

Virtual Civil Society: Malaysia's 2008 General Elections Revisited

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Abstract

This article revisits the 2008 general elections in Malaysia to examine how the internet contributed to the remarkable political change never experienced in the history of this country. The ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional lost its two-thirds parliamentary majority seats it had enjoyed since 1969, while the opposition that ardently utilized the blessings of the internet in the run up to the elections returned to full political limelight. The literature examined provides significant leads to the different political scenarios that herald increased internet usage among concerned citizens, which we were able to justify against the political reality in Malaysia. However, through a close study and analysis of Malaysia's political terrain prior to the 2008 general elections, we observed that numerous controversial issues and events that engulfed the ruling coalition government, which were effectively divulged and most often deliberated upon via the internet infuriated many enfranchised Malaysians, hence provided the opposition and civil society activists with tremendous leverage in amassing public support against the ruling coalition. This observation leads the article to contend that the degree of contestations contained in a political system, and the intensity of information fed unto the internet and regenerated, determines the role of the internet as a powerful bridge to political change.

24

25 **Index terms**— internet, social capital, ruling coalition, opposition, elections, Malaysia.

1 INTRODUCTION

26 The 12th Malaysia general elections of March 2008 marked a significant milestone in the history of Malaysian politics. The outcome of the elections was unprecedented following unfolding electoral results and events that completely reconfigured the entire political scene of Malaysia. The elections marked the dramatic comeback of opposition parties to real time opposition politics after almost four decades in oblivion hence, ushered in a new era of politics for a scathed ruling multi-party coalition, the Barisan Nasional that finally lost its two-thirds majority seats in parliament for the first time since 1969.

2 About

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37 It is pertinent that the political change that emerged from the elections was due to numerous contestations from
38 unfolding political issues that ranged inter alia from a deteriorating state of the economy and Political oppression
39 to the increasing precarious state of ethno-religious relations in the country that over the years has left many
40 Malaysians disgruntled. In light of all these, was the formation of a remarkable and resilient social capital among

4 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

41 Malaysians, who ardently used the ballot box to bring about change to Malaysia's political landscape. Aside
42 the crucial roles assumed by formal and informal offline networks that informed and wove the fabric of political
43 awareness amongst Malaysians, the internet in the 2008 elections was formidable as it deepened and strengthened
44 the social capital that forcefully swept Malaysia's body politic with powerful winds of change.

45 The internet in the 2008 elections was an indispensable political instrument for both the incumbent ruling
46 government and the opposition. However, the intensity of its significance was particularly in favour of the
47 opposition, who had used it effectively to expose numerous political issues that engulfed the ruling coalition
48 government. In addition, the internet served as the main credible source of information for most Malaysians,
49 and provides civil society groups and concerned citizens with crucial contents for deliberation as it promotes
50 citizen involvement and engagement. In the 2008 elections, the internet registered its importance by surpassing
51 all other sources of disseminating information so much so that the aftermath of the elections got the ruling
52 coalition government to reckon with the internet as the main driver behind their worst election losses in its
53 history (Ramirez, 2008).

54 State policy on the media is a fundamental factor that determines the effectiveness of media sources. The
55 mainstream media in Malaysia is controlled by government, with information easily distorted to favour the
56 regime, and ownership of the private media companies are mostly controlled by pro-government elites. Besides,
57 the strict codes associated with media practice, ownership and licensing could be taken as a deliberate ploy
58 to restrict potential media sources, who are likely to justify the neutral roles associated with media practice,
59 which consequently, may be detrimental to the agendas of the ruling coalition. These factors *inter alia* are
60 tenable justification behind increased reliance on the internet by Malaysians, which aside from providing credible
61 information, serves as a unifying source of collective social bonding amongst groups that constitute the vanguard
62 for political change like the opposition, civil society activists and minority groups.

63 3 II.

