

Deepening Authoritarian Governance in Malaysia: The 2015 Asian Democracy Index

ANDREW AERIA AND TAN SENG KEAT

Introduction

The year 2015 began badly for Malaysia. In late-December 2014, Indonesia Air Asia flight AK8501 crashed in the Java Sea while en route from Surabaya to Singapore. This crash only served to deepen the existing general despondency in Malaysia coming so soon after the mysterious disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 in March 2014 and the awful downing of MH17 via a Russian-built Buk missile in July 2014. Three plane crashes in one year was a lot for the Malaysian public to stomach.

It did not help sentiment either when in April 2015 despite a growing economic downturn the government implemented a deeply unpopular Goods and Services Tax (GST) on nearly all transactions throughout the economy. Consumers were angry with increased prices while the sheer complicatedness of the accounting procedures for GST tax rebates, claims, and reimbursement measures imposed upon businesses only contributed to a rise in the cost of doing business; not to mention deepen general disgruntlement about the state of the country.

As if not bad enough, the political news throughout the year further disheartened the country with more revelations of serious corporate malfeasance in the Malaysian government-owned strategic development company, 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB). Easily the biggest political corruption scandal the country has ever seen, 1MDB involved corrupt payments (euphemistically referred to as “donations from a Saudi Prince” by the government) estimated at RM 2.6 billion (USD 681 million) into the personal bank account of Prime Minister Abdul Najib Razak. The inability of the government to explain and resolve this scandal

Andrew Aeria is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University Malaysia Sarawak. Tan Seng Keat is Senior Research Partner in Malaysia's leading political pollster, Merdeka Centre.

only ensured that the Barisan Nasional government's credibility continued to slide.

Politically, the mandate of the governing Barisan Nasional (BN) government was repeatedly challenged in parliament and in the public realm by the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) opposition coalition throughout 2015. This was because the opposition PR coalition did not regard the 2013 electoral win by the BN as legitimate. They thus filed three legal challenges in July 2013, November 2014 (both for election irregularities) and a third in early in 2015 for "electoral overspending" by the BN. In retaliation, the BN pursued its longstanding persecution of the PR leader, Anwar Ibrahim, who was subsequently jailed in February 2015 for five years for what many believe to be on trumped up charges of "sodomy" (Amnesty International 2014; 2015a; 2015b).

All these contributed to a widespread sense of gloom in the country. Largely, there was a sense of exasperation and despair at a government suffering a severe crisis of credibility arising from perceived corruption within the uppermost echelons of the country's leadership. Indeed, the years 2013, 2014, and 2015 proved to be years of political ferment and social uncertainty that impacted negatively upon Malaysia's politics, economy, and civil society.

It was in this context that we ran our 2015 Asian Democracy Index (ADI) survey, our third and last of this funding cycle. Coming on the heels of the first Democracy Index pilot survey in 2012, the Malaysian ADI for 2013 was a humble attempt to gauge the quality of democratic governance in Malaysia. Undertaken in June, the results suggested a mixed picture that largely reflected that developing democracy—in all its multiple facets—in Malaysia was going to be long and winding road. Our 2014 survey results confirmed this trend and indicated that the democratization process was going to be a long and difficult one, if at all it happened. Similarly, our overall ADI for 2015 showed a further decline in the quality of democratic governance. This suggested that Malaysia had, since 2012, become a less democratic country. As well, it indicated that Malaysia's social fabric had deteriorated and become more fragile with the outlook for the country largely negative.

To give readers a better appreciation of the broad overview trend of the Malaysian socio-political, economic, and civil society scenarios, we thus opted to present our 2015 findings in a comparative manner. This paper thus begins by briefly describing the political-economic and social background of Malaysia from 2013–2015. We then describe our ADI survey process and its limitations. With those limitations as caveats, we then proceed to present our 2013–2015 ADI survey results along with our conclusions.

