

Full Length Research Paper

Media warfare content analysis of the conservative and alternative media during the Bukit Selambau Malaysian by-election

Mohamed Samsudeen Sajahan¹, Azlyn Ahmad Zawawi¹, Azni Syafena Andin Salamat¹, Nur Zafifa Kamaruzaman¹, Azrul Shahimy Mohd Yusof², Zaliha Hj. Hussin¹ and Kamaruzaman Jusoff^{3*}

¹Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Malaysia.

²Department of Language, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Malaysia.

³TropAIR, Faculty of Forestry, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor. Malaysia.

Accepted 18 October, 2019

This paper discuss on the role of the media in the context of warfare that was brought by the conservative mass media as well as the alternatives during the N 25 DUN Bukit Selambau, Malaysia by-election timeframe. The main idea of this study is to analyze the role of conservative and alternative media during Malaysia's 2009 by-election. It should be noted that the types of media that were selected in this paperwork were not biased upon any parties and this was determined on the rationale that these media were the main choice of the local population. Among the local media sources that were chosen for this analysis were Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian, Nanban, Tamil Nesan, whereas malaysiakini.com and tvantara.com were for the alternatives,. The discussions in this paperwork were more focused on the issues that were discussed by the media in terms of their main topic, news focus, themes, role of pictures and videos and the delivery of news. In order to deliver a more effective writing piece, the researcher had used two main communicative theories which were the theory of agenda setting as well as the framing theory in analyzing the impacts of media in this by-election.

Keywords: Agenda setting, framing theory, media warfare, Bukit Selambau.

INTRODUCTION

The by- election of Bukit Selambau, Malaysia 2009 was held on the 7th of April 2009 at the State Legislative Assembly (DUN) Bukit Selambau, Kedah. The post of State Legislative Assembly Bukit Selambau was made available due to the resignation of its previous occupant, V. Arumugam who resigned on the 8th of February, 2009 due to political-based threats that he had received. Arumugam who had earlier contested as a free candidate, joined PKR after he won the 12th General Election) in which he was elected as a member of the state's exco and held the portfolio as the chairperson of the Kedah Domestic Trade, Siamese and Indian Community Affairs, Unity and Estate Workers Committee.

The Chairperson of Malaysian Election Commission (SPR)

Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof, announced that the 29th day of March, 2009 would be the day of the naming of the candidates, whereas the voting would take place on the 7th of April 2009. This by-election would take place simultaneously with the Bukit Gantang Parliamentary Seat in Perak and State Legislative Assembly of Batang Ai (Sarawak) by-election.

This by-election had made its own mark in history, as for the first time, there were 15 candidates contesting for the post, in which they were made of one representative from the National Front Party (BN), Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) candidate namely Datuk S. Ganesan, and one representative from the People's Coalition (PKR) namely S. Manikumar, accompanied by 13 independent candidates.

State Legislative Assembly (DUN) Bukit Selambau was once a strong fortress of United Malay National Organization (UMNO) in which it had seen its former representative, Datuk Badri Yunus, who held his position

*Corresponding author. E-mail: kjusoff@yahoo.com. Tel: +603-89467176.

Table 1. Results of the Bukit Selambau state legislative assembly by-election from 1986 - 2008.

Year	Parliament Member	Party	Opposition	Opposition's Party	Majority
1986	Badri Yunus	 BN-UMNO	Ustaz Ahmad Awang Dato'	 PAS	5,194
1990	Badri Yunus	 BN-UMNO	Zainol Abidin Johari	 Semangat 46	4,359
1995	V. Saravanan	 BN-MIC	Ustaz harun Mat Isa	 PAS	7,365
1999			Karuppaiah a/l Ramasamy	 DAP	
2004	V. Saravanan	 BN-MIC	Hamdan Mohamed Khalib	 PAS	5,894
			Kalaichelvan a/l Baby	BEBAS	
2008	V. Arumugam	BEBAS ¹	Alagar S. Krishnan	 BN-MIC	2,362

position from 1986 before it was passed on to a representative of the MIC, Datuk V. Saravanan in 1995. In regards to the composition of the races, the Malays were the majority of the local population in which they made 50.2% of the local population, followed by the Indians (29.5%) whereas the rest of it were comprised of the Chinese (19.3) as well as the Siamese (1%). According to the results of the 12th general election (PRU12) for N25, Bukit Selambau, the winner was V. Arumugam who received 13,225 votes, against BN's representative S. Krishnan who received 10,863 votes.

All three by-elections (Bukit Selambau, Bukit Gantang and Batang Ai) were the perfect stage for both parties which were the National Front Party (BN) and the opposition parties to determine their own capabilities. It would serve as a benchmark to determine how much had National Front Party changed as demanded by the people (a signal form the results of the 12th General Election) from two previous by-elections, whereas for the People's Coalition Party this would also serve as their first own annual evaluation as the newly elected governing body in the state of Kedah, especially to its population in Bukit Selambau.

Nevertheless, it was apparent that the Bukit Selambau by-election had garnered more attention than the other two by-elections. On the day of the naming of the candidates for DUN Bukit Selambau, a new record was made in the history of Malaysia's democracy in which it witnessed a fight between 15 candidates (13 independent candidates, 1 National Front Party candidate and 1 People's Coalition Party candidate). This contest in Bukit Selambau marked its own path in history in the Peninsula's election in which it witnessed a contest of more than 3 different angles aside from the by-election in Tanjung Kapor, Sabah on the 8th of March 2008 which recorded a contest between 8 different candidates (Table 1).

