

# PERSPECTIVE

RESEARCHERS AT ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE ANALYSE CURRENT EVENTS

Singapore | 3 October 2023

---

## Selangor's 2023 State Election: Pakatan-BN's Defense, Perikatan's Breakthrough

Lee Hwok Aun\*



Selangor's chief minister Amirudin Shari of Pakatan Harapan and his wife Masdiana Muhamad gesture before casting their vote at a polling station during the state elections held on 12 August 2023. (Photo by Mohd RASFAN/AFP).

*\* Lee Hwok Aun is Senior Fellow and Co-coordinator of the Malaysia Studies Programme at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. The author gratefully acknowledges datasets from Ong Kian Ming (GE-15 parliamentary election results mapped onto state constituencies) and Tindak Malaysia (estimated ethnic composition data of Selangor's electoral roll), and thanks Rebecca Neo for her excellent cartographic work and Francis Hutchinson, Kevin Zhang and Adib Zalkaply for their comments on an earlier draft of this article. The usual disclaimer applies.*

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- The Pakatan Harapan – Barisan Nasional (PH – BN) pact retained power at Selangor’s 2023 state election of 12 August, but saw its seat count drop from 45 to 34. Rival Perikatan Nasional (PN) made major gains, burgeoning from 5 to 22 and depriving PH-BN of a two-thirds majority in the 56-seat assembly.
- PH maintained incumbency advantages, leveraging its track record, steady administration and social programmes to win 60 per cent of the popular vote. However, PH lost ground in the Malay electorate and suffered a lower turnout of its base; the continuing decline of UMNO curtailed the benefits of PH’s partnership with BN.
- PN’s popularity has surged; the coalition expectedly dominated in Malay supermajority seats. A coordinated campaign, lavish manifesto and targeted messaging – notably at youths, women, and the Indian community – contributed to its increased share of Selangor votes, from 27.5 per cent in November 2022 to 37.8 per cent nine months later.
- The PH-BN government has a host of young assemblypersons, and with a fresh mandate for Chief Minister Amirudin Shari’s second term, has strengths to build on. However, PN’s expansion and morale-boosting wins presage a robust opposition and a more competitive political arena.
- PH’s 2008-2023 era of dominance has ended; the next chapter of Selangor’s politics remains to be written.

## INTRODUCTION

Selangor was widely expected to be the most competitive and consequential of the six Peninsular Malaysian state elections held on 12 August 2023, referred to as PRN2023 (*Pilihan Raya Negeri*). Malaysia's 15<sup>th</sup> general election of 19 November 2022 (GE2018) verified the strength of the Perikatan Nasional (PN) coalition of Malay-based parties, and showed the consequences of an electoral contest with three major coalitions. Pakatan Harapan (PH), anchored by multi-ethnic parties and bolstered by its urban voter base, retained 16 out of Selangor's 22 parliamentary seats, mostly by wide margins. PH remained competitive in Malay-majority constituencies, aided by the capacity of UMNO, the hegemon of the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, to vie for Malay hearts. This resulted in a three-way split that diluted PN's vote share. However, a protest against UMNO and a surge in Malay support for PN catapulted the latter from one seat to six. All were in Malay-majority constituencies as expected, but portentously for PH, PN's new domain extended beyond northern Selangor to the central and southern fringes of the Klang Valley which stretches from Petaling Jaya to Klang city (Figure 2). PH and BN subsequently formed the federal "Unity government" coalition of coalitions with East Malaysian partners, which operated on the Peninsula as a PH-BN alliance to go head-to-head against PN (See Table 3 for PH and PN component parties and full names).

