



# WILL PAKATAN HARAPAN'S HOLD ON SELANGOR CONTINUE?

Tricia Yeoh

# TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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## FOREWORD

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

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

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# Will Pakatan Harapan's Hold on Selangor Continue?

By Tricia Yeoh

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- When the Pakatan Harapan (PH) federal government fell in February 2020, PH also lost control over the states of Johor, Malacca, Perak and Kedah. In Sabah, PH-aligned Warisan was replaced by the PN-aligned United Alliance of Sabah.
- PH maintained its hold on three states—Selangor, Penang and Negeri Sembilan. Selangor's position is of unique interest, given the largest share of PH assemblypersons comprising members from the People's Justice Party (Parti Keadilan Rakyat, or PKR), the party which has faced significant elite splits in 2020.
- The present stability of PH's survival in Selangor can be accounted for by the sheer majority it possesses within the legislative assembly, comprising forty-one out of fifty-six state seats. Unless a significant share of assemblypersons were to defect, the change in state government would be highly unlikely.
- PH built a strong base in Selangor during its time in power over more than a decade, securing performative legitimacy and rooting itself strongly within the community.
- PH has benefited from the highly urbanized and educated demographic profile of Selangor. However, the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic has likely changed the landscape, which may in turn affect how constituents will now respond to goodies offered by the federal government.
- Although PH in Selangor has survived the national storm, its future performance remains uncertain. This year's political realignment, public opinion towards PN and the 2018 redelineation exercise where the number of Malay-majority seats has grown may hamper PH's ability to maintain its strong margin.



- The political fragmentation that continues to unfold will see further party and coalitional realignment, which will invariably impact PH's strength in Selangor.

# Will Pakatan Harapan's Hold on Selangor Continue?

By Tricia Yeoh<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition rose to power at the federal level in the 14th general election in May 2018 upon defeating the longstanding dominant and authoritarian Barisan Nasional (BN), only to fall less than twenty-two months after its prime minister Mahathir Mohamad resigned. This led to the appointment of Muhyiddin Yassin as the country's eighth prime minister. Since 1 March 2020, when the newly formed political coalition Perikatan Nasional (PN) took over the federal government, there has been unprecedented political instability, anomalous for a country that had only ever experienced the BN rule up to 2018. This resulted in changes in several states, with PH losing Johor, Malacca, Perak and Kedah<sup>2</sup> as well. The Sabah state election also saw PH-aligned

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<sup>2</sup> More specifically, the Johor state government fell when eleven members of Bersatu switched sides and one member of PKR defected as a PN-supporting independent. Chong Fatt Full, a state legislative assemblyperson, defected from PKR to become an independent. He was then sworn in as part of the new Johor state government's Executive Council (Exco), now led by Perikatan Nasional (*Straits Times*, 6 March 2020). The Malacca state government fell after Bersatu's two state assemblypersons left the PH coalition, and one state assemblyperson from PKR and DAP respectively left their parties. The Perak state government fell after the Bersatu Menteri Besar (Chief Minister) pledged support to PN and there was a series of changes in party affiliation: a PKR assemblyperson and

Parti Warisan Sabah (Warisan) being voted out of power, to be replaced by the PN-aligned United Alliance of Sabah. The three PH-led states of Selangor, Penang and Negeri Sembilan have remained stable, however, and have survived the national-level storm.

Selangor's situation is of particular interest. Of the original fifty seats that PH had, twenty-one were held by People's Justice Party (Parti Keadilan Rakyat, PKR). Given that former Menteri Besar Azmin Ali was one of the chief architects behind the Sheraton Move in February 2020 that led to the installation of the PN government, it was widely expected that this would cause some instability within PKR, which would in turn affect the Selangor state government's own position. Yet ten months later, the Selangor state government continues unwaveringly in the midst of the national political turmoil.

Selangor did experience several defections: four PKR assemblypersons defected to Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu)<sup>3</sup> and four of the five Bersatu assemblypersons although no longer part of the PH coalition (after Bersatu left PH) have continued to be PH-friendly independents as "followers of Tun" (Mahathir),<sup>4</sup> with the exception of Selangor Bersatu

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UMNO assemblyperson joined Bersatu (*Malaysiakini*, 9 March 2020), and two assemblypersons from DAP and one from Amanah defected from their parties. Paul Yong from DAP defected to be a PN-friendly independent, Sivasubramaniam from DAP defected to Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan), and Hasnul from Amanah defected to Bersatu. Finally, the Kedah state government fell after two assemblypersons defected from PKR to Bersatu. These were Robert Ling Kui Ee and Azman Nasrudin. Although there were two Bersatu assemblypersons who defected to join Mahathir's newly formed Parti Pejuang Tanah Air (Pejuang), Bersatu maintained its count of six assemblypersons within Kedah due to the above two defections. PH also lost a PH-friendly state in the form of Sabah when thirteen state assemblypersons defected from Parti Warisan Sabah (Warisan) to align with Sabah BN chairman Musa Aman in late July 2020. The consequent Sabah state election on 26 September resulted in the PN-aligned coalition Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS) defeating incumbent Warisan Plus (Warisan and its affiliates).

<sup>3</sup> Azmin Ali, Hilman Idham, Haniza Talha and Daroyah Alwi were the four PKR assemblypersons who defected to Bersatu.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Member of PKR Selangor and National Vice-Chief of KEADILAN Youth, 13 October 2020.

Chairman Abdul Rashid Asari who, as a Muhyiddin supporter, supports PN. These defections have not been sufficient to change PH's position in Selangor, where it continues to hold forty-one of the fifty-six seats.

This paper addresses the question of what accounts for the stability and survival of the PH administration in the state of Selangor despite the continuous political shifts that have taken place throughout 2020. The paper first provides some background of Selangor as a state, studies the history of the Pakatan coalition in Selangor prior to 2018, explores briefly the impact of the 14th general election on Selangor, and then extensively examines the effects of the Sheraton Move and various events of 2020 on the PH Selangor state government, finally concluding with reflections for the future.

## **BACKGROUND**

### *Overview of Selangor*

Selangor, situated in the heart of the Klang Valley, which Kuala Lumpur—the country's capital—used to be a part of, is Malaysia's urban epicentre of industry, economic growth, and trade. As the economic hub of the nation, home to Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and major ports within Port Klang, Selangor has always been of great political and economic importance nationally, and hence, to the federal government. Considered the country's crown jewel, Selangor's per capita income has grown steadily over the years, from RM23,494 in 2005 to RM53,845 in 2020 (See Figure A.1 in Appendix A), and its median household income of RM7,225 per month is 38 per cent above the national average (Lee 2018). It also has an extremely high rate of urbanization, which has risen over the last twenty years, from 87 per cent in 2000 to 93.6 per cent in 2020 (See Figure A.1 in Appendix A).

Selangor contributes more than 20 per cent of the national GDP, represents an average of 15 per cent of national manufacturing foreign direct investment and has a relatively low debt owed to the federal government (see tables in Appendix A). Table A.1 in Appendix A shows that in 2007, Selangor's GDP contribution to national GDP hovered at 21 per cent and over the following decade, grew steadily to 24 per cent in 2019. In short, it is not as heavily dependent on the federal government

as some other states whose state finances are not as healthy. For instance, Table 1 shows that Selangor's debt as a percentage of total state debt to the federal government is not as high as that of Pahang, Kedah, Sabah, Sarawak, Negeri Sembilan and Kelantan. However, it is also interesting to note that the states of Penang, Perlis and Perak have the smallest debt as a percentage of total state debt, but this may also be the case due to the fact that the state budgets of these three states are relatively small.

For instance, although corporate taxes are paid directly to the federal government, which state governments have no access to, the proportion of commercial-status land within Selangor compared to residential-status land is significantly higher given the state's rate of industrialization. This in turn leads to higher land-based revenues accruing to the state government, and land is one of the constitutional domains that state governments have control over.

Since 1957, the BN (then called the Alliance) had held the dominant share of seats in the Selangor state legislative assembly. Although its seat percentage fell drastically to 50 per cent in 1969, from 1974<sup>5</sup> till the 2004 election it maintained over 80 per cent of seat share (the number of available seats within the state almost doubled from thirty-three in 1974 to fifty-six in 2004). Being the most urbanized and being highly industrialized, Selangor was therefore considered a monumental loss to the Barisan ruling government when the three opposition parties, later forming a post-election coalition Pakatan Rakyat comprising PKR, Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam SeMalaysia, PAS) toppled the BN in 2008. As can be seen from Figure 1, both the total and percentage of seats won by BN has plummeted steadily since 2008. In each of the three consecutive state elections, BN successively lost popularity in Selangor. Figure 2 indicates the seats within Selangor that PR won in 2008, alongside the 2004 state election results.

