

Committed or Conditional Democrats? Opposition Dynamics in Electoral Autocracies

Jennifer Gandhi Emory University
Elvin Ong University of British Columbia

Abstract: *In electoral autocracies, opposition coalition formation offers the best hope of getting to democracy. Yet forming electoral coalitions also entails convincing opposition voters to ignore compromises and engage in the cross-party voting necessary for opposition victory. To what extent are voters committed to defeating the autocratic incumbent even if it would result in dislikable outcomes? A survey experiment in Malaysia finds that opposition voters overwhelmingly express pretreatment support for the opposition coalition. But when exposed to a treatment vignette about which member party might lead the next government, many voters retract their support. Specifically, voters' support for the coalition declines when their least preferred member is expected to control the government and when they can vote for a closer ideological alternative outside of the coalition. Although voters are committed to opposition unity and democratic transition, that commitment is sensitive to the anticipated consequences of an opposition victory.*

Verification Materials: The materials required to verify the computational reproducibility of the procedures and analyses in this article are available on the *American Journal of Political Science* Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/T21M2M>.

Supporting opposition parties carries significant risks in autocracies. Autocrats possess a “menu of manipulation” that enables them to disenfranchise, disadvantage, intimidate, and repress opposition voters (Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2002). Yet many voters consistently show up at the polls to support challengers to autocratic rulers and parties. In spite of incumbent tactics to win, voters often support the opposition because they support democracy. Having limited experience with power, opposition parties often find that the most potent issue around which they can mobilize is political change (Tucker 2006).

But getting to democracy via the ballot box often requires forming opposition electoral alliances (also known as pre-electoral or electoral coalitions; Bunce and Wolchik 2011; Donno 2013; Howard and Roessler 2006; Wahman 2013; Ziegfeld and Tudor 2017). An opposition alliance is a group of parties that cooperate with each other to compete against a dominant autocratic incumbent in an

election. Such alliances require parties to coordinate their candidate offerings. By preventing opposition voters from splitting their votes among too many alternatives, electoral coalitions have helped the opposition win against autocrats in places such as the Philippines (1986), Kenya (2002), and Ukraine (2004).

While intra-opposition candidate coordination within an alliance may offer the best chance for a transition at the ballot box, it comes with significant challenges. First, these alliances require at least some opposition voters to engage in cross-party voting. In other words, for the coalition to win, some voters may be required to vote for a candidate or a party that is not their most preferred outcome. Second, electoral coalitions, by definition, require compromise among parties on a variety of important issues: who gets to run where, how political offices will be divided, and which policies will be pursued once in office. These challenges result in a dilemma for some opposition voters: If getting to democracy requires voting

Jennifer Gandhi is Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Emory University, 336 Tarbutton Hall, 1555 Dickey Drive, Atlanta, GA 30322 (jgandh2@emory.edu). Elvin Ong is Postdoctoral Fellow, Centre for Southeast Asia Research, Institute of Asian Research, School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, University of British Columbia, 1855 West Mall, #222, Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z2 (elvin.ong@ubc.ca).

We thank Leo Arriola, Natália Bueno, Danielle Jung, Beatriz Magaloni, Bonnie Meguid, Ong Kian Ming, Kai Ostwald, Michael Wahman, Steven Wilkinson, and three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments. We also thank seminar participants at the MPSA 2018 Annual Conference, Yale University, the European University Institute, the University of Minnesota, the University of Rochester, the University of Zurich, and Columbia University as well as the Comparative Politics Workshop at Emory University for useful feedback.

American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 63, No. 4, October 2019, Pp. 948–963

©2019, Midwest Political Science Association

DOI: 10.1111/ajps.12441

for a coalition that may implement policy outcomes they do not like, should they remain committed to the alliance? Or should they prioritize their policy commitments over democracy and turn away from the coalition?

We argue that when faced with a trade-off between their ideological commitments and democracy, voters will abandon an opposition alliance under two conditions: first, if they expect that a coalition victory will result in their *least* preferred policy outcome; and second, if they have an alternative option that is closer to their policy preferences, whether the incumbent or another opposition party outside the coalition. Voters in autocracies do care about policies. They are willing to go along with some policy compromises they feel are not too far from their preferred views. But not all are willing to pay any price to achieve an alternation in power, especially when an ideologically closer alternative is apparent.

We investigate this argument during the run-up to the May 2018 parliamentary elections in Malaysia, a robust electoral authoritarian regime for more than half a century (Gomez 2016; Pepinsky 2009; Slater 2010). For this election, four opposition parties (i.e., DAP, PKR, BERSATU, and AMANAH) committed to an electoral coalition, *Pakatan Harapan* (PH), against the incumbent, the *Barisan Nasional* (BN). We find that opposition voters express clear preferences for an alternation in power and express pretreatment support for the coalition—findings that are consistent with the strong support the opposition received in the last general election in 2013. Yet, for some, their support for the alliance is revealed to be conditional on post-electoral outcomes. Specifically, when BERSATU supporters learn that elections may result in outsized influence for the DAP—the party within the coalition that is most ideologically distant from them—they are more likely to desert the coalition than the supporters of other parties within the coalition. The reaction of DAP supporters to a message about possible BERSATU control of government is not as strong. We believe that the difference in the strength of the reaction between BERSATU and DAP supporters is due, in part, to the presence of an alternative for the former, but none for the latter. BERSATU supporters had the luxury of also choosing either the BN itself or PAS, an opposition party outside of the coalition. Policy differences between opposition parties and the strategic positioning of regime parties lead some opposition voters with an unsavory choice between policy and democracy. The fact that some of them choose to prioritize the former contributes to the longevity of authoritarian rule.

Our argument is related to the literature on electoral alliances in both democracies and nondemocracies. The main lines of inquiry within this literature have been twofold. One strand focuses on the consequences

of alliances for important outcomes such as government formation and survival in democracies, and regime survival in dictatorships (Carroll and Cox 2007; Donno 2013; Howard and Roessler 2006; Resnick 2011; Wahman 2013).

A different set of studies investigates the mostly political conditions for the formation of these coalitions (Arriola 2013; Gandhi and Reuter 2013; Golder 2006; Wahman 2011). These studies typically focus on the incentives of party elites to enter and maintain such alliances. Very rarely do they focus explicitly on voters (for an exception, see Gschwend and Hooghe 2008). Yet an electoral alliance is successful only to the extent that some party leaders within the alliance believe that they can persuade their own supporters to engage in strategic cross-party voting. But there is very little evidence to evaluate their conditional success. Consequently, this issue is crucial for any parties attempting to improve their electoral fortunes through an electoral alliance.

The context of opposition parties struggling against powerful authoritarian incumbents layers an additional dimension to the problem of strategic voting. A vote for an opposition alliance in this context is an action in support of democracy because it makes ending authoritarian rule more likely. Yet ideological divisions frequently make such anti-incumbent coalitions difficult, if not impossible (Greene 2007; Magaloni 2006). In this regard, our work also relates to the larger question of when citizens are willing to prioritize democracy above their ideological and material goals (Acemoglu, Robinson, and Torvik 2013; Bermeo 2003; Sartori 1976; Svobik 2017). Whereas these works examine the conditions under which citizens support the maintenance of democracy, we examine individuals' willingness to fight for it.

Electoral Alliances in Dictatorships

Opposition collective action is often critical to bringing about the end of an authoritarian regime. Collective action against the incumbent can emerge as protests or boycotts, but most attempts at coordination in electoral autocracies take the form of electoral alliances. Alliances that entail strategic coordination around candidates address a common problem confronting opposition parties: the fracturing of the anti-regime vote, which enables the incumbent to win reelection. In 1992, Kenya's Daniel Arap Moi faced seven opponents and won reelection with only 37% of the vote. In South Korea, the military regime's candidate, Roh Tae Woo, won the 1988 election with 36% of the vote because neither of the main two opposition

candidates (who collectively polled 54%) was willing to step down.

