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From the Fringes of Defeat: How UMNO President Zahid Hamidi Transformed His Vulnerability into Invincibility

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Facebook Page of Zahid Hamidi at <https://www.facebook.com/zahidhamidi.fanpage>. Accessed 20 July 2023.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The UMNO presidency has always been considered a very powerful position. As the Grand Old Party that held power continuously for 61 years, UMNO was regarded as one of the most successful parties in the world, with mass membership, territorial coverage, and a grassroots machinery that was second to none. Its President was always the Prime Minister, and had unrivalled access to state resources, making the presidency the most watched and coveted position in Malaysia.
- Despite never occupying the Prime Minister position like his predecessors, and being forced to take unprecedented garden leave due to internal pressure, Zahid nevertheless successfully bolstered the power of the UMNO presidency further.
- Zahid Hamidi used his presidency to consolidate power within the party by:
 - (1) Changing the constitution to postpone party elections, effectively lengthening the maximum term from 3 years to 5 years permanently;
 - (2) Passing an unprecedented no-contest motion for the top two positions of President and Deputy President;
 - (3) Unceremoniously sacking and suspending high-profile dissenters in the party.
- These three structural decisions undertaken by Zahid Hamidi virtually shut off opportunities for dissent and are likely to disincentivise reforms, rejuvenation and change within UMNO, which may exacerbate its decline in electoral popularity.
- These changes, however, are unlikely to be reversed as they give the UMNO president extensive powers, especially in selecting general and state election candidates, securing a longer tenure, and suppressing internal opposition.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout its unbroken 61-year rule, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) was regarded as one of the most successful political parties in the world.¹ The party's presidency was the most watched position and its sweeping power was the 'most striking feature of UMNO's organisational structure'.² Much of this was owed to the fact that the presidency and prime ministership were seen as one, where the former was held together 'through a system of patronage and disguised coercion'.³

The first Prime Minister cum UMNO President, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, deployed a highly personalised style of leadership; he held meetings of the Supreme Council ("SC", see Annex A for the full structure today) at his residence, selecting election candidates, state premiers and leaders without resistance. His successor, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, reorganised the party structure to be even more intimately tied to the government⁴ by creating full-time ministry-like bureaus in UMNO and implementing policies following 'the wishes and desires of UMNO'.⁵ The party's longest-serving President, Mahathir Mohamad, turned the centralisation process up a notch by maximally using the party-state apparatus for packing (placing loyalists in top party and government posts), rigging (manipulating procedures to curb the opposition), and circumventing (channelling government resources to loyalists), thus ensuring UMNO's dominance against all odds.⁶

On 30 June 2018, Zahid Hamidi became the first UMNO President to run the party without holding the highest executive office of Prime Minister, within what used to be the 'matrix of autocracy'.⁷ Two days earlier, the anti-corruption agency had frozen UMNO headquarters' bank accounts, regarded as a critical lifeline for the oldest and largest party,⁸ after it had just suffered its worst electoral defeat in the 14th general election that year.⁹ The party would go on to experience by-election defeats, high-profile defections,¹⁰ external pressures for dissolution, and criminal charges being filed against its top leaders.¹¹

Half a decade later, despite his party holding only 26 seats in Parliament—its lowest in history—Zahid Hamidi was able to reverse its party's fortunes by acquiring executive power through securing the second-highest position, that of Deputy Prime Minister, for himself, besides securing five other ministerial and six deputy ministerial positions for the party. Within UMNO, Zahid Hamidi's control as President is now the strongest it has ever been; he has entrenched his loyalists widely and deeply, from the highest leadership council to the lowest party branches.

Regarded as a shrewd political operator,¹² Zahid Hamidi's ability to 'snatch victory from the fringes of defeat' is remarkable.¹³ He used his time as the first non-Prime Minister UMNO President to centralise power further in the hands of the presidency. This paper will analyse the three decisions he made as UMNO President that were most consequential to the party structure:

- a. Constitutional change to postpone party elections, effectively lengthening the maximum term from 3 years to 5 years permanently;
- b. Passing a motion of no-contest for the top 2 posts;

c. High-profile sacking and suspensions of rebel party members.

