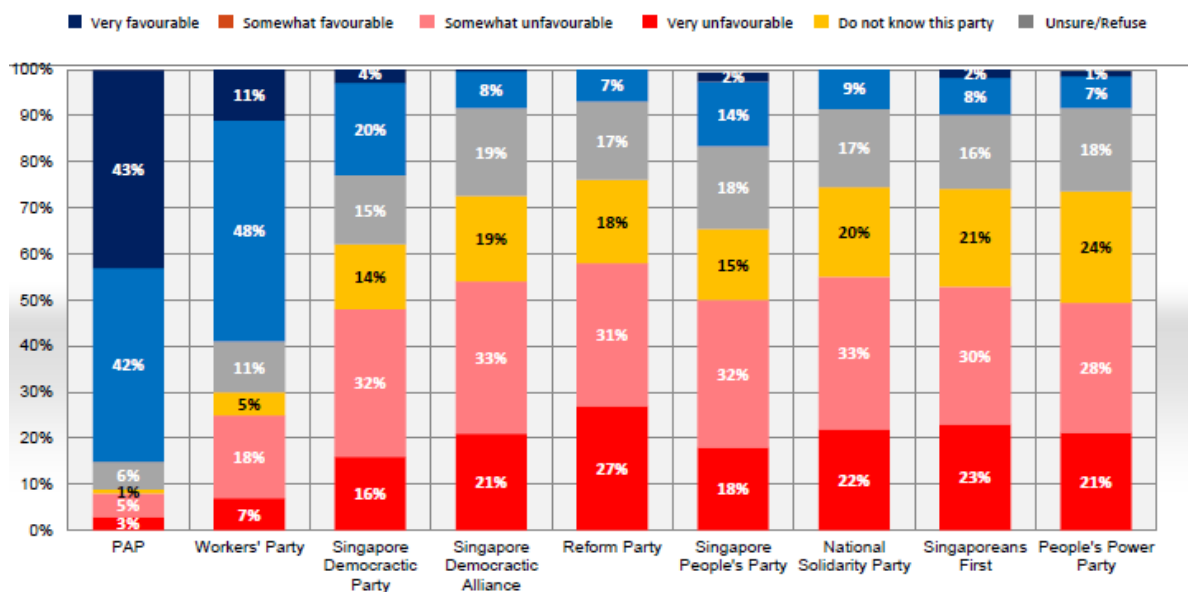
Source: Welsh n.d., 7

Figure 35: Did You Receive Government Funds in the Year Before the Election, e.g. Tax Rebate, Subsidy etc.? (Singapore, GE2015)



Source: Welsh n.d., 31

Figure 36: Do You Have a Favorable or Unfavorable Opinion of the Following Political Parties? (Singapore, GE2015)



Source: Welsh n.d., 18

Figure 37: Seats and Votes Won by the Government Party in Parliamentary Malaysia, 1959-1999

Year	No. of Seats	Total Seats	Seats (%)	Votes (%)	Difference (%)
1959	74	104	71.2	51.7	19.5
1964	89	104	85.6	58.5	27.1
1969	85	144	66.0	49.3	16.7
1974	135	154	87.7	60.7	27.0
1978	130	154	84.4	57.2	27.2
1982	132	154	85.7	60.5	25.2
1986	148	177	83.6	55.8	27.8
1990	127	180	70.6	53.4	17.2
1995	162	192	84.4	65.2	19.2
1999	148	193	76.7	56.5	20.2

Source: H. H. Lim 2002, 127

Figure 38: Sources of Malay Electoral Advantage in Peninsular Malaysia, 1955-1999

Year	1955	1959	1964	1969	1974	1986	1994	1999
% Malay in population	49.8	50.0	50.0	52.9	53.2	55.2	58.1	59.3
% Malay in electorate	84.2	57.1	54.4	55.7	57.9	55.3	56.3	56.7
% Malay-majority constituencies	96.2	57.7	56.7	57.7	69.3	69.7	67.4	68.1
Enfranchisement advantage	+34.4	+7.1	+4.4	+2.8	+4.7	+0.1	-1.8	-2.6
Delineation advantage	+12.0	+0.6	+2.3	+2.0	+11.4	+14.4	+11.1	+11.4
Total electoral advantage	+46.4	+7.7	+6.7	+4.8	+16.1	+14.5	+9.3	+8.8

Source: H. H. Lim 2002, 129

Figure 39: Results of General Elections in Malaysia, 1959-2013

Election Year	Alliance/Barisan Nasional			All opposition parties			Total no. of seats contested
	% total vote	No. of seats won	% seats*	% total vote	No. of seats won	% seats	
1959	51.7	74	71	48.3	30	29	104
1964	58.5	89	86	41.5	15	14	104
1969	49.3	92	64	50.7	51	36	143
1974	60.7	135	88	39.3	19	12	154
1978	57.2	130	84	42.8	24	16	154
1982	60.5	132	86	39.5	22	14	154
1986	55.8	148	84	41.5	29	16	177
1990	53.4	127	71	46.6	53	29	180
1995	65.2	162	84	34.8	30	16	192
1999	56.5	148	77	43.5	45	23	193
2004	63.8	198	91	36.2	21**	9	219**
2008	51.4	140	63	48.6	82	37	222
2013	47.4	133	60	50.8	89	40	222

Source: B. T. Khoo 2013a, 6

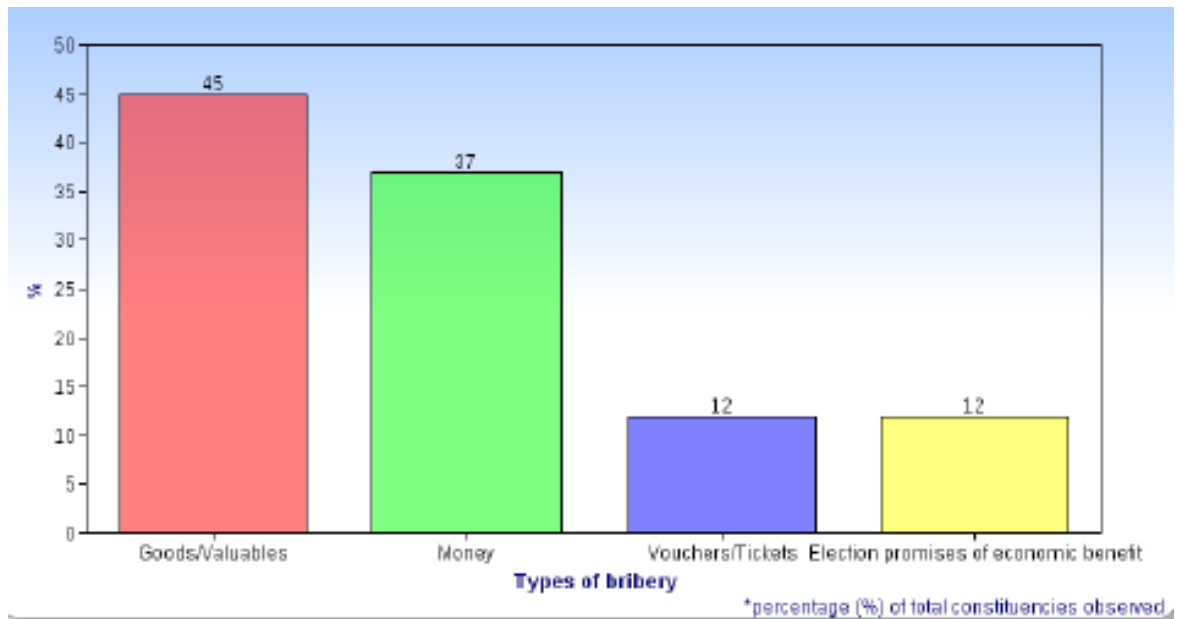
Figure 40: Percentage of New Voters in Malaysia, 2004-2013

	2004-2008 (%)	2008-2013 (%)	Change
Perlis	6.8	14.3	7.5
Kedah	6.5	19.6	13.1
Kelantan	13.3	18.5	5.2
Terengganu	14.1	22.1	8.0
Penang	5.9	16.6	10.7
Perak	0.7	19.6	18.9
Pahang	5.7	22.7	17.0
Selangor	9.9	30.2	20.3
FT	5.6	15.9	10.3
Negri Sembilan	10.4	14.4	4.0
Malacca	6.7	15.1	8.4
Johor	5.1	22.1	17.0
Sabah	83.7	21.8	-61.9
Sarawak	15.6	18.7	3.1
Overall	8.2	19.4	11.2

Note: Data excludes Putrajaya, 11 seats in Sabah and Sarawak where the 2004 data was not available. The Sabah 2004-2008 percentage is skewed by the extraordinary high number of voters in three seats, Liburan, Semporna and Ranau.

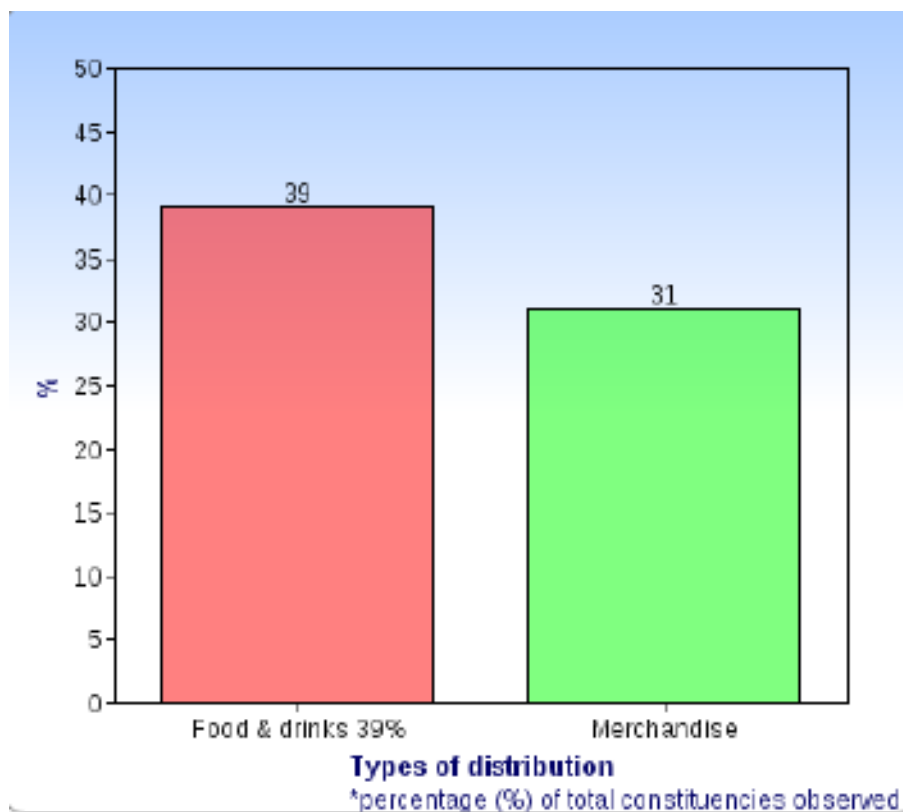
Source: Welsh 2013a

Figure 41: Incidents of Bribery During the Campaign Period by Percentage of Total Constituencies Observed, Malaysia 2013



