

PERSPECTIVE

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What Awaits Sarawak in the State Election?

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The Gabungan Parti Sarawak will retain control with more than two-thirds majority. Picture: Friends of Gabungan Parti Sarawak – GPS Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Friends-Of-Gabungan-Parti-Sarawak-GPS-444441139473292/>

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Sarawak is heading to state elections on 18 December 2021.
- The incumbent ruling coalition, the Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), should retain control of the state, and probably with more than a two-thirds majority.
- GPS was formerly Sarawak Barisan Nasional (BN), but it departed from the federal Barisan Nasional coalition after the latter's defeat in May 2018. GPS was established on 12 June 2018 in its stead. Sarawak BN (now GPS) has been in power in Sarawak since 1974.
- GPS is Perikatan Nasional (PN)-friendly, pledging support for the Ismail Sabri government but without being in a formal alliance. It holds a sizeable 18 parliamentary seats in the present Ismail Sabri government, which controls 114 seats in the Federal coalition, making it a potential kingmaker and hence having leverage to extract concessions from the federal government.
- The recent passing of the constitutional amendment recognising Sabah and Sarawak as two of the three entities that make up Malaysia in the Malaysia Agreement 1963, and also restoring the right to Sarawak to define individuals who qualify as native will work in favour of GPS as it has been pushing for these rights to be restored.
- Nevertheless, new and largely Sarawak-based parties are expected to score some gains. In particular, Parti Sarawak Bersatu (PSB), a new local party (which has attracted some high-profile political figures from other parties), has been mounting a credible campaign against the GPS.
- PSB is seen as more likely than Pakatan Harapan (PH) to make some inroads for the opposition, owing to the failure of the PH federal coalition to fulfil its electoral promises. There is also the image problem for PH, which is seen as a squabbling coalition with a bad track record over its 22 months in federal power.
- The current Covid 19 situation is likely to reduce voter turnout to between 65% and 70%. However, the new standard operating procedures and constraints on campaigning will probably disadvantage the opposition more than the GPS.

INTRODUCTION

Sarawak, in East Malaysia was due for a state election after the government's five-year term ended on 6 June 2021, with state elections to take place within 60 days from 7 June 2021. This was put on hold because of Covid-19 with the State Constitution temporarily suspended, superseded and taken over by Emergency (Essential Powers) Ordinance 2021 promulgated by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. This came into force from 11 January 2021 to 1 August 2021. On 31 July 2021, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong declared that Sarawak would remain in a local state of emergency until 2 February 2022, following the advice by the Federal Cabinet and also after discussion with the Sarawak government to keep the pandemic in check.¹

Rumours then started in early November that the localised emergency could be ended earlier. This was because the Melaka state election was to take place that month. Despite calls by the opposition for the election to be only held after 2 February 2022, the Agong made the difficult decision on 3 November 2021 to end the emergency, paving the way for a state election to be held before February 2022.² The Sarawak state legislative assembly was dissolved on 3 November,³ and an election had to be held within 60 days.⁴ On 24 November 2021, Election Commission (EC) chairman, Abdul Ghani Salleh, announced that nomination would be held on 6 December, early voting on 14 December⁵ for security personnel and polls to take place on 18 December 2021.⁶

Issues that have dominated past state elections continue to be important, such as the freedom of religion, being equal partners in Malaysia under the Malaysia Agreement 1963, regaining petroleum and gas rights, the protection of native customary rights, and the continuing use of English and Bahasa Malaysia as official languages of the state. The Parti Bersatu Sarawak (PSB), made up of former politicians from SUPP, PKR as well as native leaders who are presently not in any political positions, have now formed a formidable grouping against the GPS, actively campaigning for the above issues. The Parti Bumi Kenyalang (PBK), another new party, has also mustered enough candidates to mount a sizeable opposition numerically.⁷ The Democratic Action Party (DAP), the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), and the Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah) will campaign under their own logos and have decided not to use the PH logo. This may be perceived as a sign of disunity as the PH logo was widely used in past elections. This will also be an election where social media will figure more prominently than past elections.

This perspective examines factors that are likely to affect the outcome of the 12th Sarawak state election (SSE12). The current Covid-19 situation with new standard operating procedures will be an important issue that will impact the electoral process. The rise of the PSB in Sarawak, continuing turmoil in federal politics and the Malaysia Agreement 1963) are among other important issues that will be examined. Lessons from the 14th General Elections held in 2018 (GE 14) such as in-fighting of parties, native customary rights, and politics of development are important but have been discussed in an earlier paper.⁸ GPS is likely to win more than a two-thirds majority, but less than the 72 of 82 seats won in 2016.⁹ Turnout is expected to be 65 per cent or less because of Covid-19; turnout has averaged 68 per cent historically under normal circumstances.¹⁰

