

# Chapter 8

## ‘Remember Our Race, Our Religion and Our Progeny’: An Argumentation Analysis of Malay-Language Newspapers During General Election Campaigns



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**Abstract** This chapter focuses on discursive strategies of legitimation in mainstream Malay-language newspapers during the 13th and 14th general election campaigns. It analyses how editorials and columns published in *Berita Harian* and *Utusan Malaysia* constructed arguments during the campaign periods from 20 April to 4 May 2013 and 28 April to 8 May 2018. The chapter examines how particular relations of power were enacted, reproduced and legitimised within Malaysia’s government-owned mainstream media, where control was institutionalised. To contextualise and illuminate the discursive and social practices of both campaigns, the analysis is grounded in the discourse-historical approach’s conception of argumentation and pragma-dialectics’ ten rules for rational dispute and constructive arguing. This chapter, therefore, looks at the argumentation strategies employed in editorials and columns serving as a methodical justification of validity claims reflected linguistically using speech acts. The findings demonstrate the politics of fear that characterises much of Malaysian right-wing rhetoric, particularly how fear of the future was employed by Barisan Nasional as it struggled to maintain and retain legitimacy during both campaigns.

**Keywords** Editorials · Columns · Election campaign · Legitimation · Argumentation analysis · Politics of fear

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the discursive legitimacy micro-politics of the strongest and oldest right-wing party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)—how they produced and reproduced their ideologies and agenda in campaigning through editorials and columns in the Malay-language mainstream newspapers, *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*. It compares the election campaign

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in 2013, where the Barisan Nasional (BN) government (with UMNO *primus inter pares*) successfully maintained its legitimacy with that in 2018 when it failed to do the same as Malaysians voted out the coalition that had been in power since independence in 1957. Since the process of legitimation always involves argumentation, i.e. “by providing arguments that explain our social actions, ideas, thoughts, declarations, etc.” (Reyes, 2011, p. 782), I focus on the arguments employed in the editorials and columns of Malay-language national (but government-owned) newspapers. This chapter attempts to unmask the dominant ideologies which appear as ‘neutral’, which hold on to assumptions that stayed largely unchallenged in Malaysia during the campaign election periods in 2013 and 2018 as the government searched for support and approval to maintain power.

Fairclough (1995, p. 2), following Foucault (1975), defines power not only as the asymmetries that exist between individuals participating in the same discursive event, but also in terms of how people have different capacities to control how texts and thus discourses are produced, distributed and consumed. Therefore, this study considers texts as sites fighting for dominance and hegemony, as “power is legitimised or delegitimised in discourses” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 89). In democratic societies, it is crucial to have disciplinary power to influence knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations and social identities, as opposed to sovereign power (see Foucault, 1975, p. 223), or consent as opposed to coercion. Here, this chapter does not only analyse power in terms of resources but also in terms of the force of argument, the authority of reason or, in general, discursive power. From this perspective, power does not only claim the right to rule but also that its decisions and actions are reasonable.

In contrast to news reports which typically focus on facts, information and details, opinion genres like editorials and columns are more concerned with making sense of the ‘what-s’ by concentrating on the ‘why-s’ (i.e. meaning construction). Editorials and columns share one primary social function (or mission), i.e. they both aim to persuade their readers; hence, they will be treated as one genre in this chapter. Through editorials and columns in *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*, meanings as well as what is right, reasonable and factual are negotiated, and public opinion is formed, shaped, articulated and altered—influencing debate and promoting social interaction between writers and audiences during the campaigns (see van Dijk, 1996; Le, 2004; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008, p. 70). Against this background, this chapter views editorials and columns as argumentation. Here, there are four characteristics of argumentation or argumentative discourse that need to be considered (see Richardson, 2007, pp. 155–6):

1. Argumentation is *active*

It is an activity in which participants use language to *do* certain things, whether this is advancing their point of view or attacking that of someone else. On this point, Perelman (1979) reiterates that “it must not be forgotten that all argumentation aims somehow at modifying an existing state of affairs” (p. 11), whether this be mental, social or political.

2. Argumentation is *social*

It is a social activity in which argumentation moves are “not just the expression of an individual assessment, but a contribution to a communication process between persons or groups who exchange ideas with one another in order to resolve a difference of opinion” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 55).

3. Argumentation is a *joint process* between participants

It is an interaction, requiring participants to both produce and consume argumentation, to compose arguments and to analyse those of their opponent; argumentation can only work when participants consent to being persuaded.

4. Argumentation requires *certain standards* by which the quality of the argumentative language can be measured (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 56).

Argumentation is aimed at resolving differences of opinion, occurs in a particular material social context and is realised through the participants offering arguments which they believe support their standpoint and which aim to exert an influence on the opinions, attitudes and even behaviours of others. However, argumentation is not a free-for-all, with participants offering any argument and concluding that they have proved their standpoint. It is unreasonable for Person A to threaten Person B and then, once Person B is too scared to defend his/her standpoint, to declare that Person A has won the argument, because this is an approach of violence, not persuasion. Therefore, there are standards, or rules of argumentation, and “these rules should aim to regulate both the *product* of arguments as texts and the *process* of argument as an activity” (Richardson, 2007, p. 156) and, in other words, to regulate the content of arguments and the conduct of arguers. Such pro-active, opinionated discourse, according to McNair (2000) has:

...the power to set the dominant political agenda, as elaborated over weeks, months and years...amounting to extended narrative of unity and division, success and failure, rise and fall. In this capacity the institutions of the press take the lead in establishing the dominant interpretative frameworks within which ongoing political events are made sense of. (p. 30)

Approval and support for the established dominant political agenda give a government legitimacy. Legitimation is negotiated in society in the sense that citizens cast their votes, i.e. grant legitimacy, in return for certain benefits. Fairclough (2003) views legitimation as the “widespread acknowledgement of the legitimacy of explanations and justifications for how things are and how things are done” (p. 219). Hence, elections contribute to providing justification for the existence of a regime, thus consolidating its legitimacy. In this chapter, my analysis is based on these research questions:

- What discursive argumentation strategies were employed in Malay-language editorials and columns to legitimise the UMNO/BN government during the campaign periods in GE13 and GE14?
- How did Malay-language editorials and columns communicate their validity claims when supporting the UMNO/BN government in 2013 and 2018?

