



TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

EXPLAINING PAS's DOMINANCE IN KELANTAN

Azmil Tayeb

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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Explaining PAS's Dominance in Kelantan

Azmil Tayeb

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Islamic political party Pan-Malaysia Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, PAS) has governed the state of Kelantan on the northeastern coast of peninsular Malaysia for most of Malaysia's post-independence history.
- Until 2020, PAS functioned as an opposition party at the federal level, going against the government led by its long-time nemesis the politically stronger and better resourced United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). The David-versus-Goliath story has made PAS's longevity and durability in Kelantan all the more impressive for having endured decades of marginalization by the federal government. This has to an extent led to the state's laggard developmental growth and poor socio-economic indicators.
- PAS has often been portrayed by the mainstream media as an anachronistic and extremist party ill-equipped to cope with, much less solve, the myriad challenges faced by modern society.
- Notwithstanding PAS's shortcomings, this article provides an analysis of the factors that have allowed the party to remain in power in Kelantan for so long. It argues that after winning back Kelantan from UMNO in 1990, PAS transformed itself into a modern, well-oiled political machine, particularly when it comes to socializing its agenda to the people of Kelantan and reaching out to many out-of-state Kelantan voters.

Explaining PAS's Dominance in Kelantan

Azmil Tayeb¹

INTRODUCTION

The 2018 general elections saw an unprecedented change in Malaysian politics when the then opposition Coalition of Hope (Pakatan Harapan, PH) took control of the federal government and disrupted the six-decade continuous rule of the National Front (Barisan Nasional, BN) coalition. The so-called political tsunami swept across peninsular Malaysia but stopped short of the east coast states of Kelantan and Terengganu. The Pan-Malaysia Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, PAS), which contested as a third force, managed to strengthen its hold over Kelantan and wrest Terengganu away from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). This article explains why PAS has been dominant in Kelantan, not just stemming the Peninsula-wide wave of change in 2018, but also durably resisting the rule of the UMNO-led BN federal government for decades as an opposition-controlled state.

PAS has long been known as an ideologically driven regional party since its political influence barely extends beyond its strongholds along the northeastern coast and in northern states of peninsular Malaysia such as Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah. These states provide a fertile ground for PAS to mobilize and gain support as they are overwhelmingly Malay-Muslim and are culturally conservative with deeply rooted Islamic traditions. The population of Kelantan, for example, is ninety-six per cent Muslim. It is also a state renowned for its Islamic learning and

¹ Azmil Tayeb is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Malaysia Studies Programme, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

for producing Islamic scholars (ulama)—so much so that it is dubbed the *Serambi Mekah* (Verandah of Mecca). Malay and Islamic identities, therefore, play a central role in politics in Kelantan. Political parties of all stripes contending in Kelantan must employ language and rhetoric imbued with Malay and Islamic overtones—both are often tightly intertwined—in order for them to be taken seriously by voters. But as we shall see later in this article, simply projecting one’s Islamic credibility is not enough to entice voters to one’s side, although PAS is certainly good at doing that. More than simply a strong Islamic image, it is PAS’s long-entrenched position in the communities, its well-organized machinery, and extensive political education and outreach efforts that have helped it govern Kelantan for the most part of Malaysia’s post-independence history.

The article is divided into four sections. Section one contains the historical background of sociopolitical dynamics in Kelantan. Much of what takes place currently in Kelantan, especially the political feud between PAS and UMNO, can be traced to its past. Section two discusses the stellar electoral achievements of PAS in 2018, when it won an overwhelming majority of Kelantan’s state legislative assembly and a number of parliamentary seats, bucking the trend seen elsewhere in the country—except, that is, in Sarawak, where former BN component parties now make up the Alliance of Sarawak Parties (Gabungan Parti Sarawak, GPS), another regional political kingmaker like PAS. The section also looks at how PAS navigated the reconfigured post-2018 political landscape during the twenty-two-month rule of the PH government. As a third force, PAS at this time was torn between supporting UMNO as part of the Malay-Islam-centric National Concord (Muafakat Nasional, MN) and becoming amenable to the then PH government, who put a stop to the mistreatment of the Kelantan state government by the federal government. Section three delves into PAS’s partnership in the current National Alliance (Perikatan Nasional, PN), the coalition that took over the federal government in March 2020 after the infamous Sheraton Move. For the second time in its history, PAS has managed to be part of the federal government, which has transformed the nature of Kelantan’s relations with the federal government from antagonistic to mutually supportive. Finally, section four analyses PAS’s strength in Kelantan,

the challenges it faces from other political parties—namely, UMNO and Amanah—and its current alliance with fellow PN component party Bersatu.

OVERVIEW OF PAS IN KELANTAN (1951–2018)

To understand the present-day political dynamics in Kelantan, particularly the bitter rivalry between PAS and UMNO, we need to reach into history to comprehend why an alliance between the two parties cannot be easily achieved. PAS was founded in 1951 by an ulama faction within UMNO that argued the party was not Islamic enough. Interestingly, it was not a bitter divorce as PAS members were still allowed to keep their UMNO membership.² It was only during the tenure of its third president (1956 to mid-1960s), Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, a left-wing anti-colonial Kelantanese, that PAS began to carve a distinct oppositional stance towards UMNO. The new face of PAS served the party well in the 1959 general elections, when it won thirteen parliamentary seats and took over the state governments in Kelantan and Terengganu.³ When Burhanuddin was imprisoned in the mid-1960s under the draconian Internal Security Act for allegedly collaborating with Indonesia during the *Konfrontasi* conflict, the leadership mantle of PAS was passed to Asri Muda, another Kelantanese.⁴

Asri Muda was everything that Burhanuddin Al-Helmy was not: an anti-socialist Malay nationalist. He became the Chief Minister of

² Farish Noor, *The Malaysian Islamic Party PAS, 1951–2013: Islamism in a Mottled Nation* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), pp. 36–46.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 47–65.

⁴ The *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) started when the Indonesian government reacted to the formation of Malaysia in 1963 by trying to destabilize the new union, predominantly in Sabah and Sarawak, through bombing sorties, low-level skirmishes, cross-border raids, and various subterfuges. See J.A.C. Mackie, *Konfrontasi: The Indonesia-Malaysia Dispute, 1963–1966* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1974).

Kelantan in 1964 and held on to the position for the next ten years. In January 1973, Asri officially announced that PAS would join the BN-UMNO coalition as the country was gearing up for the 1974 general elections. Many PAS members were not happy with the decision and made their anger known. They voted for non-BN parties and, as a result, PAS did not perform as well as it had in previous general elections, winning only eleven parliamentary seats in contrast to UMNO's sixty-two.⁵

The dismal electoral result saw PAS sharing power with a much stronger and emboldened UMNO in a lopsided relationship. The now strained alliance between PAS and UMNO took a turn for the worse during the Chief Minister dispute as UMNO Kelantan fielded its own candidate for the position against Asri Muda. UMNO's candidate, Mohamad Nasir, prevailed, and Asri subsequently pulled PAS out of BN in December 1977. The new Chief Minister then launched an investigation into Asri's financial dealings while he was in office. Asri saw the investigation as a political witch hunt and tried to call for a vote of no confidence against Mohamad Nasir in the state legislature. The motion failed but the political crisis prompted the federal government to declare a state of emergency in Kelantan. In the 1978 general elections, PAS was back again as an opposition party but this time it did even worse than in 1974 by only winning five parliamentary seats, and more devastatingly, lost the Kelantan state government to UMNO. PAS subsequently had to wait twelve years before it could wrest Kelantan away from UMNO.

