

PERSPECTIVE

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Malaysia's Out-of-Sync Federal and State Elections: The Good, the Bad, and the Untimely

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Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim (centre) speaking at a press conference after the release of state election results at the World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur on 12 August 2023. Malaysians in six states went to the polls on 12 August to vote for state assembly members in elections widely seen as a barometer of support for Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's unity government. (Photo by Mohd RASFAN / AFP).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Elections in Malaysia are held at the national and state levels, and in holding these concurrently, disruptions and costs have been reduced.
- As with the federal government, state governments can decide when to hold their elections. In the past, when Barisan Nasional (BN) was in power at the centre and in most states at the same time, this discretion was largely discounted.
- Following BN's fall from power in 2018 and the country's political context becoming more fluid, state government elections have been increasingly held out of sync with federal elections. In the last four years, state polls have been held on six separate occasions.
- Concerned about rising costs, prolonged campaigning as well as implications for the country's political stability, some have proposed clustering state elections or ensuring that they are held alongside national polls.
- There are pros and cons to such arrangements. Concurrent polls can be cheaper, encourage higher turnout rates, and reduce the length of campaign seasons. Conversely, state leaders would be forced to hold elections at times not of their choosing, and state-level issues could be overshadowed by national ones.
- The challenges inherent in pursuing such a reform in Malaysia are considerable and would involve amending the federal constitution, as well as the various state constitutions.
- Consequently, it is likely that the Unity Government will head into the next electoral season under the current arrangement. The Sabah and Sarawak state elections are due in 2025 and 2026 and can be held without much concern for the current coalition arrangements.
- In contrast, the Melaka and Johor elections will be crucial barometers for the Unity Government. Due by late 2026 and mid-2027 respectively, they may expose internal weaknesses in the run-up to the general election due some 9-12 months later.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has a multi-levelled political system, which is comprised of a federal government and 13 state counterparts – all of which hold their own elections.¹ Influenced by the British Westminster system, the federal government holds elections for parliament – and the state governments for their assemblies – at least once every five years. With the exception of Sarawak, which has run on its own electoral cycle since 1963, elections for the federal and state governments have traditionally been held simultaneously.²

This arrangement has been a tradition, rather than a result of any specific legislation. According to the Constitution, elections at the federal and state levels are called by the King or Sultans and Governors on the advice of the elected leadership in parliament or respective state assembly. Given this, state leaders have the prerogative to call for elections at any time, independently of the federal government.³ Elections at both the national and state levels are organized and overseen by the Election Commission, whose establishment is stipulated by the Federal Constitution.⁴

What minimized dispersion in election dates in the past was the fact that, up until 2018, the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition was in power at the federal level and also in most states. Consequently, elections were held at the behest of the BN leadership and taken with national interests at the forefront. While BN state leaders may or may not have been in agreement with the timing, internal party mechanisms served to ensure compliance. BN state leaders often aspired to subsequent national cabinet positions and were reluctant to defy orders from national leaders which could compromise their career trajectories. Furthermore, recalcitrant menteri besar or chief ministers could be toppled by votes of no confidence passed by BN assemblypersons.⁵

In recent years, this homogenizing influence has lost force. In 2008, Barisan Nasional was beaten unprecedentedly in five state governments. In 2018, BN was defeated at the national level and in most states for the first time. Following a two-year interlude, BN returned to federal power – but in a subordinate position in the Perikatan Nasional and then the Unity Government groupings. The relative decline in BN's power at both federal and state levels allows more autonomy for state leaders to prioritize local considerations when calling for elections.

Out-of-cycle elections can occur for several reasons. First, state governments can rise and fall due to local-level machinations. Motions of confidence and no-confidence can be passed in state assemblies, and – similar to the Sheraton Move in February 2020 that led to the fall of the Pakatan Harapan administration – local coalitions can come undone. Thus, the precipitous Sabah election in 2020 arose due to a faction of the ruling coalition crossing the floor to join the opposition. Deprived of his majority, then-chief minister Shafie Apdal opted to call an election.⁶ In a similar move, the 2021 Melaka election was held because a group of UMNO representatives withdrew their support for the sitting administration, thereby denying it a majority in the state assembly.⁷ The Johor election in early 2022 was ostensibly called because the death of an assemblyperson meant the sitting coalition commanded only the slimmest of majorities.⁸