In what follows, I explain my data and draw on the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) and its discursive argumentation strategy (Reisigl, 2018; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016).

## 8.2 Data

Editorials and columns were collected from four paid-for daily Malay-language mainstream newspapers, along with their Sunday editions, *Utusan Malaysia*, *Mingguan Malaysia (S)*, *Berita Harian* and *Berita Ahad (S)*, during the GE13 and GE14 campaign periods (see Table 8.1).

This collection was initially based on the Malay-language print newspapers with the highest circulations in 2013, as shown in Table 8.2.

Even though *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*, including their Sunday editions, suffered a drop in print circulation of more than 50% in 2018, a 2018 Reuters Digital News Report showed *Berita Harian Online* still ranking first among Malay-language news portals in Malaysia with 24% of weekly usage by local users, followed by *Utusan Online* (17%). By mainstream, I refer to national traditional newspapers, with digital versions of the printed newspapers online, that circulate throughout the whole country, as opposed to local newspapers serving a city or region, with broadsheet content, as opposed to tabloid, sensationalistic news.

**Table 8.1** Totals of editorials and columns per newspaper during the campaign period

		GE13 20 April–4 May 2013		GE14 28 April–8 May 2018		Total
1	Utusan Malaysia/Mingguan Malaysia	105	243	139	250	493
2	Berita Harian/Berita Ahad	138		111		

**Table 8.2** Mainstream newspapers' circulation in 2013 and 2018 (per issue)

		2013		2018	
	Print newspaper	Average newspaper circulation	Total	Average newspaper circulation	Total
1	Utusan Malaysia	199,314	590,322	97,393	296,547
2	Mingguan Malaysia (S)	391,008		199,154	
3	Berita Harian	173,076	372,305	63,471	114,661
4	Berita Harian Ahad (S)	199,229		51,190	

S = Sunday edition.

Source Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) Malaysia (2016, 2018).

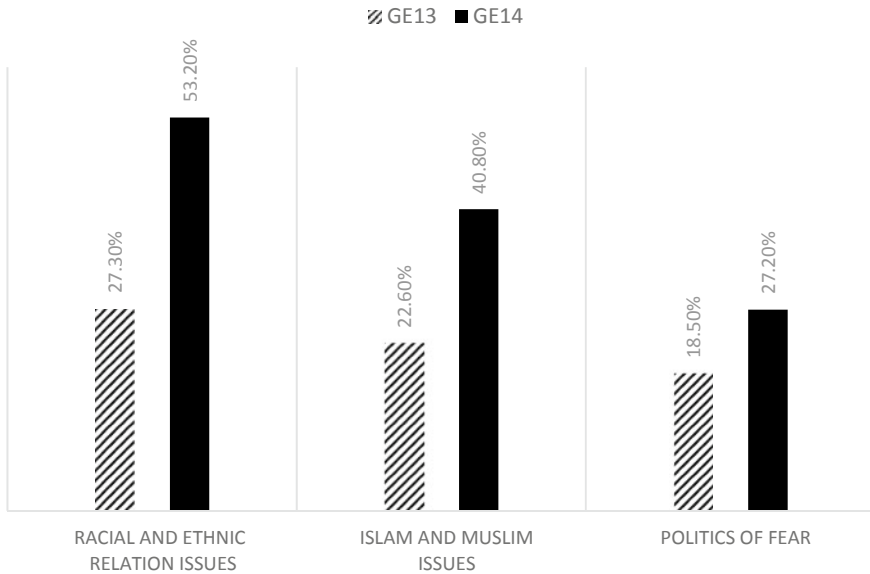
*Utusan Malaysia* is a Malay-language daily first published in 1967, a Romanised version of the jawi-scripted *Utusan Melayu*, initially published in 1939. These newspapers advocate Malay rights and articulate issues pertaining to Malay interests and development. UMNO's control of *Utusan Melayu* began with the appointment of UMNO strongman, Ibrahim Fikri, by the party leadership to run the newspaper in July 1961. The newspaper's former editor, Said Zahari (2001), wrote in his memoir that:

...only with a free policy could *Utusan Melayu* be the voice of the people, fighting for the interests of the people...But UMNO wanted *Utusan Melayu* to be totally different. That *Utusan Melayu* should belong to UMNO and should only serve that political party. (p. 73)

During GE13 and GE14, UMNO still held controlling shares in *Utusan Melayu* (M) Berhad (UMB) (Hafiz Yatim, 13 August 2012; Anuar, 2014; The Star, 8 February 2019; Ramli, 2019). Its newspapers, *Utusan Malaysia*, and the Sunday edition, *Mingguan Malaysia*, are those among mainstream newspapers that reflect the agenda and ideology of the ruling coalition, BN. It was available as a 32-page printed broadsheet as well as online at: <http://www.utusan.com.my/> until UMB officially ceased operations in October 2019 following years of financial losses (see Ong, 28 September 2019; Tan, 19 August 2019). *Utusan Malaysia* returned under new ownership of media tycoon Syed Mokhtar AlBukhary in July 2020 (*The Straits Times*, 21 July 2020).

*Berita Harian* and *Berita Ahad* are published by the New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd (NSTP). During GE13, the NSTP was largely owned by one of the UMNO's allies, Media Prima Berhad, with a 43 per cent equity stake. MPB's largest shareholder was Gabungan Kesturi Sdn Bhd, an UMNO-owned company (see Ding, Lay & Surin, 2013). In 2018, UMNO still held a direct 7.96 per cent stake in NSTP via Gabungan Kesturi Sdn Bhd and Altima Inc. (see Ramli, 2019). They are available online at: <http://www.bharian.com.my/>.

The translations of Malay-language editorials and columns from *Utusan Malaysia*, *Mingguan Malaysia*, *Berita Harian* and *Berita Ahad* from Bahasa Malaysia into English are my own. The process of translating the material was two-tiered: it was initially done in a side-by-side procedure with another Malay-language speaker, in which possible wordings were discussed before the final translated texts were verified by a second Malay-language speaker. The translation was intended to be as literal as possible, except where modifications were necessary in order to preserve conversational style. However, Malay-English translation poses its own translation challenges as these two languages come from different language families (see, e.g. Azmi et al., 2016). Therefore, maintaining equivalence when translating Malay-language content is not a straightforward task, especially when it involves inappropriate equivalent words (collocation aspect) and equivalent words according to field as well as cultural differences. Since translation is an interpretive act, some meaning may get lost in the translation process (see the discussion in Van Nes et al., 2010). Therefore, I analysed the original articles in Bahasa Melayu, instead of in the translated texts, to minimise potential limitations in the analysis.