64 4 Review of Related Literature

65 The internet is a collection of networks connected to other networks to form a huge network (McLaughlin et al.,
66 1995) and since it connects people, it becomes a social network, the base for social capital (Ferlander, 2003).
67 The 1990's saw the rise and increased versatility of the internet in unprecedented dimensions. While it has had
68 tremendous positive impacts on political, economic and social development of individuals, groups, businesses
69 and governments; it has simultaneously, inflicted collateral damage when likened to activities of terrorist groups,
70 criminal networks, fraudsters and underground economies (Diebert and Rohozinski, 2010).

71 Looking at its social benefits, the internet has offered new hope to deliberative groups, proponents of
72 democratic ideals and humanitarian groups as it provides an improved forum for political debate, one that
73 involves geographically disparate citizens, where issue relevance matters, status is less important, and arguments
74 are evaluated based on their strength (Downey and Fenton, 2003). The process of online deliberation literally
75 builds social capital and trust amongst deliberative groups; which is an ongoing bonding process that gathers
76 momentum and the force required to effect change to a particular status quo (see Yang, 2009a).

77 Social capital is a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in a society or in parts of it. It can
78 be embodied in the smallest and most basic social group, the family, as well as the largest of all groups, the
79 nation, and in all the other groups in between ??Fukuyama, 1995). It is basically the unison of individuals and
80 groups on the basis of trust, mutual agreement and cooperation, all in a quest to enshrine democratic ideals. It
81 is strategically the ability of citizens to articulate and organize requests for good government.

82 Robert Putnam delineates social capital as encompassing two forms namely; network capital and participatory
83 capital (Putnam, 1996(Putnam, , 2000)). On one hand, he attributes network capital to relations with friends,
84 neighbors, relatives, and workmates that significantly provide companionship, emotional aid, goods and services,
85 information, and a sense of belonging. While participatory capital on the other hand involves engagement in
86 politics and voluntary organizations that affords opportunities for people to bond, create joint accomplishments,
87 and aggregate and articulate their demands and desires.

88 Participatory capital is usually perceived as contentious particularly in authoritarian regimes that are
89 hegemonic, and always sensitive to public criticism and protest. Good examples are China, Malaysia and Singapore,
90 all of which are highhanded and intolerant to social movements and dissent. To make up for this shortfall, civil
91 society groups resort to the internet to strengthen the much needed social capital required to engage and empower
92 society. This assertion complements Kraut et al. (1998); Lin (2001) and Wellman's (2001) theses where they
93 contend that when people are tucked away in their homes rather than conversing in cafes, then perhaps they are
94 going online; chatting online one-to-one; exchanging e-mail in duets or small groups; ranting, and organizing in
95 discussion groups such as newsgroups and political groups. Such online activities marks the genesis of a more
96 purposeful online activism that takes the form of online petitions, protests, sabotage and campaigns that can be
97 found in blogs, internet bulletin boards, podcasts and activities such as website hacking (Yang, 2009b), which
98 are ways of expressing citizen concerns over particular political, social, economic and cultural conditions.

99 It is logical to stress that the internet reinforces and sets the agenda for what happens offline; this is so given
100 its elusive significance in bringing people together and getting them involved, providing detailed and credible

101 information on crucial issues, and provides a whole range of ways with which people can influence a phenomenon
102 (see Purdam and Crisp, 2009).

103 Most studies view the increasing use of the internet as a justification against the mainstream media, which
104 increasingly have become political tools with limited power of neutrality to disseminate information and open
105 for critical analysis, contentious issues pertaining to an incumbent government (see Weiss, 2005; ??ertzger et
106 al., 2003). This is why Gomez and Chang (2010: 3-4) through a critical empirical analyses of political events
107 in Malaysia and Singapore, argued Electoral events normally invoke cravings for regular updates among the
108 electorate, and given the nature of the mainstream media in Malaysia, the internet effectively filled the void as
109 it hosted a large array of functions that were directly linked to the 2008 general elections. It is on this note
110 the present article looks back at the 2008 general elections to examine the dynamism of the internet and how
111 it was instrumental to the opposition and civil society activists in bringing about an unprecedented political
112 change. The rest of the article is organized as follows. The next section presents a review of related literature.
113 Section three sheds light on Malaysia's political and electoral landscape. Section four examines the catalysts
114 underpinning internet usage in the run up to the 2008 general elections. Section five analyzes the dimensions
115 through which the internet was used to influence the elections, while conclusions are presented in section six.

