



**COALITION POLITICS AMONG OPPOSITION PARTIES
IN MALAYSIA: A CASE STUDY OF PAKATAN
RAKYAT (2008-2016)**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the internal politics in Pakatan Rakyat (PR) component political parties (i.e. PKR, PAS and DAP) as the coalition opposition parties in Malaysia from 2008 to 2015. The PR was the first coalition of opposition parties in Malaysia that managed to deny Barisan Nasional of their two thirds majority in the 2008 general elections and won the popular vote in the 2013 general elections. This study is based on the assumption that there was a linkage between PR's strength and contributions and various challenges that the PR faced. Political conflicts that constrained the coalition stability in PR leading to its dissolution are investigated. The study employs Arend Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy as a framework for the analysis. The study argues that the PR as the opposition coalition in Malaysia was stronger than Barisan Alternatif (BA) or Pakatan Harapan (PH). The study found that hudud issues were the main factors that led to the dissolution of PR. However, it was also found that the main unifying element that kept the parties together in PR was main leader in politics, Anwar Ibrahim. Given the findings of this study, to achieve better electoral results, opposition coalitions in Malaysia would need to work out a better strategy to accommodate component parties with diverse ideological positions.

ملخص البحث

درس هذا البحث السياسات الداخلية في الأحزاب السياسية المكونة لـ "باكاتان رعية" أو تحالف الشعب (Pakatan Rakyat, PR)، (المكون من الأحزاب السياسية PKR، و PAS، و DAP) والذي لعب دور التحالف السياسي المعارض في ماليزيا من ٢٠٠٨ إلى ٢٠١٥. كان تحالف الشعب التحالف السياسي الأول لأحزاب المعارضة في ماليزيا الذي تمكن من سلب باريسان ناسيونال من أغلبية ثلثي البرلمان في الانتخابات العامة لعام ٢٠٠٨، وفاز بتصويت الشعب في الانتخابات العامة عام ٢٠١٣. استندت هذه الدراسة إلى افتراض أن هناك صلة بين قوة تحالف الشعب ومساهماته والتحديات المختلفة التي واجهته. تم التحقيق في الصراعات السياسية التي حدثت من استقرار تحالف الشعب والتي أدت إلى انحلاله. استعملت الدراسة نظرية آريند لايبهارت للديمقراطية التوافقية كإطار للتحليل. شددت الدراسة أن تحالف الشعب كتحالف معارض في ماليزيا كان أقوى من "باريسان ألتيرناتيف أو الجبهة البديلة" (Barisan Alternatif, BA) ومن "باكاتان هارابان أو تحالف الأمل" (Pakatan Harapan, PH). وجدت الدراسة أن القضايا المتعلقة بتطبيق حدود الشرعية كانت العوامل الرئيسة التي أدت إلى تفكك تحالف الشعب. ومع ذلك، تبين أيضا أن العنصر الموحد الرئيس الذي أبقى الأحزاب السياسية معا في تحالف الشعب كان الرئيس العام في السياسة، أنور إبراهيم. وبالنظر إلى النتائج التي توصلت إليها هذه الدراسة فإنه من أجل تحقيق نتائج انتخابية أفضل، فإن التحالفات السياسية المعارضة في ماليزيا بحاجة إلى العمل على وضع استراتيجيات أفضل لاستيعاب الأحزاب المكونة مع المواقف الإيديولوجية المختلفة.

APPROVAL PAGE

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Nur Iffah Bt Hairi*

*My Second Family
Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Islam Malaysia (PKPIM)
Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM)
Wadah Pencerdasan Umat (WADAH)*

“To Mak No, Abah Ramli, Angah, Kak Der, Abg Hafiz, Amy”

