

used to protect the media owners' interests. As a result, readers were sometimes unable to get balanced news coverage. Second, the media were frequently involved in political conspiracies that delegitimated elites (pp. 125–127). This created strained relationships between the media and some politicians. Third, the media used corruption scandals to make political attacks, in the process gaining political support and close relationships with certain elites (p. 137). Obviously, politicians often cited such media reportage to attract voters. This created a mutually beneficial relationship between politicians and the media. While politicians needed the media to reach out to potential voters, the media needed fresh money and protection from the elites in order to keep publishing and broadcasting their news. In this connection, the author discusses the Baligate and Buloggate scandals in the Abdurrahman Wahid administration.

McCoy's book arguably has some limitations. First, the author does not provide an in-depth explanation of biases in media ownership. Some media tycoons-turned-politicians had their own TV stations and newspapers to cover their political activity. In another media study, Ross Tapsell (2017) clearly defines the relationship between media oligarchs and their office-seeking motivation. It would be useful if McCoy provided a political connection map between elites and the media. Second, the book refers just tangentially to the role of social media in Indonesian democracy. This kind of media often performs as an alternative media for critical readers, particularly in urban areas. Overall, McCoy provides an alternative view of the Indonesian democratic process from the perspective of media.

Wasisto Raharjo Jati

Center for Political Studies, Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI)

References

- Sen, Krishna; and Hill, David. 2006. *Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia*. London: Equinox Publishing.
- Tapsell, Ross. 2017. *Media Power in Indonesia: Oligarchs, Citizens and the Digital Revolution*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

The Defeat of Barisan Nasional: Missed Signs or Late Surge?

FRANCIS E. HUTCHINSON and LEE HWOK AUN, eds.

Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2019.

This book unpacks Malaysia's 14th general election (GE-14) of May 2018. Facing the long-ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) administration, the freshly configured opposition bloc, Pakatan Harapan (PH), emerged triumphant, seemingly against all odds. It has been two years since that eventful day, but what do we make of the election? Bringing together ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute researchers

and a group of selected collaborators, this book presents 23 chapters covering four angles: campaign dynamics, important trends among key interest groups, local-level development in key states, and personal perspectives from a selection of GE-14 participants.

The core message of the book is the post-event unpacking of the chink in the armor of the mighty BN and how it manifested itself during GE-14. For instance, Chapter 2 (by Kai Ostwald) details how the electoral system was in favor of the incumbent, shedding light on electoral manipulations, mass media partiality, money politics, and ethnic slants. By extension, defeating the BN required a coalition that featured many of the former's key attributes, especially the Bumiputra-centric orientation. The importance of this requirement was reflected in the first Cabinet composition of PH. As astutely observed by Ostwald, parties that could attract Bumiputra, rural, and East Malaysian voters received over half of the Cabinet positions (14 of 27) despite securing only about one-quarter (32 of 121) of PH's total seats. Ostwald dampens the expectation that post-GE-14 reforms will be smooth sailing or linear, as many imprints of the old administration—more because of political expediency than moral considerations—will likely survive into the coming years of Malaysian politics.

Chapter 9 (by Geoffrey Pakiam) focuses on the voting patterns of Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) settlers. This study is important because of the settlers' disproportionately weighty presence in the electoral system: FELDA wards take up a much higher share of parliamentary seats than their voter numbers indicate, have a median of roughly 20,000 fewer registered voters when compared with Peninsular Malaysia's non-FELDA constituencies, and usually have higher proportions of ethnic Malay voters than non-FELDA wards in Peninsular Malaysia (see Figs. 9.2 and 9.3, pp. 212–213). Taking a long-term perspective, Pakiam shows that the FELDA vote bank, originally a BN fortress, was broken by both PH and Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) in the most recent GE. However, this decline was probably at least a decade in the making. Pakiam demonstrates, using longitudinal voting data, that close to 80 percent of all FELDA parliamentary seats had gravitated away from BN since 2004. Like Ostwald, Pakiam sounds the sober note that if PAS and BN choose to not contest against each other in the same FELDA wards in future elections, PH might struggle in these areas.

The standout feature of this book is its attention to local-level dynamics in key states throughout the country. Praise goes to the editors for curating essays on five critical states—three in Peninsular Malaysia (Selangor, Johor, and Kelantan) and two in East Malaysia (Sarawak and Sabah). Studies on Malaysian politics too often harp on events at the national level, without equivalent attention paid to events on the ground. Thus, it is heartening to see this attention to local politics. My personal favorite essay is Chapter 15 (by Lee Poh Onn), which analyzes developments in the hornbill state of Sarawak. It goes into considerable depth on historical issues such as the maneuvering of chief ministers that came before the long-ruling Taib Mahmud (1981–2014), weaving them into current developments such as GE-14. There is also participant observation covering

the three key constituencies of Bandar Kuching, Petra Jaya, and Mas Gading. Each of them was selected based on its ethnic composition, degree of urbanization, candidates, and parties. The choice of Bandar Kuching is lauded for it is the state's capital and oftentimes a bellwether for the rest of Sarawak, especially the urban areas. For similar reasons, Petra Jaya was chosen because it is urban but houses a predominantly Muslim Bumiputra population. Meanwhile, Mas Gading was selected because it is a semi-rural seat with a largely non-Muslim Bumiputra populace.

Overall, this book is well organized as it balances the intellectual demands of a multi-themed approach, analyzing how the proverbial David took on Goliath and won. It also does so with a fairly reasonable speed to market, which in itself is noteworthy. Befitting its ambitious title, the book is a valuable vault of information for both general and specialist readers interested in Malaysian and Southeast Asian politics. Notwithstanding its thickness, the book provides up-to-date empirical findings to policy makers, researchers, and business executives.

Guanie Lim 林鑽涔

Nanyang Centre for Public Administration, Nanyang Technological University

Speaking Out in Vietnam: Public Political Criticism in a Communist Party-Ruled Nation

BENEDICT J. TRIA KERKVLIET

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019.

This book divides Vietnamese people who have spoken out against the authorities in recent years into four categories and analyzes how the party-state “repressed” them. Through these categories, Benedict Kerkvliet looks at the governance of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) and the future of democratization. The author, who has observed Vietnamese politics for nearly three decades, has over the years analyzed the relationship between society and the state. In 2005 Kerkvliet described how politics shaped by the peasants drove the state. In the current book, extending from rural to urban areas, he explores the relationship between Vietnamese society and the state through the “anti-China” movement and the democracy movement that appeared with the development of the Internet. For its sources, the book uses online content, newspapers and magazines, government reports and documents, as well as interviews with dissidents and regime critics.

A couple of decades earlier, one could plausibly claim that Vietnamese citizens voiced little criticism in public (p. 140). However, after the mid-1990s the dialogical aspect of state-society relations became visible (p. 145). The author describes Vietnam as a “responsive-repressive party-state” (p. 6) that responds to political criticism in both hard and soft ways.