116 that online citizen journalism emerged as a sum total of the activities of individuals and civil society groups
117 aimed at correcting political bias in the mainstream media. Similarly, in Johnson and Kaye's (2004) online survey
118 to investigate how weblogs users view the credibility of blogs as compared to traditional media and other online
119 sources. In their findings, weblogs users judged blogs as highly credible more than traditional sources in terms of
120 depth of information. Based on their findings, Jonson and Kaye (2004) came to the conclusion that blogs are new
121 and better journalism that is opinionated, independent, and personal, and an avenue where so-called professional
122 journalists source story tips, information, and gain access to stories. Lending credence to these studies, Greer
123 (2003) argues that the credibility of information derived from the internet stem to be the force driving more people
124 to go online. We would like to stress here that the online process in search of credible information gradually
125 exposes online users to current and critical events that usually invoke automatic involvement and engagement,
126 Other studies attribute online activism and rising internet communities to the authoritarian disposition of many
127 states around the world. Authoritarian states are characterized by repression and subjugation of human rights
128 and civil liberty. They are highly sensitive to dissent and are readily set to deploy instruments of coercion to
129 defuse and quell any form of dissidence. In such political settings, internet usage is indispensable and critical to
130 civil society groups, as it serves as their only channel of expression and an avenue to clamour for change. Healy
131 (2001) placed emphasis on the importance, benefits and contribution of the internet to modern societies especially
132 those restrained in one form or another from socio-economic and political inclusion. He argued that the internet
133 provides powerful opportunities for people to enhance their lives and change them for good. He went on to
134 suggest that improved access to the internet helps people to develop new skills, improve their employability and
135 confidence, which in turn, regenerate their communities. This is further strengthened by Diamond (2010), who
136 emphasized that the internet serves as a formidable 'liberation technology' that empowers individuals, facilitate
137 independent communication and mobilization, and strengthen an emergent civil society.

138 Moreover, as political control of the internet becomes more sophisticated, so do forms of resistance. A case in
139 point is Yang's (2009b) observation in China where the government strives hard to control the internet through
140 keyword filtering, site blocking and other means of watching and controlling what people do online. In response,
141 Chinese netizens developed ingenious methods of dealing with internet control, which range from running multiple
142 blogs or the use of overseas servers to host their sites; using chatrooms for secret meetings as well as using the
143 versatility of the Chinese language to create characters that easily beat the best filtering technologies ??Yang,
144 2009b: 35; see similarly, ??ahimi, 2008: 46-50).

145 Numerous websites notably, Youtube, Twitter, Facebook and a host of personal blog sites have become powerful
146 tools of protest and change against political systems. During Iran's 2009 controversial elections for example,
147 Iranians were ardently blogging, posting to Facebook and, most visibly, coordinating their protests on Twitter,
148 with a couple of Twitter feeds taken as virtual media offices for the supporters of the leading opposition candidate
149 (Stone and Cohen, 2009). These *inter alia* underscore the intensity of the internet as an uncompromising tool of
150 change in a political arena that is fraught with contestations.