In the 1980s, a new breed of leader began to assert greater control within PAS. These leaders were ulamas (religious scholars), trained mainly in Pakistan and the Middle East. They steered PAS in a more puritanical direction, which sharpened the party's rivalry with the perceivably secular UMNO. The competition between PAS and UMNO had by now moved beyond the realm of politics into matters of faith and religious authenticity as they both tried to "out-Islamize" each other. PAS

⁵ Farish Noor, *The Malaysian Islamic Party PAS*, p. 88.

labelled UMNO supporters as “kafirs” (infidels), while UMNO called PAS supporters backward religious extremists. When PAS took over the Kelantan state government in 1990, it immediately issued orders to shut nightclubs, cinemas and even snooker clubs (purportedly for gambling).⁶ Traditional cultural practices such as Mak Yong, Main Puteri and Menora dances were temporarily banned because of their “un-Islamic” elements, but this ban was later lifted as long as these cultural practices adhered to the state’s syariah-compliant guidelines.⁷ At the same time, the PAS state government also accommodated the needs of the small non-Muslim (mostly Chinese and Siamese) community by allowing pork and alcohol to be sold within the Chinatown neighbourhood of Kota Bharu and granting permission for Buddhist temple construction, among other concessions.⁸

From 1990 until 2013, Kelantan was led by the late Nik Aziz Nik Mat, a Deobandi and Al-Azhar-trained religious scholar.⁹ He was known for his openness to working with non-Muslims and with secular political parties such as the DAP and PSM, as exemplified by the now defunct Barisan

⁶ Nor Fazlina Abdul Rahim, “Tiga dekad tiada pawagam di Kelantan”, *Berita Harian*, 4 April 2019, <https://www.bharian.com.my/kolumnis/2019/04/548659/tiga-dekad-tiada-pawagam-di-kelantan> (accessed 10 October 2022).

⁷ Zurairi AR, “Kelantan Lifts Mak Yong Ban after Two Decades, but Insists Performances Must Be Shariah-Compliant”, *Malay Mail*, 25 September 2019, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/09/25/kelantan-lifts-mak-yong-ban-after-two-decades-but-insists-performances-must/1794202> (accessed 10 October 2022).

⁸ Interview with Nik Baharom Nik Abdullah, Council member, Kota Bharu City Council, 8 January 2020, Kota Bharu.

⁹ The Deoband movement and its attendant seminary, Dar al-‘Ulum, began in 1866 in India. It is puritanical and reformist in orientation and seeks to purify Islam of practices it deems “un-Islamic”, such as idolizing saints and visits to graves, among others. Its schools gained global notoriety in the early 2000s for producing many of the Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. Brannon D. Ingram, *Revival from Below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018).

Alternatif (1999–2004) and Pakatan Rakyat (2008–15) coalitions.¹⁰ Nik Aziz was a believer in the transcendental nature of Islam that focuses on the Muslim *ummah* (community), and to him the racial politics practised in Malaysia is a form of *assobiyah* (tribalism), which goes against the real teachings of Islam and therefore should be dismantled.

When he passed away in 2015, it did not take long for PAS to change its orientation from one of inclusiveness to one of exclusion. During the party's 61st Annual Congress (*Muktamar Tahunan*), a mere four months after Nik Aziz's death, the party election saw a purge of the so-called "Erdogan" faction, which consisted mostly of Western-trained professionals who were amenable to working with non-Muslims, especially those within the DAP. The "Erdogan" faction later went on to establish a rival Islamist party, Amanah. One month after the Muktamar Tahunan, the PAS Ulama Council (Majlis Syura Ulama) announced that the party had decided to cease all political cooperation with the DAP, which effectively broke up the Pakatan Rakyat coalition.¹¹ PAS was now left to run on its own with the 2018 general elections less than two years away.

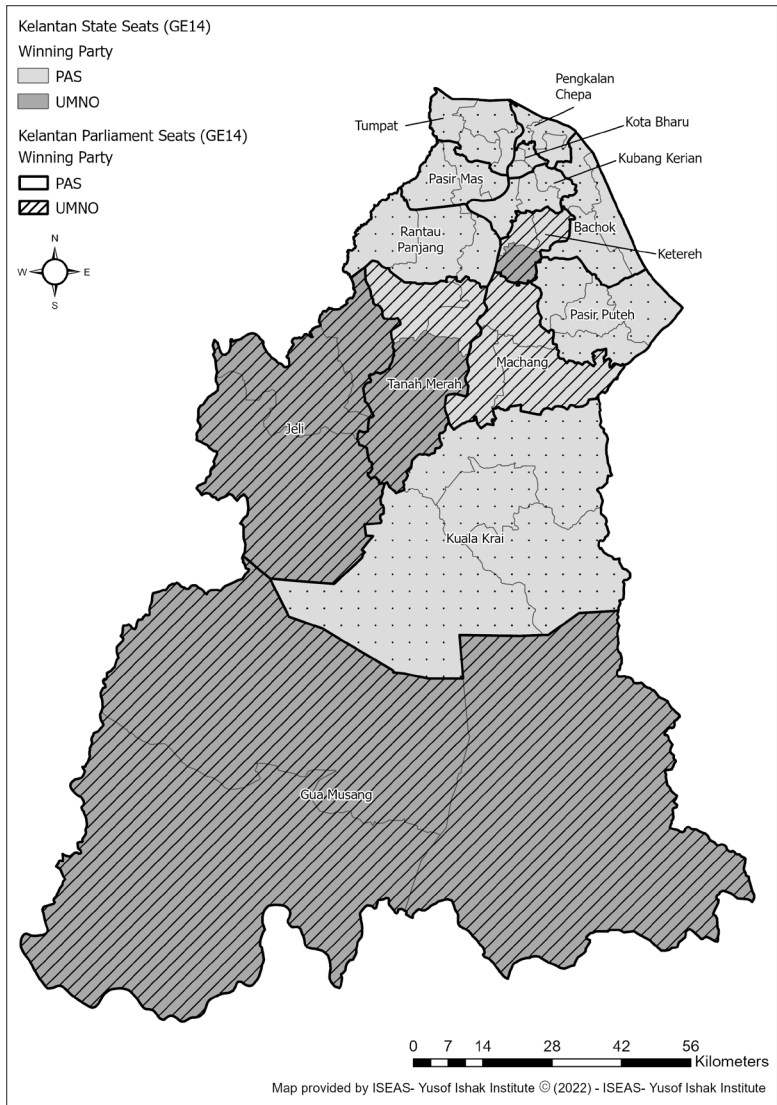
PAS's GREEN WAVE IN GE14 AND THE PH YEARS (2018–20)

On 9 May 2018, Malaysia experienced an unprecedented moment in its history when the then BN-UMNO government was voted out after having been in power for more than six decades. Despite the uneven political playing field as a result of gerrymandering and malapportionment, the opposition coalition PH managed, against all odds, to win an outright majority in Parliament and the control of seven state governments

¹⁰ Nik Aziz even entertained the idea of having a non-Malay as the Prime Minister as long as the person was a Muslim. "Bukan Melayu Boleh Jadi PM Asalkan Beragama Islam – Nik Aziz", *MStar*, 27 May 2012, <https://www.mstar.com.my/lokal/semasa/2012/05/27/bukan-melayu-boleh-jadi-pm-asalkan-beragama-islam--nik-aziz> (accessed 10 October 2022).

