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SEEING THROUGH THE HAZE:
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING
706 Duke Street, Suite 100
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

PARTICIPANTS:

Moderator:

JOSEPH C. LIOW
Senior Fellow and Lee Kuan Yew Chair in
Southeast Asian Studies
The Brookings Institution

Featured Speaker:

MEREDITH WEISS, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and Director of
International Programs
Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy
State University of New York at Albany

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. LIOW: Okay, why don't we get this morning's proceedings underway? Good morning, everyone. Thank you so much for coming by, especially on this lovely (Laughter) D.C. morning. Well, I'm coming from Singapore, so I would take this over what's going on there, anytime (Laughter).

So, talking about the haze; of course, today, we are looking at haziness from another perspective in Singapore and Malaysia, and looking really, at the not just recent developments, as the title suggests, but also, we can have a conversation about the trajectory and the future of Malaysia and Singapore, given these recent developments.

I think as much as the Indonesians would like to claim credit for having some influence on this haziness, we're looking at something else. They can of course, lobby to claim credit.

MS. WEISS: Right, right.

MR. LIOW: (Laughter) But nevertheless, we will, this morning, rather than have a formal

presentation, we will just have a conversation about this.

MS. WEISS: Mm-hmm.

MR. LIOW: And to kick-start the conversation, I have invited my very dear friend, Meredith, whom I think many, if not all of you already know, and very well, in some cases. She is from Albany, the State University of New York, as we know, and she has very kindly made the trip down to share with us some of her thoughts.

She has been working, as we know, on Malaysia and Singapore for some time now. In my personal, humble opinion, I think one of the top, if not the top scholar working on these two countries today.

MS. WEISS: Small field (Laughter).

MR. LIOW: It is, indeed, a small field. (Laughter) I think more importantly, more importantly, I think she's doing some really interesting work in these two countries. By interesting, I mean really going beyond the boring,

political Islam and that sort of stuff. So, her perspectives, I think, would be certainly illuminating.

Malaysia and Singapore -- what more can I say? I think if we've been following it, it's been very fascinating, perhaps even alarming developments. In Malaysia, you have a situation where the prime minister appears to be losing credibility as the days go by, but on the other hand, circling the wagons quite effectively, at least in the short-term within the party.

And as the days go by, the kind of revelations that we are hearing, if I may say so, it's laughable, if not for the fact that it's sad for the people of the country. You know? And what they are facing, not just in terms of now, but the leadership of the future.

In Singapore, the haziness which might have helped us cut through is a big different. There was an election, as we know, some weeks -- about two months back. She was back for election. I wasn't.

And from the perspective of a neutral, I must say that the result was somewhat anti-climactic, if not disappointing. But nevertheless, I think it does portend certain things down the road which we need to bear in mind.

So, I think with these sort of preliminary thoughts, I'll throw the floor over to Meredith, who will kick-start with 15, 20 minutes of observations.

MS. WEISS: Okay. Okay. Thanks. Thanks for coming on this not hazy, but rainy day, and I'll start with -- just purely for your amusement -- this has nothing to do with what I'll talk about; just an anecdote. My undergraduate Southeast Asian politic students are doing an ASEAN simulation now, and of course, they're trying to address, you know, what would be an ASEAN solution to the haze.

And so far, the one proposal that I think is actually going to pass their simulation is that Indonesia -- well, there are two versions of it. One is that under Indonesian lead, all of that evacuation of people from the hardest hit haze areas would be put

on islands in the Spratlys. (Laughter) Just until December 11th -- I don't know why they came up with that. I think it was one month from yesterday.

But then, they have a claim. Right (Laughter)? And then the other solution, following Australian procedure, is that they would all be shipped to Papua, New Guinea (Laughter), until finally, somebody on the Vietnam team pulled up Google Maps. So anyway, I thought I'd just share.

Those sorts of solutions aside, I actually won't talk so much about the haze directly, although, that's kind of the looming backdrop. But I'll try to keep this -- this isn't going to be very academic. I'll try to keep it to no more than 20 minutes, but I'm alluding to research that I've been doing, but trying to do this in a way that it's more about just generating a conversation on Malaysia and Singapore.

So, politics in both of these states has been surprising in recent months, but the main shock for many has been that so little has actually changed, at least institutionally. Singapore, as Joe

mentioned, had an election in September. To no one's surprise, the PAP won, but it won much more securely than even hearty supporters had thought, and after what was for Singapore a really lively and vociferous opposition campaign -- probably more so than since the 1960s.

Malaysia, for its part, has stasis of a perhaps more depressing form. So, these divisively different priorities that capsized the initial version of the opposition coalition, Pakatan Rakyat, they've sort of reconsolidated unprecedentedly substantial corruption charges and allegations of mismanagement by the state investment fund, 1MDB, and really unusually incendiary racial and religious rhetoric stemming to the level of debates over shopping trollies and things like that, and prosecution of a host of opposition activists.

But, as in Singapore, there is institutional stasis, and in particular, Prime Minister Najib remains firmly in office. No one seems to expect him to be out before the next election, unless he somehow

chooses to go, at this point. So, my goal is to try to tease out a comparison, but the distinctions in practice between these two states are significant. They both have similar Westminster-esque parliamentary institutions, although in a federal format, Malaysia.

They are both considered to be electoral authoritarian in the jargon of political science, but one, Singapore, is seen as hegemonic. Malaysia is more competitive. They differ very much on attributes like relative politicization of race and religion, although, actually, I think that's underplayed in reality. In analyses of Singapore politics, we could talk about that. And then, also, on the composition of civil society and the media.

So, what I'll focus on is why things seemingly have not changed, but I'll twist that a bit to suggest that actually, the status quo is not what it once was. So, the character of politics has actually changed in both of these states, in what I think, are probably meaningful and enduring ways.

So, first, I'll focus on the continuing

salience of what you might call transactional politics. It's a term that's used more in places like Indonesia than elsewhere, but it's a useful one; so really, politics around money, materialism, and, what we might see as essentially classic political machines in both states.

Then, I'll turn to what I see as overblown or just unrealistic expectations of what civil society, and especially online media can do, and I think that's part of why there have been these misplaced expectations. And then, I'll conclude by hopefully not subverting what I just said, to say that what looks like strong continuity actually does mask important changes.

All right? So first, the persistent character of politics is that we see a decisive turn, particularly in electoral decisions toward transactional, or really, machine politics. So, in neither state is ideology front and center, and it hasn't been for a while. That's notwithstanding divisive discourse around civil liberties in

Singapore, around Islam and Malaysia, and so forth.

Survey data from both states' recent few elections, not even just the last one, suggest that it's overwhelmingly economic issues that drive votes, and especially the rising cost of voting. In both states, as in many states, the key question is what the party has done for the voter.

What's distinctive here is that it's not that rational calculation. That's pretty normal. Okay? But that the incumbent parties firmly present the achievements of the state as those of the party. And that's this issue of one-party dominance. So, the fusion of party and state makes that sort of rational calculation then, especially damning when there's a downturn, but especially helpful when you can point to anything in a budget that helps. But it's a characteristic of these hybrid states.

The decline of ideology, for some premise for support these parties beyond pure transactional politics is problematic in the long-term; not just for the difficulties it poses for opposition, but also,

for the expectations that it raises for the dominant parties. So for instance, just another very brief anecdote: I met with a group of UMNO youth leaders from the UMNO section, and they have this leadership institute for UMNO youths that Harry John Lidden set up.

This is back in, I think, January, so in the midst of like the Hudud crisis, for those who follow that sort of thing, I asked them how they see it on those ideology, because it used to be an ideological party, in some ways. And they all sort of chuckled nervously, and several people said, survival. And that's UMNO. That's the dominant party. But I really think that is how these parties are styling their position right now, and I think you saw that same demeanor, in some ways, in PAP rhetoric, even during their last election.

Okay. So, in Singapore, the PAP adopts, still, this garrison state discourse of siege and survival to some extent, but even to the extent that those fears motivate votes, which is debatable,

neither survival nor wider and deeper prosperity is an ideological frame, per se, especially since the goal of that is to obscure the political decisions behind those allocated determinations.

This transactional discourse in Singapore takes on odd permutations, particularly if you look at the recent election rhetoric, the PAP had a theme across rally speeches that decries as populist, opposition appeals, and lauds its own embrace of unpopular, to use their term, policy decisions. Okay? Despite the hype, populist is not an inherently bad word. Okay? It can mean accountable (Laughter), responsiveness to voters' preferences. But in Singapore, it's you know, hellishness.

All right. And a party that actually acknowledges that it's in a democracy in which it has to compete cannot actually embrace the unpopular policies, or if it does so, it needs to justify that choice. It needs to make those unpopular policies, popular, because it needs to complete. And so, the PAP has actually become, by its own criteria, a more

populist party.

Pundits largely agree that a big part of the party is not just holding, but reclaiming ground; has to do with its having responded very generously to complaints about healthcare costs, access to housing, the embrace of skilled foreign talent, and so forth. But doing so, backs the party into a corner. Okay? It keeps assessment on firm and materialist ground, and it needs to keep delivering.

This is the danger of currying favor through material utility without some ideological back stop, and I find that that's really what's missing. To say we're the party of the unpopular policies, that's not really sustainable either. Okay?