151 5 III. MALAYSIA'S POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL LAND- 152 SCAPE

153 The political system in Malaysia since 1957 has been described differently by researchers. Crouch (1996) regards
154 it as 'semi-authoritarian state', that is, a state that integrates and exhibit simultaneously, democratic and
155 undemocratic principles of political administration. Closely in tandem with Crouch (1996), is Case's (1993,
156 2001) description of Malaysia's political landscape as a 'semi-democracy' and 'pseudo democracy' given the
157 fact that the government constrains and at the same time allows elements of democratic governance to thrive.
158 Following a similarly trend, Jesudason (1996) regards Malaysia as a 'syncretic state', that is, a doctrinaire and
159 responsive state that justifies economic development by structuring politics and social life in the country.

160 In addition to the country's contrasting shades of political governance, is the existence of a multi-racial society
161 with deep cleavages along ethnic and religious which becomes an exercise that is exhibited both online and offline.

162 All sources of media ought to be agents of social capital, but due to the immense influence social capital has
163 on the political and electoral processes, governments, especially less democratic ones engage in full time war
164 either to gain control of the media sources or to get them completely inactive, merely to safeguard a status
165 quo. Unfortunately, while control of the mainstream media seems feasible, complete overhaul of the internet
166 has remained a mirage for governments and as such, its credibility and popularity amongst people continue to
167 expand in great magnitude. This is why Rahimi (2003) through an in depth analysis of the different phases of
168 contestations between internet users and authorities in Iran, argue that the internet as a powerful medium of
169 interaction together with its users, are ever defiant to any form of strict control by authorities, hence proves to
170 be hugely effective as an uncontrollable political site of resistance.

171 lines. Such primordial ethnic cleavages bred suspicion, hatred and antagonism, with the inter-racial riots of
172 1969 that claimed many lives justifying this claim. Authoritarianism was perceived as the panacea for the stability
173 of the country's diverse and precarious race relations, as well as a conduit through which economic progress can
174 be sustained.

175 The semi-authoritarian nature of the political system, coupled with the pattern of political mobilization on
176 ethnic lines, promoted by political parties, is an irrefutable reason why elections has been characterized by the
177 following: a single coalition party the Barisan Nasional (BN) that monopolized and consistently controlled the
178 majority of contested seats in the parliament, while agents of social capital like the electronic and print media are
179 strictly controlled by the state. The mainstream media literally does not serve as a conduit for dissenting voices,
180 neither does it present the expectations and outcry of ordinary Malaysians and consequently, shuns contestations
181 that emanate from the opposition and civil society. In addition, there are numerous draconian laws, of which,
182 the dreaded Internal Security Act (ISA), is used to selectively intimidate opposition as it authorizes detention
183 without legal recourse, renewable indefinitely at the command of the Minister of Internal Security.

184 Electoral processes and outcomes in Malaysia, except in 1969 have always been routine, with the ruling
185 coalition, Barisan Nasional, consistently claiming election victories which puts it in the hegemonic position of
186 running the government. The independent electoral commission seems to have lost its apolitical status given the
187 excessive interference in the affairs of the commission by the incumbent government (Ufen, 2008). Furthermore,
188 the ruling coalition indulges in gerrymandering of constituencies, which gives it unfair leverage over opposition
189 parties during elections. In the same vein, the control of massive public funds by the ruling government helped to
190 enshrine an electoral and the political system that is fraught with money politics, cronyism and ethnic patronage,
191 all of which saturates electoral ethics and distorts the outcome of political and electoral events in favour of the
192 ruling coalition government (see Gomez, 1994Gomez, , 1999)). All these, inter alia, attribute to the fairly weak
193 electoral competition from the opposition.

194 6 IV. Catalysts of Political Change

195 To screen the influence of the internet in the 2008 general elections, it is imperative to briefly examine the obtrusive
196 political issues that invoked public electoral concern; with the internet as the site for credible information,
197 deliberation and assessment of socio-political and electoral events. This is necessary given the fact that certain
198 social, political and economic conditions stem to act as the drivers that define the direction and intensity of
199 internet usage.

