The Resurgence of New Malay Nationalism on social media post-GE14

Shahnon Mohamed Salleh*, Ismail Sualman
Affiliation: Universiti Teknologi MARA / Shah Alam, Malaysia
Email: shahnon@uitm.edu.my*; ismail952@uitm.edu.my

Abstract: *The 14th General Election has significantly changed Malaysia when Barisan Nasional suffered its first ever defeat since Independence. However, among the Malay majority, there was a growing sense of political anxiety and uneasiness as a result of the perceived loss of power, and to some extent, the erosion of national identity. In response, the nationalists and the Islamists have regrouped and reunited. This is manifested with the formal alliance of the two largest Malay-based parties, UMNO and PAS. Amidst the backdrop of this new political realignment, social media played an important role in setting the narrative, and mobilising the masses. Therefore, working from within this background, this paper analysed the discourse of the new Malay nationalism on social media by employing a social media tool, SeoTools, to analyse the Twitter data. The findings revealed a new insight into the dynamics of the Malay mind and motivation from the context of politics, religion, and economy. There was a significant correlation between popular sentiment and social media discourse, in that there was a renewed resurgence to reassert traditional values and identity. The failure to rein in the emotion, and the expectation, eventually cause the fall of Pakatan Harapan in 2020.*

Keywords: *discourse; general election; Malaysia; nationalism; social media*

Introduction

The role of social media and the internet in affecting socio-political change throughout the world is no longer a debate today. Everywhere from London to Washington and Kuala Lumpur, the world has witnessed a series of "political earthquakes;" from the Brexit referendum, Donald Trump's presidential election win in 2016 to Barisan Nasional (BN)'s shocking defeat to Pakatan Harapan in the 14th General Election (GE14) in Malaysia.

Notwithstanding the key political issues and other campaign issues that shaped and moved the electorates, social media played a major role in determining the outcome of the vote. While most opinion poll surveys were predicting a close win for BN in GE14, repeated analyses of social media data showed that the anti-BN sentiment was too strong and the momentum kept going for months from the beginning of 2018 until voting day (Salleh et al., 2020).

Additionally, the announcement of Tun Dr Mahathir as the PH's

prime ministerial candidate was seen as one of the major events that tipped the scale for PH, especially among the undecided Malays who were initially sceptic towards the new PH coalition (Abdullah W., 2019).

For a moment, BN's fate was almost sealed for good in the aftermath of GE14. Just a few days after GE14, BN's Sarawak component parties, PBB, PRS and SPDP decided to leave the coalition to form a new state-based coalition, GPS or Gabungan Parti Sarawak (Ling & Ogilvy, 2018). Earlier in Sabah, several elected representatives from UMNO crossed over to Parti Warisan Sabah, which effectively gave the Warisan and Shafie Apdal a comfortable majority to lead the state (Fong, 2018). Next, Gerakan, one of the founding members of BN, also decided to leave the coalition just a few days after GE14. So altogether, BN was left with only four parties; UMNO, MCA, MIC, and PBRS from originally thirteen.

And over the few months after GE14, more UMNO BN MPs crossed over into PPBM, thus reducing BN's clout and majority in parliament further, while strengthening PPBM's strength and bargaining power vis a vis PH (Nambiar, 2019).

Several months later, after all the electoral euphoria has ended, social media again played a different but important role in revealing policy flaws, unfulfilled promises and the perceived incompetency of some

members of the new cabinet. But no issue has managed to galvanize the support of the Malay Muslim community than the ICERD issue and the death of a fireman, Mohd Adib Kassim, during the controversial Seafield temple riot in November 2018 (Aswad, 2019). These were among the early seeds of protest that brought together a huge segment of the Malay Muslim community. For the first time since GE14, the two long-time rival major Malay political parties, UMNO and PAS, together with a coalition of non-governmental organizations came together to protest the government's proposal to ratify ICERD. The anti-ICERD rally that was held in Kuala Lumpur was also one of the biggest rallies Malaysia has seen in recent years (Mohanakrishnan, 2020).

But more importantly, what were the underlying issues that caused the anger and the protest?

