

## RADIO COVERAGE OF THE 1990 MALAYSIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS

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### Mass Media in Malaysia

Malaysia's mass media can be divided mainly into two categories i.e. **government** mass media and **private** mass media. All government mass media activities are coordinated by the Ministry of Information. The Ministry has two main divisions: the **Department of Broadcasting** and the **Department of Information**. The Ministry drew up five guidelines for government communicators and broadcasters:

- 1) To explain in depth and with the widest possible coverage government policies and programmes to ensure maximum public understanding;
- 2) To stimulate public interest and opinion to achieve its desired changes;
- 3) To assist in promoting civic consciousness and in fostering the development of Malaysian arts and culture;
- 4) To provide suitable elements of popular education, general information and entertainment;
- 5) To promote national unity - by using Bahasa Melayu, the national language - in a multi-racial society towards the propagation of a Malaysian culture and identity.

#### Notes :

1. On the 11th. of October 1969, Radio Malaysia and Television Malaysia were integrated to become the Department of Broadcasting, Malaysia.

## **The Department of Information**

The department's main function is to establish a two-way exchange between government and people. It disseminates government information and gathers feedback reports of public reaction at national and state levels. The department has offices in all 13 states, each headed by a Director based in the state capital. The State Directors use District Information Officers to carry out campaigns and programmes at ground level. To ensure that all ministers' activities are covered by the media, press liaison officers are posted to individual ministers.

## **The Department of Broadcasting**

Also known as RTM (Radio Televisyen Malaysia), this department has its headquarters in Angkasapuri Complex, Kuala Lumpur. The main purpose of Angkasapuri is to present government programmes and policies to the people. The presentation of news in particular is governed by the need to promote national unity in a multi-racial and multi-lingual context. The present policy of developing a Malaysian identity resulted in all announcements being made in Bahasa Melayu as well on all channels.

## **Radio**

Broadcasting in Malaya before the Second World War was conducted on an amateur basis. In those days, a small radio station provided a limited service to Kuala Lumpur under the then United Kingdom Ministry of Information and Propaganda.

In 1942, Malaya was occupied by the Japanese who added small stations at Penang, Malacca and Seremban. With the end of the war in 1946, the Department of Broadcasting was created, known as Radio Malaya. It was administered from Singapore, and started with a small staff and ex-service equipment.

However, it was the 12-year Emergency in Malaya which resulted in rapid expansion of the Broadcasting Department. (The Emergency started with the outbreak of militant communist terrorism in 1948) Particularly between the years 1950-55, staff recruitment to technical facilities progressively expanded and improved.

On 1st. January 1959, Radio Malaya separated from the Singapore station and was inaugurated in Kuala Lumpur. This new service was designed solely to serve the federation.

Since then, broadcasting has expanded at all levels including radio services in East Malaysia when Sabah and Sarawak joined the Federation. With the formation of Malaysia on 16th. September 1963, Radio Malaya became Radio Malaysia.

Despite the introduction of television in 1963, radio still has a large audience, especially among the rural people. It has succeeded cheaply and efficiently to penetrate remote areas as the prime source of information and entertainment.

## Radio Coverage of the 1990 Malaysian General Elections

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Today, Radio Malaysia operates five networks domestically National (Bahasa Melayu, Radio Satu), Blue (English, Radio Four), Green (Chinese, Radio Five) and Red (Tamil, Radio Six) Networks and Capital City Broadcasts, Radio Tiga Ibukota. It also broadcasts special programmes for the Orang Asli (Indigenous) in the Semai and Temiar dialects. Suara Malaysia (The Voice of Malaysia) broadcasts to overseas listeners in Indonesian, English, Arabic, Mandarin, Thai and Tagalog.

### Methodology

By understanding the role and functions of the Malaysian Electronic media, we can try to understand its relationship with the Electoral process in the country. This section looks specifically at the role of radio in the 1990 Malaysian elections. It focuses on :

- (a) What coverage was given on the elections during the election campaign period (12-21 October 1990) by English and Malay news programmes.
- (b) Some radio talk shows by candidates or representatives of the different major parties, during the campaign period.

### Analysis of Radio News Broadcasts

12 Malay and 13 English language news broadcasts recorded during the national elections campaign week (12/10/90 - 21/10/90) were analysed.

The news broadcasts selected for analysis were those of prime time news, that is, between 7-10 am and 5-9 pm. They were selected randomly from the National (Malay) Network (Radio One) and the English Network (Radio Four). Only Malay and English language news broadcasts were selected for this study because they cater for the majority of Malaysians.

The news broadcasts on the Chinese and Indian networks were not analysed as the majority of their audience would also have listened to the English or Malay news broadcasts.

Candidates of the incumbent party (total: 6 speeches) and five candidates of the opposition party (total: 7 speeches), broadcast over RTM during the election campaign week, were recorded for analysis. These were selected according to convenience.

### Findings and Analysis

#### Radio News

The content analysis of the radio news broadcast focussed on the study of content, communication of message, news source, headline slant, objectives, party support, theme, appeals used in the broadcast. A brief comparison was also done between the English and Malay news broadcasts.