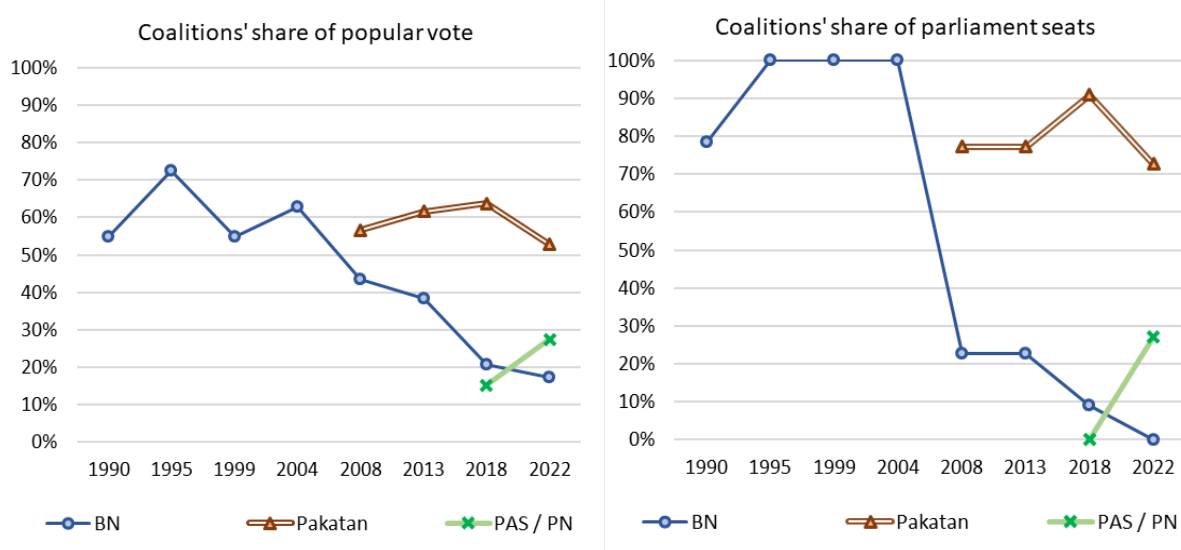
PN framed PRN2023 as a referendum on the Unity government, and sought to capitalize on perceivable economic discontent and Selangor's electoral configuration in the race to win at least 29 of Selangor's 56 seats. Selangor had been Pakatan's stronghold since 2008, but PN viewed the 37-38 Malay-majority seats dispersed throughout the state as ripe targets. PH maintained the advantages of state government incumbency and alignment with the federal Unity government, and could take comfort from GE2022 results. However, the PH-BN pact would be sternly tested. Heading toward PRN2023, questions loomed large: How much more momentum would PN gain? Would the Unity coalition's voters turn out? Would BN supporters rally behind PH candidates and vice versa?

Selangor voters answered on 12 August by giving PH-BN a new mandate but without the two-thirds majority that PH had enjoyed since 2013. PN's expected surge translated into decisive wins in most Malay-majority constituencies, while PH-BN continued to dominate mixed constituencies and retained various Malay-majority seats. This Perspective outlines the context of PRN2023, surveys salient vote patterns, and discusses the outcomes and implications of the resulting situation.

## BACKGROUND AND RUN-UP TO POLLING DAY

Selangor is Malaysia's most urbanized and economically advanced state. In 2022, 96 per cent of its residents lived in urban areas, and its median household income of RM9,980 considerably topped that of the next highest state, Johor (RM6,880), and the national median (RM6,340).<sup>1</sup> While governing the state confers prestige, Selangor's incumbent did not face credible challenges for three electoral cycles. Figure 1 shows the dominance of the Pakatan Harapan government since 2008 and the mirrored decline of the BN opposition through the 2013, 2018 and 2022 general elections. BN's and UMNO's political prospects in Selangor have been hamstrung by weak state party leadership and a demoralised political machinery.

Figure 1. Parliament seats and popular votes across eight general elections, 1990-2022



Notes: Pakatan Rakyat 2008 and 2013: PKR, DAP and PAS; Pakatan Harapan 2018: PKR, DAP, Amanah, and Bersatu; Pakatan Harapan 2022: PKR, DAP, and Amanah.

The collapse of the PH government in February-March 2020 and an emergent political reconfiguration centred on the Malay-party triumvirate of Bersatu, PAS and UMNO. By 2022, schisms grew between UMNO and the formal PN alliance of Bersatu and PAS, resulting in the UMNO-led BN competing against PN and long-term foes PH at the November 2022 general election. Three-cornered fights blanketed the Peninsula, pivotally causing three-way splits in the Malay vote. PN emerged as the new champion of the Malay heartland in northern Selangor and the periphery of the Klang Valley (Figure 2). State-wide, PN garnered an estimated 49 percent of Malay votes, dwarfing BN (27 per cent) and PH (21 per cent).<sup>2</sup> PH fared better in Selangor than the Peninsula-wide average of 11-12 per cent,<sup>3</sup> but would need to expand its Malay vote share to hold the state in a two-cornered contest.

GE2022, while limited to federal parliament seats in Selangor, provided data points for the state assembly election. Mapping the votes cast on 19 November onto the state seats within each parliament district, ethnic patterns continue to stand out. PH maintained its non-Malay majority strongholds — ethnically mixed areas without one clear majority group — in which the coalition won an outright majority on its own in three-cornered fights (Table 1). Of the 22 seats PH would have won if the state election was held concurrently with GE2022, 18 were in non-Malay majority seats. PN’s traction in Malay supermajority seats, where Malay voters comprise two-thirds or more, was also apparent; of PN’s wins by majority, all were in such areas. Winning by plurality — getting less than 50 per cent of votes but more than any other candidate — transpired in 31 of the total 56 seats. PN won a plurality in 11 Malay supermajority seats, as did PH in 5 Malay supermajority seats and 14 Malay-majority seats, and BN in 2 Malay-majority seats. The combined votes for PH and BN would carry a PH-BN pact over the halfway line. These patterns underscored the imperative of PH-BN collaboration to convince BN supporters to transfer their votes to PH, and vice versa.