Second, elections can be held out-of-cycle when the federal government decides to hold its own polls early. National-level leaders often seek to hold elections in circumstances that are favourable to them, such as following budget launches or when economic tailwinds are particularly favourable. Of course, national-level political dynamics may also push for earlier polls. While the fifteenth general election could have been held as late as in September 2023, in October 2022 the Ismail Sabri-led administration ceded to pressure from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) to ride on the momentum generated by the Melaka and Johor state elections, maximize the political bounty from the October budget release, and avoid the worst of the monsoon season.⁹

However, the November 2022 date meant that state governments also holding their polls then would have effectively lost almost a full year of their terms. Despite the recommendation by the Prime Minister Ismail Sabri that all eligible state governments hold their elections along with the national government, only the BN-led state governments of Perlis, Pahang, and Perak opted to do so.¹⁰

Conversely, states led by the opposition grouping Pakatan Harapan (PH) and the Islamist party, Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) opted to go to their full terms.¹¹ Among other reasons, party leaders argued that they needed to prepare for the year-end flooding season.¹² Despite being led by different coalitions, the leaders of these six states were able to arrive upon a mutually-agreed schedule to dissolve their assemblies.¹³ Following this, the Electoral Commission established 12 August as the common date for elections in Negri Sembilan, Selangor, Penang, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu.¹⁴

Faced with the cost of holding elections more frequently, as well as the potential for instability, there have been calls for measures to make the political system more structured.¹⁵ There are arguments in favour of, and against simultaneous elections. While relatively few countries have mandated simultaneous polls and some actively discourage them, this reform is currently being debated in India, for example. This country's constitutional similarities to Malaysia and the related discussions illustrate the complexities inherent in pursuing such a reform.

As Malaysia transitions towards a more dynamic and fluid political context, this issue will continue to simmer. This Perspective examines this issue in four sections. Following this introduction, the second will look at the costs and benefits of synchronous and asynchronous elections. The third section will look at the experience of other countries. The final section will look at how such a reform could work for Malaysia going forward.

COSTS AND BENEFITS

There are theoretical arguments for and against holding simultaneous elections.

The first argument in favour of simultaneous elections is cost. Holding national and state elections on the same day means that the election workers, physical infrastructure, and associated logistics are only used once. For example, the August 2023 state elections cost an estimated RM 420 million.¹⁶ Had they been held alongside their national equivalent in November 2022, they would have added little to the RM 1.1 billion budget earmarked for those polls.¹⁷ It is also important to note that the costs involved in organizing the elections are borne

by the federal government. This means that state governments actually wield the discretion of when to hold elections but do not incur the associated costs.¹⁸

The second argument concerns political participation. National polls usually have higher rates of voter turnout than their state-level equivalents. Thus, holding elections simultaneously would increase the proportion of people voting for their respective state leaders.¹⁹ This issue is of particular importance to outstation or overseas residents, who need to travel back to their constituencies to vote. Holding simultaneous elections would increase the probability of them voting for both levels of government, rather than requiring them to return more than once over a five-year cycle.

Analysts also argue that holding national and state elections simultaneously would concentrate political activity to one specific period, allowing life to return to normal soon after. Despite the Unity Government's large parliamentary majority, many argued that the August 2023 state polls constituted a de facto referendum on the new administration. Consequently, much bandwidth and political capital were consumed in preparing for these polls, held a mere nine months after the November 2022 election. Furthermore, frequent elections, persistent campaigning, and prolonged periods of political uncertainty can undermine public trust in polls altogether.

Nonetheless, there are valid counterarguments to such an arrangement. First, it can be argued that forcing state governments to align their electoral cycles with national ones goes against the spirit of federalism, which seeks to incorporate different political, cultural, and social aspirations within one framework. Additionally, such a measure would deny autonomy and agency to state leaders. As with their national equivalents, states have their own political rhythms and dynamics, and a specific state administration may have valid reasons for holding polls at another time. Furthermore, holding elections simultaneously would reduce the salience of state-level political issues, as attention to national-level issues and debates would be prioritized.²⁰ Last, making politicians face more frequent electoral tests increases their accountability to voters.²¹

There is an additional argument that holding smaller subsets of elections makes the logistics more manageable. This is because the election machinery is not overly stretched and can focus on specific polls in different parts of the country.²² This argument has more traction for demographically and geographically large polities, as large numbers of officials need to be mobilized and immense logistical challenges addressed all at once.²³

Asynchronous elections can also provide crucial information for national leaders. Thus, state or provincial elections held in the run-up to national polls can yield crucial information for party leaders and strategists. Results can be used as a barometer for prevailing opinions and support for flagship policies. In addition, electoral weaknesses and swing voters can be identified to allow more focussed messaging during national campaigns. However, these elections can also create instability should support levels in key states drop or exacerbate existing electoral vulnerabilities.