In Malaysia, the coalition's platforms and elections are very similar. You know, the cost of public utilities, fuel, access to Wi-Fi. I mean, nowhere else do you see Wi-Fi as a big election promise (Laughter). Education, housing subsidies. And both coalitions claim to be the best defender of Islam. But there, the opposition has presented -- not

so much the BN, but the opposition has presented a more ideological line, so it's not, let us be a co-driver to ensure that the ruling coalition doesn't make mistakes or fall asleep at the wheel, as in Singapore.

And the BN also has an ideological side in discussing ethno-nationalism. And yet, even here, I would argue, we can still look to coalition dynamics; what holds these groups together, especially on the government side, to see a triumph of transactional politics over ideology. So, what holds the national front, the BN, together, by most accounts, especially amidst this racialist grandstanding that should, by rights, rip it asunder, is the promise of patronage and the delivery of patronage. Okay? And that really, again, gets at these very materialist considerations amidst the swirling, more ideological rhetoric.

So, I would make the very important caveat, though, that while ideology may not be a great motivator for votes, it can still have really

destructive impact, and I think that's part of what we're seeing in Malaysia. So, what doomed Pakatan 1.0, the first generation, was largely -- actually, the prior version, as well, was largely, disagreement over the relative appropriateness and urgency of Islamist, especially Hudud law enactment. That indicated UMNO, as well, since UMNO had to take a stand.

And then in addition, if you look at the state level, which matters a lot in assessing Malaysian politics, the discourse of accountability, of transparency, sustainability, all of that which is not purely material -- it's not just about how much will you give me. That creates expectations of a coalition in office in Penang and Selangor, at least, less than Kelantan.

That led to really, the ouster of the former chief minister, (Inaudible) in Selangor was seen as autocratic. It's not embodying those democratic ideals, as well as criticisms of Lin Guaned for these, what are seen as overly close to business and

developers' decisions in Penang.

In Singapore, the latest IPS survey results show that Chee Soon Juan, Singapore Democratic Party, hosted the largest gains in credibility this time, doubling its share of the voters who saw it as a credible alternative. But it still has this image as radical, given a previous concerted effort to emphasize civil disobedience. So, it didn't stress civil liberties in its campaign, so much. It stressed healthcare and other material goals. But at the same time, that ideological cast did hurt its chances in some ways.

So, the key lesson here, which kind of confirms some predictions of theories of party institutionalization, which is the theoretical literature I am alluding to here, is that even if parties compete at elections in terms of economic issues, opposition parties to be rayified to have substance and to have a distinctive, long-lasting niche, need to build and sustain an image, and differentiate themselves from their competitors

between the polls.

They have less ability to make policies with which to differentiate themselves, so they need to do that through certain forms of image and discourse. That differentiation, then, will offer a premise for assessment and legitimacy then, that's less straightforward than just tallying up how much you got from the last election budget; what sort of bonuses you got. The BN and the PAP, in turn, can gain substantial leverage just from budgets, unless economic data dies, which is happening in Malaysia now. And so, in this sense, the decline of ideology has really important, I think, long-term implications for both states.

What we do see, though, is a distinctively durable form of machine politics, which is where the lack of ideology, the focus on the material goals in some ways, takes on a distinctive form in an electoral authoritarian state. So, these are the two non-communist, strong party states of Southeast Asia, but in this distinctively different electoral

authoritarian framework.

Jim Scott wrote about machine politics in the late 1960s in the region. It's supposed to go away, once the state is providing those welfare services that parties previously did. Okay? Coming from Albany, I can say, yeah, symptoms of us (Laughter). But it's supposed to fade. Okay?

What we do definitely see really clearly in both of these states, not so much played up in the academic discourse and the discussion of sort of large scale processes, but if you look at politics on the ground, is an emphasis on the politician as provider. Okay? And the politician as being the embodiment of the party, which if you're on the ruling side is, you could have went to the state. So, those distinctions are elited.

There's pressure on the PAP to show that its candidates are not out of touch, however elite they might seem; that they personally knocked on thousands of doors, despite their having been tapped for stellar qualifications that have nothing to do with excellent

door knocking skills. I mean, these are surgeons and business leaders and so forth, that are knocking on doors. Okay?

Malaysian politicians, especially Malay ones, but actually all, attend over the course of between elections, at least hundreds, generally thousands of weddings, funerals and so forth. All of this is to create a personal link to the political system. It's via the party, but it's also, importantly, via extra party networks.

So, what are termed the grassroots in Singapore, the worker's party, for instance, has tried to replicate the PAP's grassroots. They have their own welfare groups that go out, and that sort of thing, and through civil society in Malaysia, and I'll get back to that in a moment.

The fact that this is how the PAP on one hand, and the BN on the other build support creates pressure for opposition parties to mimic the same labor intensive, highly personalized, fundamentally clientelistic linkage with voters. So, that's rather

than appealing in terms of ideology or with the primary emphasis on legislative goals and achievements.

So you know, for instance, in the last election, I think the only person I saw on the opposition side who actually said, I tried to pass this policies, was (Inaudible) graduate Nuralisa, who actually had a flier when she said, I introduced five bills in parliament. Of course, none of them passed, because she's in the opposition. But in general, that's not the way you curry favor. Okay? It's very personalistic, despite the fact that again, these are strong party states. Okay?

So, turning away from all that, I'll talk now a little bit about civil society and the media. And this is, I think, where our expectations really go awry. The discussion of civil society raises a key cause of the ambiguity and unrealistic expectations of change of government or politics or policies or leaders, especially in Malaysia; complaints from civil society from whatever direction, because they're not

in just one direction.

However vehement these complaints might be has no assured mechanism for translation into institutional outcomes. Okay? So, however much you might complain about Najib or about anyone on the opposition side, that's really essentially venting, until that gets translated into the party grassroots. Okay?

So, even in Pakatan opposition held states, while the DAP in Kadulan at least entered office with not so much past; with promises of consultation, of appointing local counselors who have been all appointed since the late '60s and the early '70s; taking them from NGOs rather than parties; of keeping their civil society backers firmly in the policy loop; issue specific advocacy groups have a much narrower ambit than legislators.

And so, some former activist legislators have said, what am I supposed to do? I've got a whole host of issues to look at now. And there are real political incentives on the party's part to stick with

this time honored BN practice of choosing local counselors from among the party loyalists. Okay? And so, those promises of institutionalized inclusion and voice have pretty much gone nowhere, much to the frustration of activists in Selangor and Penang.

Also, what's more clear in Malaysia than Singapore, we actually have seen some enervation of civil society over the last decade or so with the partisanization, to coin a word, of political space. So, whether key civil society leaders have transferred their efforts to political parties, have stood for office, or whether we see an emphasis not on building up sustained coalitions around particular issues, but rather, mass protest, Bersih, and so forth.

Those mass protests that have happened are important, but they are also specifically partisan. They may have and they do have an emphasis on specific issues, but those issues are picked up by one or another coalition. So, whether we're talking about the pro Najib red shirts or Bersih, the coalition itself may not claim to be allied with one side;

sometimes they do, but the parties actually embrace these coalitions, and that helps to feed the rhetoric.

So, Tiantwab, Kadilan for instance, tried to convince that Bersih was his idea. I've heard the reverse, actually, from Bersih activists that say, uh, no (Laughter). They jumped on after. We had thought about these issues, about electoral reform. It's that coalition that formed in 2007. But it does suggest the extent to which partisan politics has swallowed up the political space. And so, it can take us back to a lot of independent initiative at this point, from civil society, even if it is active and organized. Okay?

In Singapore, we hear more from civil society now than in the past, but I think that's actually more because it's amplified through social media, which I'll talk about in a second, rather than some surge in activism. Nor, are there deep links between civil society organizations and political parties in Singapore. That has several different routes. Civil society organizations have been branded

in the past as being political and needing to register as such, and so they're very (Inaudible) of deeper involvement. There are some legal prescriptions on political activity.

Parties themselves, including on the opposition side in Singapore, have fairly top down exclusivist. Just sort of guard the battlements, cadre-based structures which don't allow for a lot of independent input, and there just seems to be no significant change. I actually thought there'd be more this time, and there hasn't been. Okay?

And that brings me to the media, which I think is the source of why we have these ambiguous views. Changes in the media landscape in both of these countries are unmistakable. We have the rise of online news sites, blogs, interactive social media, and pressure that these place on mainstream media to adapt. That's all really important, but the political implications are readily and often overstated.

In Singapore, lots of people read and post to social media. However, voting is mandatory. And

so, all the people who also don't read any media at all, or who only watch official news channels, they also vote. And they don't register in pre-election assessments of what people are saying. They're not chattering, and so we don't really see them. And there aren't a ton of surveys, either, which would give perhaps, a slightly better view.

The disgruntled, also, and others have pointed this out in Singapore, may determine that their most rational option is to vent on social media or vent at rallies, and so forth, enough that the PAP takes notice and changes its policies, as it did this time. And then, vote for the PAP as the party with the proven record of getting stuff done. Okay?

And so, it's easy to misread the chatter on social media. In Malaysia, social media are hardly uniform. They are quite polarized, partly by language, but also, by other dimensions, and different perspectives counteract each other and range from everything from extreme ethnic chauvinism to staunch political liberalism with equally wide ranging,

specific, narrower social and economic leanings.

It's worth noting, also, that some of what's circulated online in recent months has been really technical financial data on 1MDB, and so forth. So, if any of you saw the -- you know, the Edge's you know, flow charts and so forth -- and I did wonder for a while, is it just me that finds some of this a little bit hard to follow (Laughter)? I don't think so.