When formed, an electoral alliance can constitute a danger to the incumbent. Opposition alliances increase the likelihood of political liberalization as well as the probability of incumbent defeat (Arriola 2013; Bunce and Wolchik 2011; Donno 2013; Howard and Roessler 2006; Wahman 2013; Ziegfeld and Tudor 2017). In the 2002 election, Kenya's Arap Moi went down in defeat, ending nearly 40 years of KANU rule, because opposition parties were finally able to form an alliance that supported one challenger. In the Philippines, Corazon Aquino defeated Marcos by a slender margin of 800,000 votes thanks to the alliance she formed with Salvador Laurel. Coordination helps opposition parties achieve victory in parliamentary elections as well. The frequency of incumbent defeat is positively correlated with the presence of an opposition alliance in parliamentary autocracies such as Malaysia's (Wahman 2013). In the 2013 general elections in Malaysia, an electoral coalition came the closest anyone has ever come to ending 43 years of BN rule (Pepinsky 2015). An opposition alliance with a slightly different composition was finally able to achieve electoral victory in 2018.

Although electoral alliances can have potentially big payoffs for opposition forces, they are not easy to form. Party leaders may need to compromise on their policy commitments in order to run on a common platform. Because more ideologically distant partners need to compromise more, electoral alliances are more likely to occur among parties that are closer in policy preferences (Golder 2006; Wahman 2011). Party leaders also need to agree to a division of the spoils if the coalition were to actually win office. In distributing political offices, there may be a tension between recognizing parties' respective bargaining power and adequately compensating kingmakers (Carroll and Cox 2007). Finally, parties must determine a way to enforce these pre-electoral agreements about sharing the spoils *after* the election. Making credible commitments seems especially difficult for opposition parties that have short time horizons and few reputational considerations to lean on (Arriola 2013; Gandhi and Reuter 2013).

Opposition Voters

Although we know about the difficulties of coalition formation from the standpoint of party leaders, we know less about them as seen from the perspective of voters (for an exception, see Gschwend and Hooghe 2008). In a parliamentary system, when opposition parties are running as an alliance, some voters will be able to vote for their most

preferred party within their legislative districts. But other voters will need to engage in cross-party voting in order to support the alliance.

Assume two parties, *A* and *D*, in an electoral alliance to challenge the incumbent, *I*. On some policy dimension, the parties are ordered as $I - A - D$. These parties compete in a parliamentary system with majoritarian elections. There are j districts. Whichever party wins the most number of districts gets to form the next government, taking the position of prime minister and deciding on an allocation of portfolios. If party *A* wins the most districts, then the leader of party *A* becomes prime minister and gives some portfolios to party *D*, and vice versa. Since this is an electoral autocracy, if party *I* wins the most districts, then it retains the premiership and keeps all portfolios. Finally, whichever party controls the premiership sets policy at its ideal point.

In district j , the electoral alliance will sponsor only one candidate—*A* or *D*—so that opposition voter i must make a choice between $\{A \text{ or } D\}$ and *I*. Voter i cares about three things.¹ First, since he is an opposition supporter, he places some value on alternation in power (i.e., value of democracy). Second, he cares about what types of policies will be implemented after the election. Finally, voter i places value on political office for his preferred party for reasons other than implementation of his preferred policy. He believes control of the premiership would bring the most adherents and resources to his party, with other portfolios bringing slightly less value.

With this stylized framework, consider three scenarios. First, opposition voter i , whose preferred party is *A*, is deciding between candidates from parties *A* and *I* in district j . In this baseline case, the choice is easy. Voting for party *A* helps to bring about alternation in power, party *A*'s control over the premiership, and post-electoral policies in line with voter i 's preferences. Both the prime minister and policy are at the voter's ideal point. In comparison, voting for the incumbent brings no alternation, no portfolios, and policy at party *I*'s ideal point. So the opposition voter chooses *A*.

Second, opposition voter i , whose preferred party is *A*, is deciding between *D* and *I* in his district. Voting for party *D* still helps to bring about alternation in power. But now party *D*—rather than the voter's preferred party *A*—will receive the premiership and will be able to set policy close to its ideal point. Party *A* receives only some portfolios. In comparison, voting for the incumbent brings no regime change, no portfolios, and post-electoral policy at

¹We do not consider the coordination problem of voters. Here, we assume voter i is pivotal and district j is pivotal for a party to win the election.

close to party *I*'s ideal point. So the voter will choose the opposition alliance's candidate only if after the election, the value of portfolios party *A* will receive can compensate for the larger policy distance between *A* and *D* (in comparison to *A* and *I*). As the policy distance between *A* and *D* increases, we expect the likelihood that voter *i* supports *D* declines. If the value of democracy does not factor into the voter's utility or the incumbent can credibly promise portfolios to party *A* as well, then it becomes even more difficult to hold this voter's support for the opposition alliance.

Finally, opposition voter *i*, whose preferred party is *D*, is deciding between *A* and *I* in his district. The choice for *A* brings alternation, portfolios for his preferred party, and policy at party *A*'s ideal point. A vote for the incumbent makes more likely no alternation, no portfolios for party *D*, and policy set at party *I*'s ideal point. In other words, this voter faces the same dilemma inherent in cross-party voting that the voter in our previous situation encountered. But now, it is in his best interest to still support the opposition alliance and vote for *A* since the incumbent party is further from *D* than *A* in policy terms.² The absence of a close ideological alternative makes the decision to defect from the opposition alliance less likely.³

Our main contention, then, is that some opposition voters may stray from supporting the alliance because they prioritize their policy commitments over their desire to see democratic turnover and when there is an alternative. When cross-party voting requires supporting a party that stands for undesirable policies and there is another party outside the alliance that represents more desirably policy outcomes, some voters will defect from supporting the opposition coalition.

Our argument implies a source of incumbency advantage that is distinct from the results of fraud, manipulation, or intimidation: the electoral loss to the opposition associated with the need to form ideologically diverse alliances. And while centrist incumbents seem good at dividing and conquering the opposition (Greene 2007; Magaloni 2006), the incumbent has considerable room to position himself and still damage an opposition alliance. Its ability to lure opposition voters away from the alliance depends in part on the composition of the coalition itself.

²If the incumbent can credibly offer portfolios to *D* as well, then as long as *A*'s offer of policy and portfolios beats the offer made by *I*, *A* will get the voter's support. But note that the incumbent will need to offer a lot of portfolios in order to compensate for the policy distance with *D*.

³Our setting is a parliamentary election with majoritarian electoral rules, but the dynamic outlined here is more general. Under proportional representation, parties within the coalition form joint lists that may force voters to support lists that do not prioritize candidates from their preferred parties.

While we have focused on voters, their dilemma is not unrelated to the decisions of opposition elites. If party leaders do not believe their constituents will engage in cross-party voting, or fear that asking them to do so will result in some sort of backlash, they will not form an opposition coalition in the first place. So besides idiosyncratic disagreements or problems of commitment (Arriola 2013; Golder 2006), anticipation of voter reactions may be a source of fragmentation among the opposition.