Figure 2. Selangor parliament constituencies: 2022 general election results

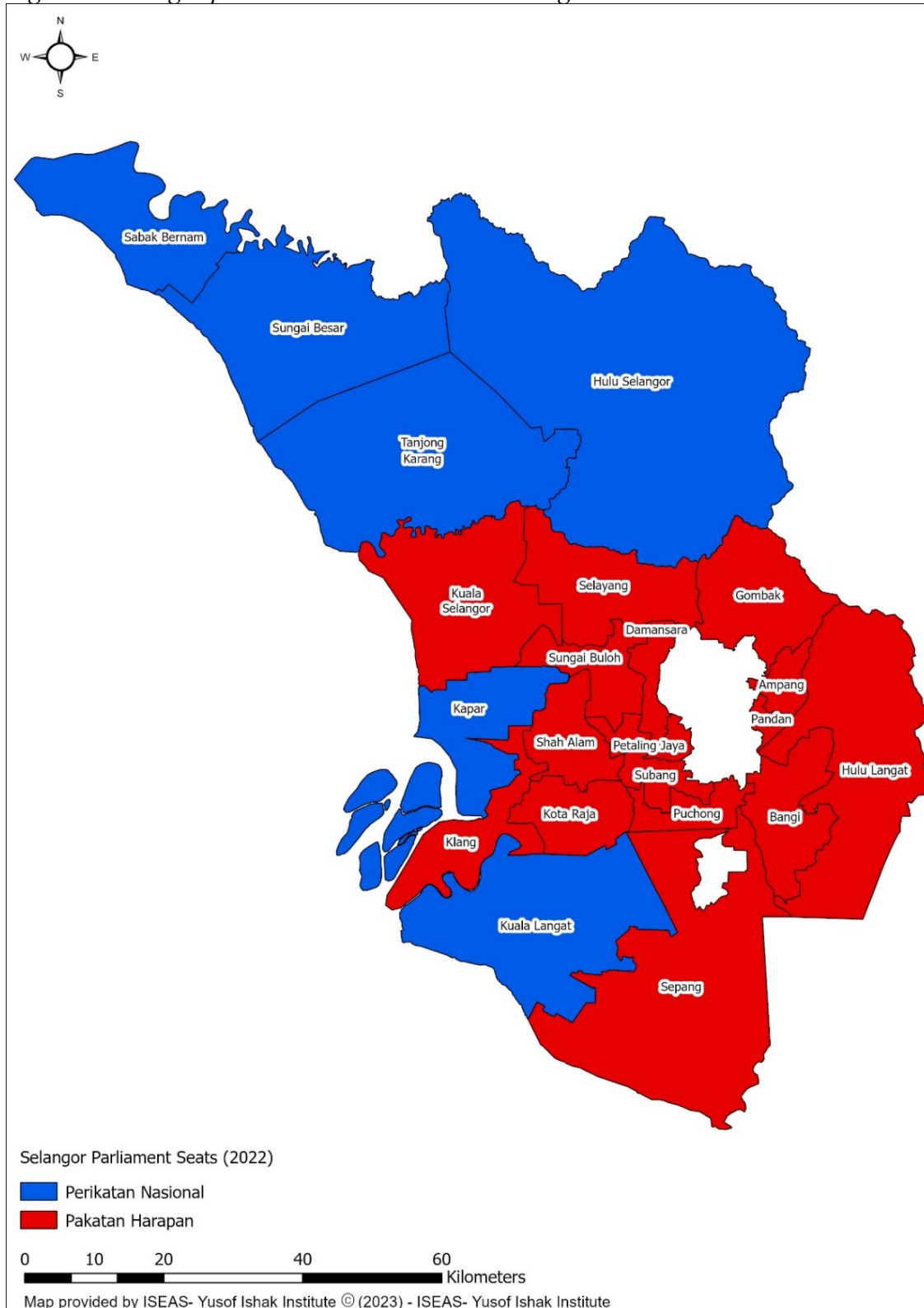


Table 1. Selangor state seats based on GE2022 parliament results, by ethnic composition (Malay share of registered voters)

GE2022 would-be 'winner'	Win by majority ( $\geq 50\%$ of votes)			Win by plurality ( $< 50\%$ of votes)		
	M $\geq 67\%$	M50-67%	M $< 50\%$	M $\geq 67\%$	M50-67%	M $< 50\%$
PH	1	3	18	5	12	1
BN				2		
PN	3			11		

Notes: M $\geq 67\%$  = Malay supermajority; M50-67% = Malay majority; M $< 50\%$  = non-Malay majority

The question for PRN2023, nine months after GE2022, was the extent to which PN's momentum would grow its share of Malay votes and carve further into BN's and PH's, particularly with perceived reservations in UMNO's base toward its partnership with PH.

