

From Independence to Democratic Breakdown: Political Transitions in Malaysia

Working Draft
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March 27, 2016

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Independent in 1957, Malaysia was initially heralded as one of the most stable and successful countries in the developing world (Almond 1960). It was a model colony for Britain's decolonization campaign as it underwent a peaceful negotiation of political transfer.¹ Moreover, the ruling party (the Alliance) had successfully navigated the tense waters of a pluralist society by consolidating a coalition able to claim the support of Malaysia's diverse population.² Common explanations of democratic breakdown, such as underdevelopment, economic crisis, and conflictual ethnic relations, fail to adequately explain the Malaysian case.³ In that year, the economy was comparatively developed and growing.⁴ While ethnic tension defined many of the contentious political debates, neither political exclusion nor economic deprivation explain the timing and nature of the post-election violence and the state's authoritarian response. The Malays had won substantial political and economic safeguards during decolonization in exchange for Chinese and Indian citizenship. The state also made several political concessions to non-Malays, including guarantees that Malay special rights were not to interfere with existing non-Malay economic ownership and activities.⁵ Finally, as a function of the structure of the Alliance coalition, non-Malays were ensured representatives in the state. Despite its auspicious start, Emerson's (1967) prophecy that the momentum derived from the colonial period was running down to expose open civil strife or strong man rule (or both) came to fruition after twelve years (278). In 1969, Malaysia's democracy faltered after an intense general election, giving way to communal violence followed by an authoritarian reversal. Why did Britain's shining star of political stability succumb to violence and authoritarianism?

¹ Harper (1999), for example, writes: "Modern Malaya has often been perceived as a monument to colonial administrative and political arrangements. By the British it is seen as a model of successful decolonization. Its institutions, economic structure, and ethnic mosaic all have recognizable origins in the late colonial period" (2).

² The Malayan population in 1957 included 49.8% Malays, 37.2% Chinese and 11.3% Indians (Means 1970).

³ Przeworski et al. 1996; Przeworski and Limongi 1997; Lipset 1960; Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Hadenius 1992; Gurr 1970; Cederman et al. 2010)

⁴ The real GDP per capita (2005 US \$) in 1957 was \$1924 and by 1969, had risen to \$2773, impressive among post-colonial states at the time (Feenstra et al. 2015).

⁵ The final Alliance constitutional compromise included a clause in the section guaranteeing Malay special privileges which noted: 'Nothing in this article shall empower Parliament to restrict or control any trade or business just for the sake of creating quotas for Malays' (Fernando 2002, 156).

Malaysia represents what I call a Full Administrative colony, where the British conceded only late opportunities for self-government but did incorporate locals into an expansive colonial administration. This chapter demonstrates that this combination of features left a legacy of limited democratic experience, weak state-society links and high administrative development. I argue that, by consequence, Malaysia's democratic regime enjoyed institutional coherence in that the state had a presence and capacity to act across the entire peninsula. However, Malaysia's democracy suffered from a lack of institutional resilience, meaning that elites had not sufficiently invested in democratic institutions which would insulate them from 'shocks' that may lead to breakdown. In Malaysia, this 'shock' leading to breakdown took the form of post-election civil conflict in 1969. The ruling party responded to the violence swiftly by overturning democratic institutions entirely. This chapter proceeds first by elaborating a general theory of the relationship between Full Administrative colonies and democratic survival.

A Theory of Full Administrative Colonies and Democratic Survival

In Full Administrative colonies, the British collaborated with a newly educated indigenous class by incorporating them into the administration of the state but conceded opportunities for political participation and internally-directed democratic processes only very late (Emerson 1937, 3). The consequences of this type of rule were limited democratic experience and weak state/society links but high administrative development. This combination resulted in institutional coherence but not institutional resilience, jointly necessary for democratic survival.

In Malaysia, the features and consequences of this colonial type manifested in a particular way. First, even prior to WWII, the British were relatively active in building a bureaucracy competitively staffed by the indigenous population. As early as 1904, there were roughly 1400 Malays in the competitive Malay Administrative Service and by 1935, this number had more than tripled (Heussler 1981, 131-135). After WWII, this process accelerated rapidly in terms of both expansion of the bureaucracy and increasing Malayanization of its employees. Between 1948 and

1959, the total size of the service increased from 45,000 to 140,000 (Stubbs 1989, 263). By 1956, roughly 96% of all civil servant positions were held by Malaysians (Annual Report 1956).

In contrast to administrative progress, the British conceded political advancements much later. The British granted self-rule only in 1955, two years before Independence. Within these two years, an inter-communal party, the Alliance, won the anti-colonial struggle, swept the only national election, and negotiated a Constitution (Fernando 2002). Though several of the most contentious issues were left unresolved, the Alliance elite were confident that they had developed a winning formula for communal harmony.⁶ Namely, this formula entailed negotiation in private elite spaces. While the new national leaders invested extensively in the operation of their inter-communal formula, this did not translate into investment in democracy and, in fact, the two goals often conflicted.⁷ The two objectives conflicted most spectacularly in 1969 when the Alliance lost several electoral battles and post-election violence broke out. In response, state officials dismantled the democratic system and bolstered the insularity of the inter-communal bargaining formula.⁸

The second effect of limited self-rule is the presence of weak state-society links. This chapter argues that gaps between state actions and social grievances were a result of contradictions in the Malaysian state system crafted during the late-colonial period. The state system, which paralleled the structure of the dominant inter-communal coalition, embraced dual, antagonistic pressures

⁶ For example, The Alliance's 1959 electoral campaign emphasized that its formula was responsible for winning Independence (von Vorys 1975). In addition, even by 1969, the major campaign message the Alliance emphasized was that "[they] are the only ones that could deliver, not just in terms of economic terms, prosperity, in terms of racial harmony, [they] are the only ones that can guarantee that whatever happens, there will be racial calm..." (Bob Reeves Interview 11.25.2014).

⁷ As we will see, evidence of this split commitment comes in part from the nature of the constitutional debates, where increasingly the contentious issues (language, education, citizenship and Malay special rights) were moved to higher, more private forums of the Alliance in the Executive Committee, beyond public debate and even full internal party debate.

⁸ The new Constitution in 1970 removed the contentious communal issues from public debate, as the Alliance leadership believed them to be the source of communal strife. In January 1971, Dr. Ismail, the Deputy Prime Minister, gave a speech to the Alliance members in Johore, noting: "Thus in the 1969 elections the sensitive issues of National Language and Special rights handicapped the Alliance generally and caused the bloodshed of May 13th. We therefore enshrined the issues in the Constitution as subjects that cannot be raised in any form by the Opposition. Thus the weakness of our partners is protected" (**Dr. Ismail Papers (d), 189**).

because it garnered support among its communal parties by appealing to their particular aspirations at the mass level while also emphasizing an inter-communal pact above communal particularities at the elite level of leadership. These dual pressures were often at odds with one another, as appealing to one's own communal group risked enflaming others, while compromising for the sake of inter-communal harmony risked a loss of confidence among one's own group. In other words, the party's structure encouraged mobilization along communal lines at the lower levels but discouraged it at the national level.⁹ When lower-level party leaders exploited these channels of mobilization, the national leadership either severely rebuked or removed them.¹⁰ By doing so, however, the leadership progressively severed links with social groups, insulating themselves and giving them a false sense of confidence that communal groups were placated by elite-level compromises.¹¹ Meanwhile, its negotiated compromises were increasingly unpopular among all communal groups.¹² In short, as communal frustrations rose, institutional channels for grievance expression were closed off. This state-society disconnect manifests in the violent displays of communal frustrations in 1969 and swift repressive state response. As the elites increasingly insulated themselves from civil society, the masses developed incentives to utilize non-institutional means of grievance expression (Milne and Mauzy 1978).

⁹ Bob Reeves describes the Alliance structure as such: "...There were always tensions within the Alliance because that was the nature of the beast, the inevitable, because the constituent parties had different sectional interests but at some level, at the top level, somehow or other, they had to be compromised and that's what Tunku Abdul Rahman always said he could do" (11.25.2014).

¹⁰ When Syed Nasir bin Syed Ismail, the first full-time director of the Language and Literature Department, aggressively expands the place of Malay as the national language and mobilized this communal population around the cause in 1967, Tunku Abdul Rahmam, Prime Minister of Malaysia, strongly rebukes him and removes him from his department.

¹¹ Von Vorys (1975) argues that the Alliance was unaware of the extent of popular discontent in the lead up to the 1969 election and that it often willingly ignored disconcerting evidences. For example, "when UMNO executive secretary Musa Hitam warned of serious PMIP threat in the northern states, he was reprimanded" (281). Bob Reeves notes that "[The Alliance] were certainly complacent; there's no doubt about that." (Interview 11.25.2014).

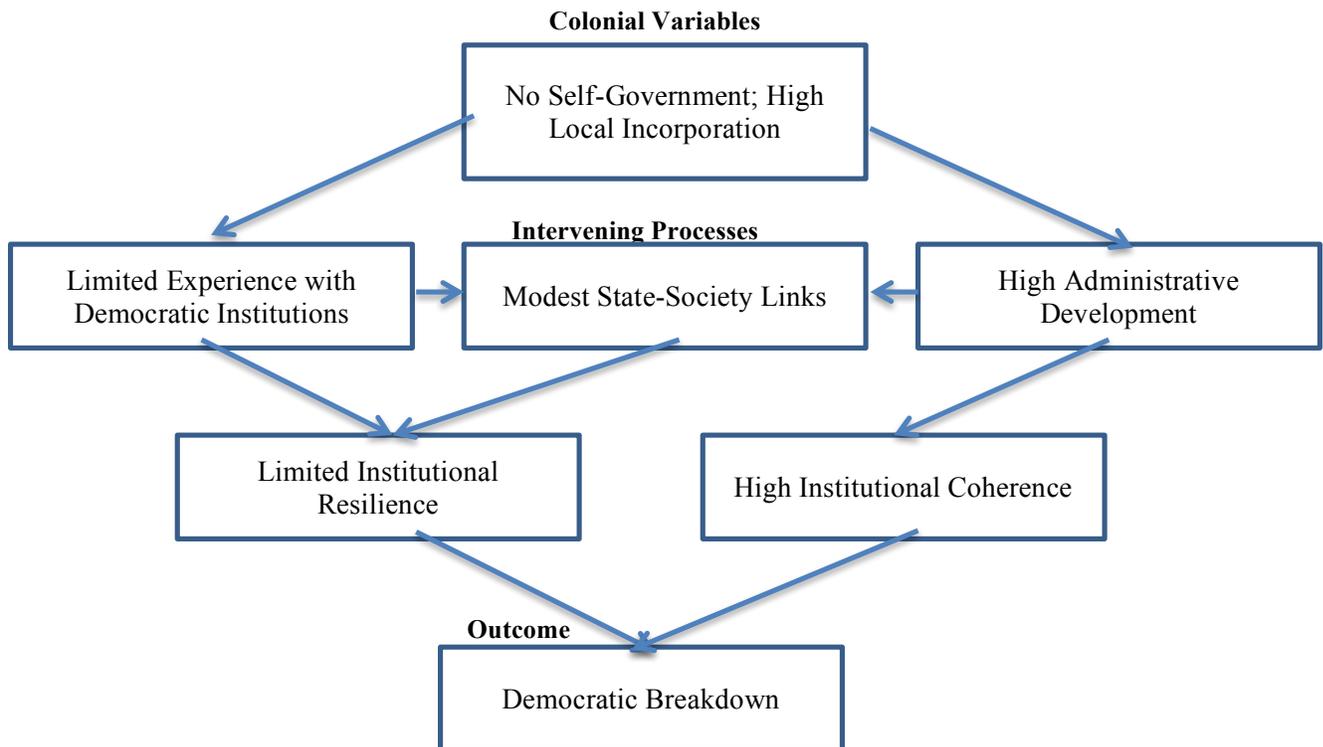
¹² The MCA's compromises on education and language were particularly disliked in the Chinese constituencies. For example, in 1960, the Minister of Education released a report which reconfigured the entire education system. The report was rapidly approved as legislation in the Parliament, with MCA support. In the meantime, more than 100 representatives from Chinese civil society organizations met and rejected the conclusions of the report. Widespread riots and mass arrests followed. Meanwhile, throughout the 1960s, Malay interest groups such as teachers' unions, national writers' associations, and University lobbies were growing anxious to finally solidify the primary and singular role for the Malay language in the polity (Ee 1997).

Finally, as a function of early efforts at administrative centralization before WWII¹³ and of a communist insurgency from 1948-1960, the British encouraged rapid and broad state-building in late-colonial Malaysia (Slater 2010, 85-90; Stubbs 1997). Because this development did not correspond with political advancement, however, colonial Malaya remained essentially authoritarian in nature. Thus, a class of educated administrators emerged, but they did not enjoy a parallel experience in political affairs.¹⁴ This high administrative capacity promoted institutional coherence, in which the state became capable of gathering and analyzing information about its population and providing public goods to it. Generally, I hypothesize that democratic survival is more likely when this potential is available. What the Malaysian case demonstrates, however, is that coherence is not sufficient for democratic survival. If not coupled with strong state-society links and democratic experience, state capacity is used to revert rather than strengthen democratic processes. This sequence is presented in Figure 1.

¹³ British colonialism was most transformative in the Straits Settlements of Singapore, Malacca and Penang, areas first brought under British control as strategic trade outposts. After 1874, the British also expanded the legal-administrative apparatus from the coast to the interior, rationalized the traditional political system and invested in a group of English-educated Malay elite to run the expanding bureaucracy in the Federated Malay States (FMS) on a political basis almost indistinguishable from the Crown Colonies (Harper 1999; Emerson 1937). Finally, in 1909, the Unfederated Malay States (UMS) were transferred to Britain from Siam. In these states, the Sultans retained more significant formal powers and the legal-administrative institutions were more diverse. However, these local differences increasingly resembled those of the Straits Settlements and FMS in a sort of institutional ‘puppeting.’ After WWII, the British brought all these territories under one political and administrative system (Stockwell 1979).

¹⁴ The first Malay political organizations included the Sahabat Pena out of Penang in the mid-1930s and the Kesatuan Melayu Meda (KMM) out of Kuala Lumpur in 1938. These organizations tended to emphasize cultural aspirations of a Malay *bangsa* and frequently were tied to Indonesia, but confronted the colonial state very little in terms of agitation for expanded representation. Within the Chinese and Indian communities, political organizations were largely connected to China and India and included the Kuomintang, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in the late 1930s and the Central Indian Association of Malaya (CIAM) in 1937 (Harper 1999, 33).

Figure 1: Malaysia: Full Administrative Colony and Democratic Breakdown



The causal chart above suggests that a legacy of limited self-rule prior to independence and high level of local incorporation into the machinery of government were responsible for limited democratic experience and state-society links but high administrative development. Though the independent state enjoyed institutional coherence, it suffered from weak resilience against the uncertainties inherent in electoral politics. Unable to respond to challenges via the existing democratic framework, governing elites instead altered the rules of the game. This argument is elaborated through three sections which expand on the nature of the intervening causal processes: limited democratic experience seen through the condensed Independence struggle, weak state-society links exemplified in a case study of the politics of education, and high levels of administrative development during the post-WWII Emergency period. Finally, the chapter examines the dynamics of the 1969 electoral contest, May 13th riots and government responses to them in order to show how these colonial era variables manifested to bring Malaysia's 12-year democratic episode to an end.

Condensed Independence Struggle and Limited Democratic Experience

Malaysia underwent a condensed transition to independence after WWII. The British initially sought to guide a gradual course toward self-government, emphasizing avenues for greater participation of all communities in the colony.¹⁵ After the Japanese occupation during WWII, British efforts to undo Malay special privileges, and a communist insurgency, communal tensions between and political mobilization among Malays and non-Malays was rife.¹⁶ Under such circumstances, though the British were prepared in 1946 to guide the colony to self-government, this goal now seemed far off (Harper 1999, 57). Nonetheless, the surprising emergence of an inter-communal national organization, the Alliance, in 1952 propelled events rapidly, and Malaya gained independence less than five years later. How did Malaya transform from a conservative, communally-divided colony to an Independent communally-integrated nation in such a short period of time? And what were the effects of this rapid transformation for post-colonial democratic survival? This section details events surrounding Malayan Independence in order to demonstrate that while the new national leaders invested extensively in the inter-communal formula for managing the Malaysian state borne out of the anti-colonial struggle, this did not translate into investment in democratic processes and, in fact, the two often conflicted. The central question remained whether such a formula, which proved satisfactory when the colonial

¹⁵ The Malayan Union Constitution, designed by the British War Office during WWII, sought to demolish the sovereignty of some Malay states, reduce the sovereignty of the Malay Sultans, and get rid of the special position of the Malays, previously favored for government posts and educational opportunities (Stockwell 1979). These decisions were made in part after the Japanese defeated British forces in Malaya and Singapore in WWII, a fate which prompted heavy public criticism of colonial policies described as “having no roots in the life of the people of the country” (Stockwell 1995, CO 875/14/9, 3). It was also a function of the altered imperial situation after WWII in which the British initiated a “declared purpose of promoting self-government in Colonial territories” (Stockwell 1995 CO 825/35/6, no 5, 51).

¹⁶ Malays enjoyed considerable political privileges as a matter of British policy prior to the Japanese takeover (Tan Cheng Lock Papers Folio 20, TCL/20/1/1-6 February 1943 *The Mixed Communities of Malaya by Sir George Maxwell*. Further, the Japanese occupation pitted Malays, who often collaborated with the Japanese, against the Chinese who were often the primary target of brutal policies (Kheng 2012). When the Japanese departed, the Chinese-led Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Party (MPAJA) initiated revenge policies against these collaborators, thus widening existing communal tensions and conflict (ibid). Finally, the communist insurgency reinforced Malay notions that the Chinese population was not loyal to the state and should not thus be granted citizenship. In this vein, President of the MCA, Tan Cheng Lock, admits that the precarious situation of the Chinese has been further complicated by the embarrassing insurrection of the MCP, for critics accuse the Chinese population of being complicit and cowardice for lack of help in the war against the communists (Tan Cheng Lock Papers Folio 21, Item 23: April 10, 1949 *At Taiping and Ipoh on “the Chinese in Malaya”*).

power remained a common enemy,¹⁷ would retain its effectiveness when independence offered a wider range of political activities.¹⁸ The state elites' minimal investment in democratic processes manifests itself primarily in the Alliance's confidence in its singular ability to ensure inter-communal harmony. The elite viewed the inter-communal formula as synonymous with democracy.¹⁹ The Alliance leadership rejected criticisms within the party and wrote-off criticisms from opposition parties (Morais 1972, 621). Indeed, the Alliance's success in the Independence struggle convinced its leadership that their established mode of operation was necessary.²⁰ These initial successes carried the coalition for 12 years, but they would not prove to be long-term solutions.²¹

This section is divided up into several parts. First, it provides an overview of pre-1945 political developments and the rise of nationalisms after WWII. Then, it looks at the formation of the Alliance and the condensed struggle for Independence. Finally, it discusses the evolution of the Independence Constitution and Alliance Formula, noting the fundamental issues of nation that remained unresolved at Independence. Despite outward signs of communal cohesion, several indications of future crises lay behind the Alliance façade. These internal crises would expose the tensions between adherence to the Alliance Formula versus democracy.