Tracking Key Malaysian Issues, 2013-2015

Since the 2013 general election (GE13), Malaysia has been going through one political upheaval after another. The GE13 results showed that although the combined political PR opposition coalition had won a majority of the total votes cast (50.87 percent) and eighty-nine parliamentary seats, it was the longstanding BN governing coalition that won the most number of parliamentary seats (133 seats) despite polling only 47.38 percent of the total votes cast (Khoo 2013). The opposition PR accused the victorious BN of cheating but was unable to stop the BN from forming the government. Legal suits against the BN were filed in court and the BN responded aggressively by pursuing its longstanding legal case against opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, who was subsequently jailed for alleged sodomy in February 2015, a charge roundly condemned worldwide by human rights organizations (Amnesty International 2015a; 2015b; HRW 2015).

The results of GE13 which saw a continued stalemate between both the BN and PR coalitions along with the vicious hounding of Anwar Ibrahim via legal means set the tone and stage for most of the other issues which dominated the country's socio-political, economic, and civil society scene. These issues largely impacted negatively upon the democratic and governance fabric of the country.

In order to curb dissent and to contain the heavy criticism against the government, numerous legislative amendments were pushed through parliament via the BN's brute majority. In place of the obnoxious Internal Security Act that allowed for indefinite detention without trial and which was repealed in 2011, parliament passed the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012 (PCA), the Security Offenses Special Measures Act 2012 (SOSMA) and the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015 (POTA). All these acts were deemed undemocratic by the political opposition and civil society groups since they allowed for too much arbitrary power to be concentrated in the hands of the police and Home Minister without sufficient parliamentary or judicial oversight. Evidence of further tightening of political space occurred when over thirty opposition politicians, civil society activists, students, and even academics were charged for sedition (The Guardian 2015). Newspapers critical of the government like *The Edge Daily* and the *Edge Weekly*, *Malaysiakini*, and *The Malaysian Insider* either had their printing licenses revoked or slapped with libel cases principally for reporting on the huge 1MDB scandal that engulfed Prime Minister Abdul Najib Razak (Malaysiakini 2015a).¹ To contain growing dissent from both within government, parliament and the civil service over the 1MDB

scandal, PM Najib Abdul Razak made sweeping changes to his administration, sacking dissenters and appointing loyalists. He sacked five members of his cabinet, namely Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Muhyiddin Yassin, Rural and Regional Development Minister Mohd Shafie Apdal, and three others. DPM Muhyiddin had been among some of the most strident critics of PM Najib's dealings over 1MDB (The Straits Times 2015a). Also sacked was Attorney-General Abdul Gani Patail (The Straits Times 2015b). To shore up his position, PM Najib appointed four members of the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee investigating the 1MDB scandal to his cabinet, effectively crippling their investigation. He also removed from office the Head of Special Branch, the country's secret intelligence gathering service. All in all, this fell swoop successfully removed all internal threats to PM Najib's political survival and stymied a Special Task Force investigating the 1MDB allegations (The Straits Times 2015b).

Despite earlier promises made in 2012 to repeal the Sedition Act, Prime Minister Najib did a turn-around in late-2014 and strengthened it instead so as to protect himself from increasingly strident demands for his resignation. Hundred were arrested and charged and by mid-2015 alone, over 176 civil society activists, academics, lawyers, politicians, and even a cartoonist had been charged under the Sedition Act and/or the Peaceful Assembly Act (Hew 2015). The deepening 1MDB crisis also galvanized former Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad into action on behalf of the country when he resigned from UMNO and began a campaign in earnest to oust PM Najib Abdul Razak from office.