Post-GE14 Malay Resurgence

Resurgence as a general term means a new increase of activity or interest in a particular subject or idea (Cambridge, 2022). So, the notion of "resurgence" from within the Malay Muslim society in Malaysia is not something new. Historically, from the 20th century, leaders and groups would rise, challenge, and lead the community for a common cause. For example, the 1946 anti-Malayan Union protests that took place throughout

the entire Malayan peninsular had united all the Malays for the first time, from Perlis, to Kelantan to Johor under the leadership of the charismatic Malay nationalist leader Dato' Onn Jaafar. That momentous event would eventually lead to the birth of a new Malay nationalist party, United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). In the 1970s, Anwar Ibrahim and his fellow Islamist-inclined friends formed and led a new Islamic movement, ABIM or the Muslim Youth Movement. Then came the 1979 Iranian revolution. The success of the Islamic revolution in Iran has sparked and animated Islamist-based political parties throughout the Muslim world, from Morocco to Malaysia. In Malaysia, PAS, still very much influenced by the Iranian Islamic experience, decided to move away from its previous nationalist-Islamist outlook, which was predominant from the time of former party presidents, Dr Burhanuddin Helmy to Dr Asri Muda, to embrace a more conservative Islamic identity (Muzaffar, 1987). In response, and in what was seen as an attempt to check on the influence of Islamic party, Dr Mahathir Mohamad brought in the influential young Malay Muslim activist, Anwar Ibrahim into UMNO in 1982, and went on to embark on a series of Islamization policies such as the "Dasar penerapan nilai-nilai Islam" or the inculcation of Islamic values in

government, the establishment of the International Islamic University (IIU), the setting up of the Islamic bank and a number of other Islamic institutions (Noor, 2014). The UMNO-PAS rivalry went on for the next few decades until they finally came together in 2018.

The anti-ICERD protest and the death of fireman Adib Kassim, were some examples of the big issues that triggered the emotion and the consciousness of the Malay Muslim civil societies. However, at the back of it, there were bigger, fundamental issues and alarming concerns. To understand the underlying issues and the deep-seated anger and protest, it is worth tracing the series of discontent from GE14. Fundamentally, there was already a widespread feeling among the Malay masses that the defeat of UMNO and BN were not just a loss for UMNO and BN, but a loss for the Malays, the Malay political power and the erosion of Malay Muslim interests (Alhadjri & Muhammad, 2018). It is also worth noting that PH only won about 25 percent of Malay votes nationally. The remaining Malay votes were split between BN and PAS. On the other hand, PH was strongly backed by the support from the non-Malays especially the Chinese where PH won almost 95 percent of their votes (FMT, 2018). In essence, while a significant proportion of the Malay electorate contributed to the end of Najib Razak

and BN, the positive mood seemed to dissipate just after a few months. It somewhat reaffirms the popular sentiment and corroborated by scholars like Wong Chin Huat (2022) that PH did not win the majority vote, but came to power because of split in votes between BN and PAS in most constituencies (Augustin, 2022).

The other issues that riled some in the Malay civil societies were the appointment of senior cabinet positions and senior civil service positions like the Attorney General and the Chief Justice, where both were non-Muslims; Tommy Thomas and Tan Sri Richard Malanjum respectively. Notwithstanding the fact that Tan Sri Richard was among the most senior judges, to them it was unacceptable for a Muslim majority country to have both non-Muslim attorney general and non-Muslim chief justice (Tahir, 2018). The then PAS information chief, Nasrudin Hassan was quoted as saying that these appointments would cause "restlessness among Muslims" (Tahir, 2018).

At the ideological level, one key difference that sets the two camps aside is the contestation on the ideals and the reality of "Malaysia Baharu".

On one hand, the idea of "Malaysia Baharu" or New Malaysia would entail the end of corruption, good governance, a more inclusive governance and so forth. On the other hand, "Malaysia Baharu" is

viewed as an attempt at changing the status quo (Wan Mansor, 2019). To many Malays, it was an attempt to "liberalize" the country further, to change the national identity and other traditional features of the country. The result of the GE14 has transformed and altered the balance of power and the power-sharing formula between the two major ethnic groups in Malaysia, the Malays and Chinese. Since 1955, UMNO and MCA were effectively seen as the political representative of the communities that they represent. But under PH, there is no more such similar power-sharing formula, whereby – at least theoretically – all component parties in PH are equal, unlike in BN where UMNO serves and forms the backbone of the BN coalition. As a result of DAP and PKR being the parties with the most seats in PH, more cabinet posts were allocated to non-Malays at the federal level (Wan Jan, 2020).

