

Understanding politics to attain sustainable development



Exploring Sustainable Development
with Dr. Goh Chun Sheng

Malaysia is about to hold its 15th general election (GE15) on Nov 19, 2022. As the current political situation has become highly unpredictable, the country is facing an increasingly uncertain outlook.

However, compared with the past elections, at least according to the author's observation, there seems to be a lack of enthusiasm and motivation among the voters.

Although now voters over 18 will be automatically registered, there is a fear that the turnout rate will be relatively low. The situation is exacerbated by the effect of vote suppression – when casting a vote is too arduous for voters who live far from their registered constituencies.

Prof Wong Chin Huat suggested that Parti Aka Malas Undi ('I'm Lazy to Vote Party') may turn out to be the biggest party, characterising

the people's indifference to politics, or more precisely, despond.

In the past few years, I have encountered a number of people who were passionate about sustainable development but showed no interest, if not disdain, in discussing politics. I was pretty surprised to see such a disconnection.

Politics determines the leadership, the outcome of the decision-making process, and, eventually, the development direction. Neglecting politics is like neglecting the elephant in the room.

We must determine the right course, design sound policies, and ensure effective implementations to achieve sustainable development. Advocates, thinkers, designers, researchers of sustainable development, and all stakeholders will need a basic understanding of politics to bring about change.

However, a systematic inquiry into politics in the discussion of sustainable development is largely missing in our country. Similarly, to the author's knowledge, no political scientists specialised in Malaysia are making comprehensive analyses of sustainable development in the political dimension.

Sustainable development is

about the future: improving, repairing, and protecting our ecological, social, and economic fabric to sustain the long-term prosperity of our human civilisation.

Sustainable development also builds on the past, understanding and critiquing our human behaviour, societal changes, and the impacts that result from these changes. As a layman, I have been learning from my colleagues and self-readings how political science explains power relations, the gap between rich and poor, and social justice – all critical issues that affect the sustainability of our civilisation.

I believe the basic knowledge of the four aspects of politics can be particularly useful.

The first is a fundamental understanding of where power comes from – who are the decision makers, why they get to make decisions, and how decisions are being made. Based on my observation, many people in Malaysia do not know which three major institutions the separation of powers refers to.

It is not uncommon to encounter an ironic situation where there is so much anger, but no one really knows who is to blame, and it ends up with vague accusations of 'ini semua salah xxx' (it's all the fault of xxx). There is obviously a need

for us to learn more about our political institutions and their power relations.

Second, it is also crucial to understand the dynamics of social and political movements. In the past decade, we have seen many advocacies, lobbying, publicity, and policy declarations on climate change. How did these movements form? Who is leading? Where does the money come from? Why do it?

We often hear people (including intellectuals) talking in general terms like 'those people', 'environmentalists', 'big corporations', 'capitalists', 'the US government', 'fake news', 'the western conspiracy', etc. However, the social and political dynamics behind these movements are not straightforward. We also see prejudices, biases, and a lack of capacity (or interest) to understand the sciences (sometimes, it is just about the maths), resulting in actions and decisions that could be ridiculous from a rational point of view. Systematic analyses of these dynamics and how to deal with the various forces will be essential to drive sustainable development.

Third, the function of ideology cannot be ignored. To move towards sustainable development, we will have

to re-examine our way of comprehending the world and possible changes in our societal structure. Unfortunately, this is probably the most obscure part of the entire discussion about sustainable development, at least for Malaysia.

Understanding what it means to change the societal structure requires understanding the complexities of ideology. What is 'capitalism'? 'Neo-liberalism'? 'Socialism'? Such knowledge is the foundation to effectively engage in discussions and debates about the concept of wealth, identities, inequality, social justice, and so on.

The fourth is knowledge about the various political systems. As sustainable development is not just a matter of one country, we will have to consider the different political systems around the world and how they interact with each other. The climate regime complex is probably the best example. We often hear about how the electoral cycle undermines sustainable development policies, with numerous examples from energy to food policies. Politicians tend to focus on short-term effects, which is the exact opposite of the nature of sustainable development.

In kopitiams and mamak stalls or on Facebook and YouTube,

we have seen people lecturing each other about the differences between the Chinese and American systems, linking these to the increase in global food and energy prices. Given the globalised nature of sustainable development, it is inevitable to recognise and account for the differences in the political systems in different countries.

I believe that proper education in politics and governance is essential if we want to meet the real sustainability challenges of the future. Sustainable development is not only about the environment, the economy, or the society, but all three. Its complexity requires knowledge about politics to interpret. The four aspects mentioned above, i.e., the nature of power, social movement, ideology, and political system, are keys to decision-making and policy formulation.

Gaining knowledge of these aspects is essential for realising the changes required for sustainable development.

Dr Goh Chun Sheng is a researcher at Sunway University and Harvard University. His research interests lie within the intersection of bio-economy and nature-based economy, with a special focus on both Malaysian and Indonesian Borneo.

Tasik Biru rep: GPS has better chance of winning Mas Gading



BAU: Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) has a better chance of winning Mas Gading this 15th general election (GE15), said Tasik Biru assemblyman Datu Henry Harry Jinep.

He said despite GPS fielding new face Lidang Disen, he believed GPS' track record as the state government will see a vote swing in favour of the coalition.

"But we will continue to do our work, to tell the people that since GPS won the last year's state election under its own logo, GPS has proven to have brought development and reduced people's burden. And we want the people to continue with us in bringing more development."

"The people now know the difference of what it's like to be under GPS than to be under the opposition. We want to tell the voters in Mas Gading, don't waste your vote away. Instead, vote for a government that takes care of Sarawakians," he told reporters at the Bau Civic Centre on Saturday.

