

Good example of consequences of permanent campaigns essay

[Business](#), [Leadership](#)



Introduction

With the evolution of the new communication technologies, political campaigns have been revolutionized in a way that even after politicians win elections, they continue in a 'campaign mode' during their governance. The continuous campaigning is aimed at gaining a political advantage in the following election (Hecl, 1999). The leaders are now able to reach the public in more effective and extensive ways through the internet, broadcasting medium, as well as old fashion printouts. This situation has been referred to as the 'permanent campaign'. The phenomenon is witnessed in most countries of the world, including the United States of America. Continuous political campaigns have far reaching consequences as far as governance, political discourse and public engagement with politics is concerned. This paper explores the permanent campaign in Malaysia, highlighting the various effects of the phenomenon on political discourse and the leaders' performance. The essay also evaluates consequences of the permanent campaigning system on the public's engagement with politics in the said nation and the role of the new information media outlets such as social media.

Background of the Political Climate in Malaysia

In Malaysia's 2013 general election, the ruling Barisan National (BN, National Front) coalition led by Prime Minister Najib Razak has been campaigning against Pakatan Rakyat (PR, People's Pact) led by ex-Deputy Minister, Anwar Ibrahim for the past two years (Suffian 2008). Malaysia's 2013 general election is considered to be the closest-fought ever since the independence

in 1957. The opposition coalition alleges that there is electoral fraud and threatens to refuse to accept the result. It is noteworthy that the ruling party, which has easily and repeatedly won elections since independence, has a lot of inbuilt advantages which has been established throughout its many years of ruling, including the years of its predecessor, Perikatan (Alliance) since independence (Suffian, n. d). This advantage is derived mainly from the mainstream media which the government controls either directly or indirectly (Suffian, n. d). The fact that the ruling coalition has had control over the mainstream media has been an important pillar in advancing the permanent campaign mode. The party officials and consultants are always thinking about campaign messages and communications to endear the coalition leaders to the electorate. Such messages are aired through the press, electronic and social media.

Permanent Political Campaigns

The result of the general election in 2008 was described as the worst result in the coalition's history. As such, since the 2008 election, the National Front has been campaigning to gain majority support from the public. There have been claims that the state has practiced ' bribery' towards the public by distributing cash handouts and goodies especially to attract young voters. The illegal campaign tactics have been applied by the ruling coalition, despite the fact that it is the largest party in the nation and enjoys the support of the mainstream media, which is mainly state-owned or controlled (Suffian, n. d).

It is also noteworthy that both political parties are practicing negative

campaigning in their promotional political actions. Many of the candidates spend much of campaign period holding late-night rallies known as 'ceramahs' which are generally packed with political attacks. The electioneering was also fought online and 2013 electioneering has brought about a lot of tension with its polarized ideology by both the coalition parties. The two leading political coalitions turned to online tools such as social media, Youtube videos and websites to advance their campaigns in a bid to outdo each other (Suffian, n. d). Accordingly, with the long years of campaign just right after the election, it can be argued that Malaysia is in a state of permanent campaign, whereby both parties are using the advantage of new political technologies, especially the use of public relations for persuasion to gain public support.

Effects of the Permanent Campaign on the Leaders' Performance and Governance

It may be rightly argued that where permanent campaign is put before effective governance, leaders' performance can suffer greatly (Thomas, 2000). Sinclair (1997) notes that 'permanent campaign' has replaced good governance in countries where political leaders concentrate on continuous campaigns with a view to winning the following elections. According to Ornstein and Mann (p. 219), political leaders and party members are more concerned with winning the next election and retaining or winning partisan control, than delivering on their campaign manifestoes in the interest of the country.

Furthermore, good governance requires that political leaders unite in making policies aimed at enhancing a nation's development process. However, the

need for the leaders and their consultants to further political messages and gain advantage over their opponents may compromise the policy making process, negatively affecting the leaders' performance (Thomas, 2000; Agreda, 2013). Partisan and ideological polarizations, which are characteristics of permanent campaigns, can jeopardize national unity and spur political divisions, resulting in an unfriendly political climate in which development cannot thrive. This undermines governance as winning the next election surpasses public service as the priority. Permanent campaigns create a scenario where party leaders spend their time posturing in public to gain political mileage and projecting their opponents negatively, instead of engaging in governing the country for the good of the citizenry (Agreda 2013).