Pre-1945 Political Developments and Late Colonial Nationalisms

¹⁷ Tunku Abdul Rahman (the Tunku), the UMNO and Alliance leader, in the lead up to the 1955 elections, fends off UMNO members' demands for more legislative seats by appealing to the need to maintain unity and exercise restraint in communal demands, lest they jeopardize their bid for independence (Sheppard 1995, 93). Further, Alliance leaders consistently used the British as a scapegoat for unresolved areas of communal concern. For example, in a speech by the MCA President (Tan Cheng Lock) at the Annual General Committee meeting of the Association on 15 January 1955, puts the contested issue of Education policy squarely on British shoulders: "Let us remember that in the case of Education, for instance, the present policy was not laid down by the Malays; it is, in actual fact, the creation of the British whose ideas were adopted by a hand-picked Committee and then by a fully-appointed Legislative Council. I am sure the Malays are no more anxious to destroy Chinese education and culture, and the contribution they can make to the future Malayan culture, than the Chinese would want to deny the other races in the country their own languages and culture" (**Cheng Lock Papers (f), 20**).

¹⁸ Von Vorys (1975) notes that the Alliance was deprived of a "convenient, common target which could distract from their own conflicts of interest" (144).

¹⁹ On November 14, 1966, Tun Dr. Ismail, Minister of Home Affairs, notes in an interview that democracy means compromise, and that the greatest democracy in the polity was practiced in the Alliance Directorate (**Dr Ismail Papers ©, 128**).

²⁰ **Dr. Ismail Papers (b), 46**.

²¹ Harper (1999) argues that the Alliance won its late-colonial support "on credit" (350), by making promises to each of the communal groups which were to be fulfilled after Independence.

It was not until after World War II that the British amalgamated the various administrative entities of Malaya into a single political entity. The British established protectorates in Penang and Malacca in 1786 and added Singapore in 1819 to together form the Straits Settlements in 1826. Between 1874 and 1888, they established control over Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang and administratively joined these states in 1895 to form the Federated Malay States (FMS). Finally, between 1909 and 1914, the British annexed Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu in the north and Johore in the south to form the Unfederated Malay States (Emerson 1937; Stockwell 1995, lii-liii).

The Governor of the Straits Settlements (also the High Commissioner for the Malay States) served as the highest authority in the colony. The supporting bureaucracy had two sections: an almost exclusively British Malayan Civil Service in the highest offices and a Malay-dominated Administrative Service (Heussler 1981). There were, however, different degrees of colonial presence among the three parts of the peninsula. As a Crown Colony under the legal jurisdiction of the Imperial Parliament, the Straits were most directly ruled and its population became British subjects. The FMS, though a protectorate, was after 1896 run almost indistinguishably from the Crown Colonies.²² Finally, in the northern UMS after 1909, each state had its own British Advisor responsible to the Governor but no coordinated administration prior to WWII. Despite this, each Unfederated Malay State developed a similar bureaucratic structure and adopted many of the FMS laws as State laws (**Stockwell 1995 CO 825/35/6, no 14, 57**).²³ While such a

²² In 1874, the British introduced the Residential System was introduced, whereby the Malay Sultans agreed that they would accept a British Advisor to advise on matters other than Islam and Malay custom. In practice, the British officer essentially took over the states' governments (Emerson 1937). By 1893, the British worked to secure a greater degree of administrative uniformity in the States including areas of justice, taxation and land settlement (Gullick 1992, 98). These changes corresponded with a weakening of the traditional Malay system of Sultans and their State Councils. Emerson (1937) describes this phenomenon as such: "Under the direction of the Resident-General a large and efficient central administration has been built up in which the Sultans had either no share or a share so small as not to be worth speaking of... If their actual powers are almost nil, they not only retain their high offices but are substantially guaranteed their possession of them (140).

²³ Gullick (1992) notes that this curious phenomenon evolved as a defense mechanism against further British intrusion in state affairs (162-163). The civil administration was suffused over the traditional aristocratic structure to form a brand of governance based on the dynamics of each particular state. The dual process of change and continuity was possible because "the new bureaucracy was built on the foundations of the traditional Malay system of government which it replaced. The personnel of the new civil service was drawn almost entirely from the old ruling class. This

disjointed administrative structure prevented national political movements from forming, much less calls for electoral representation, prior to WWII, the differences in colonial administrative presence across the States should not be overstated (Cheah 1988).²⁴ As Lord Hailey remarks in 1943: “It is obvious that there are many advantages in the existing system, which is practically one of direct official rule, under the façade of ‘advice’ to Malayan rulers” (**Stockwell 1995 CO 825/35/6, no 3A, 48**).²⁵

During the Japanese occupation of Malaya in WWII,²⁶ the British worked to amalgamate the three administrative units for the first time.²⁷ The War Office drew up the Malayan Union in 1942 which forced the Malay Sultans to surrender legal power, created a unitary Malayan state and offered common citizenship for all races (**Stockwell 1995, CO 825/35/6, no 3A, 48**). Through this scheme, the British hoped to lay the groundwork for greater administrative efficiency and democratic progress facilitating self-rule, with an emphasis on participation of all the communities of Malaya.²⁸

continuity was only possible because a younger generation of Malay aristocrats was educated for the new role in schools of European type” (Gullick 1992, 162).

²⁴ Even in the most indirectly ruled states of the UMS, Emerson (1937) notes that the significant difference is not so much in the nature of the system or even in its particular legislation, which both resemble those of the FMS and Colony, but in the the legal right of the State’s Advisor and Legal Advisor to modify such enactments before introducing them to the State Council, whereby they could always make modifications as they saw fit (349).

²⁵ This position of the British Resident as advisor was frequently described as a ‘façade’ because it provided “that the Sultan would accept a British Resident (FMS) or Advisor (UMS), whose advice had to be taken on all matters except those relating to Malay custom and Mohammedan religion” (Gullick 1992; Emerson 1937). In this way, the Malay Sultans had through previous treaties already largely given up their formal authority, though they retained legal sovereignty.

²⁶ This military disaster is generally accepted as the point of the beginning of the end of British imperialism in Malaya, though the British would return after WWII and not grant official independence until August 1957 (Stockwell 1995, li).

²⁷ Sabah and Sarawak were not added until Malaya became the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. The Malayan Union scheme also did not include the amalgamation of Singapore partially because “its wealth gave it a preponderance in pre-war Malaya which was resented by other political units in the Peninsula and so created a barrier to closer union” (**Stockwell 1995 CO 825/35/6, no 2, 42**). These differences in status and wealth were exacerbated by the predominately Chinese population there, in contrast to the rest of the Malay states (**ibid, CO 825/35/6, no 3A, 47**). It remained separate until 1963 though it separated again in 1965.

²⁸ The Under Secretary of State for the Colonies in a speech to the House of Commons on October 8, 1946 notes that the heterogeneous system was “clumsy and wasteful and encouraged separatism and difficulties of administration” (quoted from Tadin 1960, 62). This was deemed to be one of the primary difficulties in defending Malaya from the Japanese as well: “As a result of these complications in the administrative machine there was, at all levels, too often uncertainty and delay in reaching decisions” (**Stockwell 1995, CO 877/25/7/27265/7. No 1, 30**). Concerning the decision to integrate immigrant populations in order to facilitate self-government, Lord Hailey argues: “Is it intended, for instance, that self-government shall take the form of a progressive relaxation of official control over the Sultans and their councils? That might be termed self-government, but unless we retained authority to prescribe and regulate their functions, it would mean something like autocratic rule in the hands of the Sultans and their Malay advisors. Such rights as the immigrant population might acquire would only be obtained on sufferance” (**Stockwell 1995, CO**

After WWII, the British reoccupied Malaya and initiated the process of administrative and political amalgamation. This began with efforts to obtain “undisputed rights of jurisdiction throughout this area” by negotiating new treaties with each of the Malay Sultans in order to remove their legal independence (**Stockwell 1995, CO 825/35/6, no 3A, 48**). Accordingly, Sir Harold MacMichael, the British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, secured new treaties with the Malay Rulers with relatively minimal resistance.²⁹ The announcement of the Union in October 1945, however, prompted massive Malay mobilization against it (Cheah 2002, 10-11; Tadin 1960, 62). Though the Sultans’ fate was protested in time, the Malay most vigorously opposed the implications that the immigrant Chinese and Indian populations were equal to the Malay.³⁰ Indeed, much of the opposition was directed at the Sultans themselves, the Malays calling their signing the MacMichael treaties an act of betrayal³¹. Malays thus gathered under a guise of Malay nationalism and *bangsa* (race).³² In May, Dato Onn bin Ja’afar formed UMNO, a Malay movement capable of organizing mass political action.³³ Through this new political

825/35/6, no 3A, 48). For further discussion of these decisions, see: Harper 1999, 58; Means 1970, 52; Andaya 2001, 264-265.

²⁹ This was perhaps because he was able to wield the threat of non-recognition or play on their fears of being labeled a Japanese collaborator. Indeed, Brigadier HC Willan was sent to interview each of the Sultans in order to prepare the groundwork for MacMichael’s mission. These interviews emphasized the Sultans’ roles during the Japanese occupation, their allegiance to the British and the credentials of those that ascended the throne during the Occupation (Stockwell 1995 CAB 101/69, CAB/HIST/B/4/7); This was with the exception of the Sultan of Kedah. Rather than resistance, the Sultans did, however, submit memoranda, which expressed concern about immigration, citizenship and the protection of Malays (Stockwell 1995 CO 537/1541, no 18, 180-186; Smith 1995, 62). For further details on MacMichael’s mission, see **Tan Chang Lock Papers (a) and Stockwell 1995 CO 273/675/19, no 1, 171-175**).

³⁰ Harper 1999, 85; HT Bourdillon notes: “To sum up, I think we must admit a genuine and fairly widespread Malay revulsion against the White Paper. I have no doubt the White Paper has been misunderstood, but that does not make the revulsion any less real. In almost all the reactions from popular bodies, as opposed to Sultans, it is *citizenship* which is attacked” (Stockwell 1995 CO537/1528, no 44, 200). Similar assessments appear in Brigadier AT Newbould’s account: “The Malayan Citizenship proposal has created far more heartburning than that for Union. This is on the score that no one can hazard a guess as to the number of aliens who will be automatically admitted to citizenship...” (Stockwell 1995 CO 273/675/18, no 20, 189).

³¹ HT Bourdillon’s assessment of the on ground situation in Malaya goes as follows: “On the contrary, we are told that the Sultans are the object of popular pressure. It is clear, that the White Paper made a direct impact on the more reflective Malays, whose responding protests were perfectly genuine though they varied in size and intensity from State to State” (Stockwell 1995 CO537/1528, no 44, 200).

³² For example, the prominent Malay newspaper, *Utusan Melayu*, declared on December 22, 1945: “Malaya belongs to the Malays. We don’t want the other races to be given the rights and privileges of the Malays” (quoted in Tadin 1960, 67).

³³ Means (1970) argues that this rapid mobilization was possible owing to Malay integration into existing colonial institutions: “Malays in government service assumed leadership of the party, and through their position they were often able to use the administrative structure of the Malay States to accomplish the political mobilization of the Malays. Thus senior Malay government servants organized Malays working in the district offices, and they in turn secured the help of

movement, Malays demanded that the British repeal the Malayan Union and declare the MacMichael treaties invalid.³⁴ Under mounting pressure, the British relented.³⁵

Subsequently, a committee of British officials, Sultans and UMNO produced the Federation of Malaya in 1948 (Stockwell 1995 CO 537/1530, no 245, 259). The Constitution included a unitary system with a limited role for the Sultans in their respective states. It imposed very restrictive citizenship requirements for non-Malays and provided a preferential role for Malays in the political process by reserving 22 of the 100 seats in the Legislative Council (von Vorys 1975, 82). This time, opposition came from the non-Malay communities.³⁶ The Chinese formed the All Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA) on 14 December 1946. The Council organized a local and then nationwide *hartal* on 20 Oct. 1947 (Harper 1999, 91). The movement failed, but its organizational efforts coupled with the urging of the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney³⁷, led Tan Cheng Lock to form the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) on 27 February 1949.³⁸

In 1949, despite the British Parliament's stated commitment to Malayan Independence, these goals were severely complicated by communal hostilities and the outbreak of a communist insurgency (Andaya 2001, 274; Fernando 2009, 3).³⁹ In an effort to promote inter-communal dialogue, Malcolm MacDonald initiated the Communities Liaison Committee (CLC), an informal body of community leaders brought together to discuss inter-communal differences

penghulus (village headmen) who recruited and propagandized for UMNO at the grass roots level. In this way the traditional power structure of the Malay society was transformed into a mass political party" (100).

³⁴ Stockwell 1995 CO 537/1528, 221

³⁵ Heng (1988) argues that the British conceded to this movement partially because it could not risk alienating conservative Malay support at a time when the communist threat was escalating. See also Stockwell 1979 and Lau 1991.

³⁶ The non-Malay response was partly against the nature of the Federation agreement and partly against the manner in which it was formed (i.e. with only Malay representatives) (**Tan Cheng Lock Papers (b)**). British High Commissioner, Sir H Gurney, reports that the initial aim of the MCA was to increase racial harmony rather than end to emergency, per se (Stockwell 1995 CO 537/4242, no 5, 179-180)

³⁷ Stockwell 1995 CO 967/84, no 70, 152

³⁸ **Tan Cheng Lock Papers** ©; The British urgency for a Chinese political party stemmed from the need for increased Chinese partnership in combatting the communist insurgency (Hing and Heng 2000).

³⁹ Sir Henry Gurney's views concerning the Chinese population in Malaya suggest: that while the High Commissioner does not rule out the possibility of Chinese becoming 'Malayans' with the passage of years, he does not regard it as immediately practical...the conversion of the Chinese into Malaysians is an unlikely development" (Stockwell 1995, CO 967/84, no 70, 155)

(Stockwell 1995, CO 967/84, no 70, 156-57). The Committee was based on the belief that confidential discussions among elite members of the ethnic communities would help to resolve outstanding issues and improve relations among them (Fernando 2012, 284). The issues of citizenship and Malay special rights proved to be the most controversial.⁴⁰ Though the forum received little public notice at the time, Fernando (2012) argues that its *modus operandi* would have far reaching consequences (301). Indeed, private elite bargaining modeled after Committee procedures would become a principal feature of the Alliance structure.⁴¹

In short, although the British were committed to self-rule in Malaya after WWII, the security challenges and communal tensions presented severe obstacles (Andaya 2001, 264)⁴². Initially, thus, the British demanded non-communalism exemplified via Dato Onn's Independence of Malaya Party (IMP),⁴³ arguing that UMNO and MCA visions of the nation were incompatible with a stable, inclusive democratic state.⁴⁴ This would change only with the formation of a surprising partnership to which the discussion now turns.

⁴⁰ Dato Onn worked considerably to get UMNO to accept the CLC's citizenship proposals, which included recognition of the principle of *jus soli*. While the UMNO Executive Committee conceded, the branches were unwilling and finally at a General Assembly meeting on 20 May 1950, Onn and the UMNO Executive Committee resigned *en masse* to force the issue (Tadin 1960, 84). The move was successful, but it marked only the first of Onn's defiant acts (i.e. compromising on communal issues), which ultimately led him to resign from UMNO (ibid; Fernando 2012). The British position on this balance between communal aspirations remained tilted toward Malay interests as had previous policies. High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, describes this favoritism as such: "It is better that the British and the Malays should work to a common policy, been at the expense of legitimate Chinese interests, than that we should appear to support any Chinese political claims other than those which non-Malays will be entitled to make as Federal citizens. This is what we should mean by the 'special position' of the Malays" (Stockwell 1995 CO 967/84, no 70, 148).

⁴¹ **Tan Cheng Lock Papers (d)**

⁴² In March 1948, Dr. William Lineham, civil servant and constitutional advisor for the Malayan Union remarked: "The prospects of the rise of a strong independence movement in Malaya, at any rate within the next generation or so, appears to be exceedingly remote. Such a movement would be impossible unless it received very substantial support from the Malays. In the present state of political affairs and in the state of affairs likely to develop in the future...the Malays may be expected to withhold that support" (Stockwell 1995 CO 537/3746, no 9, 1). WL Blythe, Secretary of Chinese Affairs, reiterates a similar conclusion regarding the willingness of the Chinese to cooperate with the Malays to form some kind of national movement (ibid, 2)

⁴³ Dato Onn, former President of UMNO and leader of the Malayan Union movement, in 1951 breaks with UMNO and starting the non-communal IMP, claiming that "his object is to free himself from the inactive and purely conservative elements in UMNO who have been obstructing his efforts to admit non-Malays into UMNO and who are in his view merely a dead weight in any political party" (Stockwell 1995 CO 537/7303, no 10, 293).

⁴⁴ These preferences were expressed initially at the moment of the IMP-UMNO split, HC Sir Gurney arguing against Tunku Abdul Rahman's vision for independent Malaya as the new President of UMNO, which aimed at getting practical advantages for Malays as opposed to prioritizing Independence. Gurney notes that he "pointed out the obvious weaknesses of these ideas of how to make things still easier for the Malays at other people's expense" (Stockwell 1995 CO 537/7297, no 18, 299). Later, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Oliver Lyttleton, and High Commissioner, Sir

The Alliance: Ad Hoc Partnership to National Party

The Alliance was born out of an *ad hoc* coalition between UMNO and MCA just before the 1952 Kuala Lumpur municipal elections. Emphasizing the importance of inter-racial harmony for a successful administration, the coalition won nine out of the twelve seats and 51% of the popular vote (Fernando 2009). The strategy's success prompted UMNO and MCA to extend the partnership to the national level. Both parties' leaderships agreed that their anti-colonial objectives relied on closer cooperation between all communities in Malaya, though both were also committed to retaining their communal identity.⁴⁵ A National Directorate was charged with overseeing the Alliance's activities, and UMNO-MCA liaison committees were then formed at the national, state and district levels in order to coordinate the activities of the coalition at all levels.⁴⁶ Importantly, however, mobilization remained explicitly based on communal loyalties at the local levels (Fernando 2009, 27; 2002, 28). The national leadership was unified primarily by a common commitment to independence as well as their social status within their respective communities as English-educated professionals (*ibid*, 29).

