

ISSN 0219-3213

2018 no. 2

Trends in
Southeast Asia

PARTI PRIBUMI BERSATU MALAYSIA IN
JOHOR: NEW PARTY, BIG RESPONSIBILITY

WAN SAIFUL WAN JAN

ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK
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Trends in Southeast Asia



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Published by: ISEAS Publishing
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Singapore 119614
publish@iseas.edu.sg <http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>

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ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Wan Saiful Wan Jan.

Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia in Johor : New Party, Big Responsibility / by
Wan Saiful Wan Jan.

(Trends in Southeast Asia Series, 0219-3213 ; TRS2/18)

1. Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia.
2. United Malays National Organisation.
3. Political parties—Malaysia—Johor.
4. Johor—Politics and government.

I. Title.

II. Series: Trends in Southeast Asia ; TRS 2/18.

DS501 I59T no. 2 (2018) January 2018

ISBN 978-981-4818-09-4 (soft cover)

ISBN 978-981-4818-10-0 (ebook, PDF)

Typeset by Superskill Graphics Pte Ltd

Printed in Singapore by Mainland Press Pte Ltd

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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Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia in Johor: New Party, Big Responsibility

By Wan Saiful Wan Jan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) was officially launched on 14 January 2017, led by prominent personalities including former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, former Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, and former Kedah Chief Minister Mukhriz Mahathir.
- Upon establishment, the party immediately announced that they are aiming to win the southern state of Johor in the upcoming general election. Historically, UMNO splinter parties have never been able to threaten UMNO in this state. Since independence, Johor has always been seen as an UMNO bastion.
- PPBM has moved quickly to establish themselves in all parliamentary and state constituencies in Johor, however, and it has been rather successful in attracting support from those aged below 35. Their key challenge remains the rural and female voters.
- Identity politics is a major hurdle for PPBM. The presence of the Democratic Action Party (DAP) in the Pakatan Harapan coalition — of which PPBM is a member — is a hurdle in attracting Malay support. Among Malay voters, DAP is perceived as a threat to Malay privileges.
- At the same time, PPBM leaders in Johor believe that their contribution towards the coalition is not yet fully recognized by their coalition partners who insist that PPBM contests only in constituencies with a large Malay population. Areas with a high percentage of Malay voters are difficult for PPBM to win because UMNO tends to enjoy huge support in such constituencies, and PPBM leaders argue that they deserve more mixed seats to run in as well.

- Winning Johor, or some other state, is crucial for PPBM. Should the coalition fail to win at the federal level, PPBM will need a base to avoid disintegration.

Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia in Johor: New Party, Big Responsibility

By Wan Saiful Wan Jan¹

1. INTRODUCTION

On 9 September 2016 the Malaysian Registrar of Societies (RoS) gave approval for the establishment of Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), following the splintering of the main party in the country's ruling coalition, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO). PPBM was then officially launched on 14 January 2017, boasting some of the most famous names in Malaysian politics today as its top leaders. Malaysia's longest-serving Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad was named as Chairman, and former Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin as President. Former Chief Minister of the northern Malaysian state of Kedah, Mukhriz Mahathir, who is Mahathir's son, was named Deputy President.

Right from the start, PPBM projected itself as a party that champions the Malay agenda. This is a position traditionally dominated by UMNO, who has always been able to fend off other contenders.² PPBM's Malay agenda also bucks the trend among Malaysian opposition parties who usually prefer to take a more multiracial and multicultural approach. This is a bold strategy, and makes clear that PPBM aims to replace UMNO as the political party for ethnic Malays in Malaysia. Bearing in mind that

¹ Wan Saiful Wan Jan is Visiting Senior Fellow at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, and Chief Executive of the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS), Malaysia.

² A notable previous contender was the Parti Melayu Semangat 46 formed in 1988 by former Finance Minister and former Vice-President of UMNO, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah. But the party survived for just eight years. Razaleigh dissolved the party and rejoined UMNO in 1996.

UMNO today is led by Prime Minister Najib Razak, who is suffering from various allegations of corruption and whose popularity rating has been very low for many months,³ the establishment of PPBM is a development that cannot be ignored.

Soon after the party obtained the RoS approval, Muhyiddin declared that it would work towards wresting the southern state of Johor from the ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional (BN).⁴ This announcement was not surprising. Johor is after all Muhyiddin's home ground. Not only is he Member of Parliament for the Johor constituency of Pagoh, he was Chief Minister of the state from 1986 to 1995. Johor is also the birthplace of UMNO and has remained the party's bastion since 1946, which makes the proclamation by Muhyiddin worth scrutinizing further. Is this a realistic target for the fledgling party? This essay seeks to answer that question.

It presents the author's analysis of media coverage and academic literature on the topic, together with findings from an extensive fieldwork conducted between April and August 2017. During the fieldwork, interviews were conducted with national, state and divisional leaders and activists of PPBM, other parties in the opposition coalition, and UMNO. More time was spent in rural areas with a high proportion of Malay voters because these are the areas where PPBM is expected to focus on. The author also travelled to various parts of rural Johor to interview community leaders and villagers, including in eight FELDA⁵ settlements, to gauge grassroots reactions to PPBM.

Following this introduction, the essay is divided into five sections. Section 2 provides a brief description of Johor's demography, economy, and political history. Subsequently, it looks into the formation and the

³ *Time* magazine named Najib as among the five world leaders whose ratings are lower than President Donald Trump <<http://time.com/4785127/michael-temer-nicolas-maduro-donald-trump/>>.

⁴ "Muhyiddin's statement is like 'counting chicken before they hatch' — Salleh". *Bernama*, 9 October 2016.

⁵ Federal Land Development Agency, a federal statutory body tasked with resettling poor Malays into new areas.

organization of PPBM, and the external and internal dynamics shaping the party. The next two sections examine the likelihood of PPBM achieving its ambition of capturing Johor in the next elections and how UMNO reacts to PPBM's presence. The essay ends with a summary.

2. JOHOR: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

2.1 Demography and economy

Johor is the third largest Malaysian state in terms of population size, after Selangor and Sabah.⁶ Of its 3.6 million inhabitants, 54 per cent is ethnic Malay, 33 per cent is Chinese, and 6 per cent is Indian. It has a rather substantial number of non-Malaysians. The 2010 Census recorded a total of 271,899 foreigners, or 8 per cent of the population at that time. But that was before the influx of more foreign workers involved in the various mega construction projects launched in the state.⁷ Malaysia as a whole is facing a serious problem in handling illegal migrant workers, and it is estimated that for every one legal foreign worker, there are two illegals.⁸ By that measure, Johor today may have more than 800,000 illegal foreign workers, equivalent to a staggering 22 per cent of its total population.

Johor is also a relatively urbanized state with a young population. More than 70 per cent of Johoreans live in urban areas and the number is increasing. Fifty per cent of the population is aged between 15 to 44 years old,⁹ creating a significant demand for jobs. The state's consistent economic growth has helped meet that demand thus far, especially as it

⁶ Data from Department of Statistics Malaysia as of July 2016.

⁷ For example, construction work for Forest City, Danga Bay and Petronas RAPID Project were all ramped up after the 2010 Census. A large number of foreign workers work on these projects.

⁸ <<http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/the-dilemma-of-having-foreign-workers-in-malaysia>> (accessed 29 July 2017).

⁹ Data stated here are from Department of Statistics Malaysia and Johor State Investment Centre.

evolves from one that is mainly based on agriculture into one based on industry and services. GDP per capita increased from RM21,116 in 2010 to RM26,399 in 2014, recording a healthy growth rate of between 4 to 6 per cent annually for the past several years.¹⁰ In March 2016, the state government published a four-year Johor Strategic Growth Plan with the ambitious target of growing per capita income by 8.7 per cent per annum to enable it to become a “high-income state” by 2020.

Four ongoing mega projects make Johor a state that is being closely watched not just by Malaysians but also by the wider world. Two of them are part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative: The RM60 billion high-speed rail linking Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, which will have stops in several Johor towns and cities and which is pivotal to the relationship between the two countries; and the RM9 billion electrified double-tracking of the train line connecting Gemas in Negeri Sembilan and Johor Bahru, due to be constructed and then operated by state-owned enterprises from China. Then there is the RM430 billion Forest City, a mixed-use development being built on four reclaimed islands in the Johor Strait, also run by a company from China. And Malaysia’s national oil company Petronas is investing RM90 billion into a major oil and gas refinery in Johor’s eastern district of Pengerang.

2.2 Politics

Although Johor is governed by Barisan Nasional (BN), which nationally is a coalition of thirteen political parties, led by UMNO, only four BN parties have seats in the state. In the last general election (GE13) at the state legislative assembly level, UMNO led the BN bloc by winning thirty-two seats, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) gained two seats, the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) three seats, and the People’s Movement Party (Gerakan) one seat. On the opposition side, the

¹⁰ Data from Oxford Business Group <<https://www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/state-readiness-wide-range-investment-opportunities-await>> (accessed 25 July 2017).

Democratic Action Party (DAP) won thirteen seats, the National Justice Party (PKR) one seat, and the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) four seats.¹¹ At the federal parliamentary level, BN won twenty-one seats, with UMNO having the lion share of fifteen seats, followed by MCA with four seats, and one each for the MIC and Gerakan. The DAP, in turn, won four parliamentary seats, and PKR one.

Figures 1 and 2 show that there is a relationship between ethnic distribution — more specifically the percentage of Malay voters in a constituency — and election results. Non-Malay areas are more likely to vote for non-UMNO parties and vice versa. In Figure 1, it can be seen that of the fifty-six seats in the state legislative assembly, sixteen have less than 45 per cent Malay voters, twenty-six have between 45 to 70 per cent Malay voters, and fourteen have more than 70 per cent Malay voters. In GE13, the mainly Chinese DAP dominated constituencies with high numbers of non-Malay voters, while UMNO dominated those with a larger Malay population.

The same is reflected in federal parliamentary constituencies. Figure 2 shows that of the twenty-six parliamentary seats in the state, six have less than 45 per cent Malay voters, fifteen seats have between 45 to 70 per cent Malay voters, and five seats have more than 70 per cent Malay voters. DAP and PKR won four and one seats respectively, all in constituencies with high percentage of non-Malay voters. Non-Malay BN parties, namely the MCA, MIC and Gerakan, won in six constituencies, but UMNO once again dominates with fifteen seats, especially in areas with a higher Malay population. In fact, data from the Malaysian Election Commission show that in nine of the fifteen seats won by UMNO, their margin of victory was sizeable, at more than 10,000 votes in each.¹²

¹¹ This composition changed slightly following the formation of two new Malay parties, Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah) and Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM). For the purpose of this essay, data from GE13 will be used since the change does not significantly affect the composition.

¹² <http://resultpru13.spr.gov.my/module/keputusan/paparan/paparan_Laporan.php>.