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This research has been conducted based on the content analysis of local based mass media which include conservative and as well as

alternative media. As a guide this research also has been guided by two theories which are Agenda Setting Theory and Framing Theory.

Agenda setting theory

The agenda setting was a method in communicative study by scholars in order to determine the usage of mass media by the general population. The theory of agenda setting was coined by Cohen in the year 1963. This theory rejected the premise that the media had a huge capability in influencing passive audiences (*Bullet Theory*). The 'Bullet Theory' argued that a passive audience was one who received information and processed it passively; in which the audience was regarded to be without opinion and thus it was easy to influence them with any information disseminated by the mass media.

An agenda was an issue or topic that was selected to be aired by the media through the selection process. Later on, the issue or topic would be edited by an editor using specific techniques so that some issue would appear to be more important than others. The ease of paradigm of agenda selection challenged the media's capability in communicating with the audience on which was the most significant issue, which was the most important, and what was the audience supposed to think of.

The hypotheses that were used in the theory of agenda setting were:

- 1.) Media can influence the local populations' opinion by giving more attention towards some issues, and disregarding the rest.
- 2.) Media had the power to influence the general population's thinking.
- 3.) The more relation between the media's topic with the general population's topic, the more effective the agenda setting.
- 4.) The general population had the power to determine their own agenda.

In terms of the application of the agenda setting theory, it was not limited to selected fields; in reality, it was applicable in other fields of researches such as political advertisement, political campaigns, debates, business news, management of corporate reputation, policies, general opinions, as well as public relations.

In this paper, the researcher did not use the survey method (by choosing respondents to reflect on their own awareness of the issues that were debated), as the researcher had chosen to analyze the issues that were discussed during the campaigning period for Bukit Selambau by-election. In a nutshell, this research was more focused on the contents of the media itself in determining what they were trying to convey to the general population (the general population regard as important to be discussed). In reality, this research was more focused on determining what was the agenda

Table 2. Division of headline during the research period (29/3/2009 - 7/4/2009).

Media	Number of articles
Utusan Malaysia	62
Berita Harian	48
New straits times	41
The star	52
Tamil Nesan	58
Tamil Nanban	49
malaysiakini.com	57
tvantara.com.	27

setting process; from the emergence of issues to the media's exposure and focus trend, news placement, as well as dominance of pictures and videos which were regarded as one of the elements that determined the credibility of an issue that would be discussed by the public.

Framing theory

The framing concept shared several similarities with the agenda setting theory, but it was more elaborate in terms that it gave more focus on the issue that was discussed rather than a general discussion of the issue. The basis of the framing theory was that the media provides the focus of a discussion of an event and let the general population evaluate it. The main hypothesis of the framing theory was that the media was responsible in attracting the attention of the general population to a specific issue according to the needs of the editors and journalists. In a nutshell, the frame referred to how the media interpreted and presented an event or issue, in which later on it influenced how the general population interpreted the information that was given to them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The agenda of Malay language media

The agenda of conservative media that was observed by the researcher during the Bukit Selambau by-election were Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian, New Straits Times, The Star, Tamil Nanban and Tamil Nesan whereas for the alternative media, the researcher had turned to sources such as tvantara.com dan malaysiakini.com. The following were the numbers of news headlines related to the Bukit Selambau by-election in the alternative and conservative media that were analyzed along the duration of the by-election (Table 2).

In the context of this research, the researchers had looked upon the role of mainstream Malay language newspapers in conveying information regarding the Bukit Selambau by-election. The researchers had analyzed the effectiveness of Utusan Malaysia and Berita Harian in delivering their message. These newspapers were considered to be the main media of information dissemination for the general population especially to the Malays who made the majority of the local population. There were three ideologies that can be explained in the context

of the mainstream media in which they were the positive ideology which can be considered as pro-government, neutral ideology which had no tendency to take any side, as well as negative ideology which was pro-opposition. In this research, it was found out that the news that were delivered in these newspapers were more positive in which it were biased towards the current government party (National Unity Party). Altogether, there were 62 and 48 articles in Utusan Malaysia and Berita Harian that documented the process and ongoing of the Bukit Selambau by-election (Figure 1).

Based on the analysis, the neutral issue that was discussed on the mainstream media was on the fact that the Bukit Selambau by-election had made its own mark in the history book in which it had recorded 15 candidates contesting for a single post on the 7th of April 2009. This was the highest number of candidates ever recorded in history of Malaysia. According to the Vice Chairperson of the Malaysian Election Commission (SPR), Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar, the entry of 15 candidates in this by-election had overcome the previous record of an eight-way fight at DUN Tanjong Kapor and Sukau, Sabah on the 12th General Election 2008 (Headline: Bukit Selambau by-election recorded a 15-way fight: highest number of contestants ever, 2009). The prospect of it was very attractive that it attracted the attention of 13 independent candidates to contest for the post that was available aside from the National Front Party (BN) and the Coalition Party (PKR) in which both parties sent a candidate each.