Empirical Context

Key Features

We use a survey experiment in the run-up to the May 2018 general election in Malaysia to test the idea that as the policy distance between parties *A* and *D* within the alliance increases, support for the coalition declines among party *A* voters who are "treated" to the idea that party *D* will control the premiership because party *A* voters have an alternative outside of the coalition for which to vote. Three specific features of this election are important for our approach. First, there are policy distinctions within the opposition alliance. Besides *A* and *D*, there are two parties—*B* and *C*—that lie between them in terms of policy positions. This enables us to compare the reaction of party *A* voters to those of voters from parties *B* and *C*. In response to hearing that party *D* is likely to control the premiership, we expect party *A* voters will be more likely to defect from the coalition than voters from parties *B* and *C* because the policy distance between *A* and *D* is greater than between *B* (or *C*) and *D*. Second, alternatives exist outside of the alliance. Besides the incumbent party, which has policy positions close to that of party *A*, a spoiler opposition party outside of the coalition lies to the left of *A*. In contrast, there is no credible alternative to which party *D* voters can defect. Consequently, our expectation is that party *A* voters exposed to the treatment about party *D* will defect, whereas party *D* voters exposed to the treatment about party *A* will not. Finally, the timing of the study must be noted. At the time of our survey, of the four coalition parties, *A* and *D* were the likeliest contenders for the premiership, but the coalition had given no indication of its post-electoral plans: either which party would lead it or what policies would be proposed. Consequently, our vignettes about *A* and *D* as possible leaders of government were plausible, but there was enough uncertainty among voters that would enable our respective treatments to have some effect. And in the absence of a common policy platform at the time of the survey experiment, it would not be

unreasonable for voters to believe that the party that controlled the government would determine policy.

The Case of Malaysia

For the May 2018 election, the *Barisan Nasional* (BN) was the incumbent ruling coalition, led by the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), and including almost a dozen smaller parties, such as the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), *Gerakan*, and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). While historically the coalition's electoral success was partly due to its multiethnic composition and the rapid growth of the economy, repressive tactics against the opposition (Slater 2004) and the manipulation of electoral rules (Ostwald 2013, 2017) have been critical as well. In particular, the BN has benefited from gerrymandered districts that overweight their supporters, especially in rural areas. Since the early 1990s, however, the BN's electoral fortunes have swung substantially. Figure 1 shows the share of seats won in each election for the national parliament by the BN (and its precursor, the Alliance) and the largest opposition parties.

Approaching the elections, a new opposition alliance, the *Pakatan Harapan* (PH), was formed by four opposition parties: BERSATU, PKR, AMANAH, and DAP (which correspond to our parties A, B, C, and D). The Democratic Action Party (DAP) is the oldest party in the alliance, having competed in elections since its founding in 1966. The People's Justice Party (*Parti Keadilan Rakyat* [PKR]) was born out of splits within the regime in 1999: between Prime Minister Mahathir and his deputy Anwar Ibrahim. The National Trust Party (*Parti Amanah Negara* [AMANAH]) is a moderate Islamist party recently formed by former members of the more hardline opposition Malaysian Islamic Party (*Parti Islam se-Malaysia* [PAS]). Finally, the Malaysian United Indigenous Party (*Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia* [BERSATU]) is another product of a regime split with UMNO's former leader, Mahathir Mohamad, forming the new party in September 2016.

The existing ethnic, religious, and class cleavages within Malaysian society structure the ideological positioning of the parties within the opposition coalition (K. M. Ong 2015). Although the constitution protects freedom of religion, there have long been debates about the state's appropriate relationship with Islam given that over 60% of Malaysians are Muslim. In addition, Malaysian society is multiethnic: Malays and *Bumiputeras* constitute almost 70% of the population, Chinese over 20%, and Indians just under 10%.⁴ Worries over the rel-

⁴*Bumiputeras* include Malays, natives from Sabah and Sarawak, and members of the Orang Asli community.

ative size and economic status of the Malay Muslim community have led to affirmative action programs for Malays and indigenous peoples (i.e., *Bumiputeras*) that have been in place since the 1970s, such as the New Economic Program (Gomez and Saravanamuttu 2013). These programs have led to increased education, employment, and ownership among the Malay and *Bumiputera* communities, but they have drawn criticism from non-Malays.

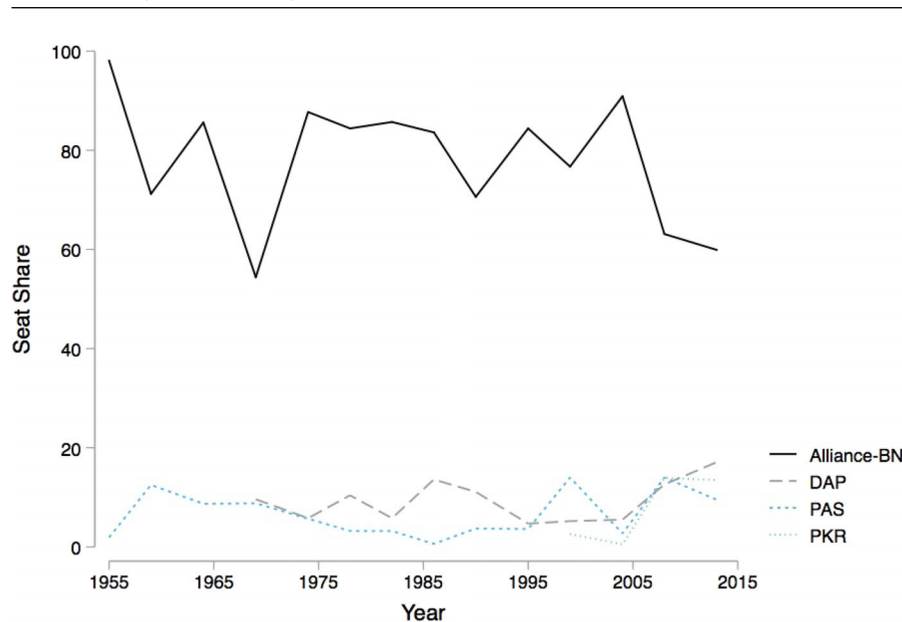
How do the opposition parties compare in their policy positions on these ethnic, religious, and class cleavages? The biggest policy differences fall between the two most prominent members of the alliance: DAP and BERSATU. The DAP is a secular leftist party that has been a consistent advocate for equal treatment of the various ethnicities (i.e., against *Bumiputera* privileges), cultivating its support mostly from the quarter of Malaysia's population that is ethnic Chinese or Indian. It won 38 seats in the previous general election—the largest number of seats among all the opposition parties. BERSATU, in contrast, is fully invested in a pro-Malay program (Wan Saiful 2018). Mahathir, its current leader and Malaysia's prime minister for 22 years (198–2003), cited the necessity of this strategy in order to compete with UMNO: “UMNO's popularity is because it is a racial party If the new party is to compete with UMNO, it must give the people in the rural constituencies and the unsophisticated urban constituencies the kind of comfort associated with UMNO's kind of racism.”⁵ Accordingly, full membership within the party is open only to *Bumiputeras*; non-*Bumiputeras* may join the party only as associate members.

The other parties in the coalition are more moderate and less prominent. Emphasizing its commitment to progressive Islam, AMANAH's positions are less polarized than those of its fellow alliance members. As a newly formed small splinter party from the much larger PAS, it has strongly advocated that alliance members put aside their differences to concentrate on defeating the BN. The multiethnic PKR similarly has emphasized a willingness to compromise and a focus on defeating the BN, which has helped in drawing multiethnic mass support. The party had 28 legislators at the time of the election, but factional infighting and imprisonment of its longtime leader, Anwar Ibrahim, diminished the party's standing within the coalition.

If the supporters of the BERSATU and DAP, the two opposing poles of the coalition, do not wish to vote for candidates from the opposition coalition, then what are

⁵“Mahathir Explains Why His New Party Is Race-Based,” *Free Malaysia Today*, August 17, 2016. <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2016/08/17/mahathir-explains-why-his-new-party-is-race-based/>.

