Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian Democratization

Edited by William Case
Contents

8 Conflict, oppositional spaces and political representation in Southeast Asia
   Garry Rodan
   117

9 Civil society and democratisation in Southeast Asia: what is the connection?
   Meredith L. Weiss
   135

10 Ethnicity and democracy
   Joel Savat Selway
   147

11 Islam and political democracy
   Robert W. Hefner
   170

12 Women and democracy in Southeast Asia
   Susan Blackburn
   186

13 Hype or hubris? The political impact of the Internet and social networking in Southeast Asia
   Jason Abbott
   201

PART 3
Uncertain institutions

14 Electoral systems
   Benjamin Reilly
   225

15 Rethinking party system institutionalization in Southeast Asia and beyond
   Allen Hicken and Erik Martinez Kuhonta
   237

16 Democracy, hybridity, and accountability in Southeast Asia’s legislatures
   William Case
   250

17 Courts and judicialization in Southeast Asia
   Bjoern Dressel
   268

18 Democracy, the rule of law and governance in Southeast Asia
   Natasha Hamilton-Hart
   282

19 Money politics: patronage and clientelism in Southeast Asia
   Edward Aspinall
   299
Contributors


Nathan Gilbert Quimpo teaches Political Science and International Relations at the University of Tsukuba, Japan. He is the author of Contested Democracy in the Philippines after Marcos (Yale University Southeast Asian Studies 2008) and the co-author of Subversive Lives: A Family Memoir of the Marcos Years (Anvil Publishing 2012, with Susan F. Quimpo). His research interests include democracy and democratic governance, conflict and peace, political corruption, and security studies.

Benjamin Reilly is Dean of the Sir Walter Murdoch School of Public Policy and International Affairs at Murdoch University, Australia. Formerly Professor of Political Science, Head of the Policy and Governance program, and Director of the Centre for Democratic Institutions in the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University, he has also worked with the Australian government, the United Nations, and other international organizations, and he has held visiting appointments at Harvard University, USA, University of Oxford, UK, and Johns Hopkins University, USA.

Garry Rodan is Professor of Politics and International Studies at the Asia Research Centre and School of Management and Governance, Murdoch University, Australia. His thematic research interest is in the political economy of regime directions in Southeast Asia. His latest book, co-authored with Caroline Hughes, is The Politics of Accountability in Southeast Asia (Oxford University Press 2014).

Joel Sawat Selway is a political scientist at Brigham Young University, USA and faculty associate at the Kennedy Center of International Studies (Asian Studies Program). He is also the interim Director of the Political Economy and Development Lab (PEDL). Selway’s publications have appeared in World Politics, Political Analysis, Comparative Political Studies, British Journal of Political Science, and Journal of Conflict Resolution, among others.

Aim Sinpeng is a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Political Science, McGill University, Canada. She has published widely on the politics of Thailand. Her research interests are in the areas of media, politics, and social movements.

Mark R. Thompson is Director of the Southeast Asian Research Centre (SEARC) and Professor of Politics at the Department of Asian and International Studies at the City University of Hong Kong. He is the author of The Anti-Marcos Struggle (Yale University Press 1995) and Democratic Revolutions: Asia and Eastern Europe (Routledge 2004), and co-editor (with Eric Batalla) of the forthcoming Routledge Handbook of the Contemporary Philippines.

Meredith L. Weiss is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University at Albany, State University of New York, USA. She is the author of Student Activism in Malaysia: Crucible, Mirror, Sideshow (Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University 2011) and Protest and Possibilities: Civil Society and Coalitions for Political Change in Malaysia (Stanford University Press 2006) and editor of several volumes, most recently, Electoral Dynamics in Malaysia: Findings from the Grassroots (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies/Strategic Information and Research Development Centre 2013) and the forthcoming Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Malaysia.
Conflict, oppositional spaces and political representation in Southeast Asia

Garry Rodan¹

Introduction

Changes in the institutional space, organizational form and ideological orientation of political opposition are fundamental to the prospects and nature of democratization everywhere. Indeed, distinctions between and among democratic and authoritarian regimes essentially rest on the extent and nature of political competition and conflict permitted through opposition. What then are the directions in political opposition in Southeast Asia, how might they be explained and what are their implications for democratization?

Southeast Asia comprises a diverse range of political regimes and thus the extent and forms of political opposition across the region vary too. Nevertheless, two themes shaping the struggle to define oppositional space are evident. First, historical legacies – especially of Cold War repression – militate against large-scale, independent civil society organizations linked to political parties (Iriye 1974; Scipes 2011). Civil societies are more atomized and fragmented than in earlier Western European democratisations, in which independent labour movements, often linked to reformist political parties, were integral (Luebbern 1991; Eley 2002). Second, powerful elites seek to contain the scope of political opposition, although the methods vary from outright repression to sophisticated forms of political co-option.

However, the limits of these constraints on opposition are periodically tested. In particular, conflicts over the uneven economic, environmental and social impacts of capitalist development exert a pervasive influence in all countries, often in articulation with ethnic, religious and other conflicts. The political management of capitalism is thus important in any analysis of opposition in Southeast Asia. This dynamic process ensures that the precise institutional and ideological complexion of political regimes and the extent and nature of oppositional politics is never a fully settled matter.

The political vacuum created by the general lack of independent mass class-based organizations and political parties aligned to them in Southeast Asia has been filled by an assortment of organizations. This includes small political parties with limited organizational bases as well as ethnic and religious – including mass – organizations (Tompa and Ufen 2013). These various organizations may or may not be organically linked to groups they purport to represent. In many post-authoritarian societies, the latter variety has proliferated in the form of small, single-issue
advocacy non-governmental organizations (NGOs) led by middle-class activists, often funded by multilateral aid agencies.

This chapter illustrates both the constraining effects of historical legacies on opposition politics and how conflicts generated by capitalist development pose political management challenges for elites seeking to ensure the continuing containment of political opposition in Southeast Asia. It examines the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore, encompassing a range of democratic and authoritarian regimes as well as contrasting political economies. Capitalism is organized differently in each case, reflecting variations in respective domestic interests and articulations with the global economy. Conflicts associated with capitalist development can therefore have different emphases and be dealt with in contrasting ways. In each country, though, these conflicts periodically manifest in struggles over the institutions and ideologies through which political opposition is conducted.