**Fig. 8.1** Key topics discussed in Malay-language editorials and columns during GE13 and GE14

The selection of texts for qualitative analysis was based on the most frequently recurring themes previously identified in a quantitative content analysis conducted prior to this study. Across the sample as a whole from 20 April to 5 May 2013 and 28 April to 8 May 2018, racial and ethnic relations accounted for around a striking 40 per cent ( $n = 197$ ) of the discussion, almost the same amount of attention that was devoted to Islam and Muslims (32%,  $n = 157$ ). Of note was the substantially high number of politics of fear articles (23%,  $n = 113$ ) during both campaign periods, as illustrated in Fig. 8.1.

The preliminary quantitative findings speak in a rather interesting way (which I explore more in subsequent sections) with regard to how topics of racial and ethnic relations, Islam and Muslims and the politics of fear were foregrounded in mainstream editorials and columns to legitimise the UMNO/BN government during GE13 and GE14. Against the background provided earlier, such negotiation of legitimacy in an opinion genre like editorials and columns is argumentative in nature, as it typically involves persuasion through the reinforcement and clarification of existing ideas, as well as consideration of various viewpoints during the campaign periods. Since opinion, as a form of complex verbal action, is goal-oriented, it must be defended and supported, which explains why they exhibit certain argumentative structures and strategies, such as proving (or making) their own positions plausible and/or others' untenable. The selected data, therefore, were further analysed using the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) discursive strategy, i.e. argumentation, which is summarised in Table 8.3.

**Table 8.3** Summary of argumentation strategies in the DHA (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016)

Discursive strategy	Purpose	Devices	Linguistic function
ARGUMENTATION	justification and questioning of claims of truth and normative rightness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• topoi (formal or more content-related)</li> <li>• fallacies</li> </ul>	Ways of reasoning Ways of persuading

### 8.3 Argumentation Strategies

Argumentation in this chapter draws on Reisigl (2014, see also Reisigl & Wodak, 2016; Reisigl, 2018), whose conception of argumentation follows Kopperschmidt’s Habermasian theoretical framework.<sup>1</sup> According to Houtlosser (2001, p. 41), in Kopperschmidt’s (1985) view, when assertive or directive speech acts are performed, they imply a guarantee of a legitimate underlying validity claim. Performing such speech acts implies one’s obligation to defend them, when asked to do so. However, Kopperschmidt (2000 in Reisigl, 2014) convincingly argues, which is a point I wish to reemphasise, that “argumentation is not an autonomous speech act per se” (p. 70). Although validity claims of truth as well as of normative rightness are prototypically performed by or take the form of assertive and directive speech acts at the level of pragmatic deep structure, “the literally uttered secondary illocutionary act often deviates from the intended primary illocutionary act” (Reisigl, 2014, p. 70). Therefore, Kopperschmidt (2000, p. 59 in Reisigl, 2014, p. 70) highlights that all types of speech acts can fulfil an argumentative function under certain conditions, which complicates the argumentation analysis discussed in the section below.

This chapter also integrates a normative dimension in the analysis to distinguish between reasonable and fallacious argumentation. Key to argumentation strategies in the DHA is argumentative *topoi* (singular *topos*) (see Reisigl & Wodak, 2016; Reisigl, 2018). Topoi can be described as central parts of argumentation that belong to premises, as illustrated in Fig. 8.2.

Since argumentation is frequently enthymemic, i.e. shortened on the linguistic surface structure (Reisigl, 2014, p. 72), topoi are not always expressed explicitly but can be made explicit as conditional or causal paraphrases, such as ‘if x, then y’ or ‘y, because x’ (see Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, pp.69–80; Wodak et al., 2009 [1999], pp. 36–42; Wodak, 2015, p. 53). Argumentation schemes can be reasonable or fallacious; if the latter is the case, we label them *fallacies*. A fallacy is “an underlying, systematic kind of error or deceptive tactic of argument used to deceptively get the best of



**Fig. 8.2** The relationship between topos/fallacy, argument and claim in a simplified functional approach to argumentation

a speech partner” (Walton, 2000, p. 1). However, KhosraviNik (2015) asserts that “distinguishing reasonable from fallacious, identifying topoi is not an objective, formulaic process” (p. 112), because “it is not always easy to distinguish precisely without context knowledge whether an argumentation scheme has been employed as reasonable topos or as fallacy” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 110). And to say that an argument is fallacious, according to Walton (2000), is a strong charge as it entails “more than just the claim that the argument is weak or has been insufficiently supported by good evidence” (p. 25). A central normative basis for the DHA approach is pragma-dialectics with its ten commandments (or of reasonableness) for rational dispute and constructive arguing (see Reisigl, 2014, pp. 79–80). The ten rules are as follows (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2016; pp. 208–12):

1. The freedom rule (freedom from arguing): participants must not prevent each other from advancing or casting doubt on standpoints.
2. The burden-of-proof rule (obligation to give reasons): whoever advances a standpoint is obliged to defend it if asked to do so.
3. The standpoint rule (correct reference to previous discourse by the antagonist): an attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has been advanced by the protagonist.
4. The relevance rule (obligation to ‘matter-of-factness’): a participant may defend her standpoint only by advancing argumentation related to that standpoint.
5. The unexpressed premise rule (correct reference to implicit premises): a participant can be held to the premises she leaves implicit; equally, an antagonist may not falsely suggest that a premise has been left unexpressed by the other participant.
6. The starting point rule (respect of shared starting points): a standpoint must be regarded as conclusively defended if the defence takes place by means of arguments belonging to the common starting point. A premise must not falsely be taken as a common starting point, and, conversely, a shared premise must not be rejected.
7. The validity rule (logical validity): the reasoning in the argumentation must be logically valid or must be capable of being valid by making explicit one or more unexpressed premises.
8. The argumentation scheme rule (use of plausible arguments and schemes of argumentation): a standpoint may not be regarded as conclusively defended if the defence does not take place by means of an appropriate argument scheme that is correctly applied.
9. The closure rule (acceptance of the discussion’s results): the failed defence of a standpoint must result in a protagonist retracting the standpoint, and a successful defence of a standpoint must result in an antagonist retracting her doubts.
10. The usage rule (clarity of expression and correct interpretation): formulations must be neither puzzlingly vague nor confusingly ambiguous and must be interpreted as accurately as possible.