In each section, this paper will consider the background and implications of the given ‘reform’ before concluding with an overall outlook for UMNO.

Before Zahid Hamidi came to power, UMNO was already a highly centralised organisation. As the party’s supreme leader (“*pemimpin utama*”), the President carries the prerogatives of selection. An UMNO President can appoint dozens of leaders at the highest decision-making council besides holding the final say on disciplinary matters and choosing candidates for the party to contest in general and state elections.¹⁴ Through the years, such incumbency advantages have also grown. In 1971, the Liaison Committee replaced the State Liaison Committee (and its earlier form, State Executive Committee)¹⁵ to limit state-level power in favour of the President and his council.¹⁶ Mahathir Mohamad (1981-2003) lengthened the presidency by an optional 18 months, and created barriers to challenges to the presidency by modifying rules and procedures.¹⁷ This resulted in the presidency staying unchallenged for decades.

Notwithstanding, Zahid Hamidi’s presidency started at a point of weakness. He was forced to compete and debate against two candidates—the first time since 1988. Although he won by a reasonable margin,¹⁸ substantial opposition within UMNO forced him to take an unprecedented garden leave, amidst an unceasing call for him to step down.¹⁹ To add to his travails, Zahid Hamidi was charged with 87 criminal counts relating to corruption²⁰—the highest in the country—adding urgency for him to exercise any leverage he could to avoid final defeat.

Studying Zahid’s comeback from vulnerability to invincibility, therefore, is also a study of the awesome tools at the UMNO President’s disposal. The structural changes that Zahid undertook were merely the final steps of consolidation started long ago by his predecessors.

A. Postponing party elections to 6 months after general elections

Ironically, the most consequential structural decision for UMNO was also the easiest to pass. At the extraordinary general meeting held on 15 May 2022, attended by 2,586 delegates,²¹ the party passed a constitutional amendment that allowed party elections to be postponed to six months after general elections.

Before the amendment, party elections had to be held every 3 years, with an option of an 18-month delay. Any postponement beyond this would attract investigations from the Registrar of Societies (RoS),²² that carry the prerogative of suspension and deregistration.²³

The main reason for postponement was tactical: for the party to focus its strength on the next general election without a party election for fear that the latter would threaten party unity.²⁴ There was also a procedural reason, and this regarded UMNO’s future requests for postponement and the fear that these risked being rejected, now that the Home Ministry was no longer controlled by the party.

At that time, UMNO SC members were keen to retain their positions, especially as the window for the next general elections being held was closing. Zahid Hamidi’s faction’s success in painting his opponents as ‘traitors’, or a fifth column, also disincenitised many from objecting to the postponement or challenging for the highest leadership positions.²⁵

While a constitutional amendment requires two-thirds approval by eligible attendees of the Special General Assembly,²⁶ achieving that was not really difficult in practice. In fact, constitutional amendments are occasionally passed in large batches, mixed with substantive and procedural changes, typically reflecting the desires of the President.²⁷

The implications of this amendment were severely underestimated. Running out the clock under the amended provision now enables elected officers to stay for a maximum of 66 months—nearly doubling the default term limit of 36 months—as seen in Table 1. The maximum term period under the pre-amended provision was 54 months, which was still a whole year less than the maximum term period post-amendment.

*Table 1: Before-and-after comparison of the maximum term period for UMNO office bearers after the passing of the 2021 constitutional amendment*²⁸

	Default term limit	Optional period of extension	Maximum term period
Pre-2022 amendment	36 months ²⁹	18 months	54 months
Post-2022 amendment	60 months	6 months	66 months

Significant term period amendments had only happened twice in UMNO’s history. In 1971, UMNO under the presidency of Tun Razak amended the constitution to extend the term period for Supreme Council positions from one year to three years.³⁰ Mahathir Mohamad, in December 1998, passed an amendment to allow an 18-month extension, a provision that was retained at an extraordinary general assembly in 2000. Be that as it may, Zahid Hamidi’s latest update to the term period stands as one of the most consequential in UMNO history.