SARAWAK: DIFFERENT DEMOGRAPHY, DIFFERENT POLITICS

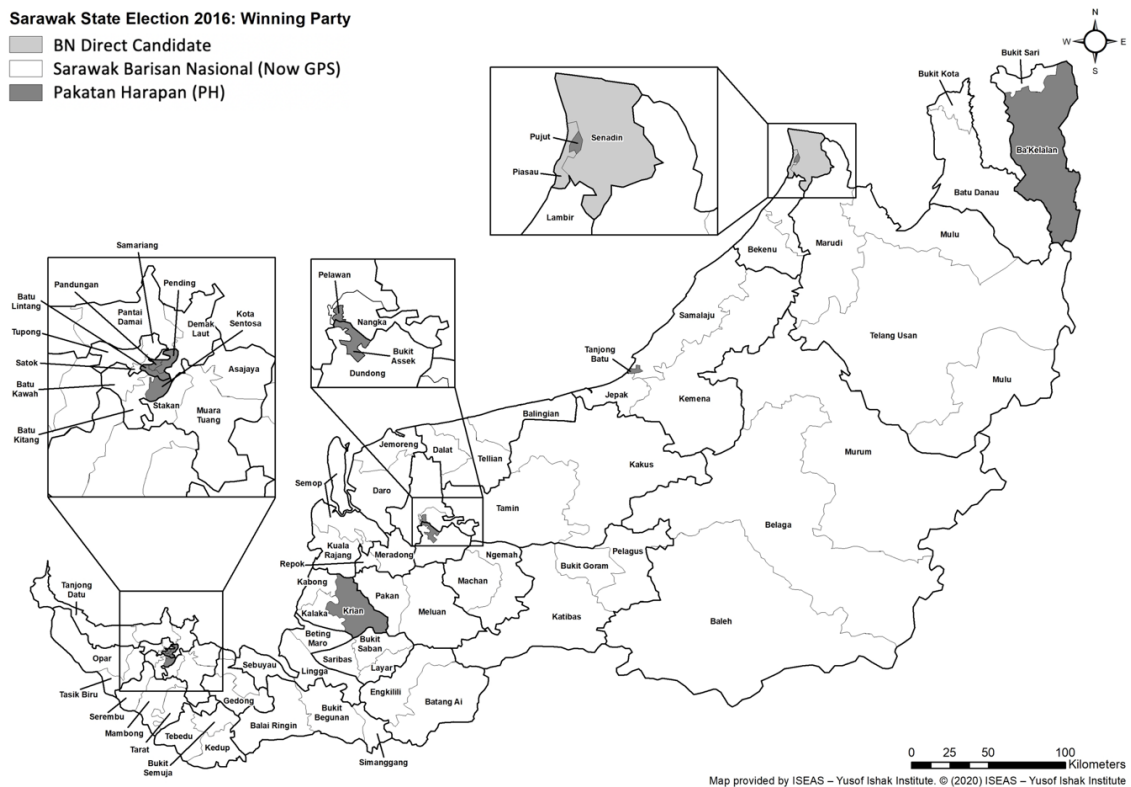
Sarawak is unique. The Malay and Melanau make up about 30 per cent of the total population, the Dayak about 45 per cent and the ethnic Chinese about 24 per cent. Forty-three per cent of Sarawak's population is Christian, and only 30 per cent Muslim. Since 1978, Sarawak is the only state in Malaysia that held its state elections separately from its parliamentary elections. The prerogative lies with each state to decide when to hold state elections.¹¹

GPS is a coalition made up of the Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB), Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), Party Rakyat Sarawak (PRS) and the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP).¹² GPS was formerly Sarawak Barisan Nasional (SBN) and has been in power in Sarawak since 1974. Sarawak BN departed from the federal Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition after the defeat of BN in the parliamentary elections held in May 2018 (GE 14). GPS was established on 12 June 2018, from the former coalition of parties in SBN.

GPS is Perikatan Nasional (PN)-friendly, pledging support for the Ismail Sabri government but is not in a formal alliance with it. It also holds a sizeable 18 parliamentary seats of the 114 seats controlled by the Ismail Sabri government. This places GPS in a strong bargaining position.

Presently the GPS controls most of the Malay/Melanau (Muslim Bumiputera) and Dayak (non-Muslim Bumiputera) seats, while the SUPP controls less than half of the total ethnic Chinese seats, with the remainder being controlled by the DAP (Appendix 1). Despite that, the GPS has allocated 18 seats for the SUPP to contest in, up from the 13 seats in the 2016 election. Some of these seats were contested by BN direct candidates in the 2016 election.¹³ Map 1 shows the various state seats in Sarawak.

Map 1



COVID-19 AND THE NEW STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

Three hundred and forty-nine candidates are contesting in 82 state seats. GPS has put in place 82 candidates, PH 62 candidates, Perikatan Nasional (PN - PAS) 1, PSB 70 candidates, PBK 73 candidates, Sarawak People’s Aspiration Party (Aspirasi) 15 candidates, Parti Bansa Dayak Bersatu Baru 11, and Parti Sedar Rakyat Sarawak (SEDAR), 5 candidates. There are also 30 independent candidates.¹⁴

Straight fights will take place in only four state seats, three-cornered fights in 13 seats, four-cornered fights in 33 seats, five-cornered fights in 24 seats, six-cornered fights in seven seats and an eight-cornered fight in one seat.¹⁵ Such multi-cornered fights will work in favour of GPS, especially for its non-marginal seats where GPS candidates enjoy strong support, and the multitude of opposition candidates will most probably split opposition votes. In the 2016 state election, over 69 seats were supported by 56 per cent of the voters or more, and as such can be considered safe seats for the GPS.¹⁶