Source: Bersih 2015, 27

Figure 42: Incidents of Treating During the Campaign Period by Percentage of Total Constituencies Observed, Malaysia 2013



Source: Bersih 2015, 32

Figure 43: Malaysia's GE13 Results by % of Vote and % of Parliament Seats

	Barisan Nasional		Pakatan Rakyat		PR margin	
	% Votes	% Seats	% Votes	% Seats	% Votes	% Seats
Total	47.4	59.9	50.9	40.1	3.5	-19.8
Peninsular Malaysia	45.6	51.5	53.3	48.5	7.7	-3.0
East Malaysia	51.5	84.2	33.1	15.8	-18.4	-68.4

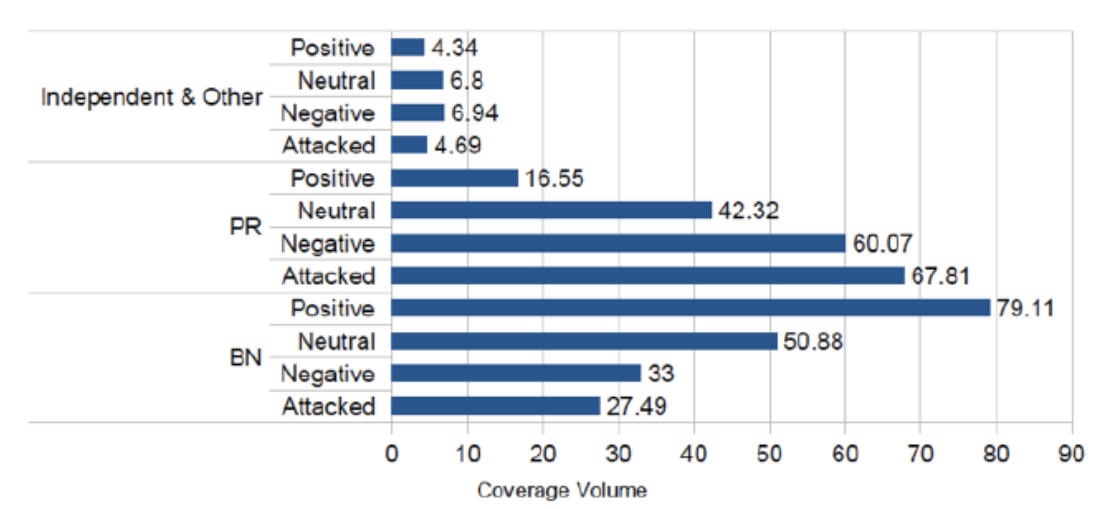
Source: Ostwald 2013, 524

Figure 44: Malapportionment at the State Level During Malaysia's GE13

	% Seats	% Voters	Seat difference	% BN
Sabah	11.71	7.61	9.1	64.0
Sarawak	13.96	8.20	12.8	62.7
Perlis	1.35	1.03	0.7	55.7
Pahang	6.31	5.57	1.6	55.6
Johor	11.71	12.15	-1.0	55.0
Melaka	2.70	3.32	-1.4	53.9
Negeri Sembilan	3.60	4.20	-1.3	52.7
Kedah	6.76	7.87	-2.5	51.5
Terengganu	3.60	4.71	-2.5	51.5
Kelantan	6.31	6.94	-1.4	46.3
Perak	10.81	10.53	0.6	45.3
Selangor	9.91	15.41	-12.2	40.6
WP Kuala Lumpur	5.41	6.11	-1.6	35.3
Penang	5.86	6.35	-1.1	32.2
Peninsular Malaysia	74.33	84.19	-21.9	45.6
East Malaysia	25.67	15.81	21.9	51.5

Source: Ostwald 2013, 525

Figure 45: Tone of Coverage of Political Parties in Malaysian Media During the GE13 Campaigning Period



Source: Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs 2013, 18

Figure 46: Perception Towards Direction of the Country, Najib Razak, Barisan National and Pakatan Rakyat by Ethnicity, Malaysia (January-February 2013)

Ethnicity	Direction of the country		Performance of Najib Razak		Perception towards BN			Perception towards PR		
	Right	Wrong	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Positive	Negative	Unsure/Refused	Positive	Negative	Unsure/Refused
Malay	74	21	75	22	68	19	13	27	40	33
Chinese	21	51	31	45	13	55	31	45	6	49
Indian	69	26	68	24	51	27	22	43	14	43
Overall	58	31	61	29	50	31	20	34	27	39

Source: K. H. Lee and Thock 2014, 29

Figure 47: List of Bersih's Demands for Elections in Malaysia, 2007-2016

<i>Year</i>	<i>Demands</i>
2007	1. A thorough clean-up of the electoral roll 2. The use of indelible ink to prevent multiple voting 3. The abolition of postal voting for military and police personnel 4. Fair access to the mass media for all parties
2011	1. Clean the electoral roll 2. Reform postal ballot 3. Use indelible ink 4. Minimum 21 days campaign period 5. Free and fair access to media 6. Strengthen public institutions 7. Stop corruption 8. Stop dirty politics
2012	1. Resignation of the existing Electoral Commission 2. Implementation of the eight earlier demands before the 13th general election 3. Observation of the 13th general election by international observers
2015	1. Clean elections 2. Clean government 3. The right to dissent 4. Protect parliamentary democracy 5. Save the economy
2016	1. Clean elections 2. Clean government 3. Strengthen parliamentary democracy 4. Right to dissent 5. Empowering Sabah and Sarawak

Source: Y. H. Khoo 2024, 573

Figure 48: Total Number of Protestors in Bersih Rallies, 2007 to 2016

<i>Bersih Rally</i>	<i>Total Number of Protestors (Estimation)</i>
10 November 2007: 'Save Malaysia, Restore Our Rights'	30 000 to 40, 000
9 July 2011: 'Walk for Democracy'	50, 000
28 April 2012: 'Sit-In Protest'	250 000 to 300, 000
29–30 August 2015	500, 000
19 November 2016: 'Stand United—New Malaysia'	120, 000

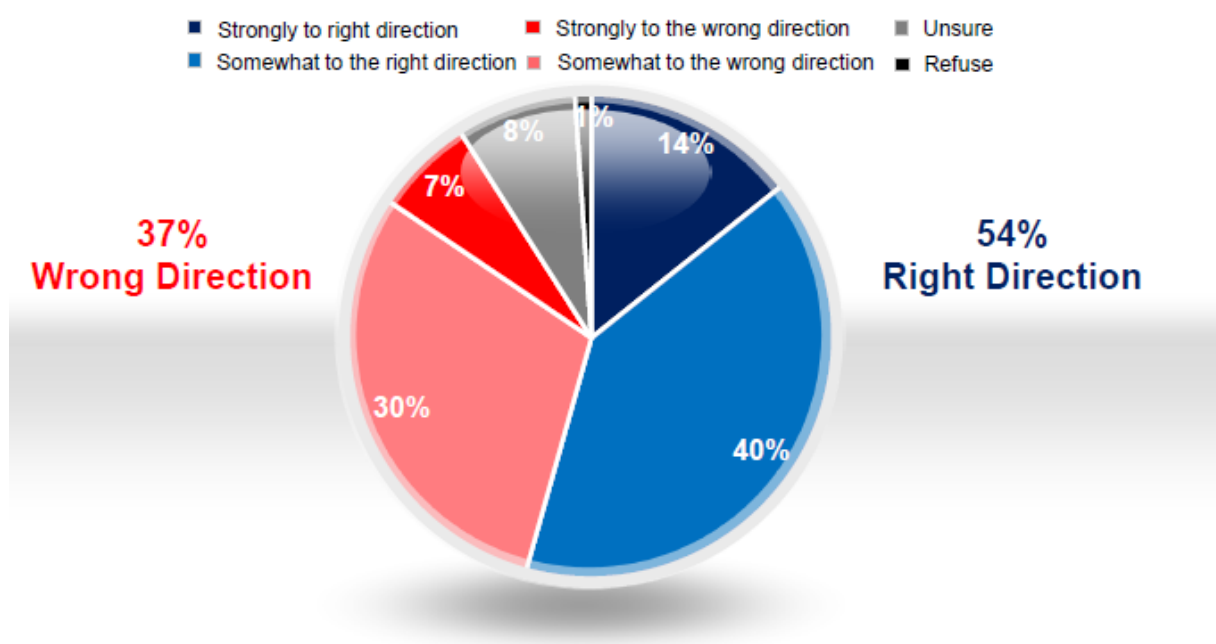
Source: Y. H. Khoo 2024, 573

Figure 49: Tens of Thousands Gather in Malaysia, Kelana Jaya Stadium, to Protest the Results of the General Elections (2013)



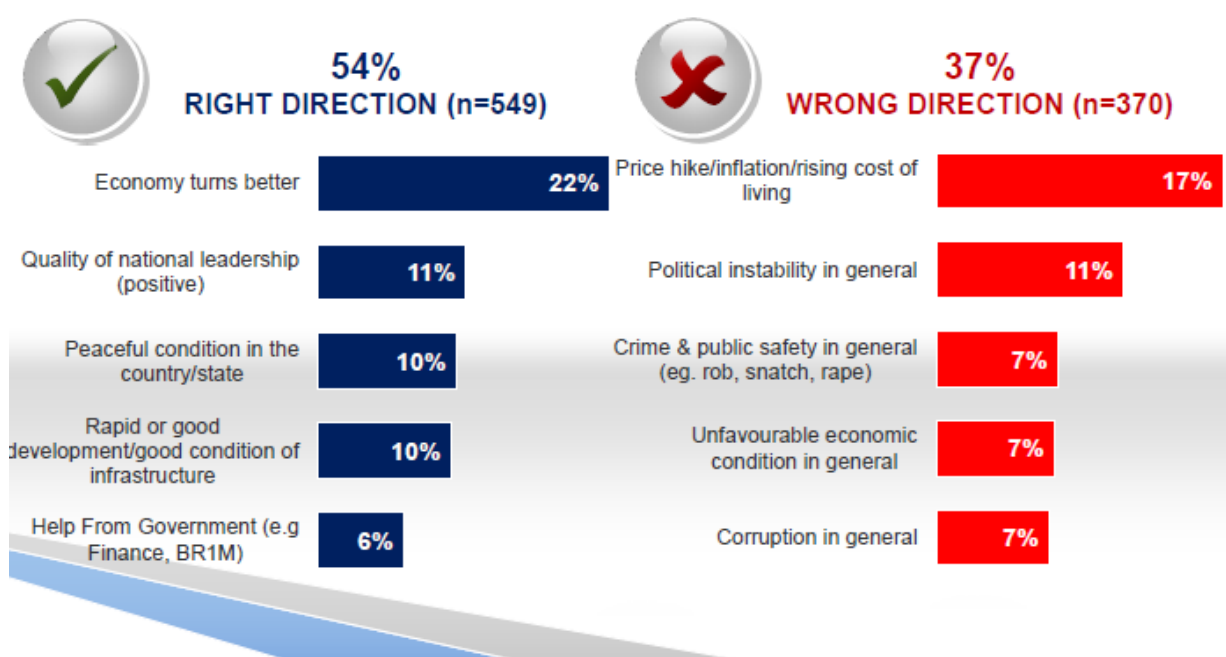
Source: Palatino 2013

Figure 50: Do You Feel Things in This Country are Going in the Right Direction, or Do You Feel Things Have Gotten on the Wrong Track? (Malaysia, 2012)



