

**THE RISE AND DECLINE OF UNITED MALAY
NATIONAL ORGANIZATION (UMNO) IN SABAH,
MALAYSIA, 1991-2018**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The United Malaysian National Organization (UMNO) is a well-known political party in Malaysian politics founded by Dato' Onn bin Jaafar on May 11, 1946. The party played a very important role not only in the process of gaining the independence of Malaya but also in the formation of Malaysia. This representing party for the Malays, negotiated with the British to obtain independence for Malaya and later to form the new state of Malaysia. After the successful formation of Malaysia, the country was ruled by a coalition known as the Parti Perikatan. However, UMNO saw the necessity of merging with other local parties from Sabah and Sarawak to strengthen the alliance. Hence, the alliance was replaced by a new alliance known as the Barisan Nasional (National Front) in 1973. Since then, the Barisan Nasional has dominated the political arena in Malaysia since the founding of the coalition. The party alliance in Malaysia is important in order to unite people of different races to achieve common goals. Over the years, this alliance became the largest alliance in Malaysia and managed to rule the country until 2018. Even local parties from the state of Sabah joined this alliance to develop the power and secure its interests. However, due to the political instability in Sabah, no local party has ruled Sabah for more than ten years. This precarious situation led to the arrival of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) to Sabah in 1991. This party later succeeded in gaining the support of the people and became the party that ruled Sabah for the longest time. However, after ruling for a long time, the popularity of UMNO-BN in Sabah began to decline. Therefore, this thesis examines the political development of Sabah since independence and its relationship with the federal government, examines the factors of the emergence of UMNO-BN and its government in Sabah, and studies the main reasons for the downfall of UMNO-BN in Sabah. This research employs a qualitative approach by conducting library research to gather information on the subject and relying on primary and secondary sources. Most studies have also focused on the rise and fall of UMNO-BN in Sabah from independence until 2018 as UMNO-BN lost to the opposition during Malaysia's 14th General Election (GE14). It is study that the rise of UMNO-BN in Sabah is mainly due to the tense relationship between the local party that ruled the Sabah state government and the federal government ruled by UMNO-BN. The clash between the leaders of the local political party in Sabah with the leaders of UMNO-BN led to the coming of the national party UMNO to the political arena in Sabah. However, UMNO's rule in Sabah continued for more than two decades, making UMNO the only party to rule Sabah for more than ten years. Altogether, the study found that the downfall of UMNO-BN in Sabah was due to internal factors such as the political rupture within the UMNO party, the Najib Razak's scandals, and the weak statement made by UMNO-BN during GE14. This study also discovered that external factors such as the birth of a new local political party in Sabah, a strong opposition coalition, and media advances also contribute to the downfall of UMNO-BN in Sabah's politics.

خلاصة البحث

هي حزب سياسي معروف في السياسة الماليزية (UMNO) المنظمة الوطنية الماليزية المتحدة أسسها داتوء أون بن جعفر في 11 مايو 1946. وقد لعب الحزب دورًا مهمًا للغاية ليس فقط في عملية الحصول على استقلال الملايا ولكن أيضًا تشكيل ماليزيا. قام هذا الحزب ممثلًا للملايو بالتفاوض مع البريطانيين للحصول على الاستقلال للمالايا ولاحقًا لتشكيل دولة جديدة ماليزيا. بعد التشكيل الناجح لماليزيا، حكم البلاد تحالف يعرف باسم حزب التحالف ضرورة الاندماج مع الأحزاب المحلية (UMNO) ومع ذلك، رأت المنظمة الوطنية الماليزية المتحدة الأخرى من صباح وساراواك لتقوية التحالف. ومن ثم، تم استبدال التحالف بتحالف جديد، يُعرف باسم جبهة "باريسان ناسيونال" "الجبهة الوطنية (في عام 1973). ومنذ ذلك الحين سيطرت الجبهة الوطنية على الساحة السياسية في ماليزيا منذ تأسيس الائتلاف. يعد تحالف الأحزاب في ماليزيا مهمًا من أجل توحيد الناس من أعراق مختلفة لتحقيق أهداف مشتركة على مر السنين، أصبح هذا التحالف أكبر تحالف في ماليزيا وتمكن من حكم البلاد حتى عام وحتى الأحزاب المحلية من ولاية صباح انضمت إلى هذا التحالف لتطوير القوة وتأمين 2018 مصالحتها. مع ذلك، بسبب عدم الاستقرار السياسي في صباح، لا يوجد حزب محلي يحكم صباح منذ أكثر من عشر سنوات. وقد أدى هذا الوضع غير المستقر إلى قدوم المنظمة الوطنية الماليزية المتحدة إلى صباح في عام 1991. وقد نجح هذا الحزب لاحقًا في الحصول على دعم الشعب وأصبح الحزب الذي حكم صباح لأطول فترة. ومع ذلك، بعد الحكم لفترة طويلة في صباح في الانخفاض. لذلك، تبحث هذه الأطروحة في التطور UMNO-BN بدأت شعبية السياسي في صباح منذ الاستقلال وعلاقتها بالحكومة الفيدرالية، وتدرس عوامل ظهور في صباح UMNO-BN وحكومتها في صباح ودراسة الأسباب الرئيسة لسقوط UMNO-BN يستعين هذا البحث بنهج نوعي من خلال إجراء بحث المكتبة لجمع المعلومات حول الموضوع