So, you kind of have to wonder. I mean, you saw this a bit during the Asian financial crisis, this you know, very detailed financial data. But at least then, there was some greater act of trying to translate that. Or, you could say, oh wow, our currency is crap right now. Right? And so, you're getting some of that in Malaysia now, although it's not clear how much of that is really because of 1MDB versus, you know, devaluation of the UN, and so forth.

But at any rate, the average Malaysian or political scientist observer is unlikely to be able to follow this in full, whether these are *Wall Street*

Journal exposés or local ones. It's still intriguing just how widely some of these spreadsheets and such, and flow charts have disseminated. But I don't think we can read a clear policy implication or a mass protest implication from some of the more obscure issues involved from these financial axiom nations.

It does matter in both Singapore and Malaysia that more people have access to information from more than one source or perspective. So, the heavy attentions at rallies in Singapore, for instance, doesn't say much about how people will vote. The rallies, because of the way that they're scheduled and organized, they have a national catchment, whereas voting is through a local catchment. And so, that was another reason for the misperceptions. But that participation -- also at PAP rallies, suggests an increased yen for information. Okay?

Sustained strong readership of online media, including subscription sites in Malaysia, likewise indicates a real interest in political information, and it's worth bearing in mind when we're considering

these online media. In Malaysia, 70 percent plus are urbanized now. So, when we talk about an urban rural bias, that doesn't mean what it means in a place like Burma. Okay?

And most Malaysians, nearly all, it's estimated, have access to online media. If they don't have broadband access, which is spreading -- all those promises of Wi-Fi and so forth, they have it through smart phones. So, even you know, the rural voter in Suralac and so forth, still gets online, often just for Facebook, but it's something.

All right. So, to conclude, despite my saying, oh, it's all the same, it's all the same, I'm now going to say, no, actually, it's changed (Laughter). So --

SPEAKER: You're never trustworthy.

MS. WEISS: No, no. I try. I'm just keeping you on it. What has changed, obviously, is not the institutions. It's not the cast of characters. But it is the character of politics. Okay? Modes of political engagement and citizens'

expectations of their government are changing demonstrably in both states.

I don't see any sign that that will reverse, particularly in Malaysia, but also, increasing in Singapore, we have a less cyclical, less election tide and much more sustained interest in politics and claim to voice. That voice may not get anywhere, but people still claim it. So, there's what we -- if we're going back to the Almond and Verba days, days, might call a shift from a subject to a participant in political culture across both states.

So, in a word, we could say that these are more democratic polities, to stretch that term a little bit, notwithstanding a lack of turnover in leaders or transformation in institutions. Patronage still matters a lot in Malaysia, and targeted benefits for specific communities or constituencies do feature in Singapore, as well; that new campus coming to Pongal, for instance.

But there's rising awareness of who really does and does not benefit from these policies. There

are increasingly slick and expensive efforts to spin policies, to explain policies, to fine tune policies, so as to be responsive to the segments that do chatter, that do actually speak up. That, in the end, may be clientelistic, contingent and hard to sustain. But it also, at least ensures some direct accountability and some responsiveness, and it acknowledges, validates the validity of these popular claims.

So, I'll stop there. Leave it to Joseph to add any thoughts he might have, and then we can take this direction however you want it to go.

MR. LIOW: Well, thank you. Thank you, Meredith. Actually, I just wanted to just throw out a few things, maybe ask questions or discussion points.

MS. WEISS: Okay.

MR. LIOW: In the case of Malaysia, I wonder what the -- or how deep these trends that you outlined run, as far as East Malaysia is concerned.

MS. WEISS: Okay.

MR. LIOW: Because increasingly, I think the

view is that in the Sunanjam if -- or the peninsula, they basically have brought themselves to a stalemate.

MS. WEISS: Mm-hmm.

MR. LIOW: And it's likely to stay that way for a while. So, the game changers could be East Malaysia.

MS. WEISS: Right.

MR. LIOW: But it's more than just the numbers, as far as the seats are concerned.

MS. WEISS: Mm-hmm.

MR. LIOW: There's an impact on the kind of transactional politics --

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

MR. LIOW: -- that you outlined, for sure. But there's also an element of ideology, not just in terms of religious identity. You know, unlike the mainland or the peninsula states, these are mostly minorities.

MS. WEISS: Right.

MR. LIOW: But also, this notion of secession.

MS. WEISS: Mm-hmm.

MR. LIOW: It's been something that has been discussed --

MS. WEISS: Right.

MR. LIOW: -- over and over again. It doesn't go away. You know? It may not have much traction in the long run, but the point is, it doesn't go away. And Jehovah in that, as well.

MS. WEISS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. LIOW: That has surfaced. So, are we looking at similar trends and dynamics, or do they take on a different form? And the workers' party -- I was always a bit -- again, as a neutral observer, I am quite disappointed in their performance, and I'm still trying to figure out -- not that I follow it very closely or really put any effort into trying to figure it out, but nevertheless, in my free time, I do try to ask myself what went wrong.

MS. WEISS: Right.

MR. LIOW: You know? I mean, they were on the up and up, and I think they were very foolish

about their prospects.

MS. WEISS: Mm-hmm.

MR. LIOW: I know, at least in terms of some of the minutiae, for example, that Chairman Sylvia --

MS. WEISS: Mm-hmm. Sylvia Lim, yeah.

MR. LIOW: -- who was one of the stars of the party, didn't really -- as it turns out, didn't quite pull her weight in certain (Inaudible). And she lost, in fact. Same for the other star, Chen Show Mao. So, where did the workers' party itself go wrong? I mean, we can say that the PAP did a number of things right.

MS. WEISS: Right.

MR. LIOW: But at the same time, what did the workers' party do wrong, or didn't at least, get quite right?

MS. WEISS: Right.

MR. LIOW: Maybe you'll start with that.

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

MR. LIOW: And anyone who wants to jump in.

MS. WEISS: I mean, East Malaysia is an --

and Sabah and Sarawak is an interesting point of comparison. So, this is the one area where the urban rural divide is most clear, but where also, you have state parties. Specific parties that -- so in Sarawak, for instance, you don't have UMNO. You have these other BN parties.

So, I think that the transactional politics, the patronage that ties those parties in is absolutely apparent. The make up of the cabinet, the number of members of the cabinet from Sabah and Sarawak -- what may eventually disrupt that pattern is not that -- they don't actually seem to have gotten much. You know?

MR. LIOW: Yeah.

MS. WEISS: So, the cabinet seat is supposed to come with the rewards that flow through that office. And there doesn't seem to be a lot of evidence of that, nor, if you look at the recent budget, there are all sorts of targeted bits for this and that, but the specific things that focus visibly, obviously, where an NP can point to that and say, ahh,

I've got that, for Sabah and Sarawak was much less than I actually thought it would be, and I think that may have to do with just the declining resources that the state has to dispense, which is the problem of relying on patronage.

I do think the upcoming Sarawak state elections will be interesting to see for a couple of reasons. Number one, the new chief minister. It's a low bar to say he's less corrupt than the last one, but he is less corrupt than the last one (Laughter). And he's actually fairly competent, which hasn't happened for a long time. Okay?

SPEAKER: Mm-hmm.

MS. WEISS: And so, that may have actually helped -- I mean, there was such an obvious reason not to support -- he was being called white hair in you know, opposition rallies -- not to support him before. So, there is that.

But then, the BN side, especially in Sarawak, but also in Sabah, also picks up these same state rights issues, which is kind of an odd thing.

So, one thing that we saw in the last election was that on both sides, opposition and BN, states' rights oriented parties, which is a distinctive ideological cast, possibly now extending to Johor of this, we'll secede if we don't get what we want. We have specific state aims. You saw a little of this on the east coast around the oil, but it's much more clear in Sabah and Sarawak for all sorts of reasons.

They still could say, we're a federal system, one of the most centralized federal systems in the world. And so, if you want states' rights, you actually have to vote for the national parties. If you vote for the state parties, we can't do anything in the national parliament. And so, that structural constraint continues to undercut the more radical states' rights oriented parties, and they have a plan.

What I think will be -- now, you mentioned that -- I won't talk about the boring political stuff, but I'll talk about political Christianity, instead. That's going to be a key issue in Saba and Sarawak, so the BN has historically rallied a lot of support in

both states by not just working with church leaders, but themselves by being church leaders.

And so, the Christians in Malaysia have not been significantly mobilized into the last couple of elections, and then, it's been fairly selective. A couple of sort of evangelical Catholic churches on the peninsula, and so forth. The larger religious constituency is about 30 percent Christian in East Malaysia as opposed to the peninsula, where it's much lower. It's still been very pro government.

And so, the DAP in particular, but (Inaudible portion) has been doing this, as well, has actually been going in and working directly with pastors of these different churches to try to get them to see the beauty of Pakatan. So, for instance, bringing groups of pastors, somewhat obscuring the partisan piece of this, but not really -- bringing them to Selangor to meet with Hannah Yo, who is, herself, evangelical and the speaker of the assembly in Selangor, to come pray for the Selangor government; things like that.

So, I think that that dimension will introduce a dynamic that we haven't seen before in this way, so I'm not going to try to make predictions. But I do think that there are different dynamics. There are elements of the same ones. In other words, I think the BN will still overwhelmingly rebound to patronage. This is what we've done. You know, in the last election, they were building bridges. You know, it wasn't just here's a kindergarten. It was here is a $30 million bridge. Vote tomorrow. (Laughter) You know, that sort of thing.