The change in the new racio-political dynamics and the failure on the part of PH to address the Malay anxiety was one of the areas that has triggered and perpetuated the backlash and the new resurgence (Wan Jan, 2020). Apart from the racial and religiously charged issues and controversies, there were also several failed electoral promises that angers some segment of the people, for example, the issue of PTPTN and the promise to end all tolled highway,

amongst others (The Straits Times, 2018).

From Jawi To #BMF: The Narrative Frameworks of The Malay Resurgence

In attempting to theorize the new Malay resurgence, the trend can be chronologically divided according to three key narrative frameworks: the awakening phase, momentum building, and unity and solidarity. The 'awakening phase' refers to the series of issues and events that took place in the aftermath of GE14. From the sense of loss of power among the Malays, the loss of inter-ethnic bargaining power, the cabinet and senior civil service appointments, to policy issues like the ICERD ratification proposal and the PH's "liberal agenda". For instance, the PH government was seen as weak when it comes to issues and matters that concerns the Malay Muslims, for example on LGBT rights (Wan Mansor, 2019). While the prime minister and the PH government have repeatedly made it clear that they are not recognising the rights of the LGBT community, the debates and narratives grew louder especially on social media. And naturally this has resulted in a strong rebuke and condemnation from the conservative Malay Muslim groups.

The second phase of the resurgence, 'momentum building', represents the series of by-election victories by BN, supported by PAS, throughout 2019, from the Cameron Highlands by election, Semenyih, Rantau and Tanjung Piai (Hussin, 2020). UMNO and BN successfully defended Cameron Highlands and Rantau, while capturing Semenyih and Tanjung Piai from PPBM-PH with a bigger majority in the process. These consistencies have given a new sense of hope and optimism for the nationalists and conservative Islamists towards winning popular support in their campaign towards the next general election (GE15).

At the same time, more and more controversies have cropped up and continues to dent the PH badly especially among the Malays. For instance, throughout the month of August to September 2019, a record number of controversies have dragged and drained the nation unnecessarily. The proposal to introduce jawi, or Arabic letters, in the Malay language syllabus has stormed the nation especially among the non-Malays (FMT, 2019). The news was first reported in a vernacular newspaper and has caused huge anxiety and confusion among the Chinese community, thinking that jawi is a language to be introduced in schools, when the fact is jawi is just a script used in the Malay language. One possible misunderstanding was largely due to the grave mistranslation in the newspaper where the word jawi was wrongly translated in Chinese as a language, not a script (Liew, 2019).

So, when news broke out that children in vernacular schools would need to learn jawi, many became enraged and opposed the move, with Dong Zong being the most vocal ones (FMT, 2019). As a result, anger and frustration erupted among many in the Chinese community claiming that the DAP has betrayed them.

Dong Zong's confrontational attitude in rejecting the jawi syllabus in the Bahasa Melayu curriculum – which has been reduced from six to three pages, from initially made compulsory to optional – has ignited a new wave of response from the Malay Muslim community. Dong Zong was attacked and labelled as anti-national for their uncompromising attitude (Ibrahim, 2020). Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad too called Dong Zong racist for their views (Bernama, 2019). For the Malays, including many urban moderate Malays, Dong Zong's aggressive, uncompromising attitude in opposing jawi was something that crossed the line. It was seen as an attack not just to the Malays, but to the national identity, arguing that jawi scripts have long been featured prominently in many Malaysian official symbols and identities such as the Ringgit note, the national stamp and the national Coat of Arms.

Sensing that the national culture and identity is under attack, several Malay Muslim groups launched a new consumer campaign,

called the Buy Muslim First campaign or #BMF (Dzulkifly, 2019). As the name implies, it was never aimed at boycotting non-Muslim goods and services, but to call on the Muslims to prioritise Malay and bumiputra products (Mustaffa & et al., 2019). The campaign received such a huge positive response from the public. One example is the specific pro-BMF Facebook group (BMF Official) that was set up received millions of subscribers within just a few days (FMT, 2019). Many supported and heeded the call by sharing a list of Muslim products and services from grocery stores, list of Muslim brands and so on. However, there was a mixed reaction to the campaign. Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng deemed it as inappropriate and argued that such a boycott would only result in negative effects (Bernama, 2019).