Yet, throughout such struggles in the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore, the capacity of elites to protect and advance their interests is achieved as much through political change as in opposition to it. Even with the transition to a democratic regime following the 'People Power' overthrow of Marcos in the Philippines, challenges to an elite-dominated political system have lacked sustained potency. In particular, cohesion among civil society organizations as well as between them and political parties has made little headway under electoral democracy and related institutions. As in the electoral authoritarian regimes of Malaysia and Singapore, the social foundations for strong oppositional politics and more representative formal and informal political institutions are yet to emerge.

**Philippines**

The Philippines boasts one of the longest histories of electoral democracy in Southeast Asia and, with the 1986 People Power overthrow of Marcos' authoritarian regime, was the first country in the region to dispose with a Cold War dictator in favour of restored democracy. Yet for more than a century now, oligarchic power in one form or another has dominated the Philippines. Why is this so, especially given a proliferation of extra-parliamentary and civil society forms of political participation in recent decades in the Philippines?

The answer lies in the continuing fragmentation of civil society forces, including reticence among such forces to align with or develop mass political parties. This fragmentation has historical roots in the political economy of capitalist development and Cold War geopolitics hostile to the formation of independent, collective action—especially cohesive social movements involving trade unions—that characterized experiences of democratization in Western Europe. Crucially, a particular configuration of state power has been integral and thematic to the way that private capital accumulation and political strategies of oligarchs have evolved and reinforced each other (Sidel 1999). It is in this context that the struggle to expand the democratic space of civil society continues to be conducted and the fragmentation of oppositional forces has been so pronounced.

Spanish and American colonial powers helped consolidate the power of local clans and, in turn, a landowning class engaged in commercial agriculture (Teahanee 2013: 188). Thus, when elections and political parties were introduced early during American colonial rule, networks of state political patronage favouring landed oligarchs simply became more institutionalized through limited intra-clan competition. Although limited in policies and structures, these parties could harness vast private and state resources to electoral advantage, including for intimidation (Hedman and Sidel 2000: 39–40).
Conflict and political representation

It was no less important how colonial rule embedded the interests of local oligarchs as the fact that it did. As Sidel (1999: 19) emphasizes, 'a distinctive pattern of state formation shaped the processes of twentieth-century capital accumulation in the Philippines'. In particular, this state formation 'facilitated the emergence and entrenchment of small-town bosses, provincial "warlords", and authoritarian presidents by providing mechanisms for private monopolization of the resources and prerogatives of the state' (ibid.: 19). Concentrations of private power were aided by the state, as was the ability in turn of oligarchs to privately resource political candidates and, in some instances, to intimidate or eliminate others (ibid.).

Viewed in this way, the absence of highly centralized administrative and regulatory apparatuses is not a sign of a weak state that is vulnerable to particularistic demands and patronage politics (Hutchison 2001: 44). On the contrary, the state's institutions and capacities are ideally suited to serving particular class (oligarchic) interests. Arresting the power of oligarchs is therefore not a matter of strengthening the state but of transforming state-power relations so that different class interests benefit. By definition this would entail changes in the nature, purpose and effect of state institutions — a transformation not captured by Weberian ideas of enhancing state capacity per se.

Importantly, the consolidation of economic and political power by oligarchs has involved dynamic interrelationships between state power and class interests. This is highlighted, for example, in Hutchcroft's (1998) concept of 'booty capitalism' and related analysis of how oligarchs diversified into industrialization from the 1950s. This shows how capitalist development in the Philippines came to depend on, and reinforce, patron-client relations made possible by privileged access to state power. The same relationships would prove important in subsequent diversifications by oligarchs into finance, real estate, and construction.

Given the acute class bias in the exercise of state power in the Philippines, opportunities to progress reformist agendas to address problems of inequality and poverty through formal institutions have been limited. Concentrations of local private power have also enabled repression and intimidation directed particularly at militant labour and peasant organizations, as well as local journalists reporting on oligarchic practices and interests. Consequently, neither strong social democratic movements involving cross-class alliances nor sustainable powerful class-based alternatives have emerged. Instead, there has been a fragmentation of political opposition to oligarchic rule and the periodic rise of radical movements.

Despite and because of oligarchic power, most significant political opposition during colonial rule and the Cold War involved leftist and nationalist-led mass peasant and worker movements whose focus was not principally electoral politics. This included the unsuccessful armed Huk Rebellion (1946–54) against the Philippine government, demanding radical land reforms to arrest peasant exploitation. The newly formed Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) abandoned electoral politics altogether in the late 1960s in favour of revolutionary armed struggle (Quimpo 2008: 55).

As the Cold War intensified, though, so did the opportunity for elites to suppress opposition in general under the pretext of fighting communism. This process was significantly ratcheted up under Marcos' rule, especially following his declaration of martial law in 1972. With the exception of the Catholic Church, civil society organizations were broadly harassed, but working-class and peasant organizations faced greatest repression (Hilhorst 2003: 235). Executive control over the police and military was strengthened and politicized while anti-communist vigilantism also increased (Hedman and Sidel 2000: 4).

On the labour front, Marcos retained enterprise unionism but also moved to politically co-opt and control a disparate labour leadership through the creation of a single peak union, the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP). However, as he did not also formally shu
down the labour federations which failed to join, and he could not contain a communis-
led opposition more broadly, the labour movement became more polarized ideologically
under authoritarian rule – a factor that has contributed to its internal divisions under re-
democratization (Hutchison forthcoming 2015). The CPP-linked Kilusang Mayo Uno
(KMU, May First Movement) was formed in 1980, and subsequently the American Federation
of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL–CIO) supported Marcos’ labour
strategy. Indeed, the AFL-CIO provided more money to the TUCP to compete with the KMU
than it gave to any other labour movement in the world (Scipes 2011: 36).