200 a) The Reformasi Spirit

201 The genesis of the change that was observed in the 2008 general elections dates back to the 1998 Reformasi
202 movement initiated by Anwar Ibrahim and his supporters following his dismissal from office as the deputy prime
203 minister and finance minister by the former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad. The movement which swept
204 across the country pulled an astonishing confluence of about 30,000 to 100,000 people in demonstrations and
205 rallies against the long-standing Barisan Nasional coalition government, demanding for an end to cronyism and
206 for democratic freedoms (Clarke, 1998). The movement was a wakeup call for a burgeoning and frustrated
207 middle class and the poor, and a real test of social capital among Malaysians as it never turned racial, but more
208 issue based, which continued until Anwar Ibrahim was arrested and jailed in late 1998. Still very fresh in the
209 minds of many, the 2008 elections provided a convenient rallying avenue for the Reformasi movement, which in
210 the words of Welsh (??008) is a 'spirit that lives on' among a large array of supporters viz. Malays, non-Malays,
211 civil rights groups and a sizeable number of non-governmental organizations.

212 7 b) Ahmad Abdullah Badawi's Blunder

213 The high hopes for change many Malaysians had in the government of Ahmad Abdullah Badawi, who succeeded
214 Mahathir Mohamad that ruled the country for 22 years, resulted in the ruling coalition's landslide victory in
215 the 2004 general elections (see Table 1). Badawi's popularity was quickly dashed barely a year after he assumed
216 office. It started with his failure to meet up his election promises such as checking and putting an end to corrupt
217 practices and improving racial and religious relations amongst races and groups. Instead, poverty aggravated
218 as inequalities continued to widen, increased price hikes of basic essentials like petrol, food stuffs, housing and
219 healthcare, raising the cost of living without any improvement in income.

220 Tackling corruption which was one of his major campaign promises became even more conspicuous yet, with
221 little or no effort to bring corrupt officials to book. Many examples of Badawi's failures abound. There were

222 alleged accusations leveled against his former deputy, Najib Razak, now Prime Minister being involved in the
223 murder of Altantuya Shariibuu, a Mongolian model and translator as well as profiteering from the government's
224 purchase of Russian fighter jets and French submarines -all of which were never investigated. Another example
225 was the corrupt practice evident in the authorization of thousands of so-called approved permits (APs) by the
226 minister of international trade and industry, Rafidah Aziz, allowing wellconnected Malays to buy imported
227 passenger cars at discounted rates. Also the affirmative action policy which has from the early 1970's been one of
228 unfair advantage enjoyed by the Malays was given additional boost as delegates from the UMNO party congress
229 voted in favor of the extension of the policy. Ethnic tensions was intensified on Badawi's watch when delegates
230 attacked the non-Malay and non-Muslim Chinese and Indian population, referring to them as pendasang (recent
231 arrivals), with a prominent UMNO leader who was also the education minister waving a keris (a traditional
232 Malay dagger) insinuating a repeat of the 1969 bloodshed should the so-called pendasang challenge the rightful
233 privileges of the Malays. All these, coupled with his strained relations with his predecessor, Mahathir Mohamad,
234 over cancellations of some of Mahathir's prestigious development projects added insults to injury as Mahathir
235 mounted series of severe attacks criticizing Badawi as incompetent, wishy-washy and ineffectualthese among other
236 things, bred distrust, loss of confidence in Badawi's government especially by the working class and the poor.
237 The understanding and cooperation that reigned among the three opposition parties over the 2008 elections was
238 remarkable. In spite of their religious and ideological differences, consensus on approach and direction to be
239 taken was always realized, which made it possible to field one opposition candidate for each constituency, with
240 this; it guaranteed undivided votes for the opposition. In addition, the opposition parties' message of "change"
241 premised on a more equitable and practical redistribution of national wealth, the dismantling of monopolies, and
242 a more responsible government were consistent and penetrating, hence, attracted more support. Furthermore,
243 they backed their messages with contentious revelations that discredited the ruling coalition's alleged corrupt
244 government. An example is the posting of a video clip showing a prominent lawyer V.K. Lingam on the phone,
245 brokering Supreme Court appointments. To further consolidate their cohesive strategies, they presented as
246 electoral candidates, professionals and business men with credible credentials that would make change feasible.
247 This is in sharp contrast to the ruling coalition that was rather complacent and was not arduous in their efforts
248 to woo voters' confidence.