FIGURE 1 Seat Shares of Alliance-BN and Opposition Parties (1955–2013)



Note: Before 1969, the ruling coalition was called the Alliance. PAS was part of the BN in the 1974 election. Sources include Wong, Chin, and Othman (2010), Weiss (2013), and the Inter-Parliamentary Union website (<https://www.ipu.org/>).

their alternatives? DAP's mostly Chinese and Indian supporters can potentially vote for one of the non-Malay parties of the BN, such as the Chinese-based MCA or *Gerakan*, or the Indian-backed MIC. But this is highly unlikely. Since the 2008 "tsunami" general elections, non-Malay voters have largely deserted the BN (Chin 2010; Khalid and Loh 2016). The BN's gradual marginalization of Indian and Chinese interests over the decades has led to growing disillusionment over the MCA, *Gerakan*, or MIC's claims that non-Malay interests can be protected and advanced only within the dominant ruling BN coalition. As a result, even if DAP's supporters wish to protest against a BERSATU-dominant opposition alliance, they have little choice beyond the DAP itself. At best, they can simply abstain from voting.

BERSATU's Malay Muslim supporters, however, have the luxury of more alternatives. As supporters of a newly formed splinter party from UMNO, they can potentially switch their support back to UMNO if UMNO can credibly commit itself to reforms to rid itself of corruption. A potential signal of credible commitment to reform may involve the costly move of replacing the current prime minister, Najib Razak, who has been mired in a global money laundering and corruption scandal.⁶ Although

such a move may appear drastic, it is not without precedent, as UMNO had previously galvanized to force the unpopular Abdullah Badawi to retire as prime minister in 2008. Moreover, BERSATU's supporters can also potentially vote for PAS, the conservative Islamic opposition party that is not a member of the *Pakatan Harapan* opposition alliance. Although PAS's consistent advocacy of an Islamic state for Malaysia may be unpalatable for some voters, it is a much more acceptable option for pious Malay Muslims than living under a non-Malay, secular, DAP-dominant regime.

Consequently, we expect that BERSATU supporters are most susceptible to defection from the opposition coalition if they expect the DAP will control the government. The prospects of a BERSATU-led government, however, will do little to push DAP supporters to desert the coalition since they have no other alternatives.

Research Design

Survey Experiment

We commissioned a telephone survey of Malaysian citizens between August 14 and September 25, 2017. The response rate was 5.75%. Of the 6,767 individuals who initially responded, 61.08% revealed themselves to be supporters of one of the parties within the incumbent

⁶For an overview, see the *Wall Street Journal's* series of articles at <http://www.wsj.com/specialcoverage/malaysia-controversy>.

ruling coalition, the BN. Removing them from the sample, as well as removing observations with missing responses, underage respondents, or enumerator error, leaves us with a sample of 2,195 opposition supporters.⁷ We also exclude respondents from Sabah and Sarawak since politics in these two East Malaysian states is quite distinct from the rest of the country.⁸ Of this sample of opposition supporters, 1,277 individuals supported a member party of the *Pakatan Harapan* opposition coalition, whereas 918 respondents indicated support for PAS.⁹

Our outcome of interest is in determining support for *Pakatan Harapan* among respondents who support one of its member parties. We expose all respondents to a general text, after which we survey their support for PH. The key feature of this text is that it makes no reference to post-electoral differences in outcomes among the coalition parties. With all respondents exposed to this message first, we get a baseline assessment of how much they support the alliance:

Recent surveys done show that if the four parties of the Pakatan Harapan were to contest the elections separately, the Barisan Nasional for sure would obtain the majority of seats needed to form the next government. How likely would you cast a vote for candidates from Pakatan Harapan parties?

All respondents then go on to answer a variety of questions eliciting demographic information (for the ordering of questions, see the survey instrument in SI Table A.2). We randomly assign our sample into one of three groups: one control and two treatment arms.¹⁰ The control group gets a message that is a repetition of what they learned about the PH earlier, again omitting any discussion of post-electoral differences among coalition parties:

⁷Enumerator error was low. Out of the initial sample of 2,298 opposition supporters who provided full responses to all questions, only 52 respondents were found to have been wrongly asked questions for the treatment vignettes. The number of underage respondents was also low. Out of the 2,246 opposition supporters who provided full responses to all questions and who were correctly assigned to one group, only 51 respondents were under the voting age.

⁸The main opposition parties are localized, advocating for local ethnic minority groups, and electoral politics is relatively more multidimensional (Hazis 2012; Weiss and Puyok 2017).

⁹For more information about the representativeness of the survey, see Table A.1 in the supporting information (SI).

¹⁰Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the three groups via a random number generator. Respondents assigned to Group 1 were in the control group. Those assigned to Group 2 were in the DAP treatment group. Those assigned to Group 3 were in the BERSATU treatment group.

Recent surveys show that if the Pakatan Harapan coalition stays together, it may win enough seats in the next election so that it—rather than the BN—would be able to form the next national government. How likely would you cast a vote for [candidates from] the Pakatan Harapan?

The treatment groups receive a message that has the same opening line as the control group message. But each treatment group receives an additional two sentences as a reminder that an electoral victory will result in one of the parties—the DAP or BERSATU—gaining control of the government.¹¹ The DAP [BERSATU] treatment group receives the following:

Recent surveys show that if the Pakatan Harapan coalition stays together, it may win enough seats in the next election so that it—rather than the BN—would be able to form the next national government. In addition, recent extra surveys done also show that the party with the most number of seats within the coalition will be the DAP [BERSATU]. Therefore, the DAP [BERSATU] leader will be the next prime minister. How likely would you cast a vote for [candidates from] the Pakatan Harapan?

Responses to these questions provide a posttreatment measure of support for PH. This setup enables us to examine within-subject differences in attitudes toward the coalition that differ across subjects. Table 1 summarizes the format of the survey.

Estimation Methods

Our main interest lies in a three-way comparison: within-subject differences across control and treatment groups for a specific party versus other parties within the coalition. We expect the DAP treatment to make BERSATU voters more likely to decrease their willingness to vote for the coalition than other voters. We expect the BERSATU treatment to have little or no effect in making DAP voters switch away from supporting PH in comparison to other voters. Note that we are interested only in comparisons between the control and DAP treatment groups and between the control and BERSATU treatment groups. We

¹¹We focused on these two parties in our treatment arms since we have little reason to believe that the PKR will elicit conditional support given its centrist platform. We also did not construct a treatment arm for AMANAH because the party's likelihood of controlling the government is so low as to make that hypothetical situation unrealistic.

TABLE 1 Format of Survey

	Groups		
	Control	DAP Treatment	BERSATU Treatment
Pretreatment text	Main text	Main text	Main text
Pretreatment outcome	<i>Support PH₀</i>	<i>Support PH₀</i>	<i>Support PH₀</i>
Treatment text	Placebo text	DAP text	BERSATU text
Posttreatment outcome	<i>Support PH_{control}</i>	<i>Support PH_{DAP}</i>	<i>Support PH_{BERSATU}</i>

do not have theoretical expectations for the comparison between the DAP and BERSATU treatment groups.