Importantly, Marcos’ authoritarian regime did potentially threaten what Anderson (1988)
referred to as post-war ‘cacique democracy’, under which oligarchy faced no serious challenges.5
Not only did Marcos centralize control over resource patronage,6 but the cronies that he favoured
through preferential access to state licenses, monopolies and loans were also mostly not from the
traditional elite (McCoy 2009). The 1983 assassination of Benigno Aquino, a senator of
traditional elite pedigree intending to contest for power, galvanized oligarchic elements in
opposition to Marcos (Winters 2012: 61). These elements had joined liberal and
conservative business and Catholic Church critics of Marcos as well as popular forces with more
reformist and radical agendas in mobilizing against Marcos (Thompson 1995; Hutchcroft and
Rocamora 2012).

The People Power overthrow of Marcos in 1986 was followed by competing attempts to
shape the institutional and ideological forms of democracy to follow – with implications for the
scope and nature of political opposition (Boudreau 2009). Under the 1987 Constitution,
the rights of ‘marginalized sectors’ – including workers, farmers, women, the urban poor,
and the elderly – were to be represented in local governments. Hence the 1991 Local Government
Code mandated that one-quarter of seats be reserved in all municipal, city and provincial
legislative assemblies for NGO representation of sectors. However, due to resistance from
traditional political elites, Congress failed to enact the proposed enabling law (Cuarteros

Indeed, it soon became apparent that electoral institutions restored under President
Corazon Aquino (1986–92) led to the restoration of elite democracy (Bello and Gershman
1990). This pattern would prove an enduring one that saw established and new political
dynamics dominate electoral politics (Rivera 2011: 59–73; Rood 2013). Some presidents would also
play concerted roles in exploiting and reinforcing local oligarchic patronage systems.

The processes at work here reflected more than the recurrence of particular families
and personalities in Philippine politics, or even the influence of individual presidents. It was
the consolidation of the structural power of oligarchic capitalism that underlay these tendencies
in political institutions. Continued capitalist expansion and diversification has enabled the
emergence of new entrants into the economic and political elite (Pinches 1996; Hedman
2012). However, the nexus between economic and political power would not be fundamentally
shaken even under liberal democracy.

This did not mean that opponents of traditional elite politics and/or oligarchic capitalism
remained passive. On the contrary, it was disquiet about this pattern from civil society forces that
led to concessions which saw the opening up of new formal and informal political spaces.
These spaces, however, have tended to reinforce or highlight the structural weaknesses and
fragmentation of the opponents of traditional politics and oligarchic capitalism (Boudreau 2009).

It was against the background of growing discontent about elite democracy that provisions of
the 1987 Constitution guaranteeing seats in the House of Representatives for hitherto under-
represented groups were implemented. Since the 1995 Party–List System Act, up to 20 per cent
of the House of Representatives seats have been available on the basis of proportional
representation.7 Organizations at the party system has facilitated a
campaign on
election: labor
co-operatives;
women; anti-
NGOs an opp
broader alliance.

In the post
Accord
salary cart
in service em
1993, the
power (Hut
Meanwhile,
Middle-class
to the poor
aid funding,
development
Since the
transparency
NGOs (Ro
reform agen
or es
Hilhorst (2)
into multip
Yet ind
also create
as the tru
1977–8 As
pro-poor rat
and limits
By 20
allegations
shaped th
bigger sh
garchic ir
alternative
representation. These seats are electorally contested among traditionally marginalized sectors, organizations and parties that can hold up to three seats each. This process is meant to strengthen the party system and make Philippine politics more ‘issue oriented’. Instead, the party-list system has facilitated a political pluralism characterized by a continued disaggregation of interests and policy issues among challengers to traditional political parties (Wurzel 1997).

In the 2010 and 2013 elections, for instance, there were respectively 187 and 111 groups accredited by the Commission on Elections to contest the party-list ballot. Alongside competition between various multi-sector groups for votes, there were one or more dedicated organizations seeking to represent each of the following sectors or constituencies in each of these elections: labour; overseas Filipino workers; the urban poor; indigenous cultural communities; co-operatives; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Filipinos; jeepney drivers; the elderly; youth; women; anti-corruption advocates; anti-poverty advocates; agricultural reform advocates; and advocates of action to combat climate change and global warming. Crucially, the system offers NGOs an opportunity for validation as stand-alone entities, which many take in preference to broader alliance building.

In the post-Marcos rebuilding of civil society, class-based organizations also made modest gains. According to Hutchison (forthcoming 2015), by 2011 as little as 1.0 per cent of all wage and salary earners and 0.5 per cent of the total workforce were effectively organized. Globalization contributed to this, including through the decline of the garments industry – that resulted from the end of preferential market access under the Multi Fibre Agreement (MFA) – and the growth in service employment in business call centers where unions have struggled to get a foothold. In 1993, the KMU also split into blocs reaffirming or rejecting the CPP’s armed struggle for state power (Hutchison forthcoming 2015).

Meanwhile, a wide and diverse range of other organizations has proliferated (Yu Jose 2011). Middle-class-led NGOs in particular mushroomed, taking up many causes and issues of concern to the poor and marginalized and engaging in varying forms of opposition to social and economic inequalities. However, dependence of many such organizations on multilateral aid funding often constrains or guides the nature and extent of their opposition to the developmental strategies promoted by elites.

Since the late 1990s, this is evident through pro-market aid programmes promoting transparency and accountability governance reforms and various related watchdog roles for NGOs (Rodan and Hughes 2012). Some activists wholeheartedly embrace such neoliberal reform agendas; others seek to refine them through engagement with aid agencies and government or eschew them altogether to pursue more expansive reform agendas. Consequently, Hillstrom (2003: 14) observes that progressive civil society forces have ‘increasingly fragmented into multiple communities and non-communities’.

Yet inadequate representation, of the poor in particular, due to this oppositional splintering also creates a vacuum that can be exploited by charismatic leaders portraying themselves as the true champions of the politically marginalized. Thus, against the background of the 1997–8 Asian financial crisis, Joseph Estrada was elected president adopting anti-oligarchic and pro-poor rhetoric. His political demise, no less than his rise, revealed much about the possibilities and limits to contemporary political opposition movements in the Philippines.

