

THE MERDEKA PAPERS

Neo-Colonial Manipulation in #PRU14 (14th Malaysian General Election)

“We’ve done it in Malaysia”

– Mark Turnbull, Managing Director of SCL Elections¹

The Merdeka Papers take their name from the original rallying-cry for Malaysian independence against colonial rule. They reveal new evidence about close relationships between Western interests, the Western psychological warfare mercenaries of SCL and CAMBRIDGE ANALYTICA, and Malaysia’s current ruling elite – specifically, the government of NAJIB RAZAK and BARISAN NASIONAL.

Many of the techniques of social influence and control being used today have their roots in the COUNTER-INSURGENCY doctrines used to suppress the movement for Malaysian independence more than half a century ago. They have since been supercharged with the help of new technologies, big data analysis and social media. Citizens of Malaysia, and of every country, should reject this manipulation, look for the truth, and participate fully in their democracy. This is the path to lasting Merdeka – for the many and not just the few.

Background

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS LABORATORIES (SCL) is the company behind CAMBRIDGE ANALYTICA (CA), the controversial Western political consultancy which worked to elect Donald Trump and has also been linked to Brexit.

As a group, SCL and CA specialise in PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE, BIG DATA analysis of populations with the intention of driving ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE, and MICRO-TARGETING IN SOCIAL MEDIA. They specialise in POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS and DEFENCE AND SECURITY CONTRACTING. They often operate with local partners or through FRONT ORGANISATIONS/COMPANIES. They use VIDEOS, CULTURAL CAMPAIGNS and INFLUENCERS, as well as more traditional political techniques.

Until 2015 one of SCL’s proprietary tools, TARGET AUDIENCE ANALYSIS, was reportedly “EXPORT-CONTROLLED” AS A WEAPON by the UK government – meaning it could only be used with UK government approval. SCL has deep links in the UK and US security communities, as well as in right-wing politics. The main investors in Cambridge Analytica are US hedge funder ROBERT MERCER and his family. Mercer has been called a white supremacist and is reportedly strongly ISLAMOPHOBIC.

SCL has a long history of work in South-East Asia. It conducted large-scale research in THAILAND in the run-up to the victory of President THAKSIN’s coalition. After the fall of

¹ Undercover recording, Channel 4 News (UK)

Suharto in INDONESIA, it worked on re-directing youth frustration away from civil unrest, and on the election campaign of Aburrahman WAHID. More recently, it engaged in extensive contacts with local partners in the PHILIPPINES in the run-up to the victory of President Rodrigo DUTERTE.

The Petronas Project

In 2014, extensive dialogue took place between PETRONAS, the national oil and gas company owned by the Government of Malaysia, and SCL. At the time, the head of SCL Malaysia was SHAHID SHAYAA, who had previously worked for NAJIB RAZAK in the Performance Management Delivery Unit of the Prime Minister's Department.

SCL was involved in preparing at least three strategy documents for Petronas between May and September 2014. They all related to the same project: large-scale data collection on the populations of SARAWAK and SABAH "to understand current attitudes, perceptions and key drivers at community and individual level", and "to develop data infrastructure to improve PETRONAS strategic communication planning and activities in target communities".²

The [FILE-1 document](#), dated 2nd May 2014, was presented jointly by BERKSHIRE

CONSULTING & MANAGEMENT SERVICES (Shahid Shayaa's local company) and SCL GROUP.³ Berkshire Consulting was described as having been previously "engaged by Barisan National" (Najib Razak's governing political coalition) "to design and mobilize an integrated political campaign for the 13th General Election", including a "centralized Command-And-Control Centre" (a signature technique of SCL), as well as "integration of more than 100 team members / leaders working in different cells / operating units" and the creation of the new BETTER NATION brand identity.

The FILE-1 document is presented on the surface as being intended primarily to improve Petronas's reputation and corporate social responsibility and communications. For example, it talks about one of the challenges being that "Malaysians have this belief system that they own PETRONAS" (p37), and strategies to deflect demands for an increase in the oil royalty.



