

PERSPECTIVE

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Singapore | 11 November 2021

Recurring Themes in the Politics of Parti Keadilan Rakyat

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Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim (C) gestures outside the National Palace after meeting with Malaysia's King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah in Kuala Lumpur on August 17, 2021. Photo: Arif KARTONO, AFP.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The origin and evolution of Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR, or People's Justice Party) were tied to crises that befell successive regimes from 1998 to 2018. The present crisis is qualitatively different because the Covid-19 pandemic pre-empted former modes of political mobilization. Today, PKR will have to negotiate between inhibited activism and profitless quietude to establish solidarity with latent dissent.
- From its inception, PKR's politics has been little if not coalition politics. On record, PKR stayed with every one of its coalitions. This apparent accommodation of inter-party difference is an important quality in the existing two-coalition system since a strong opposition will demand a democratic, pluralist political framework no matter who rules.
- The PKR has been amply rewarded for its demonstrated commitment to multiethnic politics and principled opposition to ethnic discrimination. Massive non-Malay support enabled the opposition coalitions to advance at every general election from 2008 to 2018. It is improbable that PKR will turn its back on the non-Malay voters. Nor will the latter back the 'Malay-Muslim front' of the ruling Perikatan Nasional (National Alliance).
- Anwar Ibrahim characterised the PKR's 'reform agenda' as a 'humane economy' which combines a critique of 'the way things are' with a vision of 'how things should be'. New discourses and civil society initiatives to respond to the present public health disaster, economic disruption and social misery have a moral and social tenor that can resonate with the spirit of the humane economy.
- In a limited sense, 'PKR was Anwar, and Anwar was PKR'. The advantageous side of this tight bond benefitted PKR at crucial moments before the 2008 and 2013 general elections. But the bond created complications for party unity and integrity when the leadership mishandled the vulnerable side of the bond. Whether PKR can restore a healing 'just unity' depends on whether its leaders' conduct can internalize the principles of their conception of democratic and institutional reform.

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysian history, some political parties had risen unexpectedly on swells of public discontent at critical moments – Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS, or Pan-Malaysia Islamic Party) in 1959, Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan, or Malaysian People’s Movement) in 1969, and Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS, or Sabah United Party) in 1985. But as part of the Pakatan Harapan (Harapan, or Pact of Hope) coalition, Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR, or People’s Justice Party), surpassed those parties by defeating the 61-year-old regime three years ago.¹ The political situation has since been unsettled by the collapse of the Harapan government, the Covid-19 pandemic, and economic contraction. Even so, PKR is a rallying-point of opposition to the Perikatan Nasional (PN, or National Alliance) regime.

All this makes it compelling to examine PKR’s importance to Malaysian politics. To do so, this essay discusses five themes of PKR’s politics, namely, its origin and evolution in crises; stress on coalition-building; commitment to multiethnic politics; ‘humane economy’ as reform agenda; and unique bond with Anwar. Not written in the mould of ‘SWOT analysis’,² this essay suggests that those five themes may resonate with current conditions.

THEME 1: ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION IN CRISES

There are reasons to cry out with irony that, ‘Crisis is PKR’s middle name!’

The obvious one is that PKR’s origin lay in Anwar’s fall, itself an outcome of the 1997 East Asian financial crisis. Anwar’s sacking brought two traumas – one for the Malay community which rebelled against Mahathir’s regime, and another for UMNO and the government whose leadership transition has been troubled ever since.

The deeper reason is PKR’s evolution in parallel with several disasters that befell the post-Mahathir regimes.³ Those events provoked surges of popular outrage and organized dissent that bore narratives of defiance – ‘Enough is enough’, *Lawan tetap lawan!* (Fight, resolutely fight!), and the ubiquitous *Re-for-ma-si!*

The present crisis is qualitatively different. Harapan’s collapse was followed by unstable PN regimes, and deteriorating Covid-19 and economic conditions. There is public disaffection with the regime’s crisis management. But the post-March 2020 suspension of Parliament, the declaration of a state of emergency, and prolonged movement control orders denied the opposition recourse to its former modes of mass mobilization. Besides, there is public weariness with ‘politicking’ (on all sides) construed as elite manipulations remote from the suffering of ordinary people. Current dissent, avoiding grand discourses of structural reform, is generally expressed in small-scale, direct, community, self- and mutual-help projects to alleviate immediate health and economic pains found in the lacunae left by *#kerajaangagal* (‘failed government’). Today, with PN and Harapan agreed on a ‘truce’ that should last until the next general election, PKR will have to negotiate nimbly between inhibited activism and profitless quietude if it wishes to establish meaningful solidarity with latent dissent.