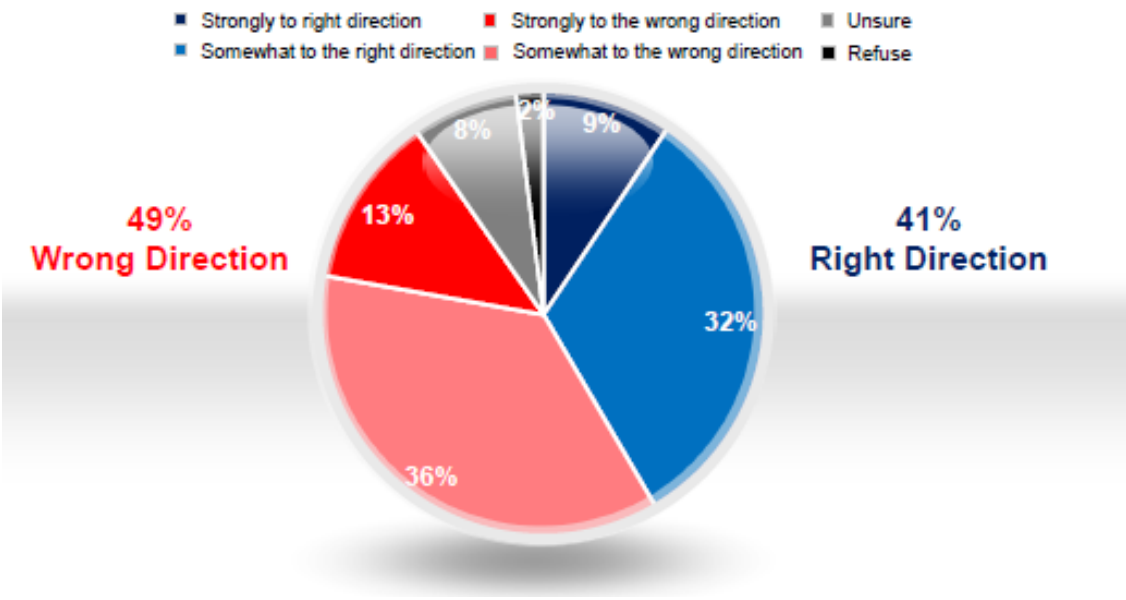
Source: Merdeka Center 2012, 6

Figure 51: What Is the Reason for You to Say So? (Malaysia, 2012)



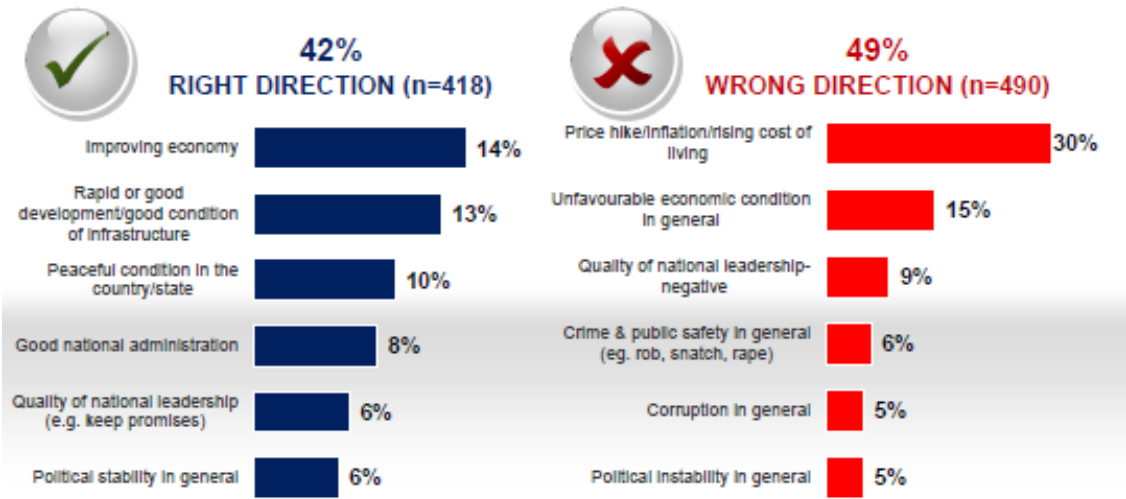
Source: Merdeka Center 2012, 8

Figure 52: Do You Feel Things in This Country are Going in the Right Direction, or Do You Feel Things Have Gotten on the Wrong Track? (Malaysia, 2013)



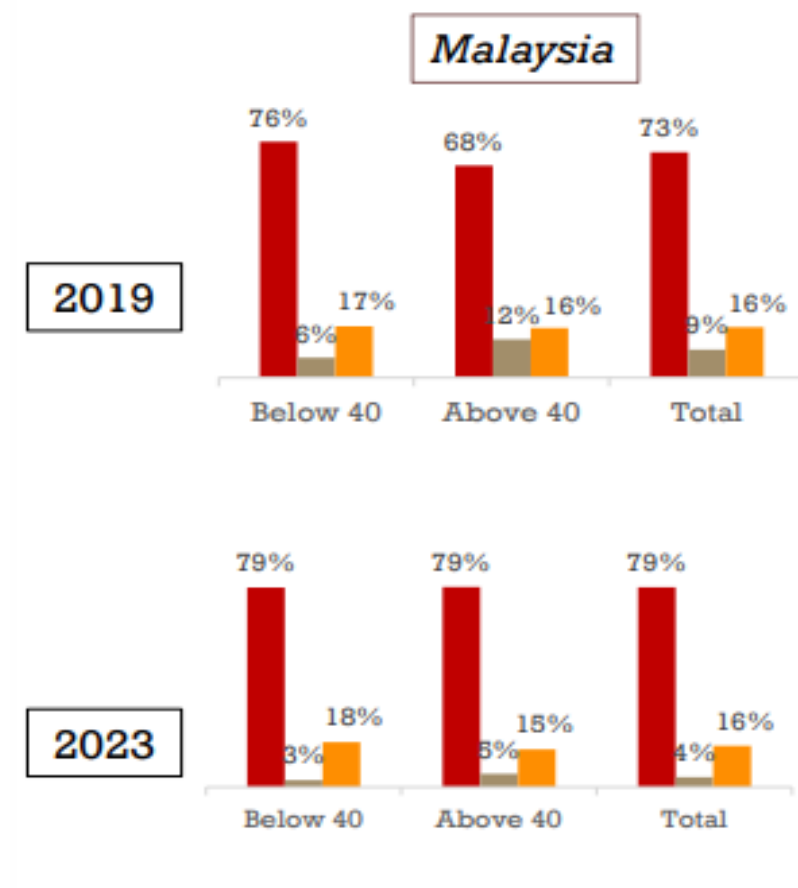
Source: Merdeka Center 2013, 4

Figure 53: What Is the Reason for You to Say So? (Malaysia, 2013)



Source: Merdeka Center 2013, 8

Figure 54: If You Had to Choose Between Democracy and Economic Development, Which Would You Say is More Important? (Malaysia)



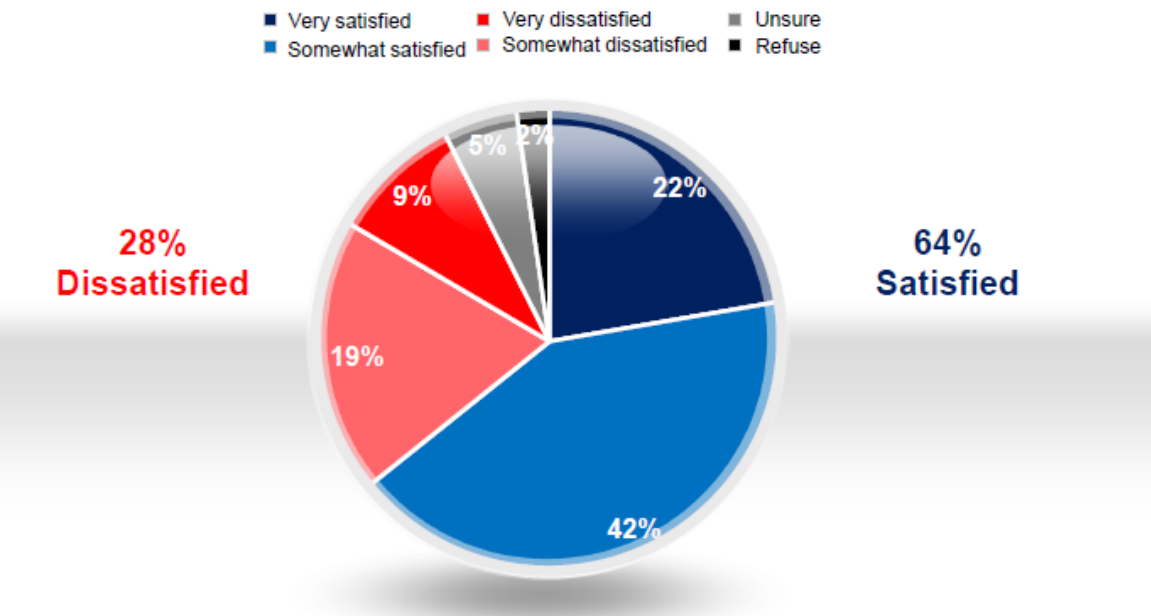
Red: Economic Development

Brown: Both

Orange: Democracy

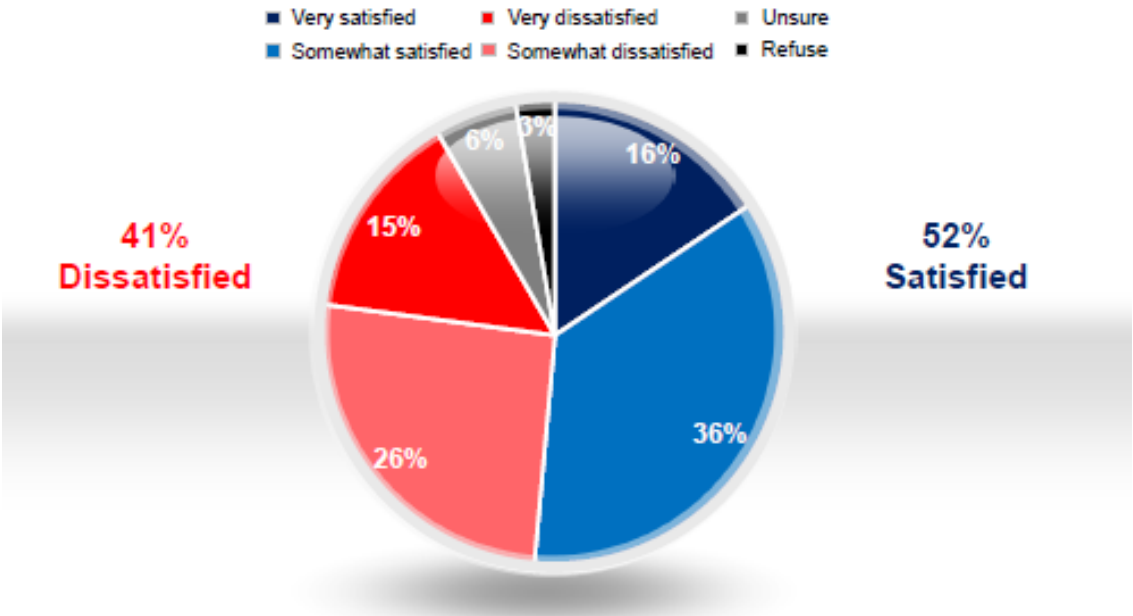
Source: Suffian and Tai de Lee n.d., 17

Figure 55: How Satisfied or Dissatisfied Are You With the Performance of Najib Tun Razak as Prime Minister? (Malaysia, 2012)



