



CONCLUSION: INSIGHTS, IMPLICATIONS, AND EXTENSIONS

The evolution of opposition politics in Malaysia from the 1920s through the late 1990s yields important insights about politics in Malaysia and in illiberal democracies more generally. The contrast between Malaysia and Indonesia indicates the significance of specific state structures and political conditions to the type of coalitions and agendas that may take shape. A complex understanding of the relative input of CSAs into reform processes, particularly coalition building, has both empirical and theoretical value. It places segments of civil society, opposition parties, individual voters, and the state in context, describing a transformation that is both cultural and institutional. Regardless of how far the complete framework developed here may travel, an abstracted version of its major tenets clearly resonates with the experiences of other illiberal democracies, particularly those with a configuration of forces at least loosely resembling Malaysia's. It helps us to grasp what sort of links form to unite opposition actors and why, what the relative contributions are of activists from civil and political society in propelling a state toward a new political paradigm, and what the balance is between contained and transgressive forms of contention. Careful attention to context, history, and process thus enables useful theoretical understandings of the roles of CSAs and parties in political reform and of the relative comparability of such roles across states.

Progress toward political reform in Malaysia has proceeded on two tracks, one cultural and one institutional. The former involves a change in political norms and behavior, which makes reform more durable and legitimate. Malaysian political culture has consistently included noncommunal possibilities, premised primarily on class or on religion. These norms have gained prominence and legitimacy through issue-advocacy work in civil society since the 1970s and the selection of noncommunal

issues as the common denominator to unite opposition parties sporadically since the 1950s, and more concertedly in the 1990s. To have an impact, this normative shift must be institutionalized in government structures and policies. Recognizing the receptiveness of the public to a new message and the opportunity for change, and building on the experience and example of cross-racial civil societal campaigns, party-based reformers have been stimulated to find new ways of cooperating for shared ends. Serendipitous catalysts, most notably the regime's inability to avoid economic crisis and the availability of charismatic reformist leaders, have added a sense of urgency and opportunity. Looming always in the background, though, has been the state. The nature of the regime plays a major role in determining the nature of protest, especially the relative significance of contained and transgressive strategies. As the opposition mobilizes, the government retains the ability to quash reformers (at the risk of losing legitimacy), cede power to them (or at least take the risk of doing so by engaging at the polls), or undercut them by implementing at least some of the reforms demanded. Malaysia's political opposition has thus been pressed not only to find creative ways to avoid suppression and convince the public that the omnipresent government is fallible but also to strike an optimal balance among strategies of protest, both inside and outside the system.

Reformasi in either Malaysia or Indonesia is best regarded not as a one-time cataclysmic movement but as a stage in a historical process. How civil society and political society have developed and interacted over time largely determines what sort of institutions may emerge to support a reform effort. By the time of Malaysia's 1999 elections, the opposition—political parties and other forces—had taken its prior experience of coalition building one step further. The major opposition parties had united in a single coalition and reached a reasonably stable consensus on a set of immediate priorities, policy preferences, and leaders. Political opportunities had shifted by the time of the 2004 elections. Mahathir had exited the scene and been replaced by a leader who promised to work with CSAs and reform the party and government. Moreover, the economy was picking up, Islamism had lost some popular appeal (at least as presented by PAS), and the Anwar issue had faded. It is hardly surprising, then, that opposition unity was harder to achieve and that the incumbent government was able to reconsolidate control. Indonesia has followed a different trajectory. There, a history of regime repression and lack of trust across sections of the opposition meant that what alliances formed and what priorities were set were fragmented and continually contested. As of 1999, Indonesia had no counterpart to Malaysia's BA, and, indeed, coalitional possibilities remained shaky in 2004. However, if only because the

ancien régime had lost its leader and been firmly discredited, new political institutions and norms had kept percolating, albeit with uneven participation, and with, at best, uncertain consensus from the forces most critical to the collapse of the New Order.

The 2004 Elections

Both Malaysia and Indonesia held elections in 2004. The results in both places indicate continuing popular engagement with some of the same issues as in 1999, even if different parties were seen as best able to tackle those concerns. Malaysian reformists seem to have retreated to contained contention, including the pursuit of top-down reforms. While discontent with the regime remains, it is insufficiently galvanizing (and current alternatives are insufficiently convincing) to spur strong efforts at systemic change. Indonesia, by contrast, could be drifting more toward a Malaysian-style illiberal democracy: institutions for participation are in place, but politics remains elitist, cliquish, and driven more by pragmatism or opportunism than by coherent aims or lofty ideals.