So, I think we'll see more of that on the BN side, but I think the opposition is trying different approaches. They're very strong in the city. They're very weak in the rural areas. The other thing that makes this just different in Sabah and Sarawak is that a lot of these communities are just fundamentally unreachable. The opposition side doesn't have the money for helicopters and speed boats and that sort of thing, and there's no other way to reach some of these communities.

That's where the church networks can help, but not all of those communities are Christian, also. And so, you know, PAS is still hoping that oh, maybe we'll make inroads with the Muslim communities. That's never worked, and they're seen as so Kelantan, especially now that I think it'll work even less. But so, it is same same but different (Laughter).

In terms of the workers' party, I think multiple things went wrong. I think the key issue is what they -- you know, they're both trying to rally support in the same way. They have grassroots that they create, and that they get to go door to door with the candidates, and so forth, and the PAP just has more people, more resources, can do more of this.

But this will be my copout. It'll take another election to see if I'm right. I think the larger issue is that the only appeal that can really work in Singapore now, if you're opposition, is a co-driver strategy. No one is that unhappy with the PAP. You know? In material terms, it's doing good things. And no party is trying to curry dissatisfaction with

the PAP.

No one is saying, oh, the policies are terrible. And so, you don't want a fine tuning policy. Okay? We don't want as many migrants here, but we want all of the goals that they've laid out, that migration will help to achieve. We want that economic growth. We want those movements into different sectors. We'd just like it to be Singaporeans to a greater degree, who are taking those jobs.

So, these are fairly -- if you listen to the rally speeches, if you look at the platforms, they may be presented as dramatic changes, but they're really now. It's fine tuning, healthcare policies, housing policies and so forth. And so, that co-driver strategy means the parties -- by focusing on material goals and specific policies, are consciously, actively not differentiating themselves from the PAP.

So, in one of the SPP's final rallies, for instance, one of their top candidates you know, said openly, these are the policies we'll introduce, and of

course, you know, at best we're only running like a dozen candidates, or 20, or something like that. At best, we can introduce it. There's no chance that we can actually pass these things, because the PAP won't vote for our proposals. Right? But let us introduce these into the debate

But if you see that the PAP can say, look, we responded. This is how many people have healthcare now, and so forth. There's no reason to vote for the WP, based on the premises the WP has given me. The only reason is if you specifically want that co-driver, right, or if you want the voice in parliament, as the SPP, which was sort of the second line, was saying.

And I think we've over estimated how many want that voice in parliament, above wanting -- and this will come back to the clientelism that machine politics face -- above wanting not just the policies the PAP has given, but that their MP be amongst those who is giving those policies.

In some ways, the ways in which WP in

particular, as a party that's had a town council has put on the defensive, was in trying to say no, no, we haven't lost out on development funds for -- if you live this in housing development for a state age, to be a state, you won't lose out personally. You won't be taking one for the team by voting for WP, because this is all long-term finding, blah, blah, blah.

At the same time, you have Pertom Singh, for instance, giving a really excellent speech in which he explains that Alginate had gotten whatever many millions in these extra development funds under PAP rule, not a cent of which had continued under WP rule.

And so, you are actually asking voters for SPP or WP, or the opposition parties to say we know because of the structure of housing here, because of the structure of local governments, with town councils headed by your MP, you actually might lose out on redevelopment or upgrades or whatever else if you vote for us, but want the voice in parliament. At the same time, that's not really the essence of the campaign.

So, I think it's that tension between, are

you asking for an ideological support for liberalism, for more voices, or are you voting based on material transactional politics. And I think the latter really trumped.

MR. LIOW: Tom?

SPEAKER: Yeah. Getting back to our good friend, Najib --

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

SPEAKER: I remember publishing a book once saying that the system in Indonesia would endure for several decades. It gave me a vested interest in keeping Suharto in office (Laughter). Got it to 98. It was a damn nice thing. But you know, he's gone.

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

SPEAKER: And the system has changed.

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

SPEAKER: And patronage systems do change.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: And the question for us, as analysts is, how do we look at these long-term trends --

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: -- that you've been talking about, but also, what are the short-term catalytic factors that can bring down this kind of regime.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: And I guess, Professor Weiss and I both have profited from having grown up in the most corrupt city in America, Boston, Massachusetts (Laughter) when patronage was king. And yet, it's changed now. And one of the things that changed it, one of the catalytic effects was when they sent Mayor Curley to jail.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: For some reason, that put a crimp in his appeal. Now, it didn't mean that he couldn't get re-elected. He came very close, after coming out of the state prison, as a result of being convicted of bribery. But you know, what are the catalytic things that might -- you've already talked about one; a short, sharp downturn in the resources of the patronage machine.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: If they suddenly cannot deliver the goods in the way that they were accustomed to delivering. Secondly, the rise of an alternative leader of some sort, maybe within the patronage machine, as in the case of Habibi; what a strange outcome, when you talk about unpredictable. And then, the third thing is the possible impact of judicial things that are beyond the control of the patronage party, itself.

MS. WEISS: Yeah. So, in terms of the short-term, what would have to change for Najib to be out of office is that the massive UMNO branches turn against him.

SPEAKER: Okay.

MS. WEISS: And that's where (Inaudible) was clear. Okay? So, that's not going to happen. I think the last I heard, it was like 16 of the 2,000 -- I don't even know how many branches there are. It's a lot, you know, were openly against him. And so, that would be the short-term change.

The longer issue here, though, is that in some ways -- and you know, I actually heard this from -- I had this very strange experience of being asked to give a seminar for the MCA, invited by one of their senators. I had no idea, actually, what they wanted me to really talk about. I knew they had something. She had expressed an interest in civil society, so I just kind of went. I thought, two hours, I can wing this (Laughter).

And I talked about civil society, and then we opened it up to Q&A. And the first question was from one of their -- they also have a leadership. You know, everybody does now. So, it was one of their strategists. You know, I don't remember his name -- doctor something. He said, should we leave the BN?" (Laughter) And then, the questions continued in that vein.

And so first, I said, why are you asking me (Laughter)? You know, it's not that I'm a political scientist by definition. I'm not in politics. I'm not Malaysian (Laughter). You know? But I could give

my opinions. I just made sure to say, these are my opinions, you know, not the U.S. government, whatever else.

So you know, one of the things that that discussion led to was of some mutual agreement, that had the MCA, in this case -- and the MCA is a partner to (Inaudible) in the BN -- had they acted faster and actually pulled out of the coalition while it was still clearly a Najib has done bad stuff moment, they could save their own skin. But once the saga, 1MDB and everything else had been allowed to drag on longer, it becomes more clear that this is actually more systemic about the BN and UMNO, and not just the one guy. So, we're past the point where getting rid of Najib would change something.

And so, I don't think it's because of what I said, but they are still in the coalition. But at any rate, I don't think -- getting rid of Suharto -- Suharto is a dictator and was backed by the military that left him. So, in some ways, there's a more clear way to change that system. It doesn't mean that

Prabowa doesn't come close to winning next time. Right?

SPEAKER: Mm-hmm.

MS. WEISS: And so, it's still not a complete shift, but it's harder to see how you change deeply embedded electoral authoritarianism. I've got a book in the works on this, though. So, I'll give you the short form, which is basically getting rid of one leader won't do anything; that rather, what we have, both on the government side and the opposition side, I would argue in both states, but especially in Malaysia, is what -- you know, Kitschelt writes about linkages between politicians and voters.

We have a system of clientelist linkages, not programmatic linkages, not charismatic linkages, but fundamentally clientelist ones. Okay? I am your link to government. Vote for me. So, this is couched in the rhetoric of parties, but the people really are key. And some of that has to do with this branch structure of the mass parties on the Malaysian side and the grass roots structure in Singapore, which is

very PAP linked, though officially non-partisan.

So, even if Najib were out of office, even if a few others were out of office, even there just thrown in jail in disgrace, which I don't think is going to happen, that doesn't change voters' expectations for at least the medium term of politicians. So, I don't find that opposition politicians expect to win votes any differently than BN politicians do. They do have a different discourse.

As I said, there is an ideological expectation on the opposition side. But what they tell me in interviews actually wins votes, is small gifts, when you have a child who needs something, or being able to point to policies that you've done and in Selangor or Penang. That same sort of credit-taking clientelist linkage. Right?

And so, until that linkage shifts, that way of relating, I don't think we're going to see a fundamental systemic shift. In other words, Pakatan might come to power, but I'm not sure that that would

actually change all that much. I do still think -- and that's why I say, yeah, I'm saying stasis, but with gradual -- I think what's happening is that we have a subterranean change in the nature of politics.

And so, I think what leads to a long-term change is that people are starting to expect something different. It's just not going to translate into a direct institutional shift probably for a few elections down the line yet.

MR. LIOW: Bill?

MS. WEISS: Let me take a few questions, and then I'll answer.

MR. LIOW: Yeah. Bill (Inaudible).

SPEAKER: First of all, Carl and I mean no offense to people from Newark or Chicago (Laughter), when you say Boston is number one. Everyone has his or her own sort of a primary interest.

MS. WEISS: Absolutely.

SPEAKER: But we recognize there are other contenders (Laughter). In any case, you, or perhaps Joseph, I'm not sure who threw the word "haze" into

the title. And I consider that to be a fair opening.

MS. WEISS: Okay.

SPEAKER: The haze issue, looking at it from a particularly American point of view is a real public -- or public health threat to certain highly vulnerable segments of the population; the aged and children, who happen to have very high social value in these countries. And not only that, but the haze is an issue that -- it strikes me that most, if not all voters would think that it is a material matter, not an ideological matter that government ought to be able to address.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: Yet, here, we have governments in two countries who have seen this before when they were in power, and were unable to resolve it. And it strikes again. And each time it arrives, it appears at least from a public health perspective, to be worse; to involve more persons in more places with more dire consequences.

