

## **The urban drift in Kuala Lumpur in the 2008 General Election: a return to the old ways?**

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### **Abstract**

The 2008 Malaysian General Election was a watershed election in the nation's electoral history. For the first time in almost forty years the ruling Barisan Nasional failed to obtain a two-third majority in Parliament. The coalition also lost five states to the opposition coalition. The results indicated a significant swing in the voting pattern of the electorate. This article examines the electoral campaign in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, the issues of debate and the outcome of the general election in the city which also witnessed a tremendous swing in votes to the opposition coalition. It analyses the reasons for the shift in voter perceptions which resulted in the ruling coalition retaining only one of the eleven seats compared to the seven seats they captured in the 2004 general election. The article shows that the voters in the city were affected by a range of national issues, including the call for electoral reforms, grievances over the rise of essential goods and fuel and issues of corruption and discriminative legislation. This invariably led to a significant shift in the voting pattern.

**Keywords:** Malaysia general election 2008, Kuala Lumpur, voting patterns, urban votes

### **Introduction**

The 2008 Malaysian General Election produced some major surprises in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, the national capital, where a total of 11 parliamentary seats were contested. The political tsunami which hit most states in peninsular Malaysia was also strongly felt in Kuala Lumpur.<sup>2</sup> The informal opposition coalition, Barisan Rakyat<sup>3</sup>, made up of the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Parti Se-Islam Malaysia (PAS) won all the seats in Kuala Lumpur with the exception of Setiawangsa where the Barisan Nasional incumbent Datuk Seri Zulhasnan Rafique, the Federal Territory Minister, won with a smaller margin than in the 2004 election. The opposition won all its seats comfortably with the exception of the Wangsa Maju seat which the PKR candidate won by a razor thin 150 votes.<sup>4</sup> The Barisan Nasional, on the other hand, won the safe parliamentary seats of Putrajaya and Labuan comfortably.<sup>5</sup> Among the informal opposition coalition, the PKR contested five seats and won four, the DAP won all the five seats it contested and PAS won one of the three seats it contested. An independent also contested in Lembah Pantai. In Kuala Lumpur, the BN gained only 37.99% of the votes cast. The DAP obtained 34.25% of the votes while its coalition partner PKR obtained 22.97% of the votes.<sup>6</sup>

The opposition win is a tremendous turnaround in Kuala Lumpur's electoral history since the 1980s when the opposition DAP dominated most of the seats in the