

Party Politics and Institutional Internal Party Democracy in Malaysia

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Abstract

Internal party democracy shows an intensive examination of the thought, idea and demonstration of democracy within the political parties. Each political party stands for internal party democracy through a course of actions and decisions, made in relation to those which are affiliated with power and authority. In the case of Malaysia where internal party democracies are low level institutionalization where the absence of free and powerful internal conflicts minimize confrontational political culture. It is acknowledged that political parties cannot undertake their democratic activities if they themselves are not democratic in their internal undertakings. It is much more important to understand how the political parties offer themselves to the general voters. These functions show intra-party democracy as crucial for development of institutional democracy. Firstly, it supports a political culture where the democratic argument and collective ownership are in the decision-making process. Secondly, it is practiced party solidarity through the minimizing of factionalism. Thirdly, it offers a reasonable internal conflict resolution framework and fourthly, it reduces pioneering and the discretionary utilization of power. Thus, the degree to which political parties can retain internal party democracy relies on the degree to which procedures of successful membership supports are formally practiced. It is basically actualized in the party's authoritative rules and strategies. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to assess internal party democracy among the major political parties and their political culture and its impact on party politics in Malaysia. Finally, this paper concludes

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by explaining how the prevailing political culture is pushing the country to the brink of an abyss and discusses the way out as well. Methodologically, it is a qualitative in nature and mostly secondary data such as newspaper reports, observers' reports, and research reports have been used to prepare this article.

Keywords: Party Politics, Internal Party Democracy, Institutionalization, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Internal party democracy is associated with the power and authority but it is mostly relied on a course of actions and decisions. These decisions provide a reflection of a party's democratic values and ethos as well as the constituent context, state regulation and legislature of the country. The most crucial issues, political parties must consider with regards to the internal democratic practice of the party's activities. In fact, the fundamental function of political parties is to join all nationals with the government and its affairs (Sartori, 2005). With a view to accepting this role, political parties give support to party individuals, activists, supporters and leaders in the party decision-making process. In addition, internal party democracy suggests all nationals to involve in the political parties' decision-making structures and systems that offer opportunities to a particular citizen to affect those decisions by performing his/her role as a voter (Chambers and Croissant, 2010). In this way, Intra-party democracy is a system that offers significance to high level people participation in the decision-making process. So, when there is a deficiency of such standards, the party may confront institutional and operational difficulties (Ahmad, 2007). There are additionally arguments on the justification and the advantages of internal party democracy. A contention is that the internal party politics will choose fit and competent leaders, define more responsive strategies, and subsequently select a number of prominent candidates for the elections. At a more theoretical level, it is contended that inter party politics will fortify good political culture. Internal party democracy has potential to connect the people to the government, and add to the stability and authenticity of democracy in which these political parties fight for power and authority (Scarow, 2005). This paper discusses the internal party democracies of Malaysia and how they are consistent with the regularity of elections, the decision-making process and the criteria of frequency in leadership change.

INTERNAL PARTY DEMOCRACY IN MALAYSIA

The internal party democracy of Malaysia's major political parties is comparatively more democratic with its periodic party elections

and participatory practice of the decision-making process though leadership changes do not happen frequently. Since the nation's independence, Malaysian Prime Ministers have battled off difficulties from traditionalists in high-stake party elections. The domination of the party presidency is obvious especially within of the DAP where long-standing domination has, through the years skillfully dispensed with internal party restrictions to guarantee its survival (Hwang, I. 2002). The upshot of such strength is that the DAP is currently deprived of a capable and visionary leader. The party is at present considering on how best advancing as a democratic Malaysia in identity within a multi-ethnic society. The PA *Sulama* administration has always advance the party as a source of religious information and as paragon of religious temperance. In this way, while PAS supports open party elections, the *ulama* demands that the party be led by devout and ceremonial *ulama* theocrats (who definitely is a man), independent of whether he has skill or dynamic political vision (Gomez, E. T., 2007). In this way, it is easy to understand why it frequently calls for democratic and meritocratic changes at all level. The party leadership stays undaunted in its definitive of an Islamic state in Malaysia which would follow the Shari'a and its punitive codes. This target holds even for the professionals within the party. So, PAS is progressively okay with the talks on democratization, equity, responsibility, rights and straightforwardness according to the benchmark of Western understanding of democracy (Tan, 1990). On the other hand, family dynasty uncovers factional clashes PKR and is a key instrument to keep the party together. In this case, it is a straight battle with the spouse and wife for PKR leadership. This gives a conflicting perspective to the internal democratic practice and dynastic political issues the party itself.