-This would never be possible without your shared love, indeed-

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Abstract in Arabic.....	iii
Approval Page	iv
Declaration	v
Copyright	vi
Dedication	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
List of Tables.....	xi
List of Charts.....	xii
List of Abbreviation.....	xiii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the Study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	2
1.3 Significance of the Study	3
1.4 Research Objectives	5
1.5 Research Questions.....	6
1.6 Literature Review	6
1.6.1 The General Overview of Opposition Parties in Other Countries and their Similarities to Pakatan Rakyat (PR)	7
1.6.2 The Party System in Malaysia Focussing on Historical Coalition among the Opposition Parties in Malaysia	13
1.6.3 The Pakatan Rakyat (PR) in General.....	18
1.7 Theoretical Framework	22
1.8 Methodology.....	25
1.9 Chapter Outline.....	27
CHAPTER TWO: THE PARTY SYSTEM IN MALAYSIA	30
2.1 Introduction	30
2.2 The Party System in Malaysia	31
2.3 Malaysia: A Dominant Party System (1957-1998): From Parti Perikatan to the Barisan Nasional.....	32
2.4 The Opposition in Malaysia: Pakatan Rakyat Parties.....	36
2.4.1 Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS).....	36
2.4.2 Parti Democratic Action Party (DAP)	39
2.4.3 Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR)	40
2.5 Broken Monopoly: From the Barisan Alternatif (BA) to the Pakatan Harapan (PH).....	42
2.5.1 The Barisan Alternatif (BA, 1998-2004)	42
2.5.2 The Pakatan Rakyat (PR, 2008-2015)	45
2.5.3 The Pakatan Harapan (PH, 2015 until now)	51
2.6 The Performance of Pakatan Rakyat Parties in General Elections by Coalition Building with Other Parties	55
2.6.1 Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS).....	55
2.6.2 Democratic Action Party (DAP)	57

2.6.3 Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR)	60
2.7 Conclusion.....	62
CHAPTER THREE: THE OPPOSITION COALITION IN MALAYSIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPURTINITIES.....	64
3.1 Introduction	64
3.2 Fundamental Ideological Differences	65
3.3 Pakatan Rakyat Common Policy Framework.....	67
3.4 The Joint Manifesto and Campaigns.....	73
3.5 Distribution of Seats	75
3.6 The Selangor Chief Minister Crisis (2014)	77
3.7 Political Attacks from Incumbent Party.....	79
3.8 Winning People's Confidence.....	80
3.9 Conclusion.....	82
CHAPTER FOUR: THE COLLAPSE OF THE PAKATAN RAKYAT (PR)	84
4.1 Introduction	84
4.2 De Facto Leader of Anwar Ibrahim	85
4.3 Islamic State and Implementation of Hudud.....	88
4.4 Clash of Ideologies	91
4.5 No Longer Focusing on the Issues.....	92
4.6 Personalities and Power	95
4.7 Political Attacks by Barisan Nasional (BN): Organisation	97
4.8 Political Attacks by Barisan Nasional (BN): Individual	98
4.9 The Fear of the People	100
4.10 Conclusion.....	103
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION: SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	105
5.1 Summary	105
5.2 Findings.....	108
5.3 Recommendations for Pakatan Harapan (PH) or Coalition among the Opposition Parties	114
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	117
APPENDIX I QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW	132
APPENDIX II INTERVIEWEES	134

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Percentage of Vote Share and Seats Won	36
Table 2.2	Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) National Leadership 2015-2017	38
Table 2.3	Democratic Action Party (DAP)'s National Leadership 2015-2017	40
Table 2.4	People's Justice Party (PKR)'s National Leadership 2014-2016	41
Table 2.5	Election result for the Dewan Rakyat seat of P93 Sungai Besar, Selangor in 2016 and 2013	54
Table 2.6	Election result for the Dewan Rakyat seat of P67 Kuala Kangsar, Perak in 2016 and 2013	55
Table 2.7	Seats Won by PAS in General Elections, 1955-2013	57
Table 2.8	Seats Won by DAP in General Elections, 1969-2013	60
Table 2.9	Seats Won by PKR in General Elections, 1999-2013	62
Table 3.1	Approaches to Key Issues/Problems in Election Manifestos	71
Table 3.2	Political Manifestos: 12th Malaysian General Election (GE12) & 13th Malaysian General Election (GE13)	73

LIST OF CHARTS

Pie Chart 3.1	The Percentage Distribution of Seats by Pakatan Rakyat (PR) Component Parties in 12th Malaysian General Election (GE12)	77
Pie Chart 3.2	The Percentage Distribution of Seats by Pakatan Rakyat (PR) Component Parties in 13th Malaysian General Election (GE13)	77