While Party development was significant, it did not yet translate into support from the British support who remained skeptical of the coalition's communal character.⁴⁷

General Templer, were the most outspoken in these policy preferences. In 1951, Lyttleton argues that the Emergency must be the priority: "It is a mockery to give a man a vote when you can't protect his life. Personally, I should like to keep my head on my shoulders before I thought of the polling booth" (quoted in Fernando 2009, 73). Templer also consistently dragged his feet on the question of self-government. His plans envisioned electoral reforms and the holding of town and municipal elections in 1953 first, State Council elections in Johore and the Straits Settlements in 1954 and in other states in 1955, and Federal Legislative Council elections from 1956-1958. 1960 was thus the earliest date envisioned for independence (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1022/86, no 35, 462**; Fernando 2009, 39). **Tan Cheng Lock Papers (d)**

⁴⁵ There were initially negotiations for an IMP-MCA Alliance, owing to their partnership since the former's creation (**Tan Cheng Lock Papers (e)**). These fell apart when Dato Onn insisted that the MCA candidates run under the IMP flag (Fernando 2002). Fernando argues that the Alliance represented a compromise between extreme communalism and the ideal of non-communalism (29).

⁴⁶ 30 UMNO-MCA Liaison Committees were established by 1954 (Fernando 2009, 27).

⁴⁷ The British High Commissioner, General Templer even tried to destroy the communal coalition by cutting off MCA revenue (von Vorys 1975, 111). He advocated a slow pace to self-government such that the Emergency could be resolved and that the non-communal IMP could take root and garner more electoral support (Fernando 2002, 46-47). Even after the 1953 KL municipal elections, the British conferred predominately with the IMP about the appropriate political steps. Both were high concerned with the UMNO-MCA Alliance because: "a) in it the UMNO is in fact subordinate to MCA; b) the MCA leaders are concerned almost exclusively with promoting Chinese interests; c) many

Nonetheless, the Alliance intensified its demands for independence. In August 1953, it set a determined stance that the Federal Legislative election should include a 3/5 majority of elected seats (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1022/86, no 93, 16**). Unfortunately, at the time, the IMP still had twice as many members nominated in the Federal Elections Committee, and because it favored a more gradual movement to self-rule, the Council agreed to a simple majority of elected seats (Smith 1995, 182-84). Under the direction of Tunku Abdul Rahman, leaders of the Alliance traveled to London to meet with the Secretary of State directly, but to no avail (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/309, no 53; CO 1030/310, no 56**; Fernando 2011, 499). On 13 June 1954, the Alliance members resigned their Council positions and organized large-scale demonstrations, forcing the High Commissioner to compromise out of fear that the civil administration would break down and damage the counter-insurgency (Fernando 2009, 53).⁴⁸ The stand-off had two significant effects: first, it radically accelerated the British's more gradual plans for the devolution of power and second, it considerably advanced the Alliance's status as a national movement (Fernando 2009, 35). The Alliance would hereafter set its own hastened pace toward Independence with minimal British obstruction (Fernando 2011, 499-500)⁴⁹.

The 1955 elections served as the first national election in Malayan history and the only one prior to Independence. With an election campaign promising independence within four years, Malayization of the civil service and the setting up of an Independent

of them are primarily interested in forwarding the cause of the KMT" (**Stockwell 1995 CP 1022/86, no 20, 452**). After further meetings with the UMNO-MCA leadership, JD Higham reports: "I think there is little doubt that UMNO, despite their fine liberal professions, will turn on their allies once they have used them to force the pace for federal elections" (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1022/86, no 25, 455**).

⁴⁸ This was indeed a reluctant move on the part of the British who found the Alliance methods in the affair to be "somewhat of dictatorship, and could hardly be described as methods worthy of persons whose ostensible aim is democratic self-government; they are a sad augury for the future if the Alliance should sweep into power" (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/311, no 123, 54**). Moreover, at this juncture, the British still favored non-communalism (represented by the Party Negara, former IMP) and the Rulers, and feared that such a compromise would create rifts between the British and these interest groups (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/311, no 125, 66**).

⁴⁹ The Emergency, heretofore a major impediment of British willingness to concede self-government, at this point is dropped as a precondition owing to the Alliance's electoral and organizational successes (**Stockwell 1995 FO 371/116941, no 72, 187-188**).

Commission to review the Constitution, the Alliance won almost 80% of the popular vote and 51 of the 52 elected seats (46 out of 98 seats nominated).⁵⁰ It speaks to the degree of consensus among the three coalition parties that they were able to transform the political playing field so extensively from a mere ad hoc arrangement in 1952 to Independence under a mass-based national movement in only three years.⁵¹ As the Alliance grew more confident, they became increasingly vocal in their demands for devolution of power (Fernando 2009, 145). The extent to which the Alliance Formula of inter-communal compromise had also been sanctioned is a matter I turn to in the next section.

The Constitutional Bargain and the Inter-Communal Contract

Up to the point of the Alliance's 1955 electoral victory, the coalition had largely avoided the most contentious national issues, focusing on issues of anti-colonialism, independence, and safeguarding every communities' rights and interests (Fernando 2002). In the making of the Independence Constitution, however, the contested subjects of language, education, citizenship, and Malay privileges now dominated the discussion and served to illuminate the central tensions both across and within the party. The evident difficulties of these issues also convinced its leaders of the necessity of their mode of dealing with them: namely, negotiations within the top leadership and making private compromises away from public pressures.

At the Alliance's request, an Independent Commission was set up to draw up the Constitution.⁵² Multiple stakeholders presented their wishes to the Commission for consideration. The Alliance issued a joint memorandum which outlined the principal agreements of UMNO,

⁵⁰ Note that citizenship laws were still strict. The electorate was 84% Malays, 11% Chinese and 4% Indian (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/225, no 4, 145**). Thus, whereas Malays make up roughly half of the population, they represented about 5/6 of the electorate. In addition, estimates suggest that approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ or 600,000 eligible Chinese did not register to vote. (Fernando 2002).

⁵¹ Before the national elections, the Indian party, MIC, was added to the Alliance.

⁵² Known as the Reid Commission, its members included: Lord Reid, an appellate Court judge from Britain, Sir Ivor Jennings (Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge), Justice Abdul Hamid (Pakistan), Justice B. Malik (India) and W.J. McKell (Australia) (Fernando 2002). The Alliance first rose this issue during the Federal Legislature crisis, but the British rejected the idea until the Alliance's dominance was demonstrated in its electoral success in 1955 because it was strongly opposed by the Malay Rulers (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/70, no 36, 166-167**).

MCA and MIC and left responsibility for the details to the Commission. On citizenship, they agreed to the principle of *jus soli*, but not retroactively.⁵³ On the special privileges for the Malays, they decided that these policies would be reviewed in 15 years after independence.⁵⁴ On language, the Alliance agreed to Malay as the national language and English as an official language for a maximum period of 10 years “or for such shorter period as the Legislature may decide”.⁵⁵ Finally, the MCA and MIC presented an alternate position on language, advocating the use of Mandarin and Tamil in government business for a minimum period of 10 years.⁵⁶

The Reid Commission’s report, released six months before Independence, caused significant uproar, most especially over the communal issues (Fernando 2002, 147). Some of the most contentious decisions were the imposition of a 15-year re-evaluation of the Malay special privileges, the absence of Islam as the official religion and the provision for multi-lingualism in the legislature (ibid, 147).⁵⁷ As the terms of debate were now open to public scrutiny, the Alliance was forced to respond to criticisms outside as well as within their own parties.

The Alliance reacted not by holding debates within its General Assembly, however, but by setting up a special sub-committee to work out a new consensus, again emphasizing their preference for discrete elite compromise.⁵⁸ Ultimately, the 15-year timeframe for the review of

⁵³ Those born in Malaya prior to Independence would be entitled upon registration to become nationals so long as they met further requirements including being of good character, taking an oath of allegiance, having resided in Malaya for 5 out of the 7 years prior and having a simple knowledge of Malay (**Stockwell 1995 CO 889/6, ff219-239, 313-314**). Citizenship was a controversial decision as the Chinese announced their intention to submit a separate memorandum to the Commission advocating greater citizenship rights, to which numerous UMNO branches responded that *jus soli* was totally unacceptable to the Malays. Then, several Chinese leaders formed a Federation of Chinese organizations, which would rival the MCA and lobby H.M.G in London directly on the issue. The Alliance executive committee disciplined both sections of the parties, but the Alliance, still skittish of backlash, did not include citizenship in its election manifesto at all (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/258, no 1**).

⁵⁴ For fear of negative reactions from the Malay communities, the time period was not published but conveyed orally to the Reid Commission (**Stockwell 1995 CO 889/6, ff281-290, 321**). The Special position of the Malays principle states that, in recognition of the fact that the Malays are the ‘original sons of the soil’ and by virtue of the treaties made between the British and the Rulers, the Constitution should guarantee their access to ‘a reasonable proportion of lands, posts in the public service, permits to engage in business of trade, where such permits are restricted and controlled by law, Government scholarships and such similar privileges according by the Government’ (**Stockwell 1995 CO 889/6, ff219-239, 315**).

⁵⁵ **Stockwell 1995 CO 889/6, ff219-239, 315**

⁵⁶ **Stockwell 1995 CO 889/6, ff219-239, 315-316**

⁵⁷ Commission member, Mr. Abdul Hamid, submitted a minority report which favored Malay-centric positions on citizenship, the special position of the Malays, language and religion (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/519, no 26E**).

⁵⁸ Von Vorys (1975) describes this preference as such: “The Alliance was developing a method of its own in settling inter-communal issues... The heads of the communal parties worked things out privately, informally, and secretly. Not

Malay special privileges was changed to the vague: ‘from time to time’. A clause was added to protect non-Malay communities by restricting Malay special privileges to areas that would not encroach on their existing economic activities. Finally, English would remain an official language for 10 years. The Malay-centric nature of these resolutions was not lost on the non-Malay members, yet as Fernando (2002) describes: “It was quite clear to the MCA and MIC that there was little they could do to alter UMNO’s proposals in view of the likely political implications for their UMNO colleagues and for the future of the Alliance (154-155). In other words, in the name of Independence, the non-Malay leaders kept quiet.”⁵⁹

When the Constitution reached the Federal Legislature in July, however, an MCA leader broke ranks and strongly criticized the White Paper, arguing that the changes made to the Reid Commission Report were no longer a fair communal compromise (Fernando 2002, 183). This dissension was not well received, and the member was forced to resign from the MCA (ibid). The compromise, as negotiated in the Alliance sub-committee, was final, and any criticism was construed as disloyalty both to the inter-communal Constitutional contract, the Alliance formula and the Independence struggle.

Nature of the Bargain: the Alliance Formula

Within the Alliance coalition, each of the racially exclusive parties claimed to be the legitimate representatives of its respective communities (Gagliano 1971, 5). Then, each party’s highest leadership positions alone asserted a monopoly over the process of integrating communal

that the members of this Directorate always agreed....But, the leadership of UMNO, MCA, and MIC agreed that to carry on negotiations in public on such communally sensitive issues as citizenship and Malay privileges would trap them in a rigid pattern and place the communities on a path of polarization which would inevitably lead to confrontation and communal violence. And, however democratic the means might be, the end would be neither a common nation nor a stable political system” (133).

⁵⁹ Tunku Abdul Rahman, president of UMNO, also emphasized the primacy of Independence over constitutional agreement and noted during the Working Committee on revision of the Reid report that “if faced with a serious threat of revolt, he would have been ready to fall in with the idea that Merdeka should come first and consideration of the Reid Commission Report later”, citing Pakistan as a positive example of such a situation (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/524, no 31, 366**). Despite the MCA and MIC’s capitulation to Malay-centric compromises, this did not necessarily translate into compromise among its constituent communities. For example, in May 1957, the Pan-Malayan Federation of Chinese Associations, which claimed to represent over 1000 Chinese organizations, denied that the MCA and the MIC were representative of the non-Malay population in Malaya and accused the Alliance of going back on its election promises, most especially regarding citizenship (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/439, no 82, 385-386**).

interests.⁶⁰ Thus, each of the members of the Directorate were expected to possess dual qualifications: an ability to politically organize their respective community and a capacity to retain the confidence of leaders across the communal parties. Within the Directorate, intense communal bargaining took place and compromises were made.⁶¹ These debates were conducted privately and pragmatically, each member trying as much as possible to not concede more than what would be deemed acceptable to their community.⁶² This was a fine line to tow, but the Alliance regarded itself as the only organization capable of doing it.⁶³ It considered itself a national institution above partisan politics.⁶⁴ As much as possible, partisan conflicts should remain inside the coalition, and the party should avoid airing its private negotiations for public debate.⁶⁵ This was the essence of the Alliance Formula.

Several examples serve to demonstrate this preference for private negotiation of sensitive issues. When the Alliance issued its manifesto for the 1955 Federal Election, only the abridged

⁶⁰ For example, in the process of developing the Independence constitution, debates surrounding the Reid Constitution were removed from the General Assembly and compromised within the small forum of the Directorate, compromises which could not be legitimately challenged from outside this group (von Vorys 1975, 133). This latter phenomenon is evidenced by the MCA member who rejected the Constitution White Paper within the Federal Legislature and was made to resign his post (Fernando 2002, 183).

⁶¹ The Directorate composed Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak and Tun (Dr.) Ismail of UMNO, Colonel (Sir) H.S. Lee and T.H. Tan initially then Tun Tan Siew Sin and T.H. Tan of MCA, and Tun V.T. Sambanthan of MIC (von Vorys 1975, 162).

⁶² For example, when in 1954 the education committee of the MCA meeting was reported in the Singapore Standard to have scrapped the national school plan and decided that Chinese should be an official language, Tan Cheng Lock and the MCA had to backtrack and rein in its Chinese education pressure groups in order to rectify its relationship with UMNO who was as a consequence responding to Malay uproar (Ee 1997, 150). In short, in a decision between supporting Chinese communal interests and maintaining a relationship with UMNO, MCA leaders chose the latter.

⁶³ Tun Tan Siew's remarks show this justification: "In a multi-racial society, however, there are problems which though read and thus require solution, are far better aired in private than in public. As our experience has indicated, if those burning issues with racial overtones are shouted about in 1956 from the housetops with each side trying to make political capital out of them at the expense of the party, I do not think the result would have been a peaceful Federation of Malaya after 1957. In fact, there might have been no independent Federation of Malaya at all and there might well have been a bloodbath. After all, it is commonsense to believe that such issues are best raised in a committee room rather than from a public platform" (Morais 1972, 331).

⁶⁴ Gagliano 1971, 5; Minister of Home Affairs, Tun Dr. Ismail, notes in 1966 that the greatest democracy was practiced *inside* the Alliance Directorate (Dr Ismail Papers ©, 128).

⁶⁵ For example, in the lead up to the 1964 national election, the PAP of Singapore campaigned on a platform of exposing and addressing communal problems, notably defining its campaign by a call for a 'Malaysian Malaysia' (Milne and Mauzy 1978, 72). The Alliance, by contrast, expressed consistent uneasiness with this open examination of communal differences for fear that it would mobilize its constituent groups against the inter-communal structure of the Alliance itself. This uneasiness with the PAP's method and style of party politics, most especially among the Malay *ultras* in UMNO, ultimately led Tunku to expel Singapore from the Federation (ibid, 71). Or, for example, the Tunku made a direct bid to the Chinese education union (UCSTA) in January 1955 to drop calls for Chinese to become an official language until after the elections in exchange for the Alliance working to repeal the Education Ordinance of 1952 (Ee 1997, 158-160).

version was published (Heng 1988, 200-202). It remained silent on contentious communal issues including citizenship and Malay special privileges, issues which UMNO had made private commitments to the MCA and MIC on (Fernando 2011, 500-501). This was not because its leadership had failed to make an agreement, but because it was felt that airing the issues publically would undermine its resolution.⁶⁶ In another instance, the Alliance submitted its position on the time period for Malay privileges orally to the Reid Commission so as to avoid negative Malay reactions.⁶⁷ Later, in perhaps the most dramatic commitment to the Alliance Formula, a mere two years after the merger of Malaya and Singapore, the Tunku expelled Singapore when its leader, Lee Kuan Yew, consistently violated what was deemed to be acceptable actions concerning communal issues.⁶⁸ Finally, the decision to move the entire MCA section on education into a private sub-committee served to shield it from the organized Chinese pressure groups.⁶⁹

As the next section will argue, despite each of these efforts to remove inter-communal issues from public discourse, pressures from civil society continued to strain the Alliance structure in the lead-up to Independence and afterward. Given the contested nature of the debates and the strained structure of the Alliance framework, it is perhaps unsurprising that there were moments when the formula was violated. These types of internal challenges came from radical factions

⁶⁶ Heng (1988) describes this calculation as such: 46

“The public stand of the Alliance on citizenship was thus to avoid holding out any promises to non-Malays while at the same time reassuring them that the problem would receive serious consideration in the immediate future...The MCA leadership, however, knew that the UMNO national leaders had conceded far more to the non-Malay demands on citizenship than what had been made public. The Alliance position as expressed in its full Manifesto designed for limited circulation and the Tunku’s views in an election policy paper on citizenship make this point clear. The Alliance top leadership could afford to be less circumspect on the issue of citizenship in its comprehensive Manifesto, because it was protected by the restricted circulation of the document. In this document, the Alliance implicitly expressed its willingness to grant citizenship to the large majority of non-Malays resident in the country” (205).

⁶⁷ Stockwell 1995 CO 889/6, ff281-290, 321

⁶⁸ Milne and Mauzy (1978) describe this conflict as such: “The PAP [the main political party in Singapore] believed in drawing attention to the existence of communal problems, analyzing them, and stressing the need of overcoming them if Malaysia were to survive. The Alliance, while believing that it was necessary to make general pronouncements on the desirability of racial harmony, feared that any extensive open examination of communal differences, for example, at university forums on politics, would only stir up trouble.” (71).