By 2001, Estrada was removed by extrastitutional means following corruption allegations and related People Power II mobilization against him. However, class divisions also shaped the significance attached to such charges. First, Estrada and his cronies were seeking a bigger share of the economic cake through market liberalization that unsettled established oligarchic interests. Second, the direct representation he offered the poor constituted a political alternative to intermediary organizations, not least middle-class-led NGOs. Many within these
NGOs gave priority to liberal governance changes ahead of redistributive and structural reforms. It was profoundly significant, therefore, that the subsequent and unsuccessful People Power III mobilization to have Estrada reinstated was almost exclusively supported by working-class and poor Filipinos (Hutchison 2006).

Against this background, new state-sponsored forms of political participation and representation continue to emerge. Nowhere is this more evident than in poverty alleviation strategies adopting community-driven development (CDD) projects. Here, the Philippines government links with multilateral aid agencies to promote institutions and ideologies of local 'empowerment' that target the poorest communities.

The principal such CDD project has been the Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan–Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Services (Kalahi-CIDDS). It was first implemented in 2003 by the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) in concert with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and jointly funded by the Philippines government and the World Bank. As Kalahi-CIDDS expanded over the next decade, it institutionalized competitive participatory processes to determine service delivery and development fund allocations, including through public meetings, elections and other mechanisms to generate feedback and preferences on project priorities. The underlying assumption is that developing local capacities to design, implement and manage development activities is integral to arresting 'elite capture' of development projects and reducing poverty (World Bank 2011: 7).

However, CDD-related political participation has tended to operate as an alternative to, rather than an activator of, more cohesive civil societies. Individuals incorporated into the political process do not do so as representatives of collective organizations. Multiple, separate barangay-level consultations and representations also work against such a dynamic. Moreover, the decision-making that representatives participate in has a heavy technical or administrative orientation. This creates opportunities for some NGOs to assist with local capacity in project selection and implementation. However, processes are not designed to accommodate wider debate or contestation over how best to combat poverty. Indeed, they are premised on the notion that market supportive mechanisms are central to solving poverty (Reid 2005, 2008).

President Benigno Aquino III came to office in 2010 pledging to arrest corruption and poverty through strengthening local participation. His administration promptly introduced Bottom-up-Budgeting, subsequently renamed the Grassroots Participatory Budgeting Process, and related mechanisms to further extend local input to state-defined poverty alleviation projects. The President impressed NGOs to work in partnership with the government in this and other CDD initiatives (Burgonio 2012). This overture reflected the influence within his administration of a broad coalition of technocrats, including those with NGO backgrounds, for whom technical capacity building and the marginalization of corruption at the local level is critical to combating poverty (Dressel 2012).

However, impressive increases in economic growth rates under Aquino – which some linked to a harder official line against corruption – went hand in hand with the consolidation of inequality and poverty. In 2012, the GDP increased by a stunning 6.4 per cent, but the Philippines' poverty incidence of 27.9 per cent was among the highest in Southeast Asia (Burgonio 2013). Meanwhile, Forbes Asia reported that 40 Filipino billionaires increased their wealth by nearly 38 per cent from US$13 billion in 2011 to US$47.4 billion in 2012 (Abinales 2013: 228).

On the eve of the President's July 2013 State of the Nation Address, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines demanded that the government show how economic growth would benefit the poor and the jobless (Doronila 2013). As Aquino delivered his speech, leftist Bayan and allied organization activists clashed with police amidst protests for more action on
inequality and poverty (Padua 2013). Sensing the public mood, Aquino’s speech declared ‘inclusive growth’ to be pivotal to his government’s objective.

Aquino’s goal spoke to the concerns of all civil society forces opposed to poverty and inequality, but the political arrangements to help realize this are also likely to continue to divide opponents of oligarchic capitalism in the Philippines. Moreover, it remains to be seen how concerted and effective technocratic reformers in Aquino’s Administration are in contending with the pervasive structural power of oligarchic interests. It is this power that fundamentally circumscribes the limits to political competition and thus the form of democracy prevailing in the Philippines.

Malaysia

The institutionalization of ethnic politics is pivotal to the fragmentation of the political spaces and forms of opposition in contemporary Malaysia. However, the emergence, consolidation and tensions associated with such institutionalization have political economy foundations and dynamics. The exploitation of ethnic politics has been integral not just to authoritarian rule but to a model of capitalist development under which state power has been systematically harnessed to promote an ethnic Malay bourgeoisie and politico-bureaucratic elite. Importantly, state patronage has not been randomly dispensed on the basis of ethnic affirmative action, but selectively to the advantage of a coterie of politically trusted entrepreneurs.

Economic crises and related intra-elite struggles over state patronage have previously provided short-lived opportunities for oppositional politics. Increasingly, though, uneven social and economic impacts of rapid capitalist development are facilitating new oppositional coalitions within and between political parties and civil society. Precise concerns of these coalitions vary, but use and abuse of state power to protect and advance the interests of politically connected entrepreneurs is thematic. The division of labour under colonial capitalism gave ethnic politics a structural basis. Indigenous ethnic Malay and immigrant ethnic Chinese and Indian communities were generally drawn into different roles in labour and capital markets. Moreover, from the colonial to postcolonial period, as Kho (2005: 1) explains, Malaysia’s political economy was ‘Janus-like: its ethnic aspect constantly exposed while its class aspect was hidden. Thus, the structures of political economy and the inequalities they bore were susceptible to political mobilization that seized upon real and “perceived” ethnic differences’. Colonial authorities’ recognition and political fostering of ethnic elites and their organizations — including in brokering a compromise deal by ethnic elites leading to the Federation of Malaysia in 1948 and Malay independence in 1957 — contributed to this.

Consequently, the Alliance coalition of parties comprising the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malay Indian Congress (MIC) that ruled from 1957 until 1969 adopted a political framework of ethnic representation and interethnic power sharing. Through interethnic elite bargains and compromises on behalf of their respective communities, the Alliance aimed to reconcile improvements in the conditions of ethnic Malays while simultaneously managing internal political competition (ibid.: 1, 12).

However, following the failed attempt by the Alliance to satisfy the expectations of impoverished ethnic Malays as well as the related race riots in May 1969 and a state of emergency from 1969–71, ethnic politics was to be elevated both ideologically and institutionally. Thus was born the New Economic Policy (NEP), the primary stated aim of which was to ‘eradicate poverty irrespective of race’ and to ‘restructure society to abolish the identification of race with economic function’ (quoted in Kho 2005: 14–15). Market solutions to poverty gave
Garry Rodan

way to a new state interventionist strategy including promotion of an ethnic Malay bourgeoisie and new forms of economic regulation and social engineering (Gomez 2002).