The most important effect is that it entrenches incumbency advantage by guaranteeing general and state election candidate selection powers for the President. With the amendment, an UMNO President does not need to prove himself in a party election between general elections like before. In other words, if Zahid Hamidi is the President for the 2023-2028 term, he shall also be guaranteed the candidate selection rights, precluding any possibility for an alternative person to take his place in a party election and subsume that right. This situation now significantly curtails dissent against the President and his team, jeopardising any dissident’s candidacy in the upcoming election.

Chances for a large-scale dissent movement similar to that led by Khairy Jamaluddin in 2021 calling for early party elections to determine the leadership going into the next general election

are miniscule now. Dropping local warlords not aligned with the President, like Annuar Musa, Shahidan Kassim, Tajuddin Rahman, and Zahidi Abidin, prior to the 2022 general elections proved that dissent within UMNO can be politically costly.³¹ The amendment significantly increases the political cost for dissent.³² The ‘feelers and soundings’ of grassroots that guided early UMNO Presidents will matter less now.³³

Even if party dissent happens *after* the general elections, it is highly unlikely to succeed. The short six-month window between the general election (“GE”) and the party election is insufficient to mobilise dissenters to overthrow the leadership, save for a severe violation on the President’s part. A President who fills the candidacy list with his loyalists in a general election will likely return with more capital if they become part of government or the legislative body, making a post-GE overthrow harder. The pre-GE candidate selection process can be used as an anticipatory tool to stamp out potential future threats in the party long before the party election is held.

To a smaller degree, the amendment also disincentivises reform and performance by elected party officers who enjoy the security of tenure. In a virtually guaranteed 5-year term, elected members are likely to take it easy and only pick up on their work when party election approaches.³⁴ Rejuvenation, reforms and course correction are less likely now since the party has severed midterm party elections which would have continued to serve as a vital feedback loop.³⁵

Although the 60-month term remains optional and the previous default 36-month term remains on paper, the option will likely be exercised. The provision can always be interpreted in line with the President’s desire for maximum time in power.³⁶ Moreover, ever since the first 18-month delay was allowed under Mahathir, all UMNO Presidents have used it, even reforming Presidents like Abdullah Badawi and Najib Abdul Razak.³⁷

On a balance of probabilities, it can be argued that the effective term period for UMNO office bearers have now been extended to 66 months; it is this that will deter performance and reform efforts.

B. No-contest motion for top 2 posts in UMNO

Despite Zahid Hamidi’s apparent willingness to open up the top two posts—President and Deputy President—for contest before 2023,³⁸ a delegate motion of no-contest for these posts was passed on 14 January 2023. This was the first time a no-contest was passed through a delegate motion at the General Assembly (or “PAU”). Before that, no-contests were secured as an SC advice or resolution, and/or through structural engineering, such as using the innovative bonus and quota system.³⁹ While the top two posts were rarely contested in the past—the last two presidential contests were 31 years apart, in 1987 and 2018—they were still a technical possibility. This delegate motion shuts that out, creating a ‘disguised autocracy’ by limiting the voters’ freedom of choice.⁴⁰

At that time, Zahid Hamidi did not follow the practice of bringing the no-contest motion to the SC and announcing an advice or resolution after; this was because there was no guarantee he would succeed in barring contests. If he failed, there was no guarantee that he would win the

contests since opposition was building up following UMNO's worst-ever electoral performance two months earlier. Resorting to an unprecedented method of deploying a delegate-led no-contest motion,⁴¹ while 'sneaky',⁴² was the surest way of closing off contests.