Malaysia

Malaysia's eleventh general elections, held March 21, 2004, seemed superficially to signal the demise of reformism.¹ Posting its best result since 1955, the BN won around 90 percent of parliamentary seats, regained Terengganu's state government, and nearly recaptured Kelantan. While the DAP fared slightly better than before, winning twelve seats (compared with ten in 1999), PAS lost nineteen of its twenty-six seats, and Keadilan (including PRM) lost all but one of its five (albeit still garnering 9 percent of the vote). One independent from Sabah also won a seat. All told, though, the BN won only 56 percent of the vote in the Malay heartland and 64 percent nationwide, while support for PAS slipped by less than 1 percent (to 15 percent overall). Three key factors must temper judgment of the polls and their import.

First, election monitors declared the polls "the most disorganized" in Malaysian history. Problems ranged from allegations of phantom voters to sudden transfer of voters to incorrect ballot papers to last-minute extensions of polling center hours. The Elections Commission blamed some hassles on the record-breaking brevity of the campaign—eight days—which left little time to prepare. The elections were unusually suspenseful, too, because of the number of seats that were decided after recounts and on whisker-thin margins. Both PAS and Keadilan rejected the results and called for new polls, and even the BN complained of malfeasance.

The mainstream media, too, sustained their bias in news coverage and advertisements; the “three Ms” mattered as much as ever. The BN benefited enormously from majoritarian electoral rules and disproportionality in electoral districts—though the DAP gained, too, in majority-Chinese areas.

Second, part of the reason why the BN—especially UMNO—fared so well was its own adoption of core Reformasi demands. In turn, a major cause of PAS’s decline in 2004 appears to have been its greater emphasis on Islamic statehood than on such issues as economic growth, jobs, crime, social problems, and education (which polls had shown to be core concerns for most voters, regardless of ethnicity), not least because Abdullah Badawi had already seized more middle ground in decrying corruption and promoting moderate, progressive Islam (packaged afresh as *Islam Hadhari*) himself (Ibrahim 2004: 4–8). Also, PAS’s fielding of women in ten seats (unsuccessfully) could only go so far to counter UMNO’s diligent efforts to woo Malay women. In addition, many CSAs and ex-UMNO members seemed willing to give Abdullah Badawi and his cabinet lineup—touted as both younger and cleaner than before (despite prior charges against several ministers)—a chance, especially in the absence of the Anwar factor or other galvanizing issues. The incumbent government could count on a “feel good” factor, with the results thus perhaps to be read more as a green light to Abdullah Badawi to pursue reforms than as a rejection of the opposition.

Third, that the main opposition parties failed to articulate a unified, relevant platform—though the BA issued a joint manifesto pledging stronger civil liberties, reinstatement of local council elections, reservation of 30 percent of top government posts for women, cuts in road tolls and car prices, and more (Barisan Alternatif 2004)—says less about voter preferences than about the parties themselves. Keadilan, for instance, was basically trapped between PAS and the DAP, and it was plagued by a weak organizational network and an excess of inexperienced, young idealists. PAS, meanwhile, seemed to be suffering from overconfidence, internal division, and disorganization, especially since the death of Fadzil Noor (Ibrahim 2004). One columnist offered the following harsh critique: “In a space of five years, Pas and Keadilan lost it all. . . . They alienated the non-Muslims; they alienated business; they alienated foreign investors; and without even realizing it, they had alienated their own constituency, the Muslims” (Kalimullah 2004). The media’s playing up of acrimonious negotiations between PAS and the other parties did not help—but neither did Nik Aziz’s much publicized insistence that PAS supporters would go to heaven, whereas “those who support[ed] un-Islamic parties [would] logically go to hell,” for they “like gambling and condone adul-

tery and rape” (Ng 2004; “Pak Lah Steps” 2004). Simply failing to develop a coalition hurt the opposition overall, too: at least a few seats were lost in three-cornered fights.