⁶⁹ “Tan Cheng Lock proposed that the MCACECC should establish a working subcommittee to reduce the necessity for calling full MCACECC meetings because open discussions ‘could sometimes be misrepresented and distortions could lead to misunderstanding’...Thus the Working Subcommittee was intended to pursue in a quiet manner issues brought by the UCSTA to the MCACECC” (Ee 1997, 168).

within each of the coalition parties, partly because the member parties' structures provided both the incentive and means to mobilize the population by exploiting communal issues.⁷⁰

Nonetheless, the Tunku was instrumental for a time in reinforcing the Alliance Formula and punishing violators (Fernando 2011; Clutterbuck 1985, 261; Sheppard 1995, 93). Thus, despite breaches in the Alliance formula, the leadership remained confident in its approach, believing that the survival of both the party and nation were dependent on its inter-communal elite bargaining formula.⁷¹ Thus, rather than altering the Formula, Alliance leaders dug in deeper, further narrowing the group which could legitimately decide policies related to communal issues.⁷² The result was a significant constraining of the institutional channels for grievances expression. In short, this process of increasing insulation from public pressures represented a commitment to the elite's mode of conflict resolution (the Alliance Formula) born out of the late-colonial period rather than a commitment to democratic principles and processes.

Conclusion

The Alliance leadership took the presence of a constitutional bargain as proof that the Alliance Formula was a success, even if several communal issues remained unresolved (Dr. Ismail Papers (b), 46).⁷³ In addition, at independence, the Alliance did enjoy the asset

⁷⁰ For example, Abdul Aziz bin Ishak, the first Minister of Agriculture of the Federation and one Vice president of UMNO deliberately championed the cause of rural Malays by promoting agricultural projects and institutions that undercut existing non-Malay ventures. Through these activities he became something of a Malay folk hero until his violations of the Alliance Formula could no longer be tolerated and the Tunku removed him (von Vorys 1975, 171-183).

⁷¹ For example, Tun Dr. Ismail, prominent leader in UMNO, praises the singular ability of the Alliance formula to tackle the difficult communal issues: "In fact after a few weeks of dialogue, the UMNO MCA and MIC ceased to see the communal problems from the angles which each party had tried to put across to the others and they now looked at these problems as a challenge which the Alliance as a unity should find solutions to. As I saw this spirit emerge and expand, during the rest of the conference, I was convinced that whatever may happen in the future, this spirit of the Alliance would triumph over all obstacles" (Dr. Ismail Papers (b), 46).

⁷² Von Vorys (1975) describes this commitment as such: "the Alliance was developing a method of its own in settling inter-communal issues. There were no projects of survey research to determine popular views, nor any bureaucratic procedures. The heads of the communal parties worked things out privately, informally, and secretly. Not that the members of this Directorate always agreed...But, the leadership of UMNO, MCA, and MIC agreed that to carry on negotiations in public on such communally sensitive issues as citizenship and Malay privileges would trap them in a rigid pattern and place the communities on a path of polarization which would inevitably lead to confrontation and communal violence. And, however democratic the means might be, the end would be neither a common nation nor a stable political system" (133).

⁷³ In terms of outstanding communal issues, the clause 'to be reviewed from time to time' seemingly left the special position of the Malays open to interpretation and alteration. Further, the role of English as an official language was set

of legitimacy stemming from their being the engineers of independence and from their landslide victory in the only colonial election (Fernando 2009, 145). Nonetheless, this support could not be taken for granted, as it required both vertical mobilization of communal constituencies and loyalty among the leadership to retain legitimacy, two necessities that often conflicted. It would thus partially be the leadership's response to pressures from below that would determine its fate and commitment to democracy.

In the next section, I detail how the institutions that might facilitate a back-and-forth relationship between state and society became increasingly closed off. I argue that the Alliance demonstrated a commitment to the Alliance Formula rather than a commitment to democratic channels of popular grievance expression and state response. The formation of these methods of elite negotiation in the late-colonial period set a precedent moving forward. In short, the method of resolving the inter-communal bargain became more central to elite notions of appropriate governance than did the maintenance of democratic principles. Such an attachment bodes poorly for democratic processes, which require responsiveness to social, political and economic changes either before or after the polls. The limited experience with democratic politics outside the domain of an 'independence mandate' had not yet tested the Alliance in this manner, and the condensed Independence struggle had not yet resolved the most contentious issues the Alliance government would be expected to legislate. The next section examines the effects of this commitment to the Alliance Formula and the relations between state and society.

A Strong State and a Discouraged Society: a case study of the politics of education

After Independence, questions loomed over how to implement the Constitutional compromises. The transition from chief negotiator between Malaya and the British and among communal groups to chief executive put a great strain on the Alliance structure.

to expire ten years after Independence. Both issues would become central to conflict during the first decade of Independence.

Despite the Alliance's steadfast confidence in the Constitutional bargain and the Alliance Formula, the decade demonstrated that its actions and negotiated compromises not only failed to contain communalism but actually exacerbated tensions, as their cultural and economic policies were unpopular among all groups.⁷⁴

This section illuminates the gaps sustained between the state and society in Malaysia by examining debates surrounding one of the communal issues that held paramount importance both before and after Independence: education.⁷⁵ It argues that diverse pressures continually pushed the state to resolve perceived injustices in this field, from protecting non-Malay rights of cultural expression through vernacular languages to completing an agenda to make Malay the dominant identity of the nation. Under this pressure, the inter-communal Alliance Directorate further centralized and insulated itself under pretenses of the necessity of the Alliance Formula. At the same time, the national party leadership rebuked and removed those intermediaries that mobilized or responded to specific communal aspirations. This process progressively cut off the institutional channels of information-sharing between the state and society. Without these intermediaries, citizens were unable to realize change through formal networks. As frustrations with a non-responsive state mounted over the decade, the electorate finally sought redress through the polls and then in post-election riots in 1969. Because this

⁷⁴ For example, the 1967 National Language Act sought compromise between radical Malay and non-Malay aspirations but ultimately proved unwelcome to both communities (Mauzy 1985, 160). Further, Malays were increasingly aggrieved by what they saw as slow progress toward their economic progress relative to other communities, a promise of the Constitutional bargain as related to the 'special rights of the Malays.' This frustration is highlighted by Abdul Aziz bin Ishak, Minister of Agriculture of the Federation and one of three Vice Presidents of the UMNO party, who championed rural Malay economic opportunities, particularly by trying to eliminate the private middlemen in rice production and turning private rice mills into cooperatives (von Vorys 1975, 230). In the process, however, non-Malay communities were alienated and aggrieved by what they saw as Malay preference at their communities' expense. A direct attack on Malay special rights became a central facet of some oppositions' party platforms in 1969 (von Vorys 1975, 259).

⁷⁵ Ee (1997) argues that within the Chinese community, the cause of education became 'suffused with a political struggle, the objective of which was to resist cultural domination while undergoing political integration (4). In the last decade of colonial rule, the British recognized the sensitivity surrounding this particular cultural struggle for political transition, nation-building and overall stability in Malaya: "After citizenship, Education policy is probably not only the most contentious subject in Malayan politics but also the one most likely to give rise to friction between the Malay and Chinese partners in the Alliance Government" (Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/51, no 96, 283).

phenomenon was paired with the Alliance's commitment to its Formula of governance above democratic processes, it responded to the security challenge by rejecting the democratic process wholesale, constraining political activities and further insulating the state.

I argue that tenuous links between the state and society resulted in a lack of institutional resilience. In short, where the institutions of political grievance expression are not present and/or accepted, neither the elites nor masses inculcate the norms to continue to work through them. Thus, upon Independence, elites were both unwilling, because of their overriding commitment to the Alliance Formula, and unable, owing to their progressive insulation from social grievances, to respond to diverse pressures from below. The discussion proceeds in four parts: post-war education policies, educational interest groups and the Alliance Formula, post-Independence debates, and the National Language Act of 1967.

Post-War Education Policies: movement toward Independence

Prior to WWII, the British invested relatively little in Malayan education outside of the Straits Settlements.⁷⁶ To the extent that government provision of education was available, it was limited to the Malay population⁷⁷ and included rudimentary vernacular primary schools in rural areas and English education for Malay aristocrats in urban centers, including one College (Seng 1975, 24).⁷⁸ For the non-Malay populations, there were several estate-owned Indian schools for the laboring population, and a resilient system of community-financed Chinese primary schools (O'Brien 1980). After 1945, the British sought to replace these three distinct

⁷⁶ Raffles College and the King Edward VII College of Medicine were the only post-secondary schools and were located in Singapore (Lim 1967, 298).

⁷⁷ British defended the relative neglect of non-Malay communities in this regard as such: "Even so, the Governments of Malaya tended, and with reason, to regard the bulk of the Chinese population as transient and consequently did not feel any compulsion to make special provision for either English or Chinese vernacular education for the children of this community" (Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/51, no 69).

⁷⁸ In 1905, the Malay College in Kuala Kangsar was established. It was intended to train sons of Malay aristocrats for employment in the Malay Administrative Service (O'Brien 1980, 56; Seng 1975, 24).

vernacular education systems (Malay, Chinese and Indian) with a common national system, implying the use of English as a common neutral language (Fennel 1968, 51).⁷⁹ In addition, when the Emergency began in 1948, the British became increasingly concerned with Chinese education and its connections to the communist insurgency (Fennel 1968, 83). Meanwhile, Malay leaders from 1948 demanded that the Malay language have a prominent role in this system (Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/51, no 96, 284).⁸⁰ In either scenario, there was little room for non-Malay schools, a policy that most directly impacted an autonomous, expansive and growing Chinese school system.⁸¹ This was the immediate post-war educational situation.

The British commissioned several education reports through the late 1940s and early 1950s.⁸² Through this contentious process, the 1952 Education Ordinance finally became the first post-war legislation (Ee 1997, 62). It committed the government to provide compulsory, free primary education in a system of new national schools that could use either Malay or English as the medium of instruction. As a small concession to non-Malays, where there was demand from at least 15 students, the schools could offer courses in Tamil or Mandarin (Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/51, no 69, 106).

⁷⁹ For the British, this was predominately a security imperative, as suggested in the following memorandum from the CO Far East Department: "The different races of Malaya think of themselves primarily as Malays, Chinese or Indians and only secondarily, if at all, as Malayans. No plans for defence against communist aggression from without and subversion from within can have a full chance of success so long as the people are thus left without a common outlook on fundamental questions... The need is for schools, dedicated to promoting Malayan unity, in which children of all races may grow up together, learning each his mother-tongue as a subject of study but being taught through the medium of a common language. The common language must be the *lingua franca* of the country, English. Only thus can racial exclusiveness, at present fostered by the vernacular system of education which predominates in Malaya, be broken down" (Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/51, no 71, 132).

⁸⁰ Malays were concerned both for the cultural role of the Malay language as well as extending educational facilities to Malays *before* allocating additional expenditure to the education of non-Malays. This latter issue was a function of the groups' perceived economic underdevelopment relative to non-Malays (Ee 1997, 50).

⁸¹ Of the 1105 Chinese schools in 1946, 27 were missionary schools and 2 were government run (Ee 1997, 32)

⁸² In 1950, the British produced the Central Advisory Committee (CAC) report suggesting that the use of English be extended as a neutral language acceptable to all groups. Both UMNO and MCA rejected such a proposal (Fennel 1968, 118-134). Two new Committees, Barnes and Fenn-Wu, were commissioned and focused on Malay and Chinese systems, respectively. The Barnes Committee suggested that Malay should be the main medium of instruction and that separate vernacular schools be replaced with a single type of primary school taught in both Malay and English (ibid, 146-165). By contract, the Fenn-Wu Report supported the teaching of both Malay and English in all schools but recommended that vernacular schools be retained. It further recommended increased government aid to Chinese schools to help them evolve into truly Malayan schools (ibid, 166-181).

The Malays were not especially pleased with the report, its leading newspapers contending that the community wanted only one type of national school which used Malay as the medium of instruction (Fennel 1968, 250; 290-292). Predictably, the Chinese community even more vigorously opposed the Ordinance (ibid, 248-250).⁸³ The Barnes Report and subsequent Education Ordinance encouraged Chinese teachers and community leaders to organize nationally for the first time, and the United Chinese School Teachers' Association (UCSTA) was formed in December 1951. Education advocates argued that if the Chinese were to become partners in the Malayan nation, then the schools that they had heretofore provided for by their own resources should be incorporated into the national educational system. They envisioned a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multicultural country which embraced diversity as a source of interracial integration and national strength (Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/51, no 69, 108). The teachers' union was also tied to a group of local businessmen, Management Committees (MCs) which consisted of the Chinese schools' benefactors who thus enjoyed wealth, prestige and influence in their communities. These advocates formed the United Chinese School Committees' Association (UCSCA), a group whose membership overlapped with the state-level MCA representatives (Ee 1997, 101-106). The central debate over education was thus less whether a national system was necessary, but whether a single language was an essential basis of this system (Ee 1997, 4).

In terms of Legislatures' reactions, Malays were concerned far more with availability of English, especially in rural areas, than the role of Malay (Fennel 1968, 255). By contrast, the MCA leadership initially shared Chinese education groups' opposition to this narrow vision for

⁸³ In 1953, there were 52,500 Chinese studying in English schools compared to more than 234000 enrolled in Chinese schools. The influence and importance of Chinese education within this part of the non-Malay population was thus quite large (Ee 1997, 97).

education in the country,⁸⁴ even joining the teachers and MCs of Chinese schools in opposing the policy two weeks before the Legislative Council vote. This support did not, however, translate into legislative votes, and the Ordinance passed unanimously (Ee 1997, 63; 123; Fennel 1968, 258-260).

This disconnect between Chinese interest groups, specifically the influential UCSTA as an outspoken defender of Chinese cultural interests, and MCA action in the Legislative Council is indicative of early strains in the Alliance formula. Ultimately, financial difficulties rather than communal opposition forced the British to abandon the plan for national schools, and the education debate resumed (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/51, no 81, 153-154**). Both Malay and Chinese education advocates were poised for a fight.

Educational Interest Groups and the Alliance Formula

The MCA developed a relationship with organizations committed to Chinese education starting in November 1952 when national MCA delegates including their president, Tan Cheng Lock, attended a meeting in which the teachers (UCSTA), managers (UCSCA) and MCA delegates formed a joint committee to oppose the 1952 Education Ordinance (Ee 1997, 134). This historic meeting set the Chinese education interest groups and MCA as partners in the cause of defending Chinese education and culture and solidified the institutional links via teachers, school managers, local, state and national party representatives through which these efforts were to be coordinated. In short, at this late-colonial period, the links between this particular set of social groups and the state via political representatives were institutionalized such that the coordination of activities and channels of information-sharing and political grievance expression were strong and clear. Despite the unanimity with which opposition to the 1952 Ordinance was expressed at this meeting, however, the MCA delegates in attendance failed to direct their

⁸⁴ Tan Siew Sin, later President of the MCA, contended that “the only regime which have insisted on unity through uniformity are [the] totalitarian regimes” (quoted in Ee 1997, 62).

colleagues in the Legislative Council to vote in accordance with the meeting's resolutions. Two weeks later, not one Councillor spoke or voted against the Ordinance (Ee 1997, 137).

In April 1953, the teachers, managers and MCA leaders met to form a Central Committee on Chinese Education. While the Chinese education organizations argued for a body independent from the political party, it was placed under the MCA as a subcommittee (MCACECC). This was an effort to control these outspoken Chinese interest groups (Ee 1997, 139-143). From this move, Chinese education organizations could exert influence on the MCA directly, being members of one of its subcommittees, but the MCA ultimately controlled decisions on Chinese education as the party could veto any problematic resolutions (ibid, 143). As we will see, this relationship proved workable when the colonial government remained the main target of opposition, but broke down as inter-communal battles emerged as the loudest conflict.

The MCA's subsequent move to form a coalition with UMNO further constrained the Chinese education organizations' public campaign, as it became subject to the methods of the Alliance Formula. While the UCSTA and UCSCA remained vocal in rallying support for Chinese education after this occurred, Tan Cheng Lock and the MCA came to prefer more discrete channels of negotiation on these issues among elites. For example, the *Singapore Standard* reported that an MCACECC meeting in 1954 resolved to reject the national school plan and moved to make Chinese an official language. Tan Cheng Lock received extensive backlash from Tunku Abdul Rahman for this event, the latter responding to public outcry from the Malay Teachers' Association. The Tunku emphasized the necessity of discrete negotiation to keep controversial issues out of the public. For the more central cause of Independence Alliance leaders need to keep communal interest groups with conflicting demands 'at arms' length' (Ee

1997, 148-150). In short, the MCACECC's publicized negotiations on such matters were an unacceptable breach of the Alliance Formula.

The event demonstrates early difficulties in the Alliance party members' joint tasks of balancing a working inter-communal relationship across parties and sustaining support among their communal bases. This effort to represent yet constrain communal interests was the Alliance's central challenge. Its resolution was to keep debates and commitments outside the public sphere. The Alliance parties needed to act more discretely with communal interest groups, in this case the Malay and Chinese education organizations, lest they damage inter-communal compromise. At this juncture, Tan Cheng Lock thus proposed to move discussions further out of the public by organizing an MCACECC subcommittee.⁸⁵

Fortunately for the Alliance, there existed throughout the 1950s a convenient alternative outlet for communal frustrations – the British. Both the MCA and UMNO repeatedly redirected attention on the education issue away from the Alliance and against the colonial rulers, largely by emphasizing Independence as the paramount importance.⁸⁶ In this spirit, in January 1955, the Tunku made a direct bid to the UCSTA to drop calls until after the first national election for Chinese to be made an official language in exchange for the Alliance working to repeal the 1952 Education Ordinance (Ee 1997, 156-158). By accepting the bargain, the interest group

⁸⁵ In proposing this move, Tan Cheng Lock notes that open discussions 'could sometimes be misrepresented and distortions could lead to misunderstanding' (quoted in Ee 1997, 168).

⁸⁶ For example, in a speech to the MCA Annual General Committee in 1955, Tan Cheng Lock notes: "Let us remember that in the case of Education, for instance, the present policy was not laid down by the Malays; it is, in actual fact, the creation of the British whose ideas were adopted by a hand-picked Committee and then by a fully-appointed Legislative Council. I am sure the Malays are no more anxious to destroy Chinese education and culture, and the contribution they can make to the future Malayan culture, than the Chinese would want to deny the other races in the country their own languages and culture" (**Tan Cheng Lock Papers, Folio 86. 15 January 1955. Speech by the MCA President at the Annual General Committee meeting of the Association at the Chinese Assembly Hall, Kuala Lumpur, 20**). In another moment when Chinese and Malays condemned the implementation of the Razak Education Report in 1956, the Alliance directed its members that 'direct criticisms of the Minister of Education and the government were to be avoided by attributing problems of implementation of the Report to 'distortion... by certain expatriate officials in the Education Department that has incensed public opinion and caused annoyance' (quoted in Ee 1997, 192).

made temporary concessions on communal issues in order to ensure progress toward Independence. The UCSTA agreed, and the issue was postponed but not resolved.