Consequently, in order to detract attention from political scandals and the weakness of the governing coalition, government agencies played up religious issues and ramped up social tension. Christian material written in Malay and indigenous languages were confiscated by government agencies under the pretext that "using Allah in non-Muslim literature could confuse Muslims and entice them to convert" (The Guardian 2014). Such aggressive tactics along with legal challenges from the Catholic Church (the final appeal to the Federal Court was defeated in January 2015) against these government actions only served to polarize society along sectarian lines. It did not help either that government sponsored groups like the Persatuan Pribumi Perkasa (Mighty Native Organization, or Perkasa) and the Ikatan Muslimim Malaysia (Malaysian Muslim Solidarity, or ISMA), both ethnic and religious supremacist groups further fanned sectarian tensions and divisions between the country's Malay-Muslim majority and other minority groups. They held provocative

demonstrations, issued press statements, and demands that official fatwas be pronounced to declare liberal- and plural-minded groups opposed to their beliefs as being “deviant,” thus allowing the government to take stern action against them (Malaysiakini 2015c). Paradoxically, even as these inter-religious tensions were being fanned, the government continued its crackdown on the minority Malay-Shia community by detaining and jailing them for being “deviant Muslims” (HRW 2014; Ahlulbayt Blog 2015). Similarly, police abuse and impunity continued unabated. “Unjustified shootings, mistreatment and deaths in custody, and excessive use of force in dispersing public assemblies persist because of an absence of meaningful accountability for Malaysia’s police force” (HRW 2015).

This culture of impunity was not helped by the view that Malaysia’s judicial system remained subservient to the government (Malaysian Bar Council 2012). While generally respected to deliver rational and impartial judgments for most corporate cases, the perception remained that the Malaysian judiciary did not perform to internationally accepted standards when cases involved major political personalities (e.g., Anwar Ibrahim sodomy case; the Altantuuya Shaaribuu murder case), sensitive cases involving Islam (e.g., Allah controversy; divorce and child custody involving a single Muslim parent; body-snatching of dead Muslim converts; et cetera), police impunity (e.g., deaths in custody), or the political opposition (FMT 2014).

The government continued to remain intransigent and dismissive of the norms of international law and United Nations (UN) standards. It rejected the recommendations put forth by other countries on freedom of religion and native customary land rights during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). It also rejected recommendations from the UN Special Rapporteurs on issues related to freedom of religion and freedom of information. As noted by the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM), “Of the 232 recommendations received from UN Member States during the review held on 24 October 2013, Malaysia has accepted 150 recommendations, 113 of which are accepted in full, 22 accepted in principle and 15 accepted partially. Malaysia did not support 83 recommendations which call for immediate changes to existing laws, regulations and policies or matters which it is not prepared to consider or commit to implement at this juncture” (SUHAKAM 2014).

The government also looked very weak and fragile when it failed to detect and consequently failed to deter an invasion into Sabah state by armed militants from the Sulu archipelago, South Philippines (The Economist 2013). This led to a major outpouring of public frustration at the

huge number of illegal foreigners in Sabah and Malaysia along with extensive commiserations at the high number and regular frequency of armed gangs kidnapping Malaysians and foreigners for ransom on the East coast of Sabah state (Daily Express 2015). Despite the setting up of a royal commission to address the problem of illegal immigrants gaining citizenship and a huge increase in public spending, weak border security and poor crime prevention remained unresolved. This only served to deepen public mistrust of the government.

Electoral reform also remained stymied. Deep dissatisfaction over the lack of electoral reforms, ongoing abuse of police and judicial power and the 1MDB scandal led to another series of major public rallies over two days in August 2015 in key cities around the country and in seventy other cities globally. Led by Bersih 4, a coalition of electoral reform civil society groups saw peaceful demonstrations of involving between 40,000 to 250,000 people (Bloomberg 2015a; 2015b). Among their key demands was for free and fair elections, a clean government, the right to dissent, the strengthening of parliamentary democracy, saving the country's economy, and the resignation of PM Najib Abdul Razak (Malaysiakini 2015b). The government responded to this challenge by arresting and charging the key leaders of Bersih 4 along with a few others under the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012 for taking part in earlier the street protests in February and March 2015 (The Malaysian Insider 2015).