والاعتماد على المصادر الأولية والثانوية . كما ركزت معظم الدراسات على صعود وسقوط أمام UMNO-BN في صباح منذ الاستقلال حتى عام 2018 حيث خسر UMNO-BN لقد الدراسة أن صعود (GE14) المعارضة خلال الانتخابات العامة الرابعة عشرة في ماليزيا في صباح يرجع بشكل أساسي إلى العلاقة المتوترة بين الحزب المحلي الذي حكم UMNO-BN كما أدى الاشتباك بين UMNO-BN حكومة ولاية صباح والحكومة الفيدرالية التي يحكمها UMNO إلى مجيء الحزب الوطني UMNO-BN قادة الحزب السياسي المحلي في صباح مع قادة إلى الساحة السياسية في صباح . ومع ذلك، استمر حكم المنظمة الوطنية المتحدة للملايو في صباح لأكثر من عقدين مما جعل المنظمة الوطنية المتحدة للملايو هو الحزب الوحيد الذي في UMNO-BN حكم صباح لأكثر من عشر سنوات . إجمالاً، اكتشفت الدراسة أن سقوط وفضائح UMNO، صباح كان يرجع إلى عوامل داخلية مثل التمزق السياسي داخل حزب واكتشفت هذه الدراسة . GE14 خلال UMNO-BN نجيب رزاق، والبيان الضعيف الذي قدمته أيضاً أن العوامل الخارجية مثل ولادة حزب سياسي محلي جديد في صباح، وائتلاف معارض . في سياسة صباح UMNO-BN قوي، وتقدم وسائل الإعلام تساهم أيضاً في سقوط

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences in History and civilization.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The formation of Malaysia in 1963 presented an opportunity for Barisan Nasional (National Front), which is a coalition of parties from Malaya, to enter the political arena of Sabah.¹ Malaysia is a federal state that practises a system known as Parliamentary Democracy with Constitutional Monarchy, and the paramount ruler of Malaysia is His Majesty The King.² As a federal state that practises democracy, Malaysia conducts an election every five years in order to choose the government that will rule the country.³ Ever since Malaysia's independence and even before Malaya gained independence in 1957, a famous political party known as the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) had received huge support from the Malays and dominated Malaysia's political arena.⁴ Dato' Onn Jaafar was appointed the first President of UMNO, and the main objective of this party was to oppose and fight the establishment of the Malayan Union which was perceived as suppressing the rights of the Malays.⁵ Hence, UMNO has been viewed as the 'protector' of the Malays since then.⁶ Through the coalition of several political parties known as Parti Perikatan or the Alliance Party, this coalition even got the support from the non-Malay communities such as Chinese and Indian.⁷ Since then, the coalition became the 'protector' of the independence of Malaya, and changed Malaya's political system by forming the Malaya Constitution 1957 right after

¹ Hamdan Aziz and Syahrin Said. "The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in Sabah, East Malaysia: An Overview 1990-1994", *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, vol. 7, no. 12 (2017): 566-567.