We carry out a difference-in-difference analysis in which we expect that for BERSATU supporters:

$$[\text{Posttreatment support PH} - \text{Pretreatment support PH}]_{\text{DAP treatment}} - [\text{Posttreatment support PH} - \text{Pretreatment support PH}]_{\text{control}} < 0.$$

We can express our quantity of interest in regression format as well:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{SupportPH}_{it} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{DAPtreatment}_i + \beta_2 d_t \\ & + \beta_3 \text{BERSATU voter}_i \\ & + \beta_4 (\text{DAPtreatment}_i \times d_t) \\ & + \beta_5 (\text{DAPtreatment}_i \times \text{BERSATU voter}_i) \\ & + \beta_6 (\text{BERSATU voter}_i \times d_t) \\ & + \beta_7 (\text{DAPtreatment}_i \times d_t \\ & \times \text{BERSATU voter}_i) + \beta X_{it} + \epsilon_{it}, \end{aligned}$$

where *i* stands for individual and *t* for time (i.e., before or after treatment). *BERSATU voter* is a dichotomous indicator equal to 1 if the individual indicates pretreatment support for that party; *DAP treatment* is a dichotomous indicator equal to 1 if the individual undergoes that treatment; *d* is a dummy equal to 1 if the response is posttreatment; and *X* stands for various covariates. The coefficient β_7 captures the within-subject Treatment \times Covariate interaction effect of the DAP treatment on support for the coalition over time for BERSATU versus other supporters. The same procedure applies in determining whether DAP voters are more likely to turn away from the coalition after receiving the BERSATU treatment.

To assess whether the groups are balanced on observable characteristics, we examine political attitudes and demographic characteristics of the respondents that were measured prior to the intervention. The left side of Table 2 shows means and differences in means between the control and DAP treatment groups, whereas the right side makes a similar comparison for the control and BERSATU treatment groups (for descriptive statistics, see SI Table A.3). There is substantial balance in pretreatment covariates across the two sets of comparisons. Stratifying

the comparison by respondents’ partisan affiliation shows similar balance (see SI Tables A.4 and A.5).

In terms of political views, our respondent pool displays consistent attitudes. First, respondents are resolutely in support of democracy. Over 95% of them believe that it is important for “the party that controls the government to change from time to time.” This demand for alternation in power makes opposition voters unique from BN supporters. Consistent with this view, our analysis of the latest Asian Barometer Survey from late 2014 also reveals that BN voters were 10 to 20% more likely to state that “only one political party should be allowed to stand for election and hold office” (see SI Table A.11).¹² Second, respondents are dissatisfied with the current government. Four out of five supporters of one of the coalition parties take a dim view of the regime and of Najib Tun Rakak, the incumbent prime minister, rating them “somewhat” or “very” negatively. Third, respondents believe that an opposition victory is possible. Approximately the same proportion of respondents believe that the opposition coalition has a good chance of winning a majority and forming the next government. In pretreatment questioning, over 90% of respondents voice intention to vote for PH. Important to note is that these views are shared consistently across supporters of all four parties. Opposition supporters clearly embrace the importance of alternation in government, and their support for PH is a way to achieve this goal.

Results

As a first test of our hypothesis, we track the post- and pre-treatment change in *Support PH*, a dichotomous indicator

¹²The Asian Barometer Survey is a research network comprising 14 country teams, and it is part of the Global Barometer Survey network. Its regional headquarters are cohosted by the Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica, and the Center for East Asia Democratic Studies at National Taiwan University. For the background and methodological details of the Asian Barometer Survey, refer to the project’s website: <http://www.asianbarometer.org>.

TABLE 2 Balance between Control and DAP Treatment Groups and between Control and BERSATU Treatment Groups on Pretreatment Variables

	Means		Differences in Means		Means		Differences in Means	
	Control (N = 716)	DAP	t-statistic	p-value	Control (N = 716)	BERSATU	t-Statistic	p-value
		Treatment (N = 736)				Treatment (N = 743)		
Political views								
Support PH ₀	3.09	3.10	-0.254	.800	3.09	3.13	-0.854	.393
Support PH ₀ (dummy)	0.78	0.79	-0.147	.883	0.78	0.79	-0.241	.810
Previous vote	0.73	0.80	-2.628	.009	0.73	0.76	-0.984	.326
Alternation important	2.79	2.75	1.552	.121	2.79	2.81	-0.767	.444
View of leader	1.84	1.77	1.596	.111	1.84	1.76	1.889	.059
View of regime	1.87	1.85	0.487	.626	1.87	1.82	1.158	.247
Coalition chances	2.79	2.82	-0.926	.355	2.79	2.82	-0.885	.376
DAP likely winner	0.31	0.31	0.123	.902	0.31	0.35	-1.727	.084
BERSATU likely winner	0.23	0.21	1.293	.196	0.23	0.21	1.007	.314
PKR likely winner	0.39	0.40	-0.221	.825	0.39	0.33	2.608	.009
AMANAH likely winner	0.07	0.09	-1.799	.072	0.07	0.11	-3.015	.003
Demographic characteristics								
Gender	0.72	0.71	0.541	.588	0.72	0.75	-1.314	.189
Age	39.37	38.76	0.878	.380	39.37	39.91	-0.771	.441
Malay	0.73	0.75	-0.850	.396	0.73	0.72	0.207	.836
Chinese	0.22	0.22	0.021	.984	0.22	0.24	-0.869	.385
Indian	0.05	0.03	1.304	.192	0.05	0.04	1.063	.288
Other ethnicity	0.01	0.004	1.313	.189	0.01	0.01	0.644	.520
Income	2.34	2.37	-0.508	.612	2.34	2.43	-1.626	.104
Internet access	0.78	0.79	-0.466	.641	0.78	0.78	0.003	.998
Public employment	0.06	0.06	0.462	.644	0.06	0.08	-0.929	.353
Private employment	0.41	0.42	-0.251	.802	0.41	0.44	-1.191	.234
Self-employment	0.31	0.30	0.293	.770	0.31	0.30	0.525	.600
Retired	0.07	0.07	-0.266	.790	0.07	0.08	-0.609	.543
Unemployed/ Student	0.15	0.15	-0.153	.878	0.15	0.11	2.247	.025

Note: The control group across the two comparisons refers to the same set of respondents. Number of observations for *Previous vote* is lower due to missing data.

of support for PH that takes the value 1 if the respondent is very or somewhat likely to vote for PH or 0 if he is very or somewhat unlikely to support the coalition. Support for the coalition declines by 0.32 among BERSATU supporters who receive the DAP treatment in comparison to BERSATU supporters in the control group. In contrast, among DAP supporters, exposure to the BERSATU treatment results in no change in support for the alliance (for the full set of results, see SI Table A.6).

To more precisely evaluate the treatment effects, however, we need to compare these respondents to supporters of other parties within the coalition as well as control for covariates. For this, we use a linear probability model in which our dependent variable is *Support PH* (defined above).¹³

¹³A Brant test provides evidence that our data violate the parallel regression assumption. Therefore, we use generalized ordered

TABLE 3 Difference-in-Difference Estimation of Coalition Support for Supporters of BERSATU versus Other Coalition Parties

	Model 1				Model 2			
	Coeffic.	Std. Error	p-value	Adj. p-value	Coeffic.	Std. Error	p-value	Adj. p-value
Constant	0.907	0.010	.000		0.604	0.082	.000	
DAP treatment	0.012	0.021	.596		0.010	0.021	.638	
Time	0.021	0.013	.147		0.021	0.013	.148	
BERSATU supporter	-0.008	0.039	.844		-0.032	0.043	.472	
DAP Treatment × Time	-0.096	0.034	.017	.117	-0.096	0.034	.017	.201
Time × BERSATU Supporter	0.062	0.042	.165		0.062	0.042	.165	
DAP Treatment × BERSATU Supporter	0.010	0.048	.841		0.020	0.049	.693	
DAP Treatment × Time × BERSATU Supporter	-0.303	0.079	.003	.019	-0.303	0.079	.003	.032
Alternation important					0.057	0.015	.003	.034
Coalition chances					0.049	0.016	.010	.122
DAP likely winner					0.006	0.025	.818	
BERSATU likely winner					0.018	0.031	.572	
PKR likely winner					-0.005	0.030	.863	

Note: N = 1,277 respondents. Regressions use OLS with standard errors clustered at the state level. Bonferroni-adjusted p-values are included for coefficients with unadjusted p-values that reach conventional levels of significance.