¹¹ "PAS batal tahaluf siyasi dengan DAP", *Harian Metro*, 11 July 2015, <https://www.hmetro.com.my/node/63696> (accessed 5 July 2018).

Figure 1: Kelantan State Seats (GE14)



(Penang, Kedah, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor). PAS, contending in the 2018 general elections as a third force, also performed remarkably well. PAS won 9 out of 14 parliamentary seats in Kelantan and 6 out of 8 parliamentary seats in Terengganu. PAS also retained the state government in Kelantan, with a resounding 37 out of 45 state seats, and regained the Terengganu state government by securing 22 out of 32 state seats. In the mixed state of Kedah, PAS also went beyond expectations by gaining 3 out of 15 parliamentary seats and 15 out of 36 state seats.

Besides the larger political tsunami that swept across most of peninsular Malaysia in this general election, PAS also benefitted from its own green wave of anti-UMNO sentiment that rolled through Kelantan, Terengganu and parts of Kedah.¹² In these places, especially Kelantan, the perennial choice had always been between PAS and UMNO. Naturally, anti-UMNO votes seen throughout Malaysia gravitated towards PAS in areas where PAS and UMNO had long been bitter enemies. In states where PAS and UMNO's political rivalry was not as binary and deep-rooted, and where PH was also competitive, PAS fared badly—places such as Hulu Langat and Kuala Langat parliamentary districts in Selangor. Interestingly, PAS had gained handsomely from the anti-UMNO sentiment despite having all but admitted to receiving money tainted by the 1MDB scandal from the then Prime Minister, and now convicted felon, Najib Razak.¹³

As a third force, PAS had a choice to make after the 2018 general elections: whether it should join the then PH government or ally itself with BN-UMNO as part of the opposition coalition. It was an easy decision, as PAS, UMNO and other Malay-Islamic parties opted to work together against the PH government. The alliance between PAS and

¹² Azmil Tayeb, "Green Wave of Change on the East Coast: PAS and Anti-UMNO Backlash in Kelantan". *JEBAT: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics and Strategic Studies* 45, no. 1 (2018): 232–50.

¹³ Fareez Azman, "Isu RM90 juta: 'Saya belum dipanggil' – Nik Abduh", *Astro Awani*, 7 February 2019, <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/isu-rm90-juta-saya-belum-dipanggil-nik-abduh-197892> (accessed 20 October 2022).

UMNO was easier said than done though because of their tumultuous history. The attempt by the two parties at political partnership faced a real test in the Sungai Kandis by-election on 4 August 2018. Many PAS supporters refused to vote for the UMNO candidate, Lokman Noor Adam, defying the directive from the national leadership. In the end, the PH candidate, Mohd Zawawi Abdul Mughni, coasted to an easy victory.¹⁴ Despite the stirrings from its rank and file, PAS leaders went on to formalize the party's alliance with UMNO and smaller Malay-Islamic parties by officially forming the Muafakat Nasional (MN) coalition on 14 September 2019. Among the main objectives of MN was to strengthen and advance the Malay, Islamic and Bumiputera (sons of the soil) agenda, which it perceived as being under threat from the PH government, the cabinet of which was made up of many non-Malays.¹⁵

The PH government's short-lived tenure was characterized by constant ethno-religious conflagrations instigated by its predominantly Malay-Islamic opposition, including MN. PH's political opponents identified ethno-religious issues as the government's soft underbelly vulnerable to concerted attacks. Protests against efforts to ratify the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the Rome Statute, and the death of the fireman Muhammad Adib Mohd Kassim during the Seafeld Hindu temple riot, among others, became major distractions for the PH government.

Nevertheless, when it came to its dealings with the PAS government in Kelantan, the PH government did not want to continue the vindictive policy of the previous BN-UMNO administration. The PH government started to channel federal funds directly into the state government's

¹⁴ Anne Muhammad, "PAS Members Unwilling to Vote for BN in Sg Kandis Experiment", *Malaysiakini*, 1 August 2018, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/437506> (accessed 6 August 2018).

¹⁵ Nazura Ngah, "Piagam Muafakat Nasional UMNO, PAS dimeterai", *Berita Harian*, 14 September 2019, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/politik/2019/09/606917/piagam-muafakat-nasional-umno-pas-dimeterai> (accessed 10 October 2022).

coffers instead of using the State Development Office, a state-based federal agency, as an intermediary, which, in turn, had the latitude to determine who was deserving of said funds.¹⁶ In December 2019, the PH government allocated a one-off payment of RM400 million (SG\$122 million) to the state government in Kelantan for it to use however it pleased.¹⁷ In all, the PH government did try to repair the long-damaged federal relationship with the state government in Kelantan even though it had to confront persistent ethno-religious onslaughts from its political opponents, including PAS.

PAS AS PART OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: THE PN YEARS (2020–PRESENT)

At the end of February 2020, with the global pandemic looming on the horizon, the PH government fell apart after twenty-two months in power. Bersatu and a group of PKR MPs withdrew their support for PH and later formed the Perikatan Nasional (PN) coalition with PAS, UMNO and other parties.¹⁸ For PAS, this was its first taste of federal power after the brief yet disastrous fling with UMNO in the mid-1970s. As a member of the PN government, PAS was rewarded with eight positions in a bloated seventy-member cabinet: Takiyuddin Hassan (MP–Kota Bharu) as the Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department (Parliament and Law), Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man (MP–Kubang Kerian) as the Minister of Environment and Water, Mohd Khairuddin Aman Razali (MP–Kuala

¹⁶ Interview with Ahmad Fathi Yusoff, Research Fellow, Institut Pemikiran Tok Guru (state government’s think tank), 10 April 2019, Kota Bharu.

¹⁷ Muhafandi Muhammad, “Kelantan guna duit RM400 juta dari pusat untuk projek rakyat”, *Astro Awani*, 12 Februari 2020, <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/kelantan-guna-duit-rm400-juta-dari-pusat-untuk-projek-rakyat-230529> (accessed 10 October 2022).

¹⁸ Azmil Tayeb, “Malaysia in 2020: Fragile Coalitional Politics and Democratic Regression”, *Asian Survey* 61, no. 1 (February 2021): 99–105.

Nerus) as the Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities, Ahmad Marzuk Shaary (MP–Pengkalan Chepa) as the Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department (Religious Affairs), Che Abdullah Mat Nawi (MP–Tumpat) as the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Industries, Awang Hashim (MP–Pendang) as the Deputy Minister of Human Resources, Ahmad Amzad Hashim (MP–Kuala Terengganu) as the Deputy Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, and Siti Zailah Mohd Yusoff (MP–Rantau Panjang) as the Deputy Minister of Women, Family and Community Development. Five out of the eight positions above went to PAS MPs from Kelantan.