After the Alliance won the only federal election in 1955, the bargain between Chinese education organization and the Alliance provided a framework for a new approach to education, but it needed to be translated into a workable policy. The Alliance appointed a new Minister of Education, Dato Abdul Razak Hussein, and commissioned an education report (Fennel 1968, 423). The Razak Committee concluded that, for the next 10 years, a national system based on one medium of instruction was financially impossible. Therefore, all four streams of primary schools should be integrated into the national system. This would include Standard Primary Schools that teach in the national language and Standard-type Primary Schools that teach in either Chinese or Tamil but include Malay and English as compulsory subjects. Both types of schools would receive public funds and use a common curriculum (ibid, 435-442).⁸⁷

When the report was debated in the Legislative Council, Malays dismissed it as not going far enough to promote the Malay vernacular (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/51, no 96, 284-285**). Then, on June 4, it was announced that all public examinations (including the Lower School Certificate Examination) would take place only in the official languages, a policy which underhandedly forced Chinese secondary schools to alter their medium of instruction to English in order for its students to prepare for exams outside their vernacular language (Ee 1997, 180; Fennel 1968, 451-452).⁸⁸ At this point, Chinese education advocates stopped supporting the legislation, arguing that its implementation was inconsistent with the spirit of the report. They then decided that the only solution was to re-introduce the issue of official language (Ee 1997, 180-186).

⁸⁷ The Report was far less clear about what to do in secondary schools. At the time, there were only Chinese secondary schools teaching toward their own exam and English schools teaching toward the Cambridge School Certificate (**Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/51, no 96, 284**).

⁸⁸ Language of examination was naturally tied to economic opportunities and social mobility, as state certificates provided access to higher education and job opportunities.

The MCA was right in the middle of these contrasting pressures. Unable to get UMNO to concede on the language issue, a dispute developed between national MCA leaders, who wanted to work within political limits, and the state-level MCA leaders, who wanted the MCA to fight for a better Chinese education deal. In light of these developments, the state-level MCA leadership mobilized more than 1000 representatives from 454 *shetuan* around the country in February and April 1957 to make its own demands on the Reid Report.⁸⁹ In addition, the meeting decided to form a rival political party, the Federation of Chinese Guilds and Organizations (Ee 1997, 189). This direct challenge to the MCA's right to represent the Chinese community ultimately broke down, but it demonstrated the real rift between national leaders and social groups.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, when the Reid Report subsequently recommended the use of Chinese and Tamil as official languages for a period of 10 years or more but the Alliance, with MCA's support, roundly opposed this, the *shetuan* with accompanying MCA state leaders sent it own delegation to London (Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/439, no 82, 385-386). This move immediately came under fire from UMNO and MCA national leaders, who questioned Chinese state leaders' loyalty to the country and accused them of trying to divide the Chinese community (Ee 1997, 202). Thus, in the immediate lead-up to Independence, the links between national leadership and intermediary district and state-level leaders (who dealt more directly with communal pressures from below) were severely strained, creating a wide gap between grassroots pressures and the governing leadership.

Post-Independence Debates, 1957-1969

⁸⁹ The four major organization consisted of the Federation of Selangor Chinese Guilds and Associations, the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, the Perak Assembly Hall and the UCSTA. Three out of four of these organizations were led by MCA leaders (Ee 1997, 187-188).

⁹⁰ The political organization broke down when the UCSTA decided to withdraw its support. This was not because the UCSTA did not align more closely with the *shetuan*'s political demands, but because it was concerned with the parallel outcome of the Education Report and felt that it could not politically distance itself from the MCA at the time (Ee 1997, 194-203).

Despite the Alliance's electoral mandate to lead the country, the MCA in particular was rife with internal crisis immediately after Independence. A schism had been forming throughout the constitutional negotiations between a conservative faction led by Tan Cheng Lock and a more progressive faction with deeper connections to Chinese education and workers' organizations, including the *shetuan* (Ee 1997, 260-61). The latter accused the MCA of conceding too much to UMNO, and the former defended the MCA for embracing a spirit of inter-communal compromise.⁹¹ The issues of education policy had not been resolved and Chinese civil society organizations remained active in calling for reforms.⁹²

In 1958, Tan Cheng Lock died, and the conservative faction lost its charismatic leader. The scene was set for the progressive faction to assert its influence in the MCA. In the Annual Meeting of the MCA Central Committee in March 1958, members of the progressive faction were elected to the Presidency and other major posts (Ee 1997, 260). The significance of the event was that these challengers represented a group of men "who were neither initiated into the political bargains which preceded independence nor were apparently prepared to abide by them. Indeed, the new MCA leadership saw little purpose and no virtue in exercising restraints" (von Vorys 1975, 163). In other words, this new leadership was a direct threat to the Alliance Formula, and UMNO leaders distrusted them.⁹³

Indeed, it was not long before the new MCA leadership confronted UMNO. On June 24, 1959, Lim Chong Eu, the new MCA President, wrote a private letter to the Tunku asking that the MCA be awarded 35 legislative seats in the 1959 election and that his agreement with Razak,

⁹¹ Recall that this latter group had organized a rival organization to the MCA in the debate over education in 1956 and citizenship in May 1957 (Ee 1997, 189, 252; Stockwell 1995 CO 1030/439, no 82, 385-386).

⁹² The issue of secondary school conversion was particularly tense. On November 14, 1957 students from 6 major Chinese secondary schools staged demonstrations to protest the implementation of age limits on school attendance. The Alliance government sent in riot police to break up the protests. On the 17th and 19th, more students protested in other schools, and again the riot police were sent in. As a result of these three days, 24 students were expelled. This served only to exacerbate the situation, and protests were staged at numerous other locations (Ee 1997, 250).

⁹³ At the same time, UMNO was facing pressure from Malay education advocates to make greater progress on Malay secondary schools (Ee 1997, 262).

that the implementation of the requirement for all exams to be held in the official languages to be delayed “until such time as Malay is fully developed and teaching facilities of Malay are adequately provided in all schools,” be written into the Alliance manifesto (Ee 1997, 263). Most important, in a blatant disregard for the Alliance Formula, the MCA’s publicity chairman made these demands public, thus sparking an UMNO-MCA crisis. The Tunku accused the MCA leadership of betraying the Alliance and announced that UMNO would contest all 104 Parliamentary seats in the upcoming election. Lim Chong Eu met with the Tunku several times to repair the damage but to no avail. Ultimately, Tan Siew Sin, leader of the conservative faction of MCA, undermined the MCA position altogether by contending that neither the Chinese education nor electoral seat allocation issues were important enough to break up the Alliance. The Tunku told the MCA leadership that they could remain in the Alliance only if he selected their election candidates and if they agreed that the Alliance manifesto would have no specific statement on Chinese education (ibid, 264). This time the vote swung toward the more conservative faction under Tan Siew Sin. By 89 to 80, the MCA accepted these terms (von Vory 1975, 165). In the process, many top MCA leaders from the defeated progressive faction resigned.

What this episode demonstrates is that the Alliance Formula could not be broken without severe repercussions. In 1961, Tan Siew Sin was elected MCA President. He proved to be a more loyal Alliance partner, his opening speech emphasizing that “the main task of the Association is not only to maintain the unity of the community, but to forge that unity into a greater unity of the Malayan nation itself... it must be accepted that the interests of the country as a whole have to be more important than the interests of any single community” (Morais 1972,

279-280).⁹⁴ As will become apparent, while his loyalty to the Alliance Formula may have strengthened the MCA's relationship with UMNO, it further frustrated the MCA's relationship with its Chinese constituencies.

After the 1959 elections, Abdul Rahman Talib was named Minister of Education and set up a committee to review education policy once again (Talib Report 1959). Unlike the Razak Report, Chinese education organizations were not consulted despite their efforts to engage and participate (Ee 1997, 266). The report recommended that secondary education should all be in the national language (Malay) and all exams should be in the official languages. Moreover, it declared that the objective of satisfying "the legitimate aspirations of each of the major cultural groups who have made their home in Malaya" was "incompatible with an education policy designed to create national consciousness and having the intention of making Malay the national language of the country" (Talib Report 1959, paras 17-20).

On November 5, a meeting of more than 100 representatives from Chinese education organizations met and rejected the Talib Report. By that time, however, the Report had already been approved by Parliament less than a week after its publication (Ee 1997, 269-270). The MCA had strenuously supported the Talib Report and done so without consultation with the UCSTA or UCSCA. The event sparked furious debate among Chinese secondary schools for more than a year until in 1961, the Alliance government took measures to silence one outspoken advocate of Chinese education, Lim Lian Geok, by revoking his citizenship (*ibid*, 270-274). Despite of resistance, the Talib Report had sealed the fate of Chinese secondary education, as most could not continue without the government aid associated with conforming to the national school system (*ibid*, 272). By the end of 1961, 54 of the 71 Chinese secondary

⁹⁴ This was again reiterated in no uncertain terms at an MCA General Assembly meeting on November 10, 1962 when he argued: "We should not forget that while we owe a duty to the Chinese community whom we are supposed to represent, we also, in view of the multi-racial nature of our society, owe a duty to the Alliance, which has served this country well in the past and which will no doubt continue to serve it equally well, if not better, in the future" (Morais 1972, 621).

schools had converted to English schools (ibid, 274). The MCA leadership had thus been instrumental in securing the legislation that served as a huge setback for Chinese education interest groups.

No significant moves were made in education policy for the next eight years. Meanwhile, public expenditure on education did rise dramatically, however, by well over 30%. The number of primary schools increased from 4,214 to 4,367; enrollment increased from 789,267 to 1,215,590. In addition, 523 new secondary schools were built, and enrollment increased from 72,586 to 416,389 (von Vorys 1975, 217). Despite these financial efforts, however, inter-communal relations remained tense.⁹⁵ The gap seemed to be increasing between the English-educated leaders of MCA and the Chinese-educated working population, the former who seemingly failed to prioritize this anxiety and the latter who felt progressively alienated. This is evidenced from the fact that in 1964, Chinese voters were increasingly voting against MCA in its contests with more chauvinist Chinese parties (von Vorys 1975, 161). Further, the Malay community was dissatisfied by what they saw as too slow a movement toward economic equality and cultural dominance.⁹⁶ As we will see in the crisis over the National Language Act in 1967, this Malay and Chinese angst was ripe for political exploitation.

⁹⁵ For example, many Malays were mobilized around an opposition party, the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP), during the 1964 election when the Alliance admitted Singapore into the Federation. Because the addition largely included Chinese people, the PMIP campaigned on a message that the Alliance had betrayed Malay Islamic values and special privileges. The party won nine Parliamentary seats (von Vorys 1975, 160). During the 1964 election campaign, Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore campaigned on a message of 'Malaysian Malaysia' calling for a nation that embraced equality of races in a direct challenge to the special rights of the Malays. This strategy sparked massive riots in Singapore and Penang (Clutterbuck 1985, 283). While tensions were high, outright violence was relatively rare; In the 1960s three major 'racial' incidents occurred; in Bukit Mertajam (Province Wellesley) in 1964, in Kuala Lumpur in 1965, and in Penang in 1967 (Milne and Mauzy 1978, 77). Nonetheless, the short venture with Singapore inspired a Malaysian opposition party (the DAP has direct ideological roots in the PAP) which reinvigorated non-Malay rights (Vasil 1972, 13).

⁹⁶ Bedlington (1978) argues that "the First Malaysia Plan, formulated in 1963, generated much economic development, but did little to correct inequities among ethnic groups apart from creating a handful of wealthy Malays. Most educated Malays were able to climb the ladder of socioeconomic success only in the public service. Yet politicization of Malays, including those resident in rural areas, proceeded steadily as the ruling Alliance (especially the UMNO segment) sought to expand its political base, a process that heightened economic expectations as well as increasing political consciousness...." (115-116). In short, as von Vorys (1975) notes: "the coalition of English educated administrators (and politicians) and Malay school teachers and other more communalist elements in UMNO – in fact, the intermediate leaders who were responsible for Malay mass-support for UMNO – was in peril" (145).

The Independence Constitution also failed to resolve the question of national language, central to the politics of education. It promised only that the status of English was set to be re-evaluated in 1967 (Fernando 2009, 154). A faction within UMNO led by Syed Nasir bin Syed Ismail, the first full-time director of the Language and Literature Department, had been anticipating this event and interpreted it to mean that English would retain an official place for a maximum of 10 years, after which Malay would take its paramount position as the sole national language (von Vorys 1975, 200). In the run-up to the 10-year deadline, Syed Ismail initiated policies that determinedly championed the cause of the Malay language and mobilized numerous Malay advocates around it.⁹⁷ These efforts continually provoked the non-Malay communities and reinvigorated their efforts to secure their cultural role in the nation. For example, in 1966, the Selangor branch of the MCA passed a resolution, immediately supported by the Perak branch, calling on the national body to secure a more liberal use of Chinese for official purposes (Vasil 1972, 14).

As head of UMNO and the Alliance government, the director's behavior put the Tunku in a precarious position. In particular, the Tunku wanted to tread carefully on the issue for fear that the MCA would lose its electoral support among non-Malays (von Vorys 1975, 205). On February 24, 1967, he led a National Language Bill to Parliament which provided that Malay would be the sole national and official language. It continued to allow translations of official documents into other languages, however. Further, the use of English could continue for official purposes 'as necessary' (Mauzy 1985, 160-161)⁹⁸. Syed, upset by this compromise, publically

⁹⁷ This included printing school textbooks in Malay, translating English books into Malay, initiating courses in Malay, conducting research on Malay cultural heritage, and expanding the administration of the Department. He also held large rallies which proclaimed the value of the Malay language for the nation and declared that the country would make the transition to Malay as its sole official language by 1967 (von Vorys 1975, 200-201).

⁹⁸ The primacy of the manner through which the compromise had been reached in the directorate was a point recorded by Tan Siew Sin who noted in the Parliamentary debate: "It underlines once again, if further underlining is needed, the efficacy of the Alliance method of solving a difficult problem. We have always maintained that controversial issues are best resolved around a table in a committee room and that the surest way of not resolving a controversial issue is by shouting about it from the house tops or through the medium of the public press" (quoted in von Vorys 1975, 207).

criticized it and organized rallies of Malay teachers' associations, national writers' associations, and Malay student organizations against it.⁹⁹ He also sent a letter to the Tunku criticizing him for his accommodationist stance. These actions were in clear violation of the Alliance Formula, and Syed was almost expelled from the Party for disloyalty and was retained in his ministry though not in the UMNO Executive Council only after a dramatic personal apology to the Tunku (von Vorys 1975, 210).

The episode represented once again the fine balance between inter-communal compromise and communal mobilization. Syed was simply an Alliance member who saw benefit from exploiting UMNO's mobilizing capacity by appealing to sectional interests. When the Tunku had to discipline him so as not to isolate the non-Malay contingents, however, he also further frustrated the Malays (Vasil 1972, 15). It was an issue the opposition Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PMIP) would use to their full advantage in the 1969 election as the already mobilized Malay educational interest groups would prove an easy target¹⁰⁰.

Conclusion

The Alliance coalition was in a precarious position throughout the negotiations of education policy. They inherited a fragmented system of vernacular and English schools from the colonial period, and efforts to coordinate and nationalize this system were consistently resisted by all communities. Pressures from below broke the tenuous hierarchical links within the Alliance party, creating dissension among the middle level elites in UMNO and the MCA. In the MCA, this pressure was felt through a wholesale rejection of the leadership in 1959 (Ee 1997, 260). In UMNO, it was felt through a Minister of Language and Literature who saw an opportunity to mobilize communal popular support (von Vorys 1975, 200-210). Dissension could not be tolerated, and these members were severely rebuked and/or removed. The aggrieved communities

⁹⁹ Andaya (2001) argues that "In this context debates about bahasa were not simply about language or even the primacy of the Malays: they concerned the very survival of Malay culture" (291)

¹⁰⁰ Vasil (1972) argues that "this period had seen a significant revitalization of the PMIP and a substantial increase in its appeal among the Malay masses" (24).

were unable to reach representatives in the Alliance, who were constrained by the Alliance Formula in their capacity to respond. In 1969, dissatisfied voters sought opposition parties to fight for their aspirations. When the results provoked violence, the Alliance was quick to reinstate its mandate to rule, but with a constrained opening for political activities.

Extensive Administrative Development: Legacies of the Emergency

After WWII, the British rapidly implemented a centralized and expansive form of rule consistent in institutional form across the entire Malayan peninsula. This included the introduction of a centralized and uniform bureaucratic structure, the dramatic build-up of police and military personnel with intensive intelligence gathering in order to make the population 'legible,' and the extension of social services to broader segments of the population. Thus, what was a heterogeneous institutional configuration during the early decades of colonial rule divided among the FMS, UMS and Straits Settlements became a strong, knowledgeable state that touched all segments of society, even in peripheral zones. This section assesses this transformation in four ways -- by looking at the expenditure and size of the security forces, the extent of bureaucratic reach via direct taxation and intelligence gathering, the provision of public goods, and the availability of infrastructure. The central argument of this section is that despite decades of institutional heterogeneity, the British eventually transformed the size, capacity and structure of the administration, leaving a legacy of a strong state apparatus. As we will see in the following section, this provided a useful resource for the Alliance elite to dismantle the democratic regime in 1969 with minimal resistance.

Pre-WWII Political Design

Prior to WWII, the British maintained heterogeneous institutions across Malaya with some areas of the peninsula administered under more centralized and expansive administrative structures than others. The Unfederated Malay States (UMS) were the least centralized and retained the traditional structures of the Sultanate to a larger degree. Despite the fact that each Unfederated State had a separate administration, Rulers and their Councils in the UMS did adopt

much of the same policies as were implemented in the FMS and Straits Settlements in an effort to stem British administrative encroachments, though this was done in a more ad hoc manner (Stockwell 1995 CO 825/35/6, no 14, 57). In addition, because the Rulers in each state signed treaties requiring that they seek and take all advice of the British Advisor except in relation to Malay custom and religion, “when identical instructions [were] sent to all the Residents and Advisors identical action [was] taken in all States” (Emerson 1937, 54).

The Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States (FMS) were far more centralized and administratively developed under a British Governor and nominated Executive and Legislative Councils from 1909 (Emerson 1909, 145).¹⁰¹ From Federation in 1896, these areas were run almost indistinguishably and developed a common civil service, which included a Malay Administrative Service (MAS) for the lower bureaucratic positions and Malay Civil Service (MCA) for the senior positions (Heussler 1981, 112). After Federation, power shifted to a centralized system of legislation and governance in Kuala Lumpur (at the expense of the state Residents, Rulers and Councils) (Emerson 1937, 140). The position of each state still rested on the treaty with the Sultan as sovereign; however, his actual authority was seriously circumscribed by amalgamation (ibid). Each state had common services and functions including land policies, revenue collection, judicial systems, and school and labor registration (Thio 1969, 120-126).