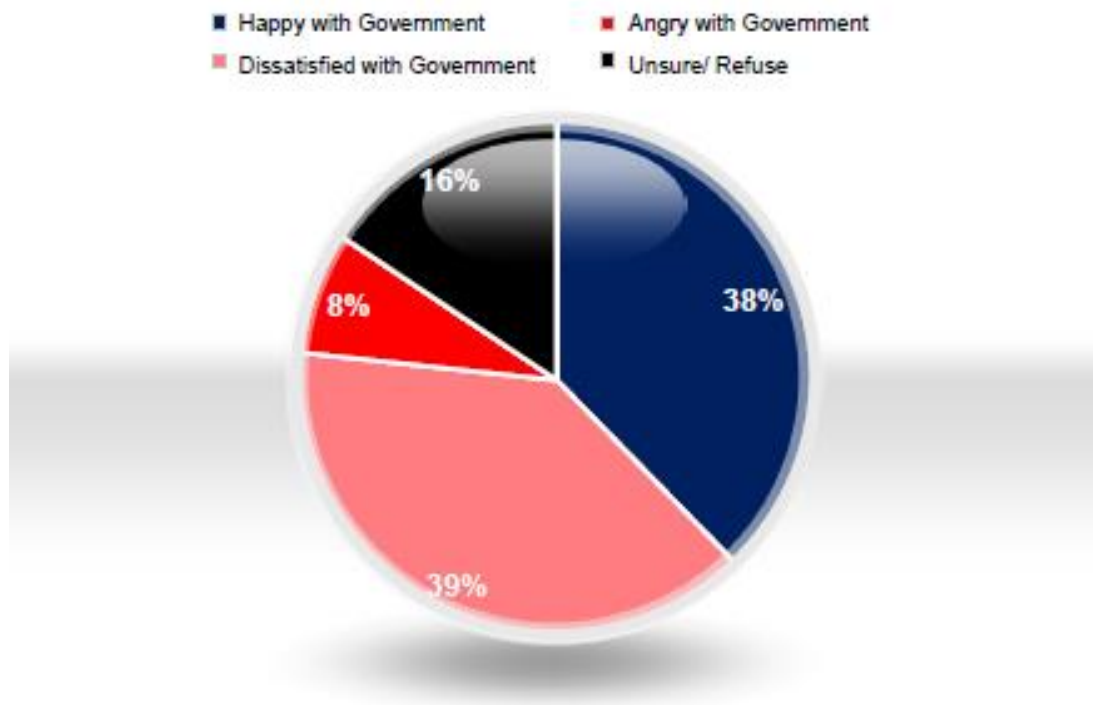
Source: Merdeka Center 2012, 17

Figure 56: How Satisfied or Dissatisfied Are You With the Performance of Najib Tun Razak as Prime Minister? (Malaysia, 2013)



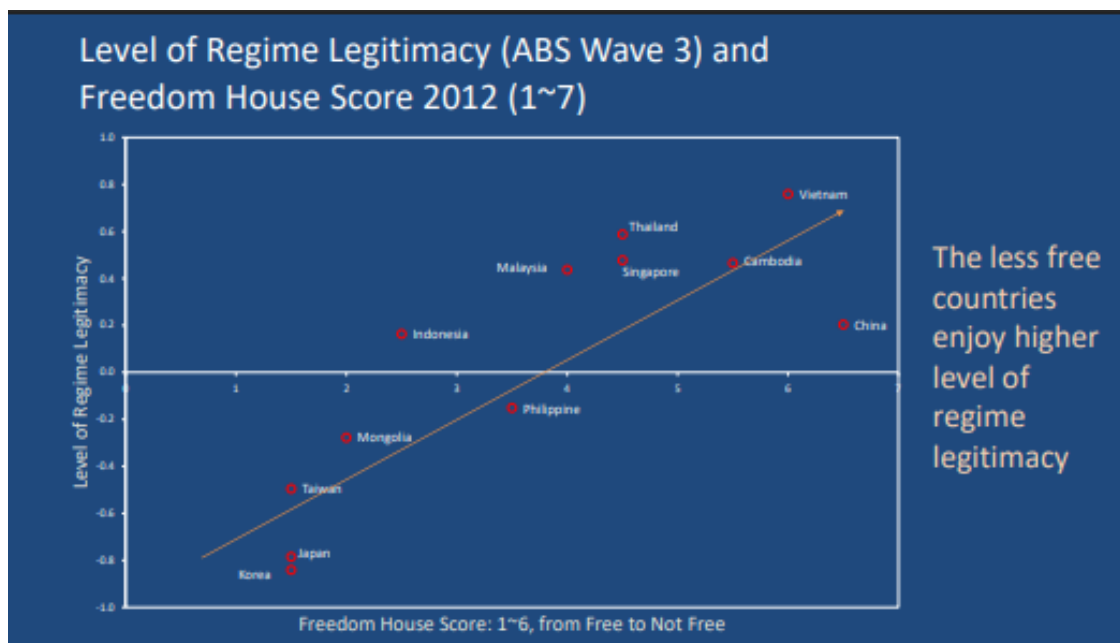
Source: Merdeka Center 2013, 13

Figure 57: Some People Say They Are Happy with Government While Others Are Dissatisfied and Others Say They Are Angry. Which One Best Describes How You Feel? (Malaysia, 2013)



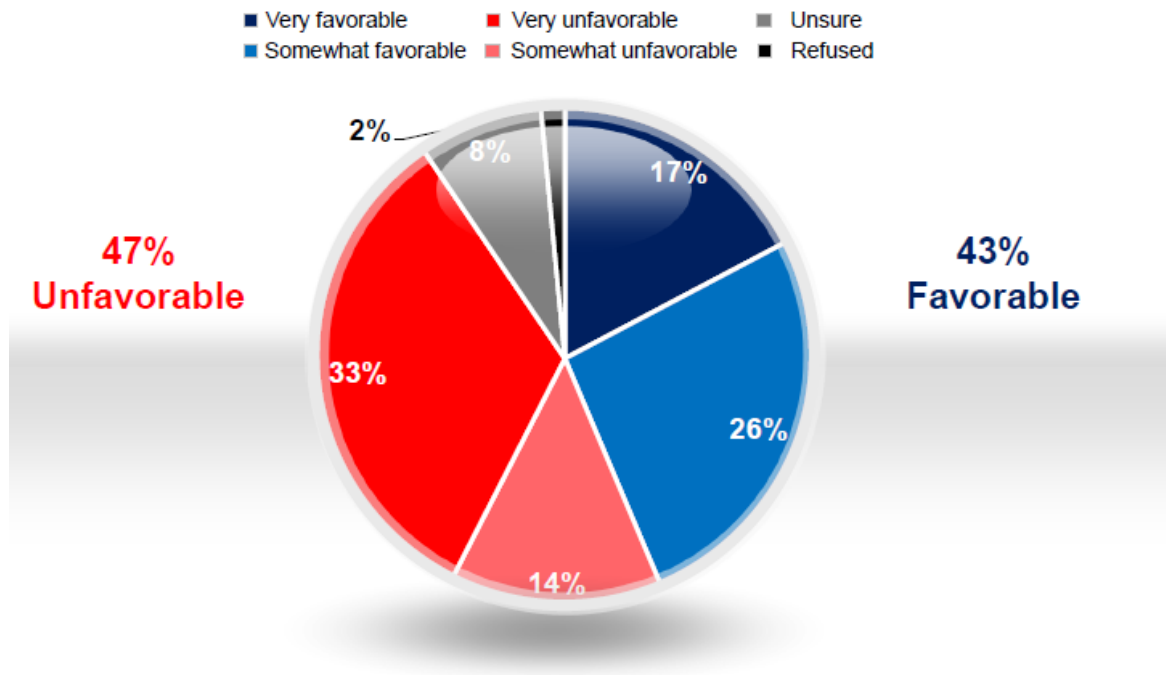
Source: Merdeka Center 2013, 17

Figure 58: Level of Regime Legitimacy (ABS Wave 3) and Freedomhouse Score (2012)



Source: Chu n.d., 28

Figure 59: What Do You Think of Bersih? (2015)



Source: Merdeka Center 2015, 4

Figure 60: Performance of Political Parties by Constituencies' Ethnic Composition, Malaysia 2013 vs. 2018

	2018				2013		
	Total	Pakatan	BN	PAS	Total	Pakatan	BN
Malay > 70%	71	14	39	18	65	17	48
Malay 60–70%	33	27	6	0	23	7	16
Malay 50–60%	13	11	2	0	26	13	13
No ethnicity > 50%	24	22	2	0	29	21	8
Chinese 50–60%	10	10	0	0	7	7	0
Chinese 60–70%	3	3	0	0	4	4	0
Chinese > 70%	11	11	0	0	11	11	0
	165	98	49	18	165	80	85
Share of districts		59.4%	29.7%	10.9%		48.5%	51.5%
Share of votes		48.7%	31.7%	19.4%		53.3%	45.8%

Source: Suffian and Tai de Lee n.d., 22

Figure 61: Popular Votes by Coalition, Malaysia 2013 vs. 2018

	GE 2018		GE 2013		Change	
	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%
PENINSULA						
Barisan Nasional	3,273,222	31.7	4,347,688	45.8	-1,074,466	-14.1
Pakatan Harapan/ Pakatan Rakyat	5,029,539	48.7	5,035,582	53.3	-6,043	- 4.6
PAS ¹	2,006,653	19.4	–	–	+2,006,653	+19.4
Others	28,578	0.3	64,598	0.9	-36,020	- 0.6
SARAWAK						
Barisan Nasional	462,090	52.5	481,038	58.9	-18,948	- 6.4
Pakatan Harapan/ Pakatan Rakyat	381,863	43.4	304,508	37.3	+73,355	+ 6.1
PAS ¹	10,591	1.2	–	–	+10,591	+ 1.2
Others	25,984	3.0	31,681	3.8	-5,697	- 0.8