Generally, no-contest at the top gives a 'false sense of security and popularity' to the leaders.⁴³ Leaving open a technical possibility of contests is important in a Malay party because it could be used as a signal to the leaders to step down from their positions if they had overstayed their usefulness.⁴⁴

Former prime minister and UMNO Vice President Ismail Sabri argued that the no-contest motion was invalid because it had violated Article 9.3 of the UMNO Constitution (UC) which states that the top leadership positions 'shall' be elected every three years.⁴⁵ In other words, even if the motion was tabled as an SC motion at PAU after discussions and debates, it would not be valid since the UC demands that contests must be a technical possibility. Past court cases relating to the interpretation of 'shall' and 'may' showed that the overall intention and consequences of the interpretation matters more than the exact wording.⁴⁶ Since UMNO is set up as a party with a democratic process of elections, it could only be interpreted that an election 'shall' be had for the highest posts.

In fact, a leaked official letter showed that the RoS found the no-contest motion in violation of Article 9.3 which necessitates corrective measures.⁴⁷ Subsequently, the Home Minister on 7 March 2023 exempted UMNO from the effects of Section 13 of the Societies Act 1966 which governs the cancellation and suspension of societies.⁴⁸ Curiously, this decision referenced Section 70 of the same Act, which stipulates the Minister's discretion to exempt compliance with the same Act. These unusual interventions underscore the case that UMNO's no-contest motion amounted to a legal infraction.⁴⁹

It is likely that the Home Ministry's exemption is a one-off matter, and is unlikely to be made a practice in future UMNO party elections. However, the upshot remains the same, that is UMNO as a party has reverted back to its norm of not opening up the top two positions for contests. A delegate motion was a last resort to limit brewing dissent. Now with a loyalist-dominated SC, future no-contest advice or resolutions will likely pass, and the backing of the candidate selection powers from the party election postponement should secure the no-contest by default.

As no-contests persist as a norm, the status quo will likely remain. While contesting lower positions is still possible, the top two no-contest practice creates a chilling effect for members to fall in line.⁵⁰

C. High-profile sacking and suspensions of party members

Almost two weeks after the no-contest motion was passed, UMNO announced that a few high-profile party leaders, including Khairy Jamaluddin, Hishammuddin Hussein and Shahril Hamdan, were being sacked and suspended respectively from the party, shown in Table 2.⁵¹

Table 2: List of high-profile sackings and suspensions on 27 January 2023.

No.	Member Name	Last held party leadership position	Disciplinary outcome
1	Khairy Jamaluddin	UMNO Youth Chief	Sacked
2	Noh Omar	Supreme Council member	Sacked ⁵²
3	Hishammuddin Hussein	Vice President	Suspended for 6 years
4	Shahril Sufian Hamdan	UMNO Information Chief and Deputy Youth Chief	Suspended for 6 years
5	Maulizan Bujang	Johor State Executive Committee member and Tebrau Division Chief	Suspended for 6 years
6	Mohd Salim Mohd Shariff	Jempol Division Chief	Suspended for 6 years

NB: Other than Khairy and Noh Omar, 42 other members were also sacked.

According to Article 20.4 of the UC, the Disciplinary Board (or Lembaga Disiplin, “LD”) must listen to and be satisfied with the presence of a violation before deciding on the punishment(s) to be meted, if any. Article 20.5 of the UC also states that every layer of the party must report to their respective disciplinary units before submitting the case to the LD. The proper due process requires that the LD then make a recommendation to the management meeting, before the SC ultimately decides. On a balance of probabilities, there was no disciplinary report or investigations on these members before the final decision was made.

The case of Shahril Hamdan’s suspension is instructive of the overall sacking and suspension process during this period. Unlike Khairy Jamaluddin or Hishammuddin Hussein, whose public statements and manoeuvres could be classified as violations of the broad obligations of members (Article 6 of UC), however tenuous, it was much more difficult to penalise Shahril Hamdan for a disciplinary transgression. Shahril was part of Zahid Hamidi’s apparatus prior to his suspension, having served as the party’s Deputy Youth Chief and Information Chief. Indeed, in the letter that was passed indirectly to Shahril via WhatsApp a few days later, there was only a reference to the UC clause being violated,⁵³ without specifics on which actions were found to violate those clauses. This was a clear violation of due process, an essential component to natural justice, as ‘no man should be condemned unheard’.⁵⁴

Without a clear delineation of the transgressions, it is impossible to assess if the punishments have been proportionate.⁵⁵ Proportionality is an emerging natural justice doctrine in Malaysia, whereby its violation would render the punishment *ultra vires* (beyond legal authority prescribed). Taken in total, it can be argued that the sackings and suspensions were private decisions made by the President without due process, based on an LD report that was not seen by the leaders or the victims involved, and that might not exist at all.