The third phase of the resurgence is 'unity and solidarity'. From a renewed sense of political awakening in the fourth quarter of the 2018 onwards, to the momentum building throughout the series of by-elections in 2019, the formalization of the union between UMNO and PAS in September 2019 marked a new chapter in Malaysia's colorful history of political realignment especially if one considers the decades-long historical enmity and rivalry between the two major Malay political parties (Razak, 2019). The historic moment was convened in a special convention,

dubbed the 'Konvensyen Penyatuan Ummah' or Muslim Unity Convention. It was also supported by other smaller parties like Berjasa and other Malay Muslim groups. The pact was unsurprisingly criticized by the ruling coalition party. The most scathing attack came from DAP where its leader, Lim Guan Eng described the formal pact between UMNO and PAS as an open attack towards the non-Malays (Malaysiakini, 2019). While UMNO and PAS have cooperated before in the 1970s, things were a lot different before. When PAS was in BN the last time, it was more of an agreement between the leadership of the two parties without a proper understanding at the grassroots level, which explains the main reason of the short-lived 'marriage'. In 2019, there seemed to be greater understanding between UMNO and PAS leaders, not just at the leadership level, but down to the division and branch levels. All in all, the formal pact between UMNO and PAS has solidified their political strength and determination towards the next general election (FMT, 2019).

To UMNO especially, it was like a much-needed boost in getting their house back in order especially after a disastrous electoral defeat in GE14. Perhaps not wanting to be left behind the proverbial Malay-unity train, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad officiated another 'Malay unity-themed' event, called the 'Kongres Maruah Melayu' or Malay Dignity Congress in October 2019 (Berita Harian, 2019). Tun Dr Mahathir's participation in the Congress was seen as a new realization that he needed to win back Malay support. However, the pro-Malay rhetoric at the congress was immediately attacked by those who viewed it as another event at promoting "Malay supremacy" (Abdullah M. , 2019). It naturally attracted all sorts of attention and speculation as to the real purpose of the congress? Was it about forming a new political coalition representing a broad Malay-based parties while denying Anwar Ibrahim from becoming the next Prime Minister? UMNO MP Hishammuddin Hussein dropped the biggest hint of what may come when he alluded that, "If you look at the people on the stage (at the congress), they have enough numbers to form the government." (Tan, 2019).

On the social media front, things appeared to be a lot messier, with more political exchanges and discourses between rival partisan factions and rival ideological groups. More people are participating in the online discourse especially on matters pertaining to Malay and Muslim related issues. Theoretically, this leads to the question of to what extent is the emotion of the nationalist resurgence is felt online? Or perhaps more tellingly, is the political reality that we know today is

shaped and driven by what happens online?

And what sort of ideological contestation, racial or political polarization that is being manifested online?

Method

Fundamentally, this study aimed to fill the gap in the knowledge by analyzing the social media political discourse within the context of the political change in Malaysia as a result of the 14th general election in 2018 and the subsequent protests and resurgence that ensued. Therefore, in order to fulfil this objective, a comprehensive big data approach was employed in order to fully capture and comprehend the totality of the discourse, quantitatively and qualitatively. In general, big data refers to a massive amount of dataset that makes manual human calculation nearly difficult and necessitates computer intervention or application to evaluate (Kitchin, 2014).

Methodologically, a social media network tool, SeoTools, was used to extract, retrieve, and classify the relevant data from Twitter for analysis. We chose Twitter primarily for two key reasons; accessibility and reach. Twitter's

Application Programming Interface (API) enables the mining of millions of data and information in the form of big datasets, allowing analytical tools such as SeoTools to

mine data from Twitter based on relevant keywords and hashtags for research purposes. The scope and context of the research is based on the key political events that have shaped the political landscape in the months following the 2018 General Election.