In Malaysia, the ruling coalition has control over the mainstream media, which it uses to advance its political messages and doing campaigns. Once elections are over, the ruling coalition does not stop campaigning. Instead, in anticipation of the next election, the government, through political consultants and party officials has continued to campaign (Franz, 2013). This was evident after the controversial 2008 general elections which the opposition claimed had been rigged. After getting in office, the government has continued to institute various campaign moves aimed at gaining public affirmation and support, and projecting the opposition as wrong, using a wide range of media, including press, electronic, social and the mainstream media (Suffian, n. d; Christopoulos, 2013). The underlying goals had been to win the 2013 elections. As maybe expected, as political leaders and members inject more energy in gaining public support and political mileage

for the next election, good governance has suffered greatly. For example, the management of economic issues and inter-ethnic interests in Malaysia has been jeopardized by the permanent campaign (Suffian, n. d).

The policy making process has also been hindered in some ways, as leaders are bent on projecting themselves as superior to their opponents. Lastly, permanent campaign is a costly affair and may lead to misuse of public funds (Franz, 2013). This happens when party leaders (the ruling coalition in Malaysia) allocate government funds to political campaigns which should otherwise be financed by the private candidates. Such misappropriated funds could be used in more useful development projects for the benefit of the citizens.

Public's Engagement with Politics.

Now that it is clear that Malaysia is in a state of permanent campaign especially for the past two years, it is necessary to analyze the public's engagement to the nation's politics. According to UMCEDEL survey, 21% of the voters remained undecided for three main reasons: firstly, they have no interest over the country's politics; secondly, they still remain undecided after the campaigning; and lastly, due to reasons such as disillusionment of both parties (UMCEDEL, 2013). This is due to the fact that, for the most part of the campaigning generally involves negative campaigning as mentioned earlier. Negative campaigning may lead to disappointment of the public, resulting in resentment and change of political inclinations. For example, when a political party leader is seen to concentrate on defaming their opponents, the public may develop resentment for the leader and change

their mind. This is also true as far as political ideologies are concerned (UMCEDEL, 2013).

Moreover, the advent of the information technology coupled with the permanent campaign system has increased public engagement in politics. For example in Malaysia, use of social media and other information technology outlets has offered the people a platform to actively participate in the nation's politics through sharing opinions, voicing concerns and extending political visions (Christopoulos, 2013; Suffian, n. d). The ongoing campaign system employs the social media and other electronic information outlets to reach to the electorate. This was evident in 2008 when the opposition coalition in Malaysia leveraged web-based strategies to reach to a considerable portion of the electorate, although it did not win the elections (Suffian, n. d). Despite the negative effects of the permanent campaign mode, the system has positive effects, notably a more active involvement of the electorate, leading to wiser decision making during the electioneering period. Agreda (2013) implies that permanent campaigns can be used to achieve positive results, such as increased civic education and awareness creation among the electorate. This would go a long way in building a more, informed citizenry who make equally informed political decisions during the election ring period.

Conclusion

It is worrying that Malaysia's Prime Minister's concern is mainly about his next election when he should be worrying about the country's welfare. The ruling parties have been spending a lot of money for campaigning instead of

concentrating on programs that benefit the country and its citizenry.

Theoretically, the idea that politicians have to continuously campaign in order to build coalitions and foster public interest in his or her policy agenda—and to enhance his or her prospects for re-election, is a neutral account of politics and process. As the phenomenon takes hold, it erodes the politicians' credibility as statesmen and women, leading to overall paralysis of the system due to lack of confidence among actors, including the voters. It is even more appalling when electioneering in Malaysia has been more about negative campaigning which destructs the public to actually decide over more important matters such as the manifesto which would be most beneficial to the goods of the people. Nevertheless, it is notable that the public is getting more engaged into the politics with the rising popularity of social media as a major campaigning tool. All in all, permanent campaigns have far reaching negative effects on governance and political engagement of the public.

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