The GPS-led state government, aware that its five-year mandate was expiring in June 2021, was eager to contain Covid-19 infections within the state even as numbers were rising elsewhere in Malaysia.¹⁷ This strategy was initially successful. Despite a surge in daily new infections nationwide from late March to late May 2021, infection numbers remained relatively stable. The Malaysian vaccine taskforce also prioritised Sarawakians for Covid-19 vaccinations ostensibly because of the need to build up immunity against COVID-19

before the state election. In late June, Sarawak accounted for 20 to 25 per cent of total vaccinations administered in Malaysia despite comprising less than 10 per cent of the nation's population. GPS, for its part, claimed that the prioritisation was due to the ruling coalition possessing strong bargaining power vis-à-vis the federal government of which GPS is a crucial faction. One key political narrative long propagated by GPS is that it needs a strong mandate from the people, so as to negotiate strongly with whichever coalition that will be controlling the federal government.¹⁸

Despite the relatively high vaccination rates, a surge of Covid-19 infections occurred in Sarawak beginning from late July 2021, increasing almost tenfold at its peak in mid-September. At its height, Sarawak recorded more than three thousand new Covid-19 infections daily, with deaths rising in number accordingly.

Admittedly, daily new infections have been on a consistent downward trend since September, with fewer than 100 daily cases for most of December. However, fresh memories of the Covid-19 surge is likely to dampen voters' turnout. The move to hold an early election, in spite of plausible health risks posted by the Covid-19 pandemic, was also widely perceived as an attempt to avoid the influx of young voters aged 18 to 21 which would be included in the electoral role come January 2022 under the Undi-18 Bill. GPS' decision to hold an early election was therefore not well received, as seen in criticisms from the Sarawak opposition.

The standard operating procedures (SOPs) for urban and rural seats make this a different election from past polls when gatherings of over 1,000 attendees were not unsurprising. Physical campaigning under stringent conditions is only allowed in areas with low 4G coverage (ceramahs), and only 64 out of the 82 seats can have physical campaigning.¹⁹ A maximum of 150 people is allowed for each rally, and the audience is limited to residents from that kampong or longhouse. Any form of entertainment during the campaign is not allowed, and food provided must be in the form of packed food; among many other limitations.²⁰

In addition, GPS also has immense resources and can use boats and helicopters to reach remote areas during the campaign. This is something the opposition lacks. In terms of rural outreach, the strategy of co-opting headmen to influence society and to control villagers has been and will be another tool used to win political support.

Chong Chien Jen, DAP Sarawak Chairman, questioned ceramahs being held indoors, as the virus is more likely to spread in enclosed areas. Booking such venues by the opposition would be difficult as these venues are controlled by village development and security committees (JKKK) controlled by the GPS.²¹ The number of areas with poor 4G coverage also not only limited the opposition from using social media but also points to the poor track record of GPS in developing 4G capabilities in Sarawak. Overall the 4G coverage for the whole of Sarawak averages 52.2 percent in 2021.²²

PARTI SARAWAK BERSATU: RISE AND RISE?

On 9 November 2020, the Parti Sarawak Bersatu (PSB) became the leader of the opposition bench in the Sarawak Legislative Assembly (DUN). The DAP which initially had six state seats, the same as PSB, was reduced to five when Padungan assemblyman Wong King Wei resigned from DAP on 26 July 2020²³ “disillusioned with the direction and the way the party has been managed...”²⁴ Incidentally, the PSB has indicated that it will be contesting in as many state seats as possible, rejecting any cooperation with Pakatan Harapan (PH and its DAP component) parties despite the risk of three-cornered fights benefiting GPS.²⁵

The Parti Sarawak Bersatu (PSB) started life as the United People’s Party, a breakaway from the GPS component party, the Sarawak United People’s Party (SUPP). PSB has in recent months been announcing a slew of upcoming election candidates and promises to field a credible multi-ethnic slate in a majority of the state assembly’s 82 seats.²⁶ It has also come up with a very detailed manifesto for the Sarawak election, promising to protect Sarawak’s rights in national politics, and also looking after the interests of all Sarawakians in an equitable manner.²⁷ However, the PSB is a new party with no proven track record in governing the whole of Sarawak.

PSB is seen as more likely than PH (and its DAP component party) to pose a threat to GPS, owing to the failure of the former PH federal coalition to fulfil its promise to return Sarawak’s rights under the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63). There is also the image problem for PH, which is seen as a squabbling coalition with a bad track record over its 22 months in federal power. PH is also perceived as a federal coalition and a peninsula-based party, unlike PSB, a Sarawak-based party. On 24 October 2021, the new Sarawak National Party (SNAP) announced that it has thrown its support behind PSB.²⁸

Dayak seats may fall to the PSB in the forthcoming state election if native leaders together with Baru Bian in PSB can mount a cohesive campaign to garner Dayak support, especially in rural areas. There are 58 rural state constituencies in Sarawak that PSB could viably contest in,²⁹ with 13 marginal GPS seats in which the PSB could put up a strong show (see Table 2 below). Likewise, there are four marginal PSB seats that could also potentially fall to GPS (see Table 2).

For PSB, despite the generally positive coverage, and its visually and also substance-wise strong manifestos, there is the perception that some of its candidates have “defected” to another party after their victory. See Chee How in the Batu Lintang state assembly constituency faces this problem. Selected Batu Lintang constituents have voiced that he defected from PH to PSB, although he was in reality sacked from Parti Keadilan Rakyat (in PH) before he joined PSB.³⁰ Baru Bian, another PSB candidate, is likewise perceived to have left PKR for PSB.