From the standpoint of the Malay Muslim nationalism, some of the major political movements and events that have shaped the narratives and discourse, were the December 2018 anti-ICERD protest, and the Malay Dignity Congress or the Kongres Maruah Melayu in October 2019, which led to the "Sheraton Move" plan – the exit of Bersatu and several PKR MPs from Pakatan Harapan – which caused the eventual fall of the Pakatan Harapan government and the resignation of Tun Dr Mahathir as Prime Minister in February 2020 (New Straits Times, 2020).

So, accordingly, several politics-related search keywords were tested for analysis before finally deciding on the "Melayu Islam" keyword to capture the data and conversation during the turbulent moments from August to September 2019. As it is impossible to capture all the related tweets in the Twitter networks, the data extraction and the purposive sampling process was done by using SeoTools.

The social media network tool is capable of extracting thousands of tweets per dataset based on a given keyword, classifying the contents,

identifying all users, and organizing them all in a network. In this study, a total of 4,222 raw data have been extracted. The gathered data will then be saved in an Excel spreadsheet for data coding, classification, and detailed analysis. 1,231 data were sampled and cleansed before they will be analyzed accordingly.

The data collected is expected to examine the social media demography, political sentiment, and the political discourse.

Results

This section presents the findings and the results based on the data extracted, and analysed from Twitter. As exemplified in previous section, the aim of the research is to analyse the discourse of the new Malay nationalism and its manifestation on social media specifically on Twitter. Also, to what extent that it manages to capture the real political sentiment and to what extent it reflects, shape or influence the new Malay nationalism?

Social Media Demography

While there have been many studies related to social media use and politics, however, data and local studies on the socio-political demographics on social media appears limited. So, the first data presented here is an attempt to fill a

gap in the research by mapping and assessing the racio-political demographics in the Malaysian Twittersphere or sometimes popularly referred to as Twitterjaya (Supramani, 2023). It is important to note that the political demography on social media is more dynamic, based on "active social media users" who post updates or share information on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, rather than "passive social media readers" who silently observe social media discussions. For the record, the latest 2020 census shows that there are 32.4 million Malaysians and 69.4 percent are Malays and bumiputras, 23.2 percent Chinese, 6.7 percent Indians, 0.7 percent others, and 8.3 percent non-citizens (Malaysiakini, 2022).

Figure 1.
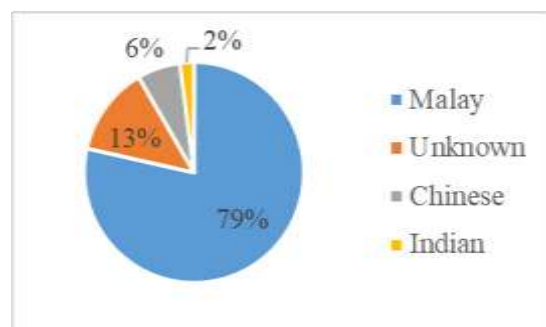
Social Media Demography by Race

Figure 1 above shows that out of the total data sampled from Twitter, 79 percent or 685 tweets, were Malays; 6 percent, or a total of 55 tweets were Chinese; and 2 percent or 17 tweets, Indian. The remaining 13 percent of the data were either from anonymous, a

collective group or unidentified accounts. It is worth noting that the Malays were largely overrepresented proportionately in the data. Despite Twitter being seen as a platform that is seen and favoured by the more urban, liberal and youth demographics, the data here shows otherwise. In other words when it came to the issue of Malay and Muslim interest, the Malays were quite overwhelmingly more interested as clearly reflected in the data as above. On the other hand, the Chinese and the Indian were largely underrepresented in the sampled data since it is likely these political issues were largely viewed as a Malay Muslim issue.

Social Media Political Inclination

The following data is based on an analysis of social media users' political leanings or inclinations based on their postings and comments on Twitter, where each posting sampled was classified as (i) pro-BN/PAS, (ii) pro-PH, and (iii) Neutral. As a rule, postings and comments that were critical of and negative towards PH were classified as pro-BN/PAS. Likewise, postings and comments that were critical of and negative towards BN or PAS were classified as pro-PH. Postings that do not show a clear inclination towards any party or politician were classified as neutral.

The chart in Figure 2 shows quite an overwhelming anti-Pakatan Harapan government sentiment, that a majority of 58 percent of the sampled data showed a pro-BN or PAS inclination or negative towards PH. A total of 36 percent were pro-PH, and 6 percent were neutral or undecided.

