

Malaysian Media: Ownership, Control and Political Content

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Abstract

Following a brief overview of the culture and politics, this paper examines the contemporary electronic media in peninsular Malaysia. A general explanation of ownership patterns, regulatory/control trends, and consumption is presented as background for the current discussion. (A somewhat detailed content analysis of radio and television programming is included in the paper.) The implications for influences on political speech from formal and informal content controls are explored within the context of Malaysia's dynamic and emerging privatized media. Finally, media content from the 2000 Malaysian Parliamentary election is offered as evidence of the impact of privatization and content controls on political speech.

## Malaysian Media: Ownership, Control and Political Content

This paper will examine the current ownership structure of Malaysia's electronic media, and specifically will seek to examine the implications of Malaysia's political environment on the media's political content. To understand the political milieu of contemporary Malaysia, we will first provide some brief historical and societal context.

### Background

Malaysia is composed of thirteen states, eleven of which are located on the peninsula that extends south from Thailand, with the South China Sea to its east and the Indian Ocean to its west. Singapore lies at the southern tip of peninsular Malaysia. Two states, Sabah and Sarawak, are located on the island of Borneo and are known as "East Malaysia."

"Malaya" which had been under British influence since 1826 (British Broadcasting Network), gained its independence in 1957 when "the Federation of Malaysia" was established as a constitutional Monarchy, with the Supreme Head of State being the *Yang Di Pertuan Agong*, or the King, who is chosen from the states' sultans. The Prime Minister heads Malaysia's parliamentary government.

The effects of Great Britain's colonial rule are still evident in the racial make up of the people of peninsular Malaysia, as the British had immigrated ethnic Chinese and Indians to work the tin mines, rubber plantations and other holdings.

Thus, Malaysia's multi-racial society is composed (officially) of 61% Malays, 30% Chinese, 8% Indians, and 1% *Orang Asli* (i.e. "original man") and the diverse indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak. Roughly eighty-five percent of Malaysia's

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twenty-two million people live on the peninsula, with the remainder inhabiting the states of Sabah and Sarawak (Malaysian Tourism Council, 1998).

Considerable disagreement exists regarding the accuracy of the minority populations reported above, as the provisions of the 1970 *New Economic Policy* (explained more fully below) require adhering to certain quotas, based on population estimates, in making hiring decisions and determining university admissions. Some non-Malaysian sources list the population of Malays at less than one-half the population, Chinese as over one-third, and Indians as 10%.

Malaysia's official religion is Islam, and in 2002 Prime Minister Dato Sri Doctor Mahathir Mohammed declared that Malaysia was a "Muslim State." But freedom of religious worship allows all religions to coexist, and indeed there are significant populations of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Animists throughout the country. Religious affiliations divide along ethnic lines with most Malays practicing Islam. Ethnic Chinese and Indians practice Buddhism and Hinduism respectively, as well as many of the Christian-based faiths. Orang Asli and other indigenous people are predominantly Animist.

### Malaysian Politics

Malaysia's Parliament is headed by the Prime Minister Mahathir, as it has been since 1981. A "ruling coalition" or *Barisan Nasional (BN)* controls the Parliament. The *BN* is composed of three parties, which represent the three major ethnic groups. *UMNO* (the United Malay National Organization) exerts the most control, but the *BN* also includes the *MCA* (Chinese party) and the *MIC* (Indian Party).

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The *BN* has effectively ruled Malaysia since 1969 by maintaining a two-thirds majority in the Parliament. This continued control has allowed the *BN* to amend the constitution at will, with one result being that power has become increasingly concentrated in the executive branch and with the prime minister. Parliamentary elections have long been subject to such gerrymandering that outside observers have concluded that elections are only called when the Prime Minister believes that such a clear majority exists for the *BN* that they are assured of maintaining their two-thirds majority and resultant control of the Parliament (United States Department of State, 2000).

In November 1999 Malaysian voters re-elected Mahathir to the office of Prime Minister, and maintained *BN* control in most states, in a “surprise” election that was called on short notice. Election observers noted that the timing of the election took advantage of a quirk in Malaysian election laws that left *thousands* of newly registered voters disenfranchised.