In the ensuing decades, ethnic and racial-based systems of control and distribution of economic, social and political resources would be institutionalized. Curbs on opposition politics would also intensify. The British had already embarked on measures to arrest the influence of the Malayan Communist Party-affiliated Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions, dominated by ethnic Chinese, during the nationalist struggle. Sponsoring so-called ‘non-political’ unions led by anti-communist English-educated ethnic Indians was one strategy. Another was support for local elections, a move that created opportunities for social democratic and socialist political parties seeking to transcend communal politics and forge links with working-class and peasant organizations.

Precisely because of the initial progress in local elections by such parties, the Labour Party in particular, and the Socialist Front (SF) generally, subsequently suffered at the hands of authorities under the Alliance and successor Barisan Nasional (BN) ruling coalitions. The Communist bogeyman provided the rationale for systematic dismantling of union and party leaderships under the Internal Security Act and other repressive laws (Munro-Kua 1996: 40–57). The labour movement never recovered and the bases for viable prospective class-based or cross-class alternatives to ethnic politics were fundamentally undermined.

While the organizational bases for social democratic or socialist political alternatives had been eroded and repression intensified under the BN, this was not the complete end for either political party or civil society opposition. Semblances of both persisted, but they were characterized by ethnic and religious segmentation entirely consistent with the institutional frameworks and ideologies of representation championed by the BN. Thus, for example, the Democratic Action Party (DAP) was ethnic Chinese dominated, and Parti Islam se Malaysia (PAS) the exclusive political vehicle for ethnic Malay Muslims.

Moreover, secular NGOs essentially comprised ethnic Indians and Chinese, while Malays located in predominantly rural-based Muslim organizations (Weiss 2006: 110). Increasingly, under the NEP, state and ruling coalition coverage of developmental activities ‘crowded out’ genuinely independent Malaysian NGOs from rural areas – whereas these areas had been important to activist bases in the Philippines and other parts of Southeast Asia (Loh 2012: 206–8).

As Malaysian capitalism advanced, though, middle-class NGOs based in the urban centers of Kuala Lumpur and Penang emerged from the 1980s to play an increasing and distinct political role. These small, issue-oriented advocacy organizations championed human rights, social justice, environmental, feminist, governance and other progressive causes. The activists involved were predominantly English-educated and ethnic Chinese, but they espoused non-ethnic politics. These NGOs had proliferated by the time the Asian financial crisis began in 1997 as social and environmental impacts of capitalist development intensified. As in the Philippines, these activists were sceptical about traditional political parties – including opposition ones – but they were not averse to coalitions with them in the right circumstances and on the right issues.

Such circumstances presented themselves when the 1997 Asian financial crisis instigated an intra-elite power struggle, as different UMNO factions competed to limit the damage on their respective corporate allies and to shape the policies and strategies for recovery. This translated into a political crisis following the expulsion and imprisonment of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and, in turn, the formation of the breakaway Parti Keadilan Nasional (PKN) – or National Justice Party. This drew significant ethnic Malay support away from UMNO and helped ignite the broader reformati movement comprising unprecedented co-operation among BN party political opponents and between these parties and civil society activists. Thematic
reformasi demands included calls for an end to restrictions on media and civil liberties and to corruption, nepotism and cronyism (Hilley 2001).

Despite massive public demonstrations over several years and some opposition electoral gains in 1999, the coalitions comprising this movement proved unsustainable. Infighting over religious and ethnic sensitivities aroused by debate over the ‘war on terror’ led to the retreat back to more customary and segmented forms of oppositional political organization (Weiss 2006: 127–61).

However, in the approach to the 2008 general elections, some of the initial overtures in cross-ethnic oppositional coalitions found more fertile ground as the contradictions of capitalism under the NEP manifested more acutely. Significant reductions in income inequality during 1976–90 are widely attributed to NEP affirmative action policies (Shari 2000; Law and Tan 2009; Ragayah 2008). However, economic liberalizations and privatizations from the mid-1980s, which expanded capital accumulation opportunities for sections of the domestic bourgeoisie, are also seen as responsible for the subsequent rising inequalities within and across ethnic categories (Ragayah 2008; Gomez 2012).

One political consequence of this was growing disillusionment among working-class ethnic Indian and ethnic Chinese with the MIC and MCA who were demonstrably ineffective in representing their interests within the BN government. The formation of the Hindu Rights Action Front (HRADF) in 2007 and its 30,000-strong street demonstration later that year was symptomatic of this (Case 2010). Even more significantly, the BN’s ideological grip on many ethnic Malays was being loosened rather than tightened by successful capitalist development. As Khoo (2012) put it: ‘Four decades of economic transformation and urbanization had re-shaped the occupational and social world of Malays such that their lived material experiences could reduce the socio-cultural distances between them and non-Malays’. Shared concerns about material inequalities, politicized and biased governance regimes, and corruption were thus increasingly steering political activism towards coalition building across ethnic categories.

This dynamic was given powerful expression through both the content and modus operandi of Bersih – or Gabungan Pilihanraya Bersih dan Adil (Coalition for Free and Fair Elections). In November 2007, around 40,000 Bersih supporters assembled in central Kuala Lumpur to demand electoral reform, following revelations of previous vote rigging. Cleaning up electoral processes was also the means by which other reforms to address inequalities and state power abuses through a change in government could be achieved. Street demonstrations in defiance of authorities were integral to the strategy by which oppositional forces attempted to progress their reform demands. These demonstrations and electoral campaigns in 2008 and 2013 marked important shifts in oppositional politics.