THEME 2: STRESS ON COALITION-BUILDING

The PKR's birth was attended by a range of Reformasi allies.⁴ The opposition formed a coalition, Barisan Alternatif (BA, or Alternative Front) to draw synergistically on the appeal of Anwar's cause and the interventions of opposition parties and civil society organizations.⁵ But PKR's result was modest at the 10th General Election (GE10) of 1999 and disastrous at the 11th General Election (GE11) of 2004. By then BA had fallen into disuse. To contest the 12th General Election (GE12) of 2008, the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and PAS renewed their cooperation with Anwar's mediation. An electoral alliance of DAP, PKR and PAS was formed just as public sentiment turned against the Barisan National (BN, or National Front) regimes headed by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). At GE12 the opposition achieved an electoral breakthrough by winning more than a third of parliamentary seats and five state governments.

That historic election made two things clear. First, only a cohesive opposition could successfully challenge BN's domination. In 2008 the DAP-PAS-PKR trio was only an electoral alliance.⁶ Having realized its long desired 'two-coalition system', however, the opposition established a formal coalition, Pakatan Rakyat (PR, or People's Pact). Later elections proved that the opposition correctly banked its future on an institutionalized coalition that could resolve inter-party differences, overcome external obstacles, and jointly govern where it had won power.⁷ Second, PKR ceased to be the opposition's weak link when its parliamentary representation leapt from a single seat in 2004 to 30 in 2008. Remarkably, PKR won seats long held by BN that neither DAP nor PAS expected to win. As it were, PKR repaid its debt to its partners, and enjoying the advantage of Anwar's leadership of PR, PKR could even stiffen PR's spine.⁸

From its inception, PKR's politics has been little if not coalition politics.⁹ On record, PKR stayed with every one of its coalitions – BA, PR, and Harapan – unlike some of its partners.¹⁰ Hence PKR has been more accommodating of inter-party difference, which is important in two ways. First, PKR's stance is consistent with its support for democracy and pluralism. Second, the days of one hegemonic party lording over a multi-party coalition that utterly dominates Parliament are over.¹¹

The existing two-coalition system emerged from three consecutive general elections from 2008 to 2018 and has survived five regimes. Whatever its terms, the PN-Harapan truce reflects a basic truth: no matter who rules, there will be a strong opposition to demand a democratic, pluralist political framework. Today, Harapan forms the single largest bloc in Parliament – and, arguably, a more cohesive one than PN despite the latter's advantages of incumbency. Still, one of Harapan and PKR's toughest tasks is to secure more allies but reliable ones who temper self-interested calculations with observance of basic principles.¹²

THEME 3: COMMITMENT TO MULTIETHNIC POLITICS

With its origin in Reformasi, PKR was bound to have a predominantly Malay membership. But PKR's leadership has been a multiethnic mix of the original Anwaristas,¹³ veterans of Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM, or Malaysian People's Party), civil society activists, and

politicians from Sabah and Sarawak. As such, one of the most heartening aspects of PKR's politics is its demonstrated commitment to multiethnic politics and principled opposition to ethnic discrimination.¹⁴

There are notable points about PKR's multiethnic commitment. First, Anwar repudiated UMNO's ethnic politics and policies as fully as anyone with his background could.¹⁵ Second, while his rejection of ethnic discrimination is tied to his promotion of multiculturalism in the 1990s, its antecedent was his ABIM-era advocacy of the universalism of Islam in a plural society.¹⁶ Third, PKR's multiethnic spirit thrived in PR's heyday when PAS under Nik Aziz Nik Mat's guidance lived its most tolerant period of the early 21st century,¹⁷ and DAP-PAS cooperation gained strong grassroots support. Fourth, Anwar and PKR never took a 'pro-Malay' turn despite being spurned by non-Malay voters at GE10 and GE11.

The patient audacity of its multiethnic politics brought PKR ample reward. Non-Malay voters only swung from BN after being snubbed by UMNO between 2005 and 2007. But their unrelenting swings enabled PR to create the 'tsunami' of GE12 and gain the popular vote at the 13th General Election (GE13) of 2013, and Harapan to win the 14th General Election (GE14) of 2018.