P. Loganathan, Tan Hock Huat, Radzi Md. Lazim, Mohd Fazil Abdul Wahab, Abdul Rahim Abu, L. Sarala, A. Jayagopal, Khamis Awang, S. Moganakumar, Husaini Yaacob, M. Vanesan, Mejar (B) Anuar Abd. Hamid and T. Chandrarajan were the independent candidates who contested for the available post whereas National Front Party and Coalition Party were represented by S. Ganesan and S. Manikumar. The province of Bukit Selambau had 35, 140 registered voters with the Malaysian Election Commission (SPR). (Headline: BN candidates expected to face tough challenges in the three by-elections, 2009). Nevertheless, National Front Party candidate, Datuk S. Ganesan, expressed that the 15-way fight was a good demonstration of the democracy that was practiced in the country, even though some reacted by saying that the huge number of candidates was due to the reason that there were problems in the coalition parties.

A positive ideology can be seen in terms of National Front Party role of continuous development for the people. This was a guarantee that was given by National Front Party candidate who expressed their readiness to serve the people, regardless of their background or ethnicity (Muhd Nizam Abd. Hamid, Zainu'l Azhar Ash'ari, Opat Rattanachot, Mohd. Shariza Abdullah and Safina Ramli, 2009). In this by-election, BN had also focused their attention to the survivability of the youths. For example, National Front Party wanted the youths to show their support towards the governing party who had offered



Figure 1. Content ideology of the Malay mainstream media during Bukit Selambau, Malaysia by-election, 2009.

numerous incentives as well as support in propelling their success in fields such as economics and sports. Through the Ministry of Youths and Sports, the government had offered countless support to the youths through numerous skims that was provided. This phenomenon was further bolstered with the government's promise to build a RM150, 000 Futsal courts complete with floodlights for the youths to engage in sporting and economic activities. (Headline: Modern Futsal Court, 2009). Aside from that, the role that was played by Tun Mahathir (previous Prime Minister of Malaysia) had further strengthened the National Front Party that it replenished the people's confidence of the party. This was done through the former Prime Minister's return to UMNO. Moreover, it was believed that the event would lead to a more stabilized political situation that it can improve the relations between races, in which it would later on result in the Bukit Selambau's population to unite as one in order to achieve the developmental agenda that was proposed by the governing body. Development for the people has always been the main focus of BN. In relation to that, the 'Syarikat Perumahan Negara Berhad' (SPNB), with an

increased budget of RM200 million in the Malaysian Second Economic Stimulation Package had started the building of the affordable housing scheme ('Rumah Mesra Rakyat') for the citizen in which the project would be fully completed by the end of this year. Thus, in line with their agenda, SPNB had requested for the government's support (National Front Party) in order to ensure that those with a low income per capita would be able to afford their own house. The concept of affordable housing scheme was aimed at those household who had a monthly income of less than RM1, 500 per month. They would only need to pay RM40, 000 of the total cost of the house, in which the rest of the amount (RM20, 000) would be supported by the government (Azmi Deros and Norakmah Mat Youb, 2009).

The needs of the people continued to be the main concern of the government; in which the problem that was faced by more than 500 residents who inhabited a 2.4 ha land, owned by a co-operative in Sungai Tukang would later be solved, with the Lembaga Kemajuan Wilayah Kedah's (KEDA) decision to buy the land for them. Numerous efforts were done by the National Front Party in