Indeed, the 2008 general elections’ significance derived not just from the BN’s drop in vote share to just over 50 per cent, nor even from the opposition taking 5 of the 13 state governments.19 It was no less, according to Maznah (2008: 455), that the opposition campaigns showed ‘signs that ethnic interests are being uncoupled from the ethnic identity of their advocates’. Weiss (2009: 743) also argues that the scope and scale of civil society and opposition party collaboration was different from anything before, ‘less tied to communal interests, more participatory and open, and more critically self-reflective’. The BN vote share eroded further at the 2013 general election to 47 per cent, the impact cushioned by acute electoral malapportionment. Middle-class support across ethnic categories consolidated in major cities and towns – especially in Peninsula Malaysia where ethnic Malays had been core to pre-election rallies and demonstrations (Welsh 2013a).

Yet the 2013 election results also highlighted uneven transformations in ethnic political identity and the complexity and importance of class and geography as mediating factors in this
process. Cranked-up BN appeals to communalism in the election campaign prompted record opposition votes by ethnic Chinese, disproportionately middle class and located in cities and towns. Meanwhile, the BN's pitch and targeted handouts to working-class and rural ethnic Malay voters in West and, particularly, East Malaysia proved decisive in securing government (Welsh 2013b). In the process, UMNO now accounted for two-thirds of all BN seats. Paradoxically, according to Kessler (2013: 2), UMNO thus emerged politically even stronger, having been 'delivered a dominant position within the parliament, ruling coalition and government'.

The utility of ethnic ideology to UMNO's political management of class tensions inherent in the existing model of capitalist development in Malaysia is therefore not exhausted. Indeed, it remains central to efforts by elites to try and consolidate the political fragmentation of civil society, although increasingly focused on the working class and discouraging cross-class alliances, based on ethnic ideology, with reformist-minded middle-class Malaysians. In electorally crucial East Malaysia, this means not just shoring up BN-aligned civil society organizations, but also fostering forms of economic development and political patronage that help reproduce rather than transform the social base of BN support.

In between these elections, the Bersih movement had intensified as a future change of government now presented as a realistic possibility. Bersih activists demanded a royal commission to probe allegations about irregularities in a number of states. Despite authorities banning a planned Bersih 2.0 rally for 9 July 2010, the demonstration proceeded in the face of water cannons, tear gas and other forms of intimidation. More than 1,600 arrests were made. Undeterred, a Bersih 3.0 rally on 28 April 2012 – which some estimated involved more than 200,000 protesters – demanding a clean-up of electoral rolls before the 2013 general elections, was met with more tear gas, brutality and at least 470 arrests (Channel NewsAsia 2012a; Human Rights Watch 2012).

Meanwhile, Anwar articulated pointed denunciations of the BN's ethnic politics and the core related proposition that ethnic Malay political supremacy is pivotal to distributive justice in Malaysia. Highlighting that most people living in poverty are ethnic Malay, Anwar (in April 2010) asked:

What type of supremacy is this? We should instead abolish the question of ethnicity and solve the problem of poverty. Those that will benefit are of course the poor; the Malays and Bumiputeras in the villages, Indians in the estates and Chinese in the towns. That is what we should focus on.

To be sure, Anwar's perspective was far from uniform among and within the Pakatan Rakyat (PR, or People's Alliance) coalition of opposition parties and among civil society activists opposed to the BN. Yet social and economic transformations attendant to Malaysian capitalism had produced tensions exposing the hegemonic ideology of ethnic politics to more challenge than at any previous time. Crucially, owing to Malaysia's dynamic political economy, new forms of collaboration became possible and desirable among opposition forces – even if not all such forces were yet convinced of the need to completely dispense with ethnic and/or religious political lenses. One indication of this latter point was differences over whether ethnic political representation should be preserved or transcended in local government in states where PR had won office.

However, it also remains to be seen how adept BN proves in refining its political management of the existing capitalist model. The scale and range of one-off payments targeting poorer families in the two years prior to the 5 May 2013 general elections had an estimated cost of around US$2 billion (Koswanage 2013). Clearly, more substantive and systemic measures are required to redress material inequalities. While such challenges are not unique to Malaysia but
Conflict and political representation

afflict most advanced capitalist countries to some degree, the BN cannot abandon reliance upon ethnic-based conceptions of the causes and solutions to inequality. This is both the basis of the rationale for the regime’s power structures and its strategy to disarm and fragment opponents — including through institutions and ideologies of political representation.

What is not yet clear is how much of the opposition to and discontent with the BN can be united in a sustainable way around a reform agenda that views democratic institutions and ideologies as the primary basis to reducing material inequalities and other grievances.

Singapore

Elite cohesion has been a hallmark of Singapore’s authoritarian rule for the last five decades. A virtual class of technocratic politico-bureaucrats, not complicated by the attempt to cultivate a private domestic bourgeoisie, as in Malaysia, has consolidated and expanded capitalism. In the process, bureaucratic and administrative techniques of political control and governance have been institutionalized that fundamentally circumscribe political opposition. This includes creative expansions in political co-option intended to further fragment and compartmentalize political engagement.

Nevertheless, the uneven effects of Singapore’s highly globalized economy have intensified in the last decade, and in 2011 the People’s Action Party (PAP) returned its lowest level of voter support in history. Singapore has entered an intriguing juncture in its political economy as the PAP grapples with the need to better manage tensions between Singapore’s particular global economic integration and social and distributional outcomes. Meanwhile, alongside some opposition electoral gains, there has been a growing questioning by Singaporeans of a core ideological rationale for the existing social and political order: meritocracy. The PAP is aiming to preserve that ideological rationale as it attempts to manage conflict over its economic model.

Exceptional elite cohesion and the technocratic nature of authoritarian rule in Singapore is a function of a particular form of state capitalism. The foundations of this state capitalism were laid by conflict between contending factions of the ruling PAP that came to power at the 1959 elections for self-government. During the 1950s, independent student, cultural, ethnic and trade union organizations were active, often in defiance of colonial authorities trying to moderate the nature and extent of political mobilization. The influence of the outlawed MCP (Malayan Communist Party) within the labour movement through front organizations was a matter of particular anxiety for authorities.

Indeed, British concerns about the potential for communism or socialism through the ballot contributed to the alliance between these largely Chinese-language-educated popular forces and the English-language-educated middle-class nationalists led by Lee Kuan Yew that formed the PAP in 1954. The former provided the requisite mass organizational bases for effective electoral politics otherwise unavailable to Lee and his colleagues, while the latter offered the cover for leftists of respectability and political moderation in British eyes. Significantly, the domestic bourgeoisie’s close interdependence on colonial capitalism contained its enthusiasm for a self-governing Singapore, limiting its influence over politics once that arrived.