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

ABIM	Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia
AIR	Angkatan Insaf Rakyat
APU	Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah
BA	Barisan Alternatif (Alternative Front)
BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
BR	Barisan Rakyat (People's Front)
DAP	Democratic Action Party
DPJ	Democratic Party
DUN	Dewan Undangan Negeri (State Legislative Assembly)
GAGASAN	Gagasan Rakyat
HAK	Harakah Keadilan Rakyat
KDM	Koalisiyon ng Daang Matuwid
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MP	Member of Parliament
MSC	Malaysian Solidarity Convention
NPA	National Democratic Alliance
PAS	Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (Pan- Islamic Party of Malaysia)
PBB	Partai Bulan Bintang
PNP	People's New Party
PH	Pakatan Harapan
PGP	Partido ng Galing at Puso
PKB	Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa
PKP	Partai Keadilan dan Persatuan Indonesia
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People's Justice Party)
PKS	Partai Keadilan Sejahtera
PPM	Parti Pekerja Malaysia (Malaysian Workers Party)
PPP	Partai Persatuan Pembangunan
PR	Pakatan Rakyat (PR)
PRM	Parti Rakyat Malaysia (People's Party of Malaysia)
PRS	Parti Rakyat Sarawak (Sarawak People's Party)
PSM	Parti Sosialis Malaysia (Socialist Party of Malaysia)
PAN	Parti Amanah Malaysia Negara (National Trust Islamic Party)
PPBM	Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SF	Socialist Front
UMNO	United Malay National Organisation
UNA	United Nationalist Alliance

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This is a case study of coalition building among opposition parties in Malaysia covering the period between 2008 and 2016. The main focus of the study is the opposition coalition known as Pakatan Rakyat (PR). The study aims to achieve the following objectives. First, this study will explain the nature of the party system in Malaysia. Second, it will analyse how Pakatan Rakyat dealt with the various political challenges that it faced. Third, it will examine the reasons for the dissolution of PR.

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country with a relatively high percentage of minorities. By 2015, Malaysia's total population had increased to more than 30.3 million. In 2015, Bumiputeras constituted 62.04% of the population while Chinese constituted 22.78%; Indians, 6.60%; and other Malaysians 0.99%. Non-Malaysian citizens account for 2.6 million people, or 8.58% of the country's population (Ministry of Human Resources, 2015).

Coalition building is therefore an important strategy used by political parties to unite and attract support from the different communities in the country. Pakatan Rakyat (PR) was a coalition among the opposition parties in Malaysia which included the Parti Tindakan Demokratik (Democratic Action Party- DAP), Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People's Justice Party- PKR) and Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS). PR was initially formed in 2008 and continued to exist until 2015 as a reconstitution of the previously existing opposition coalition known as the Barisan Alternatif (BA).

The study seeks to examine the strengths and the weaknesses of the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) coalition and the factors that led to the breakdown of the PR in 2015 (Mohd Nawab, Saravamuttu, Hock and Johan, 2016). The analysis will help identify some important trends that have shaped the opposition coalition politics in Malaysia in recent history.

The strength of a coalition depends on its internal cohesion. In the case of PR the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim was an important binding factor for the PR component parties. As the de facto opposition leader in Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim helped to provide leadership which maintained unity in the PR coalition while emphasising moderation (Nathaniel & John, 2008). The unity in the PR coalition helped the PR to obtain impressive election results in the 12th and 13th Malaysian general elections.

“Moderation” was an important binding theme in PR politics which involves a steeply secular DAP and a committed Islamist party PAS, working together under the same coalition. Having a background in Islamic youth politics in Malaysia, and being a former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar personified moderation among the PR followers. Anwar’s imprisonment in 2015 following a court case seriously affected the stability and unity within the PR. In addition to the impact of personalities on PR, this study examines how component party ideologies in the PR shaped the fate of the coalition.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Coalition building is an important mechanism through which disempowered parties can develop their power base and thereby defend their interests in a better way. Pakatan Rakyat (PR), as the opposition parties in Malaysia, had a great victory in the