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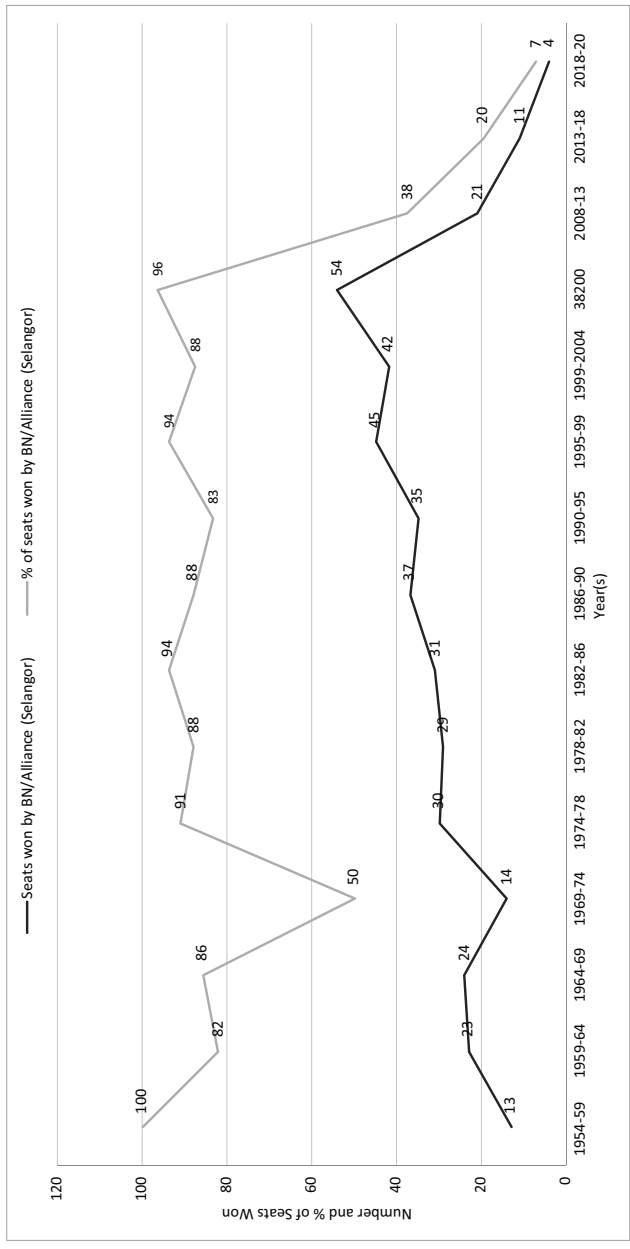
<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that following the 1969 election, Kuala Lumpur was carved out of the state of Selangor in 1974 and gazetted as a Federal Territory before the 1974 general election took place, which is politically significant since the majority of opposition support was at the time found within the geographical area of Kuala Lumpur.

**Table 1: State Debt as Percentage of Total State Debt to Federal Government, 2008–19**  
(in percentages)

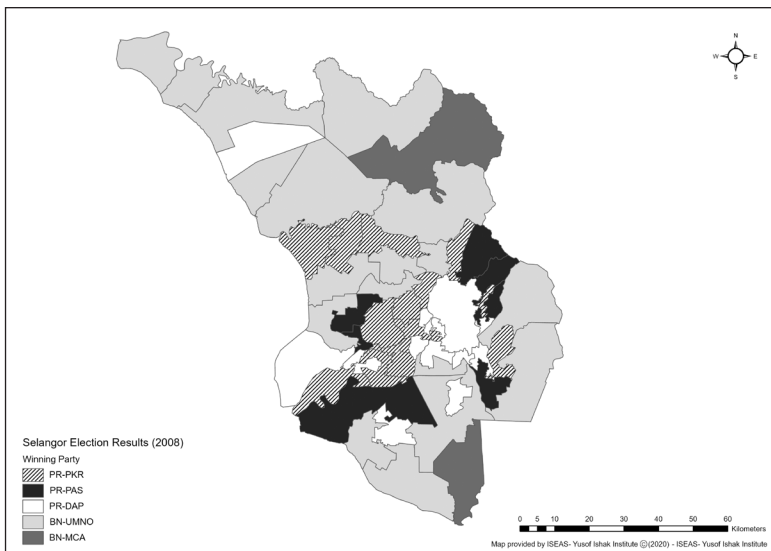
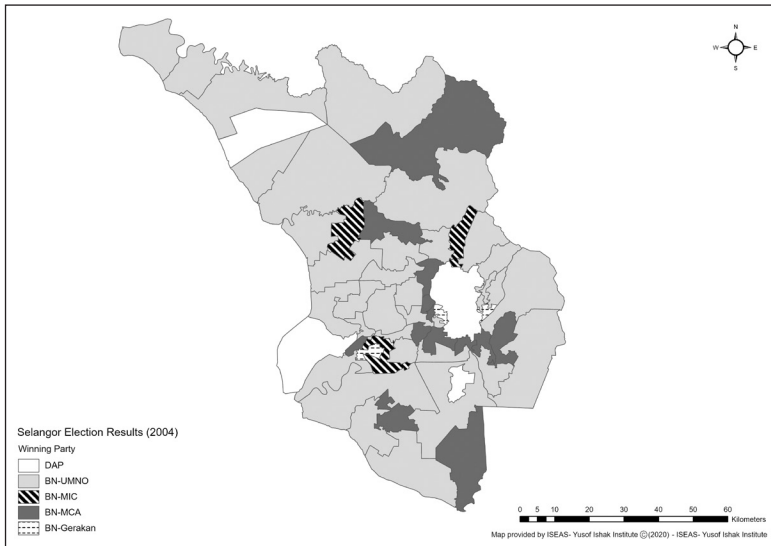
Year	Pahang	Kedah	Sabah	Sarawak	Negeri Sembilan	Kelantan	Selangor	Terengganu	Melaka	Perak	Johor	Perlis	Penang
2008	11.85	12.8	13.66	9.53	11.10	5.65	6.3	5.57	7.47	4.91	5.5	2.12	3.60
2009	11.69	12.6	12.86	9.36	11.83	5.38	5.8	5.44	7.78	4.80	6.6	2.20	3.70
2010	12.52	14.2	14.09	11.80	7.43	6.14	5.5	5.68	4.84	5.24	6.5	2.29	3.79
2011	14.29	15.4	14.42	13.23	8.86	6.76	5.8	5.98	5.31	5.99	1.7	2.04	0.22
2012	15.96	16.5	14.80	14.47	6.06	7.60	5.7	6.21	5.58	2.52	2.1	2.16	0.31
2013	16.35	16.4	14.48	14.30	5.54	7.74	5.5	6.01	5.50	3.01	2.6	2.22	0.32
2014	16.57	15.9	14.64	14.23	5.54	7.85	5.8	5.52	5.27	3.39	2.7	2.16	0.37
2015	17.24	13.7	15.35	15.09	5.53	8.00	6.1	5.34	5.07	3.59	2.6	2.09	0.41
2016	17.45	13.9	16.49	14.94	5.52	8.17	6.5	5.23	4.98	1.98	2.4	2.09	0.38
2017	17.60	15.2	16.48	14.33	5.38	8.16	6.4	5.07	4.85	1.84	2.3	2.03	0.36
2018	17.67	15.4	16.47	14.21	5.52	8.46	6.5	4.17	4.95	1.85	2.3	2.15	0.34
2019	20.1	17.2	18.2	13.5	6.2	5.4	7.3	2.0	5.4	1.7	1.0	1.6	0.4

Source: Federal Government Financial Statements, various years.

**Figure 1: Total and Percentage of Seats Won by Alliance/Barisan Nasional in Selangor, 1954–2018**



**Figure 2: BN and PR Selangor State Constituencies in the 2004 and 2008 Elections**





### *The Political History of Pakatan in Selangor, 2008–18*

To understand the PH state government in Selangor of 2020, it is important to examine the role that the Pakatan coalition played historically, going back to the year 2008 during which the opposition parties PKR, DAP and PAS not only denied BN a two-third majority in the federal parliament, they also took over five states simultaneously. The strength of the PH government in the state of Selangor has therefore been built up over a period of time, and being in power for more than a decade has certainly contributed to its continued hold over the state.

How did BN, in just one election cycle, go from winning fifty-four of fifty-six state seats in Selangor, to retaining only twenty-one seats in 2008? In the lead-up to the 2008 general election, numerous media stories had emerged of then Menteri Besar Khir Toyo having obtained a bungalow for himself and his wife for a price that was far below market value. He was eventually convicted of corruption in 2011 for this. The opposition parties were quick to target the alleged corruption of Khir Toyo, making it a central part of its election campaign. Another Selangor politician, then Port Klang assemblyman Zakaria Mat Deros, was reported to have been building a palace without planning permission and had not paid his assessment fees for twelve years (Fernandez 2006). These alleged corruption cases added to the national fervour and frustration against the Barisan federal government for their “arrogance and excesses, economic scandals, rising cost of living, crime and corruption” (Saravanamuttu 2008), leading to the eventual fall of Selangor into opposition hands.

While Selangor certainly had economic significance as elaborated upon above, losing the state also had political implications. For instance, UMNO representatives could no longer be appointed into positions as local councillors and various local committee members, and would be unlikely to receive state-based tenders or lucrative remunerations and benefits that came alongside these positions. However, the loss was not felt as significantly, given that BN continued to control the federal government, and to afford largesse enough to distribute among members and supporters. Be that as it may, losing Selangor was a blow to UMNO.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “Nobody believed it at the time that we lost ... I had asked Dr Khir whether he believed that we could lose (Selangor) and he said while he did not believe it, he

Since 2008, the party has not seen any of its leaders emerge strongly within the state. Its opposition leaders have been weak, and more importantly, UMNO has not produced a sufficiently strong Menteri Besar candidate in any of the subsequent elections. There are several potential reasons for this: first, UMNO's party power base has always been within the rural and sub-rural regions of the country such as in the heartland states of Johor, Pahang and Kedah. The control that BN had in Selangor prior to 2008 had more to do with the absence of a strong opposition, and to opposition parties being weakened by a highly centralized political and administrative system of government. Second, the central seats in the urban heart of Selangor were actually occupied by a mix of MCA and Gerakan representatives prior to 2008 (BN component parties, the Malaysian Chinese Association and the Malaysia People's Movement Party, Gerakan). Any UMNO leader wanting to rise within these seats would have needed to compete with their coalition party members, and on the basis of ensuring optimal electoral performance, UMNO instead maintained—and maintains to this day—support in the rural regions of the state, especially in to the north and the east. Finally, given Selangor's industrial economy, UMNO politicians would have had a hard time claiming performative legitimacy, unlike in most other states.