Bureaucratic Development

In 1910, the British introduced a scheme for the admission of aristocratic Malays from across the peninsula into the lower division of the Civil Service (Khasnor 1984, 2). This service bred a ‘new elite’, an English-educated Malay administrative class emerged, outside the realm of the traditional structure but in close connection with it, with whom the British collaborated to govern

¹⁰¹ The key difference between these two administrative units was that each Sultan in each of the Federated States remained legally sovereign in the same way other Sultans did in the UMS. Each Sultan signed a separate treaty agreeing to receive and provide a suitable residence for a British Officer, to be called Resident (or Advisor in the UMS), who shall be accredited to his Court, and whose advice must be asked and acted upon on all questions other than those touching Malay Religion and Custom” (Emerson 1937, 121). In the FMS, this system did not mean merely providing advice, but actually taking over the administration and governance of the states (ibid, 123).

the colony. The service was restricted to Malays from the traditional aristocracy.¹⁰² They were groomed in the Malay College at Kuala Kangsar after 1909 (O'Brien 1980, 56). The large majority of these students came from the FMS, but a quota system meant that a select number of seats were reserved for the UMS as well (Khasnor 1984, 34). The school instructed the elites in both English and Malay. Once accepted into the Malay Administrative Service, there was a strict system of promotion which, theoretically, allowed for mobility into the Malayan Civil Service as well, though in reality, the British retained the most senior positions (ibid, 86).

These minimal efforts only laid the bare bones for the impressive bureaucratic structure that existed by 1957. Indeed, prior to World War II, though the services had grown, it remained a rather limited apparatus, as evidenced in part by the fact that direct tax collections amounted to only 1-2% of total tax revenue in 1947 (Slater 2011, 68). This challenge was exacerbated in 1945 by the physical destruction and communal hostility associated with the legacy of the Japanese occupation (Cheah 2012; Stubbs 1989, 42-46). With the return of the British in 1945, the police force was dilapidated and had trouble establishing control over the Malayan countryside or ensuring personal security (**Stockwell 1995 CAB 21/1681, MAL C 6(50)1, 244**).¹⁰³ These issues were made worse by the fact that the police service was comprised largely of Malays and had been utilized by the Japanese during the occupation to suppress predominately Chinese guerrillas (Stubbs 1989, 46). Moreover, the Malayan Civil Service was ill-equipped and few spoke the necessary languages to reach the population (Stubbs 1997, 58).

In 1950, the colonial government determined that new policies and resources were needed to effectively combat the communist insurgency. At this point, the colonial government implemented a more political approach, termed the Briggs Plan (**Stockwell 1995 CAB 21/1681, MAL C(50)23, 216-221**). This entailed first the massive resettlement of Chinese squatter

¹⁰² Overall then, the MAS was a protected service. Non-Malays were allowed to compete in the Straits service starting from 1933, but this same provision was not extended to non-Malays in the Malay states until nearer to Independence (Johan 1984, 112).

¹⁰³ Stubbs (1989) notes that more than 600 murders were reported during the BMA period ending April 1946, and that kidnapping, extortion and piracy were common (15).

communities into New Villages. By 1954, 570,000 squatters and landowners had been resettled (Stubbs 1989, 102). The policy also included the corresponding expansion of public services, infrastructural and economic development, though the initial record of the Public Works Department in this regard was poor.¹⁰⁴ Particularly, when Lieutenant-General Sir Gerald Templer arrived as the new High Commissioner and Director of Operations in 1952 to take over the faltering counter-insurgency campaign, he set about a new course to defeat the communists centered on winning the hearts and minds of Malaya's population (Stubbs 1989, 140-148). The essence of the campaign emphasized both punishing those who aided the guerillas and gaining the support of the people by addressing their grievances and bringing them under the Government's administrative control, including the expansion of cultural, political and economic programs (ibid, 155). Accordingly, Templer centralized the Federal Government, upgraded the conditions of the Civil Service, and expanded the administrative and infrastructural capacity of the state to reach the most remote areas (ibid, 156-164). Between the period of 1948 and 1959, the total size of the bureaucracy (local, state and federal levels) grew from a mere 45,000 to 140,000 (Stubbs 1989, 263). By 1960, there were roughly 20 civil servants per 1,000 persons, up from 11.5 a decade before (Evers 1987, 672).

In addition, these administrative positions were increasingly being filled by Malaysians. Before 1948, the lower levels of the administration were already held by Malays, but after 1948, the process of Malayanization was accelerated further (Heussler 1981). In 1953, Templer provided for the first opening of the MCS to non-Malay applicants, previously open only to British and Malays (Stubbs 1989, 160). **By 1954, there were 1,074, or 49%, Malaysians in the MCS (citation).** By 1956, of a total 106,600 civil servants in the total service, 103,000 were held by Malays (61,000), Indians (29,000) or Chinese (13,000) (Annual Report 1956).

Security Forces: Police and Military

¹⁰⁴ By the end of 1951, just over 200 of the 360 resettlement centers had schools and many projects to provide basic water, drainage and sewage services were well behind schedule (Stubbs 1989, 106-107).

In the late 1940s, the communist insurgency broke out. At the time, there was a significant understaffing problem in the Malayan security forces (**Stockwell 1995 T 220/86, 103**). Early efforts to rectify this situation meant a rapid expansion but a poorly trained force, most especially lacking Chinese or Chinese-language speakers (Stubbs 1989, 72-73). Unsurprisingly, these non-Chinese forces gained a reputation for brutality and further alienated the Chinese community (Stubbs 1989, 73-76). The process of retraining, reorganization and expansion took place in two difference phases. First, in a January 1949 report of the uprising, the British concluded that one of the major challenges was that a large segment of the population, the squatter communities, were outside the processes of administration (**Stockwell 1995 CO 967/84, no 70, 152-153**)¹⁰⁵. Accordingly, the Briggs Resettlement Plan was introduced in 1950 in order to resettle the squatter communities and both protect them from communist raids and break up the Min Yuen's hold within these populations,¹⁰⁶ to provide them with the services required to win their loyalty and to gather information to make the group more 'legible' (**Stockwell 1995 CAB 21/1681, MAL C950)23, 216-221**). Such a plan required an incredible mobilization of state and law enforcement, however, and thus corresponded with an initial effort to coordinate the activities of the police and military under the civil administration.¹⁰⁷

Second, when General Templer became High Commissioner in 1952, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Oliver Lyttelton, prioritized the reorganization and retraining of the police and Home Guard (Stubbs 1989, 156). Accordingly, Templer set about initiating a major expansion

¹⁰⁵ In a report by Field Marshall Sir W Slim, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, in Nov 1949, he reports "I did not realise before that very considerable portions of Malaya have not since the war, and in some cases before it, been under effective administration...Now, however, very large Chinese populations are settled in these areas. These Chinese are referred to as squatters but for all practical purposes they are permanent inhabitants in Malaya, and they have not been under an effective civil administration...in this note I have strayed considerably from the purely military aspect of the Malayan problem, but until it is recognized that the problem is by no means a military one, and that any military effort can only be subsidiary to and in support of a civil effort, we shall make no progress (**Stockwell 1995 CO 537/4374, no 5, 173-175**).

¹⁰⁶ During the communist insurrection, the MCP built up Min Yuen, or 'masses organization' in different states which were used to provide the MRLA units in the field with food, funds, information and recruits. They infiltrated and worked among the squatters and were responsible for communications and propaganda (Stubbs 1989, 87).

¹⁰⁷ To carry out the resettlement, the military was responsible for clearing the peninsula area by area from south to north, followed by the police and civil administration establishing effective control over each area (**Stockwell 1995 CAB 129/40, CP(50) 125, 231**).

and centralization of the administrative arm of government. The consolidation of the coordinating structure provided an opportunity for the civil administration, police and army to meet regularly. In addition to increased coordination among civilian and security branches, efforts were also made to initiate a massive recruitment effort. In the course of these counter-insurgency efforts, the Malayan police force grew from some 11,000 in 1947 to more than 73,000 in 1952 (Stubbs 1989, 157).¹⁰⁸ The military was also expanded and comprised nearly 30,000 personnel in early 1952 (Stubbs 1989, 159). Finally, a key component of the security build-up during this period which provided for Malayan state strength after Independence was the parallel expansion of an effective intelligence-gathering organizations including the Special Branch of the Police and Director of Intelligence (ibid, 159).

Direct Taxation and Government Revenue

Direct taxation serves as a useful indicator of state institutionalization because it represents a huge collective action problem. Indeed, many post-colonial states still lack the administrative structure to impose an effective direct taxation scheme. In Malaya, the colonial regime built up this system during the late colonial period. In the late 1940s, there were pressures internally from the security situation and externally from the Crown to make Malaya self-financing (**citation**). In December 1947, the Malayan administration introduced the Income Tax Legislation. The Malayan government used the newfound revenues from the Korean War boom in commodity prices to put in place a massive tax structure that had the potential to ensure relatively high levels of revenue throughout the Emergency and into the Independence period.¹⁰⁹ For the period 1947-1953, the percentage of tax revenue from direct taxation rose from roughly 1% to 25% (Slater

¹⁰⁸ Notably, at no point during the Emergency did the number of Chinese police exceed 2000 (Stubbs 1989, 157).

¹⁰⁹ Stubbs describes the importance of the Korean War for Malaya as such: “The possibility that the fighting might be extended to other parts of East and South-East Asia, coupled with an increased demand for strategic raw materials stimulated by stepped up military requirements and the competitive stockpiling of key commodities, produced a dramatic rise in the price of nearly all commodities. Prices for the two pillars of the Malayan economy – rubber and tin – were catapulted to record heights. The resulting boom had important consequences for the financial position of the Malayan Government as well as for the prosperity of Malaysians in general. If not for the Korean War boom, the course of the Emergency would have been very different” (107).

2010, 68). Government revenues increased from M\$235.5 million in 1948 to M735.4 million in 1951 and remained around \$620 during the recession years of 1953-54 (Stubbs 1989, 164). It was also supported by the introduction, in 1951, of Malaya's Employees' Provident Fund (EPF). This was a compulsory contribution scheme that registered over 500,000 employees and 12,000 employers in the first year (Slater 2010, 90). Esman (1972) notes that by the early 1960s, the Malayan government was able to mobilize about 18% of GNP through taxation, a comparable figure to countries like France and the Netherlands (96).

Public Services

The growth of the bureaucracy was both fundamental to and a result of the colonial government's investment in education. The role of the schools was seen as pivotal both to gain support for the government (and remove support from the communists) and to generate the supply of human capital needed to fill the rapidly expanding bureaucratic apparatus. Overall government spending on education, for example, increased from \$26.9 million in 1948 to \$110.1 million in 1957, 38% of which funded Malay vernacular schools and 40% of which funded English schools (Ee 1997, 55). Funding for schools in New Villages specifically rose from M\$33.9 million in 1950 to M\$135 million in 1958 (Stubbs 1997, 66). In 1954, no New Villages with a population of more than 400 were beyond easy walking distance of a school (Stubbs 1989, 170). At the same time, primary school enrollment in New Villages increased from 39% in 1952 to 60% in 1954 (Stubbs 1989, 171). The increase in government aid was matched with rising government control over schools, most especially to introduce textbooks with a more Malayan outlook (ibid).

The New Villages were targeted for other services as well, including the creation of an adequate water supply, roads of passable standards, sanitation and public health resources (Stubbs 1989, 169). For example, expenditure on health and medical facilities rose from \$24.8 million to \$49.4 million between 1950-1954 (ibid, 172). Static dispensaries rose from 32 to 172 from 1951-

54.¹¹⁰ Overall, economic conditions improved throughout the 1950s, such that spending on education, health, and social welfare increased substantially even after the boom in commodity prices had ended. As Stubbs (1989) notes: “This point was underlined in the years after the end of the Emergency when, although people were allowed to live wherever they chose, few New Villages were abandoned and residents only left their village if forced to do so in order to seek employment” (233).

The late colonial government placed the greatest emphasis on service provision and development of the New Villages because the Chinese population was the most vulnerable to communist recruitment and coercion. There were, however, calls for Malay rural development as well (Stubbs 1989, 178). Initially, the Government set up the Rural and Industrial Development Authority (RIDA) in August 1950. Then, in 1953, Templer increased RIDA’s budget to \$8 million and in 1954 made it a quasi-governmental corporation. Further, the Malay kampongs were targeted for increased road access and medical services (Stubbs 1989, 178).

Nonetheless, because of the ongoing emergency, the pre-independence economic plans, epitomized in the First Five Year Plan of 1956, were cautious and focused on budget balancing and military spending. As such, even with military spending, Malaya’s budget projections remained enviable, for example calling for a deficit of M\$149 million in 1956 but in fact securing a surplus of M\$65 million (von Vorys 1975, 221). By 1959 with the Emergency winding down, the Alliance was finally able to balance fiscal responsibility with political exigency, meaning a prioritization of reducing income inequality between the Malays and the non-Malay. The Alliance took greater control of the planning process (ibid, 223). Because this politicization of economic planning was paired with a high level of technocratic know-how within the Economic Secretariat, however, the facilitation of private sector growth ran in parallel to an expansion of

¹¹⁰ Despite impressive gains, one must note that there continued to be gaps in the reach of services. By 1958, 21% of New Villages still received no direct medical services at all (Stubbs 1989, 172).

public service spending directed toward rural Malays (ibid, 224-225).¹¹¹ During this period, results were quite impressive overall, with GDP per capita rising at an average of 2.5% each year (von Vorys 1975, 234).¹¹² At the same time, inter-communal redistribution made lesser gains, the income in Malay dominated industries increasing by 8% while the income of non-Malay dominated industries rising by 16% (ibid, 238). Thus, while Malaya inherited a strong economy manned by a knowledgeable and capable administrative staff, these advantages did not necessarily translate into political gains for the Alliance, as relative economic development remained unequal across communal groups.

Transportation and Communications

Transportation and communications plays a key role not only in facilitating economic development but also in providing necessary infrastructure for the institutionalization of links between the state and social actors, administrative control and provision of public services, particularly those outside urban spaces. The (non)growth of these sectors thus provide an instructive glimpse into the extent to which the state is able to gather and share information with the citizenry. In that vein, colonial Malaya witnessed impressive growth in three areas: railway, road and communications networks.

First, colonial Malaya saw three distinct phases of rail infrastructural development. For the purposes of tin mining, by 1896 the mines were connected along the western coast with nearby coastal ports by short, state-owned and state-operated railways. From 1896-1909, connections among longer north-south lines linked the interior terminal points of the railways in the various mining districts. By the end of this period, more than 500 miles of line were built that connected Johore in the south to Penang in the north. Between 1912 and 1931, rails were built to open up the East Coast. Thus, by 1931, the system integrated the entire Peninsula. In 1939, 1,069 miles of

¹¹¹ For example, in the Second Five Year Development Plan (1961-65), the Federal Land Development Authority (FLDA) focused on assisting states with projects to reclaim large parts of the jungle and development new settlements (von Vorys 1975, 231).

¹¹² Some noticeable failures remained, in that unemployment in the rural sector rose from 5 percent in 1962 to 5.3% in 1967 (von Vorys 1975, 236).

line had been built (Table 5). At this point, there were still important administrative differences due to decentralization, especially in the UMS. However, as the Peninsula was opened up to access by railways throughout, economic penetration also followed (Leinbach 1975, 275). While the most intensive political development took place only after WWII, this system of interconnected railways allowed for easier penetration of some of the most inhospitable and outlying areas once the process kicked off.

Table 5. Pan-Malayan Railway Mileage, 1902-39

Year	Miles
1902	274
1904	339
1906	428
1908	468
1910	538
1912	734
1914	822
1916	876
1918	949
1920	1014
1930	1074
1939	1068

Source: Tilman (1964) p. 56

The expansion of road networks before and during the late-colonial period is a second indicator of state access to the hinterland. Leinbach's (1975) analysis suggests that the initial phase of road construction reflected an effort to link and exert administrative control over economic ventures, most especially tin. The first major road construction push came when mining locations were moved further inward from the coast starting in 1874 and second when the administration amalgamation of the FMS required increased inter-state connections after 1898 (ibid, 272). Then, from 1911 after the UMS had been integrated into the British colony, trunk networks were extended to the northern and eastern areas of the peninsula for economic and political expediency (ibid, 274). Initially, starting in 1911 rubber production followed patterns where road networks were already accessible, but as this industry expanded, it rushed transport

expansion further to keep up with its economic needs (ibid, 276-277). There was a parallel political imperative between 1911 and 1939 to integrate state and district administrations supported the growth of “new routes [which] welded frontier administrative outposts to the main development cores” (ibid, 277). Finally, in the post-WWII phase, this expanded construction was linked to security imperatives as well as social and economic objectives specifically aimed at rural modernization. The accumulation of these phases of construction meant that by 1968, “there were few interior areas where no roads had penetrated” (ibid, 279). This rapid growth of secondary roads in the rural spaces was possible only because a trunk road system had already been established across the peninsula by 1950 (ibid).¹¹³

Finally, communication is a third important facilitator of government penetration into the peripheral areas. Propaganda became a crucial part of the Emergency campaign after it turned toward political solutions beyond the military (Stubbs 1989, 180-184). Initially, the Government focused on printed word, and by 1951 the total of weekly and periodical publications exceeded five million copies (Stubbs 1989, 180). Later, the colonial government focused on the expansion of radio propaganda via the Community Listening Service and by 1952 could make broadcasts from every state and Settlement (ibid, 181). This naturally corresponded to the need for greater popular access to radio, and by 1951, the number of listeners’ licenses more than tripled to 110,800 and the number of community receivers in kampongs, New Villages, estates and mines increased from 32 in 1949 to over 1400 in 1953 (ibid, 181-182). Providing information to the population, especially in remote areas, is a key aspect of security generation but also more broad-based political development. With a wide network of transportation and communications, the new Malayan state could invest in expansion rather than starting from scratch. A solid infrastructural base was thus one of the important legacies of the colonial period as it provided the independent

¹¹³ Between 1958 and 1968, 520 miles of internal village roads and feeder roads were built to link peripheral settlements to the main road network (Leinback 1975, 279).

Malayan state the means to gather information easily from its population, provide public services to it and, as we will see, exercise authoritarian measures in 1969.