Regularity in Election

The major political parties in Malaysia keep up their regular practice in their party elections in choosing their leaders with certain contentions. The internal party elections of UMNO are held at regular intervals. UMNO is Malaysia's biggest political party comprising the 14-party national front coalition that has governed Malaysia since the independence from Britain in 1957. About 150,000 UMNO members vote through a discretionary Electoral College system, in which, each of the 191 party regional representatives get the opportunity to select one for every challenged post. The poll is politically critical on the grounds that the party president is, of course, the nation's chief (Moten, 2006). It is critical to see how party interests are kept up in spite of the internal battle during the party internal elections. UMNO held its last party election in October, 2013 after it was deferred to clear the

path for the thirteenth General Election. The election was at first planned to be held in 2012. The current UMNO leadership would end in 2016 while the present parliament will end in 2018. On the other hand, the PKR leadership selection has been effectively done although poor organization has added to the general issues in holding the party elections. The divisional heads are selected for the supreme council. In a way the government controlled media circulated reports on internal battles, voter intimidation, verbal misuse, apparition voters, fixed votes and vandalism at the various PKR divisional offices. Despite discussion of internal party democracy, it is clear right from the beginning of PKR's internal elections that the present party leadership has its particular favored applicants (Fauzi, Hamid, 2007). Likewise, PAS has chosen HadiAwang because they do not want the party to be led by a non-*ulam* group. Even though, two other candidates are qualified to challenge for the party leadership post. VP Ahmad Awang, an *ulama*, and VP DatukHusam Musa had both received the adequate nomination to challenge but support was stronger for HadiAwang. HadiAwang has additionally been given a simple entry to hold the party leadership before. But the same cannot prevail under the current circumstance. The *ulama* group demands for only HadiAwang to be party president. Another group which expects an *ulamato* lead the party, however, does not want HadiAwang. The third group involves the experts and reformists who are vocal for an adjustment or change in the party leadership. Though their claim is vital under the present political atmosphere, each of the three groups makes a demand in this manner. The current issue is not whether HadiAwang has been a decent president but rather if he is qualified to lead PAS into the general election (Function, 2006).

However, all dynastic practices in PKR have diminished and accessed to political influence for the common people who neither have the benefit of having with political influence nor the riches. The votes from the young are becoming a factor in the elements of internal elections (Case, 2001). While Member of Parliament and PKR Vice-president Nurullzzah is seen as the dynastic beneficiary to her father, her opportunity to lead the party is problematic to the party politics and its leadership. In addition, her validity to lead the party is still a central mark issue (Walk 31, 2014. the Malaysian Insider). On the other side, DAP is established as a communist law-based political party since 1965. In the late 1980s, there was a pronounced gap between DAP secretary general Lim Kit Siang and his representative Lee Lam Thye (Siah, 2013). The Bandar Kuala Lumpur MP, Lam Thye retired from the party before the 1990 general election. His quiet withdrawal from the political party got open appreciation and gained as the gentle man

legislator tag. At the point, DAP was small in size and battling to establish itself as political party. Since then it has developed in stature and wields political power in a few states. Since 2006, DAP Deputy Chairman is Tan SengGiaw, the Member of Parliament (MP) for Kepong and the other four prominent members are Vice-Chairman M. Kulasegaran, MP for Ipoh Barat, Zulkifli Mohammad Noor, Chow KonYeow and Richard Wong. DAP, likewise, has a Central Executive Committee (CEC). In 2004, 402 (out of 591 total national agents) representatives were available to vote in favor of individuals from the CEC (Thomas, 2007).