Differences in turnout could also be decisive. Projecting PRN2023 scenarios from GE2022 results, Ong (2023a) showed that PH-BN held a substantial buffer and could retain Selangor in a "neutral" scenario of 50 per cent transfer of BN support to PH candidates and a 50 per cent loss of BN votes to PN. Khairy (2023) similarly argued that a PN win, while not unimaginable, would require a steep drop in PH-BN turnout and a large number of their supporters migrating to PN. Marzuki and Khairul (2023), referencing a survey that found low likelihood of vote transfer within PH-BN and a sizable transfer in favour of PN (as well as almost half of respondents indicating "unsure"), posited the possibility of PN winning the vast majority of Selangor's 37 Malay-majority seats. However, they did not present permutations and pathways for PN to cross the 29-seat threshold.

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Selangor voter turnout, at 72 per cent, rather exceeded expectations of a major decrease from GE2022's 74 per cent nationally. PH-BN secured 60.5 per cent of votes state-wide, a safe distance from PN (37.8 per cent) (Table 2). However, PN gained markedly from its 27.5 per cent share in November 2022, when the cumulative share of PH (with MUDA) and BN was also much higher. In absolute terms, from GE2022 to PRN2023, PH-BN's combined votes *decreased* by 396,543, whereas PN's *increased* by 233,611. The expected difference in turnout — with the opposition typically more able to mobilise voters in mid-term-type elections<sup>4</sup> — transpired, although PH-BN support did not diminish momentarily enough to trigger more losses. The MUDA-PSM partnership was a non-factor, mustering a paltry 1.4 per cent and underscoring voters' gravitation to the two coalitions and indifference toward the "third force". The majority in the state assembly aligns closely with the popular vote; PH-BN's 34 seats translate into 60.7 per cent of the total (Table 3). PH continued to secure larger victory margins, reflecting that its base was considerably galvanised,<sup>5</sup> but PN also comfortably won most of its seats.<sup>6</sup> Some constituencies were evenly split, reflecting a 50-50 electorate and the potential effects of minor differences in voter turnout. The two narrowest margins across all six states occurred in Selangor: Taman Medan (30 votes per total 44,602) and Gombak Setia (58 votes per total 61,616), both won by PN. PH's loss of Taman Medan, in the heart of the Klang Valley

won by comfortable margins since 2008, will surely be scrutinised when granular data become available, but has already served notice that metropolitan seats can also be flipped.

The Selangor election outcome for specific political parties generally mirrors their prospects across the peninsular west coast. DAP has the most clearly defined base in urban mixed constituencies and hence swept to victory in all contests, while PKR fielded candidates more widely and won most of the time. Amanah, as part of PH, remains competitive in Selangor. UMNO's two wins helped salvage the alliance, but underscore its dire state. More distinctive to Selangor, PAS has gained a foothold in a state where it has struggled for traction – and like Amanah, rode on the Perikatan brand. Bersatu, which contested the most seats, secured the most seats within PN, but its negligible non-Malay support limits its capacity to reach the prize of governing Selangor.

*Table 2. 2018, 2022 and 2023 elections in Selangor: Popular vote share by party / coalition*

<b>GE2018</b>		<b>GE2022</b>		<b>PRN2023</b>	
Party/coalition	Vote share	Party/coalition	Vote share	Party/coalition	Vote share
PH <sup>1</sup>	63.8	PH (+MUDA)	52.8	PH-BN	60.5
BN	20.8	BN	17.4		
PAS	15.2	PN	27.5	PN	37.8
independents	0.1	PEJUANG & independents	2.3	MUDA+PSM	1.4
				independents	0.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Note: PH in GE2018 included Bersatu

Table 3. Selangor state assembly: Seats held at dissolution (23 June), PRN2023 candidates and winners

	23 June	19 Aug (PRN2023)	
		candidates	winners
<u>Pakatan Harapan – Barisan Nasional</u>			
Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR)	19	20	12
Democratic Action Party (DAP)	15	15	15
Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah)	6	9	5
United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)	5	12	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>34</b>
<u>Perikatan Nasional</u>			
Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu)	4	32	12
Parti Islam se-Malaysia (PAS)	1	17	10
Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan)	0	7	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>22</b>
Pejuang	3		
Parti Bangsa Malaysia	2		
Warisan	1		

## UNPACKING THE OUTCOME

### *Ethnic composition*

Ethnicity remains the big factor in the big picture of Malaysian elections (Marzuki and Ibrahim 2023). The pattern of GE2022 persisted; Malay-supermajority seats overwhelmingly voted PN and non-Malay majority seats unanimously favoured PH (Table 4). Ethnic lines have sharpened in Peninsular Malaysia’s politics since 2020, with multi-ethnic PH facing off against an all-Malay coalition — initially with the three major Malay parties including UMNO. After GE2022, PN consolidated as a Bersatu-PAS alliance with multi-ethnic party Gerakan unconvincingly adjoined. PN forthrightly champions Malay interests, bolstered by its claim to be the successor to UMNO — with overtures to other communities and a more inclusive posture especially for election campaigning.