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Despite the theoretical advantages to holding concurrent elections, there are relatively few countries that currently have this electoral arrangement. South Africa and Sweden are two notable cases where national and subnational elections are held at the same time.

In South Africa, the electoral arrangements were the result of protracted negotiations between different ethnically-based parties that were concerned about issues such as voter turnout and representativity. The end result was an agreement that national and provincial elections would be held simultaneously in order to enable out-station voters to return to vote, but that voters would use different voting forms for each election in order to underline their different purpose.²⁴

In Sweden, simultaneous elections have been credited with the country's high turnout rates, particularly for subnational elections. That said, there have been calls to separate the elections in order for more media coverage of local issues. This is due to the perception that national-level issues tend to dominate elections.²⁵

Most federal countries prefer to hold national and subnational elections on different dates and, in some cases, follow distinct electoral cycles. Australia and India are useful comparators for Malaysia, as they are both federal systems with a central government and state counterparts. Indeed, these two countries' federal systems influenced the eventual structure adopted in Malaysia upon its independence. The Reid Commission, charged with designing Malaysia's federal system, had constitutional experts from the United Kingdom, Australia, India, and Pakistan.²⁶

Turning to Australia, its electoral system is specifically designed to ensure that federal and state elections do not coincide. Federal elections for the lower house are on a three-year cycle although, following the Westminster tradition, parliament can be dissolved and elections held earlier than this.²⁷ In contrast, most state elections have a fixed four-year cycle, with stipulated dates and days of the week when these elections must take place.²⁸

While some states have held elections on the same day, federal elections have never been held concurrent with a state election.²⁹ There is, at present, no discussion about moving towards simultaneous elections in Australia, although extending federal government terms to four years is being debated.³⁰ Constitutional amendments are onerous to organize and require the bill to be passed in parliament and then decided via a national referendum.³¹

India offers another instructive comparator. Being a federal system like Malaysia, the Indian constitution provides state governments the authority to hold their own elections. During the first two decades following independence, the Congress party was in power at the centre and in most states and all shared the same electoral cycle. However, after 1967, elections began to be held out of sync, as first several state governments and then the central government dissolved early.³² Today, with the federal government and 30 state and territory governments holding their elections, polls are a frequent event.

In a bid to promote national unity, reduce time and resources spent on campaigning, as well as lessen administrative costs, the Modi administration has been promoting ‘One Nation, One Election’. The arguments have focussed on cost efficiency, reducing the time spent on elections and campaigns, lessening demands on the armed forces who are mobilized to ensure safety and security, and reducing the salience of polarising discourse during campaigns.³³ The biggest pushback has come from state- or regionally-based political parties who argue that this measure would lessen the time and importance spent on local issues, and voters would be encouraged to vote the same way for national and state leaders. Others such as Congress leader Rahul Gandhi have argued that it goes against the country’s formation as a ‘Union of States’.³⁴

Beyond the theoretical reasons for or against this reform, the practical challenges inherent in this reform are formidable. Homogenizing national and state elections would require curtailing the tenures of more recently elected state administrations and lengthening the terms of other administrations that had been elected earlier. However, while this could be done as a one-off exercise, unless the legislation bestowing autonomy to the state governments to call for their elections is amended, there is nothing to prevent them from reverting to their own cycles if they so wished.

Ensuring a more permanent arrangement would involve adding an elaborate framework of rules. These would govern how state administrations can be dissolved, as well as provide for the frequent use of President’s Rule or Emergency powers by the central government to run states for the intervening periods between when their assemblies are dissolved and when the next scheduled elections take place.³⁵

OPTIONS FOR MALAYSIA

How, then, does the scenario look for Malaysia?