COMPARISONS AMONG THE PARTIES

Most important is that the Malaysian political parties follow the regularity of their leadership selection process as I earlier stated and they elect their leaders every three years for the party positions. UMNO the following 26 years had picked its party president and his deputy without voting and by recognition. In the party elections, UMNO retreated to legitimate elections for the two top leaders. But nobody dares to challenge Prime Minister of Malaysia. Holding internal party elections as per the time set by its constitution would demonstrate a level of maturity in UMNO. PAS is currently one of three groups as the party gets ready for its internal elections. Datuk Seri HadiAwang has never contested since assuming control of the party after the passing away of DatukFadzilMohd Noor (Motin, 2006). Though Datuk Seri Abdul HadiAwang may be having restless nights but it is not out of paranoia of losing the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) leadership. He has held the post for more than 10 years. HadiAwang has no hesitations in handing over the Islamist leadership to another for any length of time so long as the candidate is a superior leader than him. He does not expect PAS which is an Islamic movement, would be led by non-ulama.Anwar Ibrahim of PKR, the de facto leader is not challenging for any party position. The most recent voting in favor for the top leadership post was held from October 29th to November 21st, 2015, just before the beginning of the party's national congress on November 26th-28th.

PKR's internal regularity of elections creates a talk among husband and wife as well as daughter. So, political parties run by families even though it conflicts with the thought of fair democracy. But DAP was led by Lim Kit Siang as chief from 1999 to 2004. He served as General Secretary of the party subsequent to 1969. In 2004, he stepped down as the new party chief. His son Lim Guan Eng became the Secretary-General. Lim chose to take an admonitory role as Chairman of DAP Policy and Strategic Planning Commission. Lim remains an opposition leader. Thus, most of the

major Malaysian political parties have a regular process of choosing their party leaders.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The decision-making procedure for the Malaysian political parties is based on the discussion of central headquarters. UMNO leaders are chosen after every three years by the general assembly. The supreme council consists of 45 party members manages the everyday decisions for the party. The most powerful positions in the board are held by the president, deputy president, five VPs, treasurer and secretary general as well as the information chief. At the state level, the state advisory groups are deployed by the supreme council which oversees the party exercises. UMNO, likewise, has divisional offices in every state. The divisional boards are chosen at regular intervals by the branch delegates. Individuals at the grassroots level choose the branch workplaces and delegates at regular intervals. The party's general assembly is consists of individuals from the preeminent members of the supreme council and representatives from 13 states, 165 divisions, and 17,485 branches (Hwang, 2002). Branch and divisional party councils are controlled by party regular elections and these local workplaces have the power to set local plans and assign winning candidate with approval from the central office. Before the 2000 general party assembly, party president Mahathir prescribed to the supreme council that there is no challenge for the post of president and deputy-president. Accordingly, the supreme council can expand divisional nominations before the selection of the hopeful candidate for the general poll.

Like the other Malaysian political parties, PAS decision-making procedure is from the bottom up. In PAS the local level party offices have the capacity to nominate hopeful candidates although central panel makes the decision and provide options. The central advisory group meets once per month to talk about party matters. Though, PAS believes that its decision-making procedure is adaptable with taking into account of new perspectives. Party prefers to response to the people's wishes particularly decisions associated with the non-Muslims (Kamaulnizam, 1999). In DAP the central official advisory group makes key decisions. It is composed of certain members including one delegate from each state. There are five advisory groups at the national level to facilitate youth, control state ladies and open strategies. State, division, and branch workplaces have the capacity to choose their committees, present resolutions and nominate candidate for the elections. But they regularly take after the central mandates of advisory group. The advisory group, for instance, very often rejects the selection

recommendations from the local workplaces. The national council meets once every three years to talk the party situation and choose party officials. In the same way, PKR has also an official advisory group which makes decisions with consultation of information chief, treasurer, and secretary-general. PKR leader Dr. Wan Azizah has the power to fill a few selected party positions. So, some disappointed individuals claim that several choices are made at the party high level rather than the state advisory group of which each divisional head is a part. Under the PKR constitution, the top decision-making body is the advisory group (Hamid, 2008). Even if the issues are not settled, for instance, Wan Azizah can choose two VPs and seven preeminent supreme council members. The state chairpersons are not chose rather appointed by the party administration.

Party elections brought about polarization within the party. As the party develops, PKR members can see the need for clearer decision making procedures.