Source: Suffian and Tai de Lee n.d., 22

Figure 62: Summary of PEMANTAU Incident Report

Incident/Offence	Number of reported cases
Bribery and vote buying	46
Treating and gifts	196
Undue government handouts/inducement	150
Use of government machinery	105
Excessive spending/lavish events	12
Biased behaviour by public institutions (e.g. SPR/police)	20
Irregularities with Advance Voting and Postal Voting	200
Problems on voting day	274
Total	1003

Source: Bersih 2018b, 51

Figure 63: Malapportionment of Parliamentary Constituencies by States in Malaysia, Before and After Electoral Commission 2015-2018 delimitation (delineation) exercises

State	Before delimitation	1st proposal	2nd proposal	Final proposal
Perlis	1.20	1.20	1.20	1.20
Kedah	2.53	2.70	2.70	2.70
Kelantan	2.42	2.42	2.42	2.42
Terengganu	1.45	1.44	1.45	1.45
Penang	1.68	1.68	1.68	1.68
Perak	3.59	3.43	3.43	3.43
Pahang	2.93	2.93	2.93	2.93
Selangor	3.94	4.05	3.94	4.05
Kuala Lumpur	1.75	1.56	1.45	1.45
Negeri Sembilan	2.27	2.18	2.18	2.18
Malacca	2.17	2.19	2.44	2.50
Johor	3.05	3.08	3.17	3.17
West Malaysia, excluding Putrajaya and Labuan	5.25	5.39	5.39	8.53
Sabah	2.40	2.22	2.22	2.22
Sarawak	—	4.34	4.53	4.53

Note: The 2015 constituency delimitation exercise for Sarawak did not include pre-delimitation electorate sizes.

Source: Huat 2020, 219

Figure 64: Inter-State Malapportionment in GE14 (Malaysia)

State	Average Number of Voters per Parliamentary Constituency	Value of votes compared to Malaysian Average
Selangor	94,469	0.65
Terengganu	83,693	0.73
Melaka	76,108	0.80
Kuala Lumpur	71,673	0.85
Kedah	69,630	0.88
Negeri Sembilan	69,642	0.88
Kelantan	67,185	0.91
Penang	66,750	0.92
Johor	63,428	0.96
Perak	58,647	1.04
Pahang	52,859	1.16
Perlis	45,699	1.34
Sabah	39,829	1.54
Sarawak	35,779	1.71
Malaysia (excluding Putrajaya and Labuan)	61,200	1.00

Source: Bersih 2018b, 24

Figure 65: Boundary Between Two State Constituencies in Johor State (Malaysia)



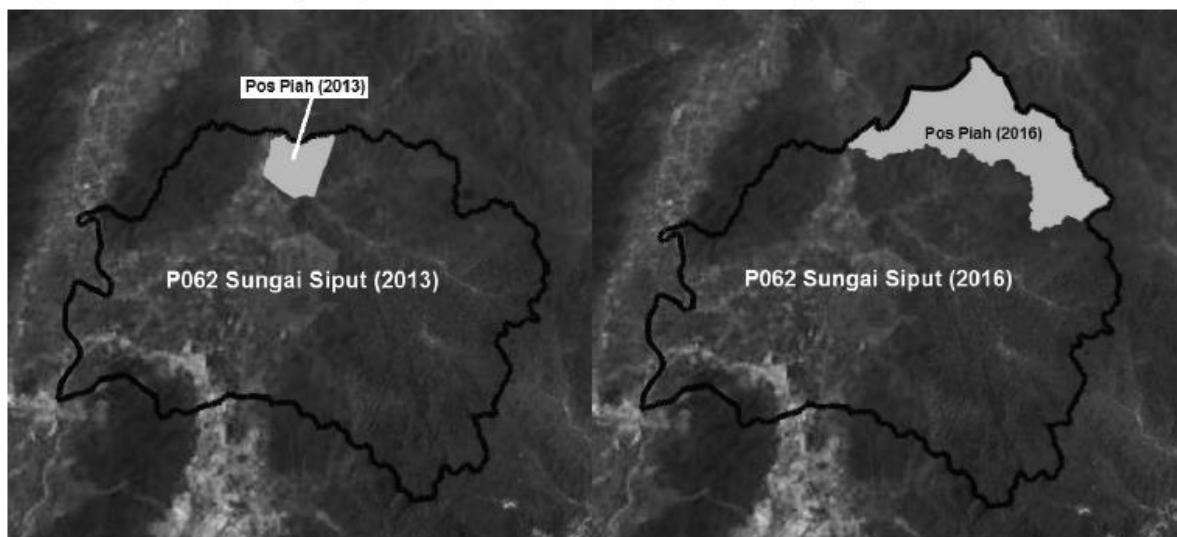
Source: Ooi 2018

Figure 66: Closeup of the Boundary Between Two State Constituencies in Johor State Showing Divided Communities (Malaysia)



Source: Ooi 2018

Figure 67: Boundary Changes to Parliamentary Constituency Sungai Siput and Polling District Pos Piah in Perak (Malaysia)



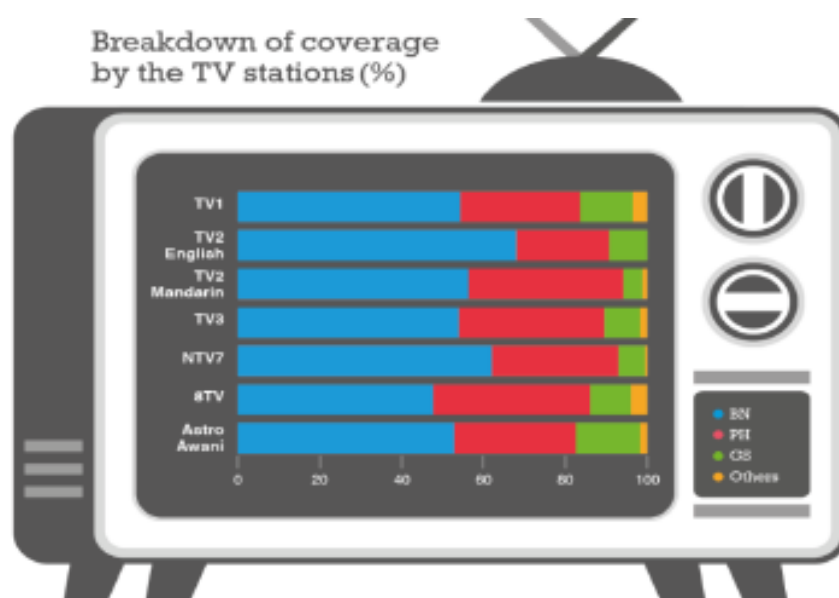
Source: Huat 2020, 225

Figure 68: Ethnic Composition of Districts Between GE13 and GE14 (Malaysia)

	<i>Mixed districts</i> <i>40–60% Malay</i>	<i>Malay dominant</i> <i>>60% Malay</i>	<i>Minority dominant</i> <i><40% Malay</i>	<i>ELF</i>
GE13	48	86	31	.416
GE14	33	102	30	.408

Source: Ostwald 2019, 102

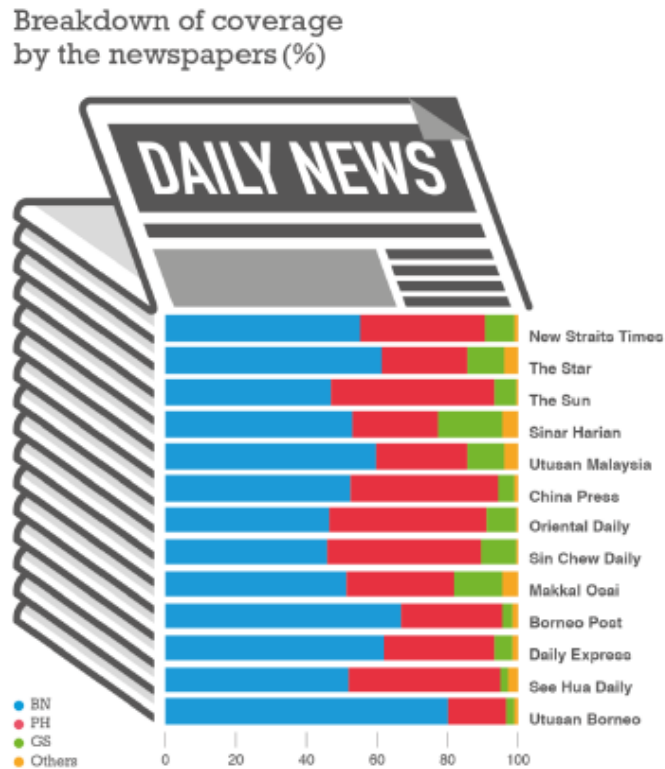
Figure 69: Breakdown of Coverage by the TV Stations in Percent (Malaysia, GE14)



Blue = Barisan National
 Red = Pakatan Harapan
 Green = Gagasan Sejahtera (PAS)
 Yellow = Others

Source: Venkiteswaran 2020, 17

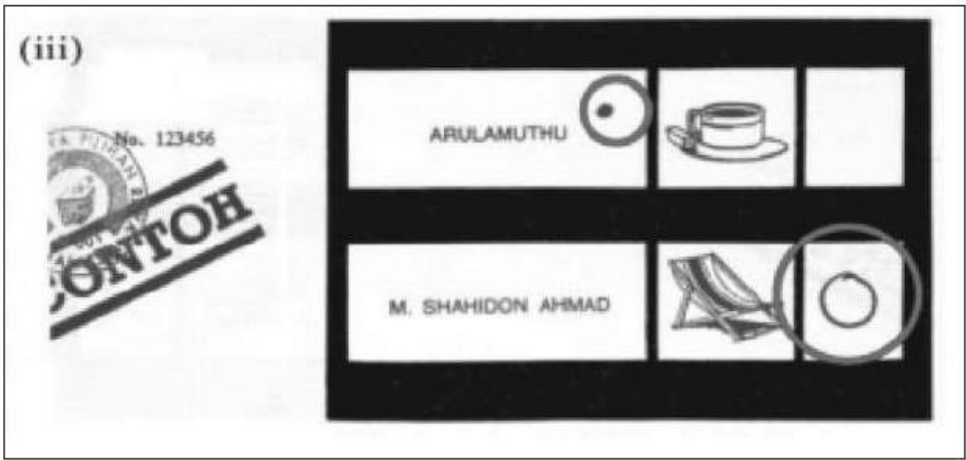
Figure 70: Breakdown of Coverage by Newspapers in Percent (Malaysia, GE14)



Blue = Barisan Nasional
Red = Pakatan Harapan
Green = Gagasan Sejahtera (PAS)
Yellow = Others