249 **8 d) A Confident Malay Electorate**

250 The unjust treatment of Anwar Ibrahim by the government of Mahathir in light of trumped-up charges of sodomy
251 and corruption leveled against him did not go down well with both Malays and non-Malays. The Malays felt that
252 the authorities' handling of Anwar Ibrahim impinged an important cultural norm which holds that a ruler must
253 always respect a subject's dignity, even when that subject has erred, and Mahathir was seen to have breached
254 this implicit social contract (Chin and Huat, 2009: 75). The Malays advertently expressed their displeasure on
255 the false promises and the continued arrogance and over-confidence of the ruling coalition that went ahead to call
256 for elections in March 2008 far before the original specified date of May 2009 -a ploy to boycott Anwar Ibrahim
257 from contesting as he was due to be released around that period. In light of these, a more enlightened Malay
258 electorate saw good reasons why the Barisan Nasional-led government deserves a payback via the ballot box.

259 **9 V. THE INTERNET AND THE 2008 GENERAL ELEC- 260 TIONS**

261 The emergence and rising trend of internet usage has been ongoing long before the 2008 general elections (see Table
262 2). Moreover, there have been quite a number of socio-political blog sites such as that of the recalcitrant blogger,
263 Raja Petra Kamarudin (www.malaysia-today.net), those of the opposition party members viz. Anwar Ibrahim
264 (anwaribrahimblog.com), Lim Kit Siang (blog.limkitsiang.com), Jeff Ooi (Screenshots at www.jeffooi.com), Tony
265 Pua (www.tonypua.blogspot.com), Nik Azmi Nik Ahmad (www.niknazmi.com) and those of human rights
266 activists like Malik Imtiaz Sarwar (malikimtiaz.blogspot.com), Susan Loone (www.sloone.wordpress.com), M.
267 Bakri Musa (www.bakrimusa.com); and a host of similar blog sites that unveil, deliberate and challenge political
268 issues in the country. Alongside these blog sites, is the outstanding role of Malaysiakini, the only independent
269 online newspaper that reports groundbreaking news on unfolding developments in the country. The momentum
270 of internet usage as well as the large array of burgeoning blog sites has been evident right before the 2004 general
271 elections, but why was its impacts only felt with great intensity in the 2008 elections? As earlier asserted, the
272 internet is only a force used to meet an end and not an end in itself. This is so given the nature of the internet,
273 with its effects shaped by actions of governments, civil society and individuals. Most importantly, the degree and
274 shades of sociopolitical and economic events within a political system determines the effects of the internet since
275 controversy is good for business, disagreement raises interest and together with anonymity is the buildup of site
276 traffic (Yang, 2009b). This serves to explain the infant and timely arrival of Badawi, whose gentility, alluring
277 persona as well as an appropriate replacement for Mahathir (who perhaps has overstayed his welcome) enjoyed
278 unparalleled public support with little or no contestation, but optimistic expectations prior to the 2004 general
279 a) Independent Online News Site b) Independent and Opposition Blog Sites

280 The series of controversial information that Raja Petra Kamarudin's Malaysia-today.com disseminates puts
281 him in the fore front as a prominent blogger, who was forced into exile after charges of sedition and criminal

10 CONCLUSIONS

282 defamation were leveled against him. He had always made the Barisan Nasional-led government uneasy and his
283 efforts prior to the election period were highly instrumental. For instance, his blog uploaded classified cabinet
284 papers on the RM12.5 billion Port Klang Free Zone scandal, though accessibility was short lived, allegedly blocked
285 by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) ??Malaysiakini.com, 2009). He also
286 implicated the prime minister, Najib Abdul Razak, and his wife, Rosmah Mansor, in the murder of a Mongolian
287 lady, Altantuya Shariibuu; and associated the inspector-general of police, Musa Hassan, with organized crime. All
288 these constitute powerful accusations that aroused public interest both online and offline, which further infuriates
289 and alienates public trust in the Barisan Nasional-led government.