PSB already has six state seats in Sarawak arising from the movement of members away from other parties, as indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Leading Members of PSB

State Assemblyperson	Ethnicity of State Seat	State Constituency	Previous Party/Coalition
Ranum Mina	Non-Muslim Bumiputra	Opar	From Sarawak BN/GPS
See Chee How	Chinese	Batu Lintang	From PKR
Johnical Rayong Ngipa	Non-Muslim Bumiputra	Engkili	From Sarawak BN/GPS
Tiong Thai King	Mixed: Chinese/Non-Muslim Bumiputra	Dudong	From Sarawak BN/GPS
Wong Soon Koh	Mixed: Chinese/Non-Muslim Bumiputra	Bawang Assan	From Sarawak BN/GPS
Baru Bian	Non-Muslim Bumiputra	Ba'Kelalan	From PKR

Source: Source: Information adapted from Undi.Info, <https://undi.info/>; and “Sarawak State Election”, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_Sarawak_state_election_-_Results. Both accessed on 1 September 2020. Marginal seats have 55% or less of the final votes.

Table 2: Marginal Seats Belonging to GPS and Opposition (55 percent and below)

Coalition	State Seat	Incumbent	Ethnic Composition
GPS	1. Batu Kitang	1. SUPP	1. Chinese
	2. Batu Kawah	2. SUPP	2. Chinese
	3. Serembu	3. BN Direct Candidate	3. Non-Muslim Bumiputra
	4. Mambong	4. BN Direct Candidate	4. Non-Muslim Bumiputra
	5. Simanggang	5. SUPP	5. Non-Muslim Bumiputra
	6. Repok	6. SUPP	6. Chinese
	7. Pakan	7. BN Direct Candidate	7. Non-Muslim Bumiputra
	8. Meluan	8. SPDP	8. Non-Muslim Bumiputra
	9. Ngemah	9. PRS	9. Non-Muslim Bumiputra
	10. Tellian	10. PBB	10. Mixed: Muslim and Non-Muslim Bumiputra
	11. Tamin	11. PRS	11. Non-Muslim Bumiputra
	12. Murum	12. PRS	12. Non-Muslim Bumiputra
	13. Telang Usang	13. PBB	13. Non-Muslim Bumiputra
Opposition	1. Opar	1. PSB	1. Non-Muslim Bumiputera
	2. Dudong	2. PSB	2. Mixed: Chinese and Non-Muslim Bumiputera
	3. Pujut	3. PH – DAP	3. Chinese
	4. Ba'Kelalan	4. PSB	4. Non-Muslim Bumiputera

Source: As per Table 1. For explanation of BN Direct Candidates, see endnote 13.

TURMOIL IN FEDERAL POLITICS

The Ismail Sabri government holds 114 seats against 105 seats held by the opposition,³¹ with GPS contributing a sizeable 18 seats. A weak coalition at the federal level in Peninsular Malaysia has ensured that the Sarawak government continues to receive “goodies” from the Ismail Sabri government. To commemorate the 58th Malaysia Day, Ismail Sabri pledged more than RM 9 billion to Sabah and Sarawak, while he also affirmed his government’s commitment to the Malaysia Agreement 1963.³² RM4.66bil was been set aside for Sabah

and RM4.47bil for Sarawak. In addition, RM 3.61 billion have been allocated to Sabah and RM 4.09 billion to Sarawak over the next five years to develop 5G connectivity.³³

GPS has been well-rewarded in the allocation of cabinet positions and obtained the key Senior Ministerial portfolio of Works in 2020 and also in 2021. Eight GPS representatives were also re-appointed.³⁴ Petronas withdrew its legal challenge against the Sarawak state government over the State Sales Tax on petroleum products in 2020. In September 2020, Petroliaam Nasional Berhad (Petronas) and its subsidiaries handed over a cheque for RM2.96 billion to the Sarawak government as payment of arrears for the State Sales Tax (SST) on petroleum products. Sarawak is the only state in Malaysia exempted from the National Gas Distribution Ordinance.³⁵ Extra funding has also been promised for Sarawak's dilapidated schools.

GPS has therefore pledged support for the federal Perikatan Nasional (PN) but only as an informal political alliance (PN plus GPS). GPS is now not only in a better position to bargain on the Federal stage, but has also managed to disassociate itself from the stance of UMNO and PAS in terms of its religious issues by saying that it is not in a formal coalition with PN. This is especially useful since Sarawak's demographic make-up generally renders the politics of Ketuanan Melayu and Ketuanan Islam controversial and unacceptable.³⁶ Both UMNO and PAS have pushed for Muafakat Nasional and Ketuanan Melayu, which Sarawak politicians and GPS have strongly said that they do not endorse.³⁷

The backdoor entry of two Bersatu members through defections warrants close observation. Ali Biju (previously from Sarawak PKR, now in Bersatu) was appointed Deputy Minister for Energy and Natural Resources, and Willie Mongin (also from PKR, now in Bersatu) as Deputy Minister for Plantation Industries and Commodities in the federal government.³⁸ Both are also active at the state level: Ali Biju is Member of the Sarawak State Legislative Assembly for Krian while Willie Mongin contested the Mambong during the 2016 Sarawak state election, although he did not win the seat. Although Bersatu is not UMNO, it is still part of the federal PN coalition. This cross over has in effect given PN a foothold in Sarawak politics. It was reported on 24 October 2021 that GPS was not in negotiation with Bersatu for seat sharing in the forthcoming state election.³⁹

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS ON THE MALAYSIA AGREEMENT 1963