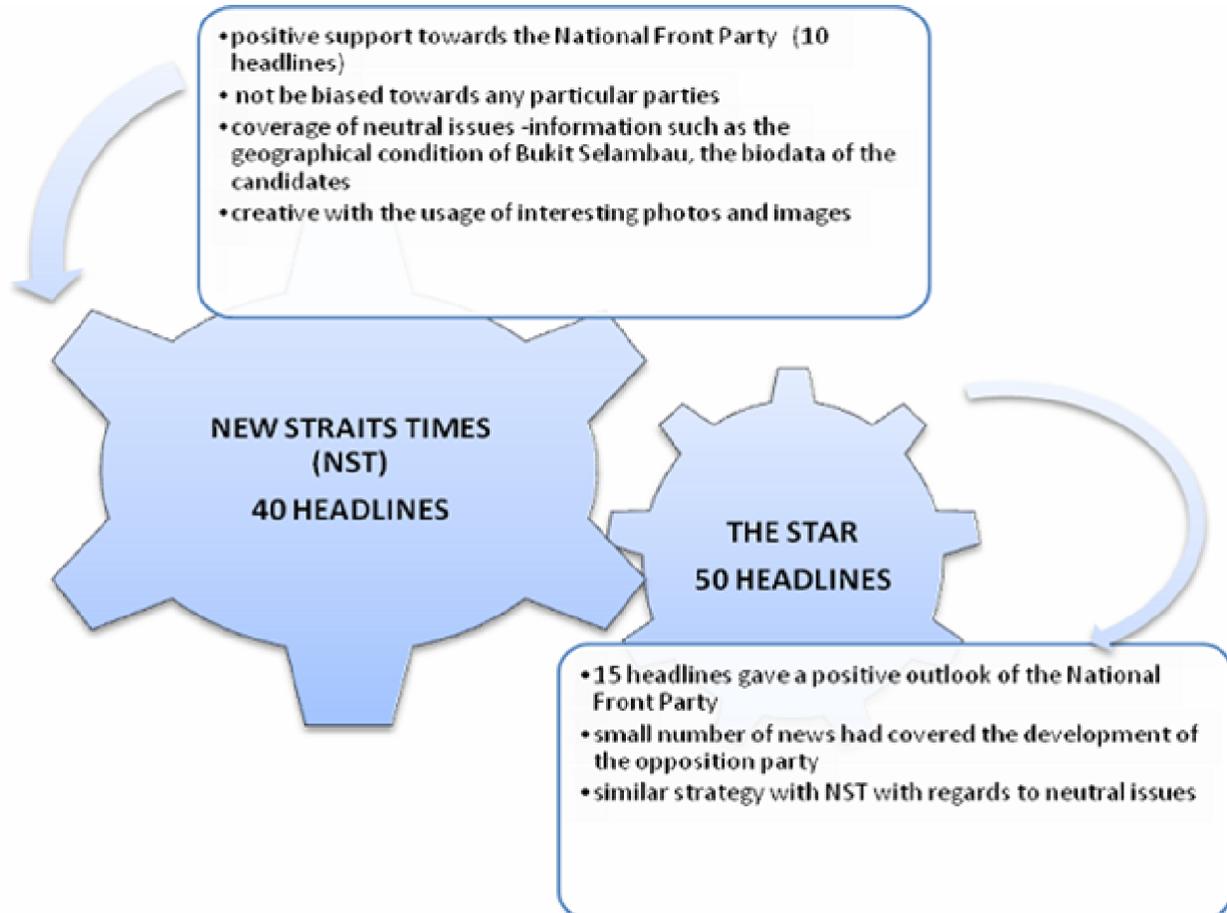


Figure 2. Content ideology of the English mainstream media during Bukit Selambau, Malaysia by-election, 2009.

Party in order to highlight the weakness of the opposition to provide ample development and prosperity to the people of Kedah even after a year had passed since they governed the state.

Negative ideologies were also coined up by the opposition parties in order to attract the attention of the people towards them. The opposition had manipulated issues such as the release of the detainees held under the Internal Security Act (ISA). Based on the statement made by Datuk Seri Hishamuddin (Minister and Vice President of United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the release of the 13 ISA detainees as announced by the sixth Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Razak had no connection with the by-elections, as it was only a sensationalized issue made by the opposition in order to attract voters. The opposition had the assumption that the release was due to their constant pressure towards the government, in order to have the detainees released (Azmi Md Deros, Fazillah Pit, Norakmah Mat Youb, Nahar Tajri and Omar Osman, 2009). However, Datuk Seri Hishamuddin himself had said earlier on that the people should be careful with negative political sentiments that were brought up by the opposition during any elections

as it was against the concept of democracy.

Agenda of English based media

For this research, two mainstream English newspapers were chosen in which they were the New Straits Times and the Star, in which analyses were done from the 24th of March 2009 until the voting day (7 April, 2009) (Figure 2).

It was found out during the analyses that both newspapers were 'fighting' in trying to gain the best scope in terms of the issues coined during the N25 Bukit Selambau's by-election. However, for the sake of this research, the main focus was on the issues that had the most impact towards the readers. English newspapers were chosen as it was the medium that middle class people chose to read more than Malay based newspapers. Moreover, English based newspapers were more aligned towards the concept of a multiracial community that has been the tradition of Malaysians. Along the research's timeline, the New Straits Time had churned up more than 40 headlines, in which 10 of them had depicted their positive

support towards the BN and the party's candidate Datuk M. Ganesan, such as:

- 1.) BN in a better position to help people in Kedah (NST, 5 April 2009).
- 2.) Ganesan to emulate Obama (NST, 1 April 2009).
- 3.) Ganesan can bring about change (NST, 30 Mac 2009).

Even though NST seemed to not be biased towards any particular parties, some of their headlines had shown their negative support towards the opposition parties, in which some of them were:

- 1.) Crowded Selambau: Abdullah says something not right in the opposition (NST, 30 Mac 2009).
- 2.) MCA blames Anwar for fracas (NST, 25 Mac 2009).

However, it would be fair to conclude that during the timeframe of the research, NST had managed to be fair enough towards all parties that it made the newspaper seemed neutral. This was achieved through the coverage of neutral issues that mostly consisted of information such as the geographical condition of Bukit Selambau, the bio-data of the candidates, as well as interesting issues such as:

- 1.) A stroke of luck for betel leaf reader (NST, 2 April, 2009).
- 2.) No withdrawals in by-election (NST, 3 April, 2009).

These kinds of topics were mostly expository unlike those which were influential towards the readers.

During the course of N25 Bukit Selambau's by-election, it was found out that NST were creative with the usage of interesting photos and images that attracted the readers' interest to learn more about the uniqueness of Bukit Selambau. However, there was less coverage on more pressing issues, such as the information on the contesting free candidates in which the general population had less information about them, even though the number of candidates had recorded a new mark in history with the highest number of candidates to date (13 independent candidates). Moreover, even though there was coverage on PKR's candidate, it was considerably less compared to BN's candidate who received extensive coverage by the newspaper. In reality, the reader should be exposed to the background of the independent candidates; however, this was not a reality.

The Star itself had come out with more than 50 headlines during the course of the by-election. From the number above, it was found out that 15 headlines gave a positive outlook of the BN:

- 1.) Look at our record- Chew: Barisan has steered the nation to greater heights (The Star, 6 April, 2009).
- 2.) Hisham: Barisan can deliver- Futsal courts and Tomoi rings are among Bukit Selambau's wish list (The Star, 3 April, 2009).