Barisan Nasional – Election Digital Campaign

- In 2012, BC was engaged by Barisan Nasional (BN) to design and mobilize an integrated political campaign for the 13th General Election.
- Communication campaign involves centralized Command-And-Control Centre and integration of more than 100 team members / leaders working in different cells / operating units to carry the same message throughout the year
- It involved analyzing more than 100 hot-topics from social media conversation, with daily tracking and dashboard to ensure communication messages addresses the top topics, etc
- A new brand identity (i.e Better Nation) was created and rolled out to appeal to young voters and fence-sitters.
- Extensive use of paid media which involved strategic placement of ads in different digital platform, etc
- More than 200-300 creative artwork ranging from political posters to other form of visual stimulus were deployed to create the election buzz

² September 2014, "Enhancing the Strategic Communication Capacity of PETRONAS – Targeted Community Engagement: A Data-Driven Solution"

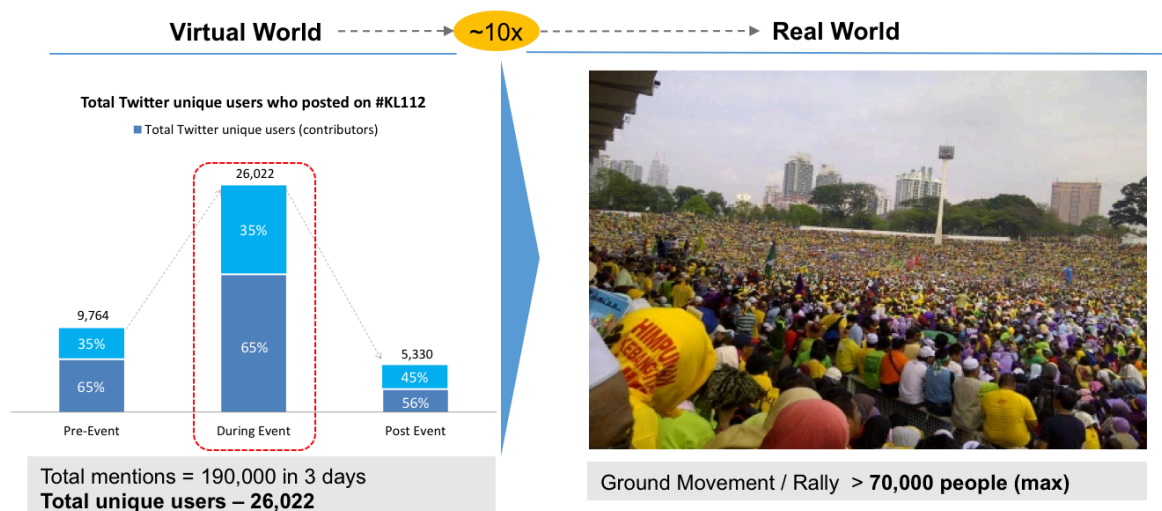
³ May 2014, "Winning the Perception Game for Petronas"

However, SCL SOURCES report that the intention from the first, as discussed with the clients, was to deliver a psychographic political data model and campaigning tools for the use of Barisan Nasional.⁴ The budget quoted to Petronas in May was \$1.3m.

1 Overall design and definition of a fully- realised, scientifically-informed public relations campaign – then can be operationalized as preparation for the 14th General Election

The underlying political agenda is explicitly signalled on p61 of the FILE-1 document, which says the work “can be operationalised as preparation for the 14th General Election”; on p7, which highlights the successes of the PAKATAN RAKAYAT opposition coalition over Barisan Nasional in major cities in the previous general election; on p14, a case study of the opposition’s Himpunan Kebangkitan Rakyat rally and the social media environment around it; and on p48, which talks repeatedly about polling as a tool for gauging POLITICAL PARTY support.

Case Study #2 - Himpunan Kebangkitan Rakyat Rally in 2012



The [FILE-2 document](#), dated 12th September 2014, describes a similar project; the budget has risen to over \$2.1m, but most of the political content has been removed. However, this document still includes tell-tale signs of an underlying political agenda; for example, a table which talks about securing data from both BARISAN NASIONAL and SPECIAL BRANCH (Malaysia’s internal intelligence service, which took over the duties of the colonial-era Malayan Security Service); references are also made elsewhere to securing political and census data.

⁴ Personal communication, multiple sources.

Data / Insights	Current Data Availability	Level of Info / Insights (Sufficient / Limited)	Data Source	How effective or important the data is in relation to GSC ?
Demographic	Yes	Sufficient	Nielsen, Zenith	High
Consumer / Lifestyle	Yes	Limited	Nielsen, Zenith	High
Social Media	Yes	Sufficient	Berkshire	High
Customer Surveys	Yes	Sufficient	TNS Survey, Merdeka Centre, PETRONAS PDB, etc	High
Public Perception Poll	Yes	Limited	TNS Survey, Merdeka Centre, others	High
Social Impact Assessment	Yes	Sufficient	PETRONAS OPU and others	High
Environmental Impact Assessment	Yes	Limited	PETRONAS OPU and others	High
Stakeholder detail Profiling– Name, Income household, constituency, IC	No	n/a	Barisan Nasional + Special Branch	High
Ground Intel - Psychographic / Psychometric	No	n/a	n/a	High

All three versions of the Petronas strategy document reviewed talk about conducting large-scale opinion research and combining datasets to build predictive analytics that determine the psychology, personalities, political views and behaviour drivers of everyone in Sarawak and Sabah. The strategy is to build both individual and community-level psychographic profiles.

