

THE INTERNET AND POLITICAL DELIBERATION
IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of the Internet in shaping political deliberation in Malaysia. Focusing on online news media, parliamentarians' blogs and the websites of selected political parties, it explores the extent to which the Internet has liberalised access to information and opened up new spaces for discussion in a country where most conventional media is controlled by the government and public discourse is restricted. The dissertation contends that while the Internet has broadened participation in public debate, its role in facilitating and enhancing deliberative democracy in Malaysia is still limited as many political actors continue to control and manipulate information for political purposes.

Although patterns of news consumption in Malaysia are changing and the Internet has become an important medium for activists and politicians alike, there are significant differences in how political and civil society actors in Malaysia use online media. This thesis shows that neither individual politicians nor political parties foster genuine political deliberation through their online presence. Instead, they use their websites primarily for information dissemination and political marketing. In contrast, the prominent online newspaper *MalaysiaKini* has made a significant contribution to broadening the public sphere in Malaysia by providing new opportunities for public debate.

Data presented in this thesis was collected through a range of methods including content analysis, structured and unstructured interviews with key informants, and web link analysis. The findings derived from the analysis contribute not only to the discourse on contemporary Malaysian politics, but also to theoretical discussions about deliberative democracy and the public sphere in a semi- democratic country.