Sarawakians have felt that their rights as enshrined in the MA 63 have been eroding over time.⁴⁰ One of the main contentions that will arise in the forthcoming elections is the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63) where the claim for equal status by Sabah and Sarawak as signatories of the agreement have been whittled down in 1976 to being one of 13 states in Malaysia.⁴¹ In early October, Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaffar, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Parliamanet), stated that a bill to restore the rights of the parties in line with the Malaysia Agreement 1963 would be tabled by the end of October 2021.⁴² On 14 December 2021, this bill was passed,⁴³ now recognising Sabah and Sarawak as two of the three entities that make up Malaysia, and also restoring the right to Sarawak to define individuals that qualify as natives.⁴⁴ In addition, Malaysia Day and MA63 will be formally mentioned and will form part of the Federal Constitution. Whether coincidental or

orchestrated, the restoration of these rights will strongly work in favour of GPS in the few days leading up to the election as it has been pushing for such rights for the state.

Religious Freedom

In terms of religious freedom, the Sarawak government has been actively supporting other religions through its Unit for Other Religions (UNIFOR), established on 27 April 2017.⁴⁵ Sarawak is the only state in Malaysia to have a unit dedicated to helping the different houses of worship other than Islam.⁴⁶ Through UNIFOR, churches and missionary schools have received funding for their projects.⁴⁷ The Sarawak government has worked hard to maintain religious freedom in the state under the Malaysia Agreement 1963. Sarawakians are free to use the term Allah and communities have been co-existing peacefully with one another. In Sarawak, a household may consist of members of various religions living together in harmony.

CONCLUSION

This paper has identified factors that can influence the outcome of the approaching Sarawak state election. GPS should win the coming state election. This will be due to the benefits of incumbency, including the fact that the new standard operating procedures for campaigning will work in its favour. Also, the use of social media in urban areas will not advantage the opposition, as such areas are already in their hands.

Turmoil in the federal government has ensured that it will deliver “goodies” to Sarawak. This strengthens the argument that Sarawakians must continue to vote and support GPS if they wish to continue receiving such perks from Peninsular Malaysia. GPS has also been rewarded in the allocation of cabinet positions, which ensures that Sarawakian concerns will be looked after at the Federal level.

However, carrying out the election in the midst of Covid-19 may work against GPS. Despite the “threat” posed by PSB and the possibility of it wresting marginal seats away from GPS, there is likelihood that the GPS may also be able to take marginal seats from the PSB.

Nonetheless, GPS is very likely to win the forthcoming election, although the extent of its victory will also be undermined by some of the factors examined in this paper.

Appendix 1: State Constituencies Groups by Ethnicity

Ethnic Composition	State Constituencies
Malay/Melanau	26 seats GPS: 26 Seats Tanjong Datu, Pantai Damai, Demak Laut, Tupong, Samariang, Satok, Asajaya, Muara Tuang, Sadong Jaya, Simunjan, Gedong, Sebuyau, Lingga, Beting Maro, Saribas, Kalaka, Kabong, Kuala Rajang, Semop, Daro, Jemoreng, Dalat, Balingan, Jepak, Bukit Kota, Bukit Sari
Non-Muslim Bumiputra	35 seats GPS: 33, PH: 2 Opar, Tasik Biru, Serembu, Mambong, Tarat, Tebedu, Kedup, Bukit Semuja, Balai Ringin, Bukit Begunan, Simanggang, Engkili, Batang Ai, Layar, Bukit Saban, Krian, Pakan, Meluan, Ngemah, Machan, Tamin, Kakus, Pelagus, Katibas, Bukit Goram, Baleh, Belaga, Murum, Kemena, Samalaju, Marudi, Telang Usan, Muku, Batu Danau, Bakelalan
Chinese	16 seats GPS: 7 PH: 9 Padungan, Pending, Batu Lintang, Kota Sentosa, Batu Kitang, Batu Kawah, Repok, Meradong, Bukit Assek, Dudong, Bawang Assan, Pelawan, Tanjong Batu, Piasau, Pujut, Senadin.
Mixed	5 seats GPS: 5 Stakan, Nangka, Tellian, Bekenu, Lambir

Notes: A majority seat consists of at least 50 per cent of one ethnicity. Mixed means that each ethnicity makes up 49 per cent or less of the population.

Source: Information adapted from Undi.Info, <https://undi.info/>; and “Sarawak State Election”, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_Sarawak_state_election – Results. Both accessed on 1 September 2020.

Appendix 2: Party and Number of Candidates

Party	Number of Candidate(s)
Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) – Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB)	47
Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) – Sarawak United People’s Party (SUPP)	18
Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) – Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS)	11
Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) – Progressive Democratic Party	6
Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) – Total	82
Pakatan Harapan (PH) – Democratic Action Party (DAP)	26
Pakatan Harapan (PH) – Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR)	28
Pakatan Harapan (PH) – Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah)	8
Pakatan Harapan (PH) – Total	62
Perikatan Nasional (PN) – Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS)	1
Perikatan Nasional (PN) – Total	1
Parti Sarawak Bersatu (PSB) – Total	70
Parti Bumi Kenyalang (PBK) – Total	73
Sarawak People’s Aspiration Party (Aspirasi) - Total	15
Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak Baru (PBDSB) - Total	11
Independent – Total	30
Parti Sedar Rakyat Sarawak (SEDAR) - Total	5
Total Number of Candidates	349

Source: Adapted from The Borneo Post, <https://12thsarawakelection.theborneopost.com/>. Accessed 11 December 2021

¹ “Emergency in Sarawak necessary to postpone state election: PMO”, 31 July 2021, *The New Straits Times*, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/07/713488/emergency-sarawak-necessary-postpone-state-election-pmo>. Accessed 31 July 2021.