Our Survey Method and Key Limitations

Malaysia started conducting Asia Democracy Index (ADI) surveys in 2012.² In that year, we ran a pilot study to evaluate the survey instrument. Consequently, we did not run any full index survey that year but did so in 2013, 2014, and 2015. Given financial constraints, we only ran index surveys and not full national quantitative surveys. To ensure that we gathered useful data that reflected the state of democracy in Malaysia, we also decided that the index would survey experts and professionals with knowledge about the quality and health of Malaysian democracy. This meant that instead of polling 1000 persons throughout the country, we only shortlisted about 200 professionals who mirrored the country's ethnic, religious and regional profiles, the three main political markers and ideological dividers in Malaysia. Our experience has been that despite polling these 200 experts, we received replies from an average of 30-40 respondents for each annual index survey.

As well, we intended that our ADI studies be easily accessible to the general public. Consequently, instead of opting for a more rigorous statistical approach (e.g., with statistical models, multiple regressions, correlations, et cetera), we adopted a simpler, more accessible, and certainly much more comprehensible approach which highlighted the mean scores of our aggregated index. While many academics would rightfully contest this survey method as being simplistic and even inaccurate, we remain committed to its use so as to ensure that a majority of society (who incidentally are not trained in nor comprehend statistical sophistication) grasp the ideas that we wish to convey.

Some of the other key non-statistical limitations of this approach have become manifest over the years. For one, it has been very difficult to get busy experts/professionals to respond to our survey (administered via email) as they often ignored the survey by citing time and work constraints. As well, there has been difficulty in getting the same persons to respond each year. The other limitations encountered were that experts, despite our best efforts, tend to be overwhelmingly conservative, middle-class individuals who generally are more cautious and reticent about their participation in polls and surveys for fear of public exposure of their views. These experts also held very different interpretations of certain terms like “justice,” “fair,” “equality/inequality,” et cetera as used in our index survey. These terms carry different meanings and connotations for respondents from different religious, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, or regional backgrounds. As well, despite our best efforts, we have always received more responses from male instead of female respondents and consistently more responses from Peninsula states than Borneo states. Hence, our findings are generally skewed towards a male- and peninsula-perspective. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, our access to our short time-series data has allowed us to make some inter-year comparisons of the ADI data, a task that we now outline.

Comparing Politics, Economy, and Civil Society in Malaysia, 2013-2015

Table 1 shows the profile of our index respondents by ethnicity, gender, age and regional background. In 2013, we had twenty-seven respondents comprised of twelve Malays, eleven Chinese, three Indians, and one other indigenous person. There were twenty-two male and five female respondents. In terms of their age cohorts, we can group them into: five (21-30), nine (31-40), nine (41-50), and four (51-60). Regionally, ten came from

the Central region while there were seven from the North, four from the South, three from the East, and three from Borneo. In 2014, we had forty respondents comprised of four Malays, twenty-two Chinese, eight Indians, and six other indigenous persons. There were thirty-three male and seven female respondents. In terms of their age cohorts, groupings are as follows: three (21-30), four (31-40), three (51-60), and one (> 61). For reasons unknown, many did not state their ages in 2014. Regionally, fifteen came from the Central region while there were three from the North, one from the South, and twenty-one from Borneo. In 2015, we had forty respondents comprised of nineteen Malays, fifteen Chinese, seven Indians, and six other indigenous persons. There were twenty-seven male and twenty female respondents. Regionally, eighteen came from the Central region while there were five from the North, four from the South, one from the East, and nineteen from Borneo.