ZAHID HAMIDI'S LASTING LEGACY AND THE OUTLOOK FOR UMNO

Deprived of executive premiership, Zahid Hamidi started his UMNO presidency as the most disadvantaged President in the party's history. He did not have the state largesse to keep his supporters loyal or the executive apparatus to eliminate enemies like his predecessors had had. However, he maximally deployed this disadvantage to elicit party sympathy, filling his speeches and public statements with commissive and self-victimisation claims.⁵⁶ He painted himself as a selfless party-first leader ("I do not want any positions in the Cabinet"),⁵⁷ drawing attention to his unique absence of power as UMNO President ("Sorry I am only an UMNO President who doesn't hold power"),⁵⁸ and contrasting his loyalty by demonising opponents as self-centred, power-hungry traitors (calling opponents "Seeking Livelihood Cluster" or *Kluster Cari Makan*, and "Afraid of Losing Power Cluster" or "*Kluster Takut Bos Hilang Kuasa*").⁵⁹

This worked well with sympathetic party members, who remembered him for taking responsibility in leading the party when UMNO was at its lowest point, even though they acknowledged the contrary view outsiders share.⁶⁰

As a non-Prime Minister UMNO President, Zahid Hamidi focused on consolidating power within the party and fully exploited every tool he had, creating far-reaching changes to the structure of the party.

Cumulatively, the three major decisions discussed in this paper virtually shut off any reasonable opportunity for dissent. Hypothetically, even if a popular leader with substantial grassroots backing were to stage a democratic overthrow of Zahid, like Khairy Jamaluddin tried to do in 2018, that option is closed now. This is not only because a no-contest for the top two posts is further entrenched in the norm, but also that dissent, however reasonable, is dramatically less likely now given the guaranteed candidate selection powers held by the UMNO President. Even if a hypothetical rebel succeeds in shaking up the party by mobilising widespread dissent, the arbitrary and personal exercise of sacking and suspension by the UMNO President could immediately uproot any challenge. Save for the President's goodwill, it is highly unlikely for democratic contests to occur organically in UMNO's new structure.

At the time of writing, two UMNO members, together with a coalition colleague, have filed for a judicial review against UMNO, the Home Minister, RoS, and the Malaysian government for exempting the no-contest motion from compliance. They seek an order to quash the Home Minister's exemption, besides seeking a declaration that the posts should be open for contest, among others.⁶¹ However, even if the case has merits, there may be procedural challenges that may defeat such suits.⁶² First, Article 20.7 of the UC allows the party to terminate a member's party membership upon bringing any party decision to court, which may result in the UMNO members losing the necessary *locus standi* to proceed. Second, the judge may not entertain the challenge, considering it non-justiciable for reasons of the UMNO decision being a private law, laches (period lapsed), or requiring the members to exhaust all domestic party-based remedies.

UMNO is expected to become an increasingly reactionary party, as reforms will be less likely to materialise without internal dissent. Each President and his appointee's tenure will be longer,