3.) Barisan women's wing show united front (The Star, 31 Mac, 2009)

The issues that were brought up were seen as a stepping stone in which it helped boost BN's credibility as a party to the media. Further observations and analyses had found out that only a small number of news had covered the development of the opposition party, and most of the time, the news were against the PKR, such as:

- 1.) Five PKR leaders quit: Kedah division leaders say they're disappointed with party leadership (The Star, 7 April, 2009).
- 2.) PKR hype turns out to be a big letdown (The Star, 5 April, 2009).

A similar strategy was also employed by The Star and NST in which the newspaper covered some neutral issues that mostly depicted the scene in Bukit Selambau's by-election, as well as the election process in general:

- 1.) More boxes to cater for XL ballots (The Star, 7 April, 2009).
- 2.) Come out to vote early (The Star, 7 April, 2009).
- 3.) All set for a peaceful campaign: Barisan, Pakatan on pasct not to provoke each other (The Star, 30 Mac, 2009).

The agenda of Tamil based media

In this research, the researchers had also analyzed the contents of Tamil based newspapers due to its huge impact towards the Indian population which made up 30% of the whole registered voters for Bukit Selambau. Another factor that further bolstered the researcher's interest to analyze the issues that were brought up by these Tamil based newspapers was due to the reason that there were 8 Indian candidates contesting for the post of ADUN Bukit Selambau, with the idea of fighting for the people's right. The two (2) newspapers that were chosen to be analyzed in this research were Tamil Nesan dan Tamil Nanban. It should be stressed here that the timeframe of this research started from the day of the naming of the vote to the day of voting itself. Attention were only given to issues that were directly related to Bukit Selambau, with disregard to issues on PRK Bukit Gantang as it may prove to have a *spill over effect* to Bukit Selambau.

During the DUN N25, Bukit Selambau's by-election, the researchers had recorded and analyzed 103 topics/ issues that directly correlates to the development of the Bukit Selambau's by-election as served by Tamil Nesan and Tamil Nanban for the reading of the Indian community. From a total of 107 headlines that were related to the development of the by-election, 58 issues were discussed in Tamil Nesan whereas the rest of it (49) made up the headlines in Tamil Nanban.

The analyses had also revealed that there were more

pictures on BN's candidate that it acted as free publicity.

As referred to the Tamil Nesan dan Nanban, Tamil based newspapers usually use pictures to explain an event. This can be seen as an advantage to the BN's candidate as pictures or visual aids had a larger impact on the voters even though there were chances for the voters to determine what the best was for them. However, this did not mean that the BN had monopolized the whole picture as there were some space dedicated to the opposition as well as the independent candidates. In general, the pictures of the opposition and the independent candidates had only touched on the surface, and it was not detailed. Further analysis had also revealed the fact that Tamil Nesan had also dedicated one whole page of the whole publication to cover the process of campaign in Bukit Selambau. Among some of the pictures that provided free publicity for BN's candidate were:

- 1.) BN's candidate Dato Ganesan meets the public (Tamil Nesan, 1 April, 2009).
- 2.) Ganesan and Koh Tsu koon meets with the Chinese community of Bukit Selambau (Tamil Nesan, 1 April, 2009).
- 3.) Tamil School of Sg. Tukang receives a budget of RM 350,000. Picture of Dato Ganesan with Tan Sri Muhaidin Yassin handing the check. (Tamil Nesan, 31 Mac, 2009).

Analyses on both of the Tamil based newspaper had revealed that the issue that were discussed were similar, but what differs them was the approach. However, it was apparent that both of the newspapers had given extensive coverage to the BN candidate, as there were only a small number of exposures given to the opposition. Furthermore, only 1% of space was allocated to those who contested as an independent candidate. Both of the newspaper had only covered issues that depicted the dissatisfaction of the independent candidates along the campaigning period in Bukit Selambau.

Aside from that, the researchers had also found out that national issues such as the power transition of the governing body of Malaysia and UMNO was not emphasized in both of the Tamil based newspapers. The issues that were discussed in both Tamil newspapers were issues of leadership, MIC's contribution to the Indian community, verbal fights between the contesting candidates, local population's welfare, campaigning activities, as well as the role of *makkal sakti* in the by-election. Thus, it was clear that issues on Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) and the release of ISA detainees which were expected to be hotly debated, had failed to find a place in Tamil Nesan dan Tamil Nanban. The issue of HINDRAF which had an impact on the Indian community was only highlighted during the release of 2 ISA HINDRAF s detainees along with 11 others on the 5th of April, 2009. Nevertheless, it was apparent that what was important to them was their request to the government to release the 3 HINDRAF leaders currently in detention under ISA (Tamil Nanban, 5 April, 2009). Simply

said, it can be summarized that the issues that were discussed were local issues based on sentiments and competency of the contesting candidates especially BN's and PKR's.

Further analysis of the contents of both newspapers revealed that in general, the issues that were delivered to the reader were free publicities for the BN's candidate and not for the rest of the candidates. Simply said, there was an imbalance in terms of the content of the headlines that was delivered by the media. BN's candidate had a clear advantage in terms of the coverage of the campaign activities, support from the MIC leaders and top brass such as the Prime Minister and the Cabinet members who had themselves took part in DUN N25's by-election.