Most outside observers have thus characterized Malaysia’s government as *semi-authoritarian* to *authoritarian*, and ultimately leading to the conclusion that most civil liberties are allowed only as long as they do not threaten the control of the *BN*. UMNO’s primary political opposition (and thus the *BN*’s primary opposition) comes from *PAS*, Malaysia’s more conservative Muslim/Malay party. *PAS* leadership encourages a shift toward the conservative interpretation of Islam, and advocates the adoption of the strict Islamic or *Shariat* Law. *PAS* has combined forces with other minority parties to form a weak opposition coalition, and has managed to achieve control of two states in peninsular Malaysia.

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In the Malaysian state of Kelantan, state law now imposes fines for women who are seen in public without their covering, or *tudong*. Any mixing of the genders is strictly prohibited to the point of requiring separate male/female checkout lines at markets, and a prohibition on female barbers cutting male customers' hair.

Recent criticisms by PAS leadership of the liberal tendencies of UMNO have seemingly contributed to a shift toward conservatism throughout Malaysia, which is manifest in a general shift away from westernization and back toward traditional Malay/Muslim values. Malay women are now nearly always seen covering, and English has been de-emphasized to the extent that universities now provide instruction in only Malay. Some Malaysian Islamic scholars have concluded that the two parties are trying to "out Islam" one another.

### New Economic Policy

Arguably one of Mahathir's most controversial and conspicuous pieces of legislation was the *New Economic Policy (NEP)*, enacted in 1970. The stated intent of the NEP was the "eradication of inequalities" between the ethnic Chinese and the Muslim Malays, who are given the designation of "*Bumiputera*," or "sons of the soil," or "princes of the land" (depending on interpretation).

Viewed by many critics as "affirmative action for the majority," the NEP was initiated as a result of the realization that the ethnic Chinese population of Malaysia had achieved control of most the country's economy and wealth. One immediate mandate of the NEP was that all Malaysian corporations must have a majority ownership by Bumiputera, and thus required ownership realignment in many corporations.

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Other provisions of the NEP called for interest free loans, government employment, free university education and reservation of real property for Bumiputera ownership. It is through the provisions of the NEP that ownership of all corporations is closely monitored and controlled, which we will see extends to the ownership of media. And it is largely through the NEP that the *BN* and the Prime Minister have conspicuously accumulated much of Malaysia's wealth.

Mahathir's "cronyism" has resulted in considerable dissension among the non-Bumiputera population. As an example, the recent construction of the "*Putrajaya*," or "people's city," or "prince's city," depending on interpretation, includes a palatial residence and executive building so lavish that critics have labeled it "Mahathir's Taj Mahal." And certainly many of Mahathir's close associates and family have benefited from the NEP.

### Malaysian Electronic Media – Overview & Content

Malaysian television viewing options include over-the-air, or "*free-to-air*," signals from both government-owned (*Radio-Television Malaysia, or RTM*) and privately owned stations, subscription signals distributed by microwave, and satellite signals distributed by direct broadcast satellite. Free-to-air television signals include those from *RTM's TV-1* and *TV-2*, and signals from the privately owned *TV-3, Metrovision*, and *NCTV-7*. Signals from all these stations are available throughout peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia via *translator* transmitters that rebroadcast the signals.

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A representative programming schedule taken from television listings published in the *Straits Times* newspaper in October 1999 appears below, and indicates the types of program content available during *early fringe* and *prime-time* on the free-to-air channels.

*Prime-time television schedule from newspaper, October 1999.*

	TV1	TV2	TV3	NTV7	METRO
6:00pm	News	West. Sitcom	Chin. Drama	News	West. Doc.
6:30pm	Religious	News	Drama cont.	Malay. Serial	Malay. Serial
7:00pm	Malay. Serial	Chin. Serial	Malay. Serial	Serial cont.	Serial cont.
7:30pm	Interview	Serial cont.	Discussion	Game	West. Children's
8:00pm	News	News	News	News	News
8:30pm	Discussion	Malay. Serial	News	West. Drama	West. Comedy
9:00pm	Malay. Movie	Serial cont.	Indian Movie	Drama cont.	West. Comedy
9:30pm	Movie cont.	News	Movie cont.	Music videos	West. Comedy
10:00pm	Movie cont.	West. Movie	Movie cont.	West. Comedy	West. Serial
10:30pm	Movie cont.	Movie cont.	Movie cont.	West. Comedy	Serial cont.
11:00pm	News	Movie cont.	News	News	News

