

Media Framing and Democratization Under Multi-Party System: A Case Study of the 2023 Malaysian Six-State Elections

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Abstract : Since the transition of power in 2018, the Malaysian political landscape has experienced substantial shifts and complexities. The decline of the longstanding ruling party, United Malays National Organization (UMNO), following the party rotation, has given rise to splinter parties such as the Indigenous Unity Party (Bersatu), along with the enduring presence of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) in the northern region of the Malay Peninsula. However, the "Sheraton Move" in 2020 led to the fall of the Pakatan Harapan government and the emergence of Perikatan Nasional, signifying the ascent of a third political force. The 2022 general elections marked Malaysia's entry into a hung parliament, culminating in an intricate negotiation that resulted in a coalition government formed by Pakatan Harapan, Barisan Nasional, and the Sarawak parties alliance (GPS), collectively governing the Malaysian federal administration. During the 2023 state elections, Pakatan Harapan and Barisan Nasional formed an unprecedented alliance, yet the media framing benefited Perikatan Nasional, even securing substantial support from UMNO's traditional constituencies. In the era of converging new media, Malaysia's democratization faces new challenges: first, political leaders leveraging media to cultivate unfiltered personas risk inducing populism; second, under the influence of agenda-setting and two-step flow theories, media contributes to polarization; lastly, Malaysia's multi-party system is no longer effectively moderate extreme ideologies into the political center. This study examines the role of media framing and its impact on the democratization process within Malaysia's consociational democracy under a multi-party system and analyzes media discourse before and after the 2023 Malaysian state elections to explore how different parties shape public opinion and political discourse, and how political messages may be amplified or distorted in the process.

Keywords : multi-party system, democratization, elections, political polarization, Malaysia, media framing

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