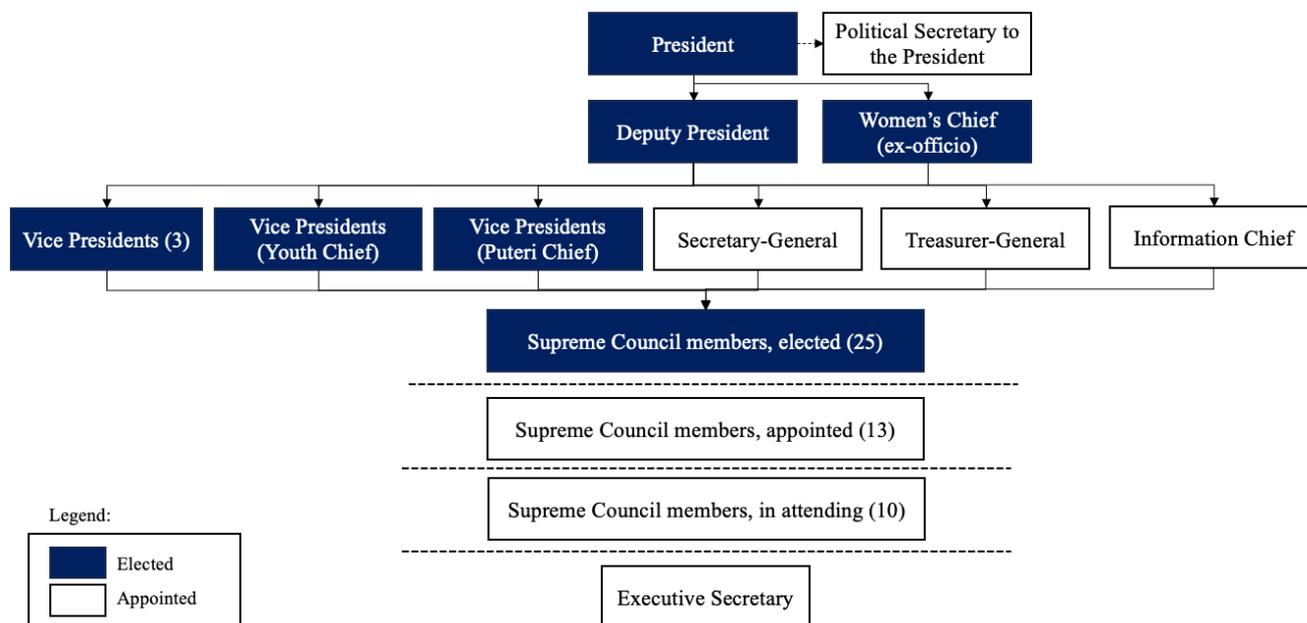
which makes reforms less urgent, as party office bearers now have reduced accountability to their members. These structural decisions by Zahid Hamidi are also unlikely to be reversed in the medium-term as every President holding the position will likely want to retain the chief benefit of selecting general election candidates and securing a longer tenure. If there are any reforms at all, these will depend on the personalities holding the presidency, and this necessarily makes UMNO a personality-driven party, where the highest successes and failures are an extension of the President.

Since many Malaysian voters, especially youths, have avoided voting for UMNO because of Zahid Hamidi, it is sensible to assume that the decline in electoral power will continue at an accelerated pace.

In the past, experts argued that the UMNO Presidency was strong because of its merger with the role of the Prime Minister. What Zahid Hamidi has shown, however, is that the UMNO presidency on its own is powerful even without the executive power; he has wielded every tool at his disposal and made his position unchallengeable, even by the best opponents. Zahid has been successful in converting his disadvantage into an advantage, but whether he can reverse UMNO's decline remains to be seen.

ANNEX A

UMNO Supreme Council Structure⁶³



NB: Appointments are the sole prerogative of the President.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Funston, J. (1980) *Malay Politics in Malaysia: A Study of the United Malay National Organisation and Party Islam*. Heinemann Education Press (Asia).
- ² Farouk, A.F.A. (2011) *Culture and Politics: An Analysis of United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) 1946 – 1999*. Working Papers No.46. Humboldt University of Berlin.
- ³ Mohamad, M. (1970) *The Malay Dilemma*. Singapore: Asia Pacific Press. p. 9.
- ⁴ Funston, J. (1980) *Malay Politics in Malaysia: A Study of the United Malay National Organisation and Party Islam*. Heinemann Education Press (Asia).
- ⁵ UMNO Malaysia Annual Statement 1971/9172, Kuala Lumpur, 1972, p.184.
- ⁶ Slater, D. (2003) *Iron Cage in an Iron Fist: Authoritarian Institutions and the Personalization of Power in Malaysia*. *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 81-101.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ UMNO, formed in 1946, has 3.35 million members and 21,883 branches as of 2021.
- ⁹ UMNO would go on to register an even worse electoral showing in the 15th general election in 2022.
- ¹⁰ List of defections by UMNO as of December 2018: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/456144>
- ¹¹ Interview with UMNO Division Head.
- ¹² Interview with Zaidel Baharuddin, the former Organising Secretary of Barisan Nasional Youth.
- ¹³ Interview with Professor Emeritus Shad Saleem Faruqi, professor of law at Universiti Malaya.
- ¹⁴ As stipulated in Article 9.8 of the party constitution.