## **Contents According to Language**

### **Broadcasts**

The analysis showed that the overall majority (68%) of both the Malay (75%) and English (62%) broadcasts emphasised events in their content. Only 20% of the broadcasts emphasized policies or issues and 12% emphasized image building. (Refer Table 1)

### **Direct Communication**

There was direct and clear communication of election messages in both the English and Malay news broadcasts. The analysis showed that the messages were not implicit or indirect.

### **Source**

The sources of election coverage during both the English and Malay news broadcasts were the station correspondents. News services or foreign correspondents did not comprise the sources.

### **Headline Slant**

- (a) Table 2 shows 75% of the Malay news broadcasts analysed used headlines favouring a party whereas only 54% of the English news broadcasts did likewise.
- (b) Of these, all the headlines analysed favoured the Barisan Nasional party, for both the English and Malay broadcasts.
- (c) The majority of the headlines favoured the party, as shown in Table 3.

### **Message Slant**

- (a) The study showed that the substance of the body of the item favoured a specific party most of the time, 83% for the Malay news broadcasts and 54% for the English, as shown in Table 4.
- (b) 92% of the Malay news broadcasts and 54% of the English news broadcasts analysed favoured the Barisan Nasional party. The rest (28% total) were neutral. None of them favoured any opposition party. (Refer Table 5).

### Headline Intensity

- (a) 67% of the headlines in the Malay news broadcasts compared to only 15% of the English news headlines were of medium intensity in their support of a particular party. 25% of Malay headlines and 23% English headlines were strong in their support. In comparison, no Malay headline which favoured a party was seen to be weak in its support, but 15% English headlines seemed to be weak in their support of the favoured party. (Refer Table 6).
- (b) Prominence of Headline. The headlines for all the election news items for both the English and Malay networks were prominent.

### Main Character in Programme

- (a) The main character for both the English and Malay news broadcasts analysed was the Prime Minister. 83% Malay news broadcasts and 54% English Broadcasts focussed on the Prime Minister as shown on Table 7. In comparison, the main character for 31% English news broadcasts were the Cabinet Ministers, and 8% were candidates, while for the Malay broadcasts 8% were government spokespersons and 8% opposition candidates. (Refer Table 7)
- (b) Looking at the most prominent parties mentioned to which the main candidates in the programme belonged, Table 8 shows that the Barisan Nasional party was most prominently mentioned in both the Malay (19%) and English (39%) networks. 3% each of the candidates' parties mentioned in the Malay network were DAP and Semangat 46, whereas for the English broadcasts, 10% were Semangat 46 and 10% others. However, 69% Malay and 13% English broadcasts did not mention the candidates' parties.

### Prominently Mentioned in Programme

The study showed that as a party, Barisan Nasional was the most prominently mentioned party during that campaign week over both the Malay (39%) and English networks (41%). *Semangat 46* was the next most prominently mentioned party on the radio broadcasts (15%), followed by DAP (8%) and PAS (3%). (See Table 9)

### Leading Political Personalities

Of the leading political personalities mentioned on the radio broadcasts, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad was the leading political personality for all the Malay broadcasts analysed. In comparison, he was the leading personality mentioned in 62% of the English broadcasts, followed by Ghafar Baba (15%) and other

ruling party personalities (15 %) and independent personalities (8%). (See Table 10)

### **Goals of the Programme**

The most prominent goal in the story for the Malay broadcasts seemed to be projection of the ruling party's image (45 %) followed by reporting events (36 %). On the other hand, for the English broadcasts, it seemed to be reporting events (54 %) followed by projection of ruling party's image (23 %) which dominated the broadcast. (See Table 11)

### **Projection of Party/Candidate**

The analysis also showed there was an indirect projection of the governing party or government candidates in both the Malay (100 %) and English (92 %) broadcasts. (See Table 12)

### **Themes/Subjects**

The three most important themes/subjects of the story for the Malay broadcasts were: stability and prosperity of the nation (28 %), democracy in Malaysia (22 %) and unity of the country (11 %). In comparison, for the English broadcasts, the important themes were stability and prosperity of the nation (23 %), democracy in Malaysia (15 %) and capability to provide strong/stable government (15 %). (See Table 13)

### **Agenda-Setting Vs Gate-Keeping**

The study seemed to show that most of the news items (84 %) could be classified as performing both agenda-setting and gate-keeping functions in both the Malay and English news broadcasts. (See Table 14)

### **Appeals**

Table 15 shows that 33 % of the Malay broadcasts compared to 54 % of the English broadcasts had no clear appeals. On the other hand, 33 % of the Malay broadcasts had the promise or positive claim based upon past performance or future plan, compared to 8 % of the English broadcasts. Also, 31 % of the English broadcasts had the criticism or attack appeal, compared to only 17 % of the Malay broadcasts. (See Table 15)

### **Campaign Activities**

Table 16 shows that the main campaign activity mentioned in the Malay broadcasts was reports of public meetings (33 %) compared to campaign speech (23 %) in the English broadcasts. The other main activities included campaign

speeches (17 %) and politicians giving interviews (17 %) for the Malay news programmes. On the other hand, the other main activity for the English news programmes was politicians giving interviews (16 %).