So, given your points, why doesn't something

like haze have a catalytic effect on voters to challenge this relationship that you have described?

MS. WEISS: I'd be curious to hear -- I know that I said we'd take the questions, but I'll just answer this, quickly. I actually expected to have a little bit more, especially since the haze was high during the actual election campaign. Not as bad as it got subsequently, but still pretty bad.

On the one hand, because there's another scapegoat. Everybody can blame Indonesia. And so, while there's talk about some of these firms or Malaysian or Singaporean, what I would expect to see is more detailed muckraking by opposition activists of which of those firms are linked to which government. And that, for whatever (Inaudible portion) --

(Simultaneous discussion)

SPEAKER: But they did that the last time.

MS. WEISS: Yeah, so no side is able to benefit really well. It's not like the opposition on one of these has a great solution, because there's an external scapegoat. So, it ends up feeding the

garrison state mentality, and Lee Hsien Loong's big midday speech was, you know, we've got IS and Syria. We've got all that mess in Malaysia and that haze in Indonesia. We don't want to be like them. Vote for us.

And so, I think they were able to twist it, I think it was two years back, same program out of the masks during the haze. They've been really good about distributing them to everybody, and they introduce a specific package of healthcare benefits for seniors in particular, who are affected by the haze.

And so, they're kind of trying, look, we're aware of this. It's Indonesia. What can you do? But here's how we're addressing it. So, remains this conundrum. I do think that over the long-term, especially as there's more detailed information about which firms are actually involved, or if Indonesia actually accepted help, but then you know, used that well, then I think this could be more of a political issue.

But I think at this point, it's too

external, and no one is articulating a good -- it's not like the opposition has a better idea. Okay. Tom, and then Ed. And I promise, I'll take the questions.

MR. LIOW: Yeah.

SPEAKER: On this endlessly fascinating issue of money politics (Laughter), the late Ambassador J.J. told me just before he left Washington that if he really needed someone's support in UMNO or in his home district, he'd build the guy a house.

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

SPEAKER: And if the guy was wavering, he'd build a road to the house.

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

SPEAKER: And this, he was joking, and yet he wasn't joking. And this indicates just how much money was involved, and J.J. you know, had a whole lot of money, and was a big financial supporter and bundler for Najib. Now, you were hinting that okay, maybe there wouldn't be as much money to spread around if things go badly, and we know the Malaysian economy

is starting to suffer.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: And I wonder if you would try to connect economic issues with political ones with respect to patronage.

MS. WEISS: Right. Do you want to -- I'll take your question, as well, and then try to get them all.

SPEAKER: It's only vaguely related, but it also has to do with this question of what's going to be happening five years, ten years from now. It's not at all clear to me that the Singapore government has a good sense of what its longer term economic model now is.

MS. WEISS: Yes, I agree.

SPEAKER: It has a big problem in that the war of the labor force for the Western MNCs is done. The next one was, let's open up the immigration flood gates and let a lot of people in, which has more than reached its limits. But there are a million more people in Singapore than there were 10 years ago, when

I arrived.

That's a big change, and it has not been well assimilated. So, I'm wondering if maybe, the surge of support we saw for PAP this time really is an outlier, and it is not a fundamental -- let me throw out a few possibilities. One is, the workers' party, I think, having won one group representation constituency, either they really screwed it up, or the PAP succeeded in making it appear that they really screwed up the management at that town council. So therefore, and I don't know what the real story is behind that, but that was endless media --

MS. WEISS: Right, right.

SPEAKER: -- for a couple of years of, they're doing this wrong. They're being dishonest. You cannot trust these people. And I think that message really hammered home, that if they're saying we should be co-drivers, the PAP was very good at portraying them as being incompetent drivers. And I think that had a big impact.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: On the haze part, which I agree is, I think, extraordinarily important, I wonder what the election would have been like if it had been held six weeks later, after six weeks of not being able to go outside.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: I think the PAP's claim that we are the competent party who solved these problems would have been a lot weaker.

MS. WEISS: Yeah, yeah.

SPEAKER: There was a quite successful effort to blame it on specific Indonesian firms, particularly Asia Pulp and Paper, which is owned by (Inaudible) which is Indonesian. But every taxi driver will tell you about how much of that money is now based in Singapore.

MS. WEISS: Yeah, yeah.

SPEAKER: How many of the companies are actually Singaporean controlled. So, this let's blame it all on Indonesia isn't going to work the next time this happens. And then, you had the impact of the

death of Lee Kuan Yew, which had a huge impact.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: And that's why they timed the election when they did, and the way that was portrayed to me by some Singaporeans, I'd love to know what Joseph thinks about this, is that that outpouring of grief that was seen was sort of the way a rebellious teenager would act if suddenly, daddy died. And like oh my god, I was so bad to him, and now I feel so guilty about it, and look at all of these wonderful things he did for me.

So, none of these things is sustainable. So, are we looking at, boy, they bought themselves some time, and now they have to figure out what their economic model is? Or, are we looking at this is a well entrenched electoral machine that isn't going anywhere for a long time?

MS. WEISS: Mm-hmm. Those are good points. All right. So, this question of patronage, building houses, yeah, that's totally plausible, actually (Laughter). I think he would do that. I think -- you

know, this makes me think through, part of the reason that we haven't seen anywhere near the response you would expect to finding out -- well, (Inaudible portion) -- and so, these revelations that after flustering, it's I'll sue the *Wall Street Journal* for claiming this. But actually, it's true (Laughter) -- the $700 million deposited into Najib's account.

So, there are two key reasons, I think, why this hasn't caused more of a stir in the BN than we would expect. Number one: Depositing party funds into personal accounts is perfectly normal in Malaysia. If this extends to, for instance, PAS(phonetic), as the other parties do this, a lot of this has to do with the fact that there are so many tiny, tiny, tiny party branches, and auditing is difficult if you need to deal with party accounts at that level.

So, you just don't have party accounts. You have personal accounts that are linked to the party. And it's understood, generally, that these are done. But you know, to the extent that -- some of you

probably know (Inaudible portion) idea of this libertarian thing tanked in Malaysia. When he was in the UK, apart from running for parliament as a conservative, he was also the -- it's an odd mix. He was in PAS, and then he was running as a you know, very conservative British politician to be -- didn't get elected.

But at any rate, he was the treasurer for the PAS branch in the Islamist party branch in the UK for students. And so, he said that over the time -- there was something -- I think he said like 300,000 pounds or something that he was controlling. They all contributed, basically typed their stipends as students.

And they were using that. They picked a PAS official and paid that person's salary. And it was all in Juan Sifel's own account. And that's just how it's done. Right? Otherwise, you come up with all sorts of tax issues and auditing issues. And so, this is not, itself, unusual. So, that's one --

MR. LIOW: And it's the 700 million in

Najib's --

MS. WEISS: The scope of it is -- yeah, exactly. (Laughter) So I mean, that's a larger sum than you normally -- but this is one of the reasons why (Laughter) -- but you know, that extraordinarily wealthy benefactor. I mean, you don't want to give it to the party. Auditing is so difficult (Laughter), for whatever Saudi king or whatever it was supposed to have been.

So, this is part of the reason why the split in UMNO, in the PAS, probably. But also, the split in PAS now has been so problematic. Those who support PAS because of the -- you know, what used to be a coherent PAS because of the progressives in the party, when they make their donation to PAS, you're going to pick your guy. Right?

And so, they're giving their donations. Some will give to the party, but a lot goes to the personal accounts of that PAS representative. And so, when they split, who gets the money? Right? And a lot of the urban PAS supporters and so on who have

money were giving it to the people who are now in Amanah, this other party. And you can't really discuss this openly, so you only get this by you know, asking a lot of, a lot of questions. It took me a long time to get to that point (Laughter). But at any rate, that's one reason why this hasn't -- nobody really wants to drop that into such a debate.

But the other issue here is just that it's not clear to me how much of a generalized economic downturn in Malaysia will affect patronage distribution, because a lot of those funds are not coming from even PETRONAS at this point, or certainly from sort of general -- things that would be affected by a general downturn in economic performance.

We don't know how unusual this $700 million was. We do know that Najib has said this was for the party. This was for election expense. It's like building people houses, probably. Right? And so in that sense, over time, yeah, I would assume that a general economic downturn is going to have an impact on patronage distribution.

But it could be, these sums that we're seeing suggest that there could be a fairly significant lag, if there's enough in these not open coffers that's used specifically for patronage purposes. So, that would be my -- it's a speculative response, but that's what I would suggest.

In terms of Singapore's long-term economic model, that's a really good point. I mean, one way that the opposition parties could, over time, distinguish themselves is less by fine tuning HDB and healthcare and so far, as saying, this is our overall economic model. Okay? Some do that to some extent, but it's not all that clear, because they'll have a platform that says you know, we're about different patterns of redistribution.

But then the way that that's drilled down is really this is what we would tweak. And so, the whole town council is -- I do think that these elections were an outlier, if you look at the historic pattern of votes in Singapore. It just doesn't fit, and there's no reason to expect that the mass of voters

would have so deeply changed their alliances so quickly.

So, I do think it's an outlier. But at the same time, it's significant. It suggests that perhaps, the unreliability of these votes -- and that's, again, a sign that parties aren't so well institutionalized as they should be from the opposition perspective.