¹⁵ State Executive Committee used to have powers to select candidates for general elections and control the party structures at the state level before 1961.

¹⁶ Washida, H. (2018) The origins and (failed) adaptation of a dominant party; The UMNO in Malaysia. *Asia Journal of Comparative Politics*, Vol 4(1), pp. 61-80.

¹⁷ This included the banning of campaigning for party positions from 1996 to 2002.

¹⁸ Zahid Hamidi won the UMNO Presidency with 93 votes, against Khairy Jamaluddin's 51 votes and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah's 23 votes.

¹⁹ Among others, pressure came mostly after the poor electoral performances of the party under Zahid Hamidi's leadership. The four straight by-election losses in Sungai Kandis, Balakong, Seri Setia, and Port Dickson forced Zahid Hamidi to take garden leave, besides the party suffering two waves of high-profile defections, including Mustapha Mohamed, Anifah Aman, Hamzah Zainudin, and Mas Ermieyati Samsudin.

²⁰ In September 2022, Zahid was acquitted by the High Court of 47 charges relating to bribery in a visa scheme when he was Home Minister.

²¹ From 1974, a maximum of 10 delegates per division could be sent to the general meetings, regardless of the size of the given division. Former UMNO President, Najib Razak, expanded this enfranchisement from 2,510 to 146,500 in 2009, consisting of 500 delegates from each 191 UMNO Divisions, and a total of 51,000 from Youth, Women's and Puteri groups. Delegates who attend the annual general assembly are eligible to cast their vote for the party leadership.

²² Established under the Societies Act 1966, the RoS is a government authority under the Home Affairs Ministry with registration, monitoring, and enforcement powers. The Director is a civil servant who is appointed by the Minister. Its current Director is Mohd Nawardi Saad and the body oversees 80,459 active organisations (as of June 2023).

²³ In June 2021, UMNO had a close brush with deregistration by the RoS after the authority invalidated the party's postponement of party polls. Link:

<https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/08/07/lawyer-explains-ros-could-suspend-deregister-umno-but-appeals-to-home-minis/1995902>

²⁴ Interview with Shahril Hamdan, former UMNO Deputy Youth Chief and Information Chief.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ Article 30.1 of the UMNO Constitution lays out the requirements for constitutional amendments.

²⁷ Examples include former UMNO President Mahathir's 15 constitutional amendments in 1998 and Zahid Hamidi's 13 amendments in 2019.

²⁸ A hypothetical example of how this could play out post-amendment would be: UMNO held their last party elections on 18 March 2023; the current parliamentary term is scheduled to run for a full five-year term from the day of its first parliamentary sitting, i.e. from 19 December 2022 to 18 December 2027 (i.e. the election date could be 18 December 2027); UMNO party election could be held 6 months after the general election. That means the latest date UMNO could hold the next party election is 17 June 2028, before accounting for the 60-day grace period between parliamentary dissolution and the general election.

²⁹ Despite the constitutional amendment, UMNO still declares their leadership for a term of 3 years, i.e. for the current term, it is for 2023-2026. However, when it comes to 2026, its leaders can invoke the prerogative of extending their term to 6 months after the general election.

³⁰ Supreme Council positions include President, Deputy President, Vice Presidents, and Central Executive Committee members.