general election of 2008 and 2013 by winning several state elections in Malaysia. PR was not only a threat to the Barisan Nasional (BN), but also affected the party system in Malaysia. Unfortunately, coalition building could also help parties initiate threats or pursue illegitimate goals, which then becomes a problem. Many conflicts arose between the leaders in the Pakatan Rakyat, especially from PAS and DAP. The impact of these tensions was that the coalition building among opposition parties in PR failed and they finally separated in 2015.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyse the performance of PR coalition parties (PKR, PAS and DAP) from 2008 to 2015 by examining the background, the results of the elections and issues that affected the performance of the PR coalition parties. There were many issues and challenges whether internal or external that influenced the stability of the PR, especially the loss of the main leaders in PR, fundamental ideological differences, crisis relationship among PR component parties, no longer issues, personalities and power, distribution of seats, manifestos, campaigns, political attacks from incumbent party and the fear of the people. The strengths and weaknesses of PR will be measured based on the selected contemporary issues in order to show how the Pakatan Rakyat have dealt with various political challenges that it faced. Finally, the reasons dissolution of PR will be analysed.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This topic is very important to political science students, social scientists and the public who are interested in this area. This study examines the coalition building among opposition parties in Malaysia namely Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) in Pakatan Rakyat (PR) from 2008 to 2016. This study is important because of the following reasons.

The research that has been carried out on this issue is not yet exhaustive and comprehensive in nature. Many scholars have written about parliamentary and state election in Malaysia. Moreover, there have been studies dedicated to the identification of the formation and successes of the PR coalition in Malaysia especially when they won the 12th Malaysian general election (GE12) and 13th Malaysian general election (GE13). However, a little has been written about the abolition of PR.

Besides, the main actors in Barisan Alternatif (BA) and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) were almost the same individuals which are DAP, and PAS as the members. However, the differences between them have been during BA period, and PKR was involved in the 10th Malaysian general election (GE10) on the ticket of the National Justice Party (PKN) and Malaysian People's Party (PRM). PKR was formed in 2003 by a merger of the National Justice Party (PKN) and the Malaysian People's Party (PRM). Therefore, BA had four component parties which were DAP, PAS, Keadilan and PRM during its early establishment and was involved in 10th Malaysian general election (GE10). BA only had two component parties during 11th Malaysian general election (GE11) which were PAS and PKR (Hilley, 2001).

Furthermore, the party system in Malaysia has changed slightly after Pakatan Rakyat (PR) was established. Barisan Nasional (BN) has no more absolute power since they are not dominant in the parliament. As a result, many discussions need to be held between the government and the opposition to reach a consensus. The decision was slowly resolved due to the heavy conflict between BN and PR.

Therefore, it is important to identify the influence of the political coalition on the party system development and to unfold the indicators that prove this relationship in order to get a full understanding of the situation. Thus, an attempt will be made to fill the gap on the existing literature with regard to the study of coalition politics as a

key determinant of political priorities and preferences in the stability of the parties, especially in Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

Challenges and opportunities of PR is also highlighted in this study as these are the factors which contribute to the dissolution of PR. The accurate reason for dissolution of PR will be found out and achieved through the explanation by PR's leaders themselves. Public opinion in media is used by researcher for supporting argument purposes as well as supporting any statement from PR's leader.

After the dissolution of PR, Pakatan Harapan (PH) was established by the coalition among PKR, DAP and a new party which is Parti Amanah Negara (National Trust Islamic Party- PAN) on 22 September 2015. PAN is a splinter party from PAS. Then, Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) is a splinter party from BN that joined PH on March 20, 2017 (Selangorkini, 2017). The PH was built as a platform for the coalition of opposition parties in Malaysia and as a replacement to PR.

This situation requires a special investigation to find out the factors that formed, maintained and dissolved PR. It is especially required to identify the role and influence of political parties as subjects of the political process which are largely dependent on the political issues and electoral systems.

Hence, this study provides an analysis of the performance of the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) in terms of strategies and approaches to solve the challenges. This study is also important as it provides a better insight into the factors that can influence the performance of political parties in Malaysia.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are:

- 1) To explain the nature of the party system in Malaysia

- 2) To discuss how the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) dealt with the various political challenges that it faced.
- 3) To analyze the reasons for the dissolution of the Pakatan Rakyat

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the nature of the party system in Malaysia?
- 2) How did the Pakatan Rakyat deal with various political challenges that it faced?
- 3) Why was the Pakatan Rakyat dissolved?