A quantitative content analysis of the free-to-air programming during the 6:00 to 11:00 p.m. day-part suggests that much of that programming is not Malaysian-produced, nor “Malaysian” in nature, but is significantly western in origin and production style. To measure this, television content was examined and classified according to these broad operational definitions:

*Locally produced cultural programming:* Programming focusing on local traditions and culture of peninsular Malaysia, including performing arts, fine arts, crafts, history, folklore, language, etc. It is worth noting that for the purposes of this project, “religious” programming was counted as cultural programming. This decision was made in light of the government’s recognition of Islam as the “official religion” of Malaysia, one result of which is that religion has become inextricably intertwined with most other aspects of the culture, including media and music. All of the free-to-air stations offer some type of Islamic programming daily during prime time, although some



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of this programming is very short (less than five minutes) and coincides with the call to prayer.

*Locally produced news/public affairs/documentary:* This category included all newscasts, news interviews, discussions and documentaries in which the content was primarily political, scientific or topical, but not *cultural*, as defined above.

*Locally produced entertainment:* Dramas, situation comedies, children's programming, musical variety, serials, etc. produced in peninsular Malaysia.

*Non-Malaysian Asian produced news/public affairs/documentary/cultural:* Any non-entertainment programming produced in other Asian countries including China, Japan, India, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Thailand, etc.

*Non-Malaysian Asian produced entertainment:* Any entertainment programming produced in Asian countries.

*Western produced news/public-affairs/documentary/cultural:* Non-entertainment programming produced in the U.S., Western Europe, Australia and Canada.

*Western produced entertainment:* Entertainment programming produced in the U.S., Western Europe, Australia and Canada.

A simple coding scheme was devised and tested to assign a numerical rating according to the classifications above. Randomly selected weekly program schedules (Monday through Friday, 6:00pm to 11:00pm) were taken from newspapers over a two-month period, and content analysis conducted for each quarter hour. Sample viewing was done to confirm the appropriate classification.

A rating of seven was assigned to locally-produced cultural and documentary programming. A rating of six was assigned to local news and public affairs. Five was assigned to locally produced entertainment programming and so forth.

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The intent of the system was to rank highest those locally produced programs containing examples of indigenous culture, to rank lowest those programs imported from the west, and to assign ordinal rankings to all others according to their perceived local cultural content.

<i>7</i>	<i>locally produced documentary and cultural programming</i>
<i>6</i>	<i>locally produced news and public affairs programming</i>
<i>5</i>	<i>locally produced entertainment</i>
<i>4</i>	<i>non-local Asian-produced news; documentary; public affairs; cultural programming</i>
<i>3</i>	<i>non-local Asian-produced entertainment</i>
<i>2</i>	<i>non-local western-produced news; documentary; public affairs; cultural programming</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>non-local western-produced entertainment</i>

This coding system facilitated two simple analyses. First each station's programming could be "scored" and a composite rating assigned which would suggest the amount of "cultural content" being aired by that station. Each quarter-hour of programming from 6:00pm to 11:00pm was coded and the program schedule given a rating by totaling the scores.

When the five free-to-air stations' programming was scored, *TVI* emerged as the station with the apparent highest number of hours of cultural programming per week, while *METRO* offered the least. Across an eight-week sample, *TVI* scored an average of 99.6 (out of a possible 140), while *METRO* scored a 53.3 (with 20 being the lowest score possible). This pattern was consistent over time, and seems to indicate that *METRO's* programming is considerably more westernized than that of *TVI*.

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Second, an overall weekly schedule could be easily analyzed for the total number of hours of programming from any of the foregoing content categories.

The results of this examination indicate the following: “cultural” content accounts for 2.5% of the available programming; “news/public affairs/documentaries” accounts for 25% of the programming; “locally produced entertainment” accounts for 23.5% of the programming; 18% of the programming is non-local Asian produced; and 31% is western produced programming. The predominance of western and non-local programming seems to contradict the implicit intent of much the media content regulation imposed by the government, which is to shield Malaysia’s citizens from influences it deems harmful to the country. (More on content regulation is found below under “Media Controls.”)