³¹ Dropped candidates for PRU15:

<https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2022/11/1019438/annuar-musa-shahidan-kassim-zahidan-tajuddin-sah-digugur>

³² Interview with UMNO Division Head.

³³ Case, W. (1994) The UMNO Party Election in Malaysia: One for the Money. *Asian Survey*, Vol. 34, No.10, pp 916-930.

³⁴ Interview with Shahril Hamdan.

³⁵ Interview with Zaidel Baharuddin.

³⁶ Interview with Professor Emeritus Shad Saleem Faruqi.

³⁷ Usage of the 18-month extension since amendment in 1998: 1999, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2015, 2021.

³⁸ Zahid Hamidi reiterated that all positions are open for contest on a few occasions: 4 February 2021, 18 March 2022, and 13 January 2023.

³⁹

Systems	How it works
Bonus system (replaced by quota system)	Candidates for the President and Deputy President posts are given 10 bonus votes for every nomination they obtain at the Divisions. These bonus votes are then added to the total votes in the party election. The purpose is to reduce the variance between Division nominations and actual delegates' votes.
Quota system (eventually removed)	Percentage of nominations needed from Divisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30% for President • 20% for Deputy President • 10% for Vice President • 5% for Supreme Council member

⁴⁰ Farouk, A.F.A. (2011) Culture and Politics: An Analysis of United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) 1946 – 1999. Working Papers No.46. Humboldt University of Berlin.

⁴¹ The delegate motion was brought by a member of Rembau, the Division led by the Deputy President, Mohamad Hasan.

⁴² Interview with Shahril Hamdan.

⁴³ Zulfakar, M. (2000) Let Members Select the Best. The Sunday Star.

⁴⁴ Interview with Professor Emeritus Shad Saleem Faruqi.

⁴⁵ Leadership positions elected include Chairman, Deputy Chairman, President, Deputy President, three Vice Presidents, and 25 SC members (see Annex A for the full SC structure). Among others, the Supreme Council has the power to decide on party election postponements. Since the President can appoint a large subset of the SC positions, including the influential posts of Secretary-General, Information Chief, and Treasurer, the power to influence the SC lies with the President.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ No one in UMNO contested the validity of the RoS letter that was leaked. UMNO members interviewed, too, did not want to comment on it. In this case, silence can be taken as acquiescence.

⁴⁸ Specifically, the referenced provision was Section 13(1)(c)(iv) on the wilful contravention of the Societies Act 1960.

⁴⁹ While the use of the Section 70 exemption was valid, since it was a broad and absolute power, the degree of reasonableness in the use of discretion may be challenged on its merits. This is especially when exemption was not considered necessary to protect two individuals from a democratic process stipulated by the UC.

⁵⁰ Hamdan, H. (2023) UMNO party elections: incumbents in control, for the moment. RSIS Commentaries, 044-23.

⁵¹ Hasni Mohammad, seen as allies to Khairy Jamaluddin and Hishammuddin Onn, was also dropped as the state liaison officer of Johor, and replaced with Zahid-aligned Khaled Nordin.

⁵² Noh Omar was initially suspended by Zahid Hamidi for six years, but he requested to be sacked instead.

⁵³ Article 20.9 was alleged to be violated by Shahril Hamdan, which was a broad clause that states that UMNO members should love the party and follow its UC, instructions, policies, decisions, secrets, good name and dignity, and code of ethics.

⁵⁴ Ridge v Baldwin (1964)

⁵⁵ Article 20.10 of the UC did not specify the length of punishment based on the violations.

⁵⁶ Haroon, N.A. et al (2020). Lakuan Ilokusi Ucapan Zahid Hamidi dalam PAU 2017 dan 2018. Volume 20(2) May 2020. GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies.

- ⁵⁷ Tanzizi, N.H. (2020) Zahid tidak mahu jawatan dalam Kabinet. Berita Harian. <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2020/03/662921/zahid-tidak-mahu-jawatan-dalam-kabinet>
- ⁵⁸ 'Maaf, saya hanya presiden UMNO yang tak pegang kuasa' (2021). MalaysiaKini. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/561404>
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