Thus the 2004 elections represent a setback to opposition-based reformists, but not necessarily the end either of reform or of gradual coalition building. James Wong (2004b) sums the situation up in referring to Keadilan: “Whatever its actual strength on the ground, it has been playing a critical but not widely and fairly acknowledged role of reducing racist sentiment and propaganda in Malaysian politics in the last five years because of its multiracial approach to democratic mobilisation.” Indeed, mass mobilization as well as contained initiatives for top-down change are key; the 2004 elections demonstrated clearly that the electoral system so strongly favors the incumbent that a straightforward electoral approach, leaving reform just to opposition parties, cannot hope to succeed.

Indonesia

The 2004 Indonesian parliamentary and presidential elections likewise represented a change from 1999. Parliamentary elections were held on March 8. The initial round of the first-ever direct presidential elections was held on July 5; the runoff (since no candidate won a majority of the popular vote plus at least 20 percent in at least half the provinces) was on September 20. Partly to preclude another Soeharto, partly to ensure adequate representation for the outer islands, and partly because the leading parties set the rules to their own advantage, the system favors large, established parties—for instance, by tying eligibility for the presidential contest to parties’ performance in the parliamentary polls.² As one observer describes it, the current system “essentially formalises the entrenched interests of existing major parties, the shifting balance between nationalist-secularist and Islamist strains and the money politics that go with the decentralization of corruption.”³ The ranks of parties and candidates signal persistence of old patterns as well as elements of change.

Perhaps the clearest sign of continuity as opposed to significant reform in Indonesia is the continued popularity of Golkar, and especially of its presidential candidate, General Wiranto (who supplanted the corruption-tainted Akbar Tanjung). Golkar won the largest share of parliamentary votes (21.6 percent), and Wiranto came in a close third in the presidential race. Golkar has retained support largely on account of its record in local administration, especially in rural areas, but also partly out of popular disappointment with democracy and nostalgia for the strong leadership of the past (DEMOS 2004: 3). PDI-P, on the other hand, lost sub-

stantial support between 1999 and 2004; its vote total declined from around 33.3 percent to 18.5 percent of the electorate. (The remainder of the vote was split among twenty-two smaller parties.) Megawati paid for her support of business and military interests and her failure to restore socioeconomic stability or eradicate corruption (S. Weiss 2003; Lane 2004; Mackie 2004). Apart from the decline of PDI-P, the results were largely similar to those of 1999.

However, two new parties touting better governance and clean leadership did noticeably well, garnering around 7 percent of the parliamentary vote each: Partai Demokrat (PD) and the more Islamist PKS (Lane 2004). PD leader Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono then went on to win the presidency. This development seems to signal a shift away from New Order politics. All the same, it was “SBY” (as he is popularly known), a former general and coordinating minister for political and security affairs, who oversaw the military crackdown in Aceh. His party’s policies are “similar to the platform of the military itself” (Guerin 2004). Indeed, even if the support of PD and PKS, especially in Jakarta—where political change tends to occur first—represents the rejection of old political elites, neither party has really distinguished itself as progressive or otherwise atypical (Lane 2004).

What is perhaps most striking about the conduct of the 2004 campaigns in Indonesia, especially given the rhetoric of Reformasi, is the relative paucity of issues and idealism in party platforms (Sherlock 2004: 15–16) and especially in selection of running mates. As the analyst Dewi Fortuna Anwar scoffs, Indonesian politics is marked by “a great deal of promiscuity. . . . Anyone can get married to anybody” (quoted in Guerin 2004). For instance, Megawati beat out Wiranto to secure NU leader Hasyim Muzadi as her running mate, not to signal an attachment to Islamist policies but just to boost her chances at the polls (Mackie 2004). Wiranto settled for Solahuddin Wahid, Abdurrahman’s brother, in a bid for the same NU votes—even though, as deputy chair of the National Human Rights Commission, Solahuddin has investigated Wiranto for alleged abuses (Muninggar 2004). Even the ascendance of PD was tempered by the reality of its need to forge an alliance for the executive ticket. Bambang nominated former Golkar member and cabinet member (under Megawati) Yusuf Kalla as his running mate, hoping to attract Islamists, Golkar members, and voters from Sulawesi. Such strategies for leverage reinforce the leader-focused and factional nature of party politics and foster “ramshackle and ill-functioning” coalitions (Sherlock 2004: 11–12). More broadly, the major parties “have made very little progress in developing coherent policy platforms and . . . their political identity derives almost entirely from symbolic gestures and rhetoric de-