Another source of television programming, *MEGA-TV*, distributes subscription television signals using terrestrial microwave transmission technology, which is fraught with certain technological shortcomings that may ultimately contribute to its demise. Microwave transmission is limited to line-of-sight, and is thus unavailable where terrain or structures block the signal path (e.g. the “shadowed” side of high rise buildings).

*MEGA-TV*’s subscription channels include 6-7 western channels: *HBO Asian*, *CNN Asian*, *ESPN Asian*, *Discovery Channel*, *AXN (Action)*, and a day-parted channel that splits its signal between *Cartoon Network*, *TNT* and *Variety Channel*. *MEGA-TV* also provides one Taiwanese channel broadcast in Mandarin Chinese, and one Indian channel broadcast in Hindi or Tamil. *MEGA-TV* costs about \$12.40 (U.S.) per month.

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The limited numbers of channels, and a dwindling subscriber base as competition from digital direct broadcast satellite signals increases, are threatening *MEGA-TV's* future.

*ASTRO* is Malaysia's direct broadcast digital satellite service, and delivers over twenty channels to more than half-million subscribers. *ASTRO's* channel line-up includes Asian feeds from western sources: *HBO, CNN, ESPN, Discovery, MTV, Bloomberg, Nickelodeon, Disney, Star Movie Channel, CNBC, Showtime, National Geographic and others*. *ASTRO* also delivers three Chinese language channels, one Indian channel, and several digital audio channels. *ASTRO* subscriptions cost about \$50.00 (U.S.) per month, which still makes it too costly for many Malaysians.

Malaysian free-to-air radio signals are now divided between about ten state-run (*RTM*) FM stations, and at least seven privately owned FM stations. *RTM* stations provide broadcast services in English, Malay, Chinese, Tamil and the Orang Asli dialect. Program content is largely dominated by western *contemporary hit radio* and *adult contemporary* popular music formats.

*RTM* provides: *Radio One* (Malay language, international music); *Radio Music* (day-parted, English and Malay language, predominantly western music); *Radio KL* (English language, western music); *Radio Four* (English language, western music); *Channel Five* (Mandarin language, Chinese and international music); *Radio Six* (Tamil Language, Indian music); *Radio Seven* (Orang Asli dialect, eclectic music); *Radio Eight* (Malay language, no music). Only *Radio Irama Malayu Asli* consistently programs traditional Malaysian music.

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The privately owned stations are known by names or acronyms (rather than by their frequencies or call letters) in a manner similar to that observed in the U.S. (e.g. “*HITZ-FM*,” “*MIX-FM*,” “*BEST FM*,” “*Light and Easy FM*,” “*Time Highway Radio*,” etc.).

The programming on these privately owned stations is predominantly, if not exclusively, familiar western popular music formats such as “contemporary hit radio,” “adult contemporary,” “easy listening,” and “dance music.” On-air promotions, outdoor advertising and stations’ web-sites all reinforce the “Americanized” character of the radio stations. According to the on-air announcers, who have adopted equally familiar western delivery styles such as the morning drive “ensemble,” the play-lists are drawn largely from western “chart” sources such as *Billboard*. In fact, if not for some colloquialisms and dialectic idiosyncrasies, one might believe that one was listening to a U.S. station, complete with U.S. produced on-air identifications, liners, and cuts.

As in the U.S., Malaysian radio broadcasting has become almost entirely dominated by FM. According to A. C. Nielsen’s Malaysian office, AM radio is no longer a “viable medium” in peninsular Malaysia (AC Nielsen, 2000). But, unlike in the U.S., Malaysian FM radio stations typically operate a number of translator transmitters throughout the peninsula, resulting in the signals being nationally accessible. Although the frequencies of the translators vary from location to location, a clear signal is nearly always available as one travels around the countryside, with some re-

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tuning of the receiver. Most stations based in peninsular Malaysia also relay signals to transmitters in the states Sabah and Sarawak, on the island of Borneo.

Radio listener-ship research conducted by *A. C. Nielsen* in western peninsular Malaysia, indicates that aggregate listener-ship for the privately owned stations (*HITZ-FM, MIX, Light and Easy, ERA* and *MY Radio*) exceeds the aggregate listener-ship of the *RTM* stations (*AC Nielsen, 2000*).