From all of the 107 headlines in both newspapers that were analyzed along the Bukit Selambau's by-election timeline of between 29 March, 2009 - 7 April, 2009, it was found out that in general, both newspapers had a nice balance of positive and neutral news on both contesting parties, however, there was a tendency to highlight negative issues on the opposition. Next, in discussing the context of the source of information for both newspapers in delivering their headlines, it was found out that there were multiple sources of information according to the news type. Undeniably, both newspapers were a source of information dissemination for the government in terms of the division, as followed by the largest Indian party MIC (including information on the branch leadership of MIC, IPF, former candidate who resigned from *Keadilan* (Kalivanar) as well as NGO's such as *Makkal Sakti* and individuals (Prof Dr. P. Ramasamy and the independent candidates).

Electronic media

The widespread of information technology (internet) had opened up new opportunities for political parties to influence the voters in hopes of getting that important 'vote'. The internet had established itself as one of the alternatives for new information, replacing traditional media which were dismissed as having a lower credibility. However, this does not mean that the researcher had dismissed the importance of the conservative media, especially due to the reason that until today, there were no single statistics that had proven the penetration or exposure to the internet had positively influenced the voters to select any single party.

Nevertheless, hardcore internet users had shown the tendency to support the oppositional party. This was mainly due to the reason that the opposition used the internet to disseminate their belief and share their views on hotly debated issues, their own objectives, as well as open discussion boards such as forums that enable users to share their own thoughts and opinions openly. A monopoly by the local government or even the governing parties in terms of the contents of mainstream mass media had also led to this.

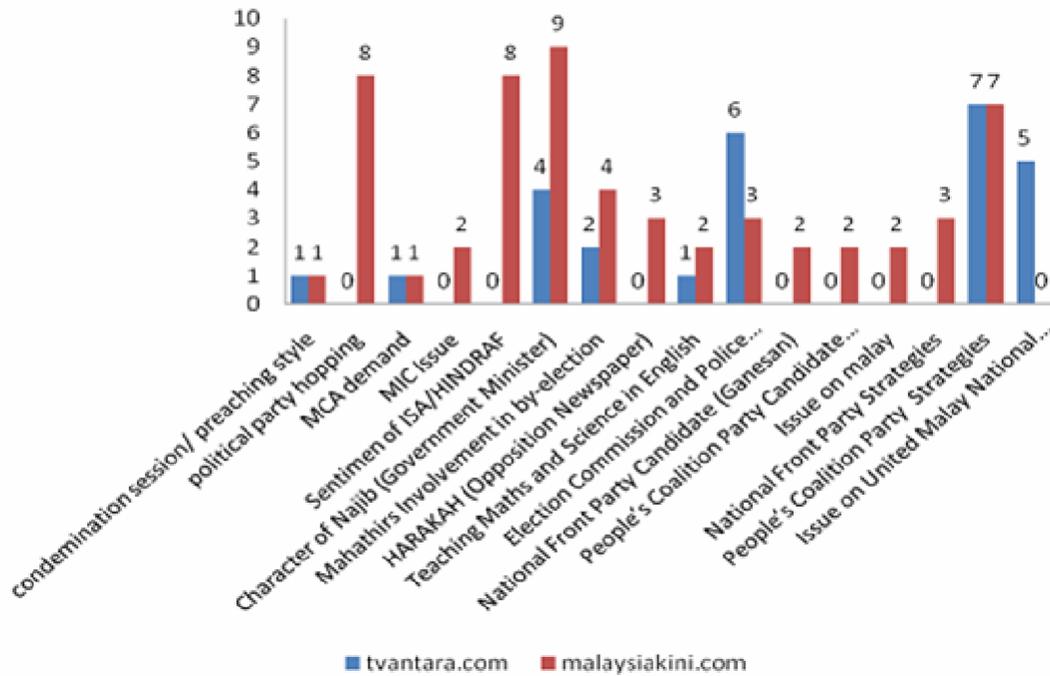


Figure 3. Difference of Issue highlighted by electronic media during Bukit Selambau, Malaysia by-election.

In regards to the impact of technology, it was generally observed that those living in urban areas as well as in its outskirts felt the most impact of technology. This factor was mostly due to the widespread exposure to the internet among the middle class and those who were educated in urban areas. However, this notion did not thoroughly dismiss the possibility that those living in rural areas were not exposed to the usage of the internet. What one needs to understand here, was that the effect were considered to be less than those living in urban areas, and this was attributed to a lack of exposures, as well as internet enabled facilities.

The essence of the contents that were made available in this alternative media was mostly used to disseminate information to registered voters during the campaigning period by the opposition party. This included the printing of materials from the internet and distributing them during the campaigning period. An exposure to new information had always been taken positively by the local population due to its comprehensive coverage without any cover-ups, as well as for its ease of access, that led some irresponsible parties to spread inaccurate information or even rumors.

In the context of the N 25 Bukit Selambau by-election, the researcher hypothesized that the exposure to alternative media would leave a significant impact, as this was based on the reason that most of the registered voters currently working in the city of Sungai Petani were exposed to the impact of the information technology.

