

BOOK REVIEWS

Malaysian Politics and the 1978 Election, edited by Harold Crouch, Lee Kam Hing, and Michael Ong. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980. Pp. xiv, 330 pp., Appendix, Index.

Because politics is a never-ending process, reporting and analysis must also be a continuous academic endeavour. This book covers the Malaysian political scene in the period centred around the 1978 election campaign. It presents no comprehensive survey or interpretation of Malaysian political developments, but in its fairly detailed description and focus on the political process of one election, it provides an excellent case study and a supplement to those volumes which have a broader time span and attempt a more comprehensive interpretation of Malaysian politics. Although the volume is a product of ten scholars, it is not a pot-pourri of unrelated papers assembled for convenience in a single binding. The papers fit together remarkably well, and they are enclosed between introductory and concluding essays providing sufficient overview to enable the casual reader to place the more detailed papers in an appropriate perspective. A common index and supplementary appendices add to the utility and coherence of the work as a whole.

The volume begins with Harold Crouch's introduction, surveying the Malaysian political scene from the 1969 era through 1978. Subsequent chapters are devoted to the internal politics of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) from 1975 to 1977; three papers concentrate on the contest for Malay support between UMNO and PAS (Parti Islam Sa-Malaysia) in Kelantan, Kedah, and in the federal election campaign. The Sarawak scene is surveyed in a paper by Michael Leigh, while two chapters examine the campaign from the vantage point of ethnic electoral constituencies — the urban Malay voter and the rural Chinese in a former resettled "new village". A description and analysis of the electoral system and electoral administration provides valuable insight into the effects of the institutional-legal requirements for election on the character of political competition and the representational bias inherent in the electoral structure. The volume ends with a chapter by Harold Crouch presenting the electoral results along with a rather brief analysis interpreting party electoral performances.

This book reflects both the strengths and limitations of contemporary political studies in Malaysia. The overall quality of the papers are excellent, but the variety of the perspectives and the analysis is limited by the research methods employed and data which was available. A number of the contributors observed the campaign in the field, and their accounts, while impressionistic, present valuable insights into campaign appeals and public responses at the grassroots level. Because public meetings were prohibited during the campaign, much of the party campaigning involved individual canvassing and the staging of *ceramah* (dialogue sessions) between party spokesmen and small groups of voters meeting in private residences. The decentralized character of the campaign proved to be an added burden on the smaller and less organized parties. This campaign style also made press coverage and research activities more difficult. Understandably, the campaign activities and the election results receive major attention in many of the papers in the book. However, the papers offer only impressionistic accounts of voter responses to party campaign efforts and appeals. The book presents no electoral survey data, since, to my knowledge, none was collected. Furthermore, election statistics by polling stations are not available, and demographic census data is not organized by electoral constituency boundaries, so that analysis of voting behaviour can only be crudely inferred from aggregate voting statistics. In anticipation of a subsequent volume covering Malaysia's next general election, it should be possible to plan the collection of more comprehensive voting data, including opinion surveys, to enhance the reliability and validity of the analysis of public response to party appeals.

The main focus of the book is on the UMNO-PAS-DAP contest at the federal level and in certain key states such as Kelantan, Kedah, and especially around the Kuala Lumpur area. Some interesting and important states were largely ignored, most notably Penang and Sabah, each of which has a distinctive political environment and which deserve to be included in the collection. However, considering how difficult it is to co-ordinate the efforts of ten scholars, it is amazing how well the articles do fit together, and how few gaps exist in their coverage.

The volume deserves to be widely read among the general public in Southeast Asia, and it should also prove to be a valuable source book for Southeast Asian scholars and libraries throughout the world. I would hope that this volume will become the first in a series covering subsequent elections having as an objective the collection of comparable time-series data and analyses of the Malaysian electoral process.

Gordon P. Means
McMaster University
Canada