### Malaysian Electronic Media - Ownership Patterns

Privatization of the media is a recent phenomenon in Malaysia, having begun in 1983. Ownership of the private media, while often somewhat obscured and difficult to ascertain, appears to follow a consistent pattern. That is many media outlets, like many industries in Malaysia, are owned by individuals with some connection to Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohammed, members of his *UMNO* party, or members of other *BN* parties.

According to Edmund Terence Gomez and Jomo K. S. in their book *Malaysia's Political Economy, Politics, Patronage and Profits*, one of the first efforts to transfer ownership of the electronic media from the government to the private sector involved the privatization of *TV3*. *TV3* was licensed in 1983 to *Sistem Televisyen (M) Berhad (STMB)*. Forty-percent of the *STMB* stock was held by the *Fleet Group*, which is *UMNO's* holding company, and thus the *Fleet Group*, with more stock ownership than any other single entity, had the right to select the remaining ownership partners (*Gomez & K. S., 1999*). *TV3* in turn owns *MEGA-TV*, a MMDS "cable" provider (*Nain & Mustafa, 1998*).

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This action appears to have established the trend for succeeding electronic media ownership. In 1994 a television broadcast license was issued to *Melewar Corporation* and *Utusan Malayu (M) Berhad* to operate *Metrovision*. Tunku Abdullah, who is widely known to be a close associate of Prime Minister Mahathir, controls *Melewar*. By 1999 *Metrovision* was struggling and was “temporarily” off-air by later that year and during early 2000. *Metrovision* has now ceased broadcasting.

Another reputed close associate of Prime Minister Mahathir, Ananda Krishnan, was issued a license in 1995 to operate *MEASAT*. *MEASAT* in turn launched *ASTRO*, Malaysia’s digital direct broadcast satellite service. Krishnan is evidently the beneficiary of other “favours” resulting from his ties to Mahathir. With an estimated net worth of over \$250-million (U.S.), Krishnan is a long-time member of the board of the *Bank Negara* and operates Malaysia’s “*Sports Toto*.”

*Natseven TV Sdn Bhd (NTV7)*, Malaysia’s most recent entry into the privately owned free-to-air television market, was licensed in 1998. Datuk (Dr.) Effendi Norwawi the Chairman of *ENCORP* group, which owns *NTV7*, serves as the Chairman of *NTV7*. Norwawi now also serves as the Minister of Agriculture (Malaysian Ministry of Agriculture, 2002).

Malaysia’s privately owned FM stations exhibit similar ownership patterns as television, and are largely controlled by Ananda Krishnan. Five of the seven stations are owned by *Airtime Management and Programming Sdn. Bhd. (AMP)*. *AMP*

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additionally operates four “FM” services that are available only via digital direct broadcast satellite (*ASTRO*). *AMP* is also a division of Krishnan’s *ASTRO*.

While the focus of this paper is the electronic media of Malaysia, a mention of the ownership of print media is worthy of inclusion as it adheres to same pattern identified above. According to the United States Department of State “*Report on Human Rights and Practices*” issued in 2000, “...leading political figures in the ruling coalition, or companies controlled by them, own most major newspapers” in Malaysia (United States Department of State, 2000).

### Media Controls

Virtually all of Malaysia’s media content is subject to some form of control. Film and television content are conspicuously subject to *a priori* censorship via the following “ratings system.”

- U* = general viewing “*suitable for all levels of society*;”
- 18SG* = for 18+ with non-excessive violent/horrifying scenes;
- 18SX* = for 18+ with non-excessive sex scenes;
- 18PA* = for 18+ with political/religious/counter-culture elements; and
- 18PL* = for 18+ with a combination of two or more elements.

Malaysian media practitioners frequently refer to the content controls by these vernacular abbreviations:

- V = Violent content.
- H = Horror content.
- S = Sexual content.
- C = Counter-culture content



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Implicit in this rating system is the notion that no excessive sex or violence is acceptable, and the system is applied in a “zero tolerance” fashion. Scenes that are deemed “excessive” in their violent or sexual content are completely removed, often with the result of the destruction of story-line continuity.

