

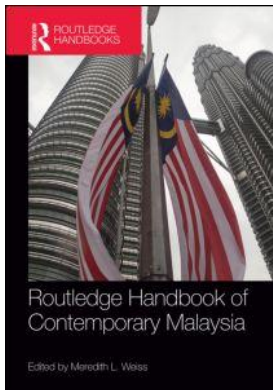
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.97.143

On: 11 Dec 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Malaysia

Meredith L. Weiss

Elections in Malaysia

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315756240.ch1>

Bridget Welsh

Published online on: 28 Oct 2014

How to cite :- Bridget Welsh. 28 Oct 2014, *Elections in Malaysia from*: Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Malaysia Routledge

Accessed on: 11 Dec 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315756240.ch1>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Elections in Malaysia

Voting behaviour and electoral integrity

Bridget Welsh

Of all the countries in Southeast Asia, Malaysia's elections have arguably received the most academic attention. Since the country received its independence in 1957, there have been thirteen general elections, regularly held within five-year intervals with the exception of the eighteen-month emergency period after the May 1969 racial riots. As elections have become highly institutionalised, the study of Malaysian elections has been a flourishing research area, dominating the discussion of politics. Despite the broadening of civil society and political contestation outside of the campaign periods, elections serve as defining points in the country's political history, be it the recent May 2013 and March 2008 polls or the pivotal historic 1955 and 1969 contests. By way of an example, less than a year after the 2013 polls, no fewer than three journal special issues, three books and multiple articles have been devoted to understanding the electoral process and outcome (Case 2013; Chin 2013a; Kee 2013; Khoo 2013; Ufen 2013; Weiss 2013; Welsh 2013, 2014).

This chapter looks at research on contemporary elections in Malaysia. The chapter is necessarily selective in its approach and coverage. The purpose is to draw together central themes and evaluate how elections are being understood, rather than to provide a comprehensive review. Attention centres on two important themes: voting behaviour and electoral integrity. This attention to political behaviour and the rules and norms governing polls reflects two comparatively recent threads in the studies of Malaysian elections. The focus is on national-level general elections (GEs).¹

The richness of recent studies lends considerable optimism regarding our understanding of elections in Malaysia. Our knowledge of Malaysians as voters has expanded, with increasing attention to different political identities and social cleavages. We also find that public attention to electoral reform has fostered in-depth research on how Malaysia administers elections and the impact of these administrative rules and procedures. As elections have become more competitive in the last decade, more attention is also centring on how elections may allow changes in leaders and policies. In short, we appreciate the multiple roles that citizens, campaigns, rules and institutions play in shaping electoral outcomes. Nevertheless, as will be developed below, considerable questions remain unanswered, not least of which is whether elections in Malaysia will offer its citizens the opportunity for regime change.

From elites to citizens: frameworks of voters and voting

With high turnouts, averaging over 70 percent since independence, it is fitting to begin with how voters have been studied. In two of the most comprehensive early studies on Malaysian elections, Ratnam and Milne (1967) and Vasil (1972) provide a detailed overview of the participants, parties and performance during the 1964 and 1969 GEs, respectively. These works set the standard for research on elections in their scope and richness and began a pattern that has occurred regularly in Malaysian scholarship – a focus on reporting on the election itself. The thrust of these initial works was on the winners and losers, allowing for resilience in these studies over time. One of the defining features of these early studies, however, was the largely missing Malaysian voter. The attention to the election primarily highlighted the elites participating in the process as candidates and their campaigns. Voters were largely missing ingredients in the initial analytical works, as an elite focus on interpreting elections emerged.

While a preoccupation with elites would persist in election studies – as it does in other analyses of politics in Malaysia – an appreciation of ordinary citizens would evolve gradually. Voters began to be framed as groups, primarily as ethnic communities. The dominance of ethnicity in Malaysian politics is a persistent feature in the analysis of voting behaviour, with the framing of ethnicity initially derived from the race-linked Malay–Chinese–Indian–Other (MCIO) conceptualisation that parallels the ethnic composition and identity of the leading peninsular-based political parties.² In 1957, the dominant party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), forged a coalition with the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), forming what was known as the Alliance. After 1969, the Alliance was expanded to include more political parties, particularly those in the two states of Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia, and renamed the National Front or Barisan Nasional (BN). While nominally more multi-ethnic, the main opposition parties historically in Malaysia have also rested on ethnic foundations, namely Malay support for the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam SeMalaysia, PAS) and Chinese support for the Democratic Action Party (DAP).