As part of the federal government, PAS MPs are now able to channel development funds to the party’s strongholds, especially Kelantan. PAS can no longer use the reason of being neglected by the federal government for not developing the state, especially when it comes to addressing perennial issues such as the clean water supply, flood mitigation, and the dearth of industrial and commercial bases to provide local employment opportunities.¹⁹ In the 12th Malaysia Plan (2021–2025), 395 development projects have already been earmarked for Kelantan, involving 74 new projects and 321 ongoing projects. RM2.39 billion (SG\$725 million) has been allocated in 2022 for the implementation of these projects, and as of August 2022, a total of RM972.1 million (SG\$295 million), or 40.7 per cent, has been disbursed by the federal government.²⁰ There is also an allocation from the Ministry of Environment and Water (the portfolio being held by a PAS minister) via the 12th Malaysia Plan to build a new water reservoir in the district of Machang in an effort to supply clean water to many of the state’s residents and minimize the impact of annual

¹⁹ “Umno punca masalah bekalan air di Kelantan – Mohd Amar”, *Harakah Daily*, 9 May 2022, <https://harakahdaily.net/index.php/2022/05/09/umno-punca-masalah-bekalan-air-di-kelantan-mohd-amar/> (accessed 10 October 2022).

²⁰ “Kerajaan beri tumpuan dua projek ‘sakit’ di Kelantan – Mustapa”, *Astro Awani*, 14 August 2022, <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/kerajaan-beri-tumpuan-dua-projek-sakit-di-kelantan-mustapa-376092> (accessed 10 October 2022).

monsoon flooding.²¹ As it becomes part of the ruling establishment, PAS is now sharing the kind of federal largesse that was long enjoyed by states under the BN-UMNO government—a perk PAS surely wants to hold on to for the foreseeable future.

ANALYSING PAS’S STRENGTH IN KELANTAN

Barring any surprises, full control of the Kelantan state government by PAS will remain unchanged when the dust from the GE15 finally settles. No party, particularly UMNO, is strong enough to give PAS a run for its money and make a serious dent in the party’s political dominance in Kelantan. While the deep-rootedness of PAS in Kelantan is a factor in the party’s political resilience over the long years, its success in recent times can be explained by its comprehensive political socialization and outreach efforts, an unshakeable belief that what is good for the party is good for the state, the centrality of Islamic discourse in local politics, the strategic voting patterns called “*undi kangkang*” (split voting), and the lack of real competition from other Malay-Islamic parties.

Political Socialization and Outreach Efforts

Long political incumbency such as PAS’s reign in Kelantan can often produce complacency that results in a party being out of touch with its supporters and opening itself to challenges from its political opponents. PAS learned this lesson the hard way when it lost Kelantan to UMNO in 1978 after governing the state for almost twenty years.²² When PAS

²¹ Isu air Kelantan: KASA setuju bina takungan air besar di Machang – Mohd Amar”, *Astro Awani*, 11 May 2022, <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/isu-air-kelantan-kasa-setuju-bina-takungan-air-besar-di-machang-mohd-amar-360818> (accessed 10 October 2022).

²² See Harold Crouch, Lee Kam Hing, and Michael Ong, eds., *Malaysian Politics and the 1978 Election* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980).

regained Kelantan in 1990, it began to operate more systematically as a modern political party—namely, by using the government tools at its disposal to strengthen its hold on the state.

PAS has long been aware of the centrality of the mosque in communal life in Kelantan. Its first order of business after taking over the state government was to establish the Section of Islamic Propagation in Learning Circles (Bahagian Dakwah Halaqat) in April 1991 under the purview of the Kelantan Department of Islamic Affairs (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Agama Islam Kelantan). Its main objective is to act as an intermediary between the state government and the people, chiefly in socializing PAS's policies among the public through mosques, schools and government agencies.²³

There is a unit of Bahagian Dewan Halaqat in every parliamentary district throughout the state, amounting to 540 members of staff.²⁴ The organization provides religious leaders (imams), teachers (*ustaz* and *ustazah*) and preachers (*pendakwah/mubaligh*) for the area, who receive regular training on how to best convey PAS's political messages to their respective flocks.²⁵ These messages are in turn relayed via Friday sermons, weekly lectures (*kuliah tafsir*), post-dawn and -dusk lectures (*kuliah Subuh* and *kuliah Maghrib*), and other mosque-centred community events. The need to keep the imams in the government's orbit was echoed by a senior officer at the Kota Bharu City Council (Majlis Perbandaran Kota Bharu, MPKB), who stated plainly that the success or failure of MPKB's community programmes is largely dependent

²³ Objektif Penubuhan, Bahagian Dakwah Halaqat Negeri Kelantan, <https://halaqat.com.my/objektif-penubuhan/> (accessed 18 September 2022).

²⁴ "Penghulu turut terima bonus raya", *Harakah Daily*, 27 May 2019, <https://harakahdaily.net/index.php/2019/05/27/penghulu-turut-terima-bonus-roya/> (accessed 20 October 2022).

²⁵ Interview with Nor Azariza Mohd Alawi, City Council member, Kota Bharu City Council, and Deputy Head, Bahagian Dakwah Halaqat Negeri Kelantan, 8 January 2020, Kota Bharu.

on MPKB's ability to persuade the local imam to buy into the said community programme.²⁶

That Kelantan is one of the poorest states in Malaysia means it also has a high rate of out-migration.²⁷ Many Kelantanese move to Penang, the Klang Valley region, and other urban areas on the Peninsula in search of better economic opportunities.²⁸ Understandably, out-of-state Kelantanese make up a powerful voting group, upon which PAS has been heavily reliant for its political longevity.²⁹ PAS works hard to woo Kelantanese voters living out of state by engaging them even during off-election years. Out-of-state Kelantanese tend overwhelmingly to vote for PAS, mainly because of its Islamic image and the need to sustain an Islamic form of governance.³⁰ The responsibility to establish rapport with out-of-state Kelantanese falls on party functionaries called *Penghulu Seranta*. *Penghulu Seranta* are part of the state appointed-*Penghulu*

²⁶ Interview with Ropein Hasan, Director, Department of Islamic Development (JPI), Kota Bharu City Council, 8 April 2019, Kota Bharu.

²⁷ Kelantan's GDP per capita in 2021 was RM15,584. By comparison, Penang, which is one of the richest states in Malaysia, has a GDP per capita of RM59,685, while the national average is RM47,439. *Laporan Sosioekonomi Negeri Kelantan*, Jabatan Perdana Menteri dan Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, p. 58, <https://cloud.stats.gov.my/index.php/s/we7LcoX3x4ShMsp#pdfviewer> (accessed 10 October 2022).

²⁸ One estimate states that there are about 200,000 voters residing outside of Kelantan. Slightly over 800,000 people voted in Kelantan in the 2018 general elections. The number is expected to be higher in the upcoming elections because of the automatic registration of voters aged 18–21 years old and first-time voters. Muhafandi Muhammad, "Pengundi luar Kelantan penting, Mustapa nafi hasut mereka tidak pulang mengundi", *Astro Awani*, 26 March 2018, <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/pengundi-luar-kelantan-penting-mustapa-nafi-hasut-mereka-tidak-pulang-mengundi-171413> (accessed 10 October 2022).