² Tony Paridi Bagang and Asri Salleh, *Krisis Politik Sabah Pasca Pilihan Raya Umum Ke-14*, (Universiti Teknologi MARA, 2019), 2.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333892834_Krisis_Politik_Sabah_Pasca_Pilihan_Raya_Umum_Ke-14> (accessed 3 January, 2022).

³ Kai Ostwald, "Malaysia's Electoral Process: The Methods and Costs of Perpetuating UMNO Rule," *ISEAS Publishing*, (2017): 2.

⁴ Zainal Abidin Abdul Wahid, "Semangat Perjuangan Melayu", *Jebat*, (1978): 1.

⁵ Nurul Huda Shafih, "United Malays National Organization (UMNO) 1946-1957: Daripada Penentangan kepada Pensebabatan," (Master's thesis, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2015), 14-15.

⁶ Abdul Latiff Mohd Ibrahim, "Orang Melayu dan Politik- Penelitian Sejarah dan Budaya Politik," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Malaya, 2004), 109.

⁷ Zainal Abidin Abdul Wahid, 4.

Malaya gained independence.⁸ Later on, this coalition was renamed Barisan Nasional or the National Front (BN), and has become the largest political coalition in Malaysia as well as dominated Malaysia's political arena by becoming the ruling coalition party of the country ever since Malaya's independence and after the formation of Malaysia.⁹ Nevertheless, this coalition faced many challenges and lost its popularity in 2018.¹⁰ In the 14th General Election, Malaysia witnessed the fall of BN as the ruling coalition party in Malaysia, which was replaced by a new coalition, namely Pakatan Harapan (PH).¹¹ The fall of Barisan Nasional shocked many parties. This is because in Malaysian history, this coalition was the one who ruled Malaya, and after that Malaysia, ever since its independence until 2018.¹²

The political parties in Sabah rose a bit late compared to the political parties in Peninsular Malaysia. The political parties in this state only emerged in 1961 when Mohd Fuad Stephens established Pertubuhan Parti Kadazan Bersatu (UPKO). This was followed by Parti Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Sabah Bersatu, also known as the United Sabah National Organisation (USNO), founded in 1962 by Tun Datu Haji Mustapha Datu Harun.¹³ In Sabah, many parties were founded to fight for the rights of a specific ethnic group. For example, UPKO was a party that fought for the rights of the Kadazans and the development of its people. However, Tun Datu Mustapha realised that the independence of Sabah can only be done by unifying the Sabahans, which consists of many ethnicities, whereby Islam is the main religion and Bahasa Melayu is their official language.¹⁴ Since then, many political parties were formed by Sabahan leaders, and this situation later shaped the political landscape of Sabah. However, after the formation of

⁸ Ahmat Adam, *Melayu Nasionalisme Radikal dan Pembinaan Bangsa*, (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 2014), 150.

⁹ Kim-Hui Lim and Har Wai Mun, ““Political Volcano” in 12th Malaysian General Election: Makkal Sakhti (People Power) Against Communal Politics, “3Cs” and Marginalization of Malaysian Indian”, *Journal of Politics and Law*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2009): 84.

¹⁰ Muhamad Nadzri Mohamed Noor, “The 14th General Election, the Fall of Barisan Nasional, and Political Development in Malaysia, 1957-2018”, *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, vol. 37, No. 3 (2018): 157-162.

¹¹ Muhamad Nadzri Mohamed Noor and Nidzam Sulaiman, *Mitos dan Realiti Dalam Situasi Hubungan Sosial di Awal Era Transisi Malaysia Baru: Satu Perbincangan*, (Selangor: Institute of Ethnic Studies, 2018), 101.

¹² Muhamad Nadzri Mohamed Noor and Jamaie Hj Hamil, “Politik, Pengundi dan Faktor Melayu/Bumiputera: Analisis Terhadap Kegagalan Barisan Nasional Dalam Pru 2018”, *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics & Strategic Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2018): 387.

¹³ Mat Zin Mat Kib, “Sumbangan Sabah Dalam Pilihan Raya Umum Ke-12: Relevansi Politik Pembangunan”, *Jurnal Melayu*, (2011): 112.

¹⁴ Nurul Matzain and Azizan Morshidi, *Sumbangan Tun Mustapha Kepada Politik*, (Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 2017): 4.