The ethnic paradigm in Malaysian elections rests on certain assumptions and is a self-reinforcing dynamic. Voters are seen to prioritise their ethnicity over other features of their political identity, such as class or gender or even sub-ethnic identities. Moreover, they are believed to view their role as citizens along racial lines, for example to see politics as being about the rights of different ethnic communities who operate in an ethnically divided polity. Voters are also presumed to assess the performance of political parties by their ability to represent their respective community. These assumptions tie into different practices in electoral contests. Voters are categorised in constituencies along ethnic lines – with different ethnic rationales used to delineate seats – which in turn leads to a particularly ethnic-oriented contest. Ethnic-based issues such as language, education, affirmative action and religion closely intertwine with broader questions of ethnic representation and feature prominently in political campaigns. Finally, voters are believed to vote according to ethnic loyalties and patterns of mobilisation. Which comes first – ethnicity in the political identity of individuals, or in the way political parties engage with voters – is moot, as a perceived mutually reinforcing ethnic dynamic heightens this lens in analysing elections.

While scholars have rightly criticised the ethnic paradigm's use and dominance in electoral analyses (Loh and Saravanamuttu 2003), not least for its shallow understanding of ethnicity (Mandal 2004), the ethnic paradigm remains embedded in research and arguably in Malaysian voting behaviour itself. The significant patterns in voting behaviour along ethnic lines and

continued use of ethnicity by political parties – prominent in GE13 (Welsh 2014) – make it impossible to dismiss ethnicity in understanding Malaysian elections.

In voting analyses, researchers have thus not surprisingly drawn attention to ethnic voting patterns (see, for example, Brown 2005; Welsh 2004; Chin and Wong 2009). This genre has run the gamut from heuristic studies based on culture to data-based analyses using detailed statistics on election results and polling. The main questions have generally revolved around two issues. Foremost is the ‘loyalty’ of the Chinese to the existing system. Traditionally, the Chinese community has been a swing group, moving away from the incumbent government in 1969, 1990, 2008 and 2013, and shoring up the incumbent coalition in elections such as 1995 and 1999. The issue of ‘loyalty’ of Malaysian Chinese is highly politicised in that Malay leaders in the dominant Malay party, UMNO, have regularly used the Chinese community as a target and labelled them as *orang pendatang* or ‘foreigners’ – despite many in the community having longer roots in Malaysia than other citizens. The Chinese, along with other ethnic minorities, are labelled as ‘second-class’ citizens. In 2013, Chinese Malaysians made up 24 percent of the population, a decrease from 36 percent at independence. Their ‘loyalty’ to the incumbent coalition is seen as decisive as it still can shape the final outcome in elections.

The second issue has been the level of unanimity of the Malay community. UMNO as a party draws its legitimacy from articulating the interest of the Malays, as they define it. Malays comprise 50.4 percent of the population currently (although with the other indigenous population of East Malaysia included, this increases to 67.4 percent). If the Malay community is split, or in other words, loyal to opposition parties, then the legitimacy of the ruling party is questioned. UMNO’s greatest political challenge has come when it has lost ground in the Malay heartland of the country, namely the north and east (Kedah, Perak, Perlis, Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang). Its greatest challenger has been the Islamist PAS, although since 1999, another party, now called the People’s Justice Party or Parti Keadilan Rakyat, has also won considerable Malay support. Securing Malay support is portrayed as the legitimate marker of the right to hold onto power by those who conceive of political power as primarily ethnicity-driven. One of the ironies of UMNO in office is that it has set the terms of its own legitimacy, opening itself to challenge when it loses support among the Malay community.

While analysis has concentrated historically on the two largest ethnic communities, the Malays and the Chinese, with greater electoral competitiveness has come increased attention to smaller minorities. These groups are no less important in shaping political outcomes, as the minority groups are evaluated for their support for the incumbent government. Studies of East Malaysia are often subdivided to reflect the communities there – Malay/Melanau, Chinese, Kadazan, Dusun, Iban and more – highlighting the ethnic pluralism of Sabah and Sarawak. Over time, there have been increasing efforts to fit East Malaysia’s ethnic communities into a peninsular-oriented framework of three different groups, a construct that does not reflect conditions on the ground. The use of the ethnic paradigm to understand voting has risen in prominence in East Malaysia as its role as a king-maker in national politics has increased (Chin 2013b).