In the short term, it is unlikely that the Unity Government administration will be able to persuade the leaders of the different states to adopt timings for elections that are against their interests. Internal party hierarchy can influence state administrations run by Pakatan Harapan, given that this coalition is at the core of the sitting government. However, given that it is not yet clear whether BN will remain a coalition partner with PH going into the next national election,³⁶ it is likely that BN will decide election dates for the states it controls based on its interests alone. This is even more likely for states run by the opposition coalition, Perikatan Nasional.

Consequently, the Unity Government has two options for addressing this issue. The first would be an ambitious structural reform along the lines being debated in India. This would require some amendment to the timing of a national election, perhaps along the lines of a fixed term. Such a reform would require a constitutional amendment. The Unity Government ostensibly has more than a two-thirds majority in parliament which could be used to pass this measure. However, this would only apply to the federal government. Amendments to provisions surrounding the dissolution of legislative assemblies are stipulated in the various states’ constitutions and changes would also require amendments to these foundational documents.³⁷ For any reform of this nature, it is likely that extensive preparation would be necessary, including studying electoral processes elsewhere.

In addition, discussion of political reform is currently more focussed on separating the offices of the attorney general and public prosecutor, as well as the extension of citizenship to children born overseas to Malaysian mothers.³⁸ Consequently, it is highly unlikely that substantial changes to the electoral system will be implemented ahead of the next round of elections.

This then leaves the more organic approach of having the state elections follow their current cycle. The table below has the dates of the most recent election for Malaysia and for the thirteen states, along with the latest date on which parliament or the respective state assemblies can dissolve. This date is five years from the day of the first parliamentary or assembly sitting. Following dissolution, elections need to be held within the subsequent 60 days.

State/national	Date of last election	Latest date for dissolution
Sabah	26 September 2020	8 October 2025
Melaka	20 November 2021	27 December 2026
Sarawak	18 December 2021	14 February 2027
Johor	12 March 2022	21 April 2027
Malaysia	19 November 2022	19 December 2027
Perlis	19 November 2022	19 December 2027
Perak	19 November 2022	19 December 2027
Pahang	19 November 2022	19 December 2027
Negri Sembilan	12 August 2023	26 September 2028
Selangor	12 August 2023	19 September 2028
Penang	12 August 2023	29 August 2028
Kedah	12 August 2023	25 September 2028
Kelantan	12 August 2023	5 September 2028
Terengganu	12 August 2023	24 September 2028

Looking ahead, Sabah and Sarawak are among the earliest state elections to be held. The political configuration of these two states is quite different from the peninsula and the results of the elections are likely to be relatively self-contained. For Sabah, it is quite likely that the eventual ruling coalition at the state level will seek to align itself with the ruling coalition at the federal level. For Sarawak, past trends indicate that the coalition in power at the state level, Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), is likely to remain in power. GPS is also a current member of the Unity Government and it is unlikely that there would be a reconfiguration of this relationship so far ahead of national polls.

This is not the case for Melaka and Johor, whose elections are due roughly one year and eight months ahead of the next general election. These two states are particularly important for UMNO, lying in the southern part of the peninsula, which is one of the last redoubts of Malaysia's grand old party. Of the two, Johor is the most important, given the party's founding in the state and traditional strong reputation of people from the state at the party's apex.³⁹

There will be several dynamics at the forefront when UMNO party strategists plot the ideal date for the various state elections. The first will be the popularity of UMNO party president Zahid Hamidi particularly among UMNO grassroots members. In Melaka and Johor, the party is exceptionally disciplined and able to mobilize contingents of supporters to turn up to vote.

However, should Zahid's leadership be contested or should there be signs of unrest within the party, the turnout levels could be affected. Indeed, party members could even use these polls as a way of signalling their discontent. An upset in one of these states would affect UMNO's momentum in the run-up to the national election.

Conversely, should the UMNO leadership feel confident, it could contemplate holding the Melaka, Johor, and even the Perak and Pahang state elections together. This would cost the latter states almost a year of their terms and would represent a huge gamble for the party. That said, solid wins across these states would put UMNO in a very solid position ahead, both of national polls and of inter-coalition bargaining in preparation for national polls.