signed to appeal to the divisions that have historically marked Indonesian society [even though] . . . they have very little to show those communities in terms of targeted policies” (Sherlock 2004: 4). There were attempts at forging less opportunistic coalitions, but these failed. A National Coalition of left/democratic parties formed in mid-2003, but then two linchpin parties opted to go it alone. Also, the PRD attempted to develop the Party of the United Popular Opposition (POPOR) with local worker, peasant, and pro-democracy organizations, but it was slow to take off, had a weak base, and was undercut by student groups’ advocating an electoral boycott (Lane 2004).

Overall, as in Malaysia, the lack of a clear enemy and the decline of critical awareness, along with a diminution in the sense of crisis, changed electoral dynamics. Despite democratic institutions, remnants of the New Order elite may be even more dominant now than before, having gained control of local and national elected positions as well as of political parties. Democracy in Indonesia is more delegative than representative; although rights and freedoms are in place, with such elite-dominated parties in control, the mass of people lack the institutional and other means to exercise them (DEMOS 2004: 10–11, 21–22). Much as suggested by this comparison with Malaysia, the researchers at DEMOS recommend “drastic changes to power relations by way of social movements and mass organising before rights and institutions may be deemed to carry any meaning”; repoliticization of civil society is a necessary precursor to altering power relations to enable real democratization, “based upon improved links between civic and political action” (DEMOS 2004: 3).

Understanding Opposition

Opposition coalition building is thus an evolutionary process, requiring not just appropriate political opportunities, so that the rewards of mobilization seem likely to outweigh the costs, but also normative agreement and a legacy of trust linking constituencies. However important contingent factors, such as regime failure, may be to catalyzing protest by altering perceptions of opportunity and threat, the array of possible reform-supportive initiatives depends upon the stock and quality of social and coalitional capital available in the polity at a particular point in time, as well as on the relative incentives attached to different strategies of engagement.

Malaysia is an illiberal democracy; New Order Indonesia was a hegemonic electoral authoritarian regime. The contrast between the two cases suggests that the greater the regime’s tendency toward democracy, the easier it is for opposition actors to develop the ideological and strategic

resources over time to coordinate. As a result, the reform that occurs in a more autocratic regime might be expected to be haphazardly organized and more reactive and destructive than proactive and constructive. Indonesia's facade of democracy under the New Order was too thin to give NGOs, students, party activists, and others the space to develop coalitional capital, including mutual trust and an understanding of their shared aspirations, even if social capital was at work in the formation of various associations. Moreover, party-based opposition in Indonesia had been hobbled even more by government regulations than had less institutionalized arenas. While these controls had been relaxed by the time of Indonesia's 1999 elections, the various sectors of the opposition had not yet had enough time to sort out their respective new niches or to forge a common agenda and strategy. As Boudreau describes the situation (1999: 13), "Given the divisions in the Indonesian opposition movement, the decisive elements in the transition did not involve mobilization of a single but socially diverse opposition movement, but a gathering of more dispersed discontent, unrest and violence." Even now, most democracy activists remain "marginalised by the mainstream elitist politics of democratisation," and so they focus on civil societal activism rather than on the political or legal systems, thus enhancing the public sphere without necessarily institutionalizing critical rights and procedures (DEMOS 2004: 3, 13-14). Hence the two-track process that allowed CSAs to prime voters for reformism, and then parties to work toward institutionalizing those preferences in Malaysia, proved elusive in Indonesia.

