Opposition Parties and General Elections: New Media Policy Responses in Malaysia and Singapore

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Political Parties & Internet Literature:

- a specialist literature (since mid 90s) - one debate stream within the literature is the equalization versus the normalization theory

- Equalization: Internet affords opposition, minor and fringe parties an advantage vis-à-vis the major/ruling party

- Normalization: In due course, major parties will duplicate their dominance in traditional media onto the web

  US, UK

  Europe, Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, others

  Asia - Cambodia, India, Japan, Korea

- Research methodology – statistical reports, features analysis, content analysis, surveys, interviews

Malaysia – Singapore Comparative Study

- A comparative study of Malaysia and Singapore with their unique system of soft-authoritarianism with a blend of the Asian values can provide good insights into the impact of new media technologies on opposition parties' electoral fortunes.

- Despite the political, cultural and geographical proximity between Malaysia and Singapore, there have only been a small number of comparative studies on new media and democracy involving both these countries.

- This paper adds to this collection of comparative studies by analysing the use of the Internet by political parties in Malaysia and Singapore and linking it to the debate on the equalisation and normalisation theory.

Malaysia

Name	Url	Date
Ruling Coalition (BN)		
UMNO	http://umno-online.com	2001
MCA	http://www.mca.org.my	1997
MIC	http://www.mic.org.my	2000
Gerakan	http://www.gerakan.org.my	2000
Sabah United Party (PBS)	http://www.pbs-sabah.org	1997
Opposition Coalition (BA)		
PAS	http://www.pas.org.my	1999
DAP	http://www.dapmalaysia.org	1996
PKR	http://www.keadilanrakyat.com	2004

Singapore

Name	Url	Date
Ruling Party Young PAP People's Action Party	 www.youngpap.org.sg www.pap.org.sg	 1995 2001
Opposition Parties National Solidarity Party Workers' Party Singapore Democratic Party Singapore People's Party Singapore Malay National Organisation (PKMS) Singapore National Front Reform Party	 www.nsp-singapore.org www.wp.sg http//:yoursdp.org www.spp.org.sg www.geocities.com/pkms21 www.snfsingaopre.cjb.net http://	 1996 1999 2001 2002 2002 2003 2009

New Media & Elections: Malaysia

1999 General Elections

was the first election to be fought in cyberspace with PAS launched HarakahDaily and Web TV, DAP and Keadilan established their own news media.

2004 General Elections

saw the rise of blogs, with the opposition had more than 7500 blogs and websites compared to only 45 bloggers in 1998 while government had only two websites and one blog in 2004.

2008 General Elections,

blogs and Youtube have gained greater popularity. Bona-fide bloggers like Jeff Ooi, Tony Pua and Elizabeth Wong achieve popularity through blog and eventually won against the ruling party candidates.

Political Parties & Elections: Spore

<u>1997 General Election</u> –

The SDP was the first party to put up profiles of its candidates, but the media licensing authorities asked to take it down even though there was no law against it. Since, the <u>internet was new</u>, the awareness of online content as well as its impact was minimum.

<u>2001 General Elections</u>–

In the run up to the 2001 elections, the ruling PAP <u>goverment enforced and enacted legislation</u>. The government introduced amendments to Parliamentary Elections Act in August 2001 which placed restrictions on what parties could do during elections.

<u>2006 General Election</u> –

It "clarified" that according to the Parliamentary Elections Act podcasts cannot be uploaded online during elections.

<u>Run up to 2012 General Elections</u>

Liberalised what political parties can do online, but introduced a "cooling off" day before polling day.

Research Significance

- These developments signal that the use of the internet by opposition parties maybe well worth studying to gain insights into the ways in which the internet is shaping how opposition parties communicate in a one party state dominant states.

- Research in this area also has the potential to contribute towards theorising about democracy, in particular the role of opposition parties' use of new technology such as the internet to counter the media and political disadvantage they currently suffer under a one party dominated regime.

Research Question

- *Has the use of new communications technology such as the internet by opposition parties in Malaysia and Singapore has given them a new competitive advantage in general elections in terms of electoral results.*

Electoral results

- **Has the use of the internet by opposition parties in Malaysia enabled them to better affect election outcomes?**

  ◇ **According to the drop in the percentage of support for BN in the last elections, YES.**

  ◇ **According to the number of seats, the answer is also Yes for the 1999 and 2008 elections. But not the 2004 elections.**

Percentage of votes for the Barisan Nasional	
General Elections	**Percentage of votes**
1995	65.2
1999	56.6
2004	63.9
2008	51.4

Number of seats in Parliament		
General Elections	**Barisan Nasional**	**Barisan Alternatif**
1995	162	30
1999	148	45
2004	190	21
2008	140	82

Electoral results

- **Has the use of the internet by opposition parties in Singapore enable them to better affect election outcomes?**

    ◇ **According to the drop in the percentage support for PAP in the 2006 elections, YES .**

    ◇ **But according to the number of seats, the answer is a clear NO.**

Percentage of votes for the PAP	
General Elections	**Percentage of votes**
1991	61
1997	65
2001	75.3
2006	66.6

Number of seats in Parliament		
General Elections	**People's Action Party**	**Opposition**
1991	77	4
1997	81	2
2001	82	2
2006	82	2

Impact on Government's Media Policies

The results of the last elections has placed pressure on both governments to review its policies of control over online political expression.

In Malaysia this has been by way of using alternative legislation and for the ruling regime to go on the offensive online.

In Singapore, direct legislation is still used and has been revised for the next election. Additionally, the ruling regime has also taken to the offensive online.

Trends to watch

- The rise in the use of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, You Tube

- More use in particular of video component, e.g., YouTube

- Monitoring and legal review of the impact of internet on politics and elections by governments in Malaysia & Singapore

- Undertaking political and online responses to the opposition in the run up to the next elections

Conclusion

• One can argue that in <u>qualitative</u> terms that there has been some kind of movement whereby the internet has made a contribution towards democracy by being a source of alternative information, albeit a small source.

• In <u>quantitative</u> terms, the effective impact on election results has been mixed since it has not given the opposition parties in both countries new capacities to shape legislation.

• Nevertheless political parties use of new media in future elections is likely to remain the target of close research and political observation.