Specific attention is given to psychological vulnerabilities in both FILE-2 (p31) and FILE-3:

- Baseline psychometric diagnostics
- Emotionality
- Socio-moral threat salience and shame proneness
- Susceptibility to influence
- Compliance to authority

There are references in various places to the controversial "HUMAN TERRAIN" methodology, which comes from military COUNTER-INSURGENCY and was pioneered in AFGHANISTAN.

A "VOTER QUERY" tool is illustrated, and there is a specific citation of "DISENGAGEMENT TARGETS" on p45. In SCL/CA documents, this typically means VOTER SUPPRESSION.

New Voter Query

[Reset Query](#)

INITIAL GROUP

Choose the initial group within which to start filtering. Leaving this group empty or "Any" will choose from all voters in the database.

Initial Group

Disengagement Targets: Very high ▾

The "dashboard" tool outlined in the strategy includes a wide range of **POLITICAL CAMPAIGN TOOLS – PHONE BANKING, TURF CUTTING/CANVASSING, ROBODIALLING, BULK SMS, SOCIAL BLASTS.**

The GHANA example in the Appendix to FILE-2 specifically blends a health research project with a political research project conducted for the governing party in a single design. This illustrates a “fast-and-loose” approach to firewalls between state, political and corporate objectives and datasets.

Appendix G talks about social contagion of political ideas as equivalent to disease, something which can be propagated by targeting “infectious” individuals “to help messaging better penetrate social networks”. There is also a discussion of “attitudinal inoculation”, a method through which an undesired view can be discouraged by sharing a weak version of it.



PSYCHOGRAPHIC PROFILING AND DIAGNOSTICS:

Delve well beyond traditional research to understand the underlying psychological motivators of behaviour for each societal target segment.



CAMPAIGN DASHBOARD:

A real-time display that shows daily/weekly targets, canvassing/messaging results, complete activity logging, detailed campaign metrics, and top performers.



SCHEDULING:

Campaign scheduling tool with shared calendar and calendar/email integrations with formatted messages.



PHONE BANKING:

Create and schedule volunteer phone banks, choose phone bank volunteers, and assign target groups/locations.



QUERY BUILDER:

Build and run custom queries and searches. Save them for later or share with others.



TURF CUTTING / CANVASSING:

Narrow down your targeted lists to specific communities and areas for optimal canvassing. Add instructions for canvassers and print paper maps and lists, or send to the SCL app.



GROUPS AND TAGS:

Build static and dynamic lists to assign or tag individuals; or for use in canvassing, emailing and phone banking.



DIRECT MAIL:

Create bulk mailings and prepare them for printing locally in office, through a local provider or through a trusted national bulk mail partner.



BULK E-MAIL:

Create individual or bulk email based on targeted groups. Send email through trusted national partners for optimal penetration and worry-free sending.



AUTOMATED CALLING / IVR POLLING:

Create automated phone calls with interactive voice response technology to allow for mass telephone messaging and surveys.



Bulk SMS (Texting):

Send single or mass SMS messages to target individuals or groups.

PETRONAS: political research and campaigning for Barisan Nasional?

The political content in the supposedly commercial strategy outlined in FILE-2 only makes sense after reviewing FILE-3, an almost identical pre-existing document dating from five days earlier (7th September 2014), as previously quoted in online media. It seems that FILE-2 was a redacted version of FILE-3. [The 7th September FILE-3 document](#) (excerpts only) talks much more unabashedly about the underlying political goals:

4.1 Overview of project objective

SCL Commercial will contribute to the overarching strategy of enhancing public perception of PETRONAS and the Government of Malaysia through two project objectives:

- **Develop infrastructure to improve the image of PETRONAS in Sabah and Sarawak through data informed reputation management and branding**
- **Understand the perception of the Government and current political situation at community and individual level in target areas and the key drivers**

The political analysis outlined in FILE-3 is also much more pointed:

The growing concern for the ruling party is that the opposition is making inroads into both Sabah and Sarawak, especially the Kadazan areas of eastern Sabah (also known as the Crocker range).