Malaysia, BN played an important role in Sabah's political arena, especially when local parties, such as United Sabah National Organisation (USNO), Parti Bersatu Rakyat Jelata Sabah (BERJAYA), and Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), decided to join this coalition.¹⁵ However, the advent of UMNO, which is the famous national party that was founded in Malaya, to Sabah's political arena in 1991 had totally changed the political landscape in Sabah.¹⁶ Ever since Malaysia's independence, Sabah was ruled by the local parties of the state, even though most of these local parties were under the coalition of BN. However, in 1994, Sabah state began to be under the direct ruling of the national party UMNO with its BN coalition, when the party won the local election and automatically removed PBS as the state's ruling government.¹⁷ Since then, UMNO-BN had dominated Sabah's political arena for about 24 years. However, the situation changed when UMNO-BN lost to the opposition coalition party known as Pakatan Harapan (PH).¹⁸ The 14th general election witnessed the fall of UMNO-BN in Sabah and the rise of a new local party known as Parti Warisan Sabah (WARISAN) under the political coalition of Pakatan Harapan.¹⁹ The declining popularity of UMNO-BN in Sabah had forced the Sabahans to bring down UMNO-BN and appoint a new local party to be the state's ruling government. This event is significant in shaping the political history of Sabah state. Hence, it is crucial to study the rise and decline of UMNO-BN in Sabah.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The coalition of parties in Malaysia is important in order to unite people from different races to achieve common goals. Since Malaysia's independence, Barisan Nasional had become the biggest coalition in Malaysia. Even local parties from Sabah joined this coalition to develop power and secure their interests. However, due to the political instability in Sabah, there is no local party that has ruled Sabah for more than ten years.

¹⁵ Asmady Idris and Suzalie Mohamad, "Kelangsungan Dominasi Barisan Nasional di Sabah dalam Pilihan Raya Umum Ke-13", *Kajian Malaysia*, vol. 32, no. supp. 2 (2014): 175.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁸ Muhammad Takiyuddin Ismail and Muhammad Nadzri Mohamed Noor, "Revolusi Senyap 9 Mei 2018", *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics, & Strategies Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2018): 161.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

In addition, the demand of the state government that is ruled by the local party in Sabah generates a tense relationship between the state government and the central government. This strained relationship was due to the demand of the state for greater autonomy. This unstable situation had later led to the advent of UMNO in Sabah in 1991.²⁰ The advent of this party in Sabah received different reactions from the people. There were some people who welcomed the participation of UMNO, while some who were displeased with the advent of this national party to Sabah's political arena. This was because they wanted the state to be ruled by a local party founded by the Sabahans people itself.

However, the promises and strategies made by UMNO-BN enabled them to gain the support of the Sabahans people. This party later succeeded in gaining the support of the people and became the party that had ruled Sabah for the longest period. Nevertheless, after ruling for so long, the popularity of UMNO-BN in Sabah started to decline. The people began to demand for the things that the government had promised them, especially regarding economic development, infrastructure and many more. This situation later led to the rise of a new local party founded by the Sabahan leaders to fight for the rights of the people.

Therefore, this study will analyse the relation between the federal and state government in Sabah, particularly concerning the rise and decline of UMNO-BN in Sabah. This is because there is no scholarly article that specifically discusses this topic so far. Thus, the purpose of this research is to fill in the gap of the study.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research will provide a deeper explanation, which is significant for the comprehension of the political dynamics in Sabah, especially to history students, social scientists, the people of Sabah, and the public who are interested in learning about the political history of Sabah. The rise and fall of UMNO-BN in Sabah are an important historical episode that needs to be studied to understand the politics in Sabah. This is because this party and the coalition played a very crucial role in not only shaping the

²⁰ Asmady Idris and Suzalie Mohamad, 172.

political system of Sabah, but also in determining the development of many aspects, especially with regards to the economy, social matters, and even religion of the state.

Secondly, this research will develop a better understanding of the political history of Sabah, especially regarding the topic and issues on why and how the UMNO-BN government arose in the first place. This research will also study the reasons why the popularity of the UMNO-BN government dropped after ruling Sabah for roughly 24 years. Thus, this study can help improve the comprehension of the readers in Sabah's political arena because it covers the topic thoroughly.