²⁹ Mazli Mamat and Mohd Rahimi Ramli, "Kecenderungan politik pengundi luar Kelantan di Lembah Klang pasca-PRU-14: Suatu pemerhatian kritikal", *GEOGRAFIA: Malaysian Journal of Society and Space* 17, no. 3 (2021): 273–86.

³⁰ *Ibid.* The author has talked to many local Kelantanese who also attest to this voting pattern by out-of-state voters.

Table 1: Number of Penghulu in Kelantan as of October 2022

| | <i>DUN</i> | <i>Parliament</i> |
|--------------------------------|------------|-------------------|
| Penghulu Mukim | 636 | |
| Penghulu Tanpa Mukim (kaum) | 65 | |
| Penghulu Tanpa Mukim (lelaki) | 45 | 14 |
| Penghulu Tanpa Mukim (wanita) | 45 | 14 |
| Penghulu Tanpa Mukim (Seranta) | | 14 |

Source: Personal communication with Ahmad Fathi Yusoff, Research Fellow, Institut Pemikiran Tok Guru (state government’s think tank), 26 October 2022.

Mukim and Penghulu Tanpa Mukim operating in each state legislative (DUN) and parliamentary districts in Kelantan (the number of Penghulu in a DUN district varies with population density).³¹ At present there are 833 Penghulu in Kelantan. Penghulu in general are the eyes and ears of PAS on the ground, acting as intermediaries between the district’s political representatives and the local community. While the work of other Penghulu is locally oriented, Penghulu Seranta have the responsibility of going outside the state to connect with Kelantanese voters.

There are fourteen Penghulu Seranta in Kelantan (one for every parliamentary district). Penghulu Seranta’s engagement with out-of-state Kelantanese starts at the level of residential areas. In residential areas (*taman perumahan*) where there is a sizeable number of Kelantanese, there is a PAS activist who acts as the “residential area ambassador” (*duta taman*). The *duta taman* is the point person for Penghulu Seranta, as this individual would assemble Kelantanese in their residential area

³¹ A Mukim, or sub-district, typically consists of several villages or residential areas. A Penghulu Mukim is responsible for their Mukim, while Penghulu Tanpa Mukim are those appointed to represent the interests of partner political parties, non-Malay and Orang Asli (indigenous people) communities, women (Penghulu Tanpa Mukim Wanita), or in the case of Penghulu Seranta, out-of-state Kelantanese—in particular, DUN and parliamentary districts. The appointment is for three years and carries a monthly allowance of RM1,200.

for a townhall-type meeting with the district Penghulu Seranta. At this meeting, the Penghulu Seranta are able to share PAS's agenda with the out-of-state Kelantanese while at the same time listening to their grievances and aspirations. Penghulu Seranta also engage with the Malaysian Association of Out-of-State Kelantanese (Persatuan Anak Perantauan Kelantan Malaysia, PERAKAN), which has chapters throughout the country for the same reason. The main objective of these meetings is to show the out-of-state Kelantanese that PAS cares for their well-being and is willing to go the distance, literally in this case, to engage with them and possibly persuade them to vote for PAS come election time.³²

Another target demographic for PAS's outreach is the newly enfranchised youth. On 15 December 2021, the Malaysian Parliament voted to lower the minimum voting age from 21 to 18 years old. The new minimum voting age creates more than 1.1 million new voters aged 18–20 years, providing political parties, including PAS, a fresh pool of voters to tap into.³³ Despite its staid image as an Islamic party, PAS has always been technologically savvy in promoting its values and agenda among young people through social media.³⁴ The lowered voting age provides PAS with the added impetus to reach out to young people. In Kelantan, many community events now incorporate programmes such as e-sports tournaments and riding in large motorcycle convoys. PAS established a motorcycle riding club called the “Alternative Riding Club” (ARC), which can be found in every parliamentary district throughout Kelantan.³⁵

³² Interview with Abdul Aziz Taib, Penghulu Seranta, 14 February 2021, Kota Bharu. See also Urusetia Penerangan dan Komunikasi Negeri Kelantan, “Seminar dan Dialog Rakyat Membangun Bersama Islam: Warga Kelantan di Perantauan”, Bangi Convention Centre, 3 February 2018, http://upknkelantan.com/download/seminar_mbbi_feb2018.pdf (accessed 20 October 2022).

³³ Aslinda Nasir, “Jumlah pengundi baru 21.1 juta”, *Utusan Malaysia*, 2 August 2022, <https://www.utusan.com.my/nasional/2022/08/jumlah-pengundi-baru-21-1-juta/> (accessed 10 October 2022).

³⁴ See Dominik M. Müller, *Islam, Politics and Youth in Malaysia: The Pop-Islamist Reinvention of PAS* (London: Routledge, 2014).

³⁵ ARC Kelantan Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/ARC-Kelantan-705201116279214/> (accessed 10 October 2022).

As this large ARC motorcycle convoy rumbles down the road, one would be forgiven for thinking that the iconic Sturgis Motorcycle Rally had arrived—with the ubiquitous *Ysuku* (slang for the Yamaha Y15ZR bikes currently popular with young people in the country) instead of Harley Davidsons. These programmes have proved to be popular among young adults and an effective means to interact with new and first-time voters in a relatable way.

Conflating Party Interests with State Government Interests

PAS firmly believes in the idea of “*parti menguasai kerajaan*” (party controls the government). “*Parti menguasai kerajaan*” essentially means there is no separation between party interests and the interests of the government. Which, in this case, are the interests of PAS and the Kelantan state government, and by extension, the collective interests of the Kelantan people. The near total sweep of state legislative seats by PAS permits it to govern seamlessly without the need to share power or compromise with other political parties. Since it wrested the state government from UMNO in 1990, the percentage of PAS’s votes in state legislative elections has hovered between 60 and 90 per cent and has only dipped below 60 per cent once, in 2004. This political dominance serves two purposes. First, PAS can claim a public mandate when implementing the undiluted version of its agenda, without fear of any backlash from the public. And second, the political dominance enables PAS to appoint its members to fill strategic positions across various government agencies and bodies, which in turn creates an uninterrupted chain of governance from the top (chief minister and the state exco members) to village heads.

At levels below the state government, all leadership positions are by appointment. For instance, city council members are appointed by the state exco in charge of local government. In Kelantan, this means only PAS members can be appointed to these local leadership positions. In Kota Bharu, twenty-four members of its city council (Majlis Perbandaran Kota Bharu) are all PAS members, including the three non-Malay councillors. The justification for only appointing PAS members is to harmonize and streamline all levels of governance, from the state government in Kota

Bharu to the village administration. The total cohesion makes it easier for PAS to implement its agenda as there is minimal resistance or “*cah keting*” (local slang for sabotage).³⁶ That is not say that PAS has sweeping control over all levels of governance in Kelantan. In areas where UMNO and Bersatu have a strong presence, the partisan constellation at the local level is decidedly mixed, such as in the Jeli, Tanah Merah and Machang parliamentary districts.

