MALAYSIA STUDIES PROGRAMME

Malaysia in Transition Seminar Series

Four Arenas:
Malaysia's 2018 Election, Reform, and Democratization

Date   :   Thursday, 15 August 2019
Time   :   10.00 am – 11.30 am
Venue :   ISEAS Seminar Room 2

About the Seminar

How do we make sense of voting patterns in Malaysia's 2018 General Election, and what do they imply for democratisation and ongoing reform efforts? Most analyses rely on the country's major ethnic groups (MCIO) or administrative units (typically the states) as categories to better understand voting patterns. We argue that Malaysia is better conceived of as having four distinct, identity-based arenas, each with their own electoral dynamics and unique visions of what Malaysia Baharu should look like.

The four arenas framework provides clarity on how the BN was defeated in GE14 despite its many structural advantages. It also has important implications for reform. Specifically, one arena is disproportionately important for maintaining power, and hence has a disproportionately large influence on setting the political agenda and constraining the range of politically feasible reforms. Without substantial changes to the electoral system or coalition structure, this will remain true for the foreseeable future, essentially defining the parameters of political competition in Malaysia.

About the Speaker

Kai Ostwald is an Assistant Professor in the School of Public Policy & Global Affairs and the Department of Political Science at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. He is also Director of UBC's Centre for Southeast Asia Research, Associate Editor (Southeast Asia) at *Pacific Affairs*, and an Associate Fellow at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. His work focuses on political economy and elections in Southeast Asia, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia. He holds a PhD in political science from the University of California, San Diego.