Thirdly, this study can be a reference to the new government, politicians, and the people itself. As this research will be studying the political issues that happened during the rule of UMNO-BN in Sabah; therefore, it can provide an overview and reference regarding the relationship, not only between the government and the people of Sabah, but also between the new federal government and state government.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

1. To study the political development in Sabah since independence and its relationship with the Federal Government.
2. To investigate the factors for the advent of UMNO-BN and its government in Sabah.
3. To analyze the main causes for the fall of UMNO-BN in Sabah.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research will focus mainly on the rise and fall of UMNO-BN in the Sabah State to answer the following questions:

1. How was the political development in Sabah since independence and its relationship with the Federal Government?
2. What are the factors for the advent of UMNO-BN and its government in Sabah?
3. What are the main causes for the fall of UMNO-BN in the Sabah state?

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

Sabah has undergone several processes before entering the formation of Malaysia to ensure the rights of the people of Sabah is safeguarded. The process begins with discussions and investigations relating to the appropriate conditions in forming an independent country that includes several states. Aszlan Selamat, in his research, 'Sabah dalam Proses Pembentukan Persekutuan Malaysia' (Sabah in the Formation of the Federation of Malaysia) provides information about the formation of Malaysia that mainly focuses on Sabah. Based on this study, the author stated that the Prime Minister of Malaya, known as Tunku Abdul Rahman, had proposed a formation of an independent country known as Malaysia on May 27, 1961.²¹ The new independent country of Malaysia would consist of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, Sabah, and Brunei Darussalam.²² However, the proposal received different reactions from the people, especially the Sabahans, as it was never discussed with the people nor the leaders of the states involved. Hence, the British established a commission to observe the reactions of the people of Sabah. As a result, two-thirds of the majority accepted this proposal with conditions (20-point agreement), while one-third of the people did not agree with the idea.²³ Nevertheless, the Federation of Malaysia was established on September 16, 1963 with the union of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak, while Brunei Darussalam withdrew from the formation at the very last minute.²⁴ Singapore, on the other hand, also separated itself from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965.²⁵ However, in the political arena of Sabah, the 20-point agreement has always been used by the opposition to gain votes from the voters until today.

Furthermore, Sabah's political development is determined by the leaders, political parties, elections, and issues raised in the manifesto or in the electoral campaigns. A significant study written by Sabihah Osman titled 'Pembangunan Politik Sabah: Satu Penelusuran Sejarah' (Political Development of Sabah: A Trace of History) briefly explained the background of Sabah's society and its political history as well as how it affected the political development of the state. The author also chronologically examined the rise and fall of Parti Bersatu Sabah, or Sabah United Party (PBS), to BN

²¹ Aszlan Selamat, "Sabah dalam proses Pembentukan Persekutuan Malaysia", *Jurnal Kinabalu*, vol. 19, (2016): 170.

²² *Ibid.*, 69.

²³ *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

and UMNO since 1994.²⁶ Based on this study, the demands of the PBS government, especially regarding sensitive issues such as the issue of Labuan, Borneonisation, oil royalty and many more, had created tension between the state and federal government which later contributed to the advent of UMNO in Sabah in 1991.²⁷ The advent of UMNO was one of the federal strategies to win back Sabah from the opposition party. UMNO had planned their strategies in approaching the next election to win back Sabah. Among the strategies made by UMNO under the BN coalition was the use of the slogan 'Sabah Baru' or 'New Sabah', and the promise of a few agendas for Sabah, especially with regards to improving the schools' infrastructures, building a university, and developing the industry in Sabah.²⁸

Not only that, political developments in Sabah are growing with the availability of local leaders who stand up for the rights of the Sabahans. These local leaders stand for democracy, and they had the vision to build a progressive, harmonious, and a united state of Sabah through the pure parliamentary democracy process. Mohammad Agus Yusoff, in his article titled 'Sabah Politics under Pairin', was one of the significant works related to this research. In his article, the author tried to chronologically explain why UMNO decided to enter the political arena of Sabah. In 1985, Sabah witnessed the rise of a new local party known as Parti Bersatu Sabah, or United Sabah Party (PBS), under the leadership of Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Joseph Pairin Kitingan.²⁹ This party won the 1985 election, and formed a new state government in Sabah.³⁰ Since then, the party actively fought for the rights of the people of Sabah, especially the rights of the indigenous group at federal level. Among the issues fought by PBS were regarding oil royalty, the issue of Labuan, the implementation of 'Borneonisation' policy, immigrants, and others.³¹ Consequentially, the federal government accused the new ruling party PBS of fanning 'anti-federal' sentiments in response to the state government's demands for a greater state autonomy. As a result, the PBS party decided to pull out from BN coalition before the election in 1990 when the federal did not seem