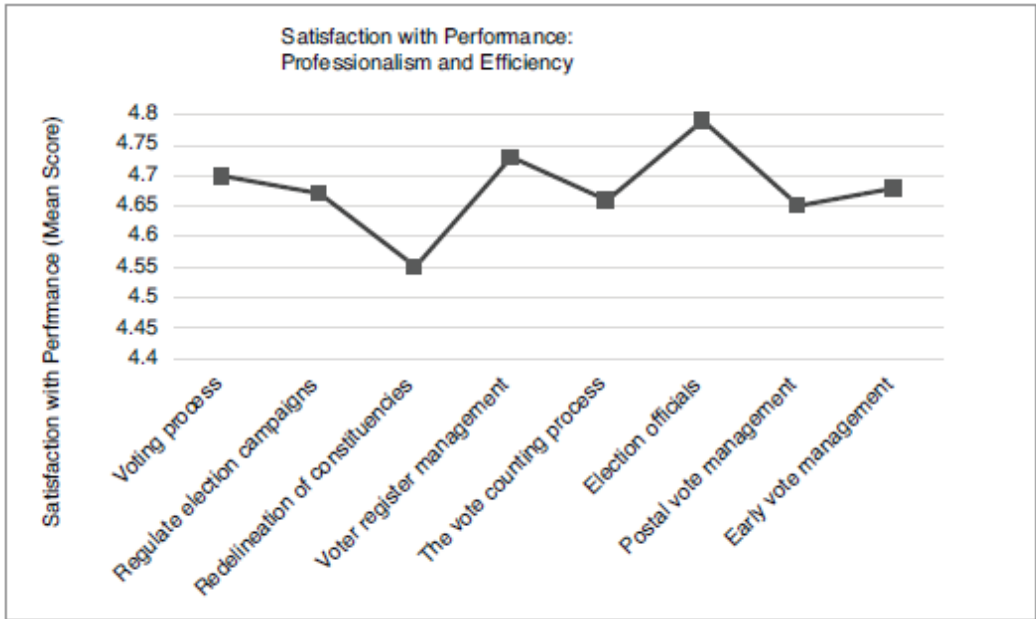
Source: Venkiteswaran 2020, 15

Figure 71: Example From the EC of a Vote That May Be Rejected (Malaysia, GE14)



Source: Bersih 2018b, 73

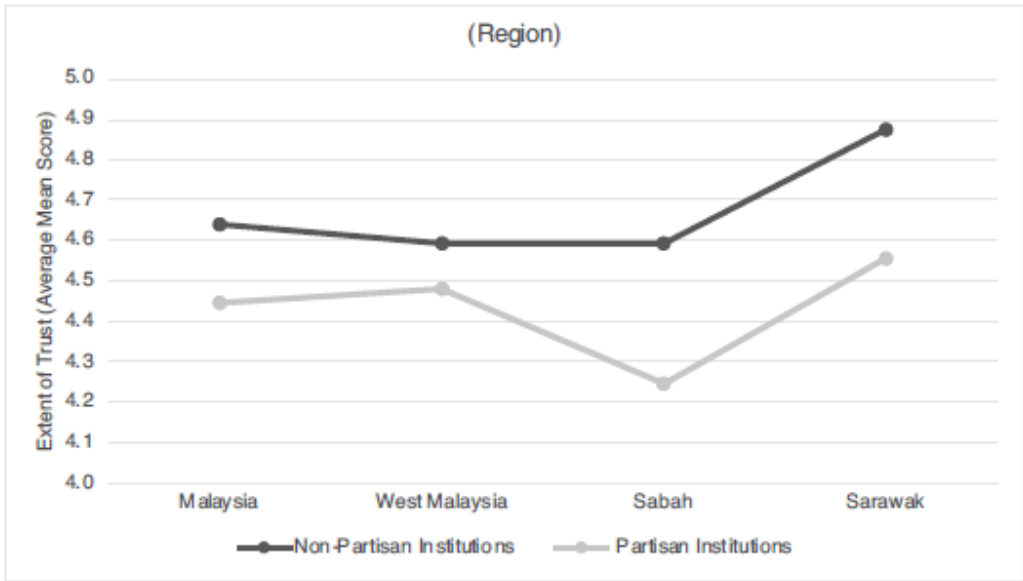
Figure 72: Perception of Election Commission After Malaysia's GE14: Satisfaction with Performance



1 = Very Dissatisfied/Unfree
 7 = Very Satisfied/Absolutely Free

Source: Ting 2021

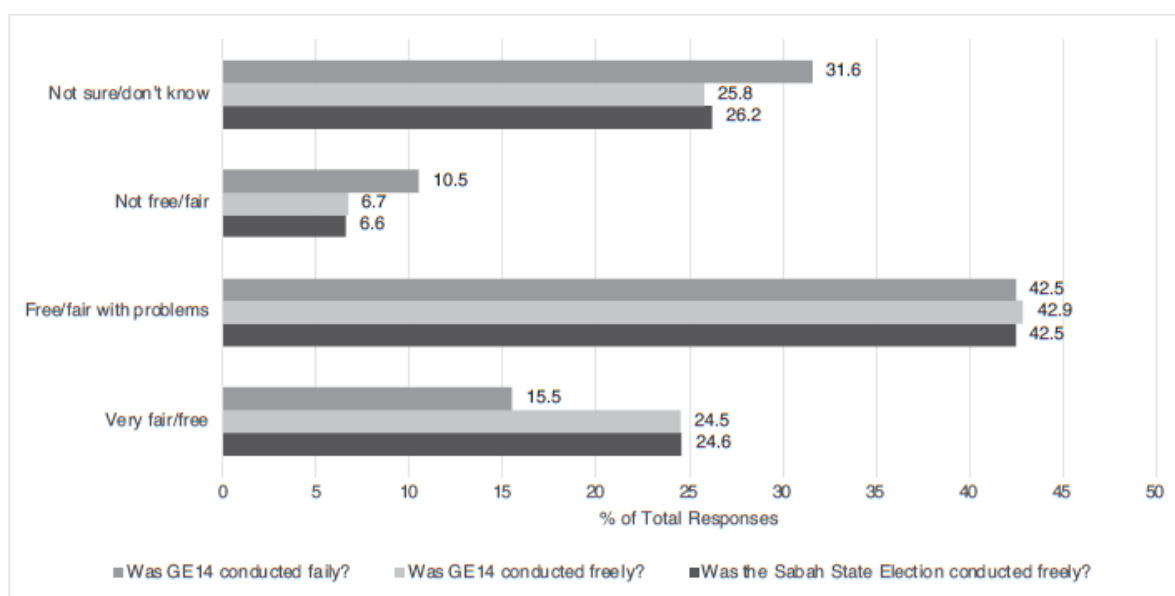
Figure 73: Trust in Institutions by Region after Malaysia's GE14



1 = Very Dissatisfied/Unfree
 7 = Very Satisfied/Absolutely Free

Source: Ting 2021, 41

Figure 74: Perceptions of Free- and Fairness of GE14 (Malaysia)



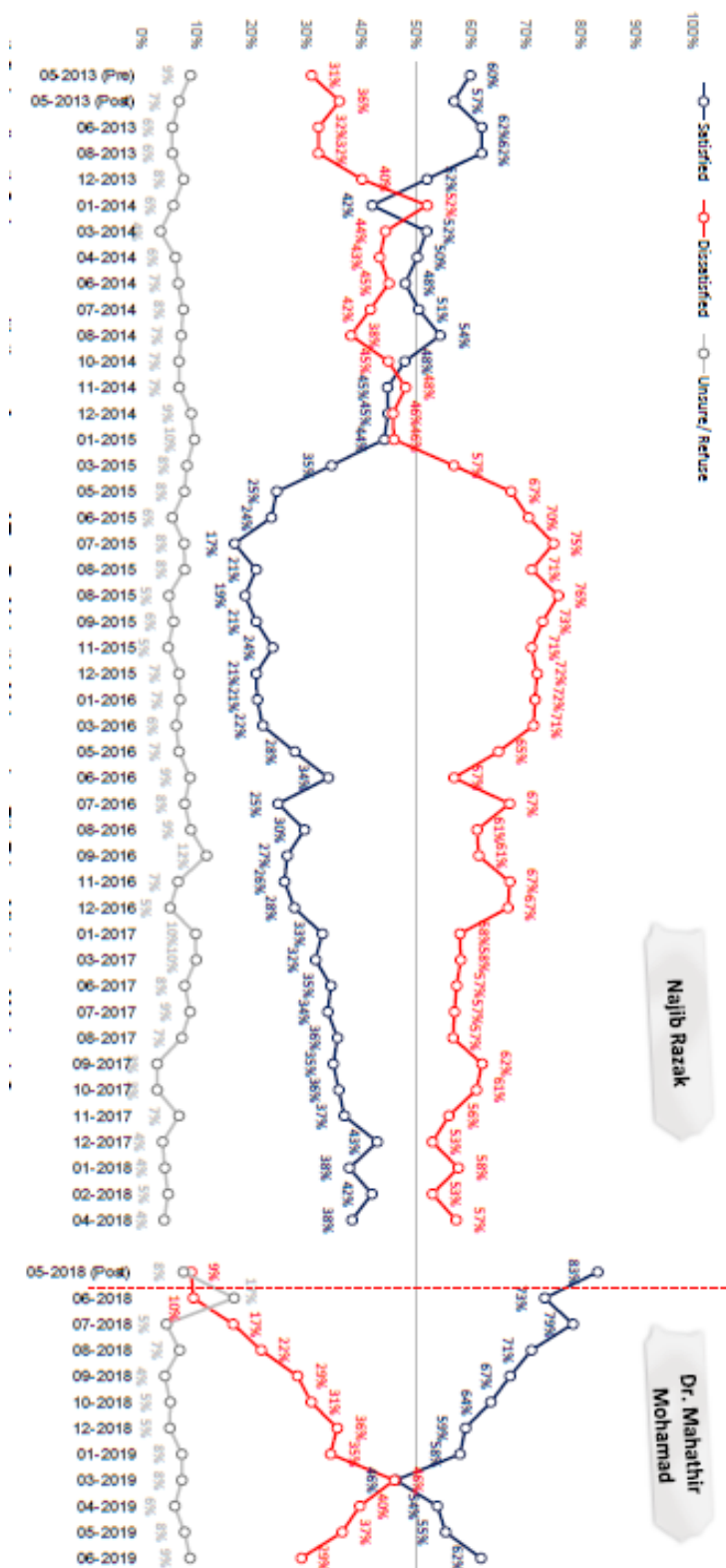
Source: Ting 2021, 50

Figure 75: Rationale Given in Answer to Whether GE14 Was Free and Fair

	Response	Count	Percentage (%)
1.	Followed the right procedure/principle	77	30.8
2.	“We managed to change the government”	37	14.8
3.	Election management issues	84	33.6
4.	Suspicion	21	8.4
5.	Post-election grouses	31	12.4
	<i>Total</i>	250	100