The belief in “*parti menguasai kerajaan*” also extends to the business sector in Kelantan. PAS, holding the levers of power, is also the only source of patronage. Similar to the appointment of local leaders, businesses dealing with the Kelantan state government must be owned and operated by PAS members. While there is no explicit mention of party membership when bidding for public projects, it is widely known that PAS membership is an unstated requirement for any contractors. According to one council member,

Yes, we distribute public projects to contractors who are members of PAS. We know who genuine PAS members are and who are faking it just to receive the projects. Only PAS members can contribute to the excellence of the state government (*menyumbang kepada kecemerlangan kerajaan negeri*).³⁷

PAS expects these party-affiliated contractors to work towards a collective goal of advancing the party’s interests—and, by extension, the state’s interests—and to not be driven purely by profit. To be a member of PAS is to subscribe unequivocally to its Islamist ideology and the dictates of its ulama (religious scholar) leadership—better known as *wala’* (complete obedience). For PAS-affiliated contractors, it means adapting their business model to dovetail with the party’s agenda.

³⁶ Interview with Nor Azariza Mohd Alawi, City Council member, Kota Bharu City Council, and Deputy Head, Bahagian Dakwah Halaqat Negeri Kelantan, 8 January 2020, Kota Bharu.

³⁷ Ibid.

Centrality of Islam in Political Discourse

For a state known as Serambi Mekah (Verandah of Mecca), Islamic values permeate every part of social and political life in Kelantan. To compete politically in Kelantan means to engage in what one Amanah activist dubbed “*politik syurga-neraka*” (heaven-hell politics).³⁸ In other words, political competition centres mainly on burnishing one’s Islamic credibility and trying to “out-Islamize” one’s rivals. Though Islam-inspired politics in Kelantan dates back to the colonial period, its significance ratcheted up by an order of magnitude in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The purge of the Malay nationalist faction from PAS and the subsequent takeover by the ulama leadership at this time steered PAS in a more hard-line direction. The Mahathir-led UMNO tried to go toe to toe with PAS with its own Islamic agenda, which escalated the political rivalry into the binary politics of religious authenticity, or “*politik syurga-neraka*”.³⁹ In 1981, Hadi Awang, the current president of PAS, delivered a fiery speech—later known as “Amanat Haji Hadi”—in which he denounced UMNO as a colonial stooge and “*kafir*” (infidel).⁴⁰ The repercussions from “Amanat Haji Hadi” deeply polarized communities in the Malay heartlands of Kelantan, Kedah and Terengganu, to the point of a mosque having two imams (one for PAS congregants and another for UMNO congregants), or indeed separate mosques for PAS and UMNO supporters, simply because according to PAS whoever supports UMNO is deemed as *kafir*.⁴¹

³⁸ Interview with Nik Abdul Razak Nik Md Ridzuan, Deputy Head of National Amanah Youth, 12 May 2022, Kuala Lumpur.

³⁹ See Amrita Malhi, “The PAS-BN Conflict in the 1990s: Islamism and Modernity”, in *Malaysia: Islam, Society and Politics*, edited by Virginia Hooker and Norani Othman (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003).

⁴⁰ Amree Ahmad, “Jawatankuasa fatwa setiap negeri berkuasa tetapkan Amanat Haji Hadi”, *Kosmo*, 17 September 2022, <https://www.kosmo.com.my/2022/09/17/jawatankuasa-fatwa-setiap-negeri-berkuasa-tetapkan-amanat-haji-hadi/> (accessed 10 October 2022).

⁴¹ The polarization reached its tragic apogee on 19 November 1985 in Kampung Memali, Baling, in the state of Kedah, when a local PAS leader named Ibrahim Mahmud aka Ibrahim Libya and his followers were involved in a

While “*politik syurga-neraka*” might not have much saliency in most parts of peninsular Malaysia, its influence in Kelantan, Kedah and Terengganu has been palpable up to the present. It is common to hear politicians of all stripes in Kelantan peppering their speech with verses from the Quran and hadiths (reported sayings of Prophet Muhammad). A day of political campaigning and constituency outreach typically starts with a communal *subuh* (dawn) prayer at a local mosque as it is considered bad form not to do so. In this pervasively religious environment, the main beneficiary is PAS as it is often seen as more authentic Islamically compared to its political rivals. Augmented by the aforementioned efforts by Bahagian Dakwah Halaqat to socialize PAS’s political message in an active and systematic manner, Islamic discourse in Kelantan remains firmly under the control of PAS. Supporting PAS means going beyond the profane world of politics, or as a PAS state legislator once said, “Voting in this world equals to voting in the afterlife.”⁴² An Amanah activist sums it up: “Kelantan people understand politics through religion [Islam]. Any party that wants to be competitive in Kelantan must be able to challenge the dominant Islamic discourse represented by PAS. There is just no other way.”⁴³

*Strategic Voting of “Undi Kangkang” (Split Voting)*⁴⁴

A unique feature of Kelantan politics is the practice of “*undi kangkang*” (split voting). This is a type of strategic voting that entails splitting one’s

bloody skirmish with the Malaysian police. The “Memali incident” resulted in the deaths of Ibrahim Libya and seventeen of his followers, along with four policemen. Mohd Iskandar Ibrahim, “Mangsa Memali ‘mati katak’, bukan mati syahid – Dr M”, *Harian Metro*, 3 May 2018, <https://www.hmetro.com.my/utama/2018/05/336394/mangsa-memali-mati-katak-bukan-mati-syahid-dr-m> (accessed 10 October 2022).

⁴² Interview with Mumtaz Md Nawī, State Exco for Women, Families and Welfare, 8 January 2020, Kota Bharu.

⁴³ Interview with Nik Abdul Razak Nik Md Ridzuan, Deputy Head of National Amanah Youth, 12 May 2022, Kuala Lumpur.

⁴⁴ This monograph was prepared and set for publication before the nomination day on 5 November 2022. As such, the author did not know that Mustapa

votes between two different parties. Typically, what happens is voters would choose an UMNO candidate for the parliamentary seat and a PAS candidate for the state legislative seat. This approach of strategic voting came about primarily as the result of Kelantan being an opposition state for much of its post-independence history and of being largely neglected by the UMNO-led federal government. Electing UMNO MPs is simply another way of securing federal funding for Kelantan, especially if the said MPs also hold cabinet positions. Voting for PAS candidates in state legislative seats, meanwhile, ensures that the Islamic state government remains in the hands of PAS. For strategic voters, “*undi kangkang*” splits the difference between ideology and pragmatism; in other words, a win-win arrangement (see Table 2).