²⁶ Sabihah Osman, "Pembangunan Politik Sabah: Satu Penelusuran Sejarah", *Kinabalu: Jurnal Perniagaan & Sains Sosial*, vol. 14 (2008): 1-28.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

²⁹ Mohammad Agus Yusoff, "Sabah Politics Under Pairin", *JATI - Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 6, (2001): 29.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

to be granting any of PBS' demands.³² The federal government considered PBS' decisions as a backstabbing action. Nevertheless, PBS once again gained victory and became the ruling party of Sabah in the elections. However, the victory of PBS in forming the state government led to the advent of the national party UMNO in 1991.³³

Next, UMNO-BN was a coalition party that ruled Malaysia since this country gained independence. Julian C.H. Lee, in his article 'Barisan Nasional – Political Dominance and the General Elections of 2004 in Malaysia' tried to describe the dominance of BN and UMNO in Malaysia's political arena ever since the country's independence by examining the practical obstruction towards the opposition party that participated in the elections. Not only that, this study also examined how UMNO and BN maintained their dominance through manipulation of certain fears of the society, especially regarding issues that would lead to social instability in society.³⁴ For example, the issues related to the Communal Riots of 1969, Malays in danger, and the Malay stereotype as well as its political ramifications and many more.³⁵ In addition to that, things like unconditional triumph, exploitation of media, money, state machinery, retribution and surveillance, counter-surveillance and counter-maneuvers, and other unfair means were also used by BN and UMNO as their tactics to dominate the Malaysian political arena.³⁶

On the other hand, the political movements in Sabah were initially based on their respective ethnicities. Voters usually voted for a candidate or parties that can represent their ethnicity and that they believe can fight for their rights. The article titled 'Ethnic Factor in the 2008 Malaysian General Election: The Case of the Kadazan Dusun (KD) in Sabah' is one of the significant works written by Arnold Puyok. This article mainly focuses on explaining the issues on why the Kadazandusun maintained their support for BN (Barisan Nasional) even though there were some significant political changes in the election result in Peninsular Malaysia. The author also focused on why the opposition failed to win their votes in Sabah. Based on this study, there are three main factors that explain why the KD voters voted for BN and abandoned the opposition. One of the

³² Ibid., 36-37.

³³ Ibid., 38.

³⁴ Lee Julian C. H, "Barisan Nasional – Political Dominance and the General Elections of 2004 in Malaysia", *Südostasien Aktuell: Journal of current Southeast Asian Affairs*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2007): 41.

³⁵ Ibid., 54-62.

³⁶ Ibid., 42-53.

factors was the lack of strong issues propounded by the opposition local-based parties.³⁷ Generally, the KD voters preferred a local party to represent them in the political matter. However, they had no choice but to vote for PBS and UPKO, who were one of the parties in the BN coalition since these were the only prominent local parties that had played significant roles as the eyes and ears of the KD group. Other local parties generally had a lack of influential leaders as well as possessed a weak party structure. The second factor was the non-committal attitude shown by the opposition.³⁸ Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) was one of the opposition parties in Malaysia that confidently promised to return the rights of the state back to the Sabahans. However, the voters were not convinced of its sincerity. This is because they believed that PKR was just another ‘peninsular party’ that wanted to control the political fortune of the KD group. Next is the lack of a strong opposition pact.³⁹ This can be seen when the opposition parties decided to be contested against each other under their own party, and failed to form a strong alliance in order to defeat BN’s dominance.