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the works that have been published centred on the coalition governments of the country. Various articles and books covering coalition by opposition parties are also found in reputed international journals of political and social sciences. In addition, the contribution of the opposition parties, especially in Malaysia, in this transitional period of democratic consolidation has been, to a large extent, studied by the scholars in general and those of political science. Moreover, there have been available the writing about the formation and success of the Pakatan Rakyat coalition in Malaysia, especially in 12th Malaysian general election (GE12) and 13th Malaysian general election (GE13). However, a little have been written about the reasons for the abolition of PR. These studies can be better reviewed by classifying them under the following three categories:

- 1) The general overview of the opposition parties in several countries and their similarities with the Pakatan Rakyat (PR). Little research has been

conducted on the points similar to the PR which are the opposition parties in countries that implement the parliamentary democracy system. They broke the monopoly of the ruling parties, formed a coalition between parties with totally different ideologies but are successful because of the coalition.

- 2) The party system in Malaysia has a historical coalition among the opposition parties in Malaysia.
- 3) The political history in Pakatan Rakyat is general.

1.6.1 The General Overview of Opposition Parties in Other Countries and their Similarities to Pakatan Rakyat (PR)

Most people believe that forming the government through coalition is necessary in order to win an election and also to be the dominant party in the government such as Malaysia. Malaysia is a Parliamentary Democracy and adopts Constitutional Monarchy. Malaysia is similar to Denmark, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Israel in that the prime minister has authority to determine an election, at will. This was also the case in the United Kingdom (UK) until the passage of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011. The situation with the opposition parties in these countries is similar to Pakatan Rakyat. The main similarity between Pakatan Rakyat and them is that the opposition parties can win due to the coalition (Mohd Nawab, Saravamuttu, Hock and Johan, 2016).

Besides, this system also allows the opposition parties to participate in general election unlike Brunei and Vietnam that do not allow any party to participate. Both of these countries implement a one-party state. Liow and Leifer (2014) explained that Brunei Darussalam totally bans the opposition party and practices absolute monarchy.

It is only The Brunei People's Party that can be accepted by the people and the Sultan of Brunei. This regulation is similar to Vietnam that practices one-party state which allows only one political party, which is the Communist Party of Vietnam, to hold effective power (Jeffries, 2006).

The opposition parties in the UK are similar with those of Malaysia in term of successfully breaking the monopoly party or a single-party majority government. The formal coalition between the Conservative and the Liberal Democrat as the opposition parties successfully broke the Labour party as the single- party in the UK from 2010 to 2015. The informal coalition between PKR, DAP and PAS as the opposition parties successfully broke BN as the hegemonic party in Malaysia since 1957 (Seldon, 2015).

Preston (1994) discussed in his book the bad performance and people's frustration with the government led by the Labour Party, which enabled the Conservative Party to win the election and take power in the UK from 2010 until 2015. This situation was similar to that of Malaysia that the government did not perform very well and the prime minister was full of controversies. As a result, the Pakatan Rakyat won in the 2008 General Election (GE 12). Seldon and Snowdon (2015) explained that the main issue that contributed to the Labour Party losing in the general election was the economic downturn facing Britain at that time. Dorey and Garnet (2016) examined in his book the formation and operation of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government from May 2010 to May 2015.

This situation did not only occur in the UK, but also in Japan. The Japanese broke the monopoly parties that had led the country for five decades. As Rosenbluth and Thies (2010) mentioned in their writings, the swing by the Japanese to the opposition not only stopped in 1993, but was also repeated in 2009 when Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lost again to the coalition built by the opposition parties

among New Party Daichi, Social Democratic Party (SDP), Democratic Party (DPJ), New Party Nippon and People's New Party (PNP). In fact, the defeat of the LDP was already expected from the beginning when the party lost the elections in the Supreme Council (Diet) in July, 2007. The total seats of coalition among DPJ-SDP-PNP were 318 seats and meanwhile LDP-NKP secured 140 seats. Thus, the LDP suffered the worst defeat by the ruling party in the history of modern Japan and many observers claimed this as a "political revolution" in Japan (Maeda, 2010).