The Indian community has also gleaned attention, although research on this community is hampered by its limited size – Indians currently comprise 7.3 percent of the population – and geographical dispersal. In 2008, the Indian community was highly mobilised over issues of religious freedom, forming a movement known as HINDRAF (Willford 2013; see also Anantha Raman Govindasamy, this volume). Their move away from the incumbent coalition is seen as one of the decisive factors that contributed to the BN’s loss of its two-thirds majority in parliament that year. (The dominant coalition has held onto power in every election in

Malaysia, although it has fallen short of a two-thirds majority three times – 1969, 2008 and most recently, 2013.) In this ethnic approach, elections are seen to be determined by the support of different ethnic communities, with voters acting as unified race-based groups.

The ethnic heuristic tool is reinforced by the use of two other related social cleavages to understand voting. The first is an extension of the ethnicity rubric to include religion. The other is geography. Let us take each of these in turn. The synergy between religion and ethnicity has always been close. From Malaysia's early years, when the organisation that became PAS was formed in 1947 by a split over Islam within UMNO, to more recent mobilisation of religious minorities over religious freedom, a focus on religion simultaneously has been an outgrowth of, and reinforced, the ethnic voting paradigm. Religious issues have permeated political campaigns due to the link with morality, party identity and political mobilisation. How much actual voters are swayed by religion as opposed to other aspects of ethnic identity is challenging to distinguish because of the explicit linking of race with religion, especially among Muslims. How much voting is determined by religion alone is even more challenging, given the complexity of religious practice and Malaysia's religious pluralism. While a Malay, as defined in the Malaysian constitution, is a Muslim and lacks the freedom to choose another religion, there are differences within the Malay community in how Islam is practised, as is the case for all of Malaysia's religious communities for their respective faiths. Recent scholarship has drawn attention to how religious issues mobilise voters and how religiosity among both Muslims and Christians has shaped voting patterns (Hamayotsu 2013; see also Puyok and Liow and Afif, this volume). The findings do show that religion and religiosity, like race, help us understand voting behaviour, especially in recent polls. For example, among Malays, PAS continues to win over more religiously devout and conservative Muslims (Yahoo! News Malaysia 2013). We also find that religiously devout Christians are more inclined to support the opposition (Welsh 2014). This scholarship, however, is less rigorous in its empirical methodology than are other studies in the ethnicity paradigm that now rely on statistical analysis of local polling-station data as well as surveys.

Another analytical framework for understanding voting behaviour has been geography, or place. The urban–rural divide remains one of the most important political cleavages in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia. Studies of rural–urban differences have pointed to the impact of information, messaging and campaigning as underscoring why rural voters differ from their urban counterparts (Ockey 2004). Seen as less informed and more focused on parochial politics and personal patronage, rural voters are believed to be more conservative and usually to favour the incumbent. In Malaysia, as a result of the concentration of Chinese in cities and Malays in rural areas, at least before the 1980s, the ethnic paradigm has been conflated with the urban–rural lens. While there remains a higher concentration of Chinese in urban areas, especially in East Malaysia, the country as a whole is more than 70 percent urbanised, with Malays now on a par with or exceeding Chinese in number in many of the urban centres of Selangor and Penang. Studies through the 1980s continued to highlight this geographic divide, with more recent scholarship holding different views of urban–rural cleavages. In analyses of the 2013 results, for example, some scholars (Chin 2013a) argue this divide was decisive for the BN while others posit that both the cleavage itself (Thompson 2013; also Thompson, this volume) and actual voting patterns (except in East Malaysia) do not help us understand the results (Welsh 2014). The view that the government gets its support from the rural areas remains prominent (Lee 2013).

This emphasis on geography has extended to other regional patterns, focused around states and dynamics in particular regional governments. East Malaysia especially has regularly been singled out for its unique voting patterns, with the power of personality and local issues given

greater explanatory importance (Chin 2013a; Welsh 2014). The use of place in politics has been a useful tool to interpret differences in voting patterns.