6 *Figure 1: Distribution of Johor state legislative assembly seats following GE13.*

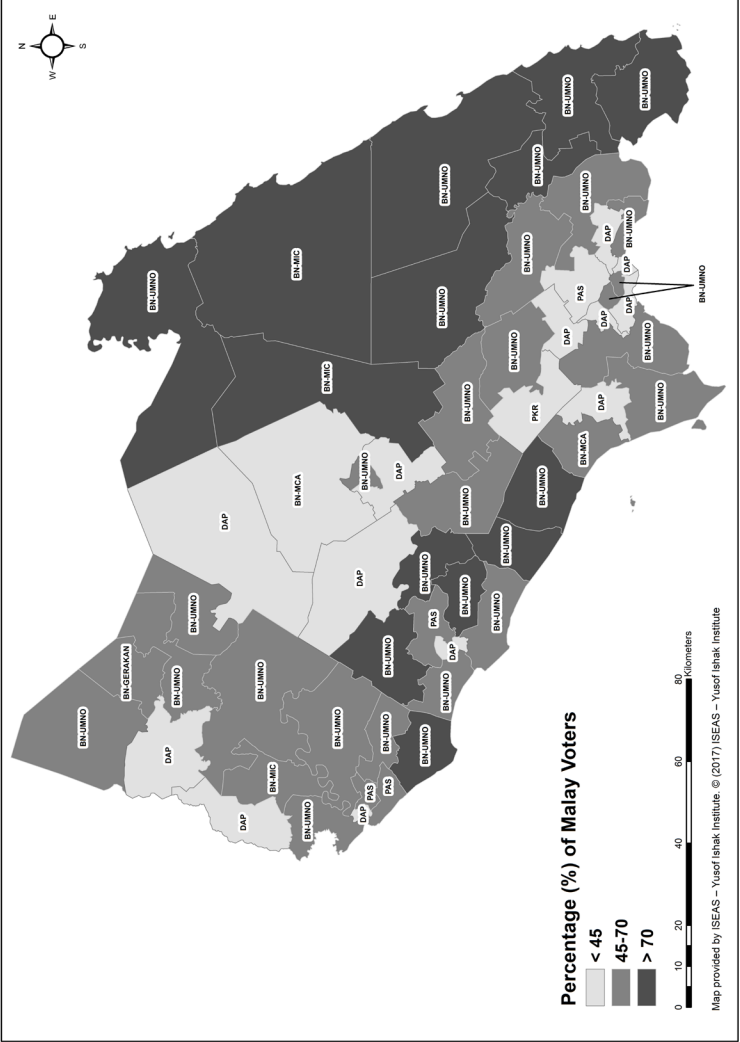
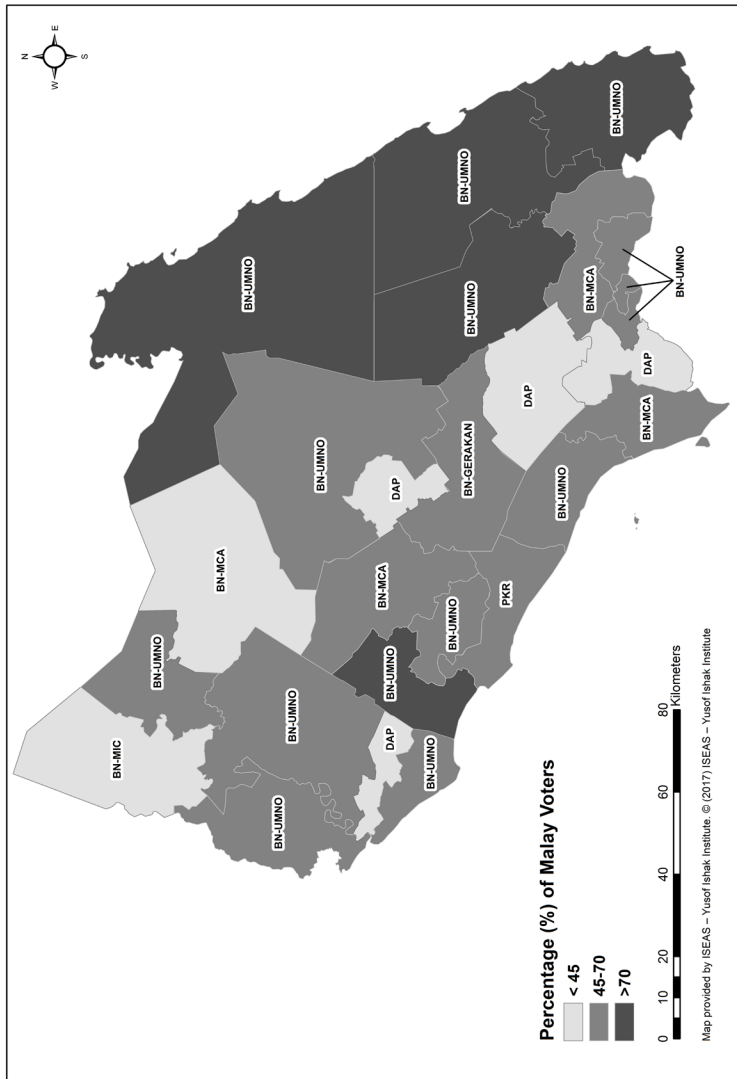


Figure 2: Distribution of parliamentary seats in Johor following GE13.



2.3 UMNO in Johor

UMNO has been the dominant party in Johor since the party was first launched in 1946. It traces its history to the anti-colonial movement in the early 1900s, which peaked in the 1940s when the British proposed to set up the Malayan Union. Under this proposal, the Malay monarchs were to surrender the bulk of their powers to the British administration and everyone who wished to apply for citizenship would enjoy equal rights regardless of their ethnicity and religion. Refusing to allow equal citizenship rights to non-Malays, Malay nationalists nationwide quickly organized themselves to oppose the British proposition.

In Johor,¹³ the anti-Malayan Union campaign was led by Onn Jaafar, a respected Malay aristocrat who was also District Officer in Batu Pahat, a town in northwestern Johor. But Onn did not just lead the resistance in Johor. He widened his leadership to the whole of Malaya by calling for a Malay Congress¹⁴ to be held on the grounds of the Johor Royal Palace on 11 and 12 May 1946. This attracted representatives from Malay organizations from across the country. On the first day of the Congress, the delegates agreed to strengthen their fight against the Malayan Union by creating a political platform. That was the beginning of UMNO, and Onn was elected as its first President.

Onn's rise as a national leader and his founding of UMNO as a national party reflect how the socio-political environment in Johor was historically different from that in other states. From the late 1800s until the Japanese invasion in 1942, Johor under British rule was largely administered by a civil service staffed by locals, especially from the aristocratic class. This created a group of experienced and capable Malay administrators.¹⁵

¹³ For a more detailed history of UMNO in Johor, see Abu Bakar Hamid et al., *UMNO Johor 50 Tahun: Memartabatkan Bangsa Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing, 1996).

¹⁴ Within the national context, this was actually the third of a series of Malay Congresses held in Malaya.

¹⁵ F.E. Hutchinson, "Malaysia's Independence Leaders and the Legacies of State Formation under British Rule", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, No. 25, Vol. 1 (2015): 123–51.

It was within this environment of relative administrative freedom that Onn grew into a “national leader” who transcended “state boundaries, constructed political opinion and connected with Malays throughout the peninsula”.¹⁶ Many other Johor Malay administrators soon followed Onn into UMNO and they too quickly rose to become national leaders through the party.¹⁷ The environment in the state at that time allowed local Malays not just to grow into charismatic leaders, but, at variance with Malay leaders in other states, the Johor Malay leadership went on to contribute to the growth of political consciousness and political activism nationwide, beyond Johor’s borders.

UMNO and the Malay nationalists continued to mobilize opposition to the Malayan Union, and the British were eventually forced to reconsider. Following negotiations with UMNO and the Malay Rulers, they agreed that the Malayan Union would be replaced with the Federation of Malaya, starting from 1 February 1948.¹⁸ Onn thus scored a major political victory, and this encouraged him to think about what UMNO should do next. He started exploring two areas: navigating Malaya towards independence from Britain and getting Malaya’s various ethnic groups to work together. The independence agenda was adopted by UMNO without much hesitation, although the speed at which independence should be gained and the actual form of independence continued to be debated. Onn, however, faced a tremendous backlash from UMNO when he pushed for non-Malays to be accepted as equal members of the party. His failure to persuade UMNO to become a multiracial party led to his resignation from the presidency as well as from the party in August 1951.¹⁹ Soon after that, on 16 September 1951, he launched the

¹⁶ D.J. Amoroso, *Traditionalism and the Ascendancy of the Malay Ruling Class in Colonial Malaya* (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, and Singapore: NUS Press, 2014), p. 187.

¹⁷ For example, Hutchinson, “Malaysia’s Independence Leaders”, identified 17 Malay figures from Johor who became UMNO’s early national leaders.

¹⁸ A.J. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics During the Malayan Union Experiment, 1945–1948* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1979).

¹⁹ John Funston, *Malay Politics in Malaysia: A Study of UMNO and PAS* (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980).

ambitiously non-communal Independence of Malaya Party (IMP). The first splinter party from UMNO was thus born, led by none less than UMNO's founding president himself.²⁰

Despite being founded and led by a towering Johorean, the IMP failed to make any mark in the state, or, for that matter, anywhere else in the country. Various authors have offered reasons to explain IMP's failure.²¹ One was that UMNO, contrary to Onn's expectations, regrouped rather than disintegrated following his departure.²² Additionally, during his tenure as president of UMNO, Onn had several confrontations with the Malay Rulers. He was scathing in some of his attacks, and he was once even quoted as saying "We must find ways and means to end feudal rule" in an obvious reference to the Malay Rulers.²³ These created the impression that his IMP was also an anti-Royal party, which was anathema to the Malay psyche at that time.²⁴

Onn dissolved the IMP in 1953, and formed another party — Parti Negara (National Party). This also suffered a similar fate, however. The fate of both IMP and Parti Negara showed that even a highly respected Johorean, and the founding President of UMNO to boot, could not muster enough support to shake the party's influence in Johor. This historical background, combined with the fact that UMNO is still strong in the state today, raises the question if it is realistic for a fledgling party like PPBM to capture Johor so quickly. But before we attempt to tackle that question, we need to consider PPBM's history and the internal and external dynamics affecting it in Johor today.

²⁰ A more detailed account of Onn's departure from UMNO to form the IMP is provided in Juita Puthuchery, *Dato Onn, UMNO and the Independence of Malaya Party 1948–1952* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 1992).

²¹ See, for example, Shaharom Husain, *Biografi Perjuangan Politik Dato' Onn Jaafar* (Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1985) and Ramlah Adam, *Dato' Onn Jaafar'' Pengasas Kemerdekaan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992).

²² Puthuchery, *Dato Onn, UMNO and the Independence of Malaya Party*, p. 298.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

3. THE STORY OF PPBM

The story of PPBM started with discontent within UMNO towards the way its President and Malaysia's current Prime Minister Najib Razak handled the various allegations of mismanagement and corruption surrounding the state-owned enterprise 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB). Some party members and leaders were upset when it was disclosed that a political donation of US\$700 million had been deposited into Najib's personal bank account rather than the party's account.²⁵ Much to Najib's chagrin, several UMNO national leaders went public to voice their concerns on these issues. Najib reacted decisively by removing them from their government posts through a cabinet reshuffle on 28 July 2015.²⁶ Unhappy with Najib's actions, Malaysia's longest-serving Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad declared on 29 February 2016 that he was resigning from the party.²⁷ Najib eventually sacked two other critics, Muhyiddin Yassin²⁸ and Mahathir's son Mukhriz, from UMNO, and suspended the membership of Shafie Apdal,²⁹ on 24 June 2016.³⁰

Throughout that tumultuous period, and especially after the July 2015 cabinet reshuffle, the affected UMNO leaders started talking to leaders of Malaysia's opposition parties and to civil society groups. The conversations morphed into an agreement to organize a rally called the People's Congress (Kongres Rakyat) on 27 March 2016 at the Shah Alam

²⁵ <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/04/malaysia-corruption-watchdog-najib-razak-donations-1mdb>> (accessed 24 July 2017).

²⁶ <<http://www.utusan.com.my/berita/nasional/rombakan-kabinet-muhyiddin-gugur-zahid-hamidi-tpm-baharu-1.117963>> (accessed 24 July 2017).

²⁷ <<http://www.astroawani.com/berita-politik/tun-mahathir-dan-isteri-umum-keluar-umno-96732>> (accessed 24 July 2017).

²⁸ Sacked from membership of the party, after previously being removed from the post of Deputy President of UMNO and Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia.

²⁹ Suspended from membership of the party, after previously being removed from the post of Vice-President of UMNO and Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

³⁰ <<http://www.utusan.com.my/berita/politik/muhyiddin-mukhriz-dipecat-1.346795>> (accessed 24 July 2017).