Selangor has become more polarised electorally (Figure 3). PH has generally secured a more diverse based compared to other states, but struggled to coax BN votes, especially from UMNO’s Malay base. Vote transfers from BN to PH varied across constituencies, ranging from an estimated 24 per cent to 65 per cent in a few marginal seats won by PN.<sup>7</sup> Plotting the Malay proportion of registered voters against PN’s vote share produces a strikingly predictive and statistically robust relationship (Figure 4). All of PN’s wins are in constituencies with more than 60 per cent Malay voters, located in the upper right corner in Figure 4. We must emphasise that the Malay electorate is not homogeneous; the rallying behind PN derives from various factors and winning is not guaranteed. These realities are underscored by PH-BN retaining a



few Malay-supermajority seats. Gerrymandering has exacerbated the polarisation. Selangor’s electoral re-delineation of 2018 — conducted at UMNO’s behest — carved out higher Malay majorities in various constituencies. In nine PH-incumbent seats in PRN2023, the share of Malay voters had been inflated by more than ten percentage points, and of these, five were wrested by PN, possibly a difference maker in PH-BN losing the two-thirds majority.<sup>8</sup>

*Table 4. Selangor state election 2023: Ethnic composition and winning party*

	Malay supermajority (>67% reg. voters)	Malay majority (50-67% reg. voters)	non-Malay majority (mixed)
PH - PKR	1	6	5
PH - DAP		1	14
PH - Amanah	1	4	
BN - UMNO	1	1	
PN - Bersatu	9	3	
PN - PAS	8	2	
Total	20	17	19