290 Opposition blog sites were also instrumental to the 2008 elections. These blog sites were well coordinated in
291 that the messages they sent to readers were coherent, uniform and targeted the key issues of the government
292 and its response to the economy and inflation, its treatment of minorities, the erosion of public confidence in
293 the judiciary, the police and the prime minister. Furthermore, opposition blog sites provided information about
294 candidates and reported on events, exposed the ruling coalition's excesses and also served as an avenue to solicit
295 donations. For instance, money politics was exposed online when a candidate of the Barisan Nasional during his
296 campaign offered RM200 cash to residents over 60 years, though he lost the election (Lee, 2009). Online donations
297 recorded some In spite of the ruling coalition's efforts at improving websites and recruiting 'cybertroopers' to
298 counter pro-opposition messages, Anwar Ibrahim's website was observed to have defied this move given the
299 fact that his website stood above other websites and elections. Sadly, the blunder witnessed during Badawi's
300 premiership awakened and aggravated an existing angst that forcefully backfired following the outcome of the
301 2008 general elections.

302 Prior to the 2008 general elections, web postings and activities of Malaysiakini as well as blog postings on
303 sites of opposition members, human rights groups and supporters of the opposition were crucial to the elections.
304 For instance, aside the credible and up-todate information made available by Malaysiakini, which is rare in the
305 mainstream media; Malaysiakini in March 2008, provided free access for the duration of the election campaign
306 and attracted 2,134,301 unique visitors that month with a monthly average traffic of one million unique visitors
307 for the year (Malaysiakini.com, 2008). The online news site in the 2008 general elections practically filled the void
308 created by the mainstream media so much so that its success heralded the arrival many independent online news
309 and information operations, which amongst many others include; Malaysian Insider (www.malaysianinsider.com),
310 Malaysian Mirror (www.malaysianmirror.com) and Free Malaysia Today (www.freemalaysiatoday.com).

311 successes such as the online donation drive by bloggerturned candidate Jeff Ooi who raised tens of thousands
312 of dollars online, which aided his landslide victory; and Badrul Hisham, who contested in elections against the
313 prime minister's son-in-law, raised more than RM30,000 within a week (Sufian, 2010).

314 displayed recent political and electoral developments in the country when keyword "politics" is keyed and
315 searched for in any of the main internet search engines (Ahmad Rizal Mohd Yusof, 2008). While other opposition
316 blog sites recorded quite a considerable number of online visitors, Anwar Ibrahim's blog site was perceived to
317 have record highs of 15,000 visitors in the period leading to the elections. c) Mobile Telephony and Visual File
318 Sharing Short message service (SMS) and video uploads, sharing and playback were efficiently utilized by the
319 opposition and their supporters. Barrage of SMS carrying useful campaign messages and election updates were
320 used to saturate voters in different constituencies. The messages were used to inform voters on current electoral
321 developments and provide leads to opposition websites were they can find comprehensive election gist and guides.
322 The use of the SMS as a campaign tool was amplified when on the eve of the election day, a pre-recorded audio
323 message by Anwar Ibrahim was sent to several tens of thousands of voters in targeted constituencies asking them
324 to vote for change.