Table 3 shows the effects of the DAP treatment on respondents. On the left side of the table are results from the baseline model, whereas the model on the right includes controls that were found to reach conventional levels of significance in a model including all pretreatment covariates without significantly reducing sample size (for results of these larger models, see SI Tables A.9 and A.10). The results show that BERSATU supporters were 30% less likely to continue supporting the coalition after learning that the DAP might form the next government, as compared to supporters of other opposition parties.¹⁴

Table 4, in turn, shows the effects of the BERSATU treatment on respondents. Both the baseline and full models show that we cannot rule out the null hypothesis. The likelihood that DAP supporters lower their support for the coalition once they learn that BERSATU will control the government is not significantly different from zero, as compared to the supporters of other opposition

logistic regression rather than ordered logistic regression and find similar substantive results. We collapse the dependent variable into a binary indicator and use OLS regression for ease of interpretation. Our results also hold using binary logistic regression. For these alternative models, see SI Tables A.7 and A.8.

¹⁴Substantively similar results emerge if we remove DAP supporters from the sample.

parties.¹⁵ DAP supporters simply have no other alternative to the coalition.

Exploring the Mechanisms

Is it really differences in ideology between DAP and BERSATU supporters that are driving the result? We make the affirmative case by showing that the DAP treatment has a similarly large effect on supporters of PAS—a party that is outside of the coalition, but one that has strong ideological conflicts with the DAP. We also address rival motivations for BERSATU supporters: asymmetry in party size, DAP as unlikely winner, and ethnic chauvinism.

The Reaction of PAS Supporters

We examine the effect of the DAP treatment on PAS supporters. PAS was formed as an Islamist party in 1951. Twice in the past, PAS and the DAP have formed electoral coalitions that eventually collapsed because of ideological disagreements, specifically over the place of religion in

¹⁵Substantively similar results emerge if BERSATU supporters are removed from the sample.

TABLE 4 Difference-in-Difference Estimation of Coalition Support for Supporters of DAP versus Other Coalition Parties

	Model 1				Model 2			
	Coeffic.	Std. Error	p-value	Adjusted p-value	Coeffic.	Std. Error	p-value	Adjusted p-value
Constant	0.923	0.015	0.000		0.600	0.082	0.000	
BERSATU treatment	-0.026	0.033	0.453		-0.027	0.032	0.409	
Time	-0.047	0.013	0.005	0.032	-0.047	0.013	0.005	0.055
DAP supporter	-0.022	0.031	0.504		0.002	0.031	0.949	
BERSATU Treatment × Time	0.085	0.029	0.014	0.097	0.085	0.029	0.014	0.167
Time × DAP Supporter	0.040	0.022	0.091	0.639	0.040	0.022	0.092	
BERSATU Treatment × DAP Supporter	0.025	0.055	0.654		0.017	0.053	0.754	
BERSATU Treatment × Time × DAP Supporter	-0.078	0.044	0.107	0.747	-0.078	0.044	0.107	
Alternation important					0.062	0.015	0.001	0.016
Coalition chances					0.049	0.016	0.009	0.112
DAP likely winner					0.001	0.025	0.963	
BERSATU likely winner					0.001	0.027	0.983	
PKR likely winner					-0.009	0.032	0.780	

Note: N = 1,277 respondents. Regressions use OLS with standard errors clustered at the state level. Bonferroni-adjusted p-values are included.

politics. Even though the parties, in the 1999 *Barisan Alternatif* coalition, had agreed to set aside their core policy demands, PAS became more assertive on the implementation of Islamic law once it gained control of subnational state governments after elections (Noor 2014; Ufen 2009). DAP leaders saw such actions as confirmation of their fears, withdrawing from the coalition in 2001. Similarly, PAS left the 2013 coalition and refused to join the current one because of its strained relations with the DAP. As late as May 2017, the president of PAS, Hadi Awang, reiterated that his party was opposed to DAP because DAP was “against the role of Islam in the country, although Islam is the religion of the federation.”¹⁶ The long history of policy disagreements between the two parties leads us to expect PAS supporters to mirror the behavior of BERSATU voters.

Table 5 shows the effects of the DAP treatment on PAS supporters as compared to the supporters of other opposition parties. Prior to treatment, about 55% of PAS supporters expressed a willingness to vote for PH. The lower baseline support for PH is not surprising given that PAS

is not included in the opposition coalition. Once exposed to the DAP treatment, however, a PAS supporter is almost 14% more likely to withdraw his or her support for the coalition in comparison to other opposition supporters.

Asymmetry of Size as a Possible Motivation

The aversion of BERSATU supporters to a DAP-led government also could be due to asymmetries in size between the respective parties. Differences in size and strength among potential coalition partners may influence party leaders’ decisions to enter into electoral alliances and voters’ willingness to support these coalitions (Golder 2006; Ibenskas 2016; Meffert and Gschwend 2011).

Specifically, the asymmetry of an alliance provokes supporters of smaller partners to turn away from the coalition (Gschwend and Hooghe 2008; Wegner and Pellicer 2013). This is because the supporters of smaller parties may be concerned that an electoral victory for the coalition will serve to only magnify these differences in strength.

But if asymmetries of size are of paramount consideration for voters, then we would expect to see AMANAH supporters exhibit attitudes similar to those of BERSATU voters. At the time of the campaign, both AMANAH and

¹⁶Yang Razali Kassim, “Is a New PAS Emerging?” *The Straits Times*, May 5, 2017. <http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/is-a-new-pas-emerging> (Accessed September 14, 2017).

TABLE 5 Difference-in-Difference Estimation of Coalition Support for Supporters of PAS versus Other Parties

	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value	Adjusted p-value
Constant	0.377	0.073	.000	
DAP treatment	0.004	0.022	.877	
Time	0.021	0.013	.147	
PAS supporter	-0.234	0.021	.000	.000
DAP Treatment × Time	-0.096	0.034	.017	.150
Time × PAS Supporter	-0.064	0.014	.001	.008
DAP Treatment × PAS Supporter	-0.016	0.023	.491	
DAP Treatment × Time × PAS Supporter	-0.141	0.036	.002	.022
Alternation important	0.038	0.024	.134	
Coalition chances	0.145	0.026	.000	.001

Note: N = 1,934 respondents. Regression uses OLS with standard errors clustered at the state level. Bonferroni-adjusted p-values are included.

BERSATU were recently formed parties; they had little parliamentary representation, and their popularity was unproven in an election. So if concerns about the relative gains of parties within the coalition were a dominant motivation, then the behavior of BERSATU and AMANAH supporters should be quite comparable.

Instead, the results in Table 6 show that AMANAH supporters do not share the same hesitations about a DAP-led government. Exposure to the DAP treatment makes AMANAH supporters increase their support for the coalition by almost 14% compared to other opposition supporters. We attribute this effect to the close relationship between the DAP and AMANAH leaders. The DAP supported AMANAH’s leaders, such as Mohamad Sabu, Khalid Samad, Dr. Dzulkefly Ahmad, and Dr. Siti Mariah, even when they were still just a progressive faction within the conservative Islamic PAS. Their defection from PAS to form AMANAH in late 2015 also garnered support from the DAP (Hew 2016).

DAP as Unlikely Winner

An alternative explanation for BERSATU supporters’ strong reactions to the DAP treatment may be that their initial expectation about the prospects of a DAP-led government were low, and the treatment vignette suggesting a DAP premiership simply led to shock that triggered a shift away from the coalition. In this case, the reaction of BERSATU supporters is an artifact of their pretreatment beliefs.