The confidence and trust by the residents in LDP was fading because the ruling party failed to settle and clarify some key issues, especially issues related to the former LDP Prime Minister Taro Aso which undermined his credibility and image among the people. Not only that, the economic outlook at the beginning of 2009 was unfavourable. In July, unemployment rose to of 5.7% in July. The election was called in August. Apart from that, the populist plan or manifesto that was produced by DPJ also contributed to the party's victory. They were more focused on the welfare of the people, especially the poor and those with low-income. Apparently, the plan was able to convince the Japanese people who were facing the difficult economic situation at that time (Arase, 2010).

However, the coalition in the European countries especially Germany is seen to be more mature. They can create a coalition with members varying at different stages and ideologies as the Pakatan Rakyat did. The grand coalition from 2005 to 2009 in Germany whether seen as a single episode or a turning point was mentioned by Bolgherini and Grotz (2011) in their introductory book titled, "Germany after the Grand Coalition: Governance and Politics in a Turbulent Environment". The author mentioned that the coalition was formed despite the parties subscribing to completely different ideologies. At the Federal level, Chancellor Angela Merkel's

party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) formed a coalition government with the Social Democratic Party (SPD). On the opposition side was the Green Party and Die Linke. However, different forms of coalition were formed at the state level. In the State of Brandenburg, the SPD joined Die Linke while in North Rhine-Westphalia, the SPD cooperated with the Green Party. More interestingly, in Hessen, the CDU formed a coalition government with the Green Party even though both parties were born out of different ideologies (Bolgherini & Grotz, 2011). Green and Paterson (2005) also claimed that the German political and economic system is undergoing fundamental changes. This coalition is not strange because it reflects the regions needs and aspirations. Barisan Nasional could not be taken for granted anymore to coalition opposition parties especially to Pakatan Rakyat because this situation can be a form of check and balance to the condition of politics in Malaysia.

The forming of coalition is not only practised in developed countries such as Germany but also in developing countries. For example, neighbouring countries such as the Philippines also implement it. Based on the news written by Rappler (2016), the Philippine presidential elections of 2016 were held on 9 May 2016. At the end of this election, the Coalition of the Straight Path (Koalisyon ng Daang Matuwid, KDM) was formed as the umbrella of the administration-backed presidential and senatorial line-up for the 2016 Philippine Senate election. Apart from that, there were three other coalitions formed by opposition parties in the Philippine which are United Nationalist Alliance (UNA), Partido ng Galing at Puso (PGP) and Coalition for Change. Even though they all have different ideologies, they can form a coalition because the keyword that can integrate them is that every coalition is temporary and not permanent.

This type of coalition is also formed in Indonesia. According to Uhlin (1998) cited in Eklof (1999), on May 21, 1998, the New Order regime emerged and the people started to understand about the party and the coalition. According to Mietzner (2014) and Tapsell (2015), Indonesia had two coalitions and one neutral party (Democratic Party) in 2014 Indonesian General Election. Great Indonesian Coalition (KIH) was a coalition of political parties to support Joko Widodo-Jusuf Kalla in the presidential election in 2014. The coalition consisted of the Unity Party (PKP Indonesia), People's Conscience Party (Hanura), National Awakening Party (PKB), PDI-P, National Democratic Party (NasDem) and Indonesian Justice. This coalition was declared during the Declaration of Jokowi-JK on 19 May 2014 in Jakarta. From the opposition's side, the Red White Coalition (KMP) was formed to support Prabowo-Hatta Rajasa in the election in 2014. In its early formation, this coalition consisted of the Golkar Party, United Development Party (PPP), National Mandate Party (PAN), Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), Crescent Star Party (PBB) and Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra). The coalition government was getting stronger when PPP, PAN and Golkar Party quit the coalition among the opposition parties. This started with PPP in October 2014, followed by the PAN in September 2015, and Golkar in January 2016 (Warburton, 2016). These three parties expressed support for the government and joined the Indonesian Great Coalition and later known as the Cooperation Coalition Government Support Party (KP3). James Siegel wrote in his book "Indonesia: A Partial Appraisal," that with the combination of PPP and PAN the Coalition of Great Indonesia turned into a majority in Parliament, with 295 seats, compared with the Red White Coalition with 204 seats and Democrats with 61 seats (Siegel, 2015, pp. 29–30).