Figure 3. Selangor state constituencies: ethnic composition and seats won by PN

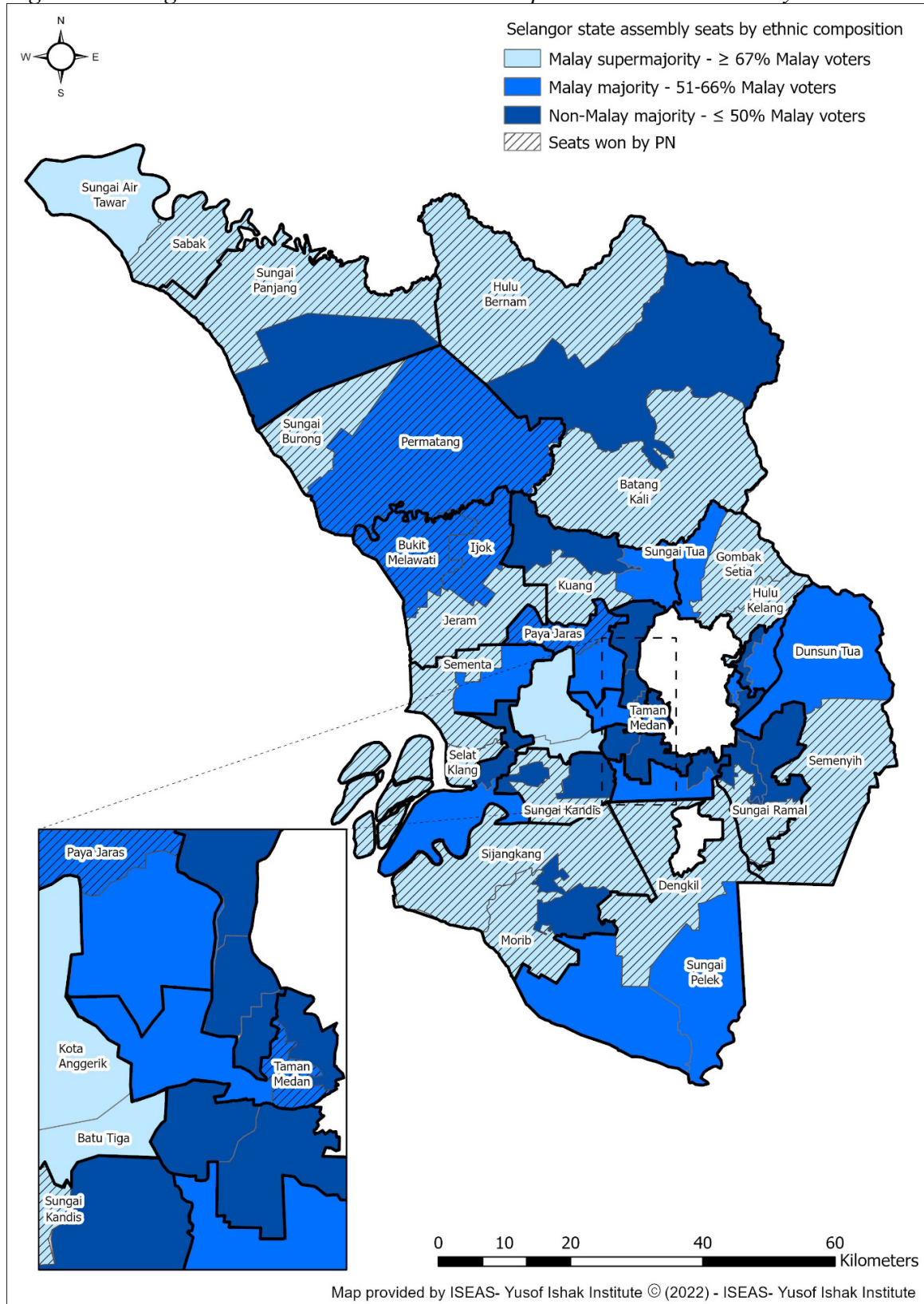
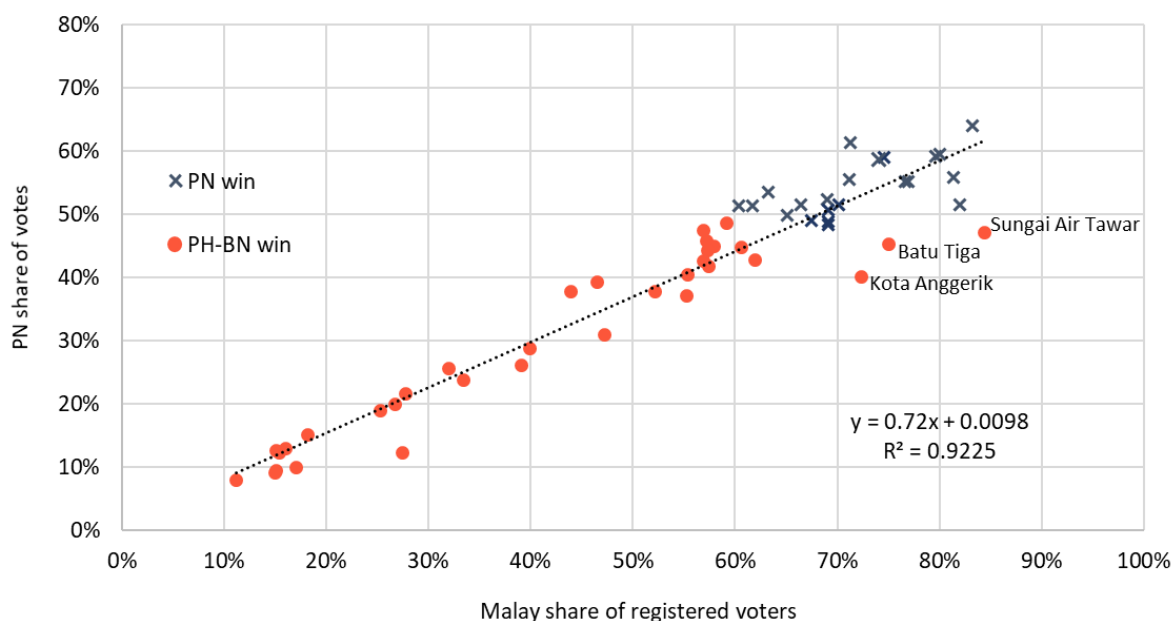


Figure 4. Selangor state assembly seats, PRN2023: Malay share of registered voters and PN share of votes



### Manifestos and messaging

PH-BN’s *Kita Selangor* (Our Selangor) — echoing PH’s GE2022 slogan *Kita Boleh!* (We Can!) — made the case for continuity. The manifesto launched on 31 July featured five key pledges and 52 offerings, spanning infrastructure and industrial development, education assistance, support for religious affairs, efficient government, sustainable development, and social assistance. The manifesto treads softly on policies that target ethnic or demographic groups, although it highlights programmes specifically for women, youth, and religious communities, especially Muslims. The manifesto strives to adhere to a brand of inclusivity and multi-ethnic politics that eschews group-targeted policies, and to scrupulously limit election pledges to new benefits, seemingly to the point of omitting to mention continuities of past administrations, such as the water subsidy programme. On the whole, *Kita Selangor* substantively represented the PH-BN administration’s track record and the changes it would engender. However, the PH-BN machinery was rather sluggish in its messaging and dissemination, particularly in the production of infographics, videos and social media content.<sup>9</sup>