During the timeframe of the DUN 25, Bukit Selambau's by-election starting from the day of the naming of the candidates to the voting day, the researchers had analyzed several issues that were discussed on two alternative media's; malaysiakini.com and tvantara.com. (Figure 3)

For the sake of this research, 84 headlines regarding the Bukit Selambau by-election were chosen by the researchers in order to assess the warfare or issue that that the alternative media had selected in order to influence and win the hearts of the voters. From the selected headlines, it was found out that 57 topics regarding the Bukit Selambau's by-election were discussed by the alternative media malaysiakini.com, whereas only 27 topics were discussed on the website tvantara.com.

Among the issues that were the agenda of both websites were the issue of jumping parties, Mahatirism, HINDRAF/ISA, leadership of Dato Seri Najib, ban on the distribution of the Harakah (newspaper founded in 1987 and published by Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) a opponent party in Malaysia, Teaching of Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMI), MCA's demand to govern the country, the Malay agenda, UMNO, speech trend, SPR, issue on Dato S.Ganesan; Manikumar (PKR) as well as the issue on the by-election strategies of the coalition party and BN

In the website malaysiakini.com, it was found out that the issues that were discussed were mainly centered towards the leadership of Dato Seri Najib. Along the Bukit

Selambau campaigning period, the issue was brought up 8 times in the agenda of *malaysiakini.com* whereas it was discussed in *tvantara.com* for 4 times. The issues that were discussed under the topic of Dato Seri Najib's leadership were his designation as the Prime Minister, prohibition of speeches on the topic of Altantuya (Mongolian model assignation that been linked with high profile leader in Malaysia), by-election served as a test for Dato Najib, as well as possible breakdowns under the leadership of Najib and the idea of 1 Malaysian.

The next most important issue in the agenda of *malaysiakini.com* was on jumping parties (8 cases), as well as on ISA and HINDRAF (8 cases). The issue on jumping parties was centered on issues such as the Vice President of People Progressive Party (PPP) joining PKR, free candidates were begged to quit, (Rahim: I'm not a sponsored candidate, and Vice President of PPP and 6,000 members joining PKR). In the context of the issues regarding ISA/ HINDRAF, the discussions were on issues such as Hindraf duo and 11 others set free, Hindraf detainee's wife denies 'support BN' claim, Anwar asking the people to not be fooled... Releasing 13 ISA detainees and Hindraf will not help PKR's Manikumar. Meanwhile, the other subject of the research on alternative media did not place emphasis on the issue of jumping parties and ISA/Hindraf.

Both alternative media's had similarities in terms of their emphasis on the issue of the PKR's strategies (7 times), issue on the speech trend (once) and MCA's claims (once).

One obvious difference between the two of them was that *tvantara.com* had given more emphasis on the development of UMNO whereas *Malaysiakini* had placed little emphasis on the issue. In *tvantara.com* the issues regarding the development of UMNO that was discussed were 15 Fakta Umno Penderhaka and Petualang Sebenar, Why Is UMNO Running Scared?, Bukti Baru, Khairy Akan Disiasat Lembaga Disiplin Umno, UMNO: Buffeted By Winds Of Change dan Nurul Ezzah : Tiada perubahan jika muka lama Umno masih memimpin.

Among other issues that were discussed in *malaysiakini.com* and not in *tvantara.com* was regarding the issue of the Malay community and the innate qualities of BN's Ganesan and PKR's candidate, Manikumar. In the issue regarding the Malays, the issues that were discussed were Hadi: Don't let religion be an issue, Malay voters may shun PKR's candidate S. Manikumar because of his religion and Malays to back Ganesan.

The former Prime Minister's presence in the UMNO's Annual General Meeting and his reentry into UMNO were also debated in both alternative media's; however what differs them was the frequency of the issues being debated there. The issue was discussed 4 times in *malaysiakini.com* and twice in the website *tvantara.com*. It was clear that from the alternative media's, most of the news that was published was pro- opposition, whereas only negative news that went against the BN's candidate and the government were delivered. Nevertheless, there

were neutral issues discussed by the alternative media's but the number was fairly small compared to the negative ones. The sources of information for the news were obtained from media representatives and the website's columnists.

Further analysis of the content of both website had revealed that *tvantara.com* and *malaysiakini.com* had attempted to optimize the usage of videos in delivering a series of speeches that were delivered by the opposition, as well as the media sessions that were done along the campaigning period of DUN Bukit Selambau's by-election. The usage of audio visual was a great hit against the conservative media which were mainly based on the visual aspect of delivery. Audio visual provided the chance to the general population to actually experience the by- election's development in Bukit Selambau, especially to those working or living in the area. The videos were regularly updated along the timeline and updates and this made it easily accessible to the end-users as they do not need extra applications to access the videos.

These were some of the videos that were available in both websites during the by-election in which the content differs per day depending on the number of speeches and the strategies employed by the opposition. In terms of the domination of videos it was clear that *tvantara.com* overwhelmed *malaysiakini.com* in terms of the number of available contents.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that there were obvious differences in terms of the agenda and framing that were done by both the conservative media as well as alternative media. The conservative media, in the context of this research, had the tendency to be pro-government and this was proven with their countless attempts to promote the National Front Party candidate whereas the alternative medias (Internet) had obviously used their freedom of speech to analyze other aspects that were not covered (consciously or not) by the conservative media in order to convey information to the people and later be appreciated by them. This research had also revealed that the basis that was upheld by both media sources neither (conservative nor alternative) would most certainly be the deciding factor in selecting the issues or agenda to be conveyed to the public.