² “King consents to lift Emergency in Sarawak”, *The Star*, 3 November 2021, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/11/03/emergency-in-sarawak-lifted>. Accessed 3 November 2021.

³ The decision was made after a request by the Governor of Sarawak (and former Chief Minister of Sarawak), Abdul Taib Mahmud, on 2 November, and also in consultation with the Malaysian Prime Minister, Ismail Sabri on 3 November 2021.

⁴ “Sarawak state assembly automatically dissolved with Emergency lifted, say experts”, *The Star*, 3 November 2021, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/11/03/sarawak-state-assembly-automatically-dissolved-with-emergency-lifted-say-experts>. Accessed 3 November 2021.

⁵ The turnout for early voting was at 89 percent. These were made up of the police, armed forces, health ministry officials, national security council authorities, local council authorities, media and all the parties involved in the early voting process. See Hana Naz Harun, “89 pct early voter turnout for 12th Sarawak election”, *The New Straits Times*, 14 December 2021, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/politics/2021/12/754324/89-pct-early-voter-turnout-12th-sarawak-election>. Accessed 15 December 2021.

⁶ This will include members of the security forces, comprising the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM), Malaysian Armed Forces (ATM) and General Operations Force (PGA) as well as their spouses.

⁷ The PBK, sharing a very similar logo to the GPS may create confusion for voters who are not able to read or those who are careless. Besides possible confusion between the GPS and PBK logo, the GPS is for the first time using the symbol of a hornbill, unlike the previous blue BN dacing (scales) symbol of Barisan Nasional used in previous parliamentary and state elections. See “Don’t mark wrong ‘bird’ on ballot paper, choose longest name, says Piasau’s Ting” *The Borneo Post*, 9 December 2021, <https://www.theborneopost.com/2021/12/09/dont-mark-wrong-bird-on-ballot-paper-choose-longest-name-says-piasaus-ting/>. Accessed 9 December 2021. See also James Chin, “Sarawak polls: Is it GPS’ race to lose?”, *Between the Lines*, no date, Accessed 12 December 2021.

⁸ These issues were discussed in some detail in Lee Poh Onn, “What Matters for the Sarawak State Election”, ISEAS Perspective 2020/109, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ISEAS_Perspective_2020_109.pdf, 2 October 2020.

⁹ Currently GPS holds on to 68 seats, with some assemblypersons having joined the PSB.

¹⁰ Ram Anand, “Sarawak polls feature many firsts, but no shocks anticipated”, *The Straits Times*, 5 December 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/sarawak-polls-features-many-firsts-but-no-shocks-anticipated>. Accessed 6 December 2021, and Goh Pei Pei, “Sarawak election during the pandemic advantageous to GPS, say analysts”, *The New Straits Times*, 19 June 2021, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/06/700204/sarawak-election-during-pandemic-advantageous-gps-say-analysts>. Accessed 5 December 2021.

¹¹ In 1978, domestic factional problems in his coalition made then-Chief Minister Abdul Rahman Ya’kub push the state election to a year later. Over time, Sarawak’s unique practice of holding state elections in a different time frame from national polls has held fast.

¹² The PBB more or less represents the Malay/Melanau Muslim Bumiputera community, SUPP the Chinese, and PDP and PRS the non-Muslim Bumiputera community.

¹³ BN direct candidates were required to return to their parties or join any other Sarawak Barisan Nasional component party upon winning a seat in the 2016 Sarawak state election.

¹⁴ Please see *The Borneo Post*, <https://12thsarawakelection.theborneopost.com/>. Accessed 11 December 2021.

¹⁵ Tarrance Tan, “Sarawak Polls: 349 candidates vying for 82 state seats after nomination ends”, *The Star*, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/12/06/sarawak-polls-349-candidates-vying-for-82-state-seats-after-nomination-ends>. Accessed 6 December 2021.

¹⁶ See Table 2 of this perspective.

¹⁷ A successful containment of infections would have been “proof” of the GPS’ excellent governance capacity and a highly valuable track record before Sarawakians head for the polls.

¹⁸ Apart from Labuan, by 20th July 2021, Sarawak had the highest share of total population with full vaccination (34 per cent) among all states, at more than double the national average (15 per cent). See “Covid-19: Over 15 million doses of vaccines given as of Tuesday (July 20)”, *The Star*, 21 July 2021, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/07/21/covid-19-over-15-million-doses-of-vaccines-given-as-of-tuesday-july-20>. Accessed 21 July 2021.

¹⁹ For a complete list of state seats where limited physical campaigning is allowed, please refer to: “Prosedur Operasi Standard (SOP) Pencegahan Covid-19 bagi Pelaksanaan Pilihan Raya Umum (PRU) Dewan Undangan Negeri (DUN) Sarawak Ke-12” *The Borneo Post*, 5 December 2021, <https://www.theborneopost.com/newsimages/2021/12/SOP-PENCEGAHAN-COVID-19-PRU-DUN-SARAWAK-KE-12-SARAWAK-05122021-Final.pdf>. Accessed 5 December 2021.