Tensions inherent to this coalition imploded not long after the PAP came to office. Thus, in July 1961 a breakaway faction formed a new political party, the Barisan Sosialis (BS, Socialist Front), stripping the PAP of vast grass-roots organizational structures. In response, authorities harassed and intimidated political opponents and critics to undermine the social and organizational bases in civil society of competing political groups — especially organized labour (Deyo 1981). The BS’s leadership was gutted in 1963 when 115 people were arrested under ‘Operation Cold Store’, ordered by the Internal Security Council (Far Eastern Economic Review 1963).
PAP leaders realized, though, that they also needed to develop the party's own power base to survive electorally. One strategy was to replace independent labour organizations with PAP-affiliated ones, giving rise to the National Trades Union Congress. More broadly, a merger of state and party reshaped the political economy of Singapore. This entailed not just a powerful new class of politico-bureaucrats, but also a form of state capitalism that rendered many Singaporeans directly or indirectly dependent on the state for economic and social resources, including housing, employment, business contracts and access to personal savings.

This structural relationship fostered vulnerability to political co-option and intimidation, and it further limited the possibility of alternative social and economic bases from which challenges to the PAP could be effectively mounted. As Singapore's economy progressed, state capitalism flourished with considerable sums of capital generated by government-linked companies (GLCs) bolstering the economic and political power of the PAP state. This has heavily conditioned the domestic bourgeoisie's economic opportunities, which have evolved to be largely dependent on or complementary to state capitalism, but not in competition with it (Rodan 2006). Much of the expanding middle class is either employed within the state in one or another of the government departments, statutory bodies, or GLCs, or indirectly derives its livelihood from servicing state capitalism through the provision of professional, legal, commercial or other services (Rodan 2004).

The difficulties of conducting political opposition were dramatically highlighted by the BS's decision to boycott parliament. By October 1966, all BS members of the Legislative Assembly had resigned. This followed a predictable rejection by the PAP government of BS's specified conditions for continued parliamentary participation – including the release of political prisoners, freedom of speech and the abolition of detention laws. BS leader Lee Siew Choh declared that members of his party would instead 'take our struggles into the streets' (quoted in Fong 1980: 178). BS quickly dissipated as any sort of political force, and there would not be a comparable successor to it – inside or outside parliament. In the years to follow, the techniques for both denying political oxygen to civil society and for isolating opposition parties from links with social forces were extended and refined.

The amended Societies Act 1968 played a pervasive role in this, under which interest group politics or any political expression from within organizations other than political parties was potentially vulnerable to prosecution. Most dangerous interventions in public political debate would be those that could be construed by authorities to be aligned with policies or positions advanced by the PAP's formal opponents. Opposition politicians that persevered in attempts to engage the public from the early 1980s onwards would have to contend with an expanding array of regulations covering licenses and permits for public gatherings and disseminating political materials. Defamation suits also became a favoured means by which critics and opponents were tamed or politically persecuted.

Yet a surprise 12.9 per cent drop in support for the government at the 1984 elections exposed shortcomings in established mechanisms of political co-option and led to a rethink by the PAP. The PAP's post-mortem reflected too on the implications of a rapidly expanding younger, middle-class constituency (Chua 1994: 659). The subsequent emergence of a group of small, independent middle-class NGOs working in areas of the environment, consumer issues, women's rights, migrant workers and human rights was also noted. These moderate groups abided by the existing constraints but, with an eye to the future, the PAP wanted to obviate any prospect of that changing.

Major initiatives in state political co-option followed, including the introduction in 1985 of the Feedback Unit – later renamed Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenship @ Home (REACH) – facilitating individual and group feedback on public policy. However, by constructing and controlling the treatment of political independents (NMPs) were a social category with a logical power at the best prospect compartmental.

The PAP's effects of its dyi and guest work meant this growth. In terms costs in manual worldwide to and other services this was intrins since 2000 (C).

This structur social and ma After consider. 1970s, income Singapore's G Statistic in cent of incom 2012).

Unskilled: the market for transport and salaries have topic. In 2010 the proportion per cent, down across its high.

The PAP elections, Th Singapore's surrendered Workers' Pat In addition, candidates, 1 public critic was also a strong point ideology of.

Almost a political co- Conversatic Swee Keat, community (ChannelN

128
controlling the social categories to be represented, authorities have been able to fragment the treatment of political issues (Rodan and Jayasurya 2007). Nominated members of parliament (NMPs) were also introduced in 1990 and among these have been members of state-conceived social categories but also members of independent NGOs. The underlying assumption is that the logical power of argument, rather than the force of political alliances and collective action, offers the best prospects for engagement in public policy. As with REACH, the process favours a compartmentalization of issues and actors (Rodan 2009).

The PAP faces new challenges, though, in politically managing the social and demographic effects of its dynamic and high-growth capitalist model. Simultaneous dependence on immigrant and guest workers at the most and the least skilled ends of the economy has become integral to this growth. Increasingly, guest workers have been sourced from South Asia and China to contain costs in manufacturing, construction and hospitality, while ‘foreign talent’ has been recruited worldwide to support higher value-added niches in financial services, biotechnology, medical and other services. By 2010, foreign labour accounted for one-third of the total workforce, and this was instrumental in boosting Singapore’s population by nearly 32 per cent in just a decade since 2000 (Chun 2013).

This structure has laid the foundations not just for rapid economic growth but also increased social and material inequalities, rising costs of living and pressures on public infrastructure. After considerable upward mobility and generally egalitarian material outcomes in the 1960s and 1970s, income inequality did not improve after 1980 and markedly deteriorated from the 1990s. Singapore’s Gini coefficient increased from 0.454 in 2000 to 0.478 in 2012 (Department of Statistics 2013: 12). The ratio of incomes for the top 20 per cent compared to the bottom 20 per cent of income earners also increased from 10.1 per cent in 2000 to 12 per cent in 2010 (Chun 2012).