It is improbable that PKR will turn its back on the non-Malay voters.¹⁸ Nor will the latter support PN's avowed 'Malay-Muslim front'. There is a simple but stark illustration of the difference between PKR and PN. When he was deputy prime minister, Anwar used to say in Mandarin, *wo men dou shi yi jia ren* (We are one family). To some he sounded gimmicky. But as PKR leader, he vowed to end ethnic discrimination. The PN Prime Minister, Ismail Sabri Yaakob, raised a *Keluarga Malaysia* (Malaysian Family) slogan. He quickly hollowed it by setting a '51 per cent bumiputera equity' for the logistics sector,¹⁹ which have rekindled the controversies over ethnic quotas of the 1970s and 1980s.

The desertion by Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu, or United Pribumi Party of Malaysia) and a big PKR faction exposed Harapan to 'anti-Malay' charges.²⁰ For years Anwar, PKR, and DAP had faced such accusations (from UMNO). They are now vulnerable because they lack an ally who can deflect a racist demonisation of the coalition. Until it broke with PR, PAS was such an ally. The Harapan partner, Amanah, has stayed above ethno-religious gamesmanship but Amanah's influence cannot match PAS's.

One of the brighter notes of life under the pandemic is a low-level awareness of shared suffering and mutual help that transcends ethnic boundaries. Activists of the 'young generation' find common 'interethnic' ground, as did their counterparts of the Reformasi era, in opposing injustice and discovering the validity of Bangsa Malaysia in practice.²¹

THEME 4: 'HUMANE ECONOMY' AS REFORM AGENDA

Anwar's original call for Reformasi had an anti-oligarchic, anti-corruption and anti-authoritarian message.²² He did not have the time to elaborate then but he was not narrowly 'pro-democracy' and 'pro-market'. When he emerged from prison his ideas of PKR's

‘reform agenda’ showed more depth, breadth and force than he had intimated before. He still denounced oligarchy, corruption and authoritarianism. He would dismantle monopolies, stop mismanaged privatisation, strengthen transparent and accountable control of public assets. He would even replace a much-abused New Economic Policy with needs-based affirmative action for the poor and deserving regardless of ethnicity.

Anwar presented his vision of a ‘humane economy’ in two PKR documents, *Malaysian Economic Agenda*, and *KeADILan Manifesto 2008 – A New Dawn For Malaysia*.²³ To realize his vision, he needed democracy, independent judiciary, free press, civil service professionalism, quality education for the masses, and just administration of welfare. He even wanted to ennoble money-making with moral responsibility and cultural refinement. It was to this cohesive ‘reform agenda’ that Nurul Izzah Anwar, Anwar’s daughter, alluded when she declared at the BERSIH 5 rally in 2016 that, ‘We do not want just to replace the prime minister. We want to replace the damned system.’²⁴

The PKR’s reform agenda found empathy with the party’s ideologically diverse leadership.²⁵ The humane economy appealed to a social base of urban subaltern classes who rebelled against the regime beginning with Reformasi. Among the subalterns was a class fraction of new Malay urban professionals. Whereas Mahathir’s Melayu Baru (New Malay) capitalists would not wean themselves from state sponsorship, these New Malay professionals were repelled by UMNO-style patronage. The latter could confidently leave the ‘existing New Economic Policy’ behind, not cling to it indefinitely. Finally, many young non-Malay activists of the ‘Vision 2020 generation’ saw the reform agenda as an important means to replace ethnic politics with ‘Malaysian’ politics.²⁶

At the present juncture the public health disaster of Covid-19 converges with the metaphorical sickness of the body politick. Has Anwar’s ‘humane economy’ a place here? For PKR there is a hopeful answer. The humane economy was not a top-down blueprint but a critique of ‘the way things are’ and a vision of ‘how things should be’. The critique targets stalled economic progress, maladministration, corruption, oligarchic excesses, social inequality, and poor public services. The vision aims to complement economic growth with redistribution, efficiency with welfare, and development with compassion. To tackle the social divide, it is essential to replace mismanagement which unjustly enriches the elites with reforms that fairly benefit commoners regardless of ethnicity.²⁷

