

## **Social movements in contemporary Malaysia: the cases of BERSIH, HINDRAF and Perkasa**

### **Abstract**

The emergence of civil society movements like Gabungan Pilihanraya Bersih dan Adil (BERSIH, Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections), Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) and Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa Malaysia (Perkasa, Malaysian Indigenous Empowerment Organisation) has been among the fundamental forces behind a changing political landscape in Malaysia. In breaking away from past traditions, these movements have brought about new, vibrant, politically engaged activism, often 'confrontational' with the state and radical in achieving its objectives. The emergence of these movements has also created a sense of political awareness that has successfully mobilised Malaysians. Although these movements are deeply rooted in issues of ethnic discontent (in particular HINDRAF and Perkasa), BERSIH's successful multi-ethnic mobilisation has set a promising precedent in Malaysian politics. In fact, had it not been for BERSIH and HINDRAF rallies, it would arguably have been impossible for the Malaysian opposition political parties to gain a more secure foothold in Malaysian politics. On the other hand, Perkasa has showcased Malay race-supremacy debates more openly than ever.