The Dynamics of Social Capital and Recent Political Development in Malaysia

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Abstract

The political landscape in Malaysia has been changing since the late 1990s with a gradual rise in resistance from civil society and the opposition parties. Domestic politics have become more contentious recently, particularly evidenced by the advent of a strong civil society and a multi-cultural opposition coalition. Thus, the social capital stimulated by ICTs and CSOs has played a vital role in strengthening and empowering the role of the opposition parties in Malaysia. This study seeks to understand how ICT-driven social capital has facilitated the surge in the opposition movement by situating the political use of social capital in a broader socio-political context. Hence the dramatic political change has been intertwined with the dynamics of social capital and creation of a public sphere accelerated by the rapid growth of ICTs in the country. By analyzing recent voting patterns, this study demonstrates that ICT-driven social capital does have a great impact on the changing political landscape in Malaysia, particularly in shaping voting behavior and political participation of Malay and non-Malay citizens in domestic politics.

Introduction

Malaysia has cherished an electoral authoritarianism wherein the ruling coalition seems to be holding multi-party elections regularly, but then restricting competitiveness so as to stay in power. Recently scholars and policymakers have become increasingly