Recently, as the Covid-19 pandemic, economic disruption, and social misery worsened, groups and individuals acted to ease deprivation and despair with self-reliance, social solidarity, mutual help, ‘colour blind’ compassion, protection of vulnerable communities, migrant labour and refugees, and so on. New discourses and civil society initiatives have arisen around notions of double (elite-plebeian) standards (*dua darjat*),²⁸ failed government (*#kerajaangagal*),²⁹ protest (*#Lawan*), self-reliance and mutual assistance (*#KitaJagaKita*),³⁰ response to appeals (*#BenderaPutih*, or White Flag movement), combatting corruption (*#RasuahBusters*),³¹ monitoring political conduct (*Solidaritas*),³² and so on. These initiatives do not come close to the scale of Reformasi mobilization. Yet the moral and social tenor of their criticisms of state incompetence, elite indifference, double standards, rising poverty, widening inequality, and social neglect evokes the spirit

of the humane economy. To the extent that the regime has no vision of a reformed post-pandemic society, PKR has a chance to reassert the meaning and urgency of the humane economy.³³

THEME 5: UNIQUE BOND WITH ANWAR

The PKR's formation and progress received crucial impetus from Anwar's plight and fight. His persecution sparked revulsion, his defiance inspired rebellion, and his demands defined a reformist platform. Conversely, Anwar's life after September 1998 depended on PKR: the party's existence was his relevance, its progress his hope, and its triumph his vindication. In this limited sense of the one's fortune being the other's fate, 'PKR was Anwar, and Anwar was PKR', as it was sometimes said.

So intertwined a leader-party bond brought benefit. On his return to active politics, for instance, Anwar had a keener feel for the restive popular mood than most. While he received reliable information from the extensive contacts that he had cultivated during his years in UMNO and government, he attracted sizeable audiences wherever he spoke. And his stature made him an effective mediator between PKR's allies. He has been universally credited with the opposition's 2008 breakthrough.

But the bond created complications. For all his charisma, Anwar is faulted for being domineering and divisive, making arbitrary decisions and showing poor judgement (of people). Without accurate insider information, a detached view might generally detect three types of complications tied to the direction of the party, the apportionment of high office, and leadership transition.

Over Anwar's first six years in prison,³⁴ PKR struggled to stabilize its organisational structure. Who should receive, transmit, interpret, and implement the instructions and decisions that passed between the party and its absent leader? Of those who administered the party, some were wont to defer to Anwar's wishes. Others did not want Anwar to 'run the party from prison'. Such differences of opinion turned fractious during PKR's early days.³⁵

When PKR could fill high office appointments after GE12 and GE13, the second type of complication arose. The Selangor Menteri Besar's post was key and ill-fated. In 2008, Anwar's choice of Khalid Ibrahim for the post disappointed Azmin Ali. In 2013, Azmin was appointed by the Sultan of Selangor over PKR's preferred nominee, Wan Azizah Wan Ismail. Quite possibly the Anwar-Azmin rift began in 2008 and was aggravated in 2013.

Leadership transition formed the third type of complication. Anwar's imprisonment from February 2015 and May 2018 was the time of his rapprochement with Mahathir and Harapan's formation. All along, PR had maintained Anwar as its leader. At high-level Harapan discussions, however, Azmin campaigned to have a 'Muhyiddin Yassin-Azmin Ali pair' nominated as Harapan's candidate prime minister and his deputy.³⁶ Eventually Harapan decided on a Mahathir-Anwar ticket. The mistrust between Anwar and Azmin must

have turned irreconcilable from there, before the PKR's bitterly divisive 2019 election, and the defection of Azmin's faction in February 2020.³⁷

These scenarios were not disputes of ideology- or policy-driven factionalism. Suffice it to note that the disputants had respectively to tread a fine line between loyalty to a strong leader and autonomy from domineering control; between rightful reward and presumptuous claim; and between justifiable ambition and *makan towkay*.³⁸ As it was, the party mishandled those complications on the vulnerable side of its bond with Anwar. Can PKR restore a healing 'just unity' within itself? That depends on whether its leaders' conduct can internalize rules of governance, transparency and accountability – the principles of their conception of democratic and institutional reform.