COMPARISONS AMONG THE PARTIES

The highest powerful body of the party and the general assembly decides on party strategies and approaches. Although UMNO party positions are controlled by the election yet the challenges for the most elevated posts are demoralized. There are few decisions made singularly by the leader. Parties settle decisions without asking for the opinions of party members. But in PAS, the most imperative decisions are made at the general assembly of the party. There are few advances made at the central stage of the party. The central council is changed consistently. For instance, in late June 2001 PAS election, number of young individuals voted to the board. Moreover, PAS is being ruled by the traditionalists and decision-making is hierarchical at various levels. On the other hand, DAP characterizes its decision-making as democratic, decentralized and open. For instance, when DAP was considering to join the opposition coalition, the party confirmed the thought with party individuals and constituents the nation over. The party does not, on the other hand, have customary elections on the choices and strategies. Several political parties both opposition and state power, frequently say that DAP is extremely centralized that the top authorities make most decisions for the party. But PKR makes decisions in a democratic way. The party is decentralized with regards to state divisions and branch workplaces because it has the capacity to make its own choices about local matters and potential candidates for national poll. But the final decision is from the party's central command. So it is evident that almost all of the

political party's central command holds an absolute decision-making power.

FREQUENCY IN LEADERSHIP CHANGE

In Malaysia, internal party democracy in terms of frequency in leadership changes still persist a question. Most political party top leaderships do not change frequently as in the UMNO, PAS, PKR but a sequence of leadership changes happen in the DAP. These changes did not happen smoothly and timely because of having a strong passion to stay in power. If we see UMNO in 1951, OnnJaafar left UMNO, Tunku Abdul Rahman replaced Dato' Onn as UMNO President. In 1954, Tunku became the first Prime Minister of Malaya (Adam, Samuri, 2008) and later UMNO is led by Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak.

Table 1 President and Secretary Generals of UMNO from 1946 to

Presidents	Period	Secretary Generals	Period
OnnJaafar	1946-1951	Abdul Wahab Abdul Aziz	1946-1947
Tunku Abdul Rahman	1951-1971	ZainalAbidinAbas	1947-1950
Abdu Razak Hussein	1971-1976	Hussein Onn	1950-1955
Hussein Onn	1976-1981	KhiriJohari	1955-
Mahathir Mohamad	1981-2003	Syed JaafarAlbar	1960-
Abdullah Ahmad Badawi	2003-2009	SanusiJunid	1984-1988
NajibRazak	2009-2015	Mohamed Rahmat	1988-1996
		Mohd Khalil Yaakob	1999-2004
		MohdRadzi Sheikh Ahmad	2004-2008
		Tengku Adnan TengkuMonsor	2008-2015

2015

(Source: Party office, the Presidents and General Secretaries of the UMNO since the party formation, Department of Publication of UMNO).

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, however, was unchallenged as party president when UMNO Baru was formed in 1987. It took a long time to be stable into the party. Since Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was the favored option from Dr. Mahathir to succeed as Prime Minister, the UMNO Supreme Council coordinated challenges for the main two party positions (Kamarudin, 2005). Political standards were neglected, political execution was untested, political thoughts were unexamined and political responsibility to popularity based society was unaccounted. If liberal democratic practices are thrown to the winds whereas internal party democracy is either disregarded or contained. UMNO today is not based on meritocracy but rather political support and family associations (Kamarudin, 2005).

Likewise, PAS first president was Ahmad Fuad Hassan. He kept the party position until 1953 when he lost support from the PAS (Farish, 2014). PAS swung to Abbas Alias, a western-

educated therapeutic specialist as its second president. However, he did not perform a dynamic role in the party (Funston, 1976). Burhan Uddin another PAS visionary leader was motivated towards liberal Islamism. He had been discharged from the PAS leadership as he was sick. Burhan Uddin passed away in October 1969 and was replaced as PAS's President by his successor Asri Muda (Farish, 2014). In 1980, the party succeeded in choosing Yusof Rawa for the leadership of PAS in excluding Asri follower Abu Bakar Omar (Sundaram, Jomo, Shabery 1988). By 1989, Yusof had turned out from PAS's President for his physical incapability and was replaced by Fadzil Noor, another member from the ulama group. After the passing away of Fadzil Noor in 2002, Abdul Hadi Awang substituted PAS is a conservative priest. He had tried to make PAS an Islamist belief system for all (Chin Tong, 2007).