Henry, who is state Deputy Minister of Transport, acted as proposer for Lidang's nomination.

On Lidang, Henry said the 47-year-old is not an unknown figure among Mas Gading



Henry speaks to reporters while Lidang (centre) and Billy look on.

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constituents as he had been aggressively working on the ground in both Tasik Biru and Opar state seats which make up the parliamentary constituency.

He also said that together with Opar assemblyman Billy Sujang, they will together with Lidang canvass for votes and maintain the winning momentum of GPS which had convincingly won

Tasik Biru and Opar in last year's state election.

"I believe with GPS' combined strength in both Tasik Biru and Opar, and our proven track record, GPS can win back Mas Gading," he added.

Meanwhile, Lidang appealed to all voters in Mas Gading to support and vote GPS in this GE15.

"GPS has a proven track record in terms of performance and bringing development. Together with Datu Henry Harry Jinep in Tasik Biru and YB Billy Sujang in Opar, we are working together to return Mas Gading to GPS," he said.



Dr Rundi (front, second left), Tiong (front, third left) and GPS supporters show the 'small heart' gesture at the nomination centre on Saturday.

Dr Rundi calls on S'wakians to vote for a stable govt

BINTULU: The 15th general election is not only a platform for Sarawak voters to choose Member of Parliaments but also an opportunity to vote for a stable government, said Datu Sri Stephen Rundi Utom.

The Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu Sarawak (PBB) senior vice president called on Sarawak people to cast their votes wisely on Nov 19.

He said voters should prioritise stability for Sarawak and Malaysia.

"I appeal to all Sarawakians to help GPS to continue ensuring our rights are protected and fight to achieve a stable government for Malaysia," he said when met by reporters at the Civic Centre here Saturday.

Dr Rundi was present to accompany Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) candidate Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing at the

nomination process for Bintulu parliamentary seat.

He said Tiong, who is PDP president, had shown his dedication through his hard work as Bintulu MP for five terms.

"I call on Bintulu people to continue supporting Datuk Seri Tiong for his sixth term as he has shown an excellent performance. If you don't believe it, go ask the villagers and those people in town here," said Dr Rundi, who is Kemena assemblyman.

Kemena is one of four state constituencies under Bintulu. The others are Samalaju, Jepak and Tanjung Batu, all of which are represented by GPS.

Meanwhile, Tiong had called on all people to work together for the sake of Bintulu.

The incumbent is being challenged by Chiew Chan Yew of Pakatan Harapan and Duke Janteng of Perikatan Nasional.

One-term report card proof of my commitment to Sibuti — Lukanisman

MIRI: Lukanisman Awang Sauni believes that his one-term report card as MP is proof of his commitment of bringing continuous development to Sibuti parliamentary constituency.

In stating this, the Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) Youth deputy chief is also ready for any open debate to be called by his challengers throughout the 14 days of campaigning, should there be any issue arising that requires further clarification.

"I'm ready to provide a come to



When approached Zulhaidah, also PKR Women Sarawak chief and PKR Sibuti chairperson, said she would strive to create a new political landscape in Sarawak.

"Women are the pillar of the political change in Malaysia, as the majority of voters are women."

"I will continue my agenda of fighting for the installation and improvement of basic facilities and infrastructures in Sibuti, highlighting the dilapidated school, and addressing

LUBOK ANTU: Parti Sarawak Bersatu (PSB) candidate for Lubok Antu Dr Johnal Rayong Ngipa believes his style of being very close to the people will win the hearts of voters.

The Engkilili assemblyman said the best way to serve the people is to constantly meet them, adding he has always been an elected representative who does that.

"Many people not only in my Engkilili constituency but in Batang Ai constituency as well know that I am a very responsible

Ai make up the Lubok Antu parliamentary constituency.

For this election, Rayong is up against Roy Ginkoi (Gabungan Parti Sarawak), Lubok Antu incumbent Jugah Muayang (Perikatan Nasional) and Langga Lias (Parti Keadilan Rakyat).

Rayong added that if the people want a capable elected representative with a good track record, who also represents a local Sarawakian party, they should look no further than him.

"I know for sure what the

"I'm ready to provide a space to interact. At least the people can see my abilities."

"Also, I assure all that I would never resort to character assassination. Instead, I will focus on what Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) can offer through its candidate, and also their performance at grassroots level," he said when met at



(From left) Lukanisman, Zulhaidah and Bobby pose for the camera after the announcement of GE15 candidates for Sibuti.

Bekenu Community Hall near here Saturday, which was the nomination centre for the 15th general election (GE15) candidates for Sibuti.

Lukanisman's challengers are Zulhaidah Suboh of Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), and Bobby William of Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS).

school issues, and addressing women's welfare matters."

Bobby, who is PBDS president, described himself as 'the voice of Sibuti constituents, particularly the Dayak community'.

"Besides aiming to end the water supply woes in Sibuti, I would want to give my fullest towards providing the best for the people in Sibuti," he said.

electd representative.

"I never fail to meet people who need my help, so I guess I am the right person to become the next Lubok Antu MP," he told The Borneo Post on Saturday after his candidacy was confirmed.

Rayong, who is making his parliamentary election debut, has been Engkilili assemblyman since 2006. Engkilili and Batang

people of Lubok Antu want. They need their incomes to be better. While other parties promise things such as good infrastructure for Lubok Antu, the first thing I will fight for is to improve is their livelihood.

"For the people in Lubok Antu, what is the use of having good infrastructure if they don't have enough to eat," he said.