A final point might be made about the Anwar-PKR bond. The era from September 1998 to May 2018 was a turbulent conjuncture at which opposition politics and social dissent converged to give life to bold narratives of the future. At the heart of all that was Anwar Ibrahim. The era did not belong to him. That would be a wrong way of looking at it given the immensity of its popular struggles and creative energies. But Anwar cut an epic figure who led PKR, PR and even Harapan very far along a rough path of political transformation.³⁹ As the late DAP MP, Sim Kwang Yang, perceptively observed, it was immaterial 'whether Anwar [was] a "knight in shining armour"'; in the 'larger historical backdrop', he was 'a powerful instrument [who brought] meaningful change to the moribund democracy prior to March 8 [2008]'.⁴⁰ It will not do to reduce Anwar's historical significance to a *mere* issue of the premiership that has eluded him. He was 51 years old when he fell. He turned 74 last August. He is unlikely to bestride a new milieu as he did the old. Still, it is one of PKR's unfinished tasks to define Anwar's role in a post-pandemic environment. What it decides might determine if his moment has passed, or is yet to come.

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute for my Visiting Senior Fellowship which gave me a very good chance to write on contemporary Malaysian politics. In this regard, I very much appreciate the kind assistance of Francis Hutchinson, Lee Hwok Aun, and the staff of ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. Francis, Hwok Aun, and Fong Chin Wei gave critical suggestions that helped me to revise a draft of this essay. I am grateful to Hamdan Mohd Salleh, Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail, Tricia Yeoh, and Zulkarnain Abdul Rahman for generously making valuable sources available to me. My knowledge of PKR and the present political juncture was much improved by conversations with Ibrahim Sani, Ong Jing Cheng, Nathaniel Tan, and Zaharom Nain.

¹ When the regime refused to register Harapan as a coalition, all its candidates contested on the PKR ticket.

² A rigorous sample of which is given by Tricia Yeoh, *Will Harapan's Hold on Selangor Hold?* Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Trends in Southeast Asia, Issue 3, 2021.

³ Those included the murder of Altantuya Shaaribu, the 'Lingam-gate' corruption of the judiciary, and the 1 Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) 'heist of the century'.

⁴ On the origins of Parti Keadilan Nasional (Keadilan, or National Justice Party), and its merger with PRM to form PKR, see Hamdan Mohd Salleh, 'Parti Keadilan Rakyat sebagai Parti Oposisi dalam Amalan Demokrasi di Malaysia' (Parti Keadilan Rakyat as an Opposition Party in the Practice of Democracy in Malaysia), in *Merentasi Sempadan yang Melewati Zaman: Kumpulan Esei Sempena Persaraan Profesor Mohammad Redzuan Othman* (Crossing Boundaries of the Time: Essays in Honour of the Retirement of Professor Mohammad Redzuan Othman), edited by Amer Saifude Ghazali, Zulkarnain Abdul Rahman and Rosmadi Fauzi, Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya, 2018, pp. 301–324; see especially pp. 309–314.

⁵ At GE10, PAS advanced but DAP faltered. At GE11, PAS shed its previous gains while DAP did no better.

⁶ The trio had an important but often overlooked ally, Makkhal Sakhti, which mobilised a huge erstwhile regime-friendly Indian vote for the opposition. The BA experience left DAP and PAS with doubts that their respective supporters would back a coalition of their 'ideologically incompatible' parties.

⁷ Ong Kian Ming, 'The April "Tri-elections" in Retrospect', *Aliran Monthly*, 29 (3), 2009, pp. 9–14. Also see Kian Ming Ong, 'Pakatan Rakyat: What is Different This Time?', *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 99:407, 141–152; on latent DAP-PAS differences, see pp. 145–147.

⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 147 for Ong's view of PKR's early weaknesses, such as poor candidate selection.

⁹ Anwar said of his political plan in 2007 that 'the vehicle of support is Keadilan, working hard, in collaboration and understanding with both PAS and DAP [and] more progressive civil society groups' ('I am committed and determined,' *Aliran Monthly*, 27, 1, 2007, p. 8).

¹⁰ DAP withdrew from BA, PAS from PR, and Bersatu from Harapan.

¹¹ Liew Chin Tong, 'How Long Can Ismail Sabri Survive as PM?' *Citizen Tong*, Part 1, 27 September 2021, <https://chintong.substack.com/p/part-1-can-ismail-sabri-survive-his>, and Part 2, 28 September 2021, <https://chintong.substack.com/p/can-ismail-sabri-survive-his-governments> (accessed on 29 September 2021).

¹² And not a 'kingmaker' partner, say, who holds a coalition hostage.

¹³ Anwar loyalists who followed him out of UMNO.

¹⁴ Analysts of GE10 were cautious in discussing the 'end of ethnicity' in Malaysian politics. Maznah Mohamad, 'Malaysia – democracy and the end of ethnic politics?', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 62, 2, 2008, pp. 441–459; and Thomas B Pepinsky, 'The 2008 Malaysian Elections: An End to Ethnic Politics?', *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 9, 2009, pp. 87–120.