So, the whole town council issue; voters are asked explicitly to choose their candidates based on who will be a good estate manager, not on who has a good vision for Singapore. And so, until that changes -- this is you know part of the super clever policies of the PAP to make it really difficult to challenge that, is that those TCs because, of the structure of HDB, because of the structure of upgrades, all of this.

So, it creates a very hierarchical centralized system of allocations. And so, you have this sort of charade, really, of here's a prime minister -- or here's a member of parliament who can

make decisions. But actually, it's very much tied to the higher levels in the system. And so, I think that that's part of really what sustains a localized, as opposed to visionary vision of politics.

The haze had a really important and interesting political implication. I'm not sure they'll be, which is not a great answer. But there is this dynamic here of looking at how these inherently, deeply transnational -- these really externalities of development elsewhere affect domestic politics in a range of states. It's something I haven't personally worked on. I'm thinking maybe I should. I haven't seen a lot of people who have.

I mean, we talk about the long-term consequences of climate change and so forth, but not so much in terms of how does that change the policy options and the political appeals of leaders in any one state that's affected by something a bit -- you know, even if Singapore can send in cloud seeders and help to tamp down the haze this time, what's necessary is long-term policy reform and economic restructuring

in Indonesia and other states to prevent this from recurring every year; not just putting out the fires, literally, but actually changing something.

And so, ASEAN can help, but not really. But there are these longer term political implications that somebody should study. Yeah.

SPEAKER: Them. (Laughter)

SPEAKER: Can I just push back on that one, a little bit?

MS. WEISS: Yeah, okay.

SPEAKER: On how much this is true, it is impossible to tell, because none of this information is public. But a lot of the land that is being burned is controlled by Singaporean corporations, not Indonesian corporations.

MS. WEISS: It's still Indonesian policy that controls what those Singaporean corporations can do, though.

SPEAKER: What they can do, but not what they must do.

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

SPEAKER: Every single one of the large companies in both Pulp and Paper and palm oil has now signed on to various agreements that they're going to do no clear cutting.

MS. WEISS: Right, exactly.

SPEAKER: No burning of their own.

MS. WEISS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SPEAKER: That is for the civil small holder farmers that they can't control.

MS. WEISS: Yeah. Right.

SPEAKER: It's garbage.

MS. WEISS: Yes (Laughter).

SPEAKER: Clearly, even if it small holders, you just don't buy from them unless they're being clean.

MS. WEISS: Right, right. Right, right.

SPEAKER: The Singaporean companies could perfectly well do this, and the Singapore government could require them to do it.

MS. WEISS: They could.

SPEAKER: Absolutely. And they have laws in

place to fine Singapore based companies and financial holders --

MS. WEISS: Right, right.

SPEAKER: -- who don't do those things. If Singapore wanted to, they could address this problem very significantly, and the Singapore population knows it.

MS. WEISS: I will concede a point. And there are Malaysian owners, as well. At the same time, there still are larger economic and environmental policy concerns. There still is -- it's still too easy to blame Indonesia on the one hand.

SPEAKER: Yeah.

MS. WEISS: And it's hard to enforce. Right? So, it's still a much grayer area than if these corporations were operating in Singapore.

SPEAKER: But Meredith, based on the principles that you have discussed, if there were a public reaction in social and traditional media and God forbid, on the street, that could play by the principles that you have brought to us, there should

be a governmental response.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: So, why is there not the popular reaction that would generate what you would see as a response?

MS. WEISS: It probably helps that you can't take to the street during a haze. You know (Laughter)?

SPEAKER: Right. But you wouldn't be able to see who else could.

MS. WEISS: That would be a good point.

(Simultaneous discussion)

SPEAKER: The Catch-22 (Laughter).

MS. WEISS: I think you know, what's been surprising is that yeah, you do see some of these exposés of witch burns, and you see Singaporeans discussing don't buy this brand. NTOC is not stocking this brand, and so on.

SPEAKER: Which is all of the Indonesian companies, only.

MS. WEISS: Exactly. Exactly.

SPEAKER: Not the supporting companies (Laughter).

MS. WEISS: So, I think we could come up -- the cynical response would be that there's no political will to push this, because these Singapore-owned firms are politically connected in Singapore. I don't think that's a sufficient explanation, because you're right, there should be more consumer pressure.

There might be a lack of knowledge or awareness that this whole discourse of it's the swidden agriculturalists, the small holders, you see dramatically competing explanations for the haze that circulate equally widely. And so, this may be part of, as I mentioned with 1MDB, difficult financial data, hard to know what's illegal, what's okay, what's you know, whatever.

I think the same may be also the case in terms of the haze; that I don't know if -- I mean, it's easy to -- ahh, there are these companies, easy to pick on the Indonesian ones. But I do think that there is this counter-discourse which has real

purchase of, it's the lawless swidden agriculturalists who are also at fault. And so, that may be a piece of it.

I don't think that that has staying power. I think over time, but it's also episodic. It just so happens to occur during election this time. But you know, the haze goes away, and it's harder to keep up the issue. So, I do think it will have a long-term political impact, partly because these are, in part, Singapore companies, partly because consumers across this wide area will be upset.

It's hard to mobilize consumers at all, but certainly, to mobilize consumers across a wide area to do more than boycott is difficult. But it still begs, though, what is the policy solution? What are these consumers asking? And they tend to be asking Indonesia to do more, which may not be the best solution. So, I think it needs -- you know, it's not an automatic process that we have a problem, because what Singapore could do is x. There's not an automatic process by which that becomes the basis for

mobilization.

SPEAKER: Yeah. Since you've opened this, could I just ask Joseph for your view on one part of --

MR. LIOW: Yeah.

SPEAKER: -- this Indonesia? If I understand the consequences this year's burn, the effects, whether it's by wind or -- because of wind changes or weather or patterns or whatever, the effects on Indonesia itself seem to be significantly greater --

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

MR. LIOW: Yeah.

SPEAKER: -- than they have in the past.

MR. LIOW: Yeah, yeah.

SPEAKER: Is there any possibility that things could actually come together?

MR. LIOW: You mean in Indonesia?

SPEAKER: In Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia, to recognize we're all in this together --

MR. LIOW: Yeah, yeah.

SPEAKER: -- and a common solution --

MS. WEISS: Right.

MR. LIOW: Yeah.

SPEAKER: -- because our aged parents or our small, little children are dying.

MR. LIOW: Yeah. Well, it's important, seriously. But let me share some thoughts on that. But on the larger issue of the haze and the elections and all that, I think, number one, the timing was a bit off. You know? Election time was when the haze was starting. Nevertheless, that was sort of oh, it's the haze again. You know?

MS. WEISS: Mm-hmm.

MR. LIOW: So, it hadn't kicked in yet, but by the time the election had passed. So in a sense, it's fortuitous for the Pap.

MS. WEISS: Yes.

MR. LIOW: I'm talking about the timing lapse. It was also a lost opportunity for the opposition.

MS. WEISS: Right.

MR. LIOW: All this discussion about the complicity of the Singapore interest, that one should be looked into. It was a lost opportunity in that sense, you know, that basically, no one is looking into it. I think the government would have -- if it had come to that, they would have responded in some way, but probably not you know, this Singapore.

MS. WEISS: Right.

MR. LIOW: You know, because of their relationship, it wouldn't be a witch hunt, you know, but there would be some sort of -- you know, if politics was at stake, there would have been some sort of response. But plan A, as always, is to leverage on the narrative of the hostile neighbor, you know, which works to a T in most cases.

I mean, you look at the media analysis and reporting on the haze, for example, and that gets to my next point. There was, actually, a public reaction, but it worked in a sense. You know, it wasn't one that called the government to be accountable for the situation. In fact, this was the

whole Yussov Galla thing. You know?

There was a movement to thank Yussov Galla for 11 months of fresh air, because Yussov Galla had made the statement (Laughter) that you know, we gave Singapore 11 months of fresh air, and you don't thank us. But we give you one month of bad air, and you're railing against us. So, there was this underlying move (Laughter). And I think it was tens of thousands of people who signed a petition to thank Yussov Galla for 11 months of fresh air.

MS. WEISS: I was going to say, there's no humor in (Inaudible). Yeah. (Laughter)

MR. LIOW: So, that's the only sort of public mission that comes to mind.

MS. WEISS: So, just to reinforce that in one way. There have been a series of MRT, the train breakdowns in Singapore. There was at least one during the election. There was significant concern that that would actually impact upon the PAP's vote chair.

MR. LIOW: Yeah.

MS. WEISS: You know, a train breakdown. And that's because the PAP claims credit for the MRT. And so, in some ways, there's been this very careful management of discourse, such that there are things that you could say probably not enduringly, but at least for now, that's somebody else, versus the MRT is ours and yeah, breakdown. Blame us. And then, you see that the minister should -- the claim said he should commit and that sort of thing. That little extreme that Lee Kuan Yew would have (Laughter). So, what --

MR. LIOW: But that -- sorry.

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

MR. LIOW: That was neutralized with the minister actually resigning.

MS. WEISS: Exactly, exactly. And this gets also, to the Lee Kuan Yew/Lee Hsien Loong comparisons of how well, he's not as good as his father. But then you know, he does resign, which is what Lee Kuan Yew had advocated people should do when something breaks down.