Table 1. Malaysia: Breakdown of Index Survey Respondents by Ethnic, Gender, Age, and Regional Background, 2013-2015

Year				2013			
Ethnicity	No.	Gender	No.	Age	No.	Region	No.
Malay	12	male	22	20-30	5	Central	10
Chinese	11	female	5	31-40	9	North	7
Indian	3			41-50	9	South	4
Other Indigenous	1			51-60	4	East	3
Others				61>	0	Borneo	3
Total	27		27		27		27
Year				2014			
Ethnicity	No.	Gender	No.	Age	No.	Region	No.
Malay	4	male	33	21-30	3	Central	15
Chinese	22	female	7	31-40	4	North	3
Indian	8			41-50	0	South	1
Other Indigenous	6			51-60	3	East	0
Others				61>	1	Borneo	21
Total	40		40		11		40

Table 1. (*continued*)

Year		2015					
Ethnicity	No.	Gender	No.	Age	No.	Region	No.
Malay	19	male	27	21-30		Central	18
Chinese	15	female	20	31-40		North	5
Indian	7			41-50		South	4
Other Indigenous	6			51-60		East	1
Others				61>		Borneo	19
Total	47		47				47

Survey Results: Perception of Politics, 2013-2015

Table 2 details the overall democracy index for Malaysia as a whole. The overall aggregate score for democracy in the country from 2013-2015 showed a decline of 0.23 points. It should be noted that the score of 4.08 (2013) is already a low score on a 0-10 scale. Scrutinizing the figures further gives us a sense that those polled are most pessimistic about the politics of the country compared to economics and civil society. Overall, one can surmise that perceptions about democracy in the country had dropped further, indicating a deep sense of gloom about the overall direction of the country as far as democracy and governance are concerned.

Table 2: Malaysia: Overall Democracy Index, 2013-2015

Fields of Democratization	Principles	2013	2014	2015	Difference (2013-2015)
Politics	Liberalization	3.74	3.53	3.20	-0.54
	Equalization	3.77	3.01	3.30	-0.47
Economics	Liberalization	5.16	4.64	4.92	-0.24
	Equalization	3.05	3.38	3.31	+0.26
Civil Society	Liberalization	4.82	4.59	4.49	-0.33
	Equalization	3.93	3.48	3.86	-0.07
Overall Index Score		4.08	3.77	3.85	-0.23

To understand why there has been a general decline in the perception about the quality of democracy and governance in the country, it is however necessary to view the various fields of politics, economics and civil society in greater detail. These results are detailed in tables 3 (Politics), 4 (Economics), and 5 (Civil Society).

Table 3 shows our respondents' perception of politics. What one notices is that there has been a decline in the perception of values in all categories by those polled since 2013. The autonomy index for the political liberalization category measures individual and civil freedoms. Despite already being low in 2013 (3.67), it dropped by a further 0.61 to 3.06 in 2015. Similarly, the competition index for the political liberalization category which measures public choice in terms of political competition also declined by 0.46 from 3.80 (2013) to 3.34 (2015). Mirroring these low values was that of the pluralization category of political equalization, which measures how evenly distributed political power was in the country. The low score of 2.89 (2015) relative to 3.26 (2013) showed that those polled perceived that government control over democratic institutions and governance processes had actually tightened further over three years. For the solidarity category of political equalization, which measures society's ability to challenge power disparities, the values also declined by 0.56 from 4.27 (2013) to 3.71 (2015). In other words, in all these categories, expert perception was that political power had become more entrenched and unequal in 2015 compared to 2013. Thus, it was no surprise that the overall political liberalization score had dropped by 0.54 to 3.20 (2015) from 3.74 (2013). This only reflected the continued concentration of power in the hands of government agents and the political elite. The drop of 0.56 in the political solidarity score from 4.27 (2013) to 3.71 (2015) thus only reflected an overall pessimism among the public about their ability to challenge this growing power disparity in society.