Convention Centre in Shah Alam, Selangor. As an invited guest to the Congress, this author witnessed how more than 2,000 people thronged the grand hall to listen to Malaysia's top opposition and civil society leaders welcoming Muhyiddin and Mahathir into their fold. Following this Congress, various closed-door discussions were hosted by the duo, during which inputs were invited from stakeholders on what their next steps should be. It was during this stage that the idea that a new political party needed to be formed started to gain strength. The seeds for the founding of PPBM were thus planted.³¹

Since the main movers for this new party were almost all from UMNO, one big issue that cropped up was whether it should be ethnocentric. A significant portion of opposition politicians and civil society activists feel that Malaysia needs to move away from ethnic-based politics and therefore the new party must be non-communal. However, an equally large number of stakeholders believed that Mahathir's and Muhyiddin's main advantage is their ability to capture the Malay votes because of their credentials as Malay nationalists. If the new party were non-communal, that advantage would be lost because they would become just like the existing non-communal opposition parties. An alternative Malay party would be more apt to complement the existing set of opposition parties. Ultimately, and upon advice from various civil society leaders, this argument won the day, resulting in the PPBM having the form it has today.³²

But not everyone agreed with that position. Many among the younger generation who sympathized with the anti-Najib agenda insisted on maintaining their non-communal idealism despite appreciating the political realities. Even though they understood that in the immediate term they must become a Malay party to capture the Malay votes, they

³¹ Interview with Sufi Yusof, Special Officer to PPBM Chairman Mahathir Mohamad. 2 August 2017.

³² Interview with Ambiga Sreenevasan, former leader of The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih) and current President of Malaysian National Human Rights Society (HAKAM), 8 August 2017. Ambiga attended several of these meetings.

asserted their desire to see the party eventually becoming a party for all Malaysians.³³ As a compromise, two categories of membership were created: Normal and Associate. Normal membership gives the person full rights as a member and is only for “Pribumi”, while Associate Membership is for non-“Pribumi”, who are not given the right to vote or contest for party positions. This was put into the new party’s constitution, in which they defined “Pribumi” as “a Malaysian citizen who is a Malay and Bumiputera, including the Orang Asli and those from Sabah and Sarawak as stated in the Federal Constitution, the respective State constitutions, and the laws of Malaysia.”³⁴

The party’s registration was eventually approved by the RoS on 9 September 2016, with seven founding members, as listed in Table 1. The official launch of the party took place on 14 January 2017 at Stadium Malawati, Shah Alam, Selangor. The objectives of the party, as per its constitution, clearly make it a party that targets the Malay Muslim voters. The first four of its thirteen objectives talk about upholding Islam as the religion of the Federation, upholding the sanctity of the Malay Rulers, defending the special position of the Malays, and strengthening the Malay language (see Appendix 1). The importance of this position will become apparent later in this essay, when the politics of Malay identity is discussed.

3.1 Party organization and financing

PPBM’s constitution describes the party’s structure as outlined in Table 2. In addition to the main body of membership, PPBM also has two wings, the women’s wing, Srikandi, for their female members of all ages and the youth wing, Angkatan Bersatu Anak Muda (Armada), for male youths under 35 years of age.

In Johor, the current Head of the State Leadership Council is Shahrudin Salleh, state assemblymen for Jorak who simultaneously

³³ Interview with Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, current head of PPBM’s Youth Wing (Armada), 11 July 2017.

³⁴ Constitution of PPBM, clause 2.

Table 1: Founding members of PPBM.

Name	Background
Mahathir Mohamad	Former President of UMNO and former Prime Minister
Muhyiddin Yassin	Former Deputy President of UMNO and former Deputy Prime Minister
Mukhriz Mahathir	Former Chairman of Kedah UMNO Liaison Committee and former Chief Minister of Kedah
Kamarul Azman Habibur Rahman	Spokesperson for Coalition of UMNO Branch Leaders
Akhramsyah Muammar Ubaidah Sanusi	Candidate for national UMNO Youth Leader in 2013 but lost
Anina Saadudin	UMNO member from Kedah who, claiming to act on behalf of UMNO, sued Najib in 2015 to recover the political donation that was banked into the latter's personal account
Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman	Former student leader, not from UMNO

is also the party's national Secretary General. Shahrudin is known as a trusted associate of Muhyiddin. His political career started to rise when Muhyiddin appointed him Political Secretary from 1998 to 2009. Muhyiddin also helped secure Shahrudin's nomination as candidate for Jorak, a state seat under the former's parliamentary constituency of Pagoh. It is therefore not a surprise when, on 4 July 2016, Shahrudin resigned from his post as the Vice-Head of UMNO Pagoh Division in protest against Muhyiddin's sacking from the party. When interviewed for this study, Shahrudin admitted that he left UMNO with a heavy heart, but he felt compelled to do so after seeing how Muhyiddin was

Table 2: PPBM's organizational structure.

Level	Name	Composition and criteria
National	Supreme Leadership Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairman (elected by the general assembly) • President (elected by the general assembly) • Deputy President (elected by the general assembly) • 5 Vice-Presidents including the heads of the Srikandi Women's Wing and the Armada Youth Wing (elected by the general assembly) • Secretary General (appointed by the President following consultation with the Chairman) • Treasurer (appointed by the President following consultation with the Chairman) • Information Chief (appointed by the President following consultation with the Chairman) • Maximum of 15 members elected by the general assembly • Maximum of 7 more members appointed by the President after consultation with the Chairman, • 3 representatives each from Srikandi and the Armada, appointed by their respective wings.
	Presidential Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President • Deputy President • 5 Vice-Presidents including the heads of Srikandi and Armada • Secretary General • Treasurer • Information Chief

continued on next page

Table 2 — cont'd

Level	Name	Composition and criteria
State	State Leadership Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head (appointed by the President following consultation with the Chairman, but must be from among the Divisional Heads) • Deputy Head (appointed by the President following consultation with the Chairman, but must be from among the Divisional Heads) • Head of State Srikandi (appointed by national Srikandi Head) • Head of State Armada (appointed by national Armada Head) • Secretary (appointed by the State Head) • Treasurer (appointed by the State Head) • Information Chief (appointed by the State Head) • All other Divisional Heads in the state as members
Division (one per parliamentary constituency)	Divisional Leadership Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head (elected by the Division general assembly) • Deputy Head (elected by the Division general assembly) • Vice-Head (elected by the Division general assembly) • Head of Division Srikandi (elected by the wing's general assembly) • Head of Division Armada (elected by the wing's general assembly) • Secretary (appointed by the Division Head) • Treasurer (appointed by the Division Head) • Information Chief (appointed by the Division Head) • Maximum of 10 members elected by Division general assembly • Maximum of 4 members appointed by the Division Head

Branch (sub-units under the Division)	Branch Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head (elected at the Branch general assembly) • Deputy Head (elected at Branch general assembly) • Vice-Head (mechanism for appointment not stated) • Head of Branch Srikandi (elected by the wing's general assembly) • Head of Branch Armada (elected by the wing's general assembly) • Secretary (appointed by Branch Head) • Treasurer (appointed by Branch Head) • Information Chief (appointed by Branch Head) • Maximum of 8 members elected by the Branch general assembly • Maximum of 3 members appointed by the Branch Head
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Source: PPBM Constitution (2017).

treated and especially when he discovered further details of Najib Razak's alleged corruption.³⁵

With Shahrudin spending most of his time in Kuala Lumpur fulfilling his duties as national Secretary General, the day-to-day operations of PPBM in Johor is left to two former veteran UMNO politicians. The first is Deputy Head Nasir Hashim, a businessman who was formerly Deputy Head of Johor's Gelang Patah UMNO Division. The second is Osman Sopian, Secretary of Johor PPBM. Osman was a three-term UMNO state legislative assembly member for Kempas, before retiring from public life in GE13 to focus on his business. The two are tasked with building PPBM's state machinery and ensuring it is well-lubricated, and supported by other State Leadership Council members.³⁶ Thus far, PPBM has Divisions in all twenty-six parliamentary constituencies across Johor, and all are holding regular activities.

In Johor, the party is mainly funded by contributions from members. The party's membership fee is low, at just RM2.00 per annum or RM100.00 for life membership. This forces the party to depend on additional contributions from its members and leaders to pay for their activities and the day-to-day operations of the party. When the party wanted to open its state headquarters in early 2017, its state leaders had to pay for the rental and renovation of the premise themselves. Daily operating costs for the state headquarters is the responsibility of Osman Sopian, the Secretary of Johor PPBM, and he relies on his own money as well as money that he raises from his network for the purpose.³⁷ At divisions and branches, the leaders and activists in the respective levels too must make regular contributions in order to cover the costs of their activities, complemented by public donation drives.

³⁵ Interview with Shahrudin Salleh, PPBM Secretary General and Head of Johor PPBM, 3 August 2017.

³⁶ Interview with Osman Sopian, Secretary of Johor PPBM, 8 July 2017, and Nasir Hashim, Deputy Head of Johor PPBM, 16 July 2017.

³⁷ Interview with Nasir Hashim, 16 July 2017.

3.2 Key dynamics experienced by Johor PPBM

3.2.1 Winning the hearts of Johor's younger voters

PPBM has been successful in attracting younger members, so much so that the majority of the party members are under 35 years of age. This is true both at the national level and in Johor. The current estimate is that nationally, PPBM has almost 200,000 members, and 55 per cent of these are under 35 years old.³⁸ In Johor, PPBM has around 7,000 approved members while approximately 8,000 more are still being processed. More than 50 per cent of that number are under 35 years old. In fact, quite a few of the party's state and divisional leading activists are from the under-35 age group, with many still in tertiary education.³⁹

Youth activism in PPBM started even before the party was officially launched. Its origin can be traced back to March 2016, when a group of twenty-five student and youth leaders signed a statement calling for Prime Minister Najib to resign. The group called themselves "Challenger" and their spokesperson was 23-year old Johorean Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman. This group came out of the blue and many of the names were not known in the national arena prior to the statement. But Challenger successfully organized themselves into a cohesive group and travelled the country to meet other students and youth leaders, recruiting many more into their cause. Syed Saddiq then became one of the seven founding members of PPBM. Twelve more members of Challenger, from the original twenty-five, soon followed him into the party, and they continue to play important roles to bring more of their peer group into PPBM. One of them, Mohamad Fahim Mohamad Farid, was appointed Head of Armada PPBM in Gelang Patah Division, and is considered one of the more active leaders of the party in Johor and nationally.

To understand why PPBM has been attractive to the young in the state, this author interviewed several leaders and members of Armada

³⁸ Interview with Mukhriz Mahathir, PPBM Deputy President, 30 May 2017.

³⁹ Interview with Osman Sopian, 8 July 2017.

PPBM.⁴⁰ Three themes emerged as the most cited reasons. Top of the list is their admiration of Mahathir. The maximum age to be a member of Armada is 35. Thus, the oldest of them were born in 1982, a year after Mahathir became Prime Minister. For the next 22 years, they lived under Mahathir's administration and they grew up seeing and enjoying the high level of physical and economic development that Mahathir brought to the country. But they were also too young to understand the criticisms that were levelled at Mahathir throughout this time in office. Hence for many of them, Mahathir is a hero.

Second is their anger against the current administration, related to the rising cost of living. They experience difficulties in finding well-paying employment, let alone buying a house, or even a car which they feel is necessary in a state like Johor where the coverage and frequency of public transportation is unsatisfactory. Those in higher education as well as fresh graduates have to deal with relatively high student debts. But while they face these challenges, they regularly read from online platforms about the extravagant lifestyle of Najib's family and the many corruption allegations surrounding other UMNO leaders. This leads them to search for a platform through which they feel they can stop the problems. Being a new party, PPBM enables them to champion this cause through a platform that has minimal red tape since the party does not yet have an extensive bureaucracy. In PPBM, the youngsters quickly found a political party that is open to their ideas and participation.

The third factor is the role played by the current head of Armada PPBM, Syed Saddiq. This law graduate from the International Islamic University Malaysia built a name as a champion debater both in Malaysia and internationally while still at university. He became well known when he became the spokesperson for Challenger and when he acted as the emcee for the People's Congress in March 2016. While building

⁴⁰ Interviews with national Armada Head Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman on 11 July 2017; Head of Armada Gelang Patah Division in Johor, Mohamad Fahim Mohamad Farid on 8 July 2017; as well as five other Johor Armada activists in Kota Tinggi (16 July 2017), Tebrau (11 August 2017), and Pontian (11 August 2017).

up support for Challenger, he travelled from one university campus to another, garnering support for the cause, and today he continues to do the same for PPBM's Armada in Johor as well as nationally. In October 2017, he even announced that he had turned down a full scholarship offer from the University of Oxford, United Kingdom, in order to continue PPBM's political struggle.⁴¹ This endeared him to many youths and young professionals, and attracted even more young people into the party.