The contemporary use of socio-economic lenses to understand voters has moved from groups to individuals, bringing more complexity to research. Gender and generational factors are now meshed with ethnicity and place. Research shows that women generally favour the incumbent regime, except Chinese Malaysian women (Yahoo! News Malaysia 2013). We also find that young voters are decisive in electoral outcomes, and have been since 1999. This trend will likely continue as a result of Malaysia's young population. In 2008, young voters gave the opposition sufficient boost to break the two-thirds barrier, but in 2013, young voters were more split, leading to limited opposition electoral gains (Welsh 2014). Data collected from polling stations and surveys have been used to capture such voting patterns with increasing sophistication.

Of these lenses, one is noticeably missing – class. While there have been efforts to bring class into our understanding of voters – pointing to lower-class support for the opposition (Syed Husin 1984) and more recently, the effectiveness of the BN in winning over lower-class voters in 2013 (Welsh 2014) – the socio-economic positions of voters are often overlooked or ignored altogether. Ethnicity continues to trump all the other frameworks, even as our appreciation of the richness and diversity of the political identities of voters themselves has been enhanced.

From clients to citizens: voters in context

Despite a deeper understanding of voting patterns, questions continue to linger in our understanding of voters. Why exactly does a Malay vote as he or she does, for example? Socio-economic markers capture differences, but do not necessarily help our understanding; we can identify patterns in our research, but are left grappling with the search for causes of voting behaviour. Rather than look at voters themselves, scholars searching for causation have turned to more interactive models that connect voters with the state or political campaigns. Malaysians are portrayed as voting in response to government efforts to win support through the provision of public services, economic performance and stability. In one of the earliest broad reflections on Malaysian elections, scholar Harold Crouch (1996) stressed the importance of the interaction between voters and the government, with elections serving to legitimise the government and simultaneously forcing the government to recalibrate its governance. The focus on the government was extended in the seminal works of Francis Loh (2002), who emphasised the impact of 'developmentalism', or the use of development resources and rhetoric, to hold onto power. Complementing such work are recent analyses of the populist use of government resources to woo support in the 2013 polls through 'commercialisation' (Welsh 2013). Looking at elections with attention to the state, through the lens of the actions of the government, allows us to understand better why voters may opt to maintain their loyalty to the BN.

Another interactive approach has involved a focus on campaigns. Traditionally, the discussion of campaigns has involved the three 'Ms' – media, machinery and money (with a fourth 'M' of Mahathir Mohamad, the country's fourth premier) (Mustafa 2004; George 2006). In each of these areas, the incumbent has been seen to have the edge, using its control over the mainstream media, large party organisation and access to resources to its advantage. Technological change and the use of the Internet and social media have levelled the playing field in media, although this rebalancing has not extended to mainstream media and analyses of the recent election reveal that the government was able to master new media, as well, although less well (Diamond 2010; Khoo 2010; Houghton 2013; Steele 2009; Tapsell 2013).

Contemporary campaigns in Malaysia are a hybrid, melding pre-modern forms of mobilisation in *ceramah* (public rallies) with post-modern practices of centralised planning and the use of professional consultants. They combine performance and theatre with policy-oriented public engagement (Lim and Ong 2006). The campaign itself has been seen as decisive in shaping outcomes, as occurred in 2008. In that contest, the government was on the defensive over issues of ethnic exclusion and perceptions of unfulfilled promises by then premier Abdullah Badawi. Besides drawing attention to the Internet and social media, contemporary research has helped us appreciate the effects of different types of messaging in campaigns – yet another ‘M’ – and their effectiveness (Ibrahim 2010). Polling and focus group analyses are now well integrated into campaign strategies. The central role of governance issues such as corruption and cost of living concerns reflects greater attention to the problems identified by voters themselves. Voters have had more impact on campaigns and in turn, campaigns have become more impactful. The interaction of campaigns and outcomes points to a further people-oriented trend in Malaysian elections: a greater attention to the needs of citizens in elections.