To summarize, the different comparative advantages of formal and informal opposition actors complement each other in circumventing the constraints of an illiberal democratic regime. A broad-based coalition premised on some degree of ideological and programmatic consensus stands a greater chance not only of making use of all available political space but also of pressuring the regime forcefully enough to unseat it or induce top-down reforms and of commanding the mass support to make a reformed order stable. It is not just social capital that sparks concerted mobilization for reform; coalitional capital is also necessary to coordinate protest among groups. Charismatic leaders or obvious moments of regime failure help aggravate the public's awareness of their grievances, but the situation must be bad enough for average citizens to be willing to take a risk. Furthermore, voters will be easier to motivate if they have been exposed to independent media that allow party and nonparty activists to attribute increased opportunity and reduced threat to current circumstances, explain themselves, counter the government's messages, and propagandize. An essential part of these messages is a validation of protest. That is, issues-based activism in civil society promotes a new

conception of popular participation in politics and of CSAs' role in the polity. Such activism feeds into opposition parties' rubric that challenging the government in power is within their rights and not antinational or ungrateful. Finally, international demonstration effects may provide fresh ideas and motivation to further coalition building and reform. Political change may occur even if not all these factors are present—witness Indonesia's democratic transition. However, their availability facilitates popular mobilization as well as the institutionalization of an alternative to the regime that reflects and furthers new political norms.

This study questions several common empirical generalizations. First, while it is true that communalism remains important in Malaysian politics, its centrality needs to be reconceptualized. Ethnicity is no longer so defining a political trait as previously. Moreover, its importance was exaggerated in the past by the suppression of subaltern histories and non-communal political alternatives, and by the blurring of race and class. Still, the waning of one set of cleavages may push others to the forefront. In contemporary Malaysia, religious categories may be usurping the prominence of communal ones dividing voters. Counterbalancing this development is a shared concern for particular issues that unite voters across ascriptive cleavages. The salience of those particular issues may eventually diminish, but inclusive, issues-based activism will no doubt persist and may again provide a kernel for a shared effort at systemic change.

Second, and more broadly, the analytical or practical separation of the spheres of civil society and political society is dubious. As Malaysian experience suggests, even if individuals or organizations from one sphere are ascendant at a given point in time, contributions from both are necessary and significant in an at least superficially democratic polity. Furthermore, civil society and political society share not only overlapping constituencies but also activists. An ideological reluctance to “dirty” themselves in party politics may hobble social activists, particularly if, as in Indonesia, even those operating in different sectors of civil society lack mutual trust or a basis for cooperation. At the same time, although opposition parties may push through reforms, their interest is more in the mechanics of securing and deploying power than in socialization at the grassroots. Parties' reach, efficacy, innovativeness, and expertise may be significantly improved if they are willing to acknowledge and work with CSAs, and such collaboration maximizes available political space.

Third, no single level of analysis can explain the progress of coalition building and reform. For instance, a focus on individuals obscures questions of collaboration across organizations. Even if ample social capital, ideological predilections (perhaps developed through civic education by

CSAs), and rational calculations favoring engagement encourage individuals to join organizations, those organizations may work at cross-purposes or find themselves unable to muster broad enough support to effect or maintain control over desired changes. Hence, while a focus on individual mind-sets and behavior is vital to any discussion of political reform, the average citizen is a very small cog in a large, complex apparatus. Traversing the individual, cultural, and institutional levels helps show how all the pieces of that mechanism work in concert to produce coalitions and ultimately, perhaps, political reform.

That said, the centrality of the individual (but pliability of preferences) suggests a twist on rational choice theories of social dilemmas and collective action. The pursuit of reform requires not just that people act to optimize their preferences, often through innovative strategies, but also that they first change their priorities and perhaps compromise in order to maximize collective utility. In the case of Malaysia, then, reform begins with getting individuals to adopt less communal or patronage-based norms, and then it shifts to finding ways to maximize these new, non-communal interests. CSAs enhance voters' trust in reformers and expectations of reciprocity, particularly through creative framing strategies (for instance, through speaking in terms of *keadilan* rather than Islam). Changes in popular attitudes and behavior, as well as prevailing conditions, in turn motivate political parties to explore new coalitional possibilities to meet voters' altered demands, capitalize on opportunities for change, and institutionalize reforms.

This conceptualization of opposition politics helps rectify the paucity of theoretically inclined research on Malaysia (and most of Southeast Asia), particularly with regard to very recent reformist initiatives. The discussion here suggests that the nature of protest and the process of reform have qualitatively changed since the evolution of the current generation of pro-democracy and (at least in Malaysia) *dakwah* organizations. These shifts have implications for the relative success or vulnerability of reform movements, but the larger historical and institutional context remains salient as well.