Another option would be to delay elections in some of these states to cluster them. The way to do this would be to declare an Emergency in the states running on an earlier electoral cycle. This was done most recently in 2021, when the Sarawak state election was delayed from June to December 2021, due to the COVID pandemic.⁴⁰ That said, a plausible reason would need to be given, and consent obtained from both the King and the Prime Minister. This, in turn, would require delicate inter-coalition negotiation between PH and BN.

Relatedly, the other determining factor would be the relationship between PH and BN as they plan their electoral strategies for the next general election. Will they contest jointly or separately? From PH's point of view, the Melaka and Johor elections would be held uncomfortably close to national polls if they were to run their full terms. However, any move to bring the national election forward to coincide with the elections in these states would entail sacrificing almost a year of the current term. This is unlikely.

Another option would be for the current schedule to run its course, with the Sabah, Melaka, Sarawak and Johor elections taking place in that order. Then, if the Unity Government and particularly Pakatan Harapan is feeling confident, they can bring the Penang, Selangor, and Negeri Sembilan elections forward and hold them alongside the federal election. This would allow them to accumulate political capital and begin the second term on the front foot. Given that Perikatan Nasional is solidly in power in Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu, there will be little that the Unity Government can do to influence the timing of their state elections. However, in reducing the number of states holding their elections just after national polls, the 'mid-term' effect on the sitting administration (should it be elected) would be reduced. Conversely, should Pakatan Harapan feel unsure about its chances at the federal level, it may seek to allow the elections in the states it currently controls to proceed to their full term, thus spreading the risk across two sets of polls. It is also possible that different PH component parties have different preferences regarding the timing of the polls in the states they control.⁴¹

The end of BN's dominance in 2018 has had multiple effects on Malaysia's political system. The reduction of the coalition's influence at both the federal and state levels has uncovered the underlying autonomy of state governments. Given the challenges inherent in adding more structure and predictability to the timing of elections, the most likely scenario is that out-of-cycle polls will remain a characteristic of Malaysia's political system for the foreseeable future. Political leaders will continue to cross the river by feeling the stones and seeking to determine the direction of the wind. Now, however, the wind blows from different directions.

ENDNOTES

¹ Malaysia also has three federal territories and local governments. These, however, do not hold elections.

² While Sabah's electoral cycle has converged with the other states, it also followed its own electoral cycle up until 2004.

³ Shad Saleem Faruqi. *Document of Destiny: The Constitution of the Federation of Malaysia*. Petaling Jaya: Star Publications 2008, pp. 440, 617.

⁴ <https://www.spr.gov.my/en/spr-info/history>

⁵ F.E. Hutchinson, 'Centre-State Relations and Intra-Party Dynamics in Malaysia: the Case of Johor', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 23 (2), 2015.

⁶ <https://fulcrum.sg/political-turmoil-in-sabah-attack-of-the-kataks/>

⁷ <https://fulcrum.sg/the-melaka-state-election-unwanted-unwieldy-and-unpredictable/>

⁸ An alternative explanation is that the national UMNO leadership was seeking to generate momentum to hold early polls at the national level. <https://fulcrum.sg/elections-in-johor-needlessly-nigh/>

⁹ F.E. Hutchinson, 'Malaysia in 2022: Further Towards Competitive Coalition Politics', in *Southeast Asian Affairs 2023*, edited by Hoang Thi Ha and Daljit Singh, Singapore: ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2023.

¹⁰ <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/malaysia-pahang-perlis-dissolve-state-assemblies-state-polls-ge15-3007651>

¹¹ <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2022/10/17/pahang-perlis-and-perak-state-assemblies-dissolved-for-simultaneous-state-polls-with-ge15/34085>

¹² <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/st-explains-all-you-need-to-know-about-the-malaysia-state-elections>

¹³ <https://prn.bernama.com/news-en.php?id=2203889>

¹⁴ <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/07/927492/ec-set-aug-12-polling-day-state-election-six-states>

¹⁵ <https://www.nst.com.my/news/politics/2023/08/943289/analysts-practical-hold-state-general-elections-simultaneously>

¹⁶ <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/07/927500/state-elections-cost-rm420-million-says-ec>

¹⁷ https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2022/09/25/elections-commission-ge15-to-cost-taxpayers-rm11b/29992#google_vignette

¹⁸ The budget for the Election Commission comes from the federally-provided Consolidated Fund. https://www.cljlaw.com/files/bills/pdf/2022/MY_FS_BIL_2022_47.pdf

