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[Bersih's impact on GE13](#)

By [Khoo Ying Hooi, Guest Contributor](#)
– 15 May 2013 **Posted in:** [GE13 Malaysia](#), [Malaysia](#)



Anwar Ibrahim called for rallies nationwide signalling the beginning of a 'movement' to protest alleged electoral fraud at the 5 May polls. [Bersih](#) has backed Anwar's claims that foul play was at hand. In a press statement released on 5 May, 2013, *Bersih* (Clean/Movement for free and fair elections) alerted that preliminary observations show that there were many [irregularities](#) on polling day. In Sunday's polls, videos and photos of alleged dubious voters flooded onto social media, along with photos of people showing that their indelible ink was easily washed off. The 13th general election concluded with hundreds of complaints of polling irregularities.

Bersih announced on the day after the polls that a people's tribunal would be set up to probe electoral fraud. Given the extensive media attention on electoral irregularity during the election, the impact of Bersih needs consideration. The movement had a tremendous impact on the political establishment by encouraging active political participation by Malaysians, which transcended the usual ethnic and class divide. *Pakatan Rakyat* has benefited the most from the expression of dissent that Bersih catalysed. From the rallies to campaigns, it cannot be denied the complementary roles of Bersih movement and the *Pakatan Rakyat*. However, it is evident that the political impact of the Bersih movement outweighs the actual electoral results.

Since its formal establishment in 2006, the Bersih movement has proven that it is more than just a collection of people pushing for electoral reforms. Its popularity made it into an important social force in Malaysia. It has contributed to a greatly increased level of political awareness especially among young voters. Furthermore, campaigns such as "*Jom 100*" that encouraged citizens to vote, and "*Jom Pantau*" campaign that advocated citizens to volunteer as polling observers, triggered more active participation in the electoral process from the citizenry.

Bersih is widely considered a pioneer in advocating for electoral observers for

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the 13th general election. Although Bersih itself was not appointed by the Election Commission (EC) to be one of the electoral observer groups, the EC did invite selected domestic non-governmental organisations and observers from ASEAN to observe Malaysia's 13th general elections.

Bersih has positively influenced the attitude of Malaysians towards elections regardless of their political inclination. Bersih-inspired gatherings took place simultaneously as a result of social media in various cities around the globe, giving the demand for free and fair (clean) elections international exposure. This further demonstrates that Malaysians are no longer political bystanders; rather, they now feel that they have more power to influence Malaysia's directions. In the past, Malaysians were known to be apathetic and complacent about elections and national and state politics. However this has changed and it is undeniable that Bersih helped trigger the people's engagement in politics.

Social movements such as Bersih however have a limited effect on society, and they cannot substitute for the state or political parties. Rather, a social movement and a political party working together is surely more effective at achieving political change.

Bersih has set up a people's tribunal to investigate electoral fraud. *Pakatan Rakyat* has welcomed this proposal. The joint effort will have a greater effect at this juncture than if Bersih acted alone. However, the critical question remains whether Bersih's concerted efforts will actually bring some, if any institutional reform to Malaysia's electoral system and process.

Khoo Ying Hooi is a fellow in the Department of International and Strategic Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in University of Malaya. She is also a PhD candidate at University Putra Malaysia, where she examines the impact of the Bersih movement on political change in Malaysia.

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About Khoo Ying Hooi, Guest Contributor

3 Comments

1. #1

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[Charles Edward Frith \(@charlesfrith\)](#)

Posted May 15, 2013 at 6:05 PM

All of the people I respect tell me that Anwar Ibrahim like Thaksin is a globalist asset. A person who will sell Malaysia to the highest bidder in order to secure power.

Quality comment or not? 1 0 6

2. #2

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[Greg Lopez](#)

Posted May 16, 2013 at 3:01 AM

Hi Charles,

Could you name some of these people that you respect who has said this, so that New Mandala readers can judge for themselves.

Thanks

Quality comment or not? 5 0 0

3. #3

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[Future Malaysian](#)

Posted May 16, 2013 at 4:28 PM

"the critical question remains whether Bersih's concerted efforts will actually bring some, if any institutional reform to Malaysia's electoral system and process."

There can be no question about the pivotal role Bersih has played in the awakening of the political consciousness and role that responsible and everyday Malaysians need to and must play in deciding the political route

not standing up to Malaysia over Ligitan and...

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- [Hang Tuah](#): I think you mean: "Malaysia, Truly Aphasia"
- [neptunian](#): If you think there is no intellectual discourse now, just wait. The Govt is slowly...
- [Hang Tuah](#): Malaysia is a dialogue-absent nation and an intellectually-impoverished society. When...

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- [Hang Tuah](#): Let me hazard a guess. Repressed anger at not being very good at hijacking airplanes,...

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- [Inaya Rakhmani](#): That is exactly the point I wanted to make. Public participation can and should...
- [Kunderemp](#): "Kawal Pemilu is an organic online social movement, and is indeed effectively..."

- o [Sectarian conflict in Mandalay \(4\)](#)

- [zayyar](#): The muslim folks have indeed been taken hostage by the hidden hands with hidden agenda....
- [tocharian](#): Where there are maggots the flesh must be rotten.

- o [Every vote must be counted, every voice must be heard \(68\)](#)

- [pearshaped](#): Ok Emo fair enough I'll cop

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the country is to take. In concert with the many vocal social and environmental activists NGOs, the combined efforts have paid off in the latest GE result. A result that have and will greatly influence the present and future political landscape of the country.

Having vigorously stirred and awoken the otherwise apathetic attitude of many Malaysians, especially those of the younger generations, the demand for real institutional reforms in Malaysia's electoral system and processes remain at the top of the agenda. And if you cannot get the government of the day to reform and change it, you go change the government of the day!

Quality comment or not?  2  1

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to that. I still like the idea of Hercules rigging...

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- [Max Havelaar](#): The latter. Regardless of how it got to this stage or who did what, what you have...
- [stephanus](#): Allyn, your article was totally wrong analysis, you must learn what is "quick..."
- [emo](#): The gangster may be in jail but doesn't mean his GANG will automatically disappear...
- [Rad](#)
[Mainstream Hipster](#): People shouldn't be outraged if ANU lets Allyn to write his piece...

- o [Prabowo Subianto: vote for me, but just the once \(56\)](#)

- [Maria](#): Educated people know to point out a certain part when they disagree and support it with...

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- [Hardjanto](#): RRI bukan di bawah menteri BUMN ya, tp menkoinfo..

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- [Peter Montalbano](#): Good thoughts, as usual, Marc. I do want to call your attention to your misuse...

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