The results of the 2008 Selangor state election were as follows: Barisan with twenty seats, and Pakatan Rakyat thirty-six, made up of the PKR's fifteen, DAP's thirteen and PAS's eight (Yeoh 2010). The Pakatan coalition won 64 per cent of the Selangor state assembly, just short of a two-third majority.<sup>7</sup>

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believed that UMNO would lose 15 seats ... At the time it was felt that it is not possible for a state government to develop on its own without federal government contributions, but what many people forgot was that Selangor is a major contributor to the federal government in terms of infrastructure.” (Interview with Budiman Zohdi, UMNO, 4 January 2020).

<sup>7</sup> The background of each of the parties that comprised the political coalition winning in Selangor is described here, to set the tone for some of the challenges later faced by the state government. The DAP was formed in 1965 as a social democratic party. Although positioning itself as a multiracial party, it has difficulty in proclaiming this identity since a majority of its members are of Chinese ethnic origin. The PKR was formed in 1998 in the wake of the arrest of then Deputy

Pakatan Rakyat won an even bigger majority in Selangor in the 13th general elections that were held in May 2013, increasing from thirty-six to forty-four of the fifty-six seats, with PAS and DAP both winning fifteen seats each and PKR fourteen. The fact that PAS and DAP had more seats than PKR would become a significant factor in later decisions that would directly impact both Selangor and the larger coalition. In 2015, Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim was embroiled in the “Menteri Besar crisis”, which eventually resulted in his resignation. Many issues arose consecutively almost immediately after the election period within Selangor, which eventually caused Khalid to lose support within his own party PKR, and from the DAP, as well as splitting loyalties within PAS. These included a controversial highway across the city of Petaling Jaya which numerous resident groups protested against, a significant salary increase for state public officials, a long-drawn water restructuring saga that resulted in water cuts, and finally an out-of-court settlement between Khalid and Bank Islam on a personal dispute that PKR alleged to be a shady deal with UMNO-friendly individuals in exchange for a lucrative housing development deal and the signing of a water deal (PKR Headquarters 2014). Following a nine-month crisis, during which PKR’s attempt at removing Khalid by vacating the Kajang state seat to enable opposition

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Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, believed by his supporters to be wrongly accused by then Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad of corruption and sodomy. PKR was later fortified by the veteran Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM), with its socialist leanings. The party today is considered by some as being ideologically weak relative to its counterparts in the coalition, although in 2008 its advisor, Anwar Ibrahim, conceptualized “The New Deal”, an elaboration of the basic economic principles espoused by the party. Of note is that PKR is the most multiracial party of the coalition in terms of membership make-up. As an Islamic party, PAS, which is today no longer part of the Pakatan coalition, is deeply rooted in religious principles. It was formed as a breakaway ulama group from United Malays National Organization (UMNO) in 1955 and has subsequently fluctuated between conservative and inclusive Islamic interpretations and practices over the years. In the 2008 elections, there was unprecedented electoral support for PAS by non-Muslims in response to slogans such as “PAS for all” and the fielding of its first non-Muslim candidate. Even then, conservative elements in the party were a strong force, and it was this struggle between the *ulama* (religious teachers) and the “Erdogans” (progressives) that manifested itself in the governing of certain aspects of Selangor (Yeoh 2010).

leader Anwar Ibrahim to contest, win and take over as chief minister failed due to the Court of Appeal's conviction on the latter's sodomy case. PKR's Azmin Ali was eventually sworn in as the new Selangor Menteri Besar in September 2014.

At the national level, the Pakatan Rakyat coalition formally ceased to exist on 17 June 2015, following what were reportedly irreconcilable differences between PAS and DAP. The coalition was reformed into Pakatan Harapan in 2015 comprising PKR, DAP and a new party, Parti Amanah Negara, a breakaway faction from PAS. In March 2017, Pakatan Harapan included Bersatu into its fold. However, between 2015 and 2018, there was uncertainty as to the collaborative entity forming the Selangor state government.

Although at the national level, PAS was no longer part of the newly formed Pakatan Harapan coalition, and had also expressly refused to cooperate with PKR, the party of the Menteri Besar, the three state executive council members from PAS did not resign. In fact, it was PAS that nominated Azmin Ali, and not his own party PKR, during the chief minister crisis the year before, complicating matters further. Until the state assembly's dissolution in April 2018, the three PAS Executive Council (Exco) members remained in their positions. The political developments in Selangor centring around leadership change, especially Azmin's ascent to the Menteri Besar position, and his reluctance to replace the PAS Exco members provide important contextual background for understanding developments in 2020. Azmin was one of the chief architects of the Sheraton Move, hence was instrumental in the formation of Perikatan Nasional which included PAS and UMNO, which were already in a separate coalition, Muafakat Nasional. To be sure, the warm relationship between Azmin and PAS in 2018 may have been an entirely political calculation: replacing PAS Exco members may have had a domino effect and caused the party eventually to call for a snap election in Selangor. This would have been something Azmin wanted to avoid.

### *Pakatan's Ten Years in Selangor: Building Deep Roots and Leveraging Incumbency*

The Pakatan coalition helmed Selangor for two terms from 2008 to 2018, and over the ten-year period, it made use of the resources available to it,

which effectively saw them return to power in each of the three successive elections (see section and tables below). The Ninth Schedule in the Federal Constitution 1957 lays out the various responsibilities that state governments have control over, while the Tenth Schedule determines the sources of revenue (see Appendix B). According to these schedules, states have only very limited and restricted revenue sources. While the federal government is supposed to provide transfers and grants to states, it is only the capitation grant that has a strict formula to adhere to. All other transfers and grants are ultimately discretionary, and history has shown that the federal government tends to punish opposition-aligned states and reward government-aligned states through such transfers. Second, states can only raise funds from sources that they have jurisdiction over, such as land and natural resources; as stated above, the more developed states therefore have higher commercial land value, which is translated into higher collections. This is precisely the advantage that the Pakatan coalition fully optimized while ruling Selangor.

First, it made use of institutional and fiscal resources such as the state government-linked companies (GLCs) and the state's revenue-raising abilities that were used to contribute to the state's many welfare programmes. Gomez et al.'s (2018) study of state government-linked companies shows that Selangor Menteri Besar Incorporated (MBI) specifically employed a high number of companies to implement state welfare policies, manage social protection and strategic concerns such as "water resource, waste management, media, education, as well as agencies to promote investment and tourism in the state" (p. 43).

By the end of the decade, the state government had launched more than forty schemes under the banner of what was initially termed *Merakyatkan Ekonomi Selangor* (MES, or People-based Economic Programme) and later renamed *Inisiatif Peduli Rakyat* (IPR, or People-Caring Initiatives). These schemes included cash incentives for babies born in Selangor and for the elderly and subsidized water schemes for all residents. The populist welfarism that eventually saw the federal government (for example, then Prime Minister Najib's BR1M scheme) and Pakatan-run states competing with ever more attractive cash incentives was termed the "monetization of consent" by Saravanamuttu (2020). The state government increased its annual allocations to the

welfare department over the ten-year period, allocating RM9.6 million in 2009, rapidly doubling that to RM22.9 million by 2018.

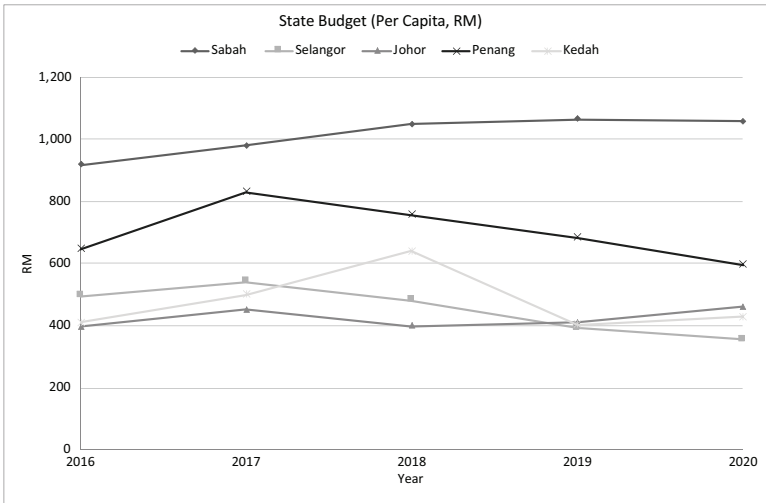
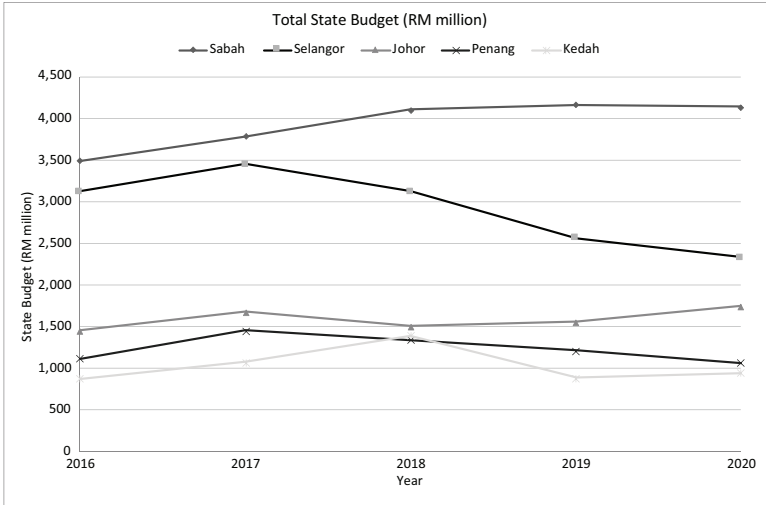
Selangor also set up its own online newspapers in the form of *SelangorKini*, *TV Selangor* and briefly, *Selangor Times*, which allowed it to counter negative messaging from the then BN-led federal government. In authoritarian regimes, it is typical that the incumbent denies media access to opposition parties, and the federal gap in the Malaysian case was a prime opportunity for presenting alternative narratives. Many of these were enabled by Selangor's access to land; land is constitutionally a state matter and all land-related revenues accrue to the state, and not to the federal government.