The results for the economy index (see table 4) also somewhat reflected the deepening authoritarian governance trend in the country. For the autonomy category of economic liberalization, which reflects how free the economy is, the index scores showed a decline of 0.47 from 6.09 (2013) to 5.62 (2015). The index for competition, which measures the level of contestation within the economy declined slightly from 4.23 (2013) to 4.22 (2015), although it was an improvement from 3.55 in 2014. Still, the low scores indicate an economy that is not free. This is reflected in the low score of 2.78 (2015) for pluralization, which measures the level of concentration of economic resources. Although there was an improvement of 0.40 since 2013, this did not detract from the reality that Malaysia's eco-

conomic resources are tightly held and indeed monopolized by a small group of powerful, rich, and well-connected elites and government-linked companies (GLCs). However, the index for solidarity, which measures the ability of state institutions to address economic inequality, showed a slight improvement of 0.14, rising from 3.71 (2013) to 3.85 (2015). Nonetheless, the figures remain low and reflect society's pessimistic perception about the government's inability to address inequality issues. Overall then, the economic liberalization score's decline of 0.24 to 4.92 (2015) from 5.16 (2013) suggests that Malaysia's economy is perceived to have become even less liberal and monopolistic in character. The low score of 3.31 (2015) for economic equalization, an improvement of 0.26 from 3.05 (2013) however reflects a continued perception of an institutional inability to address elite monopoly of economic resources while the majority population remain marginalized.

Table 3: Malaysia, Index for Politics, 2013-2015

Year		2013	2014	2015	Difference
Liberalization	Autonomy	3.67	3.35	3.06	-0.61
	Competition	3.80	3.72	3.34	-0.46
Equalization	Pluralization	3.26	2.64	2.89	-0.37
	Solidarity	4.27	3.39	3.71	-0.56
Liberalization		3.74	3.53	3.20	-0.54
Equalization		3.77	3.01	3.30	-0.47
All		3.75	3.27	3.25	-0.50

Table 4: Malaysia, Index for Economy, 2013-2015

Year		2013	2014	2015	Difference
Liberalization	Autonomy	6.09	5.73	5.62	-0.47
	Competition	4.23	3.55	4.22	-0.01
Equalization	Pluralization	2.38	3.29	2.78	+ 0.40
	Solidarity	3.71	3.47	3.85	+0.14
Liberalization		5.16	4.64	4.92	-0.24
Equalization		3.05	3.38	3.31	+0.26
All		4.11	4.01	4.12	+0.02

For the civil society index, most scores reflected a general perception that civil society is weakening (see table 5). In the autonomy category, which measures the level of independence civil society enjoys from government or economic influences, the drop of 0.17 from 4.43 (2013) to 4.26 (2015) indicated that many civil society groups are now even more controlled than before. No doubt, this is due to the enactment of further repressive laws like SOSMA, POTA, PCA and the use of the Sedition Act to charge a whole range of civil society activists and academics in order to intimidate and neutralize their influence in society. As well, the competition category, which measures the dynamic role of civil society within a democracy, showed a drop of 0.49 from 5.21 (2013) to 4.72 (2015). This likely meant that those polled felt that civil society was not as effective in challenging the concentration of power or economic resources and was actually losing out to the other key players in the country. The drop in the pluralization category, which represents how equal and influential civil society is with regard to the media and access information, by 0.55 from 4.00 (2013) to 3.45 (2015) confirms the view that civil society is losing out to its key political and economic competitors within Malaysia's democracy. The only category in which civil society polled a higher index response was that of solidarity, which measures the ability of civil society to promote diversity, social awareness, social participation and improved governance.