Unskilled and working-class Singaporeans suffered from the absence of a minimum wage and the market impact of low-cost guest workers. However, the inflationary costs of housing, transport and health driven by dramatic population growth and high professional and executive salaries have affected many middle-class Singaporeans too. Meanwhile, the PAP eschewed redistributive policies and the provision of social benefits to ameliorate market effects. For example, in 2010 the proportion of health-care spending provided by the Singapore government was 31.4 per cent, down from 44.9 per cent in 2000, compared to an average of 61.8 per cent in 2010 across its high-income counterparts (WHO 2013).

The PAP’s share of total votes dropped a combined 15 per cent in the 2006 and 2011 elections. The ruling party still enjoyed a formidable 60.1 per cent in 2011. Also, thanks to Singapore’s first-past-the-post voting system and electoral gerrymandering, the PAP only surrendered 6 of the 87 seats in parliament. Nevertheless, four of the six seats held by the Workers’ Party inflicted the first PAP defeat in a multi-seat Group Representation Constituency.

In addition, opposition parties attracted some ‘high achiever’ and establishment figures as candidates, helping to normalize the concept of electoral opposition. The scale and nature of public criticism and questioning of PAP policies and ideologies had risen, individual bloggers as well as opposition parties using the Internet to greater effect (Mydans 2011). Indeed, the PAP’s ideology of meritocracy was a thematic target in cyberspace.

Almost as a reflex action after the election, the PAP embarked on yet another initiative in political co-option, this time through a year-long series of consultations under Our Singapore Convention (OSC), launched in the second half of 2012. Chaired by Education Minister Heng Swee Keat, the OSC involved a 26-member committee from business, academia, professions and community groups but did not include any opposition party members. According to Heng (Channel News Asia 2012b), the aim of the ‘conversation’ was to get Singaporeans to think about
what sort of home they want as the nation grapples with challenges of globalization and a declining birth rate. Over 47,000 Singaporeans participated in the OSC. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has since vowed that the government would 'play a bigger role to build a fair and just society', with changes to that effect in housing, health care and education policy announced in his 2013 National Day Message. These measures are comparatively modest initiatives in trying to address the impacts of rising costs and social inequalities, tempered by the desire to limit public subsidies and strengthen global competitiveness. PAP leaders pronounced that a more 'inclusive' and 'compassionate' society should be pursued through shoring up meritocracy, notably by levelling up educational opportunities for the children of the poor (Chan 2013; Goh 2013; The Straits Times 2013).

Meanwhile, public reaction to the government's Population White Paper underlined how contentious the current economic model is. It projected that Singaporeans—who comprised 91 per cent of the population in 1980 and 62 per cent in 2012—would account for just 55 per cent of the population by 2030. The White Paper suggested that immigrants and foreign labour would sustain high growth by mitigating an aging population and falling birth rate. On 16 February 2013, around 5,000 protesters gathered in Singapore's Hong Lim Park to express their opposition to such plans, raising concerns about further overcrowding, rising costs and challenges of social cohesion (Mahtani 2013). Opposition parties released their own counter proposals including calls for slower economic growth and more emphasis on raising Singapore's fertility rate (Ong 2013).

Concerns arising from Singapore's capitalist development model have fuelled greater preparedness among Singaporeans to support opposition parties and have stimulated wider political engagement outside PAP-controlled institutions. However, these developments do not necessarily presage new organizational bases for, or greater cohesion between, the PAP's politically fragmented party political and limited civil society opponents. The Internet cannot of itself forge reform coalitions between the PAP's different critics and opponents, who are not yet inclined or able to build collective organizations that reject the PAP's compartmentalization of politics. Singapore's most disadvantaged in particular still lack organizational capacity to shape oppositional politics.

Thus, while the PAP is finding it difficult to reproduce customary levels of political and ideological hegemony, the foundations of a cohesive democratization movement that independently engages and reflects popular interests and aspirations are also yet to emerge.

Conclusion

The transformative effects of capitalist development in the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore continue to pose challenges for regime strategies to contain political opposition. Indeed, as the discussion above illustrates, the very success of all three models of capitalism in generating economic growth appears to be increasingly exacerbating problems of inequality and poverty. This is providing a fertile context for increased levels—and in some cases new coalitions—of oppositional politics of one sort or another. Just how significant this proves for the direction of regimes remains to be seen. This is not least because elite strategies in the political management of capitalism are being re-evaluated, which can be expected to aim again to fragment and compartmentalize political opposition.

The political fragmentation of oppositional forces in these countries has historical and structural roots. Significantly, though, contemporary elites across this range of democratic and authoritarian regimes have often strategically reinforced this fragmentation through various institutional and ideological innovations. These regimes, therefore, have all undergone change to
References

1. In February 2009, the transportation of goods and vehicles to the SMN (Mobile Commercial Detachment).
2. During this period, we observed that the transportation of goods and vehicles to the SMN was efficient and timely.
3. In March 2009, we noted an increase in the volume of goods and vehicles transported to the SMN.
4. The efficiency of the transportation process was further improved in April 2009.
5. In May 2009, the transportation of goods and vehicles to the SMN reached its peak.
6. In June 2009, the transportation of goods and vehicles to the SMN continued at a high level.
7. In July 2009, the transportation of goods and vehicles to the SMN showed a slight decrease.
8. In August 2009, the transportation of goods and vehicles to the SMN remained stable.
9. In September and October 2009, the transportation of goods and vehicles to the SMN was consistent.
10. In November 2009, the transportation of goods and vehicles to the SMN was slightly lower.
11. In December 2009, the transportation of goods and vehicles to the SMN continued to decrease.

Notes

- Effective management of strategic development from the perspective of other organizations
- Scope of political opposition groups with significant influence in the political system
- Our effort to identify all the organizations' political interests
- Expand our influence across the political spectrum
- Some debates which involve expression of the political space of the state and its interests.

Conflict and Political Representation
Garry Rodan


Khoo, B.T. (2012) 'Social change and the transformation of Islamic dissent: the Party Islam of Malaysia', paper presented at the workshop, Islam and Political Dissent: Studies and Comparisons from Asia and the Middle East, Institute of Developing Economies (IDE-JETRO) and Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University, Chula, 7–8 November.


133
Garry Rodan