3.2.2 Female voters a major hurdle

In GE13, half of the voters in Johor were female,⁴² making them an important component of the electorate. In her commentary on female voting patterns in Malaysia, political scientist Bridget Welsh⁴³ argued that female voters are more likely to vote for BN for four reasons. First, UMNO's women wing, the Wanita UMNO, has been a formidable force in campaigning for the party for decades and they are rooted in the social structures of many local communities. Second, women have less access to alternative sources of information, relying mainly on mainstream media that is usually pro-BN. Third, women, especially those from the lower classes, are more responsive to monetary incentives and they feel more obliged to repay the assistance given by the BN government. And fourth, women are more responsive to the fear tactics adopted by the BN, as they usually worry about how political change may impact their families. Another analyst, Maszlee Malik,⁴⁴ added that winning over female votes is crucial for PPBM if they want to become a credible threat to UMNO in Johor. If PPBM can swing women voters their way, especially in seats where BN won only marginally, Maszlee believes that the party will certainly have a good chance of winning the state.⁴⁵

⁴¹ <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/396975>> (accessed 5 October 2017).

⁴² Bridget Welsh, "BN's femme fatale: the power of women", *Malaysiakini*, 27 April 2013.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Associate Professor at the International Islamic University Malaysia.

⁴⁵ Interview with Maszlee Malik, 11 August 2017.

But although PPBM has been relatively successful in attracting the young, this experience is not replicated when it comes to female voters. PPBM leaders interviewed in this study openly acknowledge this shortcoming. They are well aware of the effectiveness of Wanita UMNO, especially in rural areas of the state. Hence, PPBM Srikandi is working hard to penetrate Johor villages. Its members also organize ad hoc membership registration and information booths in strategic locations across the state, to enable them to engage with female members of the public directly. The main issue they raise with female voters is the increasing cost of living in the state. The assumption is that women are more sensitive to the rising cost of living, especially when it affects the price of household goods because they are the ones who make the daily purchases for their families.⁴⁶

Yet the response to Srikandi's campaign has been relatively slow and they are not yet a real challenger to Wanita UMNO. The biggest hurdle is in rural areas and villages, especially the FELDA areas, where the Wanita UMNO infrastructure is deeply entrenched and they have regular, almost weekly activities. One example are the Quran Recitation meetings organized in small groups by Wanita UMNO activists in villages across the state, rotating from house to house, usually once a week. The same group also plays active roles whenever there are deaths in the village, or at wedding receptions and other community functions. Such group activities have been going on for decades under Wanita UMNO, creating a sense of belonging and loyalty among the members. They are also a visible although indirect way to campaign for UMNO to other women in the village. More importantly, if a member were to jump to PPBM, they might be ostracized from the group and this is a big deterrent for many.⁴⁷ Johor's Srikandi has not been able to penetrate this network of informal women groupings.

⁴⁶ Interview with Shahrudin Salleh, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ Interview with three Wanita UMNO activists at branch level, one each in Tanjung Piai (10 August 2017), Pontian (11 August 2017) and Gelang Patah (12 August 2017). All requested anonymity.

In the more urban areas of the state, there are some signs that Srikandi's efforts are paying off, albeit only very slowly, especially among those who are more educated. For example, in the Tebrau parliamentary constituency, which is an urban area just next to the capital city of Johor Bahru, the majority of Srikandi members are new to party politics, with PPBM being the first party that they have joined. They are relatively young, many below 40 years old, and are still building their careers. For many of them, while the cost of living remains the top complaint that drives them to join PPBM, they are also unhappy with the state of governance and corruption in the country. They have better access to non-mainstream media and they are better informed about the various allegations of misconduct especially those surrounding 1MDB and FELDA. While they do keep an eye on issues directly affecting them in their local environment, they are also influenced by national issues. In the Tebrau Division alone, out of the 1,500 or so members and activists that they have today, around 400 are in Srikandi, and many of them fit this description.⁴⁸

In fact, if one were to use attendance at opposition events in Johor as a yardstick, it is quite visible that Srikandi still has a long way to go. This author observed several public events⁴⁹ across the state between April and August 2017, and it was rather obvious that most attendees, by far, were male. Female attendees were small in number, and even when they were seen in the audience, the vast majority were non-Malays, implying that they are not from PPBM. Given the limited time before GE14, this situation does raise the question if PPBM will be able to make sufficiently large gains among Malay female voters. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Malay women generally do not attend political talks, or *ceramah*, anyway. These events tend to take place in the evenings and they often go on well after midnight. This is a deterrent especially if their husbands

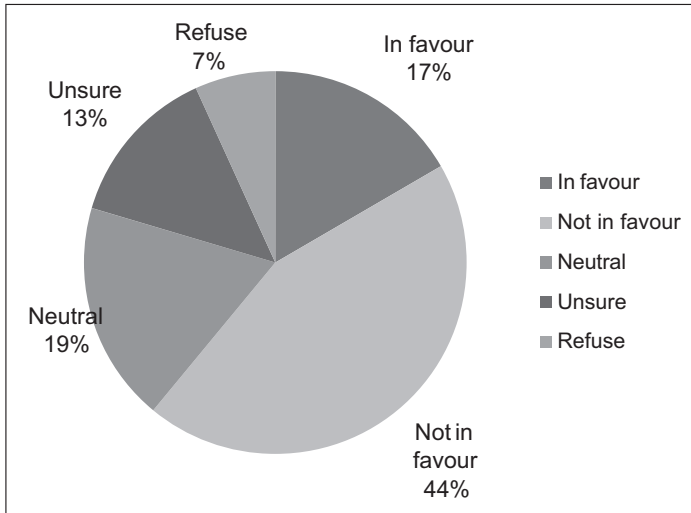
⁴⁸ Interview with Noorlihan Arifin, Head of Recruitment, Srikandi PPBM Johor, 13 August 2017.

⁴⁹ The events were in Pengerang on 13 May 2017, Kota Tinggi on 15 July 2017, Pontian on 12 August 2017, and Kulai on 13 August 2017.

are attending the event. This is also why the Wanita UMNO approach as described above, where they run daytime small group activities in the neighbourhood itself, have been more effective.

The ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute commissioned the 2017 Johor Opinion Survey,⁵⁰ and its findings confirms that PPBM is still quite far behind in terms of winning female voters (Figure 3). Only 17 per cent said that they are in favour of the party, while 44 per cent rejected them outright. The offside, however, is that 39 per cent of female voters could potentially still be persuaded, since they refused to answer the question, or they stated that they are neutral or unsure.

Figure 3: Favourability towards PPBM among female voters.



Source: Johor Opinion Survey commissioned by ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017.

⁵⁰ The survey was conducted between May and June 2017. A sample size of 2,011 respondents was interviewed via fixed-line and mobile phones. Respondents consisted of Malaysian citizens aged 18 and above who resided in Johor, selected on the basis of random stratified sampling across district of residence, controlled

3.2.3 The politics of Malay identity⁵¹

Race and religion are two issues that are pervasive in Malaysian politics. Among the ethnic Malays, the perceived threat of losing their political influence is often posed by those with vested interests as a threat to the survival of the entire ethnic group. UMNO⁵² has always played up this issue, maintaining and exploiting ethno-religious fear while presenting themselves as the only party that can guarantee Malay survival. For example, in the 2016 UMNO General Assembly, Prime Minister Najib Razak in his Presidential Address claimed that Malaysians are presented with only two options, a government that is led by Malays through UMNO on the one hand, or non-Malays through DAP on the other. He also said that if the country were to fall into DAP's hands in GE14,

surely the rights and special position (of the Malays) championed by UMNO ... will become extinct and will disappear ... This is why if the Malays ... can understand the implicit meaning of my

by quota for ethnicity, age and gender. A "Johor resident" is defined as one who is registered as a voter in the state. There were 1,104 (55 per cent) ethnic Malay respondents, 758 (38 per cent) ethnic Chinese respondents, and 149 (7 per cent) ethnic Indian respondents. 340 respondents were between the ages of 21 and 30 years old; 455 respondents were between the ages of 31 and 40 years old; 546 respondents were between the ages of 41 and 50 years old; 409 respondents were between the ages of 51 and 60 years old; and 261 respondents were 61 years old and above. The survey's estimated margin of error is +2.18.

⁵¹ The discussion in this subsection is primarily based on focus group discussions conducted with four to eight randomly selected villagers in each of the following villages across Johor: Felda Ayer Tawar 1 (Panti constituency, 11 May 2017), Kampung Sungai Rengit (Pengerang constituency, 12 May 2017), Kampung Mohd Noor (Sri Gading constituency, 10 May 2017), Kampung Serkat Timur (Tanjung Piai constituency, 11 August 2017), FELDA Taib Andak (Kulai constituency, 12 August 2017).

⁵² To be fair, all ethnic- and religion-based political parties in Malaysia have always played up ethno-religious sentiments for their partisan benefit, not just UMNO. But since this essay focuses more on PPBM, UMNO, and Malay politics, the discussion is intentionally restricted.

speech, especially with regards to the horrific fate that will fall onto them, I am confident the Malays ... will be fearful and concerned, and they will hold on as strongly as they can to UMNO as the only party that can defend their children and grandchildren...⁵³

This fear, and fear-mongering, are well recognized by PPBM founders. Hence, nationally, PPBM is firmly positioning themselves as a Malay party and this is formalized in their party constitution. This strategy is embraced by its Johor state leaders as they too recognize the importance of winning the hearts of Malay voters. Especially in rural Johor, the fear of losing Malay political power is a strong influence on voting intentions. Almost always, the fear directly contributes to voting intentions in favour of BN and UMNO, as reflected in the maps shown in Figures 1 and 2, where the more rural and largely Malay constituencies are dominated by the BN coalition.

The analogy most often cited by the villagers interviewed is that the Malays in Johor may become like the Malays in Singapore if the DAP wins more seats because the party is a remnant of Singapore's People's Action Party (PAP). They perceive the Malays in Singapore as being discriminated against by the Chinese-led PAP government. No evidence was supplied to back up this claim, and when pressed for specifics, many simply stated that they heard this from political leaders, or this was their understanding from media coverage and media commentaries. When pressed further, none of them could cite which media report they were referring to or which politician made those claims. However, there are three media platforms mentioned by everyone met by this author, the most common being the UMNO-linked television channel TV3, followed by two Malay newspapers *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*. At the same time, all the politicians they quoted are either from UMNO, or are from UMNO but now have left for PPBM. Interestingly, even

⁵³ <<https://www.najibrazak.com/bm/blog/ucapan-dasar-presiden-di-perhimpunan-agung-umno-2016/>> (accessed 2 August 2017).

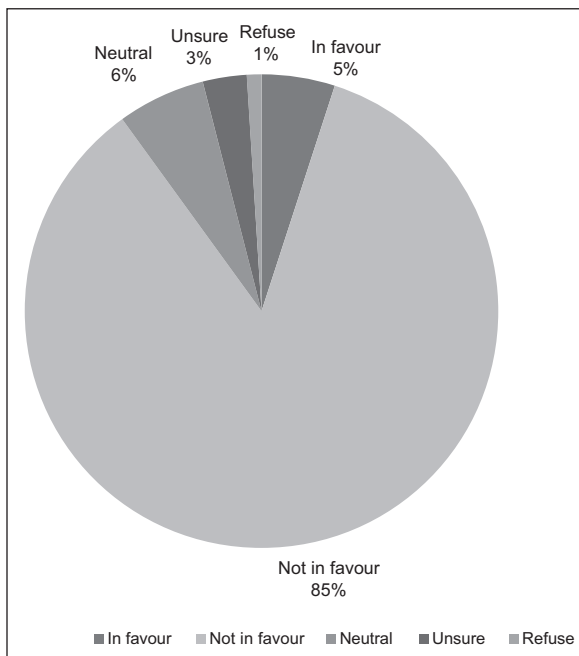
though many of them cited the example of Singapore Malays, none of the villagers interviewed have visited the country or know any Malays from Singapore.