Citizens are also taking electoral politics into their own hands. In the last decade citizens have felt empowered at the ballot box. They know they can make a difference to the outcome. From the *reformasi* movement of 1999 that brought a generation into the streets, many of whom are now in parliament, to the political awakenings that have taken place in less politically active towns such as Bentong and Miri and states such as Johor and Perak since 2008, Malaysia’s political life around elections has become energised and engaged. Elections remain the focal point for political life, but the political relationships forged during campaigning extend into everyday politics. There has been a political mobilisation of the electorate, with groups across the political spectrum making demands and contesting with each other. Ordinary citizens are no longer relying on elites and political parties for representation. Some citizens see too much ‘politics’ now in Malaysia, while others do not see the form and substance of contemporary politics, both its polarisation and its personalisation, to be constructive. Elections, however, have become less of a controlled arena of politics as described by Benedict Anderson (1996) in his characterisation of elections in the region. Rather, they are an extension of broader political engagement.

Contesting the rules: challenges of electoral reform

A central dimension of this citizen politics has been contestation over the electoral process. Dressed in yellow and marching for electoral reform, participants in the Bersih (Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections) movement catapulted the issue of electoral integrity onto the national stage. Since 2007, there have been intense discussions about how to make the rules and administrative processes governing elections fairer. Scholarship has similarly expanded to draw attention to electoral reform. Broadly, four major areas have come under scrutiny, all of which point to ways the system favours the incumbent party and negatively affects electoral integrity.

Foremost among these issues has been the conduct of the institutional bodies that administer and regulate the conduct of elections (Lim 2002, 2005). Complaints have repeatedly centred on the perceived bias and lack of professionalism of the main institution, the Election Commission (EC). This body is constituted by the prime minister and since 1962 has lost its ability to administer polls independently. The EC is comprised of senior civil servants, many of them lacking professional backgrounds in administering polls, and is seen to favour the incumbent party. That former and current commissioners have publicly claimed loyalty to UMNO has contributed to concerns about a lack of neutrality.

The institutional organisation of elections extends beyond the EC to include the Registrar of Societies (ROS) (who monitors political parties and their registration), the police (who regulate campaigns, while other branches provide intelligence reports to the incumbent party), as well as the judiciary. Concerns have been raised about the police for their support of the incumbent party and of the ROS for decades, as the party registration process has been seen as arbitrary and politically tainted. Recent complaints over the lack of a fair hearing in the over sixty electoral petitions that were filed in GE13, including measures that arbitrarily dismiss petitioners, have reinforced the view that even the judiciary's role in elections does not meet international standards of neutrality. Some reports go further, to suggest that administrators of Malaysia's polls fail adequately to ensure transparency in counting, secure and accurate ballots and the rule of law; such critiques move an assessment of the administration of Malaysia's polls away from one of non-neutrality, to suggest active participation in ensuring victory for the incumbent coalition (Pemantau 2013). While these matters remain highly contested, concerns over administrative neutrality point to a major weakness in Malaysia's electoral integrity.

These concerns are reinforced by evidence that points to exclusion and suspect practices in the management of voter registration. Malaysia has a higher voting age than the global average, twenty-one, thereby excluding millions of its young citizens from voting. The issue of exclusion goes beyond the voting age to involve the registration process itself. The EC has been seen as arbitrary in assessing when to include voters in the final electoral roll, as occurred in the competitive 1999 election, which excluded 100,000 newly registered voters from participating. While steps in recent years have allowed for online voter registration, the burden this administrative hurdle places on voters effectively excludes many citizens from voting. The exclusion is particularly acute in the more remote areas of East Malaysia, where voters are effectively registered through government civil servants as they often lack access to register otherwise. The opposite concern is also raised, with reports of non-citizens being allowed to vote. This is particularly common in Sabah, where hundreds of thousands of illegal migrants have been granted the right to vote since the 1980s, according to a recently concluded Royal Commission of Inquiry (Welsh 2013). While the EC rightly is not the sole organisation responsible for this practice and it lacks enforcement capacity to review questions of citizenship, the end result has been that elections in Malaysia have excluded citizens in the registration process, yet in some cases, included non-citizens. There is a perception that these non-citizens (some of whom are later granted citizenship) skew the electoral outcome in the incumbent party's favour.

The issue of who is included and excluded is tied to the integrity of the electoral roll itself. Recent audits of the electoral roll before GE13 identified significant problems in the composition of the list, with persistent 'phantom voters' reported, many of whom either lacked addresses or were listed all in one residence (MERAP 2013). Repeated calls to revamp the electoral roll have been effectively ignored by the EC; a cleaning exercise left many parties unsatisfied as the reported problems remained. Malaysia's judiciary has denied the ability of opposition political parties to question the electoral roll, despite reports and witnesses.