If any of these rules are violated, we no longer have sound topoi, but fallacies. Although the consequences of violating these rules may vary in their seriousness, van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2016, pp. 212–14) maintain that every violation is a potential threat to a successful conclusion of the discussion. Therefore, “all violations of the rules are incorrect moves in critical discussion as it corresponds roughly to the various kinds of defects traditionally referred to as *fallacies*” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1987, p. 284). The following section discusses how certain ideological inputs were weaved into the selected editorials and columns through the employment of discursive argumentation strategies designed to legitimise the UMNO/BN government’s hegemony through racial, religion and fear sentiments during the campaign periods in both 2013 and 2018.

## 8.4 Analysis and Discussion

During Malaysia’s GE13 and GE14 campaign periods, the slew of legal controls and indirect or direct mainstream newspapers’ ownership helped to maintain the BN government’s hegemony. All mainstream print newspapers were pro-government, including the newspapers selected in this study, as discussed earlier. Any criticism of the government can be interpreted as sedition under a provision in the Sedition Act 1948, which states that a statement will be deemed seditious if it tends to cause disaffection against any Ruler or the government (see Sect. 3(1) of the Sedition Act 1948). With regard to offences, Sects. 4(1)(b) and 4(1)(c) state that anyone commits sedition if they utter any seditious words, or print, publish, sell, offer for sale, distribute or reproduce any seditious publication, with ‘seditious’ being defined as anything with a ‘seditious tendency’ (see Malayan Law Journal, 2006). Therefore, to begin with, I argue that, with homogenous positive government and negative opposition texts in 2013 and 2018, these Malay-language newspapers had already violated rule one of the ten commandments, i.e. *the freedom rule* (freedom from arguing), as only pro-government opinions were published while those opposing it (or favouring the opposition) were not.

Imposing certain restrictions on opinions that may be advanced or called into question restricts the fundamental right of the other party to advance or cast doubts on whatever opinions they choose. As such, the violation of one or more of these rules leaves us with fallacies and no longer with sound topoi. The following will discuss the corresponding key fallacies used as discursive strategies of legitimisation in Malay-language mainstream editorials and columns during the campaign periods in 2013 and 2018. Here, overlapping arguments in Malay-language editorials and columns during both GE13 and GE14 campaigns feature a presumptive type of deductive reasoning concerned with hypothetical conjectures about what will, may or might happen in the future. Consider, first, Extract 1 from *Berita Harian* during GE13:

Extract 1 (Mat Lutu, 4 May 2013, *Berita Harian*).

**Ingat bangsa, ingat agama, ingat anak cucu**  
 Mat Lutu cuma nak ingatkan kita semua. Ingat bangsa, ingat agama, ingat anak cucu. Jangan ikut sedap hati, ikut marah, ikut benci. Kita bukan kerengga. Kita manusia. Kena pakai otak waras. Jangan korbakan bangsa kita...jangan pecah belahkan anak bangsa. Jangan kerana nak menang, hina bangsa sendiri. Burukkan bangsa sendiri. Pemimpin bangsa sendiri...Mat Lutu nak ingatkan jangan kita rosakkan masa depan anak cucu kita. Jangan sampai kita ikut cakap helang makan buah belolok. Jangan kerana kita nak menang kita hancurkan bangsa kita, agama kita, masa depan anak cucu kita. Mat Lutu doakan kita mengundi dengan tenang esok. Ingat dalam otak kita, maruah bangsa kita, kesucian agama kita dan masa depan anak cucu kita. Jangan fikir lain. Kita pakat tolak mana-mana yang tak boleh bagi tiga jaminan itu. Kita pakat tolak parti yang bersengkongkol dengan musuh kita dan mereka sendiri kerana nak menang. Kita tolak pemimpin yang tak bermoral. Kita tolak orang yang ikut fahaman liberal serba boleh

**(Remember [our] race, remember [our] religion, remember [our] progeny)**

I just want to remind all of us. Remember [our] race, remember [our] religion, remember [our] progeny. Don't follow our heart, our anger, our hatred. We are not weaver ants. We are humans. [We] must use our sanity (literally a sane brain). Don't sacrifice our race. Don't sacrifice the future of the children of our race. Don't insult your own race, the leader of your own race just for the sake of winning...I just want to remind [you], don't ruin our progeny's future. We shouldn't go to the extent where we listen too much to what others have to say because, in the end, it will ruin us [idiom: jangan sampai kita ikut cakap helang makan buah belolok]. Don't let us ruin our own race, our own religion and our own progeny's future just for the sake of winning. I pray that we can vote in peace tomorrow. Remember this: the dignity of our race, the sanctity of our religion and the future of our progeny. Don't think about anything else. Let us together reject those who can't guarantee us these three things. Let us together reject the party that is abetting our enemies just for the sake of winning. Let us reject immoral leaders. Let us reject those who have a liberal view about everything

At the speech-act level, the extract above has the illocutionary force of a directive, in which the columnist, Mat Lutu, commits himself to a validity claim of normative rightness. It performs the function of conveying the writer's plan to the reader, who is expected to do what the writer wants her to do. It exhibits a world-to-word direction of fit. The headline: **Ingat bangsa, ingat agama, ingat anak cucu** serves as an instruction or reminder ['something [such as an order, advice etc.] which has to be done or presented to someone else' (KPBM, 1989, p. 513)]. This three-part list of instructions to think about [our] race, [our] religion and [our] progeny is repeated throughout the excerpt. The explicit verb choice '*ingat*' used in Extract 1 presupposes that the reminder is not simply focused on *thinking*, but, more specifically, on *remembering*, which forms a link between past and future thoughts (via present thoughts). The use of *remind* as a verb does not merely trigger something *into* consciousness, but something that *is already held in* one's consciousness being emphasised throughout GE13 and repeated in GE14. For example, in Extract 2 from *Utusan Malaysia* in 2018, the writer uses a near synonym of 'think', '*renungkan*' (contemplate):

Extract 2 (28 April 2018, *Utusan Malaysia*).