²⁰ Interstate travel for campaigning purposes will also not be allowed for candidates, and they are only allowed to campaign in their specific constituencies. Only the top five leaders of a party are allowed to interstate. All organisers, administrators, candidates and speakers must take an antigen rapid test (ART) before conducting a rally. All ceramahs can only be carried out with a police permit, cannot exceed two hours, must end by 10 pm and cannot be conducted in open air or public spaces. See “Ceramah allowed in 64 state seats with poor 4G coverage”, *The Star*, 6 December 2021, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/12/06/ceramah-allowed-in-64-state-seats-with-poor-4g-coverage>. Accessed 6 December 2021.

²¹ “Chong questions election SOP over ceramah done indoors”, *The Borneo Post*, 8 December 2021, <https://www.theborneopost.com/2021/12/08/chong-questions-election-sop-over-ceramah-done-indoors/>. Accessed 8 December 2021.

²² Sixty-four out of the 82 state seats do not have good internet coverage. Areas like Kuching (87.6% coverage), Samarahan (71.9%), Serian (72.7%) were the exceptions but other divisions like Bintulu (22.2%), Kapit (40.3%), Miri (43.2%), Siri Aman (49.5%), Sarikei (44.3%) had poor coverage. See Part 1 - Digitalizing Sarawak with Better Connectivity Through SALURAN Initiative. 15 August 2021, Sarawak Multimedia Authority, https://www.sma.gov.my/upload/file_folder/Publication//SALURAN%20Advertorial-ENG.pdf. Accessed 25 November 2021.

²³ “Asfia: PSB to lead opposition bench in DUN, Soon Koh to be opposition leader” *The Borneo Post*, 8 November 2020, <https://www.theborneopost.com/2020/11/08/asfia-psb-to-lead-opposition-bench-in-dun-soon-koh-to-be-opposition-leader/>. Accessed 10 November 2020.

²⁴ “Padungan rep Wong King Wei announces resignation from DAP”, *The Borneo Post Online*, 27 July 2020, < <https://www.theborneopost.com/2020/07/27/padungan-rep-wong-king-wei-announces-resignation-from-dap/>>, accessed 16 September 2020. Wong also mentioned that DAP’s credibility was at stake: “[D]uring the 22-month rule under Pakatan Harapan (PH), what we said in front of the people and what we promised the people seemed to have gone down the drain. If we were to bring up our ideas and dreams as well as promises, the credibility of DAP would be in question.”

²⁵ “As GPS rides high in Sarawak, no sign of opposition joining forces”, op. cit..

²⁶ John Teo, “PSB is party to watch in Sarawak”, *The New Straits Times*, 13 April 2020, <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2020/04/583908/psb-party-watch-sarawak>. Accessed 13 September 2021.

²⁷ “See: PSB’s election manifesto warmly welcomed by the people”, *The Borneo Post*, 10 December 2021, <https://www.theborneopost.com/2021/12/10/see-psbs-election-manifesto-warmly-welcomed-by-the-people/>. Accessed 10 December 2021.

²⁸ This was made by its protem president Edmund Stanley Jugol though the party has not been approved by the Registrar of Societies as yet. If they are not recognised in time, SNAP Baru has stated that it will fully back PSB candidates. See “SNAP Baru pledges support to PSB – protem president”, *Borneo Post Online*, 24 October 2021, <https://www.theborneopost.com/2021/10/24/snap-baru-pledges-support-to-psb-protem-president/>. Accessed 24 October 2021.

²⁹ Derived from Appendix 1 of Lee Poh Onn, “What Matters for the Sarawak State Election”, op. cit., pp. 12-18.

³⁰ Annabelle Lee, “Uphill battle for Batu Lintang incumbent to shed ‘frog’ label”, *MalaysiaKini*, 9 December 2021, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/602307>. Accessed 12 December 2021.

³¹ “Ismail Sabri Yaakob sworn in as Malaysia’s new prime minister”, *The Straits Times*, 21 August 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/ismail-sabri-to-be-sworn-in-as-malaysias-new-pm>. Accessed 21 August 2021.

³² “RM9bil for Sabah and Sarawak”, *The Star*, 17 September 2021, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/09/17/rm9bil-for-sabah-and-sarawak>. Accessed 17 September 2021.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Fadillah was re-appointed as the Senior Minister (Works) along with Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Alexander Nanta Linggi; Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri, and former Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives Minister Datuk Seri Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar, who has been appointed as the Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department (Law). Deputy ministers Datuk Hanifah Hajar Taib (Sabah and Sarawak Affairs) and Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang (Health) were also re-appointed, while Datuk Hasbi Habibollah and Datuk Henry Sum Agong swapped portfolios to be appointed Rural Development and Transport deputy ministers respectively. See “Fadillah: Appointment of eight GPS reps in new Cabinet is recognition for Sarawak, state coalition”, *The Star*, 27 August 2021, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/08/27/fadillah-appointment-of-eight-gps-reps-in-new-cabinet-is-recognition-for-sarawak-state-coalition>. Accessed 4 September 2021.

³⁵ “As GPS rides high in Sarawak, no sign of opposition joining forces”, *Malaysia Now*, 24 February 2021, <https://www.malaysianow.com/news/2021/02/24/as-gps-rides-high-in-sarawak-no-sign-of-opposition-joining-forces/>. Accessed 25 February 2021.

³⁶ James Chin, “Sabah and Sarawak in the 14th General Election 2018 (GE 14): Local Factors and State Nationalism”, *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 37, no. 3 (2018), p. 175.