Figure 3 compares the state budgets of Selangor with several other states, showing that, for instance, Selangor's annual budget allocations were consistently higher than Johor's. However, per capita, Sabah and Penang's budget out-performed Selangor's.

Since states have control over land policy, the Pakatan-led Selangor government used approvals as a negotiating tool. It cancelled the controversial Kinrara-Damansara Expressway (Kidex), a major tolled highway involving the federal and state government which would have changed the face of suburban Petaling Jaya, against which vehement protests by residents and non-governmental organizations had been mounted. Both Selangor and Penang barred an unpopular federal government speed camera system in 2012, the Automated Enforcement System (AES), on the technical ground that the Transport Ministry had failed to get the state's approval (*Malaysian Insider*, 29 October 2012), something needed because these cameras were to be installed on state land. In other instances, the state government played the role of facilitator. Land was also used to entice political support. For example, in the Hulu Selangor by-election held in April 2010, land titles and financial aids were promised to voters by the Selangor state government (Kuek Ser 2012).

Second, the Pakatan coalition rode on its "good governance" narrative. It maintained that its transparency and accountability strategies such as instating open tenders and renegotiating BN contracts resulted in increased fiscal revenues, and from there it built a strong moral narrative that effectively countered UMNO's. These practices enabled

**Figure 3: Total State Budget and Per Capita State Budget of Sabah, Selangor, Johor, Penang and Kedah, 2016–20 (RM)**



Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (2020).

them to increase state income and savings, whilst returning a “good governance dividend” to the *rakyat*. Further, the Selangor state legislative assembly formed a select committee on competency, accountability and transparency (Selcat) and held public hearings on past alleged discrepancies in the running of the state. The state also passed, for the first time in the country, a Freedom of Information (FOI) Enactment that would apply to all state-based agencies, which would counteract the federal-level Official Secrets Act that makes all government documents “classified” by default. This legislation was also adopted by Penang. Selangor also declassified documents related to a landslide that caused five deaths. The narrative involved was powerful, and BN’s efforts at winning back the state in 2013 in the end proved impossible.

Third, the coalition took advantage of its incumbency status in Selangor to extend deep roots into the communities. Running the state also gave the Pakatan coalition access to the twelve local councils, 366 *kampungs* (villages) and their corresponding village committees in the more rural areas, and residential committees within urban and semi-urban localities. Appointing PH-friendly individuals increased “politician-voter linkages” that would solidify what Weiss (2020) refers to (quoting Read 2012) as “administrative grassroots engagement”. Indeed, these organizations helped leaders acquire and disseminate information, target policies, legitimize face-to-face relationships and act as a platform for citizen input and for building social capital (Weiss 2020, quoting Read 2009). These grassroots institutions enabled the opposition coalition for the first time to have direct access to voters on the ground, in an entirely legitimate manner. Ten years of managing the state government in Selangor certainly secured its position. This was further validated by the results in the subsequent 2018 election.

### *The 14th General Election in Selangor, May 2018 and the After-effects*

In the lead-up to the 14th general election and corresponding state election in Selangor in May 2018, the PH coalition had already coalesced by as early as March 2017 around four member parties. They had therefore for more than one year worked closely together, developing joint campaign



messages and materials. In Selangor, the three original Pakatan parties had already worked closely together for a decade, and therefore Bersatu's role in the campaign as well as in the administration of the state was relatively minimal; this sentiment was echoed among the parties implying that they did not actually need Bersatu to win in Selangor.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, there was improvement in the electoral standing of PH in Selangor even then. Tables 2 and 3 display the electoral improvements of the PH coalition (before 2014, called Pakatan Rakyat, or PR) within Selangor at both the parliamentary and state levels in terms of numbers of seats won in the 2008, 2013 and 2018 elections. Table 4 displays the vote share obtained by each coalition in each of the three elections. It also shows that PH enjoyed increased support from Selangor voters with each successive election, both at parliamentary and state levels, obtaining a vote share that increased from 56 per cent to 59 per cent and then to 63–64 per cent. PH's performance in 2018 was even more exceptional, given that PAS forced multiple three-cornered fights, and pulled away votes from PH. Given the numerous three-cornered fights, PH did exceptionally well in winning the majority in a vast majority of seats. PAS contested in all but two parliamentary seats (Subang and Damansara) and in forty-six out of fifty-six state seats. The parliamentary and state seats that PAS chose not to contest were those where Malays constitute less than 30 per cent of the constituency's population.

Nevertheless, compared to the 2013 election, PH increased its popular vote in Selangor by 20 per cent, which, germane to this paper, Lemiere (2018) attributes to the “popularity and strong economic record of Azmin Ali”, the state's Menteri Besar at the time of the election. In the 2018 election campaign, Dettman and Weiss (2018) describe how PH politicians in state and federal legislative offices built “ties with potential supporters through ostensibly programmatic state-level welfare schemes via strategic brokerage and credit-claiming, or helped individuals navigate the bureaucracy, and offered other forms of intermediation”.

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<sup>8</sup> “Bersatu had a small seat at the table, just purely out of giving them face, but we won Selangor on our own. We didn't need Bersatu to win Selangor.” (Interview with DAP Selangor State Assemblyperson, 6 October 2020).

**Table 2: Selangor Parliamentary and State Election Results, Number of Seats Won (2008, 2013, 2018)**

Contesting Party	2008		2013		2018	
	Parliament	State	Parliament	State	Parliament	State
BN	5	20	5	12	2	4
DAP	4	13	4	15	4	15
PKR	9	15	9	14	10	21
PAS*	4	8	4	15	0	1
Amanah**	—		—		5	—
Bersatu***	—		—		1	6
Independent	0		0		0	

*Notes:*

\*PAS contested under Pakatan Rakyat in the 2008 and 2013 elections, but left the coalition to contest as a separate party in the 2018 elections.

\*\*Amanah was formed in 2015 as a breakaway from PAS, and joined DAP, PKR and Bersatu to contest under the Pakatan Harapan banner in the 2018 elections.

\*\*\*PPBM was formed in 2016, and joined DAP, PKR and PAN to contest under the Pakatan Harapan banner in the 2018 elections.

**Table 3: Vote Share of BN and PR, later PH in the Parliamentary and State Elections in Successive General Elections, 2008–18**

Year	Parliamentary Seats			State Seats		
	BN	PR/PH	PAS*	BN	PR/PH	PAS*
2008	44%	55%	—	44%	56%	—
2013	39%	59%	—	39%	59%	—
2018	21%	64%	15%	22%	63%	14%

*Note:* Some rows may not necessarily add up to 100 per cent, as some vote share was taken up by other contesting parties. This table only displays vote share of BN, PR/PH, and in 2018, PAS.

\*PAS contested together with PR in the 2008 and 2013 general elections, but as a separate party in the 2018 general election.

*Source:* Author's calculations based on 2008, 2013 and 2018 Malaysian General and State Election Data obtained from Wong Chin Huat and Danesh Prakash Chacko, August 2020.

**Table 4: State Legislative Assemblypersons in Selangor by Political Party, Before and After the Sheraton Move in February 2020**

Before Sheraton Move				After Sheraton Move			
PH		BN		PH Plus		PN	
PKR	21	UMNO	5	PKR*	17	UMNO	5
DAP	16	PAS	1	DAP	16	Bersatu*†	5
Amanah	8			Amanah	8	PAS	1
Bersatu	5			Independent*	4		
Total	50		6		45		11
Grand Total	56			56			

*Notes:*

\*Four assemblypersons defected from PKR to Bersatu, and one Bersatu assemblyperson aligned with Muhyiddin has followed his party out of PH.

†Four Bersatu assemblypersons continued to support PH as independents, aligned with Mahathir Mohamad.

As outlined above, building networks into the communities was an important element of PH’s success.

As noted by Yeoh (2020), after the PH took over the federal government in May 2018 and lasted till February 2020, states aligned with the PH administration benefited from the renewed positive relationship in a number of ways, including having increased access to state funding, easier project approvals, and more. Selangor was one such state. Additional factors included federal agencies being more cooperative, PH politicians being able to visit schools, and the channels to facilitate any problems being open and readily available.<sup>9</sup> However, this turned out to be short-lived, as the PH federal government fell and the PN coalition took over in March 2020.

<sup>9</sup> “For the first time, government departments were entertaining things that were affecting our constituencies: schools, police, the Ministry of Transport (would deal with everything to do with buses, KTM. Hospitals and Klinik Kesihatan (community clinics) ... we could talk to them ... Police play ball with us. MARA (would) invite DAP people to officiate their programmes.” (Interview with DAP Selangor State Assemblyperson, 6 October 2020).

## THE SHERATON MOVE

### *The Immediate Implications for Selangor*

The Sheraton Move took place on Sunday, 23 February 2020, and the PH government was toppled. Since Azmin Ali was one of the main movers behind the new government, it was speculated that the Selangor state government would be affected, with subsequent defections from his party, PKR. In fact, the rift began as far back as the party's 14th National Congress in December 2019, during which Azmin's faction walked out after being unsatisfied with the messages from party president Anwar Ibrahim (*Malay Mail*, 9 December 2019).<sup>10</sup> By early 2020, it was clear that there was a clear divide between PKR members supporting PKR's president Anwar Ibrahim and those supporting its deputy president Azmin Ali.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Azmin team leaving KEADILAN ... the feeling of it started during the party congress ... to me it was a very strong signal that maybe this is a rift that cannot be repaired." (Interview with representative from KEADILAN's Women's Wing, 12 October 2020).