Conclusion

Late colonialism had an important impact on the administrative uniformity and state capacity of British Malaya. A trained and expansive bureaucracy, infrastructure for revenue collection and public service provision, and transportation and communications sectors were made available throughout the peninsula. Further, the coercive apparatus of the state included well-trained personnel, knowledgeable about the population it covered. These tools, built up during the late colonial period, were also coupled with a legacy of state advancement into the population. The Internal Security Act and the powers of Emergency were at the ready even after the communist insurgency officially ended in 1960. They were easy instruments to recall during the 1969 riots. The next section will demonstrate how the Alliance elites used the state apparatus to quickly dismantle the democratic regime when its uncertainties proved too great.

Riots and Repression: Democratic Breakdown in Malaysia

Through the 1960s, the Malayan population's confidence in the Alliance began to wane. For a number of years, the degree of this frustration was obscured by internal and external aggression which dominated discourse surrounding the 1959 and 1964 elections.¹¹⁴ When these challenges subsided and the voters assessed the domestic situation in 1969, however, frustrations with the Alliance's interpretation of the constitutional contract became central (Vasil 1972, 9). This frustration did not, however, manifest itself in extra-institutional or anti-democratic activities in the lead up to the general election. Indeed, robust party competition and high levels of public participation within a generally free and fair climate characterized the five-week campaign period and Election Day.¹¹⁵ Beginning with the announcement of election results on May 10, however,

¹¹⁴ These conflicts included the Indonesian Confrontation in 1959 and the Singapore crisis in 1964 (Vasil 1972, 6-14).

¹¹⁵ This is with the minor exception of the Labour Party. The government detained several of its party leaders prior to the campaign period and the party consequently boycotted the general election altogether. Because of these minor disturbances, any anticipation of extra-institutional activity was expected to come from the communist left. These fears

“signs began to appear which suggested that this era of quiet satisfaction with and confidence in democracy was coming to an end” (Teik 1971, 9). The following days’ events included urban riots, the declaration of a State of Emergency, moratorium on political activities, curtailment of civil liberties and dissolution of Parliament. In less than a week, a seemingly stable democratic system was entirely dismantled.

This section examines the dynamics of the 1969 electoral campaign, results, May 13th riots and government responses in order to show the manner through which several colonial era factors manifested during these events. It argues that the Alliance coalition partners had lost touch with public frustrations over the decade since Independence because of a fundamental disconnect between social interest groups and the Alliance’s mode of operation via discrete elite negotiation.¹¹⁶ As the coalition poorly adapted to communal grievances among the citizenry, several elite factions within the coalition parties brewed as well.¹¹⁷ As a function of the disconnect between social grievances and elite modes of governance, the Alliance Directorate seemed largely unaware of either the degree of popular frustrations or the extent to which internal party contests were on the brink of eruption.¹¹⁸ When the election results were announced, these crises exploded into urban riots and provided the chaotic context for radical Alliance factions to assert themselves. In a clear preference for the inter-communal contract and the Alliance Formula, the party leadership interpreted electoral challenges to the established order as a product of and problem with the system itself and used the urban violence

were heightened by an episode the day before the election in which a funeral procession for a Labour Party member killed by a police man paraded through the streets of Kuala Lumpur (Bob Reece Interview; von Vorys 1975, 286-288).

¹¹⁶ As discussed in the State/Society section, in short, both Malays and non-Malays remained aggrieved by cultural compromises relating to language and education and by economic compromises relating to a constant rhetoric of redistribution but little progress toward communal inequality (von Vorys 1975, 266).

¹¹⁷ These internal quarrels were particularly rife in Sarawak, Selangor, Malacca, and Negri Sembilan (Vasil 1972, 9).

¹¹⁸ Alliance candidates spoke confidently of their prospects for a sweeping reelection in the lead up to election day (von Vorys 1975, 281-282).

to justify a move to end democracy.¹¹⁹ Despite weak links between state and society and limited democratic experience, what the ruling party did have at its disposal was a strong and knowledgeable state including a loyal security force, extensive intelligence of the population, and a bureaucratic apparatus to enforce its vision of the state. Thus, strong institutional coherence but weak institutional resilience resulted in the state's unwillingness to uphold the democratic regime in the face of challenges from below and its capacity to carry out these directives with relative ease.

The Campaign

The major contests of the 1969 electoral campaign concerned communal issues such as Malay special rights, the official language and education. These issues centered in opposition party platforms in various forms, but because the Alliance Formula removed these issues from public contention, the ruling coalition was restricted in its ability to respond to challenges. This section examines the platforms of the main political parties, detailing the lines of contestation.

The Democratic Action Party (DAP) ran a campaign appealing for a 'Malaysian Malaysia.'¹²⁰ It issued a manifesto (Setapak Declaration) calling call for a free, democratic and socialist Malaysia based on racial equality and social and economic justice (**The Rocket. August, 1967. Vol. 2 No. 8. P. 6-7, 12**). Its dual platform called for an integrated multi-racial nation and a more just and equitable society via 'democratic socialism' and 'cultural democracy' (**The Rocket. August, 1967. Vol. 2 No. 8. P. 2**).¹²¹ The DAP argued that the Alliance had abandoned the

¹¹⁹ In January 1971, Dr. Ismail, the Deputy Prime Minister, gave a speech to the Alliance members in Johore, noting: "Thus in the 1969 elections the sensitive issues of National Language and Special rights handicapped the Alliance generally and caused the bloodshed of May 13th (**Dr. Ismail Papers (d), 189**).

¹²⁰ The concept was initially born out of the Malaysian Solidarity Movement instigated by Singapore's People's Action Party (PAP), a meeting of opposition parties which tried to form a coalition to contest the Alliance in 1964. When Singapore left the Federation in 1965, all PAP activities were banned. The DAP was formed on 19 March 1966, taking up the ideology if not the organization of the PAP platform. It was launched by the single PAP member that was elected in the 1964 Parliament, C.V. Devan Nair (Lau Dak Kee Interview).

¹²¹ In terms of 'cultural democracy' the DAP Central Executive Committee issued a policy statement on June 1, 1968 stating: "what is basic and primary in the task of nation-building in our multi-racial society is the establishment in the national consciousness of the fundamental community of territorial and socio-economic interests which unites all Malaysians, whatever their race, colour or creed may be...Such a recognition would have helped to de-fuse language, education and culture as explosive political issues, and make it possible to view cultural diversity as a source of

principles of the Constitution, which had recognized the multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature of the society.¹²² Much of its campaign centered specifically on the contention that the MCA had abandoned the Chinese by conceding too often to UMNO's Malay-centric policies (Gagliano 1970, 11). The declaration was a clear attack on the special position of the Malays as advanced by the Independence compromise.¹²³

Though a self-proclaimed non-communal party, the DAP was frequently criticized by UMNO for being anti-Malay and by the MCA for being Communist (Dr. Chen Interview). Its leadership and membership composition reinforced these perceptions.¹²⁴ Though its leadership was dominated by English-educated professionals, bi-lingualism was a common feature of candidates (von Vorys 1975, 260-61). The party's Central Executive Committee made candidate selections vigorously, emphasizing bilingualism to provide access to the ruling elite (via English) as well as the Chinese electorate (Lau Dak Kee Interview). In terms of organization, the DAP had 63 branches throughout the peninsula (von Vorys 1975, 260). Finances were a constant problem, however, and most candidates contributed substantial resources to the party's trust fund and paid their own deposits and campaigns (Lau Dak Kee Interview). Thus, the DAP could not operate on a national scale and appealed to a certain segment of the electorate, namely urban Chinese, but developed strong links to those constituents by appealing directly to their post-Independence economic and cultural frustrations.

Gerakan Ra'ayat Malaysia (GRM), inaugurated in March 1968, was the second non-communal party in 1969 (Vasil 1972, 17). More than the DAP, it made a concerted effort to

strength to the nation, and as a stimulus to collective cultural growth, rather than as a source of strife, disharmony and discord" (Who Lives 1969, 31).

¹²² The DAP party newspaper professes that "It is unfortunate that the Alliance gives the impression that it is embarked on a policy of Malay-isation. The MCA acquiesced in this too. We in the DAP cannot agree that Malay-isation is compatible with the process of Malaysianisation" (**The Rocket, August, 1967. Vol. 2 No. 8. p. 3**)

¹²³ Recall that the Constitutional Contract was, specifically, the exchange of liberal citizenship laws for the non-Malays in return for Malay as the national language and privileges to this communal group in terms of economic development (von Vorys 1975, 133).

¹²⁴ Its total membership in 1969 was 1,376, of which 1,042 were Chinese, 136 were Indian, and 181 were Malays. 1/3 of the party's candidates were Indian and only 1 was Malay (von Vorys 1975, 260-261).

attract Malays as well. Thus, while it emphasized racial equality, it made special mention of the economic position of the Malays and the need to assist this community (von Vorys 1975, 264). Gerakan's party manifesto accused the Alliance foremost of failing on economic issues, especially to protect the working and rural classes (ibid, 269). Its leadership was fairly evenly divided among the communities with seven Chinese, 4 Indian and 3 Malay candidates and included several of the former MCA leadership that had resigned after the 1959 crisis including Dr. Lim Chong Eu (ibid, 264). Its membership came largely from urban areas and was especially influential in Penang (ibid).

Third, Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Hemy formed the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP) before the 1959 election. The PMIP became UMNO's greatest competition for the Malay votes in the northeastern states of Kelantan, Trengganu and Perlis and had made significant gains in these states since Independence (von Vorys 1975, 303-304). The party campaigned on a platform of Malay nationalism and Islamic orthodoxy, accusing UMNO of making too many concessions to the Chinese.¹²⁵ Its main supporters were Muslim religious functionaries and Malay schoolteachers in rural areas.¹²⁶ Though not strongly organized, the party gained fairly significant cohesion from its unifying ideology (ibid, 261-262). This message was evidently compelling as it was able to gain popular support from Independence to 1969 at a rate higher than any other opposition party.¹²⁷

Opposition parties sought not to unseat the Alliance altogether but rather to disrupt the compromise that held the party together by "dislodging particular communal and regional supports from under [it] (Rudner 1970, 5). After prolonged negotiations, these parties agreed

¹²⁵ During the campaign, the PMIP released several provocative pictures, one of the Minister of Education and his wife dressed in mandarin cloths and another of the Prime Minister eating with chopsticks with a roast suckling pig on the table (von Vorys 1975, 285).

¹²⁶ Recall that the Malay Director of Language and Literature had organized protests among the Malay teachers' associations, national writers' associations, and Malay student organizations over the National Language Bill in 1967. These mobilized groups were a natural target for PMIP recruitment (Andaya 2001, 291).

¹²⁷ See von Vorys (1975) table on page 305

that their past disunity had worked to the advantage of the Alliance by splitting votes and that there was need to prevent the Alliance from getting a 2/3 majority in Parliament which it had been using to amend the constitution (Vasil 1972, 21). Thus, the opposition parties formed a gentleman's agreement whereby no party would contest in constituencies where another was already represented (Gagliano 1970, 11).

The Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) in the Alliance campaigned largely on a threat that it was futile to vote for the opposition. Its Party Chairman, Tan Siew Sin, argued as such: "the ordinary voter should...remember that while a bigger opposition is all right in theory, in practice it means that those voters represented by opposition members will suffer, and suffer hideously, merely to enjoy the luxury of having someone there in Parliament, scolding the Government on their behalf" (Slimming 1969, 12). In other words, if the opposition is elected and the MCA unrepresented, the Alliance would still have control of the government but the Chinese would effectively have no voice in it. UMNO reinforced this claim by consistently noting that the MCA was the only Chinese party it would work with.¹²⁸ Finally, the other major strain of its campaign message was to deny accusations made by the opposition to suggest that it served as a mere puppet to the UMNO in the Alliance and to accuse the opposition of destroying Chinese unity (Morais 1972, 290).

The MCA was the most organized and financially stable of any political party in the contest.¹²⁹ Despite this strong elite party structure, "all the comprehensive organizational blueprints did not facilitate access to the Chinese workers. The MCA presented a cohesive but small elite political group without much capacity for mass mobilization" (von Vorys 1975, 259). Indeed, the majority of its leaders came from the same social group – the English-educated Chinese business elite and professionals who were members of the guilds and Chambers of

¹²⁸ UMNO's loyalty to the MCA was especially assertive during the 1964 election when Lee Kuan Yew's PAP sought to undermine this partnership (von Vorys 1975, 165-171).

¹²⁹ It contained 674 ward branches, 97 division branches, and 11 state branches led by the Central Working Committee at the apex. Its membership rose from 137,120 in 1965 to 208,542 in 1969 (von Vorys 1975, 257).

Commerce.¹³⁰ This group was tied together by economic and political interest, but had little in common with Chinese workers and frequently lacked the cultural and linguistic ties from the majority Chinese-educated community (Ee 1997, 119). Because of this separation, they relied on the Chinese-educated local businessmen and *shetuan* (community networks) leaders who filled MCA posts at the state, district and town levels. It was thus very harmful to their links with Chinese society when, as was detailed above in the evolution of education policy, the national MCA leadership progressively marginalized its constituents by cutting links with its state-level intermediaries.¹³¹

Meanwhile, UMNO was preoccupied with the gains of PMIP in the Malay-dominated northern states and sought to shore up its communal support through directed threats and development incentives (Vasil 1972, 24-29). By 1969, the party had 340,000 members who paid an annual fee and 6,000 district branches (von Vorys 1975, 253). There existed only tenuous structural links between the grassroots and the highest level of the party, however, as the party was increasingly centralized and constrained in allowable discussion.¹³² Over the 1960s, the state-level party organization in particular had atrophied after the Directorate replaced state chairmen with liaison officers who came from the national, not state, ranks and gave Tun Razak, the Deputy Prime Minister, more substantial control over coordinating the district branches (*ibid*, 254). Moreover, the Directorate exercised full authority by signing off on the selection of candidates and appointments to high offices. In selecting UMNO representatives for parliamentary and state constituencies, many incumbents in 1969 were not re-nominated.¹³³ This

¹³⁰ Twenty-nine of the MCA's 33 parliamentary candidates in 1969 came from business or professional occupational backgrounds (von Vorys 1975, 261).

¹³¹ Ee (1997) argues that "The *shetuan* network provided the MCA not only with the most influential Chinese leaders at the local level but also the ready-made organizational bases for membership recruitment" (119).

¹³² Von Vorys (1975) notes of the National Executive Council: "Partially appointed, but largely elected by the General Assembly, it was at one time a forum of vigorous debates with only two limitations imposed on the conduct of its members; public disassociation with party policy and personal attacks on the party leadership were considered inexcusable. Lately though, it too felt severely constrained by the Prime Minister's views and much of the discussion became perfunctory" (254).

¹³³ In Kelantan alone, UMNO nominated 16 new candidates (von Vorys 1975, 254-255).

institutional over-centralization pronounced obstacles to gauging social changes and grievances among Malays through this decade.

The Alliance on whole campaigned with a relaxed confidence, perhaps even complacency, in 1969 (**The Straits Times, 10 May 1969, p. 1**; Bob Reece Interview). Vasil (1972) argues that “they had no idea of the changed mood of the non-Malay electorate and their evaluation of their prospects in the elections was based negatively, as before, on the multiplicity of the opposition parties and the existing differences among them on a personal and policy level” (23). Given this optimism, the top leadership of the coalition largely ignored disconcerting evidences, including violence and provocations of its campaigners ranging from heckling at campaign rallies, to the murder of an UMNO worker in Penang, to the growing acceptance of PMIP and DAP charges against it (von Vorys 1975, 282). In short, throughout the campaign, the Alliance remained largely unaware of any need to re-strategize at the local level.¹³⁴ It rather emphasized national unity and argued that it was the only party capable of this feat, as according to Tan Siew Sin “There is no doubt that the Alliance has passed this acid test with flying colours and that is why it has been so spectacularly successful in every election held in this country” (Morais 1972, 291).

The Alliance members also struggled to put forward a coherent political strategy. As noted, the party’s structure promoted dual pressures to appeal to each party’s individual communal constituency while avoiding enflaming other communities. The party could ignore communal sentiments among the masses at its own peril, but, as a coalition of communal parties, it could also not outright make appeals to any one community. Because the opposition was more united and organized than it had been in previous elections, the Alliance was forced to respond to the challenges of communal mobilization. In response, the coalition largely vacillated between two

¹³⁴ For example, when Musa Hitam, UMNO executive secretary, brought warnings of a serious PMIP threat in Kelantan, he was reprimanded. In addition, when a lecturer at the University of Malaya shared a position paper which predicted only 14 seats for the MCA in the Lower House, his study was ignored (von Vorys 1975, 281).

contrasting strategies: avoiding sensitive issues altogether and claiming to have simultaneously maximized the interests of all communities. The common refrain was essentially that “we are the only ones that can deliver, not just in terms of economics and prosperity, in terms of actual harmony...we are the ones that bring the country together” (Bob Reece Interview). This idea is featured prominently in their manifesto, which charged opposition parties with enflaming racial politics to the detriment of the nation and the constitution.¹³⁵

May 10: Election Results

Notably, the elections passed relatively smoothly, without extensive fraud or violence (von Vorys 1975, 289-294).¹³⁶ The election results did not present any overwhelming intra-systemic power shift either. While the Alliance did suffer losses and reduced margins of victory, these changes were significant but not traumatic. The coalition retained a comfortable majority in Parliament with 66 out of 104 seats in West Malaysia, with contests in East Malaysia to take place a few weeks after.¹³⁷ Moreover, the Alliance retained the confidence of large segments of the population, winning just under 50% of the popular vote (Vasil 1972, 36). On whole, the electoral results were quite similar to those from 1959 (see Table __).

Table __. Results of Parliamentary Elections in West Malaysia since Independence

<i>Party</i>	1959		1964		1969	
	<i>Seats</i>	<i>% of Voters</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>% of Voters</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>% of Voters</i>
Alliance	74	51.8	89	58.5	66	48.5
Opposition	30	48.2	15	41.5	37	51.5

Source: von Vorys (1975), 297

¹³⁵ The manifesto was entitled: “A Better Deal for All” and charged: “Every opposition party without exception has sought to play on racial emotions. Some have done it crudely, others go about it in varying degrees of disguise. But each and everyone of these parties is in the control of its craven core of racial bigots” (quoted in von Vorys 1975, 267).

¹³⁶ The Malay newspaper, *Berita Harian*, reported on a few minor skirmishes that were quickly contained by police (May 11, 1969, p. 1)

¹³⁷ This margin was down from 74 and 89 seats in 1959 and 1964, respectively (Vasil 1972, 36).