Some *ex post facto* control of foreign media and the Internet is also exercised, particularly as it applies to content that would “put the government in an unfavorable light.” The Malaysian Constitution provides that freedom of speech may be restricted by legislation "in the interest of security (or) public order" (United States Department of State, 2000).

For example, the *Sedition Act* prohibits public comment on issues defined as “sensitive,” such as racial and religious matters, and is often used to restrict dissenting political speech. In practice, the *Sedition Act*, the *Official Secrets Act*, the *Internal Security Act*, criminal defamation laws, and some other laws have been used to restrict or intimidate dissenting political speech.

Opposition leaders have often accused the government of using the *Official Secrets Act* to cover up various forms of corruption. Police have used the *Internal Security Act* to detain individuals who posted comments that were critical of the government, charging them with "cyber rumor-mongering" (United States Department of State, 2000).

The *Printing Presses and Publications Act* of 1984 limits press freedom. Under the act, domestic and foreign publications must apply annually to the Government for a

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permit. The act was further amended in 1987 to make the publication of "malicious news" a punishable offense, to expand the Government's power to ban or restrict publications, and to prohibit court challenges to suspension or revocation of publication permits. Government power over license renewal and other policies create an atmosphere that inhibits independent or investigative journalism and results in extensive self-censorship.

On April 1, 1999 Malaysia's parliament enacted the *Communications and Multimedia Act*. The Act requires licensing for Internet providers, and even more ominously provides for legal action against "those who post defamatory and false information on the Internet." Fear of prosecution under the *Communications and Multimedia Act* has resulted in some websites that are critical of the government moving their websites to offshore hosts. The government also refuses to recognize reporters for websites, or "online newspapers," by denying them press credentials, access to government meetings and press conferences, or admission to government buildings.

Perhaps one of the most powerful mechanisms for controlling media content is the self-censorship practiced by the media themselves. Some of that self-censorship is the result of the use of criminal defamation laws, which have been used by members of the *BN* to prosecute media owners for perpetuating "libelous" stories. The United States Department of State declared that fear of lawsuits was identified as a primary cause of self-censorship, while the Center for Independent Journalism cited self-censorship as the biggest obstacle to press freedom in Malaysia.

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### Media and Politics

It is evident that the close ties between Prime Minister Mahathir, *UMNO*, the *BN* and most of the privately owned media have created an environment that inhibits political speech. The U.S. Department of State concluded the ownership patterns of Malaysia's media "limits the range of views" (United States Department of State, 2000). At its most extreme, the Malaysian government has shown its displeasure at critical reporting by pressuring newspapers' governing boards to remove troublesome editors.

A case study in the manipulation of the media by the ruling *BN* may be seen through examining the circumstances of the 1999 parliamentary elections. The elections were widely criticized for several reasons; among them was the timing of the elections themselves, as well as the restrictions on media coverage of the opposition parties and their candidates.

Elections are called at the discretion of the prime minister, so long as they are within a prescribed five-year time frame. As has historically been the case, Mahathir's critics charge that he announced elections only when he was confident of sufficient support for *UMNO* and the *BN* to retain their control of parliament. (The prime minister is elected by parliament, thus the elections have typically been called when *BN* candidates appear to have a clear majority in their states, and will easily win election and assure continued majority control in parliament.)

The timing of the elections was also such that it took advantage of a quirk in the election laws that left several thousands of young voters prohibited from casting their votes. According to a *CNN* report, as many as 700,000 newly registered voters were

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excluded from the election because they had not been registered long enough when the elections were held on November 29, 1999. Their eligibility would have become effective in 2000. These disenfranchised voters were predominantly young Malaysians, who have been outspoken in their criticism of Mahathir and the *BN*.

Mahathir's and the *BN*'s success were further assured by manipulating the media to restrict access by the opposition parties and candidates. News coverage of opposition activities such as rallies and speeches was forbidden on all government operated electronic media outlets. The government declared that news coverage and advertising supporting opposition parties and candidates would lead to civil unrest, and was therefore in violation of several laws, including the *Sedition Act*. This threat was effective enough to also suppress any impartial reporting on the opposition by the privately owned television and radio stations as well.