Table 5: Malaysia, Index for Civil Society, 2013-2015

Year		2013	2014	2015	Difference
Liberalization	Autonomy	4.43	4.36	4.26	-0.17
	Competition	5.21	4.83	4.72	-0.49
Equalization	Pluralization	4.00	3.64	3.45	-0.55
	Solidarity	3.87	3.32	4.18	+0.31
Liberalization		4.82	4.59	4.49	-0.33
Equalization		3.93	3.48	3.86	-0.07
All		4.38	3.95	4.18	-0.09

The index for civil society solidarity rose by 0.31 from 3.87 (2013) to 4.18 (2015). If anything, this score likely reflected a view among those polled that despite a growing concentration of power and resources, they felt that civil society had an important role to play to enhance diversity

and counterbalance a weakening of democracy and governance standards. Nevertheless, overall, civil society was viewed as having grown weaker relative to both politics and economics as shown by the liberalization index that fell 0.33 from 4.82 (2013) to 4.49 (2015). As well, this position of weakness of civil society that was reflected in the equalization score that fell 0.07 from 3.93 (2013) to 3.86 (2015) suggested that the civil society sector was struggling against powerful forces and often from a Sisyphean position.

Conclusion: An Imperfect but Useful Tool to Gauge Malaysia's Democratic Malaise

The ADI is not a flawless index. Neither do we pretend that it is statistically robust or even accurately gauges the overall sentiment of Malaysian society toward democracy and the quality of governance from the perspective of de-monopolization of resources in the arenas of politics, economics, and civil society. Indeed, we are very aware that the ADI has serious limitations. However, as a humble tool that can be easily understood and appreciated by the majority of society, we believe that it has utility. As well, it attempts to present in simple format an alternative theoretical approach (i.e., a multi-layered de-monopolization process of political, economic, and civil society resources) to that of the hitherto dominant approaches in understanding democracy and democratization (Cho 2012).

What our three ADI surveys since 2013 have established is that Malaysia has been spiraling slowly downwards into an abyss of authoritarian governance. Politics in Malaysia has become more divisive and nasty with a deepening of ethnic and religious fascism. Economically, there is little change in the perception that monopoly power remains concentrated in the hands of the political-economic elite, with inequality remaining high. Socially, civil society remains weak and uninfluential. Mistrust of the mainstream media continues to grow and the internet media is increasingly controlled given tight government censorship and authoritarian legislation.

Thus, instead of moving toward democratization and good governance, Malaysia is backsliding. Tragically, in the face of major political-economic scandals like the 1MDB scandal that has engulfed the Prime Minister along with many international banks, there is no accountability. State institutions are compromised to do the bidding of political masters instead of adhering to the rule of law. State institutions do not function to expose let alone prosecute any wrongdoing that involves powerful personalities or corporate cronies close to political leaders. So too, civil society and the local media are powerless to expose political-economic wrongdo-

ings. Political-economic and social reforms seem far-fetched with pessimism, disappointment and even cynicism deep-rooted. Consequently, democratic space in Malaysia has narrowed considerably. Indeed, a healthy, functioning democracy with robust institutions of good governance and a dynamic civil society in the country are still very far from being achieved in Malaysia.

Notes

1. As a consequence of unrelenting political pressure, The Malaysian Insider e-newspaper subsequently ceased operations in March 2016 for “commercial reasons” (The Star 2016).
2. Details about the ADI theoretical and methodological framework can be found in CADI (2012).