- BN won marginally (50% to 55%) some of the parliamentary seats in Sabah in 2013, in contrast with the landslide victories of the 2008 and 2004 elections.
- PR has launched eloquent campaigns to instil fear and insecurity amongst Sabahans and Sarawakians. Recurring issues since the 2013 election include oil royalty, job opportunities and the state of the economy.
- Major oil and gas projects such as SOGIP, SSGP, SOGT affect BN swing constituencies. This provides impetus for PR to propagate messaging campaigns on economic opportunities, inequalities in wealth distribution and environmental issues. To date, PR has been successful in creating activist campaigns such as the environmental campaign against Lynas in Pahang. At this juncture, PR is already establishing media campaign platforms such as Impian Sabah to showcase their political campaigns.

Due to the limited access to mainstream media that the opposition coalition suffers, the digital field will continue to constitute the main propaganda platform for PR. The Borneo Post Online, Malaysia Kini, The Malaysian Insider and The Rakyat Post have published numerous articles and opinion pieces attacking PETRONAS' refusal to increase the oil royalty. This means that online media will be a key channel for combating negative political press and for building reputation management over the coming months.

The research and data-gathering plan is also explicitly political in FILE-3:

Social network analysis:

A key dimension of an influencer's relationship with his/her peers concerns congruity of political attitudes. Our data will show not only the influencers (and their peers') political opinions, but whether or not there is a diffusion of attitudes/opinions to peers from key influencers. As an outcome, this part of the project will provide the client a clear understanding of who key influencers are in society and this will enable targeting for 'word-of-mouth' communication techniques that could be used to augment messages delivered through mainstream channels.

Population Survey:

The quantitative population survey carried out in Sabah and Sarawak will cover variables required for psychographic insights for individuals in each community, however we will also include key political variables such as an evaluation of governmental performance, vote intentions, past vote choice, partisanship, and emotions towards political actors. Thus, the data we obtain will serve as a baseline snapshot of current political attitudes. Integration of this data with contextual political data will provide a valuable insight into:

The strategy includes political psychographics, a voter turnout model, a voter choice model between BN and PR, issues and emotional models, and strategic recommendations for drivers of shifting attitudes and behaviour.

After corroborating the data gathered through the DBR (electoral and Census data, etc.), the population survey and the community survey, on the political dimension of the project, SCL will be able to deliver some of the following:

- 1) **Political psychographic community profiles**
- 2) **A turnout model - identifying what drives turnout by community. Depending on the granularity of data, it will also allow SCL and PETRONAS to identify which variables best drive turnout for different groups of people in specific areas of Sabah and Sarawak.**
- 3) **A vote choice model - Allowing us to identify the predictors of voting for BN/ PR.**
- 4) **A party support model - For BN/PR determining what it is that drives feelings of individuals close to each party.**
- 5) **An issues model: Through which we will identify the predictors of how people feel on the most important issues.**
- 6) **An emotional model: Demonstrating what drives emotionality towards parties and how does these emotions affect partisanship.**
- 7) **Identification of target groups based on different characteristics**
- 8) **Strategic recommendations: For actions appropriate to target different groups, for example:**
 - a) **Drivers for attitude/behaviour**

It remains unclear whether this strategy was ever implemented by SCL, its local partners or Petronas itself. But it is shocking that it was ever discussed.

Ongoing SCL contacts with the government, Barisan National and UMNO

After news broke in March 2018 of the Petronas project, Najib Razak's spokesman denied any connection between Barisan Nasional and SCL/Cambridge Analytica. However, the documents and emails being released in the Merdeka Papers seem to disprove this claim definitively.

- FILE-1 shows that a director of SCL Malaysia, SHAHID SHAYAA, was engaged by Barisan National in the 13th General Election in 2013 to run an integrated political campaign for them. This campaign included signature SCL techniques, "more than 100 team members/leaders", a new brand identity, "extensive use of paid media" and "more than 200-300 creative artworks" including political posters.
- Between May and November 2014 at least, talks were ongoing between PETRONAS and SCL about building a predictive model of the populations of Sarawak and Sabah. One key goal of this work was to collect political data usable by BARISAN NASIONAL; another goal was to pilot this same approach to be used on a larger scale in the 14th General Elections.
- [FILE-4 shows](#) that in September 2016, SCL organised the attendance of Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister AHMAD ZAHID HAMIDI at the CONCORDIA SUMMIT in New

York. Concordia is a more right-wing version of the Clinton Global Initiative, an opportunity for high level networking and deal-making. Cambridge Analytica's CEO ALEXANDER NIX also gave a keynote speech at this summit. The Deputy Prime Minister participated in a session on "Intelligence from Open Sources: Partnerships for International Security" chaired by former CIA Director DAVID PETRAEUS and whose attendance list included senior representatives from the security and intelligence community (including the NSA and the US ARMY), as well as financiers such as GOLDMAN SACHS. A side meeting was organised between the Deputy Prime Minister and MARK TURNBULL, Managing Director of SCL Elections.