Despite these facts, there were widespread *perceptions* that the results represented a power shift and an unstable one at that.¹³⁸ It was the first time that the Alliance had lost its 2/3 Parliamentary majority, and the first time it had won less than 50% of the popular vote.¹³⁹ Parliament had its largest opposition in the country's history.¹⁴⁰

The most dramatic results were in fact the reverses that occurred in State Legislatures, where the Alliance won only 162 of the 282 available seats, or 57% (**Table __**). While making gains back from 1964 losses in Trengganu, UMNO still lost heavily to the PMIP in the predominately Malay states of Kelantan and Kedah (Vasil 1972, 37). The Alliance suffered even heavier losses in the non-Malay states of Penang, Selangor and Perak.¹⁴¹ The common perception was that the MCA in particular had lost its ability to speak for the Chinese population as MCA representation dropped dramatically from 27 to 13 seats in Parliament, and in 9 of these 13 constituencies the Malays constituted at least 30% of the electorate (Vasil 1972, 46). In addition, the DAP, GRM and PPP opposition parties together formed the largest Chinese contingent in Parliament (Rudner 1970, 16).

Table __. Results of State Elections in West Malaysia since Independence

Party	1959	1964	1969
Alliance	207	240	167
Opposition	70	42	112
Independents	5		3

Source: von Vorys (1975), 298

¹³⁸ Malays saw the results as the beginning of the end of their privileges in government politics and administration in the country since Independence, and the non-Malays saw them as a step forward in establishing a truly Malaysian Malaysia (Vasil 1972, 36; von Vorys 1975, 294-95). Von Vorys (1975) describes the scene in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor generally as 'volatile'. Non-Malays celebrated their victories but "the very thought of their success seemed deeply disturbing. Underneath all the ecstasy and bravado they were afraid" (308). Meanwhile, Malays in the KL urban enclaves were "appalled and perplexed...Quite unexpectedly their political future, even their personal security suddenly appeared very precarious indeed. They were simply terrified" (308-9).

¹³⁹ The Alliance was so accustomed to governing with the power to easily amend the Constitution with its 2/3 majority that its leading members viewed any reduction of its odds as seen with great 'apprehension' (FEER VOL LXIV No. 19, May 8, 1969).

¹⁴⁰ PMIP won 12 seats (up from 9), the DAP won 13 seats (up from 1), Gerakan won 8 seats and the PPP won 4 seats (Vasil 1972, 37).

¹⁴¹ The most dramatic defeat in terms of numbers took place in Penang where the Alliance won only 4 seats out of 24 (Vasil 1972, 37).

Of great significance was the political deadlock (14-14) in Selangor, the birthplace of UMNO and location of the capital. There, UMNO returned almost all of its seats but the MCA and MIC lost a combined 13 out of 15 contests in non-Malay constituencies (Vasil 1972, 37). A stalemate ensued with the seats divided evenly between the Alliance and the opposition. UMNO tried to persuade Gerakan to join them to form a government, but this never came to fruition.¹⁴²

There are several indications that the Alliance, opposition and electorate were surprised by the electoral returns. The MCA itself expressed humiliation and suffered immediate attacks from contingents of its UMNO partner (Berita Harian, May 13, 1969, p. 1). Its leadership even voted to remove itself from cabinet posts.¹⁴³ Meanwhile, a radical faction (the ultras)¹⁴⁴ in UMNO argued that the Tunku was responsible for these losses because of his unwavering commitment to the MCA. They called upon him to give up his power to name the Cabinet members (Berita Harian, 14 May 1969, p. 1). The Tunku's own response was to announce that he was prepared to go if the people wanted change (Straits Times, 13 May 1969, p. 20; Berita Harian, 13 May 1969, p. 1). In short, official reactions tended to be quite dramatic and panicked.

May 13th Riots

Then, on May 11 and 12, opposition parties held several impromptu 'victory parades' in Kuala Lumpur.¹⁴⁵ During these gatherings, non-Malays publically taunted the Malays shouting

¹⁴² Goh Cheng Teik notes that the top leadership including Lim Chong Eu had decided to remain neutral and allow the Alliance to form the government by the 12th. The announcement was to be made on the 13th, but the story was held off that morning because the MCA announced its decision to not take any government posts. When the riots broke out that evening, the issue was mute. (Interview 10.14.14). Evidently, on May 13th evening, Gerakan announced that it would not form a coalition with the Alliance in either Perak or Selangor (Berita Harian, 14 May 1969, p. 1). According to Lau Dak Kee, the Alliance also approached DAP with the same proposition, and the leadership unanimously rejected it unless the party accepted the program of a Malaysian Malaysia (Lau Dak Kee interview). This information, that the DAP would cooperate to form a government with the Alliance only if its policy of one race and one language was changed, was reported in the Berita Harian as well (May 12, 1969, P. 1). When the Alliance failed to agree to this, the DAP pushed for a new election (Berita Harian, May 13, 1969, p. 1).

¹⁴³ Tun Tan Siew Sin announced on the afternoon of May 13th: "...Under the circumstances the MCA has no alternative but to refrain from participation in the Government in that no representative will accept any appointment in the Cabinet or in the Federal Government or in the executive councils of the respective State Assemblies..." (The Straits Times, May 14, 1969). Tun Razak commended this 'bravery' and reminded voters that during the campaigning period, the Alliance has said that if the Chinese did not vote for MCA, there will be no Chinese representatives in the Government. He stressed that only MCA works towards the unity of Malaysians (Berita Harian, 14 May 1969, p. 1).

¹⁴⁴ The ultras included Dr. Mahathir, Musa Hitam, Tunku Tazaleigh, Syed Nasir and Ja'afar Albar

¹⁴⁵ The Gerakan gathering on May 12 received a police permit, though the others were less official (Rahman 1969, 76).

such phrases as: “‘The sailing boat is leaking’, ‘Malays have fallen’, ‘Malays now no longer have power’, ‘Kuala Lumpur now belongs to the Chinese’ and ‘Malays may return to their villages’ (Teik 1971, 21). In response, UMNO organized its own gathering for May 13th to start at the Chief Minister Harun’s residence in Kampong Bahru at 7:30pm.¹⁴⁶ By 6:30pm, there were between 4,000 and 5,000 Malays gathered at the residence. Soon after, a Malay evidently yelled out that Setapak had been attacked, setting off violence that then spread to several parts of the capital (Teik 1971, 22).

Official figures report 178 killed and more than 4000 refugees, though others report much more (NOC Report 1969).¹⁴⁷ By 8:00pm that evening, a curfew had been set in the capital. Riot police were immediately dispatched and the Royal Malay Regiment was deployed. Two thousand military and 3,600 police were deployed in Kuala Lumpur to restore law and order and over 2000 arrests were made that evening alone (ibid, 64; 67) Of note is that the violence associated with these events, though taking place in an important and symbolic urban center, was not of national scope.

Government Response

Late Tuesday evening, the Tunku addressed the nation in a heartfelt statement blaming the violence on communist elements and indicating that the situation was under control (Rahman 1969, 90-91).¹⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the ruling party reacted decisively. In a meeting between Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Razak, Tun (Dr) Ismail, Tun Tan Siew Sin and Tun Sambanthan, a course of action was selected which included a State of Emergency on May 14 throughout the country, suspension of Parliament indefinitely on May 16, and postponement of the East Malaysian

¹⁴⁶ John Slimming (1969) argues that UMNO was already planning their own demonstration more than 24 hours before the Gerakan demonstration took place (19;26). This would suggest that it was not solely a response the provocations on the days before. This information remains unconfirmed, however.

¹⁴⁷ Slimming (1969) reports a figure closer to 800. Time (1969) reports a figure of approximately 600 killed and some 8000 refugees.

¹⁴⁸ Tun Razak echoed this claim of communist involvement, blaming these elements for blackmailing the people to vote for the opposition (Berita Harian 18 May 1969, p. 2). It was revealed later that there is no evidence that Communists were responsible for or even involved in the riots (NOC Report).

elections (Rahman 1969, 105; von Vorys 1975, 341). Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Razak, was to rule the country by decree for the foreseeable future through the National Operations Council (NOC).

The DAP approached the government leadership to suggest that the country's next steps should be an all-party venture; these calls were rejected (Berita Harian, 18 May 1969, p. 2). Instead, political activities were banned, the local press strictly censored and foreign press curfew passes revoked. The official Information Control Center would release all pertinent information to the public (Gagliano 1970, 20). As a function of the dearth of information, rumors ran wild (Bob Reece Interview). Incidents of violence, however, were after the first few days of clashes, few. The NOC itself argues that it was only the government's swift response that saved the country.¹⁴⁹

In addition to press censorship, various regulations curtailed the activities of organizations such as trade unions, peasant associations, student movements and other social groups that may have been inclined to support the opposition (Crouch 1996, 27). Finally, the Sedition Act, Internal Security Act, and Emergency provision, relics of the communist insurgency period, were brought to the fore of establishing law and order.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, as the Minister of Home Affairs proclaimed: "Democracy [was] dead in this country" (Dr. Ismail Papers).

After a few months, the Government announced that its decision to reconvene Parliament would be conditioned on a number of changes. The UMNO leadership had determined that the cause of the riots had been the unrestrained nature of electoral competition.¹⁵¹ The Malays had

¹⁴⁹ "It was only the firm and prompt action of the Government, together with the loyal support of the Armed Forces and the Police, which quickly brought the situation under control. Had it not been for the immediate preventive measures, there is no doubt that the whole country would have been plunged into a holocaust" (NOC Report 1969, iii)

¹⁵⁰ Tunku Abdul Rahman notes the resemblance between the May 13th events and 1948, "what had happened during the election campaign and the rioting and arson now taking place in Kuala Lumpur indicated that there might well be a repetition of deep trouble as experienced in 1948, if no immediate action was taken" (Rahman 1969, 96).

¹⁵¹ Interview with Goh Cheng Teik. October 14, 2014; Teik 1970; The May 13th Tragedy: a report; Dr. Goh Cheng Teik (1970) terms this phenomenon the 'crisis of confidence in democracy' (9). Finally, some connected democracy to inter-communal violence, as Tun Razak's description suggests: "Democracy is practiced in many countries in the world today. But each country must assess its own political and social environment realistically and evolve its own constitution, rules, conventions and practices. Malaysia possesses her own distinct characteristics based on her history and present racial composition. She must now find a solution to her problems – a solution that will provide a guarantee

been provoked by what they perceived to be an overt attack on their special privileges (Teik 1971, 36). The leadership thus concluded that democracy could resume only if these political activities were permanently curbed.¹⁵² In short, on May 13th, the elite had no faith that democracy could ensure stability. The rules of the game had to change such that the status quo would not again be shaken.

The NOC widely disseminated a national ideology, which removed any ambiguity about the inter-communal contract of 1957 (von Vorys 1975, 342-343). A new set of educational and economic policies were initiated as well as the prohibition of any public challenge, including Parliament itself, to the Constitution or any other ‘sensitive issue’ (ibid, 343). In order to pass these Constitutional amendments, however, the Alliance needed additional votes. According to Dr. Ismail’s 1970 speech:

“The return to the parliamentary democracy will now depend entirely on the results of the general election in Sarawak and Sabah. If the Alliance fails to get the two-thirds majority necessary for approving amendments to the Constitution then we will have to negotiate with the opposition about support in our wish to isolate in the Constitution the several contentious communal problems. If they do not agree, then I do not see how we can recall Parliament” (quoted from Alatas 1972, 272).

There was some opposition to the appropriateness of permanent changes to the Constitution. The DAP, for example, argued that the Constitutional bargain was made by a different generation and could not be binding on new ones and, more significantly, that the restrictions to free speech were undemocratic (von Vorys 1975, 420-422). This view was outwardly rejected by the Alliance government, however, and the opposition, disorganized and weakened by the period of strict authoritarian provisions, was in no place to seriously oppose them. Moreover, the Alliance made moves to extend its coalition by driving opposition members to defection.

that in the future racial sensitivities will never again be provoked by the operation of normal democratic processes, e.g. election campaigns” (The May 13th Tragedy: a report, 80).

¹⁵² In January 1971, Dr. Ismail, the Deputy Prime Minister, gave a speech to the Alliance members in Johore, noting: “Thus in the 1969 elections the sensitive issues of National Language and Special rights handicapped the Alliance generally and caused the bloodshed of May 13th. We therefore enshrined the issues in the Constitution as subjects that cannot be raised in any form by the Opposition. Thus the weakness of our partners is protected” (**Dr. Ismail Papers (d), 189**).

UMNO also used this period of unrestrained power to shore up its own party position within the coalition by replacing its central leadership with more ‘Malay-centric’ members. An internal crisis within the party had been brewing throughout the 1960s between the ‘ultras’ and the leadership, the former who argued that UMNO had not done enough to promote the supremacy of Malay culture.¹⁵³ In the aftermath of the 1969 elections, this internal crisis was again aired for public consumption. On July 4, Raja Mukhtaruddin Dazin, a lecturer at the University of Malaya, distributed a leaflet arguing that the election represented not just an electoral defeat but a fundamental problem of democracy itself. The non-Malay communities had gained concessions from the Malays at Independence in terms of citizenship and a share of political power. Yet they were not satisfied, as evidenced through this radical politics in 1969. The leaflet urged extra-Constitutional provisions to continue indefinitely and democracy to be forsaken (Teik 1971, 17). On July 12, Dr. Mahathir, a member of the UMNO ultra group and casualty of the 1969 legislative elections, addressed the Malay Language Society at the University of Malaya and called for the Tunku’s resignation (Gagliano 1970, 25). He also demanded the MCA’s expulsion from the Alliance and Government for undermining the coalition. On July 17, more than 1,500 students gathered at the University of Malaya calling for Tunku’s resignation as well (Slimming 1969).

The Tunku and Dr. Mahathir subsequently exchanged several heated letters which were leaked to the press and widely circulated before being banned (Rahman 1969, 117-135). Only a few within UMNO were willing to stand behind Dr. Mahathir at this juncture, and he was expelled on July 12 from UMNO’s central committee (Gagliano 1970, 25).¹⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the Tunku was clearly also on his way out given the rising agitation among the Malay community for

¹⁵³ A contest between the Tunku and the ‘ultras’ was at least as old as the debate over Singapore’s admission into the Federation (Vasil 1972, 6-14). The ultra’s contention, from within UMNO, was that Singapore’s acceptance weakened the Malay position and upset the balance of power. The conflict was ultimately defused when Tunku made a near unilateral decision to expel Singapore, but the contrast between his moderate position and the extremist voices within UMNO would constantly resurface throughout the decade, as demonstrated, for example, by the incident over language policy (von Vorys 1975, 200-210).

¹⁵⁴ Dr. Mahathir would return to UMNO later and eventually become Malaysia’s fourth Prime Minister in 1981-2003.

his withdrawal, and he retired in September 1970.¹⁵⁵ With UMNO and Alliance assured of their position, elections were returned, and the Constitution was amended.

Until May 1969, democracy went on without question in Malaysia. Because the Alliance was out of touch with the fundamental changes in the electorate since Independence, it was severely shaken by unexpected reversals in the 1969 election. Inexperienced with processes of democratic turnover, the mere possibility of a power shift was taken as proof that the system itself was broken. Thus, the links between state and society that would have made the government responsive to changes in the electorate were seriously constrained.¹⁵⁶ The Alliance Formula in particular allowed for only a minimal amount of popular consultation and failed to incorporate discussion of the communally sensitive issues beyond a small elite committee. The essence of the formula argued that only within the secret cadres of the ruling party could these issues be worked out adequately. After a contentious campaign period, this view was evidently substantiated by urban riots. The government responded decisively, utilizing its strong coercive and administrative apparatus to restore order. Subsequent government actions curtailed the meaningful political playing field to ensure the pre-May 13th *status quo*. Thus, when the Alliance Formula and democratic principles conflicted most dramatically on May 13th, the former were further solidified and the latter abandoned.

Conclusion

In the 1960s, Malaysia was heralded as one of the most stable countries within the developing world. It underwent a peaceful decolonization during which the leading national party consolidated a cohesive coalition of elites that could claim the support of each of the country's communal groups. Nonetheless, Malaysia's democratic experience faltered after an intense general election in 1969. The results were followed by communal violence in Kuala Lumpur and

¹⁵⁵ University students were most outspoken about this hostility. In July and August 1969, a survey among 205 students found that only 23 associated Tunku Abdul Rahman with the Malaysian nation (von Vorys 1975, 382).

¹⁵⁶ This links could have taken the form of either providing an indication that the elite compromises of the 1960s had insufficiently addressed social grievances or, after realizing these frustrations through the election results, by convincing the ruling party to make changes over the next term.

the replacement of the democratic regime. This chapter argues that one must look at the historical dynamics of late colonialism and decolonization for an explanation of these events.

Under British colonialism, Malaya experienced fairly impressive integration of the local population into the administrative machinery of government, but only late opportunities for participation in internally-directed democratic politics. These features, associated with colonies of the Full Administrative type, left a legacy of a comparatively effective administrative apparatus, but limited democratic experience and modest state-society links. Though the independent state enjoyed a high level of institutional coherence, it suffered from weak resilience against the uncertainties inherent in electoral politics.

The manifestations of these features were an elite that had not invested in the processes and continuation of democratic institutions. They had instead interpreted a mandate to lead the country to Independence as an enduring confidence in their unique capacity to govern effectively, specifically through the Alliance Formula. Thus, they had embraced the authority of state power which their early electoral wins provided as products of the institutions, but had not internalized the inherent potential that these same institutions could provide authority to those outside their coalition.

Moreover, the institutional links between the state and organizations of civil society remained weak, given the minimal integration of the latter during the late colonial period. When the Alliance leaders negotiated Independence in a condensed and restricted fashion, they largely excluded the processes of public debate and integration. There remained significant distances between social pressures, especially on the communally sensitive issues, and the elite mode of transition and subsequent governance. After Independence, efforts by mid-level intermediaries to relay information from the masses to the party leadership were consistently rejected and rebuked. As a result, the masses turned first to alternate parties to relay their grievances and then, to some degree, to violence. The Alliance government rejected both expressions of political grievance used electoral politics as a convenient scapegoat for the instability. The challenge to post-colonial

democratization in Malaysia came thus from a need to generate institutional resilience via popular and elite investment in the democratic regime against potential destabilizing shocks.

Finally, late colonial administrative development was rapid and expansive. When the ruling party decided to dismantle democratic institutions and create authoritarian order in the polity, it was capable. The moment of perceived crisis occurred for the first time in 1969. The electoral results, though far from an electoral defeat, threatened the preeminent position of the ruling party. At its disposal, however, was a strong and knowledgeable administration able to enforce its vision of the state. When violence broke out in the capital city, the ruling party used this opportunity to justify the alteration of the rules of the game. Urban violence was met with a state of emergency and consequent coercive actions. These restrictions ushered in an authoritarian reversal, ending the country's 12-year democratic episode. Parliament was allowed to resume only after the Alliance had shored up its electoral support and amended the Constitution such that future competition and participation were seriously constrained.

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