Concerns with the electoral roll are compounded by unexplained placements and transfers of voters among different constituencies. GE13 in particular saw an unprecedented rise in the share of new voters, including in some constituencies of senior leaders in the incumbent party. For instance, the remote rural constituency of Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak himself received over 30 percent new voters (Welsh 2014). Voters in the same household, including a husband and wife, have been assigned to different constituencies without explanation. The padding phenomenon for leaders, as well as strategic movement and placement of voters

within constituencies, has occurred at regular intervals, especially in elections before delineation exercises, most recently in GE13, or in highly competitive contests such as in Terengganu in 2004. These practices are conducted by the EC and deepen concerns over electoral integrity.

A third area in which scholarship on elections has questioned the electoral playing field involves the conduct of the campaign. This area ties into the discussion of the 'Ms' noted above, especially money and the media. Financial resources have become more important in political campaigning with the move away from pre-modern campaigning to post-modern practices (Fernandez 2010; Gomez 1996). This shift has impacted the conduct of elections. The advantages of money have significantly benefited the incumbent government. Effectively unregulated campaign financing, vote buying and the abuse of state resources in campaigns have become the norm, although these practices are being challenged. The attention to money in campaigns for its favouring of the incumbent government parallels long-running complaints about control of mainstream media and obvious biases in reporting. Malaysia's mainstream media outlets are owned by companies linked to the government political parties (Mustafa 2004). There is a lack of access for opposition parties and skewed coverage during the campaign itself.

Finally, scholars have questioned the electoral framework, both the electoral system itself and organisation of constituencies, and the legal framework (Lim 2003; Das 2005; Rachagan 1980; A. Rahman 1994). In 2013, the incumbent government won 47.4 percent of the popular vote but obtained 59.9 percent of the seats (Ostwald 2013). This skew has extended the outcry over how the electoral framework advantages the incumbent. Malaysia's 'winner takes all' first-past-the-post electoral system has been criticised, with calls increasing for the introduction of a more inclusive proportional-representation system. Failure to meet international standards for constituency delineation has generated even more concern, including inconsistent use of standards, heavy malapportionment by creating seats in 'safe' areas, and lack of transparency in the delineation process itself. Malaysia has long stood out as an example that does not conform to the global trend of reducing discrimination and bias in drawing constituencies.

New understandings, persistent question

Greater scrutiny of voters, voting and the electoral process has brought increased appreciation of the complexity of elections and their importance. Scholars continue to flock to analyse elections and debates have flourished. Yet all these studies have yet to provide a clear answer to the question that has underscored much of the research: whether elections in Malaysia will serve as a means to change the government (Case 1993; Liow 1999). The BN now stands as the longest-serving government in the world. Many Malaysians believe that a change of government will open a path to new forms of governance and greater democracy. Others would like to hold onto what they know.

Contemporary studies of elections suggest that the obstacles to changing the government are high. They have been illuminated in the attention to electoral integrity and in efforts to gain a clearer sense of who constitutes the base of support for the incumbent government and why. Rather than providing a clear trajectory of trends ahead for electoral behaviour and outcomes, these contributions generally point to greater contestation and increasing confrontation over elections. Malaysia's electorate – as is the case in many parts of Southeast Asia – is polarised and this polarisation is widening. The electoral process itself is now also being contested.

Will this polarised pattern of voting change? What sort of campaign will allow the government to hold onto power? Will electoral reform move forward and how will this happen? Despite contributions to knowledge on elections, the answers to key questions of what motivates Malaysians to vote as they do and whether they can overcome the obstacles embedded in electoral rules remain elusive. If there is one certainty in our understanding of elections in Malaysia, it is that elections will continue to generate interest and debate.

Notes

- 1 GEs usually coincide with state legislative polls that determine the government in Malaysia's thirteen states, with the major exception of the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, which have traditionally operated on different calendars. Malaysia has not held local elections since 1965, as they have been suspended. The opposition state government of Selangor introduced elections at the local level in some communities after they won power in 2008.
- 2 See Loh 2011 for an excellent review of the study of Malaysian elections. He makes the point that electoral analyses have been focused on ethnicity.