325 VI.

326 10 CONCLUSIONS

327 The internet with its power to forge a resilient social capital and effect change in a particular political arena
328 has time and again, been proven to be a powerful force to reckon with. In the run up to elections, the flow of
329 information and channels of communication are indispensable to galvanizing public support. However, we have
330 argued that the intensity of contestations that shrouds a government together with the types of information and
331 messages fed unto the internet stem to define the degree to which the internet can forcefully drive the course
332 of change. This is consistent with the opposition that systematically utilized the internet to woo voters by
333 capitalizing on a large array of controversies that haunt the ruling coalition.

334 Hard lessons have been learnt by the ruling coalition so much so that it is left with little or no option but to
335 change course if it aspires to return to its full political glory. Currently, the only noticeable change in Najib Tun
336 Razak's government is the reconciliatory "1 Malaysia" policy that is hoped to unite all Malaysians irrespective of
337 ethnic and religious differences. This effort is in the right direction, but it is not enough to win back the support
338 of the electorate, who have come to understand that power resides with them. After all, policies that have long
339 been abhorred by most Malaysians such as the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the affirmative action policy of
340 the NEP are still very well protected by the present government. With these policies still in place, the electorate
341 would rather align further with the opposition, with the hope that the opposition would make way for real time
342 change. Though, this also depends on the sustainability of the cohesion binding the opposition and how well
343 they justify the mandate given to them by the electorate.

344 For now, the internet has come to remain a major force to reckon with in Malaysian politics, with both
345 the ruling coalition and the opposition well aware of its impacts when space is created for controversy. The
346 internet and its online community have literally become the whistle blowing organ against government actions,
347 which is most welcome for good governance. Mahathir's resort to blogging to discredit his successor also paid
348 off. This literally provides an unwavering justification to the online community, amongst whom are prospective
349 voters, that the Barisan Nasional, with its leader, Ahmad Abdullah Badawi is steering the country into a perfect
350 storm. With such infighting in the Barisan Nasional-led government, it may not be surprising that some members
351 within the party may own and have operated disguised websites specifically to feed the public with disparaging
352 and pernicious information about happenings in the government of Ahmad Abdullah Badawi, simply for some
353 ulterior motives.

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355 Video uploads unto file sharing websites like youtube assisted the opposition to cushion their denial of campaign
356 space on the mainstream television channels. The opposition largely utilized youtube to showcase its events
357 and speeches. Similarly a large number of user generated materials, which in many ways portray a somewhat
358 negative image of the ruling coalition were found on youtube. An example is the video clip of V.K. Lingam, a
359 prominent lawyer on the phone, brokering Supreme Court appointments. Another example is the more popular
360 video clip showing the Malaysian prime minister asleep at various public events. These video clips send different
361 messages to voters, one of which may be the insinuation of unserious and corrupt officials that constitutes the
ruling coalition government. ^{1 2 3 4}



Figure 1: 1.

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11 REFERENCES RÉFÉRENCES REFERENCIAS

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Year	Ruling Coalition Seats	Opposition Total	
		Seats	Total
1959*	74	30	104
1964*	89	15	104
1969	95	49	144
1974	135	19	154
1978	130	24	154
1982	132	22	154
1986	148	29	177
1990	127	53	180
1995	162	30	192
1999	148	45	193
2004	198	20	219
2008	140	82	222

*With the exception of Sabah and Sarawak (West Malaysia).

Source : Compiled from Election Commission of Malaysia.

c) Tactical Comeback of the Opposition

Figure 2: Table 1 :

2

Year	Users	Population	Usage	Source
2000	3,700,000	24,645,160	10.00%	ITU
2005	10,040,000	26,500,699	37.90%	C.I.
				Al-
				manac
2006	11,016,000	28,294,120	38.90%	ITU
2007	13,528,200	28,294,120	47.80%	MCMC
2008	15,868,000	25,274,133	62.80%	MCMC
2009	16,902,600	25,715,819	65.70%	ITU
2010	16,902,600	26,160,256	64.60%	ITU

Source: Internet World Stats -Usage and Population Statistics.

<http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/my.htm>

Figure 3: Table 2 :

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