All the interviewees associate the Chinese-majority DAP with the risk of further erosion of Malay special privileges, and they insist that they, as Malays, will only vote for a political party that will guarantee these privileges. Interestingly, in all the interviews, the name DAP and the phrase “orang Cina” (ethnic Chinese) were used interchangeably by the villagers. It was as if for them, the rise of the DAP is equated to rising ethnic Chinese political power, and by extension the erosion of Malay political power. When these villagers read media coverage or hear speeches from politicians about the DAP, they almost instinctively treat it as a code word for ethnic Chinese. Johor being a state that borders Singapore serves to heighten that fear because the danger feels more immediate to them. Thus, voting for any party that helps DAP get into government is the equivalent of jeopardizing Malay special position. The truthfulness of this assumption will be surely challenged by many. But, when it comes to political sentiment, at least among the interviewed villagers, their fear of the DAP and the ethnic Chinese is palpable, and they do not hide the fact that this fear influences how they vote.

The fear plays directly into the way PPBM is perceived by Malay voters in Johor because of DAP’s membership in the Pakatan Harapan (Harapan) opposition coalition, which includes PPBM, Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah) and Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR). DAP holds thirteen state seats in Johor, making them the biggest party in the coalition. While this may be a strength to the DAP, it is ironically a risk to the Harapan coalition, especially in the eyes of rural Malay voters. The problem is particularly acute for PPBM because rural Malay voters are their core target. This sentiment among the Malays is supported by findings from the Johor Opinion Survey commissioned by the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. As shown in Figure 4, 85 per cent of Johor Malays says that they are not in favour of the DAP. This contributes significantly to the low acceptance (14 per cent, see Figure 5) of Harapan among Johor Malays, indicating a huge challenge for PPBM.

DAP recognizes this challenge, and argues that, at most, they are likely to contest and win in only fourteen to fifteen seats in GE14,

Figure 4: Favourability towards DAP among Malays.



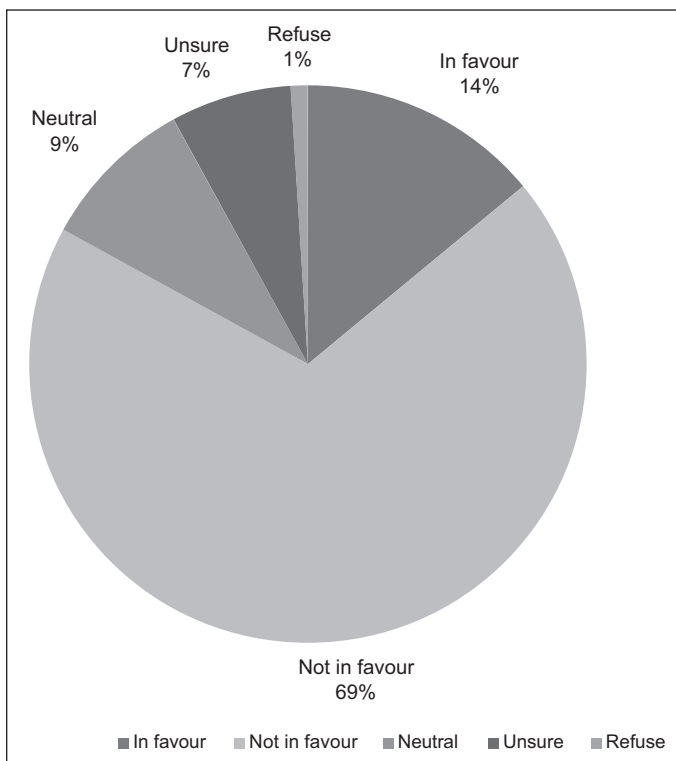
Source: Johor Opinion Survey commissioned by ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017.

making it impossible for them to become a dominant party if Harapan wins the state.⁵⁴ That notwithstanding, the current strength of DAP in the state still generates fear among rural Malay voters there. They see a vote for PPBM as a vote for DAP, since both are in the same coalition. UMNO too continues to exploit this fear by highlighting the PPBM-DAP relationship.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Interview with Liew Chin Tong, Chairman of Johor DAP, 13 July 2017.

⁵⁵ <<http://www.astroawani.com/berita-politik/ppbm-lahir-hasil-sokongan-dap-annuar-musa-135970>> (accessed 15 August 2017).

Figure 5: Favourability towards *Pakatan Harapan* among Malays.



Source: Johor Opinion Survey commissioned by ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017.

To manage this reputational risk, Johor PPBM leaders are insisting that their party must be given a significantly larger number of seats in Johor by other Harapan partners. For them to convince the Malay voters, they must be visibly seen as leading and dominating Harapan in the state. They believe that if they are not put in the driving seat, neither they nor Harapan will be able to sway a sufficiently large proportion of Malay votes their way. Negotiations on this matter are still ongoing and signs indicate that DAP, PKR and Amanah are gradually accepting PPBM's

point of view. The biggest indicator so far is that on 22 August 2017, Muhyiddin was named as Chairman of Johor Harapan, putting him as the leader of the state opposition coalition.⁵⁶ But, as of the date of writing this essay, PPBM's desire for a significantly larger number of seats remains unresolved.

3.2.4 The dynamics between Mahathir and Muhyiddin

As shown in Table 2, PPBM's Supreme Leadership Council is the highest executive body, with Mahathir as Chairman. Next is the Presidential Council, chaired by Muhyiddin. When this structure was first announced, almost immediately tongues started to wag about how there was a tussle between "Mahathir's men" and "Muhyiddin's men". This provided early ammunition for critics eager to argue that a ship with two captains will never sail far. This structure, however, was designed to ensure proper checks and balances within the party, especially when the founding members knew that the presence of the two towering figures could become a challenge if not managed properly. To accommodate both leaders, the drafters of PPBM's constitution decided to adopt a structure similar to any well-governed organization, where the Chairman and the CEO are two different people, and the Board and the Management are two different teams as well.⁵⁷

While those within the party feel that this structure exemplifies PPBM's commitment to good governance, observers continue to look into the politics behind such an arrangement. Some criticisms go deeper. Several commentators have said that the dynamics between the two figures have led to Muhyiddin having to stand behind Mahathir.⁵⁸ There

⁵⁶ <<http://www.sinarharian.com.my/politik/muhyiddin-dilantik-pengerusi-pakatan-harapan-johor-1.723005>> (accessed 22 August 2017).

⁵⁷ Interview with Rais Hussin Mohamed Arif, Head of national PPBM Policy and Strategy Bureau, 3 June 2017.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Azizul Osman, "Tun Mahathir lebih berkuasa daripada Muhyiddin dalam PPBM" [Tun Mahathir is more powerful than Muhyiddin], *AntaraPos*, 26 Januari 2017.

is quiet rumbling in the background that Muhyiddin is not assertive or popular enough compared to Mahathir, even in Johor, where Mahathir is perceived as generating more excitement whenever he visits the state.⁵⁹ When asked about this situation,⁶⁰ Muhyiddin argues that critics either misunderstand the division of responsibilities in the party, or they are trying to score political points against him. To Muhyiddin, Mahathir has always been the more aggressive person, even from the time he first entered politics decades ago. Therefore, it is illogical for anyone to compare Mahathir to any other politician, himself included.

According to Muhyiddin, the correct way to assess his performance is by looking at how he fulfils the role of party President. In less than one year he has been able to create a fully staffed and well-equipped national head office for the party. He has also identified and appointed committed individuals into various posts at the national level. And more importantly, he has set up divisions in more than 145 parliamentary constituencies across the country, including the twenty-six in Johor. He has also successfully identified and appointed the right people into various party posts, both at national and state levels. He further argues that Mahathir's assault needs to be supported by a strong and credible infrastructure, which now exists as a result of the machinery that he has built. He refuses to be drawn into the discussion about who is more powerful, believing instead that both he and Mahathir have important roles to play. He argues that they are effective now as a team, complementing each other in turning the new party into a credible challenger to the ruling regime, including in Johor.

At this point it is useful to bring data from another set of survey conducted by independent research house EMIR Research and several local Malaysian academics.⁶¹ Using random stratified sampling, 2,440

⁵⁹ Multiple interviews with various Johor opposition leaders from PKR, Amanah and DAP, conducted in July and August 2017.

⁶⁰ Interview with Muhyiddin Yassin, President of PPBM, 9 August 2017.

⁶¹ The survey is not released to the public but this author was granted a closed-door briefing on the findings. The data is used here with permission.

respondents were interviewed from across peninsular Malaysia, controlled by quota for ethnicity, age and gender. One of the questions was who would they favour to lead the country, implying the favourability or popularity of a particular leader in the eyes of the respondents. Nationally, Mahathir came top at 42.7 per cent, while Muhyiddin was second with 34.5 per cent. However, when the findings are analysed by state, as shown in Figure 6, the level of popularity is not uniform as it varies from one state to another, with Muhyiddin leading in Johor with 41.1 per cent against Mahathir's 29.5 per cent. This shows that while Mahathir might be more popular at the national level but in Johor itself, despite the criticisms thrown against him, Muhyiddin's popularity is higher.

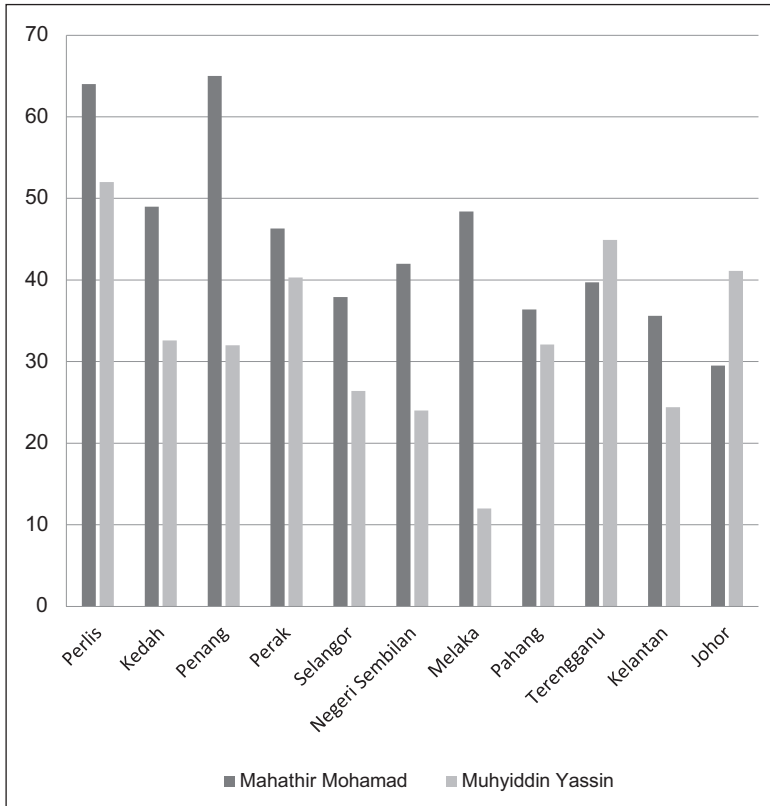
Muhyiddin's popularity in the state may have contributed to him becoming Chairman of Johor Harapan. But despite that, it is intriguing that the question has been raised whether Muhyiddin should defend his Pagoh parliamentary seat or move to a safer one. All the leaders of other Harapan component parties interviewed for this study raise this issue because they believe UMNO will expend all necessary resources to unseat Muhyiddin from a constituency that is considered his personal base in order to make a statement to the country at large.⁶² In fact, this is an issue that has been asked since even before PPBM was officially registered as a political party.⁶³

Looking at the electoral numbers, in GE13, Muhyiddin won Pagoh with a handsome majority of 12,842. But Harapan leaders still consider this risky if assaulted by UMNO in the expected fashion. The seat considered safer for Muhyiddin is Muar, where the incumbent is UMNO's Razali Ibrahim, whose majority in GE13 was slim at 1,646. The suggestion is that Muhyiddin will be able to win all the non-UMNO votes in Muar, while stealing sufficient votes from UMNO to help him win, albeit potentially with a smaller majority than what he obtained in Pagoh in GE13. When interviewed for this study, Muhyiddin denied

⁶² Multiple interviews with various Johor opposition leaders from PKR, Amanah and DAP, conducted in July and August 2017.