Table 2: Kelantan State Seats Won by Coalition and Party (2004–18)

| | <i>Barisan Nasional</i> | <i>Pakatan Rakyat/ Harapan</i> | | <i>Gagasan Sejahtera</i> |
|------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| | <i>UMNO</i> | <i>PAS</i> | <i>PKR</i> | <i>PAS</i> |
| 2004 | 21 | 24 | | |
| 2008 | 6 | 38 | 1 | |
| 2013 | 12 | 32 | 1 | |
| 2018 | 8 | | | 37 |

Not all parliamentary districts in Kelantan are open to “*undi kangkang*”. In fact, voters in most parliamentary districts tend to vote along party lines. Only in places where the UMNO and Bersatu MPs are known to be hardworking and have a proven track record of funnelling public projects to the area are they consistently elected. One example is the Bersatu MP

Mohamed, for health reasons, would not be defending his long-held seat in Jeli, or that UMNO had unexpectedly replaced the incumbent MP of Keterah, Annuar Musa, with another candidate.

for Jeli, Mustapa Mohamed. Jeli is located in the rural west of Kelantan, and its parliamentary district was carved out from the Tanah Merah parliamentary district in the early 1990s. Mustapa Mohamed, known locally as Dato' Pa, became the constituency's first MP in 1995. He lost the seat in 1999 at the height of the Reformasi wave, but he regained it in 2004 and has held it ever since. Dato' Pa is known to be a diligent MP who has visited his constituency almost every weekend for the past three decades and who has channelled numerous infrastructure projects to Jeli, transforming the sleepy semi-rural outpost into a buzzing town with modern facilities and smoothly paved roads. Many PAS supporters in Jeli acknowledge the contribution made by Dato' Pa and consistently vote for him in general elections.⁴⁵ Currently there are five UMNO and Bersatu MPs who are beneficiaries of split voting to one degree or another. They are Mustapa Mohamed (Bersatu–Jeli), Ikmal Hisham Abdul Aziz (Bersatu–Tanah Merah), Ahmad Jazlan Yaakub (UMNO–Machang), Annuar Musa (UMNO–Ketereh), and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (UMNO–Gua Musang).

“*Undi kangkang*” might not be as relevant at the moment as it once was since PAS is part of the federal government and is working together with Bersatu in the Perikatan Nasional (PN) coalition. In this political arrangement, the parliamentary seats will remain with Bersatu MPs, while state seats will be divided between the two parties. To illustrate, in the parliamentary district of Jeli, Mustapa Mohamed (Bersatu) will defend his seat, while PAS and Bersatu will share the three state seats (two for PAS and one for Bersatu).⁴⁶ Out of five UMNO and Bersatu MPs in Kelantan, three are closely affiliated with the PN government

⁴⁵ One PAS supporter related that he is grateful to Dato' Pa for modernizing Jeli and would continue to vote for him for the parliamentary seat while supporting the PAS candidate for the state seat. Interview with Abe Mat (pseudonym), 20 August 2022, Jeli.

⁴⁶ Interview with Abe Yi (pseudonym), field organizer for Bersatu MP Mustapa Mohamed, 20 August 2022, Jeli.

by virtue of holding cabinet positions. They are Mustapa Mohamed (Minister in the Prime Minister's Department), Ikmal Hisham Abdul Aziz (Deputy Minister of Defense) and Annuar Musa (Minister of Communications and Multimedia). Ahmad Jazlan Yaakub, UMNO MP for Machang, was initially appointed as chair of Malaysian Palm Oil Berhad (MPOB), a government-led company, but he stepped down last year and withdrew his support for the PN government, citing personal reasons.⁴⁷ Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah remains firmly with UMNO and securely ensconced in his Gua Musang constituency, which he has represented since 1986.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, it remains to be seen in the upcoming election whether “*undi kangkang*” will have any discernible effect on the way people vote in Kelantan since the state election will not be held concurrently with the general election. Another way of putting it: will UMNO incumbent MPs such as Annuar Musa in Ketereh and Ahmad Jazlan Yaakub in Machang receive votes from PAS members even though there are no PAS candidates running for state seats in their respective parliamentary constituencies? In the case of Mustapa Mohamed in Jeli, his party, Bersatu, is an ally of PAS, and as per agreement between the two parties, Mustapa Mohamed will be the sole candidate for the parliamentary seat running under the PN logo.⁴⁹ He also has the advantage of being the incumbent

⁴⁷ Nor Ainna Hamzah, “Keputusan Ahmad Jazlan letak jawatan bersifat peribadi”, *Utusan Malaysia*, 10 January 2021, <https://www.utusan.com.my/berita/2021/01/keputusan-ahmad-jazlan-letak-jawatan-bersifat-peribadi/> (accessed 10 October 2022).

⁴⁸ Tengku Razaleigh had a cordial relationship with the PAS state government for the better part of the last three decades, especially with the former Chief Minister, the late Nik Aziz Nik Mat. His now defunct party, Semangat 46, jointly governed Kelantan with PAS from 1990 until it was dissolved in 1996. The relationship turned sour after Nik Aziz passed away in 2015.

⁴⁹ “Bersatu, PAS Kelantan selesai bincang agihan kerusi”, *Astro Awani*, 28 April 2022, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/politik/2022/04/950387/bersatu-pas-kelantan-selesai-bincang-agihan-kerusi> (accessed 22 October 2022).

state representative for the Air Lanas seat, which he will defend in the separately held state election.⁵⁰ With or without “*undi kangkang*”, it is hard to see Mustapa Mohamed conceding his parliamentary and state seats in the coming contests.

Lack of Real Competition from Other Malay-Islamic Parties

Post-independence politics in Kelantan has been almost exclusively defined by the intense rivalry between PAS and UMNO. Historically, PAS represents the rural Kelantanese, or what Clive Kessler terms “the peasant smallholders”, against the depredations of the urban capitalist elites represented by UMNO.⁵¹ Since 1990, the competition has overwhelmingly favoured PAS as the party has managed to sustain its power both at the state and parliamentary levels, even after the 2004 general elections in which it took a severe beating when UMNO won 8 out of 14 parliamentary seats—a gain of 7 seats from the previous general elections.⁵² There are two parliamentary districts in Kelantan that are long known to be bastions of UMNO: Gua Musang and Jeli. These two areas have been steadfast in their support for UMNO (and now Bersatu in the case of Jeli)—blue oases in a green desert, so to speak.

Tengku Razaleigh has represented the Gua Musang constituency since 1986, while Mustapa Mohamed has been the MP for Jeli since 1995

⁵⁰ Mustapa Mohamed has held the Air Lanas state seat since 2004. PAS managed to snatch the seat in 2008 when Mustapa Mohamed decided to only focus on the parliamentary race and was replaced by another UMNO candidate. He contested the Air Lanas seat again in 2013 and won. According to his supporters, it is a testament to Mustapa Mohamed’s popularity in Jeli and that the people here will vote for him regardless of the party he is with. Interview with Abe Yi (pseudonym), constituency organizer for Bersatu MP Mustapa Mohamed, 20 August 2022, Jeli.

⁵¹ Clive Kessler, *Islam and Politics in a Malay State: Kelantan, 1838–1969* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 167.

⁵² In contrast, PKR lost all but one seat (Permatang Pauh) in the 2004 general elections, which was a setback for the Reformasi movement. BN-UMNO won an astounding ninety per cent of the seats in Parliament.