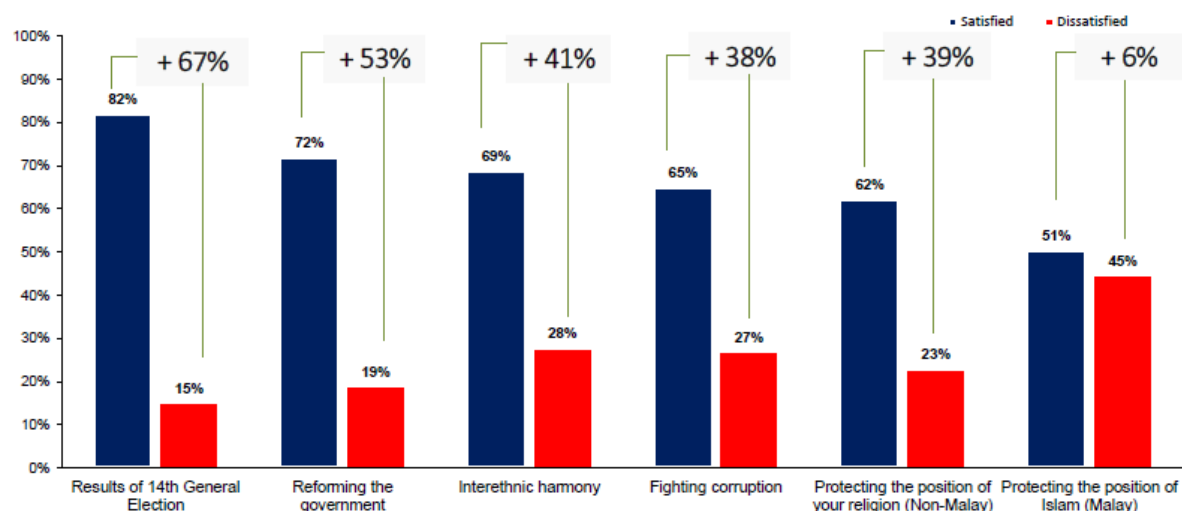
Source: Ting 2021, 53

Figure 76: Prime Minister Approval Rating in Malaysia, 2013-2019



Source: Merdeka Center 2019b, 9

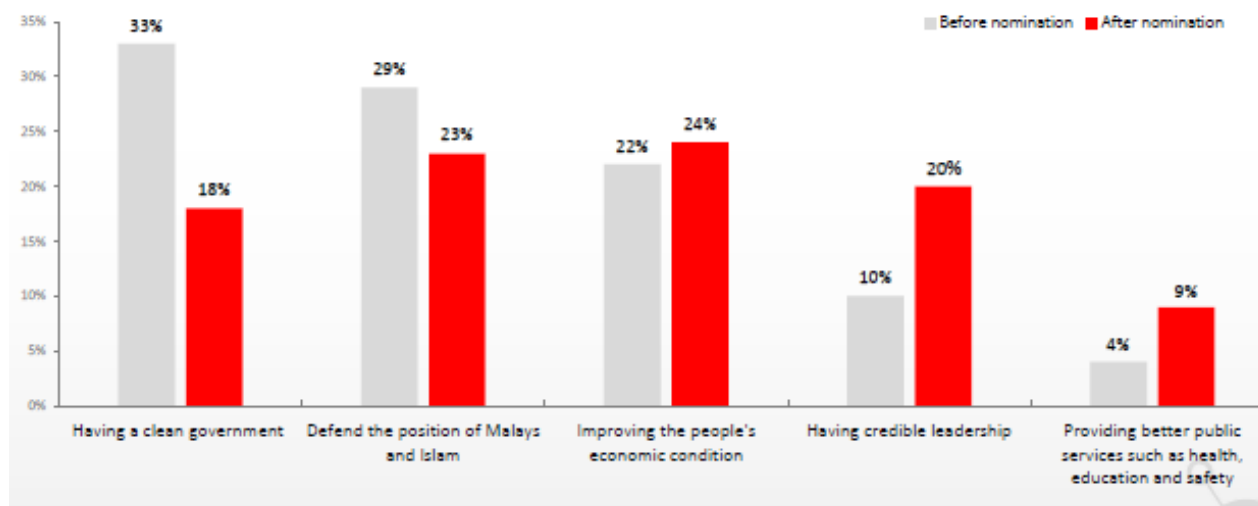
Figure 77: How Satisfied or Dissatisfied Are You With the Government 2018 After the Elections (Malaysia)



Blue = Satisfied
Red = Dissatisfied

Source: Merdeka Center 2018a, 28

Figure 78: Factors Influencing Voting Choice for GE14 (Malaysia)



Grey = Before Nomination
Red = After Nomination

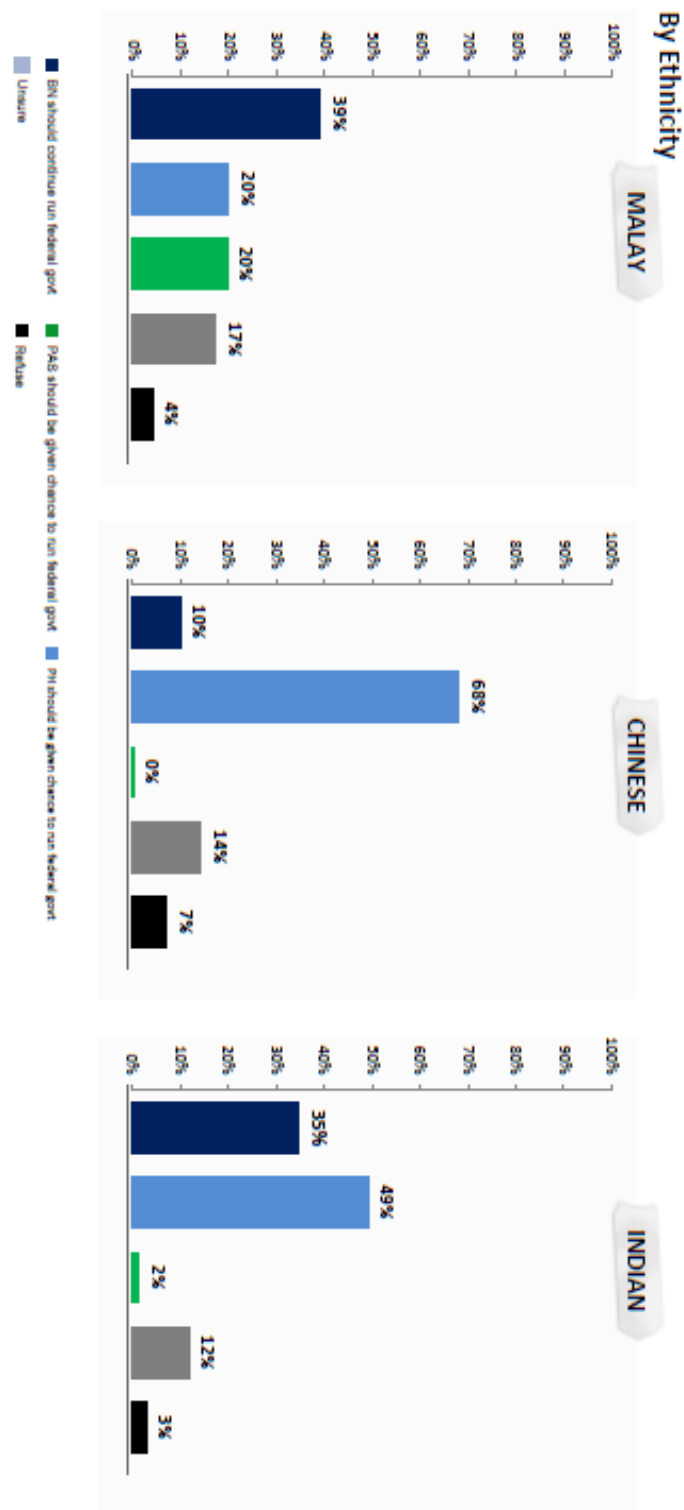
Source: Merdeka Center 2018c, 9

Figure 79: From the Following, Please Choose Two Current Issues That Are Most Important to You at Present (Malaysia, GE14)

Issues	Total (April 2018)	Total (August 2018)	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Muslim Bumiputera	Non Muslim Bumiputera
Inflation	57%	50%	54%	39%	55%	52%	55%
Corruption	37%	32%	25%	48%	23%	30%	31%
Preservation of Malay rights/Fair treatment of all races	12%	21%	18%	29%	27%	11%	21%
Job opportunities	21%	21%	23%	11%	32%	33%	21%
Housing	15%	15%	15%	9%	31%	21%	9%
Worse race relations	5%	9%	9%	9%	6%	4%	14%
Political instability	10%	9%	11%	6%	2%	14%	8%
1MDB case	6%	7%	7%	9%	3%	4%	6%
The allegations against the integrity of Najib Razak	6%	6%	4%	9%	8%	6%	0%
Weakness of the leadership	7%	5%	6%	2%	1%	2%	8%
Implementation of Hudud law	3%	4%	6%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Public transportation	2%	4%	3%	6%	0%	1%	8%

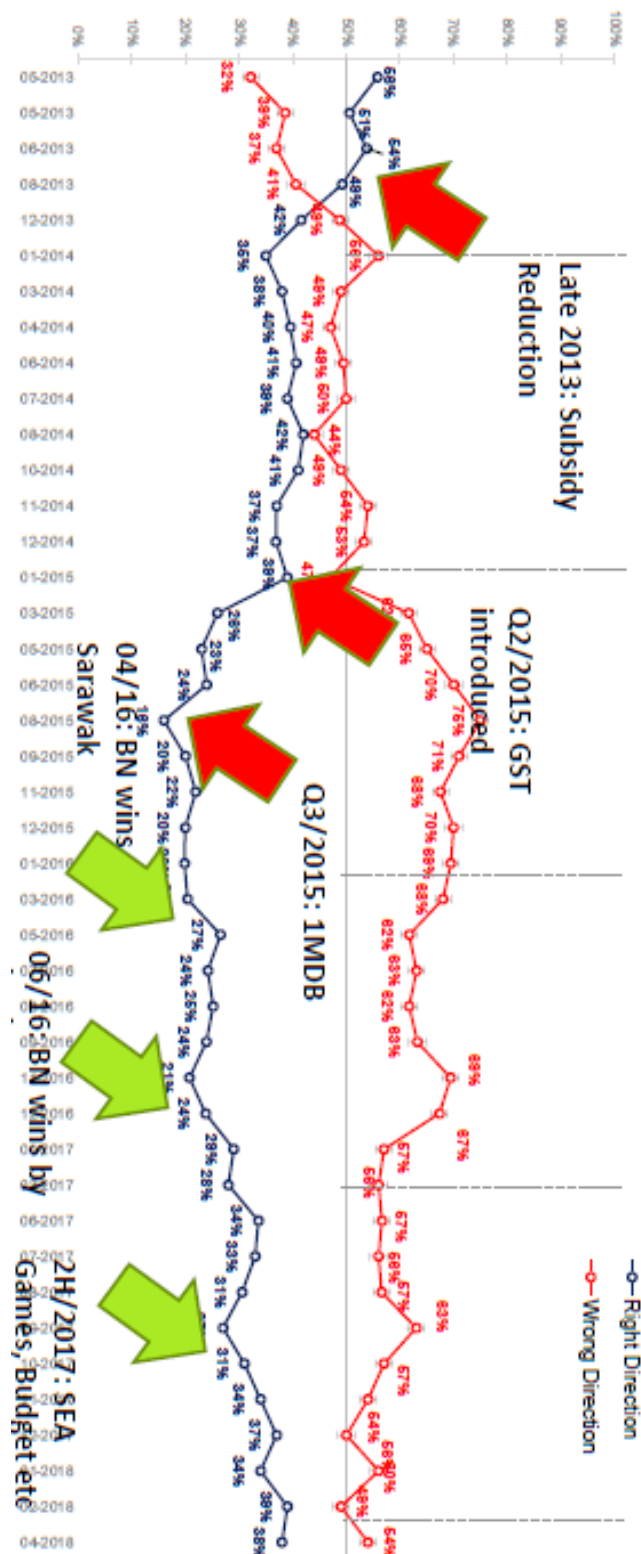
Source: Merdeka Center 2018a, 8

Figure 80: Do You Think That BN Should Continue to Run Federal Government or Do You Feel It Is Time to Let Opposition Parties Like Pakatan Harapan or PAS Be Given a Chance?
(Malaysia, GE14)