<sup>11</sup> The history of the divide between the two PKR leaders can be traced back to the leadership tussle in Selangor itself. In both 2008 and 2013, when Azmin Ali was PKR Chief in Selangor, he was not selected as Menteri Besar. Further, when Khalid Ibrahim was removed, PKR attempted to replace him with Anwar Ibrahim and then Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, not Azmin. In the party polls in 2018, Rafizi Ramli attempted to unseat Azmin's position as Deputy President. By the middle of 2019, the split within PKR between Anwar's and Azmin's supporters became public knowledge, when an infographic (later debunked as fake) circulated on social media depicting members within Team Anwar and Team Azmin (Golingai 2019). In an analytical piece on how Pakatan Harapan collapsed, Dr Jeyakumar Devaraj (2020) comments on how Azmin Ali parted ways with Anwar, believing that Azmin—alongside many other former Anwar allies—"had issues with Anwar's leadership style—making unilateral decisions, undermining democratic institutions within the party, using henchmen to bend or even break the rules—all driven by a certain degree of paranoia (which has now become self-fulfilling)". On Anwar's side, Azmin was seen as defying PKR when first, he took the Selangor Menteri Besar position from Wan Azizah and then second, by selecting Amirudin Shari as his Menteri Besar replacement instead of the party leadership's choice of Dr Idris Ahmad when he was appointed as Minister of Economic Affairs in 2018 (Golingai 2019).

Selangor's Menteri Besar, Amirudin Shari, was known to be closely linked to Azmin Ali. He was a member of Azmin's Exco from October 2014 to May 2018, and his choice to succeed him as Selangor Menteri Besar. However, the day after the Sheraton Move, Amirudin gathered the PH leadership<sup>12</sup> in Selangor at his official residence to inform them that the state government was intact, and that they would continue the mandate given them by the public.<sup>13</sup> Another meeting took place three days later, with all Selangor state assemblypersons present, during which he reiterated his position of not defecting to support the new federal government.

Once that position was taken, he needed to ensure that strategic communication took place internally to stabilize the Selangor state government. Two clear messages were sent out to PKR members in particular, to encourage them to stay the course within PH. One was that they had "fought so hard to build a multiracial platform", and it would not make sense to "walk out" and "accept that you would sit at the same table with UMNO and PAS". Second, Amirudin employed the image that "splinters never work", implying that those who had left the party over the years had subsequently never fared well.<sup>14</sup>

Had Amirudin followed Azmin over to Bersatu, he would not have been able to maintain his position as Menteri Besar. First, there would have been no assurance that the other PKR assemblypersons would follow suit, and PH would merely have appointed a new Menteri Besar to replace him. Second, even if enough PKR assemblypersons defected

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<sup>12</sup> The state chiefs of all three parties attended this meeting, namely Gobind Singh from DAP, Izham Hashim from Amanah and MB as the state chief (Interview with Member of PKR Selangor and National Vice-Chief of KEADILAN Youth, 13 October 2020).

<sup>13</sup> "The MB was the first person to stabilize the state instead of letting go. That move strengthened the scenario in the state." (Interview with Member of PKR Selangor and National Vice-Chief of KEADILAN Youth, 13 October 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Interview with representative of KEADILAN Women's Wing, 12 October 2020.

to Bersatu and PN, his position as Menteri Besar was not secure.<sup>15</sup> We see this in the fate of two other Menteri Besar in the wake of the Sheraton Move. While the Menteri Besar of Perak state defected together with his party Bersatu to support PN and retained his position, at least for a while,<sup>16</sup> the Johor Menteri Besar, after defecting, saw his position taken away and given to UMNO.<sup>17</sup> In Perak, the defected Menteri Besar lost on 4 December a vote of confidence in the state assembly, with UMNO voting against him.<sup>18</sup> The risks were always apparent, and had Amirudin chosen to leave PKR for Bersatu, there was no certainty that he would remain Menteri Besar.

PKR state assemblypersons and other grassroots members were nevertheless under pressure to leave the party. Those from DAP and Amanah, however, were not quite as incentivized to leave,<sup>19</sup> and staying with PH made monetary sense; they had annual state allocations to serve constituents, for instance to fund small projects and a range of community

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Dr Hamdan Salleh, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Universiti Selangor (UNISEL), 27 October 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Ahmad Faizal Azumu, a Bersatu assemblyperson, was appointed under PH as Perak's Menteri Besar. After the PH government collapsed in February 2020, he was still maintained as the PN state government in the state, thus becoming the only Menteri Besar to serve two opposing political coalitions.

<sup>17</sup> Dr Sahrudin Jamal of Bersatu was appointed Johor Menteri Besar on 14 April 2019, replacing predecessor Osman Sopian who resigned after eleven months in the position. After the PH state government collapsed in Johor in February 2020, he was replaced by Hasni Mohammad of UMNO.

<sup>18</sup> On 4 December 2020, a motion of confidence was tabled by UMNO assemblyman Abdul Manaf Hashim. Forty-eight assemblypersons voted against Menteri Besar Ahmad Faizal Azumu while ten voted for him. Among the forty-eight who voted against him were members of UMNO, signalling the brewing tension between Bersatu and UMNO.

<sup>19</sup> "Why would the rest leave? They are already on the government side of things." (Interview with DAP State Assemblyperson, 6 October 2020); "How many people would you need to buy to make it fall? You can't buy DAP and Amanah." (Interview with representative from KEADILAN's Women's Wing, 12 October 2020).

activities. (See Table B.1 in the Appendix for details on annual allocations given to state assemblypersons by the Selangor government.)

To be sure, those who eventually did defect to PN were rewarded with federal government positions. The Ministry of Local Government and Housing appointed 261 people to the three PH states as Local Community Officers (Penggerak Komuniti Tempatan, PeKT), to carry out community-based activities, channel information regarding the Ministry's initiatives, and obtain community feedback on projects. This programme was allocated RM2.66 million for activities between September and December 2020 alone,<sup>20</sup> and RM8.6 million for the whole of 2021. They were given allowances of RM2,000 per month and RM10,000 per year for programmes and services, assigned to specific zones within the states of Selangor, Penang and Negeri Sembilan (all the PH states). In Selangor, 288 such appointments were made based on the number of seats held by PN parties in the state (*Malaysian Insight*, 10 November 2020). This was significant in two other respects: first, the Minister of Local Government and Housing making these appointments was Zuraida Kamaruddin, MP of Ampang and known to be a strong supporter and ally of Azmin Ali. Apart from Azmin and his political secretary Hilman, the two other Ahli-Ahli Dewan Undangan Negeri (ADUNs) who defected to Bersatu were both her PKR Women's Wing allies, Haniza Talha and Daroyah Alwi.<sup>21</sup> Second, the PeKT programme was launched by Selangor Bersatu chief Abdul Rashid Asari, the only Bersatu state assemblyperson to defect to PN.

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<sup>20</sup> Parliamentary reply to YB Wong Kah Woh, MP, Ipoh Timur (10 November 2020).

<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting that in May 2020, PKR conducted disciplinary proceedings and expelled 348 members and suspended four leaders from its party. Haniza Talha was amongst the leaders who were suspended (*Malay Mail*, 4 May 2020). Later, Haniza claimed that her expulsion did not follow proper procedure, including the claim that PKR's claim of her having formed a new NGO "Nation of Women" to go against the party was in fact false (*The Star*, 29 June 2020). Such disciplinary and investigative action by PKR would have certainly contributed to the decision by these PKR members to defect.

These types of activities, funded by the federal government within opposition-held states, had been the practice under BN. However, this time, what is unprecedented is that they are being referred to as Ahli Majlis Persekutuan<sup>22</sup> (federal local councillors), in which the officers “will be placed in local councils in these states, equivalent to councillors but without a seat on the local council in these opposition-held states” (*Malaysian Insight*, 10 November 2020). According to the Ninth Schedule in Malaysia’s Federal Constitution 1957, “local government” comes under the purview of state governments. Hence it has always been the practice for state governments to appoint local councillors at their discretion. While the mandate of the Ministry of Local Government and Housing is to provide planning and financial support to local councils, the federal government does not have the constitutional right to be involved in the administration of these councils. PN’s move of appointing such “federal local councillors” is clearly a political move, especially when this is done only in opposition states.

In the end, four PKR Selangor assemblypersons defected to Bersatu in support of PN. Only one of Bersatu’s assemblypersons followed the party out of the PH coalition, while the remaining four remained in support of the PH state government<sup>23</sup> (*New Straits Times*, 5 March 2020). These four are not part of the PH government, and do not hold state government allocations or state positions.<sup>24</sup> The state government has

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Member of PKR Selangor and National Vice-Chief of KEADILAN Youth, 13 October 2020.

<sup>23</sup> The four PKR members who defected were Azmin Ali (Bukit Antarabangsa), Hilman Idham (Gombak Setia), Haniza Talha (Lembah Jaya) and Daroyah Alwi (Sementa). The one assemblyperson who remained with Bersatu was Abdul Rashid Asari (Selat Klang), and the four from Bersatu that left to be independents in continued support of the PH state government were Sallehudin Amiruddin (Kuang), Harumaini Omar (Batang Kali), Mohd Shaid Rosli (Jeram) and Adhif Syan Abdullah (Dengkil).