Civil Society and Political Transformation

This approach suggests that CSAs play a more complex role in political transformation than is sometimes presumed. Within the framework of an illiberal democracy, CSAs magnify their impact more through interaction with other sectors of the opposition, including the use of whatever established institutional channels are available, than through independent or baldly antisystemic action. For instance, as partners to political parties,

CSAs play vital roles in facilitating coalition building, mediating among parties and perspectives, and mobilizing the public to support those parties. Indeed, CSAs not only pressure the state for liberalization or other reforms but also target the public and the rest of the opposition to prioritize reformist norms and policies. As a tactical measure, by taking advantage of democratic channels, however constrained, CSAs may intimidate the public and government less, making both popular endorsement and regime forbearance (or even top-down reforms) more likely. In other words, CSAs may vacillate strategically between contained and transgressive contention to take full advantage of resources and opportunities. Thus the broader conceptualization presented here—of reformism over time, and across sectors of the polity—puts CSAs' efforts at various stages in context.

In return for their contribution to reform processes, CSAs may enjoy significant clout. While during "normal politics" in an illiberal democracy the average NGO can hope for little more than marginal involvement in policymaking, at watershed moments CSAs may help determine the shape and direction of the regime as a whole. Moreover, particularly if they establish and maintain ties with successful party-based challengers, CSAs may enjoy regularized input into policymaking processes under a new government. This influence may come as a reward for CSAs' assistance in elections—and opposition parties may feel deeply beholden to CSAs for their vote-getting power—or in recognition of their expertise. For instance, Malaysian opposition parties seem to be more willing now than previously to accommodate CSAs in crafting budgets and policy statements or in *ceramah* and other forums, acknowledging their equal legitimacy as political actors. Such a niche, though, represents an intensification of CSAs' interdependence with the (would-be) state.

This dependency may be problematic if a continued role for CSAs in policy processes relies upon perpetuation of the dominance of one coalition or party. The enhanced regard that Malaysian opposition parties today show for NGOs is no doubt linked with the fact that activists seem not to disdain or avoid party politics as much as before. With so many CSAs now actually in or backing opposition parties, they clearly have a vested interest in those parties' success. Moreover, just by dint of sharing norms and policy goals, CSAs and the rest of the (former) opposition will have a mutual stake in a new order. Under such conditions, at least some portions of civil society may find it difficult to play effective monitoring roles. CSAs may be hard pressed to critique a reformist coalition for which they helped secure power as it implements (or fails to implement) strategies and objectives that those CSAs helped to formulate.

The pattern of development of opposition politics that this perspective

reveals suggests that Malaysian political norms will continue to shift toward support of a less explicitly communal order. With issue-oriented CSAs involved, and not just parties, this evolution will probably proceed less fitfully, at least on the cultural level, than if it is chiefly synchronized to electoral cycles. At the same time, the study suggests that Malaysian CSAs will see an incentive to continue developing partnerships with political parties. Government repression or strategic concessions could slow this process, but the prevalence of hard-to-control new media, together with mounting evidence of liberalization in other states, will limit the deterrent impact of crackdowns and the sufficiency of marginal concessions more than in previous instances. In addition, coalitional capital, along with the increasing skill and sophistication of reformist leaders in both civil society and political society, facilitates further activism. Finally, more issues-oriented, noncommunal political discourse will probably progress—whether touted by the BN, the opposition, or both—as voters' norms and priorities continue their gradual shift away from the racialized, patronage-dependent status quo. As Loh (2003) concludes, these changes do not point to the end of the BN, but probably to an end to its assured dominance.

Larger Significance

The question remains of whether the processes described here are uniquely Malaysian, are (Southeast) Asian, or are more broadly relevant. In fact, while the precise trajectory of events in Malaysia may not be repeated anywhere else, an extrapolation of key processes carries explanatory and even predictive value elsewhere. Drawing out some of the implications of this framework for Malaysia and other cases contributes to our understanding of liberalization or democratization—for example, by raising the question of whether an illiberal democracy can ever be truly stable (Case 2001), or how much political openness is needed to make a difference in strategies of popular engagement, or whether reforms are likely to hit a ceiling beyond which liberalization is unlikely to be pressed or to succeed, or whether the processes that get reforms under way are replicated over time or transform significantly as reform proceeds.