### **Analysis of Radio Speeches**

Six election broadcasts by the Barisan Nasional (BN) party and seven election broadcasts by opposition parties - 5 representing *Semangat 46*, 1 representing DAP and 1 representing PAS were analyzed for the survey. (See Table 17) These election broadcasts followed the party statements very closely.

### **Content**

The analysis showed that 100% of the BN speeches emphasised image-building in the content compared to only 29 % of the opposition speeches aired over radio. However, 71% of the opposition speeches emphasised policies and issues. (See Table 18)

### **Communication of Message**

All the radio election speeches analyzed, whether by opposition or BN parties contained direct communication of messages. Communication of message was not indirect.

### **Headline Slant**

The substance of headlines analysed for the majority of the speeches - BN (83 %), Opposition (71%) - favoured a specific party. (See Table 19)

### **Strength of Headline Slant**

According to the analysis, the strength of the headline slant favouring a specific party was very strong for 50 % of the BN speeches, compared to 71% of the opposition speeches. (See Table 20)

The study also showed that the strength of speech content coverage favouring a specific party was strong for 50 % of the BN speeches, compared to 100 % of the opposition parties. The other 50 % of the BN speeches were of medium strength in the support of their party. (See Table 21)

### **Goals of the Programme**

The most prominent goal featured in the BN candidates' speeches was to project the ruling party's image (100 %). In comparison, the opposition party's candidates' speeches featured the projection of the opposition party's image (14 %) and criticism of the ruling party (86%). (See Table 22).

## **Themes**

The most important themes featured in the BN speeches included : stability and prosperity of the nation (33 %), democracy in Malaysia (28%), unity of the country (28%), industrial development (5 %) and other activities of other government party leaders (5 %).

On the other hand, the more important themes emphasized in the oppositions' speeches were: corruption issues (33 %), Save Malaysia (29 %), BMF scandals (24 %), Support of Muslims (5 %), unity of the country (5 %) and misuse of power (5 %). (See Table 23)

## **Agenda-Setting Vs Gate-Keeping Functions**

The analysis also showed that the opposition speeches slanted more towards the agenda-setting role, i.e. putting forward or directing the listeners to issues relevant to the elections. The BN speeches leaned more towards the gate-keeping functions, i.e. highlighting certain issues and ignoring others. (See Table 24)

## **Appeals**

The study also showed that all the BN speeches used the promise or positive claim appeal based upon past performance or future plan appeals. On the other hand, all the opposition speeches used the criticism or attack appeal.

## **Summary**

The content analysis of radio coverage of the 1990 Malaysian general elections showed that by and large, the government-owned radio supported parties in the ruling BN coalition and gave little coverage to the candidate from the opposition parties.



## Radio Coverage of the 1990 Malaysian General Elections

Table 1

### Distribution of Speech Regulation by Leaders in the Election Constituency

Political Leadership Classification	No. of Speech	Percentage
Local Leader	15	46.9
District Leader	9	28.1
National Leader	5	15.6
Candidates	3	9.4
Others	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

Table2

### Percentage of Respondence Attending Election Campaign

Public Attendance in each campaign	No. of Cases	Percentage
< - 499	21	65.6
500 -1000	7	21.9
1000 - >	4	12.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3

**Distribution of Issues Brought Up in the Campaign**

Political Leaders Catagories	Critic of Government	Issues on Economy	No. of Speech	No. of Speech	Percentage
Political Leaders	50.0	66.7	36.4	35.5	26.1
Regional Leaders	6.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.3
National Leader	12.5	25.0	18.2	29.4	26.1
Candidates	31.2	8.3	45.4	35.3	43.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4

**Distribution of Time Campaign Activities by Party Leaders**

Prominent Leaders	Areas								
	AMPANG	ARAU	BACHOK	JELEBU	J/BAHRU	MARANG	PARIT BUNTAR	SHAH ALAM	TO-TAL
Local Political Leaders	40.0	6.6	6.7	13.2	0	13	13.3	6.8	100
District Political Leaders	0	0	50.0	0	0	0	0	50.0	100
National Political Leader	37.5	12.5	12.5	0	0	0	25.0	12.5	100
Candidates	23.1	15.4	0	0	23.1	7.7	7.7	23.0	100.0

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Table 5

### Percentage of Political Campaign From Each Political Party

Classification of Politician	PARTY			
	BARISAN	PAS	SEMANGAT 46	TOTAL
Local Political Leader	53.3	26.7	20.0	100.0
District Political Leader	0	50.0	50.0	100.0
National Political Leader	75.0	12.5	12.5	100.0
Candidates	52.5	15.4	32.1	100.0
Others Leaders	33.4	33.3	33.3	100.0