PN stirred sentiments for change and summoned protest with its clarion call *Selangor Baharu, Kita Membangun* (A New Selangor, Let’s Rise Up). The *Selangor Baharu* slogan had been trumpeted since June, and PN’s social media machinery was activated and prolific for months prior to PRN2023, but the manifesto was unveiled only on 4 August, halfway into the two weeks-long campaign period. The late launch and dissemination blitz confined the time for scrutiny, and allowed for PN to outbid *Kita Selangor*’s terms<sup>10</sup> or capitalise on *Kita Selangor*’s omissions, such as PN’s promise of water bill subsidies to low- and middle-income households which it misrepresented as an absolute difference when in fact PN was increasing the scope coverage (PH-governed Selangor has since 2020 granted the subsidy only to low-income households).<sup>11</sup> The manifesto was expansive and lavish, with seven pillars and 112 offerings

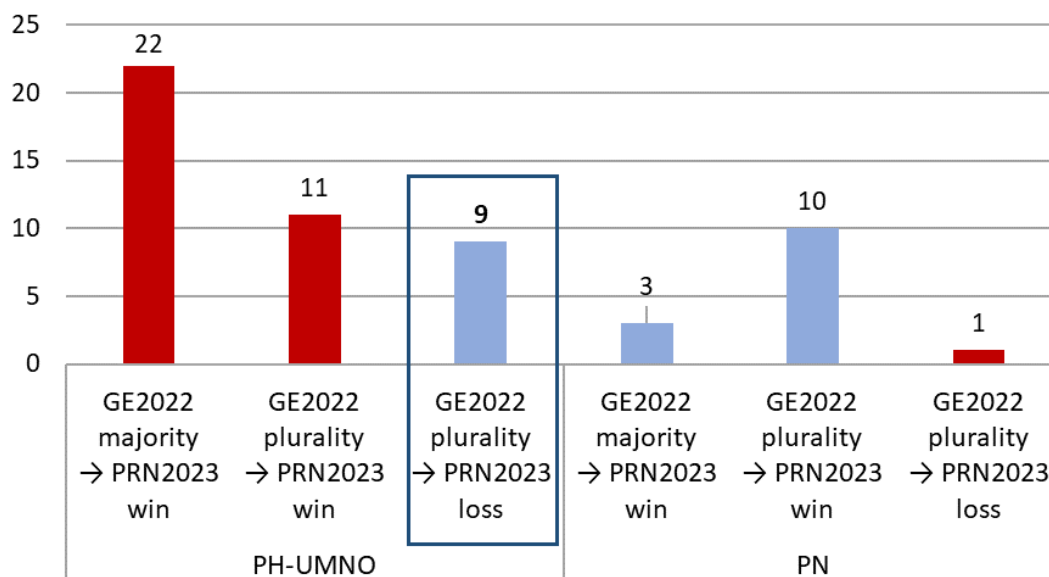
and expenditures totalling RM2 billion, and with clearly demarcated interest groups and policies, notably for youth, women, and the Indian and Orang Asli minorities.<sup>12</sup> PN's formidable social media presence, a phenomenon widely noted since GE2022, persisted into PRN2023. Its output of materials — infographics, talking points, and TikTik videos — was prolific and coordinated.

The prominence and effect of manifestos are difficult to quantify, but PN's voluminous offerings and social media engagements clearly disseminated the message widely, compelling PH to react, which underscores PN's rising popularity. The incumbent government had a manifesto to sell, but with its promises being clearly outshone by the challenger's, shifted to assailing PN's capacity to deliver.

*Party factors: Affiliation, leadership, cooperation*

The historical primacy of political parties in Malaysian voters' choice persisted in PRN2023. Candidates matter, as discussed later, but parties or coalitions — the banner or logo that campaigns contest under and that appear on the ballot sheet — remain more decisive to the election outcome. The capacity of parties to retain and rally their base, particularly with new candidates, is demonstrated by the continuance of majorities won in GE2022 into PRN2023, specifically 22 for PH and 3 for PN (Figure 5). PH and PN were also able to convert the plurality of votes at GE2022 into a PRN2023 win in 11 and 10 seats, respectively. The pro-PN swing transpired in 9 seats 'won' by a PH plurality at GE2022, an outcome that is attributable to the PN brand, given its limited prior presence and few incumbents in Selangor. Indeed, PN turned incumbency against the PH administration by highlighting cost of living and economic woes, and presented its united front and ideological convergence as a counterpoint to the past animosities and diverse ideologies of the PH-BN alliance, specifically between UMNO and DAP.

Figure 5. Selangor state assembly seats: Shift from GE2022 win by majority or plurality to PRN2023 win or loss.