¹⁵ 'Anwar eschewed playing the race card to attack Umno for not doing enough for the Malays. Instead, he focused on better governance, stopping corruption of the BN elite, so that government aid could get to the poor who needed it. He also repeatedly emphasised the importance of expanding affirmative action to include poor non-Malays and he linked this with Islamic principles of justice and fair play. He also vowed to stop the looting of national wealth by the self-serving Umno elite' (Jeyakumar Devaraj, 'Pakatan Harapan debacle: A clash of narratives?', *Aliran*, 12 July 2020, <https://aliran.com/aliran-csi/pakatan-harapan-debacle-a-clash-of-narratives/>, accessed on 25 July 2021).

¹⁶ 'Islam regards discrimination as a criminal conduct because it is completely opposed to its advocacy of uniting all nationalities and encouraging tolerance, friendship and consideration among humans' (Anwar Ibrahim, 'Islam – Penyelesaian Kepada Masalah Masyarakat Majmuk' [Islam – Solution to the Problems of a Plural Society], Speech at the Eighth ABIM General Assembly, 1979).

¹⁷ Nik Aziz resolutely refused to cooperate with UMNO. Led by Hadi Awang, PAS took on a 'Malay-Muslim first' position which Hadi once denounced as *asabiyah* (narrow communalism).

¹⁸ 'Non-discrimination is central to the position that my party takes in promoting justice', said Anwar, pledging 'to demonstrate that affirmative-action policies can be premised on need ... poverty and lack of opportunity, not race or religion' (Anwar Ibrahim, 'Confronting

Authoritarianism’, Fifteenth Annual Seymour Martin Lipset Lecture, *Journal of Democracy*, 30, 2 [2019]: 8–9).

¹⁹ Sitpah Selvaratnam, ‘Piracy ashore: Unlawful 51pct equity policy for forwarding companies’, *Malaysiakini*, 4 October 2021, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/593929>, accessed on 4 October 2021; ‘Bumiputera policy and the 12th Malaysia Plan: Discrepancies between the plan and the speech – Lee Hwok Aun’, *Malay Mail*, 2 October 2021, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/what-you-think/2021/10/02/bumiputera-policy-and-the-12th-malaysia-plan-discrepancies-between-the-plan/2010201>, accessed on 3 October 2021.

²⁰ For the next general election, Azmin’s faction might have to fight other Malay parties within PN for seat allocation, and against Harapan in ethnically mixed seats which most of the ex-PKR MPs won at GE15.

²¹ ABIM has adopted an ‘Islamic cosmopolitanism’ to reinterpret Bangsa Malaysia as fostering shared ethnic values in fighting for justice. See Muhammad Faizal Abdul Aziz, *Kosmopolitan Islam & Pembinaan Bangsa Malaysia* (Cosmopolitan Islam and the Forging of Bangsa Malaysia), Kuala Lumpur: ABIM, 2020.

²² Permatang Pauh Declaration, 12 September 1998.

²³ Khoo Boo Teik, *The Making of Anwar Ibrahim’s ‘Humane Economy’*, Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Trends in Southeast Asia, Issue 18, 2020, pp. 19–21.

²⁴ Pantaitube ‘BERSIH 5 – Nurul Izzah @ KLCC’, *YouTube*, 20 November 2016, at 06:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1o7QPtzYtNc> (accessed on 15 September 2017).

²⁵ There is an interesting suggestion that Anwar crafted a pragmatic, centrist, PKR platform, synthesizing ideas from ‘left’ and ‘right’, with PKR influenced by the Malay left, social democracy and liberalism; see Mohd Azizi Jaeh, ‘Pengaruh Sosialisme Demokratik dalam Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR): Reformasi dan Cabaran kepada Ideologi Alternatif di Malaysia’ (The Influences of Democratic Socialism in Parti Keadilan Rakyat [PKR]: Reformasi and Challenges to Alternative Ideology in Malaysia), *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics & Strategic Studies*, 44, 2 (2017): 27–50, especially pp. 31–35. As part of PKR’s intellectual milieu, Khalid Jafar led a project of political education centred on Enlightenment ideas and policies of liberal democracy and (loosely) reformist capitalism; see Mohd Azizi Jaeh and Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail, ‘Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) dan Intelektual Liberal: Kelahiran dan Evolusi Idea’ (Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) and Liberal Intellectuals: The Birth and Evolution of Ideas), *Akademika* 90, 1 (2020): 165–179, especially pp. 169–174.