The prospect of a DAP-led government, however, was not viewed as low by anyone. First, of the four parties in the coalition, the DAP won the largest number of seats in the previous general elections (38 seats). So the DAP’s statement—as early as March 2017—that the

party “confidently forecasted it is going to win more than 40 seats” in the election could be viewed as credible.¹⁷ Second, we asked respondents a pretreatment question about which opposition party they believe would win the largest number of seats. Among them, 32% projected the DAP compared to 22% BERSATU. The majority of each party’s supporters believed its own party would likely win the most seats. But respondents do not significantly discriminate among the rest of their choices. In addition, the right-side panels in Tables 3 and 4 show that inclusion of indicators of which party is projected to gain the most seats (*DAP likely winner*, *BERSATU likely winner*, *PKR likely winner*; AMANAH as the omitted category) does not change our substantive findings.

Ethnic Chauvinism

The policy differences between BERSATU and the DAP run deep. At stake is a raft of economic, educational, and employment policies that have been critical in raising the material well-being of ethnic Malays since the 1970s. Due to the overlap between policy differences and ethnic divisions, however, ethnic chauvinism and policy considerations by BERSATU voters can produce observationally equivalent responses to the DAP treatment.

We cannot discard the possibility that prejudice is a factor. Still, various pieces of evidence suggest that the “ethnic factor” cannot completely account for political attitudes. First, opposition and government supporters are divided by their beliefs in the importance of democracy. As mentioned earlier in the article, Asian Barometer Survey data show that opposition respondents attach greater

¹⁷DAP Will Decide Who Becomes Prime Minister,” *Malaysia Today*, March 26, 2017. <http://www.malaysia-today.net/2017/03/19/dap-will-decide-who-becomes-prime-minister/>.

TABLE 6 Difference-in-Difference Estimation of Coalition Support for Supporters of AMANAH versus Other Parties in Coalition

	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value	Adjusted p-value
Constant	0.603	0.068	.000	
DAP treatment	0.018	0.023	.443	
Time	0.044	0.008	.000	.002
AMANAH supporter	0.001	0.028	.966	
DAP Treatment × Time	-0.174	0.029	.000	.001
Time × AMANAH Supporter	-0.067	0.039	.113	
DAP Treatment × AMANAH Supporter	-0.014	0.044	.765	
DAP Treatment × Time × AMANAH Supporter	0.137	0.044	.009	.085
Alternation important	0.058	0.016	.004	.037
Coalition chances	0.047	0.015	.010	.090

Note: N = 1,277 respondents. Regression uses OLS with standard errors clustered at the state level. Bonferroni-adjusted p-values are included.

importance to political competition and alternation in power than BN supporters. Although the Asian Barometer Survey occurred before the emergence of BERSATU, there is no reason to think that BERSATU supporters would not similarly value democracy as other opposition voters do. But this would imply that while BERSATU and BN supporters may share their desire for pro-Malay programs, there is another issue—democracy—that divides them. Second, in response to a posttreatment question about the reasons for critical views of the DAP, over two-thirds of BERSATU and PAS supporters claim “the party does not represent majority interests.” This response suggests that the root of their objections lies over policy. Finally, if defection from the PH opposition alliance was purely about interethnic rivalry, then we should observe equal rates of defection from both sides: DAP supporters would reduce their support for PH given the BERSATU treatment, and BERSATU supporters would reduce their support for PH given the DAP treatment. Yet what we find is uneven defection—DAP supporters maintained their support for the coalition despite the possibility of a BERSATU-led government. Interethnic biases may be important, but the presence of an alternative in the policy space seems equally important.

Concluding Discussion

In the May 2018 election, the *Pakatan Harapan* pulled off a stunning upset. With nearly half of the popular vote, it won 113 seats—just enough to win a simple parliamentary majority. If the problem of cross-party voting was so serious, how did the coalition manage to win? Events subsequent to our study point to the fact that political

elites in Malaysia recognized the vulnerability of PH’s support among ethnic Malay Muslim voters, especially BERSATU’s followers. The incumbent BN thus sought to exploit this vulnerability, whereas PH leaders took great pains to mitigate it.

As the elections approached, the BN drew themselves closer to the conservative Islamic PAS, organizing multiple events where incumbent Prime Minister Najib Razak and PAS leader Hadi Awang were both seen together.¹⁸ Field interviews with candidates and academics during the election also revealed that the BN had provided financial incentives to PAS to run more than 150 candidates in the 222 constituencies across the country. It was the greatest number of candidates that PAS had ever fielded. By forcing three-cornered contests in multiple districts between BN, PAS, and PH candidates, the aim was to induce PH’s Malay Muslim supporters, especially those from BERSATU, to switch to either PAS or BN.¹⁹ The BN also launched several campaigns to stoke fears of a DAP-controlled government.

In a bid to counter the BN’s efforts, *Pakatan Harapan* announced in January 2018 that BERSATU’s leader, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, would be the next prime minister and Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, PKR’s leader, would be made deputy prime minister, should the opposition form the next government. This was the first time that any

¹⁸Su-Lyn Boo, “Another UMNO-PAS Event, but GE14 Alliance Unlikely, Analysts Say,” *Malay Mail*, December 22, 2017. <https://www.malaymail.com/s/1537911/another-umno-pas-event-but-ge14-alliance-unlikely-analysts-say>.

¹⁹Sumisha Naidu, “Multi-Cornered Fights and Fresh Faces in Selangor for Upcoming Malaysia Election,” *Channelnewsasia*, April 24, 2018. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/multi-cornered-fights-and-fresh-faces-in-selangor-for-upcoming-10171198>.

opposition coalition in Malaysia's history had formally announced its post-electoral cabinet ahead of impending elections. The announcement of an executive branch with two Malay Muslim leaders served to resolve the uncertainty over who would control the government and to reassure Malay Muslim opposition supporters that a DAP-dominated government would not be the outcome. This declaration was critical for the coalition's success. Forty constituencies that BN won in 2013 switched to one of the parties within the coalition in 2018. If BERSATU voters constituted on average 24% of coalition voters in each constituency (as in our sample) and 30% of them had defected (as in our results), the coalition would have lost 5 to 12 of these seats (see SI Table A.12). Given that the coalition won a majority by just one seat, defection by this 7% of opposition voters would have resulted in defeat.

The *Pakatan Harapan's* experience in Malaysia suggests that one important source for the failure of opposition coalitions—to form or win elections—stems from opposition voters themselves. Party leaders may anticipate supporters' hesitation to engage in cross-party voting and decide that the formation of a coalition is not worth the costly effort. Even when leaders successfully negotiate coalitions, not all of their supporters may be willing to follow them into the gamble. When opposition coalitions include ideologically distant partners and supporters see more attractive options outside of the coalition, they are willing to abandon the coalition. This may be true even if they view democratic turnover in office as important and even if desertion of the coalition means abandoning this goal.

So how might opposition parties solve this problem? One important element is to reduce the uncertainty of voters over what a post-electoral government would look like if the opposition were to win. Parties may strive to do this by issuing common policy platforms that reflect interparty agreement on policies the coalition will implement if it were to win office (E. Ong 2017). Another approach is to have coalition parties divide up political offices. The Malaysian experience teaches that critically, such deals must be made public and they must compensate important coalition members. The proposed division of offices among coalition members may not be "fair"; it will depend upon which parties' supporters have credible alternatives to which they can defect.

The problem of inducing cross-party voting among coalition members should arise in democratic elections as well. But the problem in the context of an authoritarian election highlights just how much voters are willing to give up—a chance at democracy—to protect their interests. And while the concern over policy may be specific to systems in which parties have clear, identifiable posi-

tions (e.g., less party system volatility), other sources of partisanship may drive the fickleness of voters. In this regard, our work highlights another source of incumbent advantage that emerges outside of fraud, manipulation, or intimidation.