Thus, it was clear that through the discussions of this paperwork, even though the parallelism between the media's agenda and the public's agenda were not revealed, we had seen the mass media's capabilities in focusing on an issue in which it would be later discussed by the public. In a larger context, the role of the mainstream media and alternative media can be theoretically taken as a starting point to any topic, in which later on, the general population was the ones to decide on its survivability.

The media had merely acted as the 'gatekeeper' who

determined what and how should an issue be presented to the public.

REFERENCES

- A stroke of luck for betel leaf reader (2009). New Straits Times.
- Agenda-setting theory (2009). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agenda-setting_theory
- Agenda-setting (2009). Dari <http://www.ou.edu/deptcomm/dodjcc/groups/99B2/lit%202.html#agenda%20setting>
- All set for a peaceful campaign (2009). Barisan, Pakatan on pasct not to provoke each other. 30 Mac, The Star.
- Amaran tutup mulut; Kalaivanar talam 2 muka-Calon bebas T. Chandrarajan (2009). Tamil Nanban, 2 April, hlmn.
- Azmi Deros dan Norakmah Mat Youb (2009). Nahar Tajri dan Omar Osman (2009). Pembangkang eksploitasi pembebasan tahanan ISA: Tindakan PM ambil kira pandangan umum, faktor kestabilan negara, Berita Harian, hlmn, 5 April, 11.
- Azmi Deros dan Norakmah Mat Youb (2009). 2,500 Rumah Mesra Rakyat siap 2009: SPNB dapat RM200 juta laksana projek, Berita Harian, hlmn, 3 April, 44.
- Barisan women's wing show united front (2009). The Star, 31 Mac.
- BN in a better position to help people in Kedah (2009). New Straits Times, 5 April.
- Calon BN, Dato Ganesan berjumpa masyarakat (2009). Tamil Nesan, 1 April.
- Calon BN, dijangka hadapi saingan sengit pada tiga pilihan raya kecil (2009). Utusan Malaysia, hlmn. 1.
- Come out to vote early (2009). The Star, 7 April.
- Crowded Selambau (2009). Abdullah says something not right in the opposition. 30 March, New Straits Times.
- Five PKR leaders quit (2009). Kedah division leaders say they're disappointed with party leadership. 7 April, The Star.
- Framing (social sciences) (2009). Dari [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Framing_\(social_sciences\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Framing_(social_sciences))
- Ganesan can bring about change (2009). New Straits Times, 30 Mac.
- Ganesan dan Koh Tsu koon bertemu dengan masyarakat Cina di bukit Selambau (2009). Tamil Nesan, 1 April.
- Ganesan to emulate Obama (2009). New Straits Times, 1 April.
- Gelanggang futsal moden (2009). Utusan Malaysia, hlmn. 30, 3 April.
- Gobalakrishnan (Tim. Parti Keadilan) harus meminta maaf atas kenyataan 13 calon bebas bersubahat dengan BN – Calon bebas Jayagopal. (2009). Tamil Nesan, 3 April.
- Hisham (2009). Barisan can deliver- Futsal courts and tomoi rings are among Bukit Selambau's wish list, 3 April, The Star.
- Jangan Mengulangi Kesilapan Lepas Dlm Pemilihan Calon PKR Di Bkt Selambau-SK Suresh (Ketua Pemuda MIC Kedah) (2009). Tamil Nesan, 1 April.
- Kalaivanar (Ketua PKR Jerai) Letak Jawatan Dari PKR & PKR Bahagian Jerai Dibubar -Tertipu Dgn Anwar. (2009). Tamil Nesan, 31 Mac.
- Look at our record-Chew (2009). Barisan has steered the nation to greater heights. The Star, 6 April.
- Malaysiakini.com. diaksakan dari 29 Mac hingga 7 April 2009 MCA blames Anwar for fracas (2009). New Straits Times, 25 Mac. Muhd Nizam Abd. H, Zainu'l Azhar A, Opat R, Mohd. Shariza Abdullah dan Safina Ramli (2009). Ganesan mahu bantu semua kaum, Utusan Malaysia, hlmn. 6, 1 April.
- More boxes to cater for XL ballots (2009). The Star, 7 April.
- No withdrawals in by-election (2009). New Straits Times, 3 April. Pilihan raya kecil Bukit Selambau (2009). diaksakan pada 31 Mac 2009 http://www.ms.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilihan_raya_kecil_Bukit_Selambau_2009
- Pilihan Raya Kecil Bukit Selambau catat saingan 15 penjuvu (2009). Paling ramai bertanding. Utusan Malaysia, hlmn, 6.
- PKR hype turns out to be a big letdown (2009). The Star, 5 April.
- PKR terdesak membuat tuduhan bahawa 13 calon bebas hanya berperanan untuk memecah undi, Calon bebas L Sarala (2009). Tamil Nanban, 2 April.
- Saya tidak akan menyerah kalah/menarik diri-Calon bebas Jayagopal (2009). Tamil Nanban, 2 April.
- Sekolah Tamil Sg. Tukang mendapatkan peruntukkan RM 350,000. Gamabar Dato Ganesan bersama Tan Sri Muhaidin Yassin menyampaikan cek (2009). Tamil Nesan, 31 Mac. [tvantara.com](http://www.tvantara.com). Accessed from 29 Mac hingga 7 April 2009, dari <http://www.tvantara.com>.