²⁶ Several (graduated) Chinese student activists were drawn to PKR because it was young, non-communal and offered more political space for new members; they contested successfully as PKR candidates in GE12. Thock Ker Pong, ‘Aktivisme Mahasiswa Cina Era Reformasi dan Pasca Reformasi di Malaysia: Kajian Impak Politik dalam Pilihan Raya Umum ke-12’ (Chinese Student Activism in the Reformasi Era and Post-Reformasi in Malaysia: A Study of Political Impact at the 12th General Election), *Akademika* 82, 1 (2012): 91–102, especially pp. 99–101.

²⁷ Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, the youngest member of the fallen Harapan government, criticized the PN regime’s proposed ‘bumiputera equity safety net framework’, which would require ‘bumiputera shares to be sold to bumiputeras only’, for only benefitting the cronies and the rich (*Malaysiakini*, ‘Saddiq questions why M’sian equity holders punished for not being born Malay’, 28 September, 2021, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/593115>, accessed on 4 October 2021).

²⁸ ‘But now, the Malays can see and feel – for themselves – the suffering caused by those who preach racial politics. The injustice of *dua darjat* has also made it clear that there are different rules for the powerful, and for ordinary Malays’ (Andrew Sia, ‘Aiya, this country no hope la’, *Malaysiakini*, 29 August 2021, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/columns/589084> accessed on 30 August 2021).

²⁹ For example, Lim Kit Siang, ‘#kerajaangagal193 – Parliament next week should be given a report as to what measures have been taken to reduce the shocking Covid-19 fatality rate, which had increased more than 22 times from the daily casualty of nine deaths before the emergency to 199 deaths yesterday’, 21 July 2021, <https://blog.limkitsiang.com/2021/07/21/kerajaangagal193-parliament-next-week-should-be-given-a-report-as-to-what-measures-have-been-taken-to-reduce-the-shocking-covid-19-fatality-rate-which-had-increased-more-than-22-times-fr/> (accessed on 31 July 2021).

³⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/kitajagakita2020/>. Also see Clarissa Ai Ling Lee, ‘Malaysia’s #Kitajagakita Invigorates Activism and Tackles Apathy’, *Fulcrum*, 14 September 2021, <https://fulcrum.sg/malysias-kitajagakita-invigorates-political-activism-and-tackles-apaty/> (accessed on 22 September 2021).

³¹ <https://www.facebook.com/rasuahbusters/>

³² https://www.facebook.com/solidaritas.my/?ref=page_internal

³³ ‘Rather than ethnic “others”, the more prominent narrative is one of “haves versus have nots”. Rich influencers repeatedly flouting rules and business figures callously calling the suffering lazy join politicians in being pilloried on social media.’ Bridget Welsh, ‘Pandemic failures will transform Malaysian politics’, *East Asia Forum*, 18 July 2021, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/07/18/pandemic-failures-will-transform-malaysian-politics/> (accessed 21 July 2021):

³⁴ Several PKR leaders were detained without trial during that period. Johan Saravanamuttu, ‘Reformasi Activists Under Detention’, *Aliran Monthly*, 21, 3 (2001): 2–6.

³⁵ Khoo Boo Teik, ‘Die Hard: The new, the old and the ugly in keADILan Nasional’s turmoil’, *Aliran Monthly*, 20 (5), 2000, pp. 2–6.

³⁶ Liew Chin Tong, *Lim Kit Siang: Patriot, Leader, Fighter*, Kuala Lumpur, REFSA, 2021, pp. 221–223.

³⁷ Adam Aziz, ‘Azmin leads exodus of 11 MPs from PKR and PH’, *theedgemarkets.com*, 24 February 2020, <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/azmin-leads-exodus-11-mps-pkr-and-ph>; accessed on 1 March 2020.

³⁸ Literally ‘to eat the boss’ in Malay political jargon.

³⁹ Khoo Boo Teik, ‘The ever-present Anwar Ibrahim’, *Malaysiakini*, 20 March 2018, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/416333>.

⁴⁰ Sim Kwang Yang, ‘Whom should we trust?’ *Malaysiakini*, 12 April 2008, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/81274>, accessed on 20 April 2008.

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