While full-page advertisements encouraging voters to support *BN* candidates were run in most major daily newspapers, nearly all advertising from the opposition was denied. For example, in the weeks immediately preceding the elections, *BN* ads appeared on every-other-page of the *New Straits Times* (see below), while no opposition advertising was accepted. Other newspapers edited the few opposition advertisements that appeared.

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**NATIONAL**  
**RM2.4b for housing projects**  
 Schemes to build 67,606 units in four states soon

APIS to be nation's first smart teacher training centre

Many jobs in Labuan with setting up of factories

Residents seek compensation

Ex-assemblyman's bid postponed

Disruptive that could hit 100 million

**Knock Out Deal!**

NEC

**P.C. PROBLEM**

**THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT UNITY AND PEACE MEANS**

**But you can secure it for them.**

**NATIONAL**  
**Civil servants' support valued**  
 Government sensitive to their needs

100 orphans on study tour of Cyberjaya

Carepak Care programme launched

Court issues arrest warrant against Chua for no-show

CLP plans results to be released today

Witness held over theft of handbag

**DON'T GAMBLE OUR FUTURE**

UPHOLD OUR UNITY AND PEACE

**VOTE BARISAN NASIONAL**  
 FREE • UNITED • SUCCESSFUL

**NATIONAL**  
**Bridge for Kampong Sayong folk**  
 Link to Kuala Kangsar a catalyst for development of 21 villages

Ministry admits error in PMR paper, bonus marks may be given

DAP's application to withdraw

Appeal against Amos's arrest: Hearing tomorrow

**WHOSE LAW?**

He wants Muzud Law

And DAP says, "Over my dead body!"

He has a headache

**You know they will fight each other!**

**Clearly a broken front.**

**VOTE BARISAN NASIONAL**  
 42 YEARS OF PEACE & HARMONY

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The *BN* advertising above clearly plays on the themes of threats to national unity, fear of civil unrest, and concerns that a weakened *BN* could ultimately lead to a more conservative and factionalized government.

Malaysia's media campaign laws are such that political advertising and its sponsorship need not be identified. Pro-*UMNO* television advertisements extolling the progress and stability achieved by the party had the appearance of documentaries, television news stories, or public service announcements. One notable television spot airing in the weeks preceding the election featured in its soundtrack a recording of Frank Sinatra singing "My Way." The video in the spot featured a series of stills depicting obvious signs of Malaysia's growth and development, such as the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport, the Sepang Formula One race circuit, and the Petronas "Twin Towers," interspersed with photos of a smiling Mahathir attending various functions and meeting with Malaysians of various ethnicities.

The spot contained no indication of its sponsorship. But it appeared to be a response to criticisms of Mahathir's economic policies, which have been heavily criticized by many western economic theorists and writers. The spot suggested that Malaysia was prospering because of those policies and despite the predictions that they would fail. At the same time, nearly every newspaper story in the major dailies suggested that racial equality, literacy, economic development, prosperity, and national tranquility were the products of *UMNO*, and could be sacrificed if the opposition were to succeed in the election.

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### Conclusion

It seems apparent that the pattern for private ownership of the media in Malaysia is now well established, as is the ownership structure of most Malaysian corporations. The provisions of the *New Economic Policy* of 1970 assure that ownership is controlled by the government. The government assures that ownership includes majority *Bumiputra* representation.

In turn this government control has been used to guarantee that some connection to the Prime Minister, *UMNO* and/or the *Barisan Nasional* is present in each case examined. Whether a personal friend, associate, or political “crony,” the individuals who own and control the media are in those positions by virtue of their relationship to the government, and are therefore unlikely to be critics of its policies.

Certainly, media regulations and content controls further assure that media content is scrutinized by the government. While those controls are ostensibly aimed at minimizing destabilizing influences, the government’s interpretation, application and enforcement of those restrictions have resulted in a squelching of dissenting political speech. The status quo is assured as voices opposing the current regime are silenced through censorship, fines, imprisonment, litigation or professional censure.

There may be an ironic cultural artifact of the government’s zeal to promote economic development. While Mahathir is often a vocal critic of western influence, in our analysis of media content it also appears that traditional Malaysian culture is being somewhat obscured by the importation and emulation of western-produced media content, of which the Malaysia people are eager consumers.

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