<p><b>Renungkanlah</b> wajah-wajah anak bangsa dan harganya apa yang kita nikmati sekarang. Janganlah musnahkan semua itu</p>	<p>[Let’s] <b>contemplate</b> the faces of our nation’s children and the price of what we enjoy now. Don’t destroy all that</p>
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Such usage of the specific verb for cogitation, ‘*renungkan*’ (contemplate), in Extract 2 still displays the world-to-word direction of fit, like ‘think’, ‘consider’ and ‘remember’, albeit with a degree of semantic ‘directive’ difference, which merely serves as a reminder on one level, but on another level, this speech act also functions as a threat through its essentially enthymematic argument, in the sense that it contains non-explicitly stated premises. This therefore changes the world-to-word direction of fit to world-to-word-to-world (double direction of fit), in which the world is altered to fit the propositional content by representing the world as being so altered through the declarative illocution of threats. This is also an example of *petitio principii*, also known as *circular argument/ reasoning*, in which what is controversial and in question, and thus has to be proved, is presupposed as the starting point of the argumentation. The fact that in the argument it is assumed that what has to be proved has already been proved is linguistically hidden using varying formulations, i.e. paraphrasing of the same proposition in the premises and in the conclusion. While this is often more subtle in the campaign period in 2013, it is made more explicit and direct in the Malay-language op-eds during GE14 in 2018, as in Extract 3:

Extract 3 (Shahrizat, 2 May 2018, *Utusan Malaysia*).

<p>Rakyat hanya ada dua pilihan iaitu memilih BN dipimpin oleh seorang pemimpin (Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak) yang kita kenal hati budi dan keikhlasannya atau pilih pembangkang dikuasai DAP...Pengundi perlu sedar bahawa jika gabungan pembangkang PKR menang PRU-14, bukan calon Melayu...yang memimpin negara sebaliknya ialah Penasihat DAP, Lim Kit Siang sebagai de facto leader</p>	<p>People only have two options, i.e. to choose BN which is led by a leader (Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak) whom we know inside out or to choose the opposition led by the DAP... Voters should realise that if the opposition PKR coalition wins GE-14, it will not be the Malay candidates...who will lead the country but the DAP Advisor, Lim Kit Siang as the de facto leader</p>
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The explicit declaration in Extract 3 reflects a formulation of a dogmatic view held by the writer who assumed that she had the authority to formulate a view which would bind the reader. Here, in contrast to the speech act ‘inform’ or ‘announce’, whose focus would be on information, the declaration in Extract 3 stresses the element of arbitrary decision, one which leaves no room for further discussion. It explicitly displays an illusion of choice which implies a certain finality, like a final verdict on the matter: vote for BN/Najib Razak (government) and you will be safe, vote for the opposition and you will be doomed.

The arguments employed in Extracts 1–3 are fallacious because they also violate rule 6, i.e. the starting point rule: a standpoint must be regarded as conclusively defended if the defence takes place by means of arguments belonging to a common starting point. All three arguments in the extracts above are tied to arguments about

the future, as will be further illustrated below, and arguments about the future are disseminated throughout Malay-language editorials and columns in GE13 and GE14, in which fear is aroused by depicting a personally relevant and significant threat of voting for the opposition, and then, there follows a description of a threat by outlining that voting for the government is effective and feasible to deter negative consequences. This disjunctive form of argumentation postulates only two choices, implicitly in Extracts 1–2 or explicitly in Extract 3: either maintain the status quo by voting for the government to stay in power, or all gains will be reversed, and a fearful outcome will occur. When the reader is presented with an either/or option, it is an indication of a fear-appeal argument through the explicit use of a device named ‘dichotomisation’, which is summarised in Table 8.4.

**OPTION A:** If we do not follow the columnist’s proposition in the present, i.e., vote for the government (Action A), it will lead to undesirable consequences, the future will be at risk.

Throughout the GE13 and GE14 campaign periods from 20 April to 4 May 2013 and 28 April to 8 May, respectively, projected events are constructed as variations of a conditional statement. That is, they follow an *if/then* construction, as illustrated in Table 8.4. In conditional statements, information in the apodosis (then-clause) is constructed as dependent for its realisation on the outcome of the situation presented in the protasis (if-clause). Palmer (1986) explains that the purpose of conditional sentences is not to state that “an event has occurred (or is occurring or will occur); the sentence merely indicates the dependence of the truth of one proposition on the truth of another” (p. 189). Or in slightly different terms, according to James (1982), the protasis sets up an imaginary world in which the proposition in the apodosis is the case. Information that is presented through a conditional statement, then, is presented as speculation about conditions and their contingencies. Dunmire (1997) suggests that what is significant here is how this conditional statement has been written such that the hypothetical and contingent status of the information in both the protasis and apodosis is suppressed.

**OPTION B:** In contrast, if we do follow the columnist’s proposition, the future of our race, our religion and our progeny will be in good hands. But the future is uncertain. Hence, rendering the future as known is paradoxical or, as Dunmire (2011) puts it, to “deny it as future, to place it as given, as past.” (p. 40)

This relationship between Option A and Option B is summarised in Fig. 8.3. It shows how Malay-language editorials and columns legitimised their arguments during GE13 and GE14 through a sample timeline.

As illustrated above, during the general election campaign periods, the monolithic projection of the future in editorials and columns submits to the status quo and values the present in terms of its relation to the past. The tendency to conflate current achievements with glories of the past echoes a rhetoric of actuality that views the present as the result of the past and the foundation of the future. Since the future by definition involves epistemic uncertainty, such rhetoric operates on the supposition that “we are most fully persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated” (Aristotle, 350BCE/2004, 1355a 5). Similarly, Fleischman (1982) explains that:

**Table 8.4** Summary of conditional sentences used as threats in Malay-language editorials and columns

PROTASIS [the if-clause]	APODASIS [then-clause]	
	GE13 (2013)	GE14 (2018)
If [ we do not vote for the government] If [we vote for the opposition] If [the government loses power]	+	<p><b>1. The future of our race (Malays)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our race will be sacrificed (4 May, BH)</li> <li>• The Malays will have nowhere else to go, they will never be able to be in the position they are now in government (21 April, UM)</li> <li>• 'Malaysian Malaysia' will be formed, where the backbone is the secular ideology of the 'equality' concept (28 April, MM)</li> </ul> <p><b>2. The future of our religion (Islam)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The word 'Allah' will be used by non-Muslims (to refer to their God) in the Malay-language Bible (28 April, MM)</li> <li>• <i>Shi'ite</i> teachings will be spread (28 April, MM)</li> <li>• Liberalism and pluralism will engulf the nation (28 April, MM)</li> <li>• Zionism will be established, as it is on the agenda to convert Muslims with their liberalism-pluralism understanding of religion (23 April, UM)</li> <li>• The country will be shared and plunge us all into a hole of curses by Allah (21 April, MM)</li> <li>• Malaysian Malaysia will be formed, where the backbone is the secular ideology of the 'equality' concept (28 April, MM)</li> </ul> <p><b>3. The future of our progeny</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The children (of our race) will be divided. The future of our progeny will be ruined. The future of our progeny will be destroyed (22 April; 28 April, MM; 4 May, BH)</li> </ul>

UM= Utusan Malaysia; MM= Mingguan Malaysia; BH= Berita Harian

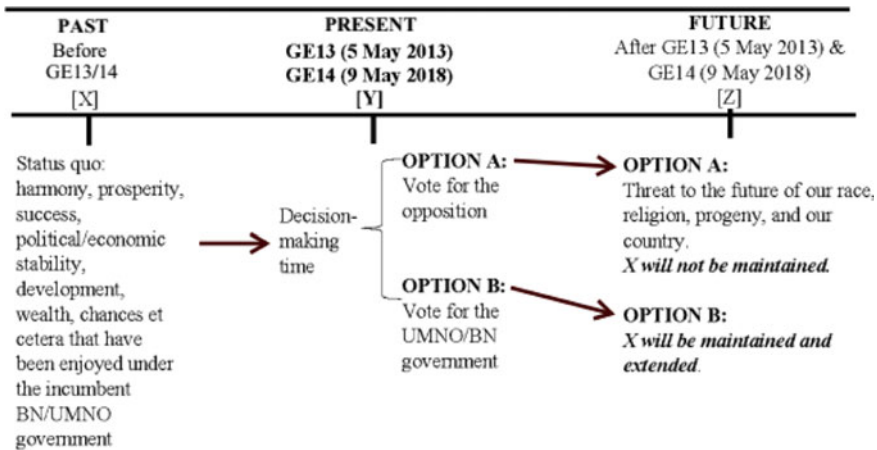


Fig. 8.3 Legitimation of arguments through time

What purports to be a *statement* describing a future event is therefore, of necessity, a subjectively modalised utterance...The subjectivity factor is a crucial one, since the distinction drawn [between contingent and assumed events] depends not on any objective, ontological notion of “future reality” but on the *speaker’s conviction* that the predicated event will at some future moment constitute reality. (p. 20)

However, given the role of campaign discourse in the political process, references to or threats about future developments and announcements or promises about future action should be expected. But, contrary to Fleischman (1982) and Dunmire (2011), in the Malay-language newspapers during the GE13 and GE14 election campaigns, references to the present tend to be positive and those to the future negative. There are two potential explanations for this: first, there is a need to maintain the status quo. And from the incumbent government’s perspective, it is not only the BN as a governing coalition that is challenged during both general elections, also at stake is the entire uninterrupted political system that has been built and steered by UMNO, the dominant party in BN since independence in 1957. Second, there is an expectation of something better than the status quo. And from the reader’s perspective, during the campaign periods in 2013 and 2018, respectively, there was the question of whether GE13 or GE14 would be conclusive, or whether they would follow a period of uncertainty, if not instability, and what this would mean for Malaysia and the region. This kind of argumentative move is thus opportunistic, especially in the attempt to win undecided voters.

In these Malay-language columns and editorials, the future is emphasised through unfavourably imagined scenarios. Consider first the extracts taken from the GE13 campaign period in Extracts 4–5:

Extract 4 (Awang Selamat, *Utusan Malaysia*, 23 April 2013).

<p>Bayangkan, jika mereka ditakdirkan diberi mandat, maka bercelaru<b>lah</b> negara!  <i>I have bolded lah above to increase its salience</i></p>	<p>Imagine if they are fated to be given the mandate, the country will be chaotic!</p>
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Extract 5 (Hasan Ali, *Utusan Malaysia*, 25 April 2013).

<p>Di peringkat diri sudah dibayangkan bencana membelakangkan akidah</p>	<p>The consequences for an individual can already be imagined [if one] trivialises <i>aqidah</i> (Islamic creed)</p>
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On the speech-act level, Extract 4 is a directive that primarily involves a validity claim of normative rightness, while Extract 5 is an assertion that primarily claims the truth. Consider now the conceptually very dense Extract 4, which starts by setting up a hypothetical space by means of the imperative '*Bayangkan*' (imagine). Within this space is a counterfactual conditional sentence. Roughly, the antecedent of the sentence (the *if* part) is 'if they (the opposition) are fated to be given the mandate', and the consequence is 'the country will be chaotic'. Although the possibility of the consequence has not yet been actualised or taken place through the use of the modal *will*, it is intensified by the particle *lah*,<sup>2</sup> making it accurate to translate it as: 'Imagine if they are fated to be given the mandate, the country will [definitely] be chaotic!' The particle *-lah* is non-obligatory, in that Extract 4 does not become ungrammatical if it is removed. So, from a rhetorical point of view, its use implicitly signals a higher degree of certainty about the validity of a proposition while manifesting commitment: the degree to which the columnist commits himself to the validity of what he is writing. In other words, the absence of hedges or modal adjuncts (i.e. probably, maybe, perhaps) and the deliberate choice to use the particle *-lah* in the column not only express the strong commitment of the columnist towards the statement, but also give the statement the validity he seeks in making it an apparent matter of fact.

On the other hand, the verb *bayang* (imagine) is affixed in Extract 5: *dibayangkan* (prefix *di* and suffix *kan*), which then changes its meaning to 'being imagined'. In Extract 5, it is no longer an order to form a mental image or concept of what will, may or might happen in the future, but a consequence that has been mentally formed by the columnist. Putting Extract 5 into context: if one trivialises *aqidah* by voting for other than the government, i.e. the opposition, the columnist has already sketched out a possible disaster as the outcome of a proposed action without any real proof being given that this outcome will occur. *Aqidah* or the Islamic creed is the most important thing in Islam. It is what a person takes as religion. Someone who has the correct *aqidah* is someone who has the right beliefs. *Aqidah* is an action of the heart; it is to believe and affirm something in the heart. This is also what marks out the Malay-language editorials and columns, the focus on Islam and defining 'us/our' as Muslims.