Meanwhile, the presence of Barisan Nasional in Sabah has slightly changed the social demographic and political conditions of the state. A significant work written by James Chin titled ‘Exporting the BN/UMNO model politics in Sabah and Sarawak’ stated that the dominance of UMNO-BN in Sabah was due to the ‘Project IC’ practised by the federal government.⁴⁰ The purpose of this project was to reduce the influence of PBS-led KDM community that once challenged the Muslim-led UMNO federal government. Therefore, in order to have a significant influence in Sabah’s political arena, the federal government decided to increase the Muslim population in Sabah by granting the Malaysian identity card to illegal Muslim migrants from Southern Philippines and Indonesian Borneo.⁴¹ Hence, the author concluded that “Project IC” was an unqualified success of the federal government in eliminating political threats from the KDM, who are the largest non-Muslim grouping in Sabah.

However, the 14th general election witnessed the fall of Barisan Nasional as the ruling government of Malaysia. An article titled ‘The 14th General Election, the Fall of

³⁷ Arnold Puyok, “Ethnic Factor in the 2008 Malaysian General Election: The Case of the Kadazan Dusun (KD) in Sabah”, *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics and Strategic Studies*, vol. 35 (2008): 13.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁴⁰ James Chin, “Exporting the BN/UMNO model: Politics in Sabah and Sarawak” in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Malaysia*, edited by Meredith Weiss (London and New York: Routledge, 2014): 85-86.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

Barisan Nasional, and Political Development in Malaysia, 1957-2018' by Muhamad M.N. Nadzri is one of the significant studies that provides basic information on the aspects of the development of BN regime as the ruling government of Malaysia since the country gained its independence. The author tried to explain the downfall of BN in GE14 by referring to the historical political situations that had started to change in GE12 and GE13. Hence, the author believes that Malaysia's 14th General Election in 2018 that resulted in a significant change in the Malaysian political arena with the fall of BN in most of the states in Malaysia, including Sabah, was due to the rise of the opposition starting in GE12.⁴² This study also provides an analysis and argument about the winning of a new coalition known as Pakatan Harapan or the Alliance of Hope (PH) in 2018.⁴³

As a coalition party that ruled Malaysia for decades, BN had faced various challenges and obstacles throughout their reign. Asmady Idris and Suzalie Mohamad had written a significant study on the topic titled 'Kelangsungan Dominasi Barisan Nasional di Sabah dalam Pilihan Raya Umum ke-13' or 'The Continuing Dominance of Barisan Nasional in Sabah in the 13th General Elections'. This study focuses on the dominance of BN in Sabah, especially since the inclusion of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in the state in 1994.⁴⁴ In this article, the authors highlighted the changes that happened in Malaysia's political scenario when BN failed to maintain the two-thirds majority, and lost many states to the opposition during the GE12 and GE13 due to the issues and questions of transparency, administration, and the quality of life of the people.⁴⁵ However, BN-Sabah seemed to be unaffected with the political changes in the Peninsula and still managed to win the election, and were able to become the ruling government of Sabah. Hence, the author had linked the continuity of BN's dominance in Sabah with the practice of 'hegemony-federalism'.⁴⁶ In other words, BN used federalism as a persuasive mechanism for Sabahans to continue raising the party as the people's advocate and the catalyst for socio-economic development. At the same time, various concessions were also given such as the autonomy to Sabah in the 20-point agreement, so that the rights and interests of the state can be preserved from time

⁴² Muhamad Nadzri Mohamed Noor, 158.

⁴³ Ibid., 141-163.

⁴⁴ Asmady Idris and Suzalie Mohamad, 179.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 172-175.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 173-178.

to time. Nevertheless, even though BN won the majority vote during GE13 in Sabah, there is no denying that there is a decrease in the number of seats won.

Subsequently, the fall of BN in the 14th general election was not expected by many parties. This is because Malaysia had never experienced an exchange of regime in the government. The article titled 'Revolusi Senyap 9 Mei 2018', also known as 'The Silent Revolution of 9th May 2018' written by Muhammad Takiyuddin Ismail and Muhamad Nadzri Mohamed Noor discusses the fall of Barisan Nasional during GE14 that happened in 2018.⁴⁷ In this article, the authors analysed the result of GE14 and considered it a silent revolution.⁴⁸ This is because majority of the analysts, observers, and voting bodies did not expect that GE14 would witness an exchange of a ruling government in Malaysia. In fact, many parties predicted that BN would remain the ruling government. Not only that, the authors also mentioned that an exchange of regimes in the government was usually done by using violence and often involved bloodshed. However, the Malaysian people proved that a revolution is not necessarily synonymous with something violent, but could also be done peacefully, invisibly, and without external assistance. According to the authors, the fall of BN was not only influenced by the votes from the citizens, but also by the votes of the government officers, especially military and police forces.⁴⁹ The Malaysians were fully utilising the ballot box channel in an attempt to bring down a regime of kleptocracy and replace it with a new one. This significant transition contributed to the victory of PH. Next, the author also discussed the various types of campaigns and strategies used by BN and PH in order to gain votes from the Malaysians. With the fall of BN regime, the world saw the rise of the opposition coalition known as Pakatan Harapan (PH) as the new ruling government of Malaysia.