Bibliography

- A. Rashid Rahman (1994) *The Conduct of Elections in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing.
- Anderson, Benedict (1996) 'Elections in Southeast Asia', in R.H. Taylor (ed.), *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia*, Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Brown, Graham (2005) Playing the (Non) Ethnic Card: The Electoral System and Ethnic Voting Patterns in Malaysia, CRISE Working Paper No. 21, Oxford: CRISE, University of Oxford.
- Case, William (1993) 'Semi-democracy in Malaysia: withstanding the pressures for regime change', *Pacific Affairs*, 66(2): 183–205.
- Case, William (2013) 'Post-GE13: any closer to ethnic harmony and democratic change?', *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 102(6): 511–19.
- Chin, James (2013a) 'So close and yet so far: strategies in the 13th Malaysian elections', *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 102(6): 533–40.
- Chin, James (2013b) 'Chinese tsunami or urban revolt? It is both actually', *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 102(6): 499–501.
- Chin, James and Wong Chin Huat (2009) 'Malaysia's electoral upheaval', *Journal of Democracy*, 20(3): 71–85.
- Crouch, Harold (1996) 'Malaysia: do elections make a difference?', in R.H. Taylor (ed.), *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia*, Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, pp. 114–35.
- Das, Cyrus (2005) 'Election laws: compelling areas for reform', in Mavis Puthuchery and Norani Othman (eds), *Elections and Democracy in Malaysia*, Bangi: Penerbit UKM, pp. 372–82.
- Diamond, Larry (2010) 'Liberation technology', *Journal of Democracy*, 21(3): 69–83.
- Fernandez, Josie M. (ed.) (2010) *Reforming Political Financing in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Transparency International.
- George, Cherian (2006) *Contentious Journalism and the Internet: Towards Democratic Discourse in Malaysia and Singapore*, Singapore: Singapore University Press and Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Gomez, Edmund T. (1996) 'Electoral funding of general, state and party elections in Malaysia', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 26(1): 81–99.
- Hamayotsu, Kikue (2013) 'Towards a more democratic regime and society? The politics of faith and ethnicity in a transitional multi-ethnic Malaysia', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 32(2): 61–88.
- Houghton, Tessa J. (2013) 'Watching the Watchdog': *Malaysian Media Coverage of GE13: Preliminary Results – Release 2*, 26 April, University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus and the Centre for Independent Journalism, available at <http://pilihanraya.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/WtW.Release.1.2.pdf> (accessed 6 May 2014).
- Ibrahim, Suffian (2010) *Reflections of the 2008 Malaysian General Election: Role of the Internet in Political Communications*, Kuala Lumpur: Merdeka Center for Opinion Research.
- Kee Thuan Chye (2013) *The Elections Bullshit*, Kuala Lumpur: SIRD.