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Dr Hamdan Salleh, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Universiti Selangor (UNISEL), 27 October 2020.



not appointed any coordinator for their constituencies, which it typically does for opposition-held state constituencies.<sup>25</sup>

The impact on the distribution of positions within the state was a direct one. The quota for Bersatu which was allocated for local councils and in *kampung* committees was removed, and all positions were now to be divided among three instead of four of the parties within PH, with the racial balance being maintained. Some state GLC positions were changed, where for instance Azmin supporter and defector Razlan Jalaluddin was removed as a director of state GLC PKNS and replaced by another PKR representative.<sup>26</sup>

That said, some state GLCs still had a “perception problem”, namely those that still maintained individuals linked to Azmin, such as those within the quasi-bureaucratic institutions of Team Selangor (a community engagement initiative by the state government) and SelCare (a state-led healthcare programme).<sup>27</sup> For example, Azmin Ali continues to be the Chair of the board of Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor, the Selangor International Islamic University College.<sup>28</sup> As noted above, state GLCs play a crucial role in Selangor in implementing state programmes and policies. They have strong influence and importantly, financial weight. Although the state government itself has not technically changed, the fact that some positions of those linked to the PN continue to be maintained within the GLC infrastructure is of significant interest.

### *Selangor as PKR's and PH's Stronghold*

It is evident that the PH coalition has been making opportune use of its time in power in Selangor. The array of welfare-based policies and

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Member of PKR Selangor and National Vice-Chief of KEADILAN Youth, 13 October 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with representative from KEADILAN's Women's Wing, 12 October 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with a political observer in Selangor, 24 October 2020.

<sup>28</sup> A photo of the KUIS Board of Directors meeting was uploaded on KUIS' Facebook page on 17 September 2020, naming Azmin Ali as its Chair (<https://www.facebook.com/FBKUIS/posts/selamat-datang-yb-dato-seri-mohamed-azmin-bin-ali-dan-ahli-lembaga-pengarah-kuis/3477018315688349/>).

programmes had been growing in Selangor and this proved popular among the electorate. What was equally important was the profile of voters within the highly industrialized state; being highly educated, especially in the urban areas, they valued a state government that steadily pursued and implemented policies in keeping with the good governance narrative. In fact, this good governance narrative was powerful and perpetuated Pakatan's popularity within the states of both Selangor and Penang, both of which the coalition has held for more since 2008.<sup>29</sup> This is similar to the opposition party Democratic Alliance in South Africa, which benefited by winning important subnational office and then creating a governance record to win new supporters (Langfield 2014, p. 291). It was very important to couple the good governance narrative with PH's programmatic abilities. Without the former, relying only on welfare-based programmes would not have been sufficient since BN at the federal government level would have easily been able to match PH's resources. As it appears, Selangor voters are less swayed by developmentalist promises than those in the more rural states, and this is for several reasons. Given their more urban demographic profile, they are less financially dependent on government assistance. Second, being more politically educated and exposed, they do not feel indebted to the federal government for economic development and for whatever aid it might provide.

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<sup>29</sup> "The intention was to ensure good governance ... to make Selangor an inspiring model for the rest of the country, sort of a proof of concept (of) what could happen if Pakatan ran the Malaysian government" (Interview with former Menteri Besar Officer Yin Shao Loong, 1 October 2019). "The narrative was we are able to give you money because we are not corrupt. We save money, so because of CAT (competency, accountability, transparency) ... we have surplus ... that was the narrative, very, very good narrative, very convincing, and it got people into it." (Interview with Penang State Exco Member, Zairil Khir Johari, 5 December 2019). "The track record of both state governments of competency, accountability and transparency was helpful in raising the public's confidence that DAP and our coalition partners could govern well together. This helped not just in Selangor and Penang but we were also able to take this message out to other states where Pakatan was not in power." (Interview with Selangor Member of Parliament, Ong Kian Ming, 4 March 2020).

Just as PAS had built its base in the East Coast states of Kelantan and Terengganu, from 2008, Pakatan—and more particularly PKR—had since 2008 built its base in Selangor, while DAP did the same in Penang. Having a political base saw the Pakatan state governments in Selangor through the political turbulence of 2020 (as it also did in Penang). There are several reasons for this. Dettman (2018) in his thesis on the Pakatan Rakyat coalition, for example, lists certain strong benefits associated with subnational office, such as the developing of patronage relationships, the strengthening ties of loyalty within state political institutions, and the ability to attract political financing from the local business community.

First, the Pakatan coalition won a large majority in the 14th general election. This meant that even if a few state assemblypersons had been enticed to defect and support PN, it would not have made much of dent in the government's position.

Second, the PH state government had steady resources available, which had been demonstrably distributed over the years. The state government provided lucrative allocations to state assemblypersons, and these grew steadily over the last decade. As politicians ultimately require funds to serve their constituencies, it would have been risky to defect away from the ruling state coalition and lose constituency funding. In 2014, the Pakatan state government offered RM200,000 annually to all opposition representatives in the state through Program Mesra Rakyat (people-friendly programmes), but all twelve BN (UMNO) assemblymen publicly rejected the funds on the grounds that their allocations were lower than that given to Pakatan ADUNs (*The Edge Financial Daily*, 26 November 2014). However, in reality, opposition ADUNs have been accepting and making use of their allocated amounts from the time they were offered,<sup>30</sup> including after GE14, although there is still discrepancy between funds distributed to PH-aligned and UMNO-aligned ADUNs (see Appendix B). Furthermore, if they became members of the new state opposition, the PN federal government would not have granted

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Officer at the Selangor Menteri Besar's Office, 1 December 2020.

any federal-level funding to them, with reports already beginning in March 2020 that these constituency development funds (CDFs) were immediately cut off from PH parliamentarians.

Third, positions in the many state GLCs, local councils, village committees and other quasi-bureaucratic agencies in Selangor were also financially rewarding and secure. Changing sides in the middle of a term would have put personal positions at risk. As pointed out in an earlier section, choosing to defect in support of PN, even if that resulted in a change of government which was highly unlikely in the case of Selangor, may not have led to the person being chosen to retain the same position. For state assemblypersons or party members who had been awarded with positions and jobs, it was therefore safer to continue supporting the state government in power and secure whatever positions they already had.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Future of PH in Selangor*

While the Selangor state government under PH has been able to ride out the stormy political weather, the future remains uncertain. While speculations about an early general election continue to circulate, and some preparations are being made in certain quarters, the PH Presidential Council has made a unanimous decision that the states it controls—Selangor, Penang and Negeri Sembilan—will not hold state elections until the end of their term, which is in 2023 (*The Edge Malaysia*, 23 July 2020). Should general elections be called early, and should the three states refuse to dissolve their respective state assemblies, then they will in the future, as in the case of Sarawak—and now Sabah since 2020—hold state elections individually and separately from national elections.

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<sup>31</sup> It is worth pointing out the resemblance of Menteri Besar Amirudin Shari's position in 2020 to that of his predecessor Azmin Ali in 2015, following the break-up of Pakatan Rakyat in August 2015. PAS, in leaving the coalition caused PR to cease to exist. Yet, PAS members continued to serve in the Selangor state Exco. A similar argument was used by Azmin in response to upset members of both DAP and PKR then, which was that the three PAS ExcOs "were retained in the interest of maintaining the stability of the Selangor state government ahead of the 14th general election" (*New Straits Times*, 24 May 2017).

The future of PH in Selangor is very much dependent on the future of PKR as a party, as well as PKR's ability to strengthen currently fraying ties with its allies DAP and Amanah. The PKR split in early 2020 eventually resulted in some of Azmin Ali's supporters defecting to Bersatu and supporting PN or being sacked by PKR. As the dust settled, only between 150 and 200 people eventually left the party and only one division in Selangor was dissolved.<sup>32</sup> The future of PKR will itself be determined by the way in which its president, Anwar Ibrahim, leads the party forward. The events of 2020 have not necessarily led to Anwar strengthening his position; his press conference where he announced that he possessed a strong convincing support from a majority of Members of Parliament to form a new government in late September 2020 was not attended by his coalition partners DAP or Amanah (*Channel NewsAsia*, 23 September 2020), leading to speculation that the move was conducted unbeknownst to them, even if they later supported it through separate press statements.

The question now is whether PH will hold onto Selangor as strongly as it has done in the past. The fate of PH in Selangor depends on certain factors, as laid out below.

First, although the redelineation exercise that took place just before GE14 did not significantly impact upon PH in 2018, this will certainly influence the results of the next election. For instance, the increase in Malay-majority and Malay-supermajority (with over 60 per cent of registered voters) seats could mean that PH loses out significantly. Lee (2019) has calculated that after the redelineation exercise, the number of Malay-majority and Malay-supermajority parliamentary seats grew from twelve to fourteen, and state seats from thirty-five to thirty-seven, with steeper increases in the supermajority class (see Table 5). Correspondingly, the number of mixed and Chinese majority parliamentary seats fell from ten to eight, and state seats from twenty-one

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<sup>32</sup> The only division in Selangor that was dissolved was that of Zuraida Kamaruddin, MP of Ampang. (Interview with representative from KEADILAN's Women's Wing, 12 October 2020).

**Table 5: Number of Parliamentary and State Legislative Assembly Seats by Ethnic Composition Before and After the 2018 Constituency Delineation Exercise**

Ethnic composition	Parliament		State Legislative Assembly	
	Before	After (Current Borders)	Before	After (Current Borders)
Malay $\geq$ 60% (Malay supermajority)	8	11	23	33
50% $\leq$ Malay < 60% (Malay majority)	4	3	12	4
Mixed	9	4	8	6
Chinese $\geq$ 50%	1	4	13	13
Total	22	22	56	56

Source: Lee (2019).

to nineteen. In GE14, this hardly made a difference to PH's support; BN only won two parliamentary seats (Sabak Bernam and Tanjong Karang) and four state seats, all of which had Malay representation above 70 per cent, and PAS managed to win only one state seat, also with 70 per cent Malays.