⁶³ <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/352337>> (accessed 20 September 2017).

Figure 6: Popularity ranking by state in Peninsular Malaysia.



Source: Author's compilation of data from EMIR Research, Malaysia

that he is considering moving to Muar⁶⁴ but in a later press interview⁶⁵ his answer was less definitive, implying that his thinking may still be evolving.

⁶⁴ Interview with Muhyiddin Yassin, op. cit.

⁶⁵ <<https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/politik/2017/08/315958/belum-pasti-muhyiddin-di-pagoh>> (accessed 20 September 2017).

4. HOW REALISTIC IS PPBM'S AMBITIONS?

4.1 Scramble for mixed seats

UMNO won thirty-two Johor state seats⁶⁶ in GE13. These seats are also the ones targeted by PPBM for GE14 and PPBM claims to be ready to contest in all of them.⁶⁷ This situation may sound like a straightforward scenario because, after all, PPBM was created with the purpose of taking away the Malay votes from UMNO and hence, by simple logic, PPBM should be able to stake a claim on all the thirty-two UMNO seats. Unfortunately for PPBM, there are overlapping claims from their two coalition partners, PKR and Amanah. Both are eyeing mixed seats that have between roughly 30 to 45 per cent Chinese voters. There are twenty-four seats (Table 3) that fit into this category, and in GE13, seventeen of these seats were contested by PAS, five by PKR and two by DAP. For GE14, there are many overlapping claims. Amanah wants to take over all the PAS seats,⁶⁸ while DAP and PKR want to keep theirs. Additionally, PKR feels that they have a better chance to win more seats this time round, and they would like to put candidates in twenty seats in total, mostly in the mixed areas as well.⁶⁹

The overlapping claims make seat negotiations complicated, and include disagreements between the other Harapan parties. Parallel to that, PKR and Amanah believe that PPBM should focus solely on the areas with larger Malay populations, and especially on the FELDA areas.

⁶⁶ The defection of Shahrudin Salleh from UMNO to become PPBM's Secretary General has reduced this number by one. However, for this paper, the results from GE13 are used as the benchmark.

⁶⁷ Interview with Osman Sapian, op. cit.

⁶⁸ Wan Saiful Wan Jan, *Parti Amanah Negara in Johor: Birth, Challenges, Prospects*, Trends in Southeast Asia, no. 9/2017 (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017).

⁶⁹ Interview with Hassan Abdul Karim, Chairman of Johor State PKR, 11 August 2017.

Table 3: Mixed state seats in Johor, arranged by percentage of Chinese voters.

State Code	State Name	Total Voters	Malay (%)	Chinese (%)	Indian (%)	Others (%)	BN Candidate	PR Candidate	Winner In GE13	Victory Majority
N44	Tanjong Puteri	51,442	61.3	31.6	5.3	1.7	UMNO	PKR	UMNO	9,097
N26	Machap	22,221	62.4	31.7	5.0	0.9	UMNO	PAS	UMNO	3,902
N01	Buluh Kasap	18,779	55.0	32.2	11.6	1.2	UMNO	PAS	UMNO	3,370
N11	Serom	24,540	65.5	32.8	0.9	0.8	UMNO	PAS	UMNO	2,264
N17	Semerah	31,046	63.2	33.6	0.6	2.6	UMNO	PKR	UMNO	2,649
N50	Bukit Permai	21,619	52.4	33.9	11.9	1.7	UMNO	PAS	UMNO	3,369
N54	Pulai Sebatang	28,170	61.8	34.5	1.4	2.2	MCA	PAS	MCA	3,412
N08	Jorak	25,364	59.0	34.8	5.4	0.8	UMNO	PAS	UMNO	3,726
N27	Layang-Layang	17,922	49.0	34.9	14.7	1.5	UMNO	PKR	UMNO	2,518
N47	Kempas	39,273	54.2	35.2	8.9	1.7	UMNO	PAS	UMNO	3,947
N24	Senggarang	24,048	60.5	37.4	0.5	1.6	UMNO	PAS	UMNO	1,855
N05	Tenang	16,940	49.4	37.6	11.3	1.7	UMNO	PAS	UMNO	1,586
N49	Nusa Jaya	50,183	47.0	38.4	12.7	2.0	UMNO	PAS	UMNO	2,201
N14	Bukit Nanning	15,502	58.7	38.4	1.0	1.8	UMNO	PKR	UMNO	1,455
N04	Kemelah	20,449	54.6	38.6	5.7	1.1	UMNO	PKR	UMNO	2,260
N03	Pemanis	22,617	56.2	39.3	3.4	1.0	GERAKAN	PAS	GERAKAN	1,329
N09	Gambir	21,382	54.6	39.7	3.8	1.8	MIC	PAS	MIC	310
N29	Mahkota	44,352	50.5	40.6	5.9	3.0	UMNO	PAS	UMNO	1,108
N15	Maharani	27,090	54.7	42.0	2.5	0.8	UMNO	PAS	PAS	3,136
N21	Parit Yaani	24,609	54.0	43.1	1.1	1.9	MCA	PAS	PAS	1,188
N30	Paloh	18,222	37.3	43.6	17.1	2.0	MCA	DAP	MCA	103
N46	Pengkalan Rinting	61,217	42.5	44.7	10.6	2.1	MCA	DAP	DAP	1,970
N13	Sungat Abong	28,262	51.0	45.2	3.0	0.8	UMNO	PAS	PAS	3,813
N41	Puteri Wangsa	43,824	39.6	47.2	11.7	1.4	MIC	PAS	PAS	3,469

Source: General elections data obtained from Dr. Ong Kian Ming, Member of Parliament for Serdang.

PKR and Amanah want the mixed areas to be left to them, while DAP wants to focus on areas with a large Chinese population. PPBM, on the other hand, feels that they are being dealt a short hand that is not commensurate with the expectation and responsibility placed on them to win Malay voters. They argue that the mixed seats can only be won by Harapan if Malay voters in those areas are persuaded to switch sides. This will only happen by virtue of PPBM presence and leadership, not through the strengths of the other three parties. They added that even to attract Malays to Harapan events, the presence of PPBM leaders like Mahathir, Muhyiddin or Mukhriz are needed because leaders from the other Harapan parties are not sufficiently attractive to the Malays yet. Thus, if PPBM is the reason for Harapan to win in mixed seats, their vital contribution must be reciprocated in the form of seats in mixed areas as well. At the same time, they also know that the high-Malay areas are not going to be an easy fight. They will be fighting against the resource-rich UMNO that has been dominant in those areas for 60 years. They are willing to take on the heavy responsibility of challenging UMNO in the most challenging areas, but in return they want to be rewarded with seats with higher probability of victory, namely, the mixed areas.⁷⁰

PPBM's desire to contest at least in some of the mixed seats becomes more apparent when its chances for parliamentary seats are examined. Winning a large number of parliamentary seats in Johor is a crucial part of its plan to become the main party in office (i.e., the successor to UMNO's role in BN) should Harapan form the next federal government. Hence their opening bid in the seat negotiations is twenty to twenty-two parliamentary seats out of the twenty-six in the state.⁷¹ But this requires PPBM to contest in both high-Malay as well as mixed parliamentary areas. As shown in Figure 2, the bulk of Johor parliamentary areas are mixed. In GE13, the majority that UMNO obtained in parliamentary

⁷⁰ Interviews with PPBM President Muhyiddin Yassin, op. cit.; Head of Johor PPBM Shahrudin Salleh, op. cit.; and Deputy Head of PPBM Johor Nasir Hashim, op. cit.

⁷¹ Interview with Shahrudin Salleh, op. cit., and Osman Sopian, op. cit.

areas with more than 70 per cent Malay voters was very large, upwards of 11,000 votes.⁷² UMNO also dominates the middle section where Malays form 45 to 70 per cent of the voters, holding ten out of the fifteen parliamentary seats in this category, albeit with a much smaller majority. In six of those seats, they only had a majority of less than 3,500 votes.⁷³ If PPBM were to contest only in high-Malay areas while PKR and Amanah take the mixed areas, then its struggle to break UMNO's dominance would be a tougher one compared to what its Harapan partners will face. This means that the other Harapan parties will benefit from the wave, or the Malay Tsunami, that may be generated by PPBM's involvement. But PPBM itself may end up with an unfairly low number of seats.

Therefore, PPBM wants the added value that they bring to be acknowledged and reciprocated with a commensurate number of seats with a high probability for victory. Apart from its opening bids for thirty-two state and twenty to twenty-two parliamentary seats, PPBM also wants its allies to accept its leadership in Johor Harapan. Judging from the interviews with the leaders with all Harapan parties in the state, it appears that they are open to these demands and are willing to negotiate, both on seat allocation and leadership position. On the former, even though all the parties have laid down their cards on the table, they are unanimous in asserting that the final decision must be made by their national leaders after taking into consideration the picture for Malaysia as a whole. Where the state leadership role is concerned, all the other Harapan partners have already agreed to Muhyiddin being Chairman of Johor Harapan. This is a major shift from their previous convention of having all the respective state party leaders as joint chairmen of the coalition,⁷⁴ indicating that the other parties are indeed appreciative of PPBM's importance and the value of Muhyiddin's leadership.

⁷² <http://resultpru13.spr.gov.my/module/keputusan/paparan/paparan_Laporan.php>.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Interview with Salahuddin Ayob, Deputy President of Amanah, 9 August 2017; Liew Chin Tong, op. cit.; and Hassan Abdul Karim, op. cit.

4.2 Johor and PPBM's long-term survival

PPBM is not the first splinter party from UMNO. Far from it. Earlier in this essay, the experience of the IMP, the party founded and led by UMNO's founding President Onn Jaafar, has been discussed. UMNO experienced several more break-ups after the IMP, and essentially, there are two patterns to the splinter parties. First, just like the IMP, are the parties that were formed directly by UMNO leaders and their followers immediately after they had left the mother party. Examples include the National Convention Party⁷⁵ that was formed in 1963 and the Spirit of 46 Malay Party,⁷⁶ formed in 1989. Second are the parties formed as a result of the coming together of multiple additional forces in support of the departing UMNO leaders. This includes PAS⁷⁷ which was formed in 1951 by Islamists from inside and outside of UMNO, and PKR⁷⁸ in 1999 by Anwar Ibrahim following his sacking from the party, after he successfully mobilized various civil society groups as well as other opposition parties to support his agenda.

None of the splinter parties have ever had any real traction in Johor. Even when they were able to make a mark nationally or in other states,

⁷⁵ Parti Perhimpunan Kebangsaan formed in 1963 by former UMNO Minister for Agriculture and Cooperatives. The party was dissolved in 1965.

⁷⁶ Parti Melayu Semangat 46 was formed in 1989 by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, a senior UMNO leader who held various posts in the party as well as several Ministerial posts including Minister of Finance. The party was dissolved in 1996 and Razaleigh rejoined UMNO together with his followers.

⁷⁷ PAS was formed in 1951 with the Head of UMNO Religious Bureau Haji Ahmad Fuad Hassan as its first President, with other UMNO members who held dual membership in both parties for several years. The party today claims to have more than 750,000 members and it remains a challenger to UMNO, especially in rural Malay seats.

⁷⁸ PKR was formed in 1999 with former UMNO Deputy President and former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim as its leader. The party today leads the coalition government in Selangor and is a leading member of the opposition coalition.

Johor remained an UMNO stronghold. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the splinter parties that followed the second model have proven more successful in building their own support base, albeit in states other than Johor.⁷⁹ On the other hand, none of the parties from the first model created any real impact or caused damage to UMNO. Just like the IMP, all of them suffered electoral failures and were eventually dissolved. This raises the question about the sustainability of PPBM — former UMNO leaders created it immediately after their exit from the mother party, and its current leadership is almost completely dominated by former UMNO members. Its genesis has thus much in common with the IMP-like model, and this has historically failed to survive.

