

Malaysia Newspapers Portrayal of 13th General Election: The Case of Political Transformation Plan Era¹

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Abstract

Political Transformation Plan (PTP) is an integrated and visionary plan push by the sixth Prime Minister of Malaysia, Najib Razak to transform Malaysia into a truly developed nation by 2020. Since then, the biggest transformation and regarded as Najib's boldest step in political reform was the repealing or amended preventive laws long deemed as draconian, such as the Internal Security Act (ISA), the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) and several emergency declarations. Those actions been regarded as supporting healthy freedom of speech and press freedom in Malaysia. However to what extend these reform has been translated into meaningful practices of Malaysia's newspaper is an interesting and very significance to understand? Generally this paper aim to assess to what extent the current political transformation has impact political reporting by Malaysia newspapers. For that, Malaysia 2013 General Election (GE13) is choosing as the case study. In particular, this study will identify how the political parties have been portrayed? Have they been fairly covered? Thus the coverage of Malaysia 2013 General Election by two Malaysia main newspapers was analysed. The Star (including Sunday Star) and Harian Metro (including Metro Ahad) were chosen as the study samples based on their circulation volume. The GE13 portrayal of these newspapers of the two weeks campaign period was content and thematic analyse using qualitative data analysis software, NVivo10. The content analysis output of this study provides some indicators on the PTP and the trend on Malaysia's newspaper political reporting in PTP era.

Keywords: *Political communication; media and politics, Malaysia GE13, communication and change*

Introduction

The role of the media is most evident in the run-up to any election. As mainstream media in Malaysia focuses primarily on positive stories for the benefit of the political elite (Anuar, 2000), analysing mainstream media coverage on general election will always contributes to academic insight. Because of the well-honed and prudent apparatus of the government, it is

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claimed that Malaysia mainstream media is biased towards the ruling party. This claimed appears to be related to newsroom culture in Malaysia, where close links between political leaders, editors and publishers make it difficult for press to be critical on mainstream political leaders as well as their party (Anuar, 2005). For some scholars such as Bari (2003), Doronila (2000) and Muzaffar (1986), press freedom has been considered a prerequisite for genuine democracy.

Study Background

When Najib Razak took charged as the 6th Prime Minister of Malaysia, he has took proactive ties by allowing the media to criticise the government for the sake of the people. He claimed, “We believe the days when ‘a government knows everything’ are over (The Malay Mail, 17 April 2012, p. 3). Among the government’s political transformation initiatives which also known as Political Transformation Plan (PTP), the Prime Minister has reviewed laws guiding the media in this country. The significance moment of this political transformation agenda took place in April 2012 when the government passed a new Security Offences (Special Measures) (2012) to replace the Internal Security Act (1960), which was considered as suppressing freedom of speech in Malaysia. Najib also have review the Printing Presses and Publication Act (1984), which would involve abolishing the condition of annual licensing renewal, and the Sedition Act (1948). These changes would unlock a new era of press in Malaysia (Anand, 2012). It would pave the way for Malaysia to practice a mature and respected democracy as claimed by the Prime Minister.

Scholars are interested among others in media-state relationship, freedom of the press and self-censorship. In addition, there has been a significant amount of literature on the effects of ownership on the media (Splichal, 2004; Nyamnjoh, 2004; Thomas, 2004; Zaharom & Wang Lay Kim, 2004, Zaharom, 2000). According to Professor Andrew Harding, the restrictions “...are considerable enough to make any politician, journalist, academic, publisher, or indeed any citizen, to think twice before placing any controversial views in the public domain” (Tang 2005: 6). However, with the PTP, it is expected that those constraints will be eased and my contribute to healthier exercise of press freedom especially in the Malaysia General Election.