Consider Extracts 6–7 from the general election campaign period in 2018:

Extract 6 (Najib Razak, 4 May 2018, *Utusan Malaysia*).

Sekiranya negara ini jatuh ke tangan DAP yang memperjuangkan liberalisme melampau dan fahaman sekular berbahaya, pastinya, hak dan keistimewaan orang Melayu yang diperjuangkan serta dipertahan oleh UMNO selama ini, termasuk institusi-institusi bumiputera antaranya MARA, FELDA, RISDA... akan pupus dan lenyap	If the country fell into the hands of the DAP who fight for extreme liberalism and dangerous secular ideology, the rights and privileges of Malays that have been fought for and defended by UMNO over the years, including institutions of the <i>bumiputera</i> like MARA, FELDA, RISDA... will be abolished
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Extract 7 (Farhana, 8 May, 2018 *Berita Harian*).

Malaysia bakal mencatat sejarah hitam yang besar iaitu bermulanya kejatuhan kedudukan Islam sebagai agama Persekutuan, sekiranya pemimpin-pemimpin DAP dalam gabungan pembangkang PKR megambil alih kepimpinan negara pada 9 Mei ini	Malaysia will record a huge dark history, namely the beginning of the fall of Islam as the religion of the Federation, if the DAP leaders in the PKR opposition coalition take over the country's leadership on May 9
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Again, on the speech-act level, Extracts 6–7 are both declarations which are expressed by assertions. At this point, we have seen how assertions simultaneously express belief, but belief itself, when unspoken, is by default (or *ceteris paribus*) the belief the writers are confident to endorse or entertain with certainty. Therefore, Extracts 6–7 serve the aim of communication, not merely pieces of information about the potential consequences of not voting for the government (or voting for the opposition), but also the writers' attitudes of certainty about these propositional events via '*sekiranya*' (if) and '*bakal*' (will). Such assertions are part of constatives which express the writers' beliefs and their intention or desire in the editorials and columns that the readers have a form like a belief—that is, in asserting *P*, the writers express: (1) their belief in *P* and (2) their intention to induce the reader to contemplate the same belief. At the same time, in asserting *P*, the writers of the editorials and columns acknowledge (and thus undertake) a commitment to *P*. By acknowledging such commitment and the entitlements that follow from it, the writers urge their readers to have the same commitment (i.e. licensing the readers to assert *P* and what follows from it on the basis of the authority of their claims about *P*). Such entitlement is made possible based on presupposed shared circumstances, which will then potentially influence the reader's decision when voting. This is especially so in making such assertions in the context of an election campaign expressing propositions, whose truth value depends on the actual circumstances [OPTION A and OPTION B above]—if the reader takes the writer's belief to be true. Such truth of presuppositions is taken for granted by the writers (and the reader is invited to take it for granted too), marking a piece of information as presupposed tends to naturalise assertive conjectures and therefore ones which can be accepted with certainty.

Extracts 4–7 evidently demonstrate how the writers evoke (and promote) people's fears, attempting to deceive the other party into reasoning erroneously. The fallacy



is delusional in character, as the reader is fooled by her anxiety into thinking that they must accept this as the truth, if the claim in question is justified. With BN's total dominance over politics in its six-decade rule, it is only to be expected that those who want change during GE13, or even GE14, albeit enthusiastically, are still worried about the consequences of change as well as the future of the country. This is understandable, as a new government would be a momentous change for one of the Asia's most economically dynamic nations. While there is growing dissatisfaction, particularly among younger, urban voters regarding government inertia on tackling corruption and cronyism, and reforming laws and policies decried as authoritarian and racially discriminatory, older (Malay) Malaysians remain fiercely loyal to BN as the architects of independence, and as the custodians of a long-standing peace, or assumed inter-ethnic 'harmony' and economic growth, especially after the violence of 13 May 1969 (see, e.g. Weiss, 2013; Welsh, 2018; Waikar, 2020).

Throughout the campaigns in 2013 and 2018, Malay-language editorials and columns intimidate the reader via a kind of innuendo suggesting that the potentially bad consequences are very scary and that the future is very uncertain and dangerous. The representation of general elections as decisive presupposes a period that requires making crucial decisions when choosing who should govern the country. The choices are connected to the status quo (i.e. when the BN government was in power, which occurred in the past, i.e. before GE13) and a consequence (which may occur in the future, i.e. after GE13 or GE14). In other words, in the past, the cause of our success, peace and harmony was the BN government, and it now triggers imminent action to maintain and extend the existing state of affairs in the future. Making sure BN is still in power after the general elections is the only way 'we' (writer and reader, Malays) can enjoy a successful future. This argument about the future is a violation of rules 4 and 7.

## 8.5 Conclusion

The editorials and columns during the GE13 and GE14 campaign periods had their own agenda; however, the aspiration for a 'balanced forum' beyond mono-ideological parameters was lacking due to the political, regulatory and structural control over mainstream newspapers in Malaysia. In this chapter, I have also argued that the absence of alternative voices in the Malay-language editorials and columns violated the first rule of the ten commandments, i.e. the freedom rule which allows a wide range of voices to be heard or cast doubts on standpoints. This violation left us with *fallacies* instead of *topoi*. Reiterating van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1987), in principle, "everyone is entitled to advance a point of view on any subject and to call any standpoint into question" (p. 283). The homogeneity of the political stance throughout the editorials and columns during the campaign periods in 2013 and 2018, as reflected through the total support given to the government as opposed to the opposition, was also identified through the *illusion of choice* in Malaysia's democracy: (1) vote for the known with a proven track record (i.e. the government) and you will be safe or (2) vote

for the unknown (i.e. the opposition) and you will be doomed. Such a leap from the desirability of one proposition to the undesirability of an extreme opposition is a form of correlative-based fallacy. It subtly coerces (as opposed to persuades) the reader to accept a conclusion with a menacing either/or projection, while backgrounding other possible alternative options in order to manufacture consent and maintain the legitimacy of the then UMNO/BN government.