- Khoo Boo Teik (2010) *Cyber-networks and Physical Coalitions in Malaysia: Realizing Dissent between Reformasi and the Tsunami*, IDE Discussion Papers No. 244, Chiba: IDE-JETRO.
- Khoo Boo Teik (ed.) (2013) *13th General Election in Malaysia: Issues, Outcomes and Implications, Interim Report 2013*, Chiba: IDE-JETRO.
- Lee Hock Guan (2013) 'Steadily amplified rural votes decide Malaysian elections', *ISEAS Perspective*, 34, 6 June.
- Lim Hong Hai (2002) 'Electoral politics in Malaysia: "managing" elections in a plural society', in Auriel Croissant, Gabriele Bruns and Marie John (eds), *Electoral Politics in Southeast and East Asia*, Singapore: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, pp. 101–48.
- Lim Hong Hai (2003) 'The delineation of peninsular electoral constituencies: amplifying Malay and UMNO power', in Francis K.W. Loh and Johan Saravanamuttu (eds), *New Politics in Malaysia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 25–52.
- Lim Hong Hai (2005) 'Making the system work: the election commission', in Mavis Puthuchear and Norani Othman (eds), *Elections and Democracy in Malaysia*, Bangi: Penerbit UKM, pp. 249–91.
- Lim Hong Hai and Ong Kian Ming (2006) 'Electoral campaigning in Malaysia', in Christian Schafferer (ed.), *Electoral Campaigning in East and Southeast Asia*, Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 55–78.
- Liow, Joseph Chin Yong (1999) 'Crisis, choice and change: Malaysian electoral politics at the end of the 20th century', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 7(2): 45–74.
- Loh, Francis K.W. (2002) 'Developmentalism and the limits of democratic discourse', in Francis K.W. Loh and Khoo Boo Teik (eds), *Democracy in Malaysia: Discourses and Practice*, Richmond: Curzon, pp. 19–50.
- Loh, Francis K.W. (2011) 'Studying elections and democracy in Malaysia: a survey and review', Keynote address for the Elections and Democracy Conference, UNIMAS, Sarawak, November. Unpublished.
- Loh, Francis K.W. and Johan Saravanamuttu (eds) (2003) *New Politics in Malaysia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Malaysian Electoral Roll Analysis Project (MERAP) (2013) Available at <http://malysianelectoralroll-project.blogspot.sg/#> (accessed 28 May 2014).
- Mandal, Sumit K. (2004) 'Transethnic solidarities, racialization and social equality', in Edmund Terence Gomez (ed.), *The State of Malaysia: Ethnicity, Equity and Reform*, London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Merdeka Center Survey Release (2003) 3 May, available at www.merdeka.org (accessed 7 February 2014).
- Mustafa K. Anuar (2004) 'Muzzled: the media in Mahathir's Malaysia', in Bridget Welsh (ed.), *Reflections: The Mahathir Years*, Washington DC: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 486–93.
- Ockey, James (2004) *Making Democracy: Leadership, Class, Gender and Political Participation in Thailand*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Ostwald, Kai (2013) 'How to win a lost election: malapportionment and Malaysia's 2013 general election', *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 102(6): 521–32.
- Pemantau Pilihan Raya Rakyat (2013) *Clean & Fair?: An Election Observation Report for GE13*, available at www.bersih.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/PEMANTAU-Report-FINAL-10-Sept-2013.pdf (accessed 6 May 2014).
- Rachagan, Sothi (1980) 'The development of the electoral system', in Harold Crouch, Lee Kam Hing and Michael Ong (eds), *Malaysian Politics and the 1978 Elections*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, pp. 255–92.
- Ratnam, K.J. and R.S. Milne (1967) *The Malayan Parliamentary Election of 1964*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press.
- Steele, Janet (2009) 'Professionalism online: how Malaysiakini challenges authoritarianism', *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 14(1): 91–111.
- Syed Husin Ali (ed.) (1984) *Ethnicity, Class and Development, Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia.
- Tan Lee Ooi (2010) 'The emergence of a virtual civil society: transcending ethnic politics?', in Francis K.W. Loh (ed.), *Building Bridges, Crossing Boundaries: Everyday Forms of Inter-Ethnic Peace Building in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia and Jakarta: The Ford Foundation, pp. 273–96.
- Tapsell, Ross (2013) 'Negotiating media "balance" in Malaysia's 2013 general election', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 32(2): 39–60.
- Thompson, Eric C. (2013) 'GE13 and the politics of urban chauvinism', *New Mandala*, 14 May, available at <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2013/05/14/ge13-and-the-politics-of-urban-chauvinism/> (accessed 28 May 2014).

- Ufen, Andreas (2013) 'Introduction: the 2013 Malaysian elections: business as usual or part of a protracted transition?', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 32(2): 3–17.
- Vasil, Raj (1972) *The Malaysian General Election of 1969*, Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Weiss, Meredith L. (ed.) (2013) *Electoral Dynamics in Malaysia: Findings from the Grassroots*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and Petaling Jaya: SIRD.
- Welsh, Bridget (2004) 'Real change? Electoral behavior in the reformasi era', in Edmund Terence Gomez (ed.), *The State of Malaysia: Ethnicity, Equity and Reform*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, pp. 162–93.
- Welsh, Bridget (2013) 'Malaysian elections 2013: a step backward', *Journal of Democracy*, 23(4): 136–50.
- Welsh, Bridget (2014, forthcoming) *Democracy Denied? Malaysia's GE13*, Singapore: Marshall Cavendish.
- Willford, Andrew (2013) 'Every Indian is burning inside', in Bridget Welsh and James Chin (eds), *Awakening: The Abdullah Badawi Years in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: SIRD.
- Yahoo! News Malaysia (2013) 'Class, gender divide seen in GE13 voting trends, says Merdeka Center', Yahoo! News Malaysia, 16 May.