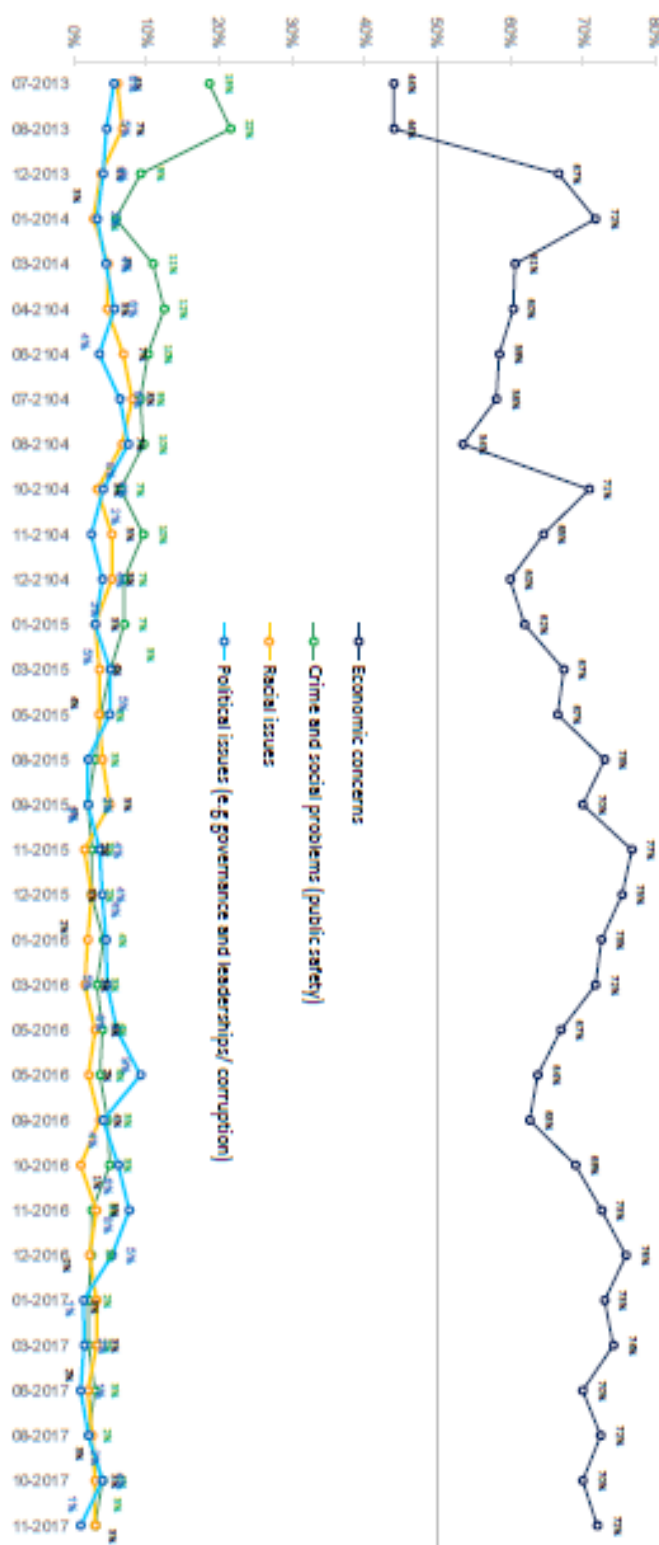
Source: Merdeka Center 2018c, 14

Figure 81: Do You Feel Things in This Country Are Going in the Right Direction, or Do You Feel Things Have Gotten on the Wrong Direction? (Malaysia, 2013-2018)



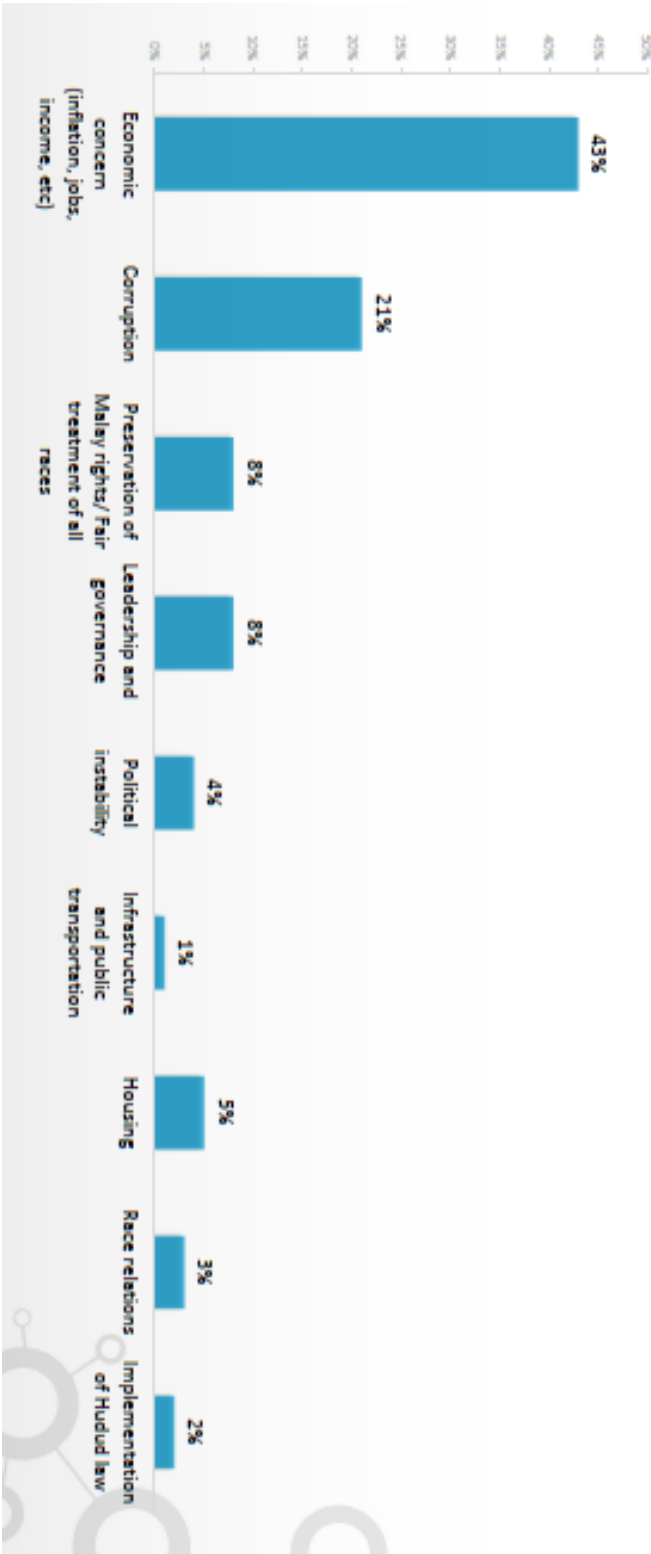
Source: Merdeka Center 2018b, 5

Figure 82: Being as Specific as You Can, What Is the Number One Problem Facing People in This Country Today? (Malaysia, 2013-2017)



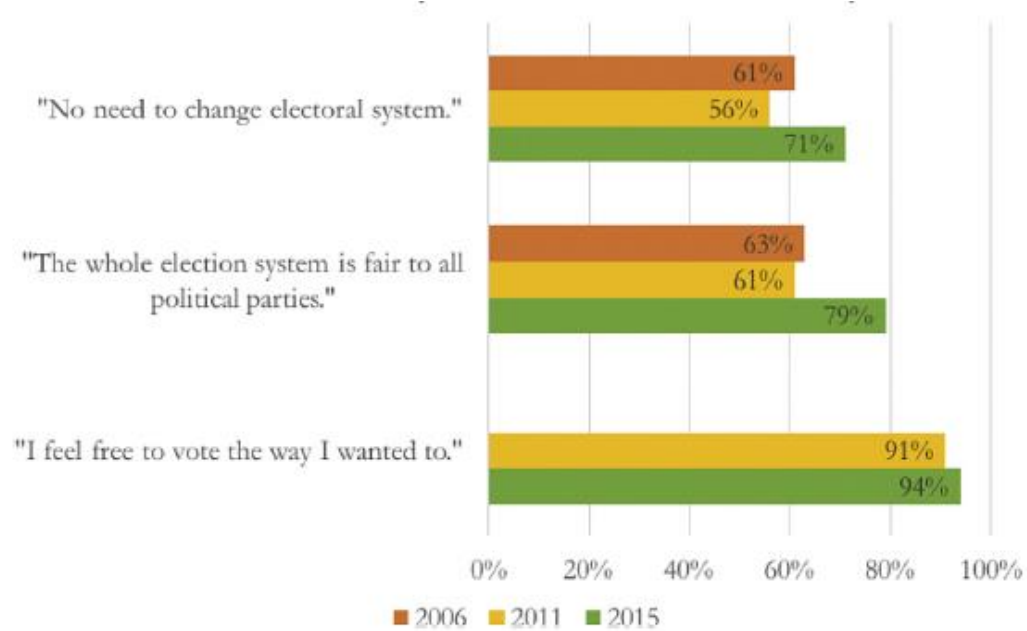
Source: Merdeka Center 2017, 3

Figure 83: From the Following, Please Choose One of the Current Issues That Are Most Important to You at Present (Malaysia, GE14)



Source: Merdeka Center 2018c, 7

Figure 84: Post-Election Survey About Electoral Quality in Singapore (2006-2015)



Source: Ong 2018, 166

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