Having said that, there is also the argument that PPBM was formed on the back of internal anger over alleged massive corrupt practices within UMNO. Thus, PPBM's establishment took place at a time when UMNO, so the suggestion goes, had lost its legitimacy as the champion of the Malay agenda because the leaders are now only pursuing their personal agenda. This arguably makes PPBM different from the IMP.⁸⁰ Regardless of that view, PPBM leaders still acknowledge the sustainability risk they face, and this is why they are determined to win at least one state, if not the federal government, with Johor being high on their target list. The intention is for Johor to become the base from which the party can survive and expand in the long run, just like PKR in Selangor, PAS in Kelantan and DAP in Penang.⁸¹ Johor therefore is not just another state. It may very well be the state that decides if PPBM will exist in the long run.

⁷⁹ PAS and PKR have formed state governments in Kelantan and Selangor, respectively.

⁸⁰ Interview with Marzuki Mohamad, Associate Professor at International Islamic University Malaysia, and former Special Officer to Muhyiddin Yassin when he was Deputy Prime Minister, 13 August 2017.

⁸¹ Interview with Shahrudin Salleh, PPBM Secretary General and Head of Johor State Leadership Council, 3 August 2017.

4.3 PPBM and the Malay votes

The establishment of PPBM raised the hopes of Malaysian opposition supporters. Although some concerns have been expressed,⁸² but overall the reaction has been positive. The expectations heightened when PPBM officially joined the Harapan coalition on 20 March 2017. The presence of PPBM in Johor as part of Harapan is particularly important for the opposition parties there because PPBM is expected to attract more Malay votes for the coalition as a block. In GE13, the opposition coalition benefitted tremendously from what was dubbed as the Chinese Tsunami, wherein the majority of ethnic Chinese voted for them. But Malay votes did not swing in their favour and this contributed to UMNO staying in power. This time round, Harapan has high hopes that PPBM, being a Malay party, will bring the Malay votes, creating a Malay Tsunami to complement the Chinese support that they already have.⁸³

Of particular interest to Harapan is PPBM's potential influence in constituencies that have FELDA settlements. FELDA areas are seen as an UMNO bastion so much so that a Johor UMNO Member of Parliament, Ahmad Maslan, once estimated that as much as 90 per cent of FELDA settlers support his party.⁸⁴ There are fifteen Johor state seats⁸⁵ that have

⁸² For example, a small loose grouping of pro-opposition activists who call themselves "Otai Reformis" issued a statement in July 2017 rejecting Mahathir's potential leadership of the opposition coalition. Additionally, on 28 October 2017, a group of activists detained without trial during Mahathir's premiership under the Internal Security Act (ISA) also issued a statement protesting his leadership of Harapan and demanded that he formally apologize for their detention.

⁸³ Interview with Aminolhuda Hassan, Amanah Johor State Chairman, 29 May 2017; Liew Chin Tong, *op. cit.*; and Hassan Abdul Karim, Johor PKR State Chairman, 11 August 2017.

⁸⁴ Zubaidah Abu Bakar, "Pas, PKR out to win Felda settlers' votes", *New Straits Times*, 23 July 2010.

⁸⁵ N03 Pemanis, N04 Kemelah, N05 Tenang, N07 Bukit Serampang, N26 Machap, N27 Layang-Layang, N31 Kahang, N32 Endau, N33 Tenggaraoh, N34 Panti, N35 Pasir Raja, N37 Johor Lama, N41 Puteri Wangsa, N50 Bukit Permai, N51 Bukit Batu.

at least one FELDA settlement, and in GE13, UMNO won ten of them. For parliament, there are eleven FELDA seats⁸⁶ in the state and UMNO won ten of them. Keeping that in mind, it is obvious that only PPBM has a reasonable chance in FELDA areas since they are the only party in Harapan that can present themselves as a Malay substitute to UMNO.

In her study of the voting patterns of FELDA settlers, Maznah Mohamad posited that

the economic basis of Malay support for UMNO is patronage, while its socio-cultural corollary is usually attributed to Malay voters' fear of a decline in Malay political supremacy ... The dependency–patronage relations between UMNO and FELDA voters played the biggest role in sustaining the Malay vote bank.⁸⁷

Maznah's argument echoes the discussion earlier in this essay on how identity politics shape the voting preferences of rural Malays, especially their attitude towards the DAP and the Harapan coalition. This also means the hurdle is even higher for PPBM in FELDA areas because the fear of losing Malay political power is more prevalent there. The problem for PPBM is that these are exactly the areas where their Harapan partners expect them to deliver. In other words, they are to win where UMNO is strongest and where Harapan is weakest. This is a very big responsibility indeed for a fledgling party to shoulder.⁸⁸

PPBM seems willing to take up the challenge though. They appreciate that for Harapan, winning the Malay and FELDA votes is crucial, and

⁸⁶ P141 Sekijang, P143 Pagoh, P144 Ledang, P147 Parit Sulong, P149 Sri Gading, P151 Simpang Renggam, P153 Sembrong, P155 Tenggara, P156 Kota Tinggi, P157 Pengerang, P163 Kulai.

⁸⁷ Maznah Mohamad, "Fragmented but Captured: Malay Voters and the FELDA Factor in GE13", in *Coalitions in Collision: Malaysia's 13th General Elections*, edited by Johan Saravanamuttu, Lee Hock Guan and Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, and Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2015), p. 154.

⁸⁸ Interview with Shahrudin Salleh, op. cit.

that in the immediate term, only they have the potential to do it. As can be seen in Figure 1 in the earlier part of this essay, there are fourteen state constituencies that have more than 70 per cent Malay voters.⁸⁹ BN holds all the seats in this category, and UMNO has twelve of them. The other two seats are held by the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), but in both areas the percentage of Indian voters is tiny, at less than 3 per cent. Thus, it is safe to assume that the MIC won these areas not because of its own strength, but simply because UMNO supporters voted for it. These two are essentially still UMNO areas. All these are the seats that PPBM would like to claim as theirs to contest.

In order to win the heart of the Malay voters, PPBM is devising manifesto pledges that prioritize socioeconomic well-being. They envision policy offers that will alleviate the economic hardships faced by the bottom 40 per cent, plus measures that can help enhance the livelihoods of the middle 40 per cent as well. The areas they are studying include enabling more home ownership, increasing the number of scholarships for education, and providing greater financial and institutional support for Islamic affairs.

As mentioned earlier, there are major projects being carried out involving investments from China. There are concerns over the impact of these on land ownership and displacement of people in traditional villages.⁹⁰ However, while this study is being done, the Johor PPBM leaders are still formulating their election promises and not many details on this front were available.

4.4 Identity politics makes it challenging

So how well has PPBM fared in winning over its target group? Much depends on how Harapan is presented, and how the Malays respond to

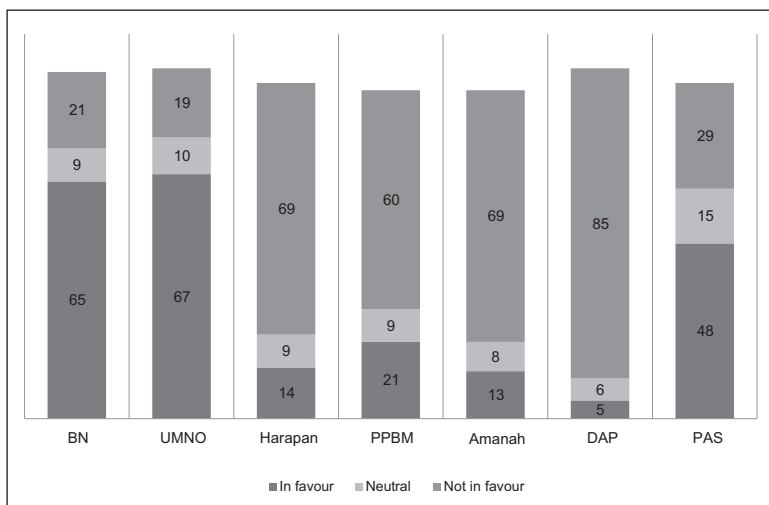
⁸⁹ The electoral data in this essay is based on official figures during GE13. It is expected that a redelineation will be introduced prior to GE14. However, since the new boundaries are not yet announced, this essay uses GE13 data.

⁹⁰ Interviews with Muhyiddin Yassin, op. cit., and Shahrudin Salleh, op. cit.

that presentation. The most pertinent issue is how Malay voters view the DAP, and much will therefore depend on PPBM's ability to convince Malay voters that the DAP is not a threat.

Telephone polling data show that the trend is not in PPBM's favour. In the Johor Opinion Survey 2017 commissioned by the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, when Malay voters were asked to state their level of favourability towards political parties, PPBM's rating was poor. As seen in Figure 7, 69 per cent said that they were outright not in favour of PPBM. This was second only to the DAP who saw 85 per cent of the Malay sample not favouring them. The numbers were worse when the sample was asked who they would vote for if elections were held today (Figure 8). Across all ethnic groups in the state, while only 34 per cent said that they would vote for BN, the number for PPBM was abysmal at just 2 per cent. Worse, among the Malays, only 2.2 per cent and 2.7 per

Figure 7: Favourability of Johor Malay voters towards political parties in the state.



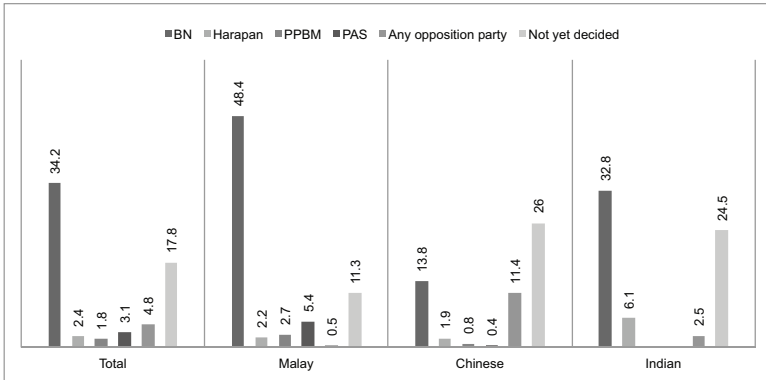
Source: Author's compilation of data from Johor Opinion Survey commissioned by ISEAS –Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017.

cent said they would vote for Harapan and PPBM respectively, while BN enjoys support from 48.4 per cent of the Malays.

The Malays' distrust of the DAP, coupled with their insecurity when it comes to the future position of their ethnic group and their religion, plays a significant role in shaping Malay political attitude. Figure 9 shows that ethno-religious identity is a major influence among the Malays. They even think the DAP is controlling the Harapan coalition. Even though it is premature without a deeper study to say that the DAP is the Achilles Heel for PPBM and Harapan in the state, it can be argued that the Harapan coalition is not necessarily the most beneficial partnership for PPBM in terms of winning political mileage among their target Malay population.