No doubt, PH will continue to benefit from the profile of Selangor voters. Being more urbanized and more highly educated, voter expectations in Selangor are relatively different compared to most other states in the country. However, circumstances can rapidly change. For example, the economic lockdowns during the protracted pandemic are hitting traders and wage-earners hard, and this makes them more dependent on government handouts. Furthermore, with the rapid realignment and fragmentation of political parties, specifically with regard to the formation of PN comprising Bersatu, UMNO and PAS, support for a Malay-Muslim coalition is certainly something that PH will have to contend with in the next election.

An issue that weighs on the Selangor state government is that it continues to fail in ending the disruptions to the state's water supply. In 2020 alone, there have been at least four instances of reported water chemical pollution, leading to water disruptions throughout the state. The regulation of water services and supplies may in reality be a complicated one, with the multiple agencies being responsible cutting across federal and state levels, but the public very much lays the blame on the Selangor state government and its water company, Air Selangor (*The Star*, 24 October 2020). Already there have been calls for the Menteri Besar to resign on those grounds. This may feature prominently in the next state election if the problem recurs.

Political factors will be of utmost importance; The onus may be on PN in the competition for Selangor. For instance, PN will need to resolve its seat distribution issues, given that all its component parties will be vying for the same Malay-majority constituencies. Crucially, PN has to identify a strong candidate for Menteri Besar, which they have as yet not succeeded in doing. That said, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin's popularity will be PN's strong point, which PH will have to contend with if he remains where he is.<sup>33</sup> The results of a survey conducted by Merdeka Center for Opinion Research in September 2020 showed that 51 per cent of the respondents were in support of PN, the highest among all the coalitions now on the field. Muhyiddin's approval rating reached as high as 69 per cent. Another question begging to be asked is how Azmin and his allies are to feature in the next Selangor state election. One perspective is that having left PKR, they also no longer have access to the party's base and will therefore find it difficult to win in the same constituencies they currently occupy in Selangor, and may have to contest in new seats.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Ratings (of) Muhyiddin in Selangor (are) sky high. If he does what he did in Sabah, just put his face and no need to put candidate's face, I think that as of today, Selangor is 50-50." (Interview with DAP Selangor State Assemblyperson, 6 October 2020).

<sup>34</sup> "A candidate or politician needs a base ... (and) that base requires a political party framework." (Interview with Dr Hamdan Salleh, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Universiti Selangor (UNISEL), 27 October 2020); "Individuals are never bigger than the party. What is their coalition (going to be)?" (Interview with representative from KEADILAN's Women's Wing, 12 October 2020).

## CONCLUSION

Malaysia experienced a particularly tumultuous year in the form of political upheavals throughout 2020. Defections and changing alliances resulted in a change in government at the centre, with the domino effects hitting many of the country's states. The PH governments in Selangor, Penang and Negeri Sembilan have survived. DAP holds the most number of seats relative to its coalition partners in the states of Penang and Negeri Sembilan and therefore, PH's unshaken position there is not surprising.

Selangor's state government remaining in the hands of PH throughout the turmoil is more worthy of cautious study. The exit of prominent PKR leaders and members, precipitated by Azmin Ali's decision to support Muhyiddin Yassin as Prime Minister and to engineer the formation of the Bersatu-UMNO-PAS federal government, has impacted the party. Given the fact that PKR is still heading the PH state government, this impact has been more limited than had been feared.

There are reasons for this, and for why the PN could not topple it from power in Selangor. For starters, PH had already been governing Selangor for more than a decade, and had built up a good track record for itself, and translated lucrative state fiscal and institutional resources into an array of programmes that its constituencies have benefited from. Incumbency has also allowed PH politicians direct interactions with the community; this is important since grassroots access is a crucial component of politics in Malaysia. Also, PH—and more so, PKR—politicians have managed to turn Selangor into a strong support base. Obtaining annual allocations from the state government is crucial for servicing constituencies, and staying in the “winning coalition” guarantees these politicians such access. Positions within an array of institutions, including local councils and state GLCs, have also been maintained; defecting is risky and would mean losing out on these distributed rewards and on the prestige associated with them—chief of which involves the position of Menteri Besar. Relatedly, PH's forty-one seats out of fifty-six represent a large majority. As many as fourteen assemblypersons would have had to leave the coalition in order for PH to lose its seat majority. As it turned out, very few defected ultimately.

Nationally, PH has taken quite a beating in 2020. As Wong (2020) eloquently argues, the democratic backsliding of 2020 is “a consequence



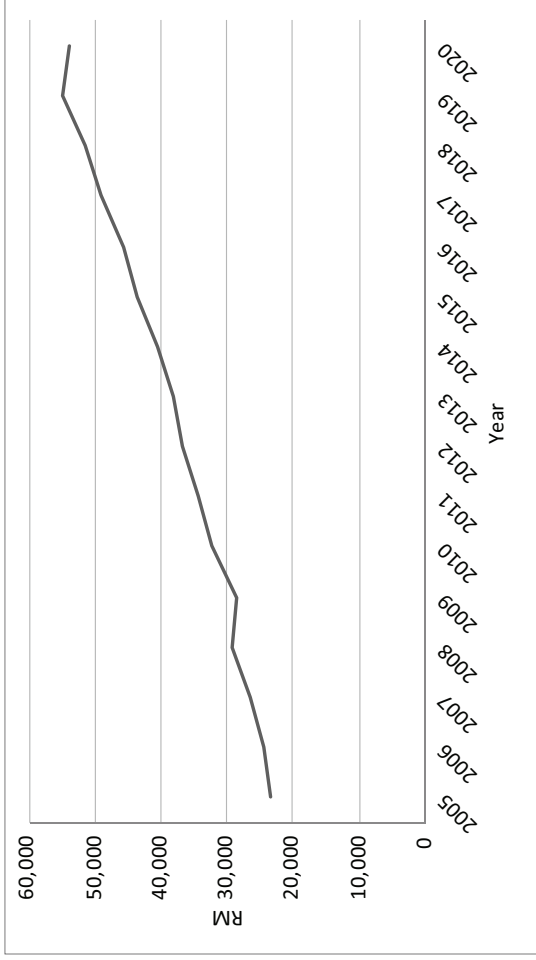
of dysfunctional parliament and dysfunctional parties” and “parties are so centralized that factionalism, infighting and splintering becomes cyclical”. Therefore, even parties within PH will need to take a hard, long look at themselves. There will be an urgent need to coalesce and consolidate if it is to seriously tackle an electoral campaign in the near future. As PN too tries to iron out internal differences, the next state election in Selangor will see greatly increased electoral competitiveness. PN will also have the advantage of federal government largesse, disproportionately greater financial resources which it will in the coming months surely activate—and has already started to do, for example in the form of PeKT.

The future is unpredictable, but this much is true: the strength and stability experienced by PH in the last decade may waver if it rests on its laurels and does not successfully counteract what will undoubtedly be a targeted campaign by PN to win Selangor, the country’s crown jewel.

## APPENDICES

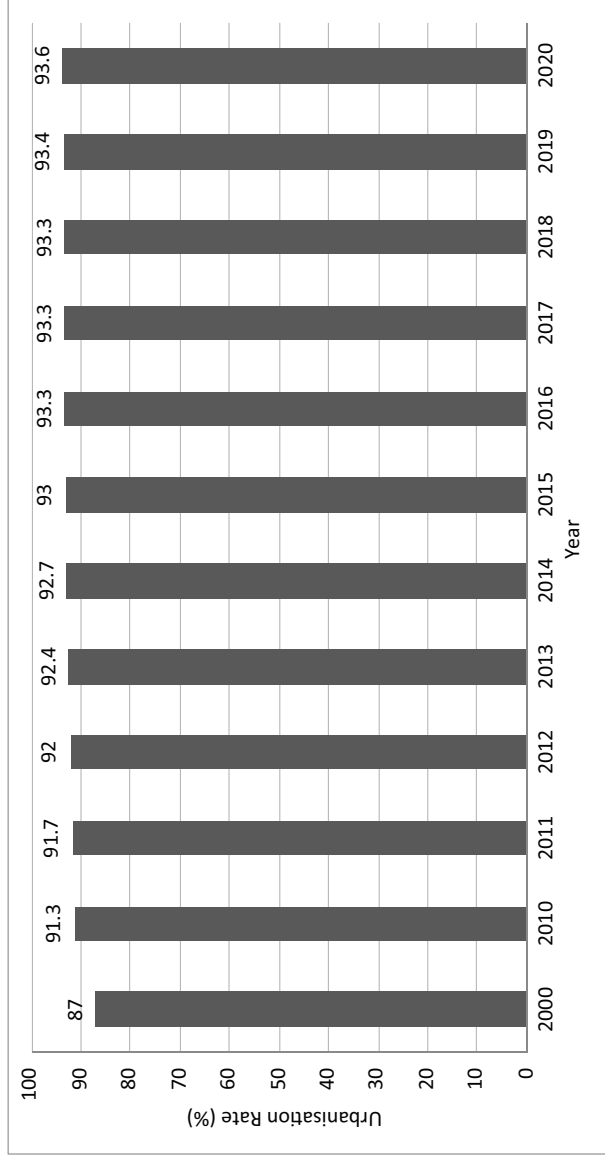
### Appendix A: Selangor's Contribution to the Malaysian National Economy

*Figure A.1: Selangor's Per Capita Income at Current Price Levels, 2005–20*



Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (DOSM), 2020.

**Figure A.2: Selangor's Urbanization Rate**



Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), 2020

**Table A.1: Selangor GDP as Percentage of National GDP**

<b>Year</b>	<b>National GDP at Constant Prices (RM million)</b>	<b>Selangor GDP at Constant Prices (RM million)</b>	<b>Selangor GDP as Percentage of National GDP</b>
2006	573,936	118,819	20.7%
2007	610,087	128,169	21.0%
2008	639,565	139,877	21.9%
2009	629,885	139,237	22.1%
2010	676,653	177,718	26.3%
2011	711,760	187,434	26.3%
2012	912,261	200,906	22.0%
2013	955,080	212,645	22.3%
2014	1,012,449	227,000	22.4%
2015	1,063,998	268,825	25.3%
2016	1,229,312	281,839	22.9%
2017	1,300,769	302,186	23.2%
2018	1,362,815	322,760	23.7%
2019	1,421,454	344,515	24.2%

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia, Economic Planning Unit.