Figure 2.

Political Inclination on social media
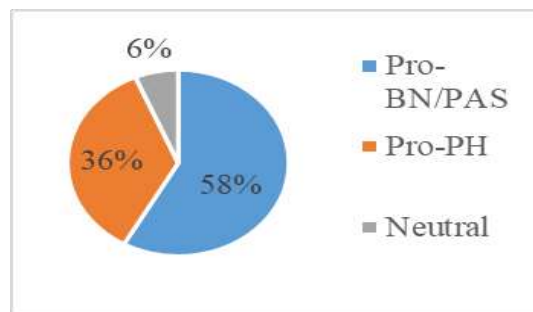
One of the popular perceptions about social media is that platforms like Twitter or Facebook have often been said as to not represent the real world. In a study by Pew Research Survey for instance has shown that there was a gap between the general population and social media users on Twitter as headlined by The Atlantic in 2019, "Twitter is not America" (Madrigal, 2019).

Granted, there is some truth to that survey, however, there were other studies and views that showed strong correlations between the real world and social media as well depending on context and circumstances (Mohamed Salleh,

Mohd Fathir, & Abd Rahman, 2014), (Warzel, 2020).

Secondly, how does the data from Twitter stand to the actual public opinion? To do this one would only to compare with the public opinion poll results. Established pollster, Merdeka Center, in a survey conducted from 28 June to 1 July 2019 showed a 41 percent of "Happy" perception towards Pakatan Harapan while on Twitter it was 36 percent (Merdeka Center, 2019). Therefore, whichever way one looks at it, it can be argued that there was some level of correlation between the general population and the sentiment on social media.
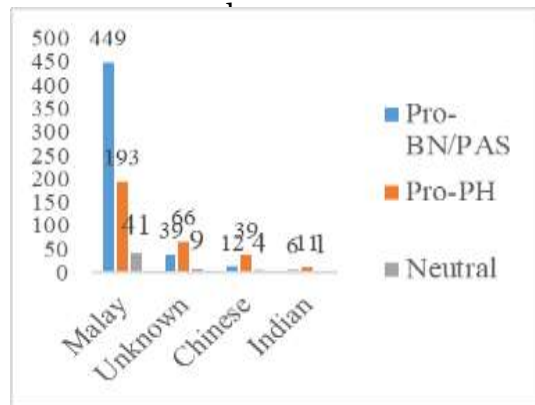
Race and Political Inclination

Since independence, the issue of race has always been a major factor and a dominating force in Malaysian politics and national policies. Therefore, any serious study about the social media community should factor in the multiracial composition as well as the racio-political dynamics in Malaysia. Prior to GE14 in 2018, it was a given that the Chinese vote was almost solid for the Pakatan Harapan while the Malay vote was mostly divided, fragmented, and varied across one state to another. But in less than a year after being in power, Pakatan Harapan's popularity has beginning to wean off (Merdeka Center, 2019). The question here is to what extent does

the ground sentiment is reflected online, on Twitter? More interestingly perhaps, to what extent social media is shaping and influencing the reality on the ground?

Figure 3.

Political Inclination on social media

Data in Figure 3 above shows the level of political support or inclination on Twitter across three major racial groups in Malaysia; the Malays, Chinese and Indians. Cumulatively, the support towards BN and PAS were highest among the Malays at 66 percent compared to 28 percent pro-PH. Among the Chinese, pro-PH sentiment was the highest at 71 percent, while pro-BN, 22 percent, the lowest among all racial groups. Indian support or inclination towards PH were also high at 61 percent, while those who favoured BN 33 percent.

So how did the social media data stack up with the popular sentiment on the ground? In a 2019 opinion poll survey (Merdeka Center, 2019), the Malay perception towards

Pakatan Harapan was lowest at 32 percent, followed by Chinese 59 percent, and Indian 59 percent. The similarity here was that support for Pakatan Harapan was lowest among the Malays and that was clearly reflected online. Among the Indians the opinion poll results and the social media inclination almost mirror each other; 59 percent and 61 percent respectively. In summary, a close correlation occurred among the Malays and the Indians, where the findings from the said survey and social media showed a less than 5 percent difference.