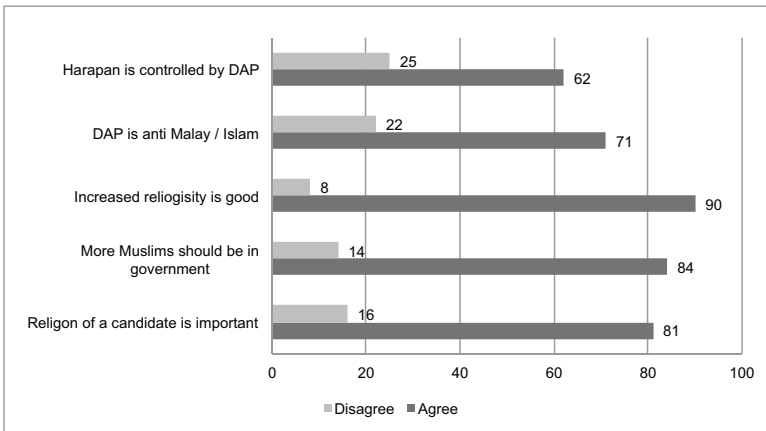
Having said that, there is one caution that must be exercised when reading the telephone poll data. It is the experience of this author, not just during the fieldwork for this study, that the Malays and Malaysians generally are cautious in expressing their political preferences. It takes time to get them to open up in conversations, especially if they had not known the interviewer before the meeting. This is particularly the case in rural areas where people frequently fear being victimized if they show a differing political attitude. To get beyond this restraint, it is usually necessary to spend time to "warm up" the conversation with informal chit-chats before delving into the more political questions. Therefore, even though the telephone poll data indicate that PPBM in Johor would likely be wiped out by UMNO in GE14, the latter cannot yet rest on their laurels. During the face-to-face interviews in the fieldwork for this study, the general sentiment was much less certain than what the survey captured. Many of those who started off by expressing loyalty to UMNO gradually changed their tone as they become more comfortable in the conversation. They became more amenable to the possibility of voting for PPBM, with some even admitting that they were only retaining the public façade of being loyal to UMNO to avoid being ostracized from their local community. These nuances may be missed in telephone polls, making it necessary to use information from both to inform judgement.

Figure 8: How would people vote if elections were called today?



Source: Johor Opinion Survey commissioned by ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017.

Figure 9: Johor Malay attitude towards selected issues.



Source: Author’s compilation of data from Johor Opinion Survey commissioned by ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017.

5. HOW UMNO RESPONDS TO PPBM

The difficulty in gauging the real sentiment among voters, especially Malay voters, is appreciated by UMNO leaders in the state. Although confident that UMNO will still win comfortably, they acknowledge that they can no longer ignore the potential threat posed by the opposition coalition, especially with Muhyiddin leading the charge. One of the concerns is the impossibility of measuring how many UMNO members remain in the party but intend to vote for PPBM. The silent protest can be a threat if Johor UMNO leaders fail to quell it properly, especially among rural voters who are traditionally staunch UMNO voters.⁹¹ To counteract the threat, Johor UMNO seems to be deploying a three-pronged strategy.

The first is by answering the allegations thrown at them in a coherent and easy-to-digest fashion. Chief Minister Khaled Nordin has been actively touring the state to deliver speeches to defend UMNO's record, as well as his personal record as head of the state government. Members of his administration have been doing the same, supported by visits by national leaders as well. In fact, on 16 July 2017, a grand event attended by almost 30,000 people was held in the parliamentary constituency of Sembrong, featuring a host of top leaders including Prime Minister Najib Razak, Deputy Prime Minister Zahid Hamidi, UMNO Vice-President Hishammuddin Hussein, Minister for Tourism Nazri Aziz, and Chief Minister Khaled Nordin. Even the Chief Secretary to the Government Ali Hamsa was there. At all these events, UMNO leaders usually provide direct responses to the allegations made by the opposition, aimed at appeasing the crowd.

Second is by reminding voters of UMNO's successes in bringing physical and economic developments to the state, while at the same time providing a vision of how Johor can develop further under them. The main slogan used for this purpose is "*Muafakat Johor*" (Johor

⁹¹ Interview with Associate Professor Dr Abdul Razak Ahmad, Founding Director of Bait Al Amanah, a think-tank of UMNO Johor that works closely with the state government, 13 July 2017.

Consensus). Perhaps learning from the way Prime Minister Najib uses the 1Malaysia⁹² brand to promote his political standing, Chief Minister Khaled also uses *Muafakat Johor* as a brand for his activities in the state. Various welfare programmes are branded as *Muafakat Johor*, such as the free *Muafakat Johor* Bus Services covering fifteen routes in the southern part of the state⁹³ and various types of assistance under the *Muafakat Johor* Work Commitment Programme (Azam Kerja Muafakat Johor) covering those who are looking for employment, grants for micro-entrepreneurs, and the disabled who would like to work from home. There was even a *Muafakat Johor* Arts Festival held in November 2017. *Muafakat Johor* comes complete with its own logo and official song, which are used in almost all state government functions. Additionally, the state government through its various agencies, as well as the UMNO-linked think-tank Bait Al Amanah, are actively creating and circulating simple infographics,⁹⁴ also under the *Muafakat Johor* brand, to highlight UMNO's previous successes and future plans. Arguably, the brand is being used to project Khaled's personal image as a successful and visionary leader for the state. The assumption is that by doing so, the fate of UMNO in Johor can be detached from that of UMNO in other states and nationally.⁹⁵

Third is by highlighting the dominance of DAP in Harapan. UMNO leaders regularly claim that voting for any party that would strengthen DAP further is not in the interest of Malays in the state. The reason for this

⁹² The 1Malaysia concept was introduced by Prime Minister Najib Razak when he became Prime Minister in 2009 as a slogan to promote national unity but it gradually evolved into a brand for various welfare programmes offered by the federal government. Examples include the cash handout Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia, the low cost shops such as 1Malaysia Fishmongers, 1Malaysia Textile Shops, and 1Malaysia Grocery Shop, as well as the free tyres for taxi drivers under the Tyre Assistance 1Malaysia.

⁹³ <<http://www.basmuafakatjohor.com/>>.

⁹⁴ Examples can be accessed at <http://baitalamanah.com/?page_id=171>.

⁹⁵ Interview with a prominent Johor Malay businessman who claims to be a regular donor to UMNO, 22 June 2017. The respondent requested anonymity.

approach, and the possible implications, are already discussed at length in previous sections. This author observed several activities organized by UMNO in the state during this study, and more often than not the speeches delivered in those activities served to remind the audience of the potential rise of the DAP if support were given to PPBM.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the end of the day though, this author feels that it is still impossible to make a conclusive prediction about how PPBM will fare in GE14. The ground is still, to put it simply, too confusing with some findings from the various surveys contradicting findings from face-to-face interviews. Most voters are reluctant to disclose their political leanings, and many may still be assessing the situation before making up their mind.

What is certain, however, is that PPBM leaders feel the long-term survival of their party hangs on their ability to win at least one state should they fail to take the federal government in GE14. Johor is among their priority states. But their main target audience, the Johor Malays, are not yet jumping onto their bandwagon. The main concern among this group seems to be the DAP and the future of the Malay agenda if the DAP were to come into government with PPBM through Harapan. The fear is reflected in the relatively slow response to PPBM's membership drive. PPBM leaders are quick to point out though that all political parties in Malaysia receive a much higher number of votes than the size of their membership, and therefore membership is not an indicator of support.⁹⁶

Between now and GE14, the most crucial factor is the seat division between Harapan parties. If PPBM gets only the high-Malay seats and less of the mixed seats, then it will be highly unlikely they will achieve their ambition of capturing the state. UMNO's majority in these areas is large, and it is not easy to imagine a scenario where the Malay votes would swing to a significant enough extent. If PPBM wants a fighting

⁹⁶ Interviews with Shahrudin Salleh and Nasir Hasim, *op cit*.

chance, having a healthy share of the mixed seats is crucial. However, the high-Malay areas are the areas where PPBM is expected by their Harapan partners to focus on and to win. This creates a real dilemma for the party — the areas where they are expected to win are also the areas that are hardest to win. Thus, even though PPBM seems to be taking the challenge and the responsibility in their stride, this is clearly one heavy burden for a fledgling party to shoulder.

Appendix 1: Objectives of PPBM as listed in its constitution

Malay Text	Translation in English
Menegakkan Islam sebagai agama bagi Persekutuan dan menghormati hak orang bukan Islam untuk menganut dan mengamalkan agama masing-masing secara aman dan harmoni.	To uphold Islam as the religion of the Federation and to respect the rights of non-Muslims to believe in and practise their religions peacefully and harmoniously.
Menjunjung kemuliaan dan kedaulatan institusi Raja-Raja Melayu.	To uphold the sanctity and sovereignty of the institution of the Malay Rulers.
Mempertahankan kedudukan istimewa orang Melayu dan anak negeri Sabah dan Sarawak dan hak-hak yang sah untuk semua kaum.	To defend the special position of the Malays and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak and the legitimate rights of all ethnic groups.
Memperkasa Bahasa Melayu sebagai bahasa kebangsaan dan memelihara hak semua kaum untuk mempelajari bahasa ibunda masing-masing.	To strengthen Malay Language as the national language and to defend the rights of all ethnic groups to learn their mother tongues.
Menegakkan sistem demokrasi berparlimen dan doktrin pemisahan kuasa dengan memperkukuhkan institusi demokrasi menerusi reformasi institusi yang menyeluruh.	To champion parliamentary democracy and the doctrine of the separation of powers by strengthening democratic institutions through holistic institutional reforms.
Memperkasa agenda memerangi rasuah dan salah guna kuasa untuk mewujudkan amalan tadbir urus yang baik dan pemerintahan yang bersih, beramanah dan berintegriti.	To galvanize the efforts to fight corruption and abuse of power so as to create good governance and an administration that is clean, honest, and with integrity.

<p>Memelihara hak-hak asasi rakyat sepertimana yang termaktub di dalam Perlembagaan Persekutuan, menjunjung nilai-nilai keadilan sejagat yang selari dengan agama Islam,serta menjunjung keluhuran perlembagaan, kedaulatan undang-undang serta prinsip keadilan dan kesaksamaan.</p>	<p>To ensure the basic rights of the citizens as enshrined in the Federal Constitution are protected, to uphold universal values that are in line with Islam, and to defend the sovereignty of the constitution, the rule of law, and the principles of fairness and equality.</p>
<p>Membentuk masyarakat Malaysia yang inklusif, progresif, dinamik dan saintifik serta menghargai seni, budaya dan tradisi sebagai acuan membina sebuah negara maju yang sejahtera.</p>	<p>To create a Malaysian society that is inclusive, progressive, dynamic, and scientific, and appreciative of the arts, culture and traditions as moulds to shape a developed and prosperous country.</p>
<p>Memperjuangkan keadilan sosial, mengagih kekayaan negara secara adil dan saksama, membela kebajikan rakyat dan membasmi kemiskinan tanpa mengira kaum dan agama.</p>	<p>To champion social justice, ensuring the nation’s wealth is shared fairly and equitably, looking after the welfare of the people and eradicating poverty among people of all races and religions.</p>
<p>Mendokong prinsip bahawa setiap rakyat berhak untuk berjaya dengan memperoleh pendidikan yang berkualiti dan sempurna menerusi satu sistem pendidikan yang mementingkan pengembangan bakat, kreativiti, inovasi dan amalan nilai-nilai murni serta melaksanakan dasar dan inisiatif yang konsisten untuk merapatkan jurang pendidikan antara bandar dan luar bandar.</p>	<p>To uphold the principle that all citizens have the right to succeed through good quality and complete education, through an education system that prioritizes talent development, creativity, innovation, and good values, as well as to implement policies and initiatives that are consistent to reduce the educational rural-urban divide.</p>

continued on next page

Appendix 1 — cont'd

Malay Text	Translation in English
Memupuk perpaduan dan keharmonian antara masyarakat pelbagai kaum dan agama, memelihara kestabilan politik dan keselamatan negara, dan memacu pembangunan ekonomi yang mapan demi kepentingan rakyat dan negara.	To foster unity and harmony between people of different races and religions, securing political stability and national security, and to drive a sustainable economic growth for the benefit of the population and the country.
Mengamalkan prinsip-prinsip Rukunegara serta mendukung Perlembagaan Persekutuan dan Perlembagaan NegeriNegeri.	To practise the principles of Rukun Negara and uphold the Federal Constitution as well as the constitutions of the states.
Menyertai pilihanraya umum Persekutuan dan Negeri serta pilihanraya kecil dengan tujuan untuk menghantar wakil parti ke Dewan Undangan Negeri, Dewan Rakyat dan Dewan Negara.	To participate in federal and state elections as well as by-elections with the purpose of sending the party's representatives to the Dewan Undangan Negeri, Dewan Rakyat and Dewan Negara.

ISEAS

PUBLISHING

30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Singapore 119614

<http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>

TRS2/18s

ISBN 978-981-4818-09-4



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