References

- Ahlulbait Blog. 2015. Shia's in Malaysia. October 12. <http://ahlulbait.tv/blog/shias-in-malaysia/>.
- Amnesty International. 2014. Malaysia: End Persecution of Anwar Ibrahim and Other Government Critics. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/10/malaysia-end-persecution-anwar-ibrahim-and-other-government-critics/>.
- . 2015a. “Malaysia: Anwar Verdict will have Chilling Effect on Freedom of Expression.” <http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/36560/>.
- . 2015b. Solidarity Statement for Prisoner of Conscience Anwar Ibrahim. <http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/37747/>
- Bloomberg. 2015a. “Thousands of Malaysians Rally in Capital to Demand Najib's Resignation.” August 29. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-08-29/thousands-of-malaysians-rally-in-capital-to-demand-najib-resigns>.
- . (2015b). “Malaysians Defy Government With Second Day of Najib Protests.” August 30. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-08-30/malaysia-protesters-defy-government-in-second-day-on-the-streets>.
- CADI (Consortium for the Asian Democracy Index). 2012. “The Asian Democracy Index: A Guide.” *Asian Democracy Review* 1:36-87.
- Cho, Heeyeon. 2012. “Democratization as De-monopolization and Its Different Trajectories: No Democratic Consolidation without De-Monopolization.” *Asian Democracy Review* 1:4-35.
- Daily Express. 2015. “Sabah Shaken Again by Sandakan Kidnapping.” December 28. <http://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news.cfm?NewsID=105487>.
- The Economist. 2013. “The Sultan's Sabah Swing.” February 23. <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21572251-chaotic-south-philippines-muslims-launch-foreign-policy-sultans-sabah-swing>.
- FMT (Free Malaysia Today). 2014. “Incompetent and Compromised Judiciary.” April 11. <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/opinion/2014/04/11/incompetent-and-compromised-judiciary/>.
- The Guardian. 2014. “Malaysia's Highest Court Backs a Ban on Allah in Christian Bibles.” June 23. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/23/malaysia-highest-court-allah-bible-ban>.

- . 2015. "Malaysia Court Dismisses Challenge to 'Unconstitutional' Sedition Law." October 6. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/06/malaysia-court-dismisses-challenge-to-unconstitutional-sedition-law>.
- HRW (Human Rights Watch). 2014. "No Answers, No Apology. Police Abuses and Accountability in Malaysia." <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/04/01/no-answers-no-apology/police-abuses-and-accountability-malaysia>.
- . 2015. "Malaysia: Anwar's Conviction Sets Back Rights." <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/02/10/malaysia-anwars-conviction-sets-back-rights>.
- Khoo Boo Teik. 2013. "13th General Election in Malaysia. Report and Summary." In *13th General Election in Malaysia. Issues, Outcomes and Implications*. http://www.ide.go.jp/Japanese/Publish/Download/Kidou/pdf/2013_malaysia_03.pdf.
- Malaysiakini. 2015a. "Home Ministry Gives Three Reasons for The Edge Ban." July 27. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/306109>.
- . 2015b. "Mammoth Bersih 4.0 Rallies to Get Najib Out." July 29. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/306575>.
- . 2015c. "Perkasa Wants Fatwa Declaring G25 'Deviant.'" December 20. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/324027>.
- Malaysian Bar Council. 2012. "Dr M 'Assaulted' Judicial Independence, Says Bar Council." February 20. http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/legal/general_news/dr_m_assaulted_judicial_independence_says_bar_council.html.
- The Malaysian Insider. 2015. "Maria Chin among 9 Charged with Illegal Assembly, Sedition." *The Edge Markets*, September 8. <http://www.theedgemarkets.com/my/article/maria-chin-among-9-charged-illegal-assembly-sedition>.
- The Straits Times. 2015a. "Muhyiddin Breaks Silence on 1MDB, Says PM Ignored Advice: Reports." July 27. <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/muhyiddin-breaks-silence-on-1mdb-says-pm-ignored-advice-reports>.
- . 2015. "Najib Sacks DPM, Four Ministers and A-G." July 29. <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/najib-sacks-dpm-four-ministers-and-a-g>.
- SUHAKAM. 2014. "Suhakam Calls for Effective Implementation Of Malaysia's Second Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Outcome." http://www.suhakam.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Press-statement_SUHAKAM-CALLS-FOR-EFFECTIVE-IMPLEMENTATION-OF-MALAYSIAS-SECOND-UPR-OUTCOME_21-Mac-2014.pdf.
- Hew, Lee Yee (2015). "Sedition Act 2015: Who Have Been Arrested, Investigated, And Charged So Far?" *Says.Com*, May 6. <http://says.com/my/news/sedition-act-2015-who-have-been-arrested-investigated-and-charged-so-far>.