The economic and non-economic factor was one of the factors that contributed to the fall of Barisan Nasional. The article written by Cassey Lee titled 'Economic Voting and the End of Dominant Party Rule in Malaysia' is an important work related to this study. According to the author, the end of BN's rule in Malaysia was due to the economic factors, especially with the issues of inflation, unemployment, taxation, and

⁴⁷ Muhammad Takiyuddin Ismail and Muhammad Nadzri Mohamed Noor, 161.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 161-163.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

financial scandal and abuse.⁵⁰ The implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) by the government in 2015 and the rise in inflation caused by the ringgit depreciation decreased the popularity of UMNO in Malaysia's political arena.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the non-economic factors also contributed to the end of BN's rule in Malaysia, especially when elite politicians from UMNO decided to leave the party. Amongst the famous former leaders of UMNO was Mahathir Mohamad, who is the former president of UMNO and the longest serving Prime Minister of Malaysia.⁵² The former UMNO members decided to form a new party, such as PPBM and WARISAN, and joined hands with the other opposition party by joining the opposition coalition known as Pakatan Harapan (PH).⁵³

From the above articles and papers, it could be concluded that the previous studies tend to only study certain issues about the rise and dominance of UMNO-BN in Sabah. All of the authors only discussed generally, and did not provide specific information regarding the rise and decline of UMNO-BN in Sabah. There are some articles written by another researcher about the fall of UMNO-BN in Malaysia's political arena. However, there has been no research conducted that specifically examines the fall of UMNO-BN during GE14 in Sabah. Therefore, this research will be specifically examining the rise and decline of UMNO-BN in Sabah from 1991 to 2018. Nevertheless, previous studies by other researchers will be used as references in conducting this study.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is using a qualitative approach which is by doing a historical investigation and critical analysis, with an exploratory qualitative research design depending on both primary and secondary sources. This research will be depending on the primary sources in order to get authentic and reliable information from eyewitnesses, and first-hand information from archival materials. The most important primary sources are reports

⁵⁰ Cassey Lee, "Economic Reforms in the Aftermath of Regime Change in Malaysia", *ISEAS*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2019): 15-16.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 10.

and agreements from 1962 to 2018, which can be accessed through newspapers, academic research, journals and so forth, that come under this category.

Hence, this research mainly depends on archival and library resources. The main sources will be the Sabah State Archives and the National Archives of Malaysia, which preserve the materials regarding the history of Sabah. Not only that, this research will also refer to the books provided at the libraries at the International Islamic University Malaysia and University Malaysia Sabah. As for secondary sources, this research will be utilising books, historical journals, academic research, articles, theses, dissertations and many more.

1.8 PROPOSED CHAPTERS OUTLINE

To achieve its objectives, this thesis will be divided into five chapters.

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter will cover the background of the study, significance of study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, literature review, methodology, and tentative chapters.

Chapter Two: The Political Development in Sabah and its Relationship with the Federal Government since Independence

This chapter will mainly discuss the historical background of political development in Sabah since its independence. It will also analyse the relationship between Sabah's state government and the federal government.

Chapter Three: The Advent of UMNO-BN and Its Government in Sabah

This chapter will specifically be dedicated to answering the second research question of this study, which is to study the advent of UMNO-BN in Sabah, followed by the historical background of UMNO and the coalition of several political parties in BN. The attention will also be focused on the factors that have contributed to the transition with the support of the Sabahans from PBS to UMNO-BN in 1994. Not only that, this chapter will also discuss the methods that led to the popularity of UMNO-BN in Sabah's political arena. This study will also find out about the mutual commitment among UMNO-BN's leaders in order to gain popularity and votes from the people of Sabah by