- By 2016, AZRIN ZIZAL has become Director of SCL Malaysia, although there are still references in emails to a separate local partner. There is no indication in the materials of a connection between Zizal and SCL in 2013, when he was working for MUKHRIZ MATATHIR.
- In October 2016, [the emails in FILE-5](#) record that TENGKU ADNAN, Secretary General of the UNITED MALAYS NATIONAL ORGANIZATION (the main party in the Barisan Nasional coalition), has "requested that [SCL] prepare a proposal" for 40 parliament areas, that AMINUDIN MUSTAFA from his team has been assigned to meet with SCL on 10th October to discuss "the details of a contract for them to consider", and that MARK TURNBULL will lead the pitch for SCL.
- [FILE-6, the itinerary](#) for MARK TURNBULL's October 2016 visit to Malaysia, includes the aforementioned meeting with AMINUDIN MUSTAFA, but also several other meetings with senior BARISAN NASIONAL figures, including family members of the PM (his nephew HISHAM KASSIM, and his brother NAZIR RAZAK was also invited); the CEO of the Barisan Nasional War Room, SUFFIAN AWANG ("to explain how we may add value to war room"), a lunch with TENGKU AZMAN (a Minister at the Prime Minister's Department, "on behalf of the Barisan Nasional Strategic Director"), and HAZALI ABU HASSAN from the UMNO Executive Committee "to bring recommendations to UMNO Youth Exco Meeting".
- [FILE-7](#), a separate strategy document produced around the same time, proposes a KICKSTARTER crowdfunding campaign raising funds from Australian and international citizens for an apparently independent election monitoring initiative called ELECTION WATCH ASIA, which is clearly a project of SCL. This proposal is described as having "Spinoff Potential" including "Political buy-in from Political Parties to Nationwide Target Audience Analysis" and "United Nations accreditation as independent elections observer for SEA [South East Asia]", and proposes target campaigns in "Parliament Constituencies of selected high profile Southeast Asian politicians". PENANG, BANGKOK, JAKARTA, CAMBODIA, KUCHING / MIRI and MANILA are all mentioned, as are several high-profile politicians. This project does not seem to have been implemented in this form yet, however.

Voter Suppression

The UNDI ROSAK (“Spoilt Vote”) campaign which has been going viral among the Malaysian youth looks similar in its strategy to other VOTER SUPPRESSION CAMPAIGNS which Cambridge Analytica or SCL have designed and run in other countries – for example, the “Do So” campaign in TRINIDAD & TOBAGO. Voter suppression was also a key part of the TRUMP campaign according to a BLOOMBERG article by SASHA ISSENBERG.

Lord Marland: yet another link between Najib Razak and SCL

LORD JONATHAN MARLAND of the UK is a shareholder of SCL who has also played a key role in organising business deals and networks between the UK and Malaysia. He has a close relationship with Najib Razak and his government. Lord Marland’s “Commonwealth Investment and Enterprise Council” (CWIEC) purports to be a public body, but is in fact a small private company. CWIEC and Lord Marland organised a Britain & Malaysia trade event shortly after the 1MDB court filing that showed a billion dollars had gone from that fund into the bank account of Najib Razak. Lord Marland and HUGO SWIRE MP, at the time a Foreign Office minister, both used the occasion to defend Razak.

Conclusion

The Merdeka Papers are just the tip of the iceberg. It may not be easy to say exactly who has interfered in Malaysia’s democracy and society, or in exactly what way. But it is long past time for the people of Malaysia to claim their independence, and to throw off this corruption.

“Often if we are working we can set up fake IDs and websites – we can go in as students doing research projects... we can be tourists, so many options. I’ve had lots of experience in this. We just used a separate organization to do a very successful operation in an Eastern European country. No one knew they were there; they just drift. **They were just ghosted in, did the work, ghosted out...**”

- *Alexander Nix, CEO of SCL Elections and Cambridge Analytica*⁵

⁵ Undercover recording, Channel 4 News (UK)