The empirical validity of problem-driven theory inhibits the aim of universality promoted by theory-driven research. The problem in this instance is how a reformist coalition can solidify and succeed in Malaysia. Observation of the process of coalition building in Malaysian history yields the framework described here. That empirically derived framework suggests intriguing theoretical insights but cannot be expected to fit other contexts so neatly. The theoretical insights may apply—that CSAs should

be explored as a portion of the opposition, or that both norms and institutions need to shift for reforms to stick—but context-specific factors will determine how closely the model approximates reality. These findings are worthwhile, though, inasmuch as they encourage students of reform to conceptualize differently the actors and processes involved.

As comparison with Indonesia suggests, this framework is highly qualified. Its basic tenets regarding the role of CSAs in facilitating the adoption of a consistent reform agenda by CSAs and parties may travel well. However, the cases in which the process described can actually be played out, so that CSAs have a chance to fulfill this potential role, are limited. The model applies specifically to illiberal democracies, and possibly only to those marked by significant social pluralism, or in which all major groups are represented in civil society. Moreover, contingent factors—such as political opportunities that catalyze mobilization, the amount of time allowed for coalition building, the legacy of past cooperation, and the response of the state to the challenge posed by reformers—may affect the process. Competing explanations, such as the notion that modernization may do at least as much as CSAs' consciousness raising to erode social cleavages, are also plausible in some cases. These limitations do not undermine the theoretical validity of the framework, but they do highlight how much of an idealization it may be.

Narrowly bounded as it is, this study does not touch on whether new coalitions actually implement promised changes if elected into office, nor does it touch on the predictors or conditions for follow-through. At stake are both the will to change the polity and reformers' ability to implement changes amid constraints. It is important to note that, should a reformist government come to power, it would still likely face some of the same challenges that precipitated the failure of its predecessor. Even if, for instance, problematic social cleavages were less of an issue under a reformed regime than previously, economic or other limitations cannot be socialized away. Indonesia is a good example. Abdurrahman Wahid may have had the best of intentions, but his regime could do only so much for social welfare, given IMF mandates and the dismal state of the economy.

Therefore, future research might explore the circumstances under which reformers follow through with changes as promised, if they win, or successfully pressure the incumbent government to reform, if they lose; examine how reformers modify their rhetoric, tactics, and coalitions over time; or evaluate whether voters' preferences and parties' or CSAs' strategies necessarily shift in tandem. Also meriting further study is how CSAs gauge the extent to which cooperation with political parties of the opposition or government is safe, or whether certain attributes help groups withstand co-optation by opposition or government parties. As Dryzek

(1996) suggests, excessive collaboration may be ultimately disempowering for civil society. Political parties' strategic decisions as to whether to share the stage with nonparty actors, work in coalition with other parties, or try to go it alone likewise bear examination. Far from the final word, then, this study represents a stepping-off point for enriching and expanding our knowledge of political protest and reform.

Review and Implications

The framework presented here of how political reform proceeds in an illiberal democracy is revealing for Malaysia and relevant to other, comparable polities, even if the specific cleavages, constraints, and sequence of events vary with time and place. Against a range of state-imposed regulations, activists and organizations from civil society and political society have contributed to fostering reformist norms, facilitating political engagement, and enabling political liberalization through contained and transgressive means, altering their strategies and collective action frames as necessary to take advantage of changing political opportunities and threats. Moreover, as implied by the contrast between Malaysia and Indonesia, the more democratic the regime, the easier coalition building becomes, since a broader range of proponents of reform are able to discuss more freely their preferences, expectations, and ideas and develop a sense over time of why, how, and on what grounds to collaborate.

In Malaysia, popular awareness of the fallibility of the BN regime and growing acceptance of pro-democratic norms, plus the sturdiness of non-communal norms in the opposition over decades, suggest that reform will continue, whether pressed from above or from below. After decades of gradual change, complemented by demographic and environmental shifts, political culture has come to assume a new timbre. At the same time, citizens have more options for how to participate in the polity, and increasing numbers have come to accept the legitimacy and value of political engagement. These trends will almost certainly continue in Malaysia and be replayed—albeit with variations—in other states. In Malaysia as elsewhere, then, forces from civil society and political society—both the government and the opposition—will likely continue to innovate strategically and ideologically as state and society gradually change.