References

- Acemoglu, Daron, James Robinson, and Ragnar Torvik. 2013. "Why Do Votes Dismantle Checks and Balances?" *Review of Economic Studies* 80(3): 845–75.
- Arriola, Leonardo. 2013. *Multi-ethnic Coalitions in Africa: Business Financing of Opposition Election Campaigns*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bermeo, Nancy. 2003. *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bunce, Valarie, and Sharon Wolchik. 2011. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carroll, Royce, and Gary Cox. 2007. "The Logic of Gamson's Law: Pre-Election Coalitions and Portfolio Allocations." *American Journal of Political Science* 51(2): 300–313.
- Chin, James. 2010. "Malaysian Chinese Association Politics a Year Later: Crisis of Political Legitimacy." *The Round Table* 99(407): 153–62.
- Donno, Daniela. 2013. "Elections and Democratization in Authoritarian Regimes." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(3): 703–16.
- Gandhi, Jennifer, and Ora John Reuter. 2013. "The Incentives for Pre-Electoral Coalitions in Non-Democratic Elections." *Democratization* 20(1): 137–59.
- Golder, Sona. 2006. *The Logic of Pre-Electoral Coalition Formation*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Gomez, Terence. 2016. "Resisting the Fall: The Single Dominant Party, Policies and Elections in Malaysia." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46(4): 570–90.
- Gomez, Terence, and Johan Saravanamuttu. 2013. *The New Economic Policy in Malaysia: Affirmative Action, Ethnic Inequalities, and Social Justice*. Singapore: NUS Press.
- Greene, Kenneth. 2007. *Why Dominant Parties Lose: Mexico's Democratization in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gschwend, Thomas, and Marc Hooghe. 2008. "Should I Stay or Should I Go? An Experimental Study on Voter Responses to Pre-Electoral Coalitions." *European Journal of Political Research* 47(5): 556–77.
- Hazis, Faizal. 2012. *Domination and Contestation: Muslim Bumiputera Politics in Sarawak*. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Hew, Wai Weng. 2016. "Will Malaysia's New Islamist Party Reshape the Political Landscape?" *ISEAS Perspective*. No. 53. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Howard, Marc, and Phillip Roessler. 2006. "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(2): 365–81.

- Ibenskas, Raimondas. 2016. "Understanding Pre-Electoral Coalitions in Central and Eastern Europe." *British Journal of Political Science* 46(4): 743–61.
- Khalid, Khadijah, and Jason Loh. 2016. "Contemporary Electoral Trends among Malaysian Chinese Voters: Changing Political Socialisation and Orientation in the Post 2008 General Election." *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 15(2): 174–208.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: The Origins and Evolution of Hybrid Regimes in the Post-Cold War Era*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Magaloni, Beatriz. 2006. *Voting for Autocracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Meffert, Michael, and Thomas Gschwend. 2011. "Polls, Coalition Signals and Strategic Voting: An Experimental Investigation of Perceptions and Effects." *European Journal of Political Research* 50(5): 636–67.
- Noor, Farish. 2014. *The Malaysian Islamic Party, 1951–2013: Islamism in a Mottled Nation*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Ong, Elvin. 2017. "Why Opposition Common Policy Platforms? A Survey Experiment in Malaysia." Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Conference, San Francisco, California. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3127946>.
- Ong, Kian Ming. 2015. "Malaysian Political Parties and Coalitions." In *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Malaysia*, ed. Meredith Weiss. New York: Routledge, 22–35.
- Ostwald, Kai. 2013. "How to Win a Lost Election: Malapportionment and Malaysia's 2013 General Election." *The Round Table* 102(6): 521–32.
- Ostwald, Kai. 2017. "Malaysia's Electoral Process: The Methods and Costs of Perpetuating UMNO Rule." *Trends in Southeast Asia*. No. 19. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Pepinsky, Thomas. 2009. *Economic Crises and the Breakdown of Authoritarian Regimes: Indonesia and Malaysia in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pepinsky, Thomas. 2015. "Interpreting Ethnicity and Urbanization in Malaysia's 2013 General Election." *Journal of East Asian Studies* 15(2): 199–226.
- Resnick, Danielle. 2011. "Do Electoral Coalitions Facilitate Democratic Consolidation in Africa?" *Party Politics* 19(5): 735–57.
- Sartori, Giovanni. 1976. *Parties and Party Systems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schedler, Andreas. 2002. "The Menu of Manipulation." *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 36–50.
- Slater, Dan. 2004. "Democracy Takes a Thumping: Islamist and Democratic Opposition in Malaysia's Electoral Authoritarian Regime." *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 5. <https://kyotoreview.org/issue-5/democracy-takes-a-thumping-islamist-and-democratic-opposition-in-malaysias-electoral-authoritarian-regime/>.
- Slater, Dan. 2010. *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Svolik, Milan. 2017. "When Polarization Trumps Civic Virtue: Partisan Conflict and the Subversion of Democracy by Incumbents." Unpublished manuscript. Department of Political Science, Yale University.
- Tucker, Joshua. 2006. *Regional Economic Voting: Russia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, 1990–1999*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ufen, Andreas. 2009. "The Transformation of Political Party Opposition in Malaysia and Its Implications for the Electoral Authoritarian Regime." *Democratization* 16(3): 604–27.
- Wahman, Michael. 2011. "Offices and Policies—Why Do Oppositional Parties Form Pre-Electoral Coalitions in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes?" *Electoral Studies* 30(4): 642–57.
- Wahman, Michael. 2013. "Opposition Coalitions and Democratization by Election." *Government and Opposition* 48(1): 3–32.
- Wan Saiful, Wan Jan. 2018. "Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia in Johor: New Party, Big Responsibility." *Trends in Southeast Asia*. No. 2. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Wegner, Eva, and Miquel Pellicer. 2013. "Left-Islamist Opposition Cooperation in Morocco." In *The Dynamics of Opposition Cooperation in the Arab World*, ed. Hendrik Jan Kraetzschmar. London: Routledge, 19–38.
- Weiss, Meredith. 2013. "Malaysia's 13th General Elections: Same Result, Different Outcome." *Asian Survey*. 53 (6): 1135–1158.
- Weiss, Meredith, and Arnold Puyok. 2017. *Electoral Dynamics in Sarawak: Contesting Developmentalism and Rights*. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Wong, Chin Huat, James Chin, and Norani Othman. 2010. "Malaysia—Towards a Topology of an Electoral One-Party State." *Democratization* 17(5): 920–49.
- Ziegfeld, Adam, and Maya Tudor. 2017. "How Opposition Parties Sustain Single-Party Dominance: Lessons from India." *Party Politics* 23(3): 262–73.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Survey Details and Institutional Review Board Details

Table A.1: Comparison of population and survey characteristics

Table A.2: Survey questions and variables created from them for use in analysis

Table A.3: Descriptive statistics for all variables among all respondents

Table A.4: Balance between control and DAP treatment groups for supporters of BERSATU versus those of other coalition parties

Table A.5: Balance between control and BERSATU treatment groups for supporters of DAP versus those of other coalition parties

Table A.6: Change in support for the coalition among BERSATU and DAP supporters, by exposure to treatment

Table A.7: Logistic models of the effect of DAP treatment

Table A.8: Logistic models of the effect of BERSATU treatment

Table A.9: Full model of the effect of DAP treatment with all pre-treatment covariates

Table A.10: Full model of the effect of BERSATU treatment with all pre-treatment covariates

Table A.11: OLS Regression Models of Asian Barometer Survey Question 131

Table A.12: Simulated effect of defections on 2018 electoral results in forty constituencies