But two other issues in terms of why the haze hasn't yet translated in Singapore into a political issue. One would be, I don't think Singaporean voters, actually, voters in most places, are accustomed to seeing these as actionable political issues, and because the opposition didn't articulate a specific way to make this a voting issue. It has to be framed as such. Otherwise, it's like the rain. It's the weather. Right? The weather is hazy. And you can blame the PAP for a lot, but maybe not for the weather.

And then, the other part is that that's not necessarily incidental that that's happened. The Consumer's Movement as well as the Labor Movement are PAP movements in Singapore. So, where this is more likely to generate into a political issue is in Malaysia, where you have an autonomous Consumer's Movement. You don't have an autonomous Consumer's Movement in Singapore. And Labor is the other group that might mobilize.

And you know, PAP MPs are assigned as

officers to different trade unions, which are all, except one, under the NTSE. And so, that makes it all the more difficult to think about how civil society would develop a critique that then could be picked up by a party, if they don't do that independently.

MR. LIOW: Yeah, but it was a point for quite an effective service.

MS. WEISS: Uh-huh.

MR. LIOW: And ask the point about --

MS. WEISS: Oh, yeah --

MR. LIOW: Which I think was important.

MS. WEISS: Yeah. No, I think that that the Lee Kuan Yew glow did help the PAP. There was the Lee Hsien Loong rally, where he was quoting his father, and so immediately viral online was, here was the father saying that, here was the son saying that.

MR. LIOW: Yeah.

MS. WEISS: And it looks more grand. But I think it still helps. And I agree, that there was a sort of sense of oh, we forsook you when you were alive. You know? I don't think that that probably

was as determining a force as some had thought it might be; you know, this question of timing the election so you get SG50 plus Lee Kuan Yew.

But there are two specific ways in which I see those things are linked; the passing of Lee Kuan Yew and the Singapore SG50 right before the election. Two ways specifically that it helped. Number one: The non-chattering classes, the ones that aren't -- a lot of them are -- they're reminded. If you don't really have any specific reason to vote for the opposition, you think of Lee Kuan Yew. Right?

The second piece of this would be, and this is speculative, but one thing that my colleagues, when we were researching the elections did find was that for instance, church communities were using text messaging, What's App and so on with very explicit vote for the PAP for these reasons, drawing on a specific religious rhetoric, which is why I say that the supposed depoliticalization of race and religion in Singapore is overstated.

Part of the SG50 activities included

massive, tens of thousands of people in Catholic, Protestant and Muslim SG50 ceremonies with the prime minister and other PAP officials in attendance. So, I think there actually was to me, a really surprising -- I don't know if I just haven't noticed it in Singapore, but sort of SG50 gave a chance to do this without seeming political. But it's right before the election -- right, to rally church-based communities, which then you know, could and did use networks.

And some of this was around this incredible inflation of the specter of gay rights. You know? Even that Lee Kuan Yew has actually made, of all Singapore politicians, the most clear statements in support of gay rights. So, it's sort of ironic in that sense.

But sending out these repeated text messages to everyone in their networks of, if you vote for WP or SDP, that's a vote for gays, even though they don't have explicit policies, so you know, vote for PAP. But I think that that's facilitated by the immediately prior organization of these mass religion rallies

around PAP.

MR. LIOW: Actually, and just very quickly, if -- I may be wrong. I didn't follow it as closely as you did. But if you look at the PAP narrative during the election, really the campaign, it was very much historical --

MS. WEISS: Oh, yeah.

MR. LIOW: -- and reflective.

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

(Simultaneous discussion)

MR. LIOW: And yes, somehow, you know --

MS. WEISS: Yeah, totally.

MR. LIOW: -- it's not clear what the plan for the next page is.

MS. WEISS: I agree. I agree.

MR. LIOW: Because they never --

MS. WEISS: I agree.

MR. LIOW: -- articulated the --

MS. WEISS: I agree. The backdrop, their stage backdrop -- because they had the you know, beautiful stage. It's a sort of historical trajectory

of Singapore.

MR. LIOW: Yeah, yeah.

MS. WEISS: And there's a lot of that. So, I mean, you can't blame them (Laughter). If you had Lee Kuan Yew, you would draw that, too. But no, I agree that there's not a real sense of what the next lap is. You know (Laughter)?

MR. LIOW: Sorry.

(Discussion off the record)

MR. LIOW: Okay, one, two three.

SPEAKER: Well, my question is pretty short and maybe simple. Since you're in Washington, I would be curious to hear your thoughts on the U.S.-Malaysia relationship.

MS. WEISS: Okay.

SPEAKER: And since the president will almost certainly be there in a few weeks --

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: -- if you had any, you know --

SPEAKER: Next week.

SPEAKER: Oh, already?

(Simultaneous discussion)

SPEAKER: You know, if you were sitting at his side, what would you suggest that he do? Who he should meet with? Who should he not meet with? What should he say there? Things like that.

MR. LIOW: Not you (Laughter).

MS. WEISS: No, that's actually the main thing I would say.

SPEAKER: Yeah?

MS. WEISS: So, I mean, he's in a bind, because you know, he wants the TPP to pass, even though there's all sorts of signs that Malaysian corporations are not necessarily the cleanest and best to deal with. But yeah, I would say that the strategically best thing he could do is, fine, go, but don't meet with Najib, because there's no necessary benefit for him in doing so at this point.

Malaysia is much more subservient to the U.S. than vice versa. And he has met with Najib before and talked with Najib, so there's still that aura of friendship. But at the same time, he'll

antagonize a lot and reduce his credibility, I think, by meeting with Najib. I think he probably will meet with Najib, but I think it's a bad idea. So, that would be the main thing.

Other than that, Pen Petkwun is the best one to talk about this. But you know, the U.S.-Malaysia relationship seems to be unsinkable. I mean, it's sometimes baffling, the extent to which it just continues on (Laughter). It's almost like the sort of lafemetist like you know, bureaucratic state idea, but that there's this foreign policy establishment that just continues unrattled, despite anything else.

But I think the depth of the political malaise in Malaysia right now -- you know, people say that -- the joke used to be Mahathir put the malaise in Malaysia. Now, it's not. But I think the depth of that, and just the uncertainty. It's not even just so much the allegations themselves. It's the covering up of investigations. It's the impeding transparency. It's all these things that the TPP in particular is supposed to avoid. You know? So, key clear

procedures, standards, all of that.

So, I think validating the regime that has been actively doing that, because a lot of that is directly Najib, himself, I think is a bad thing. But apart from that, you know, it sees like this relationship will go on happily. I'm not sure that the opposition would even be -- that Pakatan would be against the TPP. They were against the obscurity of the process, but not necessarily -- except for the Socialist party, not necessarily against things that increase trade.

So, it's not that their position is necessarily different, so I don't think that that's really such an issue, if the U.S. is mostly concerned with that. But it is really, you know, do you validate logic or not.

MR. LIOW: I think the saving grace for the U.S. is that it's an ASEAN meeting, it's not a bilateral --

MS. WEISS: Yeah, totally. Yeah.

MR. LIOW: So, you have an excuse you know,

not to spend too much.

SPEAKER: But you have to have a bilateral --

MR. LIOW: Yeah, yeah, but --

SPEAKER: I mean, with the host you just like --

MR. LIOW: No doubt. Yeah, yeah. But it won't be --

MS. WEISS: It's not as visible.

MR. LIOW: Yeah, yeah.

MS. WEISS: That's the one thing to not do --

(Simultaneous discussion)

MS. WEISS: -- and actually pull out at the last moment and send the vice president (Laughter). Yeah.

SPEAKER: You don't think (Inaudible) will make that visible?

MS. WEISS: Oh yeah, yeah.

MR. LIOW: They will go to town with that.

MS. WEISS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. LIOW: Muti?

SPEAKER: Yeah. You know, I think Meredith, you have an interesting presentation, but I'll just go back to what Carl said. You should really look into the possibilities of change.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: Because right now, your presentation and your argument seems to be continuity all along.

MS. WEISS: Right, right, right.

SPEAKER: And I think Anna raised some issues in terms of possible change. I recall in 1995 when a book on political legitimacy was published, and I told that to Joseph a couple of times, I presented in Singapore. And people -- I was laughed out of court for saying that the Suharto system will not survive Suharto. And precisely, that's what happened three years later.

And I think it's important to build into this. I mean, you already said you are not sure how change will come in electoral authoritarianism, but

it's important to see how change can come about. To me, I think you talked about the continuities and then the subterranean change. But I think it's really crucial to -- it's whether this system can survive and how it will change, and what will bring about the change.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: And that's really very crucial, it seems to me. And that's missing in your presentation.

MS. WEISS: Right, right. Yeah.

SPEAKER: And as I look at it what Malaysia -- Singapore, I think, is the outlier. I agree with Anne on the results. You know, but it's possible that changes can come about in both countries. The system may not change, but the parties may change and the structures. I think states will get more power in Malaysia, both in Sabah and Sarawak and in other states, as well.

I mean, that's how changes come about. I think that the federal -- the royalties will become more powerful. As an institution, they have become

more significant. The duration rate -- they are trying to reconnect and make it more independent.

MS. WEISS: Right, right.

SPEAKER: So, I think you've got to look at avenues where changes can take place, rather than -- you know, I mean, you talk about civil society and so forth, and I was in (Inaudible) during the last election. And almost everybody in Malaysia thought that there would be a change in government.

But they were all confined to peninsula Malaysia. They didn't take Sabah and Sarawak into account. And I think Sabah and Sarawak are going to be problematic issues for Malaysia as a whole.

MS. WEISS: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

SPEAKER: So, I think you ought to build into this how changes can affect -- maybe not at the macro level alone, even at the institutional level how changes could come about.