³⁷ “‘Extreme’ Umno not welcome in Sarawak, says Abang Johari”, *Borneo Post*, 3 September 2020, <https://www.theborneopost.com/2020/09/03/extreme-umno-not-welcome-in-sarawak-says-abang-johari/>. Accessed 5 November 2021.

³⁸ “Are Ali and Willie winning the battle but losing the war?”, *Dayak Daily*, 11 March 2020, <https://dayakdaily.com/are-ali-and-willie-winning-the-battle-but-losing-the-war/>. Accessed 4 September 2021.

³⁹ Alexander Nanta Linggi stated that “no such negotiations have ever taken place and that no such negotiation will ever take place between the two parties”. See “No negotiations between GPS and Bersatu on seat sharing for Sarawak elections, says Nanta”, *The Star Online*, 24 October 2021, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/10/24/no-negotiations-between-gps-and-bersatu-on-seat-sharing-for-sarawak-election-says-nanta>. Accessed 24 October 2021.

⁴⁰ These were some of the rights under the Malaysia Agreement 1963: Islam’s status as a national religion was not applicable to Sabah and Sarawak, immigration vested in the hands of the state governments, Borneanisation of the civil service was also to proceed as quickly as possible, no amendments to safeguards could be made without the agreement of the Sabah and Sarawak governments, the indigenous peoples of both Sabah and Sarawak would enjoy the same position given to the Malay community in Peninsular Malaysia, and Sabah and Sarawak was to be given a

high degree of autonomy over financial affairs, education, development expenditure and tariff. See James Chin. 2019. "The 1963 Malaysia Agreement (MA63): Sabah and Sarawak and the Politics of Historical Grievances". In *Minorities Matter: Malaysian Politics and People Volume III*, edited by Sophie Lemi re, Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, pp. 79-80.

⁴¹ Johan Arriffin Samad. 2021. "The 1963 Malaysia Agreement: Pakatan's Failed restoration and Perikatan's Fledgling Initiatives. In *Sabah from the Ground: The 2020 Elections & The Politics of Survival*, edited by Bridget Welsh, Vilashini Somiah and Benjamin Y.H. Loh. Singapore and Malaysia: ISEAS Publishing and the Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (SIRD), p. 47.

⁴² "Constitutional amendment Bill to restore MA63 rights to be tabled by end of October", *The Star*, 6 October 2021, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/10/06/constitutional-amendment-bill-to-restore-ma63-rights-to-be-tabled-by-end-of-october>. Accessed 6 October 2021.

⁴³ 199 lawmakers supporting the bill and 21 MPs not present See "Dewan Rakyat approves amendments to Constitution related to MA63 by more than two-thirds majority", *The Star*, 14 December 2021, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/12/14/dewan-rakyat-approves-amendments-to-constitution-related-to-ma63-by-more-than-two-thirds-majority>. Accessed 14 December 2021.

⁴⁴ The states of the Federation now comprises the states of Malaya namely Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak, Perlis, Penang, Selangor and Terengganu; and the Borneo states, Sabah and Sarawak. See Ram Anand, "Malaysia amends Constitution to elevate status of Sabah and Sarawak", *The Straits Times*, 14 December 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-amends-constitution-to-elevate-status-of-sabah-and-sarawak>. Accessed 14 December 2021.

⁴⁵ The establishment of UNIFOR was the brainchild of former Sarawak Chief Minister Adenan Satem. Through UNIFOR, an inclusive approach is adopted for all religions. UNIFOR was established to safeguard religious harmony and look after for the needs of other religions besides Islam in multiracial Sarawak. UNIFOR runs as a unit in the Chief Minister's Department under the portfolio of Sarawak's Deputy Chief Minister Douglas Uggah Embas.

⁴⁶ "Uggah: Proposed Unifor complex another reflection of CM's inclusive policy", *The Borneo Post Online*, 12 September 2020, <<https://www.theborneopost.com/2020/08/05/uggah-proposed-unifor-complex-another-reflection-of-cms-inclusive-policy/>>, accessed 12 September 2020.

⁴⁷ For example, fourteen houses of worship and religious organisations in the Layar state constituency recently received grants. See "Layar religious organisations receive grants", *The Borneo Post Online*, 12 September 2020, <<https://www.theborneopost.com/2020/09/12/layar-religious-organisations-receive-grants/>>, accessed 12 September 2020. The St Basil's Parish in Kuching received a total of RM 1.4 million for its expansion plans; the Sibu Nan Hai Buddhist Society received assistance worth RM700,000; St Edward's Church of Kampung Skio in Serembu received RM100,000; the Liew Shan Pang Temple received RM50,000, and; the Tanjung Durian Buddhist Village received RM200,000 in 2019 to renovate existing premises. About RM 50 million have been disbursed to UNIFOR each year in 2020 and 2021 to look after the needs of various non-Muslim religious organisations. See "Three bodies in Serembu receive RM350,000 Unifor fund", *The Borneo Post Online*, 1 February 2020, <<https://www.theborneopost.com/2020/02/01/three-bodies-in-serembu-receive-rm350000-unifor-fund/>>, accessed 12 September 2020. See also "123 mission schools receive initial grants of RM15 million from UNIFOR", TVSTV, <https://tvstv.my/2021/10/30/123-mission-schools-receive-initial-grants-of-rm15-million-from-unifor/>. Accessed 30 October 2021.

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