Table 2 Presidents of PAS from 1951 to 2015

President	Period
Ahmad Fuad Hassan	1951-1953
Abbas Alias	1953-1956
Burhanuddin al- Helmy	1956-1969
MohamadAsriMuda	1969-1982
YusofRawa	1983-1989
Fadzil bin Muhammad Noor	1989-2002
Abdul HadiAwang	2002-2015

(Source: Party office, the Presidents and General Secretaries of the PAS since the party formation, Department of Publication of PAS).

The PAS party election toward the end of November 2014 saw party president Datuk Seri Abdul HadiAwang return unopposed and deputy president MohamadSabu, likewise, holding the post against his challenger, Kelantan Deputy Menteri Besar, DatukMohd Amar Nik Abdullah (Farish, 2014). However, DAP founded in 1965, comprises ex individuals from the People's Action Party, including one previous President of Singapore, Devan

Nair. DAP proclaimed for a free, democratic and communist Malaysia (Goh, 1994).

Table 3 President and Secretary Generals of DAP from 1965 to 2015

President	Period	Secretary General	Period
Chen Man Hin	1965-1999	C.V. Devan Nair	1965-1968
Lim Kit Siang	1999-2004	Goh Hock Guan	1968-1969
Karpal Singh	2004-2014	Lim Kit Siang	1969-1999
Tan KokWai	2014-Present	Kerk Kim Hock	1999-2004
		Lim Guan Eng	2004-2015

(Source: Party office, the Presidents and General Secretaries of the DAP since the party formation, Department of Publication of DAP).

But most remarkable, PKR's de facto leader, the previous deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim seems to support one of the party's VP Azmin Ali who elected as deputy president. Azmin a PKR prominent figure was Anwar's private secretary. AzminZaid Ibrahim was selected as deputy president of the party administration. He had just joined the PKR in June 2009.

COMPARISONS AMONG THE PARTIES

Among the political parties in Malaysia, UMNO exercises the most dominant power in the political arena. UMNO leader plays both roles as Prime Minister of the country and as party President respectively. For instance, Mahathir Mohamad was the longest serving UMNO President and Prime Minister of the country. He was the unchallenged party president for long period of time. So, leadership does not change frequently in UMNO. Other factors may affect the UMNO leadership in public administration while coming money matters during the UMNO elections. But the use of the Electoral College framework has demonstrated UMNO's reality in making the party more open, comprehensive and democratic as conceived by UMNO president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak. PAS is also a political party where leadership does not change frequently as it consists of a number of groups. As party exercises has reflected after the change of its name in 1971 from the "Persatuan Islam Se-Malaysia" (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Association) to the "Parti Islam Se-Malaysia" (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party). PAS is led by Muslim groups (ulama), for example, Nik Abdul Aziz Nik

Mat and Abdul Hadi Awang. PAS leader did not expect the party to be led by the non-ulama groups. But if we watch the changes to the DAP leadership closely we might notice Chen Man Hin served a long period of time as DAP President. Another leader Lim Guan Eng was the rising leader of DAP for a long time. Though Anwar Ibrahim is serving a de facto leader but his control over the party is sometimes stressing. As a result, Zaid turned down the chance to challenge the PKR administration. But Anwar's wife, Wan Azizah Wan Ismail held the position unopposed. So, the party leadership changes did not happen frequently even though its elections conducted timely. But the top positions did not change democratically.

CONCLUSION

For a democratic system to work efficiently, it is necessary to have a democratic culture within the political parties. In this way, political parties are the mirror image of the national democratic system. Parties, therefore, are expected to practice periodic change of leadership, democratic election of leaders and democratic ways of decision making. The more dynamic the parties are in these issues, the more they will be competitive, efficient, accountable and democratic. However, in practice political parties in the developing countries are hard democratic internally. Malaysian political parties are no exception in this regard. Comparatively, Malaysian political parties maintain a better profile compared to their counterparts. In terms of frequency in leadership change, the three old political parties in Malaysia have relatively frequent and regular leadership changes. Only PKR has maintained no change during the past one and a half decade. However, with regards to decision making and party elections, the political parties in Malaysia have become close to each other, though the few political parties are more dictatorial in their decision-making and in keeping party elections at bay. Malaysian parties have the tendency of maintaining regularity in elections even though there are alleged manipulations in the process. At the end, in terms of internal party democracy the Malaysian political parties perform better in their political culture.

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