It is also crucial to highlight that the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural nature of Malaysia had been often used as a convenient justification for the then BN/UMNO government to restrict, regulate and control the country's mainstream newspapers. However, despite racial and religious sensitivities abounding, the findings show that the fallacious arguments employed (and condoned) throughout the campaign periods in 2013 and 2018 fall into three legitimacy categories: fear of the future for our race, our religion and our progeny. These fallacies rely on prejudices, i.e. preconceived opinions that are not based on reason or actual experience of the reader, to stir them up; the writers of the editorials and columns direct their arguments at what they take to be the deeply held emotional commitment of the reader. Such tactics exploit the bias of their readers towards their own interests, whether, for example, these are financial interests, social interests or a combination of these within the template of 'our race, our religion and our progeny'. Normatively, as discussed earlier in this chapter, there should be free-flowing discussion, so that another party can reply to an argument in whatever way she thinks will best fulfil his or her obligation or express his or her view. But fallacies that appeal to emotions are used to capitalise on a bias that shifts or twist the context of discussion, i.e. general elections in Malaysia.

Such a rhetorical argumentative strategy with persuasive messages provokes the emotion of fear by "depicting a personally relevant and significant threat and then follows this description of the threat by outlining recommendations presented as effective and feasible in deterring the threat" (Witte, 1994, p. 114). This prophecy, or 'futurology' as Fairclough (2003, p. 167) puts it, primarily works with 'fear' because 'fear begins with things we fear' (Altheide, 2002, p. 3). In this case, the findings illustrate how editorials and columns during the GE13 and GE14 campaign periods generated fear and redirected fear that already exists among Malay-language speaking readers, especially the Malays themselves, fear of everything that can be constructed as a threat to 'us' and everything that belongs to 'us'—'our race, our religion and our progeny', including status, cognitive and affective attachments, possessions as well as practices and the ability to navigate the symbols, ideas and institutions of a group (Siti Nurnadilla, 2020), as also seen in Ang & Kock (Chapter 9). As illustrated in this chapter, fear was constructed through a timeline connecting 'our' (writer and reader, Malays) past, present and future in order to legitimise the then UMNO/BN government.

The findings also show that the use of 'race' as a legitimising ideological tool has turned the concept around and used it to construct an alternative, positive self-identity of the government and the Malay/Muslim community. Bonilla-Silva (2013) notes that 'race', along with social categories, is a social (as opposed to a biological) reality, "producing real effects" (p. 9) so that, according to Buggs (2017), due to

these real consequences of 'race', racialised social structures exist, e.g. awarding privileges to Malays and denying them to others (non-Malays). Similarly, the use of religion is treated as a force which legitimates social order, considering that religion is one of the major symbols of group identity in Malaysia. Quoting Peter Berger (1973):

[R]eligion has been the historically most widespread and effective instrumentality of legitimation. All legitimation maintains socially defined reality. Religion legitimates so effectively because it relates the precarious reality constructions of empirical societies with ultimate reality. The tenuous reality of the social world is grounded for dissent. (p. 140)

Thus, legitimation, as emphasised by Turner (2008, p. 496), is a matter of social cohesion. But from a critical perspective, legitimation is a struggle for hegemony. In this sense, religion, as expressed by Berger, is an example of ideology, or 'meaning in the service of power'; alternative constructions of reality are suppressed by reference to an ultimate, unquestionable source—the sacred. Here, the empirical evidence has shown that Islam was employed as the ideology of different groups in order to maintain/regain legitimacy during the GE13 and GE14 campaigns, e.g. when writers in Malay-language editorials and columns recontextualised religious terms, among others, *aqidah* (Islamic creed) and *hudud* (Islamic law) and verses in the Quran (i.e. the words of God), to tie their arguments to the religious realm.

All these fallacies are ideologically driven as the future constitutes 'an ideologically significant site in which dominant political actors and institutions can exert power and control' in the present (Dunmire, 2011, p. 19). This gravitation towards a hypothetical future in GE13 as well as GE14 did not only assist in legitimising the government's political position, but it also reflected power legitimation. Such reasoning, according to Grosz (1999), echoes Foucault's notion of power, whereby it functions "to dampen and suppress" the potentiality and possibility inherent in the future and seeks to "link it as firmly and smoothly as possible to that which is already contained" in order to maintain the status quo and "make the eruption of the event part of the fabric of the known" (p. 16). However, as long as democratic citizens are conditioned to think with a 'second-hand' reality, democracy in the country via conventional reasoning is nonsensical. This is the current crisis of modern democracy, as while it may be easy to detect such political manoeuvres in totalitarian regimes, some people in democratic societies like Malaysia may not even be aware that they are actually fed with information by their representatives, using disguised and underhand tactics, to cement their hegemony.

There are several gaps that follow from this paper's findings and would benefit from further research. First, since the current study only focuses on mainstream Malay-language editorials and columns in print, further research could explore mainstream op-eds in *The Star* or *New Straits Times*, *Nanyang Siang Pau* or *Sin Chew Daily* (Chinese language) or *Malaysia Nanban* or *Tamil Nesan* (Tamil language) during the GE13 and GE14 campaign periods. Moreover, online newspapers have

huge potential to strengthen the democratisation process and democracy in Malaysia. Therefore, further research could explore whether editorials and columns published in online media like *Malaysiakini* or *Free Malaysia Today* played this role during the GE13 and GE14 campaign periods and helped to rationalise or mitigate the fears propagated in mainstream Malay-language newspapers.

## Notes

1. The framework is presented in its fullest form in German in *Methodik der Argumentationsanalyse* (Kopperschmidt, 1989), but see Kopperschmidt (1987) for an English introduction.
2. I struggle to compare the elusive meaning or function of the particle *-lah* in (4) with that of a similar particle in English. The translation equivalents are problematic simply because different languages have different particles; they very rarely match up in number let alone in meaning (see Li et al., 2016). The particle *-lah* is multifunctional (e.g. softening, confirming, emphasising, parsing, intensifying and expressing), and it very much depends on the reader's linguistic intuition to infer what the various uses have in common and how they differ. Examples cited from Goddard (1994) prove that *-lah* has never been consistently translated in English: Baskaran (1988, p. 342) glosses *-lah* as 'for heaven's sake' (declarative) and 'I am pleading' (imperative), Kwan-Terry (1978, p. 23) and Bell and Ser (1983, p. 13) offer 'of course' and 'really', respectively, for some contexts, but point out that in other contexts these would-be equivalents will not do.

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