Malay Muslim Political Discourse on Twitter

In attempting to map the social media discourse from the Malay Muslims, five key Malay Islam-related themes that dominated the national political discourse; politics, Islamic affairs, the economy, education, and culture, were chosen during the given timeframe.

The following Figure 4 shows that in general, slightly more than half, or 51 percent, of the tweets and conversations captured in the sample were about politics. This is followed by discussion about Islam, 26 percent, and economy 15 percent, culture 6 percent, and education 2 percent.

In all the topics of conversations on social media, from politics to Islam

to education, the discourse was heavily skewed towards pro-BN and PAS except on matters pertaining to politics and culture.

Figure 4.

Dominant political discourse on social media
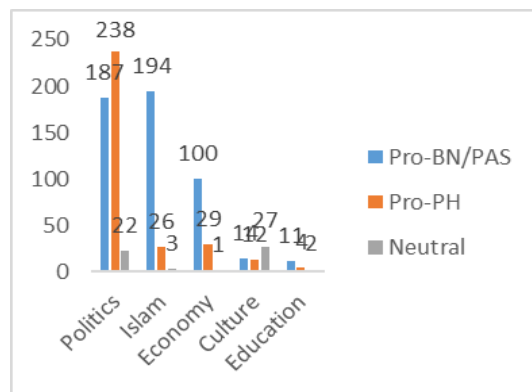
A closer look at the social media data would show that a significant chunk of the tweets in the politics category were mostly criticisms towards the Pakatan Harapan government, their weak policy implementations, Anwar Ibrahim, the polemics surrounding the appointment of the 8th prime minister, and issues like the Pakatan Harapan internal problems, and UMNO-PAS unity.

This is followed by conversations on Malay Muslim issues and other hot-button issues like Dr Zakir Naik's controversial status in Malaysia. On the economic front, the #BMF or the Buy Muslim First campaign was heavily promoted, supported, and discussed online. An example of the sentiment was captured in tweets like this,

"Mufti Perlis ajak bantu ekonomi Muslim. Tentu sekali umat Islam setuju. Saya juga seru bantu usahawan Melayu" posted on 5 September 2019. Other popular topics on education and culture that captured the interest and sparked the anger were the controversial proposal to introduce Jawi syllabus in vernacular schools, and issues related the insult or the desecration of the national flag by some quarters during the Merdeka celebration month.

All in all, many of these issues were seen as an attack towards the status quo, towards the traditional values and identity, and the erosion of Malay Muslim rights. It did not help much that the Pakatan Harapan government was unable to mitigate most of the issues and problems that has allowed BN and PAS and other Malay Muslim civil society groups to exploit them and to further proof that PH was weak when it comes to protecting Malay Muslim interests. The political anger and anxiety can perhaps be summed up with this tweet posted on 1 September 2019, *"Harap #PRU15, orang Melayu/Islam guna pula "kuasa mengundi" utk memilih pemimpin & parti yg boleh menjaga agama Islam dgn sebaik2nya!"*. In other words, the twitterer is hoping for the Malay Muslims to use the power of vote to elect leaders and political party that could protect the interests of the Malay Muslims.

Discussion

Based on the results and findings from the social media data gathered from Twitter, it was clear that after a year into the new Pakatan Harapan government, the situation deteriorated . The turning tide especially among the Malay Muslims were clear as can be seen from the anti-ICERD protest in 2018 which has spiralled uncontrolled into the following year, and reflected across social media platforms, including Twitter, as shown in this study. The change that happened in less than a year was significant politically. After all, in run up to the 2018 general election, a similar social media study has shown that there was overwhelming support across all racial groups, Malays, Chinese and Indians, for Pakatan Harapan, and against Barisan Nasional, which led to their first ever electoral defeat in history (Mohamed Salleh, Noordin, Abdullah, & Abd Rahman, 2020).

"dengan ini, saya isytiharkan, saya meninggalkan pakatan harapan. membazir undi aku" (27 August 2019)".

The above quote was a snapshot of the emotion and the anger of a Pakatan Harapan voter who felt betrayed and posted his statement of regret for voting for PH in the 2018 election and decided to quit the party. The fact that nationalists and conservative-inclined Malay Muslims and in combination with those who

were frustrated with the PH government were dominating the political discourse on Twitter – a platform more popularly known for being urban, liberal, and progressive – has shown how far the tide has turned against PH, and towards UMNO and PAS.