¹⁹ <https://www.nst.com.my/news/politics/2023/08/943289/analysts-practical-hold-state-general-elections-simultaneously>

²⁰ However, there is the counterargument that, at least in Malaysia, given the relatively small budgets given to states and their reduced responsibilities, inevitably any state election becomes a national referendum. <https://fulcrum.sg/malysias-2023-state-elections-so-much-fuss-for-so-little-work/>

²¹ For a nice overview of the various advantages and disadvantages to these arrangements for different levels of government and stakeholders, please consult A.S. George, 'One Nation, One Election: An Analysis of the Pros and Cons of Implementing Simultaneous Elections in India', *Partners Universal International Research Journal*, (02) 3, 2023.

²² <https://swarajyamag.com/politics/2024-elections-an-opportunity-for-simultaneous-polls-to-loksabha-and-state-assemblies-ex-cec-rawat>

²³ India needs to hold its elections in a phased manner for this reason. The 2024 parliamentary election will take place in seven phases, from April 19 and June 1. https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/india-election-2024-what-you-need-to-know?utm_campaign=STPicks

²⁴ <https://hsf.org.za/publications/hsf-briefs/the-south-african-electoral-system>; Tom Lodge, 'How the South African Electoral System was Negotiated', *Journal of African Elections* 2003 (1).

²⁵ <https://www.informationsverige.se/en/om-sverige/att-paverka-i-sverige/det-svenska-valsystemet.html> ; A. Lindstrom 'Various faces of localized voting in Sweden', *Local Government Studies* 47 (1).

²⁶ For example, McKell, the Australian, had been Governor-General of Australia and a cabinet member on several occasions. His expertise fed into the section on the workings of the Malayan federal system. Malik from India drafted text on fundamental liberties, which was influenced by his country's constitution. JM Fernando. *The Making of the Malayan Constitution*, 2002, Kuala Lumpur, MBRAS. pp. 109-112.

²⁷ <https://peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/having-your-say/elections-and-voting/federal-elections>

²⁸ <https://elections.nsw.gov.au/elections/how-voting-works/voting-in-new-south-wales/how-does-a-state-election-work>; <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/find-legal-answers/hot-topics-voting-and-elections/elections-australia>

²⁹ <https://australianpolitics.com/elections/dates/federal-state-election-dates-since-1901>

³⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/jan/03/anthony-albanese-four-year-election-terms-australia>

³¹ Passed in House and then Senate or passed twice in either the House or Senate.

³² B. Debroy and K. Desai, 'Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The "What", "Why" and "How"', 2017.

³³ <https://spmrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Note-on-Simultaneous-Elections.pdf>

³⁴ <https://thediplomat.com/2023/09/with-one-nation-one-election-call-modi-government-intensifies-efforts-to-centralize-power/>

³⁵ Debroy and Desai, 'Analysis of Simultaneous Elections'.

³⁶ <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/694756>

³⁷ For example, Provision 23 (2) of the Johor constitution states that the authority to dissolve that state's assembly lies with the Sultan. The analogous legislation for Kedah is Provision 53. Legal Research Board, *Constitutions of the States of Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: International Law Book Services, 1998. There is an argument that in areas where federal and state law diverge, the federal government can intervene. However, it is debatable whether this gives the federal government carte blanche to do so, or whether this only refers to areas where the two levels of government have overlapping responsibilities or where it is stipulated that the federal government can do so. There is one potential procedural shortcut to this. Should an Emergency be declared, the federal government is able to intervene in matters pertaining to state governments and can even amend state constitutions, as was done in Sarawak in 1966. Shad Saleem Faruqi, *Document of Destiny*, pp. 167-163.

³⁸ <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/694756> ;

<https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2024/03/26/family-frontiers-malaysian-mothers-in-anguish-after-govts-citizenship-amendment-wont-help-their-existing-overseas-born-children/125605>

³⁹ F.E. Hutchinson, 'Malaysia's Independence Leaders and the Legacies of State Formation under British Rule', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 25 (1) 2015.

⁴⁰ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/malaysia-extends-emergency-rule-sarawak-state-stop-polls-2021-07-31/>

⁴¹ <https://www.malaysianow.com/news/2022/10/14/the-case-against-holding-separate-state-elections>

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