**Table A.2: Selangor Manufacturing FDI as Percentage of National Manufacturing FDI**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Manufacturing Sector FDI into Malaysia (RM million)</b>	<b>MIDA-Approved Manufacturing FDI into Selangor (RM million)</b>	<b>Selangor Manufacturing FDI as % of National FDI</b>
2006	20,228	2,202	10.9%
2007	33,426	4,192	12.5%
2008	46,099	9,005	19.5%
2009	22,145	4,007	18.1%
2010	29,057	5,147	17.7%
2011	34,149	4,236	12.4%
2012	20,919	4,429	21.2%
2013	30,536	3,625	11.9%
2014	39,593	3,205	8.1%
2015	21,942	3,781	17.2%
2016	27,418	3,352	12.2%
2017	21,543	2,165	10.0%
2018	58,022	10,837	18.7%
2019	53,892	10,415	19.3%

*Source:* Economic Planning Unit, Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (MIDA).

**Table A.3: Selangor Debt as Percentage of Total State Debt to Federal Government**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Federal Recoverable Loans to States (RM million)</b>	<b>Selangor Debt to Federal Government (RM mil)</b>	<b>Selangor Debt as % of Total State Debt to Federal Government (RM million)</b>
2008	17,365.45	1,087.45	6.3%
2009	18,482.44	1,063.55	5.8%
2010	18,170.28	1,004.64	5.5%
2011	16,820.20	980.18	5.8%
2012	15,796.57	897.02	5.7%
2013	15,940.50	883.04	5.5%
2014	16,470.08	957.19	5.8%
2015	16,932.95	1,028.36	6.1%
2016	17,090.69	1,110.80	6.5%
2017	17,425.77	1,120.91	6.4%
2018	16,961.13	1,103.36	6.5%

*Source:* Federal Government Financial Statements, Treasury Fiscal Reports, National Audit Office Reports on Selangor State Government.

## Appendix B: Constitutional Division of Administrative and Financial Powers of Federal and State Governments

*Table B.1: Division of Responsibilities between the Federal and State Governments*

Federal List	Concurrent List <sup>a</sup>	State List <sup>b</sup>
External affairs	Social welfare	Islamic law and Malay customs
Defence	Scholarships	Land matters
Internal security	Protection of wild animals and wild birds and national parks	Agriculture and forestry
Civil and criminal law and procedure and the administration of justice	Animal husbandry	Local government
Federal citizenship and naturalization	Town and country planning	State works and water <sup>c</sup>
Machinery of government	Vagrancy and itinerant hawkers	Machinery of the state government
Finance	Public health and sanitation	State holidays
Trade, commerce and industry	Drainage and irrigation	Creation of offences on state matters
Shipping, navigation and fisheries	Rehabilitation of mining land and land with erosion	Inquiries for state purposes
Communications and transport		Indemnity for state matters
Federal works and power		
Surveys, inquiries and research		
Education		
Medicine and health		

<p>Labour and social security Welfare of the aborigines Professional occupations Holidays other than state holidays Unincorporated societies Control of agricultural pests Newspapers, publications, publishers, printing and printing presses Censorship Theatres, cinemas, films (subject to state list) Co-operative societies Tourism</p>	<p>Fire safety measures Culture and sports Housing Water supplies and services Preservation of heritage</p>	<p>Turtles and riverine fishing Libraries, museums, ancient and historical monuments and records and archaeological sites and remains Other services<sup>d</sup></p>
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*Notes:*

- a. Supplement to Concurrent List for States of Sabah and Sarawak: Personal law relating to marriage, divorce, guardianship, maintenance, adoption, legitimacy, family law, gifts or succession, testate or intestate, adulteration of foodstuffs and other goods, shipping under 15 registered tons, maritime and estuarine fishing and fisheries, the production, distribution and supply of water power and of electricity generated by water power, agricultural and forestry research, control of agricultural pests, and prevention of plant diseases, charities and charitable trusts and institutions in the State, theatres, cinemas, cinematograph films, places of public amusement, elections to the State Assembly held during the period of indirect elections.
- b. Supplement to State List for States of Sabah and Sarawak: Native law and custom, incorporation of authorities and other bodies set up by State law, Ports and harbours (other than those declared to be federal), regulation of traffic by water in ports and harbours or on rivers wholly within the state, except traffic in federal ports or harbours, foreshores, Cadastral land surveys, In Sabah, the Sabah Railway, and subject to the Federal list, water supplies and services.
- c. Includes rivers and canals, excludes water supplies and services; Control of silt and riparian rights.
- d. Boarding houses and lodging houses, burial and cremation grounds, pounds and cattle trespass, markets and fairs, and licensing of theatres, cinemas and places of public amusement.

*Source:* Federal Constitution, Ninth Schedule.



**Table B.2: Revenue Sources to Federal and State Governments**

Federal Tax Revenue	State Tax Revenue
<p>1. Direct taxes</p> <p>i. Income taxes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual</li> <li>• Companies</li> <li>• Cooperatives</li> <li>• Petroleum tax</li> <li>• Film hire duty</li> </ul> <p>ii. Taxes on property and capital gains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real property gains tax</li> <li>• Estate duty</li> <li>• Share transfer tax on land-based companies</li> </ul> <p>2. Indirect taxes</p> <p>i. Taxes on international trade:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Export duties</li> <li>• Import duties</li> <li>• Surtax on imports</li> </ul>	<p>1. Import and excise duties on petroleum products, export duties on timber &amp; other forest products for Sabah &amp; Sarawak, excise duty on toddy for all states</p> <p>2. Forests</p> <p>3. Lands &amp; mines</p> <p>4. Entertainment duties</p> <p><i>Other Receipts</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Licences and permits</li> <li>2. Royalties</li> <li>3. Service fees</li> <li>4. Commercial undertakings: water, gas, ports and harbours</li> <li>5. Receipts from land sales</li> <li>6. Rents and sales from state property</li> <li>7. Proceeds, dividends and interests</li> <li>8. Federal grants and reimbursements</li> </ol>

ii. Taxes on production and consumption:

- Excise duties
- Sales taxes
- Service taxes

iii. Others

- Stamp duties
- Gaming tax
- Betting and sweepstakes
- Lotteries
- Casino
- Pool betting duty

*Non-tax Revenue and Other Receipts*

1. Road tax
2. Licences
3. Service fees
4. Fines and forfeitures
5. Interests
6. Contributions from foreign governments
7. Revenues from federal territories
8. Refund of expenditures
9. Receipts from other government agencies
10. Royalties/gas cash payments

*Source:* Federal Constitution, Tenth Schedule.

**Table B.3: Federal Transfers to State Governments**

<b>General Grants</b>	<b>Special Grants</b>	<b>Tax-sharing Grants</b>
Capitation grants (based on a state's population size)	State road grant	Export duties on tin, iron and other minerals (10 per cent) <sup>a</sup>
State Reserve Fund grant: deficit grant	Service charge grant	Growth revenue grant <sup>b</sup>
Development grant (conditional)	Cost reimbursement grant	
Contingencies Fund grant for unforeseen needs	Grants to religious institutions	
State advanced grant for cashflow difficulties	For Sabah & Sarawak as per Malaysia Agreement (no review after 1973) <sup>c</sup>	
	For handing over territories in Kedah and Selangor <sup>d</sup>	

**Notes:**

- The Federal Constitution allows the Federal Government to increase this grant for the peninsular states to more than the minimum 10 per cent of export duties on minerals. This tax-sharing grant was created at the same time that State royalty rights to minerals were prohibited unless provided for by federal law (Jomo and Wee 2002).
- If federal government revenue other than export duty on tin and revenues under the Road Ordinance (1958) grows by more than 10 per cent in any particular year, the increase will be allocated to the state government in the form of a growth revenue grant. The growth revenue grant suggests tax-sharing expected of a federation, but it is subject to a maximum of RM150 million in any one year. The increase in revenue is only shared for the year concerned (Wee 2011).
- The grants to Sabah and Sarawak were given on the basis of the conditions for incorporation into Malaysia that were supposedly subject to later review, which has never taken place. Currently, RM26.7 million goes to Sabah and RM16 million to Sarawak (Jomo and Wee 2002).
- Kedah receives RM10,000 a year for territories handed over to the central British government in 1869, while Selangor receives annually RM18.3 million for handing over Kuala Lumpur, and RM7.5 million for handing over Putrajaya to the federal government.

Source: Federal Constitution, Tenth Schedule.

## Appendix C: Allocations Given to Selangor Elected Representatives

**Table C.1: Annual Allocations Given to Selangor Elected Representatives by the Selangor State Government, 2019<sup>a</sup>**

Position	Number of Constituents	Annual Allocation (RM)
State Legislative Assemblypersons (aligned to PH)	Below 30,000	730,000
	30,000–45,000	780,000
	45,000–60,000	830,000
	60,000 and above	880,000
Coordinating Officer <sup>b</sup>	Below 30,000	580,000
	30,000–45,000	630,000
State Legislative Assemblypersons (not aligned to PH)	Below 30,000	150,000
	30,000–45,000	150,000

*Notes:*

- a. Members of the Exco and the Speaker are given an additional RM300,000 on top of the constituency allocations listed above.
- b. The coordinating officer (Pegawai Penyelaras) is appointed to service opposition-held constituencies

*Source:* Financial Circular No. 1 Year 2019, Selangor State Government.

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