MS. WEISS: So, I'll just issue two quick -- I mean, it's a large issue, and definitely, I will take it to heart. So, two specific things that have

been entrained. One is, I've written an article sort of arguing that regime change is actually underway in Malaysia and Singapore; not visible in institutions, but just in the way that politics happens, and I attribute that to what I not very creatively call, a double threat: Rising in equality and social media.

In other words, especially if you look at the intra Malay inequality, that's more stark than inter-ethnic inequality now in Malaysia. And that's much more politically problematic. That's probably why -- one of the key reasons why UMNO support is down, supposedly, to 31 percent among Malays now.

SPEAKER: Yeah, I mean, if you look at all of the parties in Malaysia, all of the ethnic groups are split.

MS. WEISS: Yeah, yeah. And so that's --

SPEAKER: You know? And that's a fundamental change in --

(Simultaneous discussion)

MS. WEISS: And so, that challenges even the basis of patronage politics and the BN. Giving money

to Chinese education, when you can show this is the share of Chinese that are in Chinese education. This is the share of Malays that are in Chinese education. There's a less easy translation because of the specific distribution of benefits and the very visible rise in inequality.

That's part of why economics is such a volatile election issue, but it also creates -- I think that's partly behind the fact that I'm saying this isn't just cyclical around elections anymore. People are aware. And some of that has to do with rising urbanization. You're exposed. You know, it's not just that you're out in the compone, it's that you just don't have those options, and this becomes more visible because of new media.

So again, I don't want to overstate the power of the Internet, but I do think it matters for making visible what previously could be largely obscured. The royalty is something we didn't talk about, but I don't know what to expect from that. But it is, you know, resurgent. It's really worrisome

when you see calls to be more like Thailand. (Laughter) I mean, who wants to be more like Thailand anymore, with stronger less majesty laws and things like that. I mean, that's a bad idea.

SPEAKER: No. But I think the important thing is to know that, for example, the appointment of (Inaudible portion). To what extent the royalty became crucial and essential.

MS. WEISS: Yeah, absolutely.

SPEAKER: The (Inaudible) the mind of Penang back to (Inaudible). And dual royalty secession -- counselor ruler secession on the 1MDB and likewise.

MS. WEISS: Right, right.

SPEAKER: So, I think that you can make a case that people have seen the royalties essentially as fixtures there. You know?

MS. WEISS: Yeah, yeah.

SPEAKER: And not really important. It's all ceremonial. But actually, they have a lot of powers within the Constitution.

MS. WEISS: Yeah, yeah.

SPEAKER: And Malaysia would not have had its independence, had not the sultan sign onto the Federation of Malaysia agreement. So, I think there's a lot to the royalty as an institution which one has to look at. I'm afraid -- you know, I think just focusing on some aspects of the royalty is insufficient --

(Simultaneous discussion)

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

MR. LIOW: Yeah. I think this point about the institutions fighting back and trying to regain the pre Mahathir positions and influence that they helped previously. I think it's important.

MS. WEISS: Right, right.

MR. LIOW: The spectrum.

MS. WEISS: One other thing that I wanted to say about the sort of way that politics is changing, and this has specifically to do with opposition strategies in Malaysia. It's something I have been in the process of writing about. It's that you do see some -- especially in the DAP, but also in

(Inaudible), much less in PAS, MPs who are specifically trying to disrupt that clientelist linkage, and they do this by -- they make their rounds, for instance, through their local areas together with representatives from the local council, from the water company, from the electricity company and so forth, and say don't call me when your pipes burst. Call this guy, because that's been the way, that you're the fix-it person.

You call your MP when the lights are out, literally. Unclogging drains, all of that, you call your MP or your state representative. And so, they're trying to disrupt that, which is fundamentally disrupting this clientelist linkage. They'll still take the calls when they come. It's not a lot, and that's mostly an urban strategy, but that is the sort of thing that tells people, you're voting for me for legislation, not for the drains. Right.

SPEAKER: Mm-hmm.

MS. WEISS: And that's something that's a risky strategy, because in BN, they'll say, I'll fix

your drains and I'll legislate, but mostly, I'll fix your drains. Right? Because really, the legislation comes down from the top. And so, that's the sort of -- that's what I'm focusing on in terms of how this change happens.

It's not just civil society. It's actually by MPs taking the risk of saying I might not get re-elected because I'm doing this. But at the same time, that's actually what changes the linkage which is necessary to change the regime as opposed to just the government just using power.

SPEAKER: You know, you can actually break up politics -- sorry -- into three areas in Malaysia. Nation-making.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: And I think that's where even Sabah Sarawak issues feature very prominently.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: And your whole ethnic and religious damage, if you go into that, as well. And that's very much in turmoil. I mean, it's not what it

was. Secondly, it's the system of government, which you've talked about mostly here. But also, I think in terms of state institutions.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: How state institutions and the governance aspect of it.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: So, it seems to me, Malaysia -- and I want to go into Singapore, too, because I think Singapore too, has a lot of (Inaudible) which don't come to the surface. And I think Singapore is really willful of Malaysia. I would say, you used the term will. I think it's a matter of time before the system in Singapore unravels. And I think the last election is outlier in that sense.

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

SPEAKER: I know we haven't talked too much about Singapore in this, because Malaysia is sort of up there and Najib himself gets much attention. But it seems to me that Singapore has a lot of fundamental problems that just --

(Simultaneous discussion)

MR. LIOW: But the one thing to look up for that is the demographics.

SPEAKER: Yeah, demographics.

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

MR. LIOW: Because there are basically fewer and fewer authentic Singaporeans in (Inaudible). And you know, the migrant community -- how that affects the election, I think is something to --

MS. WEISS: And most of the opposition candidates were telling me that they expect new voters, the new Singaporeans to be largely pro PAP.

MR. LIOW: Yeah.

MS. WEISS: And they like this country that they migrated to.

SPEAKER: You know, I made the statement that people really like this PAP government or the expatriates.

MR. LIOW: Yeah, yeah (Laughter).

SPEAKER: And these migrant --

(Simultaneous discussion)

SPEAKER: So anyway, I'm sorry.

MR. LIOW: There was a question?

SPEAKER: Yeah. So, I really appreciate your presentation as a whole, and I agree with many of the broad strokes. I guess one thing I was surprised to hear you downplay was the effects of the 1MDB scandal in Malaysia.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: I think what you said was that the policy implications or the mass protest implications of 1MDB are not really directly clear. And I would disagree. I think they are actually, very clear, particularly if you look at the way that Najib and the Malaysian government has cracked down on peaceful expression --

MS. WEISS: That's true.

SPEAKER: -- and freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in the past couple of years.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: And specifically, the use of the Sedition Act and peaceful assembly acts. I mean, in

the past -- from 2007 to 2013, there were only two cases in which the Sedition Act was used, and in then in the past two years, since the 1MDB scandal, there have been 36. And all of those cases have actually been regarding civil society groups, opposition MPs, journalists and media organizations that have specifically criticized 1MDB and Najib.

And if you look at the Bersih rallies, at the ones in August, the 40,000 strong, 34 hour protests, the two stated reasons behind the Bersih rallies were specifically to call for institutional reform regarding government accountability and corruption, and to call for Najib's resignation, because of his mishandling of the 1MDB scandal.

MS. WEISS: Right.

SPEAKER: And then, the Bersih chair was arrested on the Sedition Act (Laughter).

MS. WEISS: Exactly.

SPEAKER: And so, I think these implications are actually very clear, and you might be right in the -- even if, let's say, the BN actually continues to

support Najib, and they actually do end up losing the next election. And perhaps, nothing will actually change in terms of the patronage system. Perhaps there will not actually be institutional reforms of government accountability. But I think it's a mischaracterization to describe 1MDB as business as usual, just a bigger business as usual.

MS. WEISS: I didn't mean to say that it was business as usual. I mean, I just think said a passing reference in like my first few minutes of, there's been a crackdown with the Sedition Act and other things. So no, my point is not that this is just business as usual. It's that there would be two sort of key aspects here.

One is that issue of how partisan civil society is, which is useful in some ways, but also means there's less of an independent space if we're looking at a long-term political trajectory. So that itself, is meaningful in terms of the nature of political space in Malaysia.

The other aspect is, where I was saying that

this was not having the effect that many expected was that that massive protest, all of these complaints, all of this awareness of the crackdown has no implications, it seems, for whether Najib gets out of office. So, I was really saying that it's not as, oh, this is just the usual scandal. It's much larger.

But rather, that the structural nature of electoral authoritarianism in Malaysia means that civil society -- that we can't expect change because civil society is up in arms.

SPEAKER: Okay.

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

MR. LIOW: Okay? That was fun (Laughter).

MS. WEISS: Yeah, thanks.

MR. LIOW: I think it was a very -- I don't know about you guys, but I know it was quite a thrill to be discussing these things with someone who you know, obviously knows a little bit about it. (Laughter) Much more than we do, of course.

MS. WEISS: Yeah.

MR. LIOW: And you know, these two are not

particularly high, I think on the agenda of the administration here. But nevertheless, longstanding friends of the U.S., as Meredith pointed out in the case of Malaysia and Singapore, as well.

And also, as we have ascertained in the discussion, going through some subterranean, some more obvious sort of trends pointing to change, and certainly, things to keep a lookout for in the coming years. But for today, please join me in thanking Meredith. (Applause)

MS. WEISS: Thanks for having me here.

MR. LIOW: A pleasure.

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