(he lost in 1999 but regained the seat in 2004). When asked why these two areas continue to support UMNO even as PAS has swept the rest of the state, PAS leaders often point to the rural aspect of Gua Musang and Jeli as the reason. One PAS state legislator said that because of geographic isolation these two areas only consume information from the federal government's news stations, such as TV1, TV2 and TV3, which explains their support for UMNO.⁵³ Presently, Mustapa Mohamed is allying himself with PAS as part of the PN coalition, along with Annuar Musa (Ketereh) and Ikmal Hisham Abdul Aziz (Tanah Merah). Tengku Razaleigh and Ahmad Jazlan Yaakub (Machang), however, refuse to work with PAS, with the former even plotting with Amanah in Kelantan to retake control of the state government in the upcoming election.⁵⁴ While Tengku Razaleigh's parliamentary seat is considered safe as no PAS candidate has ever mounted a serious challenge there, the same cannot be said for Ahmad Jazlan's seat in Machang. His withdrawal from the PN government leaves him open to challenge from a PAS candidate in the general elections, though he does stand a fair chance of retaining his incumbency because of Machang's long history of electing UMNO candidates.

Another party that can be considered a rival to PAS in Kelantan is Amanah. Since Amanah was once part of PAS, they both share a common Islamic political orientation. But that is where the similarity ends. Amanah currently poses almost no threat to PAS in Kelantan. In the 2018 general elections, Amanah contested 5 out of 14 parliamentary seats and

⁵³ While Gua Musang might be rural and its geography can be forbidding, Jeli is only about a hundred kilometres from the capital Kota Bharu. Interview with Mumtaz Md Nawi, State Exco for Women, Families and Welfare, 8 January 2020, Kota Bharu.

⁵⁴ "Ku Li mula langkah rampas Kelantan, ketua Angkatan Amanah Merdeka Rakyat Kelantan", *Astro Awani*, 28 April 2022, <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-politik/ku-li-mula-langkah-rampas-kelantan-ketuai-angkatan-amanah-merdeka-rakyat-kelantan-359049> (accessed 10 October 2022).

23 out of 45 state seats; it was decisively routed in all of them.⁵⁵ In fact, many of its candidates lost their deposits, including Nik Omar Nik Aziz, the son of the late Nik Aziz Nik Mat, who contested in the Chempaka state seat. Husam Musa, the long-time right-hand man of Nik Aziz, also lost his bid for the Salor state seat. Amanah in Kelantan is at present in a shambles, and it will be highly unlikely to put a dent in PAS's dominance as a result of a lack of party machinery, grass-roots organizing, and all-around enthusiasm.⁵⁶ Despite the sombre mood, Husam Musa recently launched the "Save Kelantan" campaign—chiefly on his own initiative and not blessed by the national Amanah leadership—to challenge the PAS state government by working with UMNO Kelantan through Tengku Razaleigh.⁵⁷ Given how formidable PAS is in Kelantan, the "Save Kelantan" campaign to topple the state government will continue to remain an elusive dream.

Bersatu, a splinter party from UMNO, competed against PAS in the 2018 general elections but has now become its ally. In 2018, Bersatu contested in seven parliamentary seats and eleven state seats and lost them all. But in 2019, two UMNO MPs from Kelantan—Mustapa Mohamed in Jeli and Ikmal Hisham Abdul Aziz in Tanah Merah—jumped to Bersatu to join the then PH government, which then gave Bersatu a foothold in the state. After the Sheraton Move in March 2020, Bersatu partnered with PAS by virtue of being in the same PN government. Bersatu, as a young party, does not have an active presence at the ground level, and as such it needs to tap into PAS's grass-roots network and party machinery to

⁵⁵ N. Faizal Ghazali, "AMANAHA Kelantan mahu Kuala Krai, sedia serah Bachok", *Malaysiakini*, 16 January 2018, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/408852><https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/408852> (accessed 10 October 2022).

⁵⁶ Currently, there are only ten Amanah activists in the whole state of Kelantan who can be considered as active. Interview with Nik Abdul Razak Nik Md Ridzuan, Deputy Head of National Amanah Youth, 12 May 2022, Kuala Lumpur.

⁵⁷ Hazelen Liana Kamarudin, "Save Kelantan sedia tegur kerajaan negeri", *Sinar Harian*, 28 April 2022, <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/article/200148/edisi/save-kelantan-sedia-tegur-kerajaan-negeri> (accessed 10 October 2022).

mobilize its supporters. Both parties campaign under the same PN logo, though when observed at PN rallies in Kelantan it is PAS supporters that are the most prominent.⁵⁸ An UMNO stalwart in Jeli shares his perception of Mustapa Mohamed's partnership with PAS:

I see him [Mustapa Mohamed] as being too close to PAS and forgetting his UMNO roots. He has yet to engage with UMNO rank and files who have supported him for many years. In fact, he has yet to offer any explanation to us [local UMNO members] why he jumped to Bersatu. He has been avoiding us. He still has about 30 per cent support among UMNO members here, while another 30 per cent are on the fence, waiting for him to offer an explanation and an apology. But yet, he spends all his time with PAS. There is no guarantee that PAS members will vote for him come election time. They [PAS members] might take the money but not vote for him. They've been known to do that.⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

PAS has shown over its seven decades of existence how politically resilient it is, functioning for most of that time as an opposition party against the UMNO-led federal juggernaut. In the state of Kelantan, where PAS has ruled the longest, it had to contend with marginalization by the federal government that to all intents and purposes punished residents of the state for voting for the "wrong" party. Kelantan as a result did not get the chance to develop at the same rate as other states in Malaysia, especially ones ruled by the BN-UMNO government. The puritanical version of Islam put into effect in Kelantan, coupled with its lagging

⁵⁸ There are only eight Bersatu branches throughout Kelantan, a clear indicator of its grass-roots weakness vis-à-vis PAS and UMNO. Interview with Abe Yi (pseudonym), constituency organizer for Bersatu MP Mustapa Mohamed, 20 August 2022, Jeli.

⁵⁹ Interview with Abe Mat Bun (pseudonym), a former Penghulu Mukim and a long-time UMNO activist, 21 August 2022, Jeli.

economic growth, paints an image of PAS-ruled Kelantan as backward and religiously extreme. Despite this unflattering perception, Kelantan stubbornly remains the stronghold of PAS, which boggles the minds of many outsiders.

Those not familiar with the state-level politics in Kelantan might wonder why the Kelantanese keep supporting a party that has failed to deliver material development after repeated chances and whose religious orientation seems overmatched by the tangible demands and challenges of the real world. This article has illustrated the means by which PAS has made itself politically relevant and competitive despite all its shortcomings. It is difficult to see PAS losing Kelantan to UMNO again like it did in 1978 as the party has become savvier and more systematic and organized since 1990. PAS's bastions in Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah have provided the party with a near-guaranteed number of parliamentary seats in the general elections, which allows PAS to play the role of kingmaker in national politics. The inclusion of PAS in the federal government has certainly benefitted Kelantan immensely and has helped to tighten the party's grip on the state. It is the reason PAS still wants to maintain a relationship with UMNO while in an alliance with Bersatu as it hedges its bet heading into the general elections. Whether the gambit will work though remains to be seen.⁶⁰

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⁶⁰ Azmil Tayeb, "PAS's Election Gambit: Having It Both Ways?", *Fulcrum*, 21 October 2022, <https://fulcrum.sg/pass-election-gambit-having-it-both-ways/> (accessed 21 October 2022).

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