To some extent there was clearly a new sense of awakening among the Malays, which gained traction and solidification especially with the formal union between two of the largest Malay-based parties, UMNO and PAS in 2019. Perhaps for the first time, the response towards the perceived indifferent or weaknesses towards the Malay anxiety was the two-pronged response, not only through politics but economy; politically through the support towards UMNO and PAS as exemplified in the series of by-election electoral victories in 2019, and economically, through the BMF campaign which aimed at promoting and advancing Malay Muslim business and commercial products. These sentiments were also reflected online and captured through the data sampled from Twitter.

At the heart of the protest, what were the key resentments that led to the new resurgence? In general, the results from the study showed broadly three key issues from politics, Islam, and the economy. In other words, the growing dissatisfaction towards the Pakatan Harapan government, the inability to

effectively respond to the Malay Muslim frustrations, and the perceived weaknesses in managing the economy and cost of living issues. The following tweet here basically sums everything up about the Malay resurgence, "Kebangkitan Melayu Islam pertama adalah KESEDARAN JATI DIRI. Kebangkitan kedua adalah PENYATUAN dan menjana KEKUATAN EKONOMI." In essence, the twitterer argued that that the first level of awakening is identity consciousness. The second level is unity and the power of the economy.

Conclusion

In summary, there are three key observations that can be concluded from the results. Fundamentally, they are related to the three interconnected variables, the demographical dynamics, the racio-political disposition, and the role of social media in platforming, reflecting and facilitating the resurgence. As discussed, data and analysis clearly point towards a growing Malay resurgence which stemmed largely from the anti-ICERD protest in Kuala Lumpur in 2018, which would not have taken place had Pakatan Harapan did not win the 2018 election. According to former chief justice of Malaysia, Tun Abdul Hamid Mohamad, there were three biggest rallies in the history of the Malay struggle; the anti-Malayan Union rally in 1946, the

Independence celebration rally in 1957, and thirdly the anti-ICERD protest, which was the biggest of all (Mohamad, 2020). Tun Abdul Hamid (2020) argued that that protest has effectively changed the Malaysian political landscape especially to those who would want to challenge the Malay special rights and the position of Islam as enshrined in the Federal Constitution. From that single spark, the fires of resurgence continue to burn weeks after weeks, and months after months, which eventually led to one of the biggest political events in 2019, the "Himpunan Penyatuan Ummah" or the formal unification between UMNO and PAS in September and "Kongres Maruah Melayu" or the Malay Dignity Congress the following month. Many Malays including those on social media were sympathetic and expressed their support for the new political pact between UMNO and PAS, and saw it as a political solution to the national crisis.

But on the other hand, the resurgence online has also exposed, or widen, the political schism especially among the Malays and the non-Malays. Social media may not entirely be the cause of the present divide or polarisation, but it reflects and mirrors, and to some extent exaggerates our socio-political realities. While social media has allowed practically any individual or groups to voice out their fears and concerns, frustrations and complaints, paradoxically, social media has also exposed and revealed the deep schism and the growing polarization in our society: a society that is polarized not just racially, but across politics, values, religion, and region. The overrepresentation of the Malays, the underrepresentation of the non-Malays on Twitter, and the key issues that dominated the political discourse were evident. The sense of lostness politically, economically, culturally, from one issue to another have enraged the Malays further. As a result, UMNO and PAS was then seen as the natural base that the Malays could rely and depend on, if not politically, psychologically.

It is also worth noting that Twitter is not just a public sphere, as imagined by Habermas (1991), but a fertile ground for the dissemination of ideas, identity formation, and network mobilization, apart from political exchange and conversation. It also empowers and enables a new ground up approach in creating a popular resurgent movement online.

Conclusively, while the new political dynamism, or the new digital nationalism, did not really affect the political landscape on a mass scale, it has nevertheless succeeded in reaffirming and reflecting the national sentiment – based on the significant level of correlation in this study – that race and religion continues to matter especially among the Malay Muslim majority, and proven to be one of the dominating force that led to the fateful fall of the Pakatan

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