Party incumbency, of course, conferred some advantage on the PH-led government. PH-BN campaigned for a second Chief Ministerial term for Amirudin Shari, generally well-regarded for his steady, people-friendly, and relatively scandal-free administration of Selangor, and enabled PH-BN to show cohesion by rallying behind him. Material conditions could have benefited the incumbent. Amid widely perceived economic discontent and cost of living woes, household survey data showed remarkably rapid income growth (derived from multiple sources, including government assistance) for Selangor’s low-income households between 2019 and 2022.<sup>13</sup> The Unity coalition’s campaign was also buoyed by the support of its federal government presence, including various prominent Selangor members of parliament and federal ministers. Conversely, PN’s absence of a clear Chief Minister candidate — its manifesto was launched by party president Muhyiddin Yassin, not a Selangor-based leader — undercut its credibility (Ong 2023b).

Grassroots mobilization and cross-party coordination are crucial at the local level. In a closely fought election, these factors can make the difference in turning out the base and winning over new, non-partisan or undecided voters. PH and BN have established networks over the years while holding power; PAS’ grassroots have been more clustered in areas such as the parliamentary constituencies of Gombak (state seats Sungai Tua, Gombak Setia, and Hulu Kelang) and Kapar (Meru, Sementa, Selat Kelang). PH-BN party machinery evidently rallied votes for Amirudin in Sungai Tua, bolstered by his candidacy strength as Chief Minister candidate, but narrowly lost in Gombak Setia and Hulu Kelang, where PAS’ established presence (the party is headquartered in Gombak) carried PN’s candidates. PH-BN collaboration was particularly consequential in Dusun Tua, where the UMNO candidate, as a beneficiary of DAP’s relinquished incumbent seat, relied on DAP-PH support. In Sungai Pelek, the only Malay-majority seat contested by DAP, PH’s visible collaboration with UMNO yielded winning dividends (Figure 2).<sup>14</sup>

*Candidates*

Seat negotiations to allocate candidates across the coalitions' component parties proceeded steadily, and by and large amicably, in both coalitions. PH's concession of two seats to UMNO — Dusun Tua (DAP incumbent) and Gombak Setia (PKR incumbent) — triggered some murmurings of discontent, but were generally accepted as coalition-building gestures. PH fielded a combination of incumbents with a substantial number of new candidates, which reflected internal party dynamics and office holders, and an overall strategy to enhance the campaign for a fresh mandate. The onus on renewal fell primarily on PH, after three terms in government. Accordingly, out of PH's 44 candidates, 21 were first-timers. BN's lineup arguably lacked the pull factor of a popular figure such as Minister of International Trade and Industry Tengku Zafrul, whose rumoured candidacy did not materialise.

Some selections roused public attention or provoked a public response. The candidate choice for Hulu Kelang, where PN Selangor chief and former Chief Minister Azmin Ali was widely expected to contest, was one notable surprise. Azmin, a PKR leader turned nemesis for his role in leading a defection to Bersatu which was a key trigger for the infamous Sheraton Move that brought down the Pakatan Harapan federal government in February-March 2020, was defeated in Gombak by his former protégé Amirudin Shari at GE2022. PH's flag was carried this time by Amirudin's political secretary and one-term Selangor assemblyperson Juwairiya Zulkifli, parachuted in from Bukit Melawati. A Bersatu youth leader expressed displeasure at the quality of candidates in Selangor, but the complaints did not ripple widely.<sup>15</sup> The newness of PN's candidates, however, was a clear constraint. PN duly disseminated their profiles and highlighted past administrative experience, and academic or professional qualifications.

An assessment of candidates is highly localized and individual-specific, but a few general points can be registered here. PRN2023 in Selangor saw a few incumbents prevail against perceived unfavourable odds. These exceptions – two of PH-BN and one of PN – provide useful reference points to highlight the potential personal impact of the candidate. UMNO's Rizam Ismail, on the back of his local popularity, strong grassroots support and resourcefulness, retained the Sungai Air Tawar, the constituency with the highest share of Malay voters (83 per cent), preventing a PN sweep of all seats with more than three-quarter Malay voters.<sup>16</sup> Incumbent Mohd Najwan Halimi of PKR also quite comfortably defended his Kota Anggerik seat. In Gombak Setia, Hilman Idham (Bersatu) scraped through by a razor thin margin of 58 votes to claim the scalp of UMNO's Megat Zulkarnain Oardin, who is also BN's Selangor chief. Multiple factors surely contributed to the outcome, but it is plausible that Hilman's incumbency made the marginal difference. Non-incumbent candidates can also run winning campaigns, such as Amanah's Danial Al Rashid who had maintained a track record of local public service in Batu Tiga, and Bersatu's Azmin Ali, whose personal connections in Gombak contributed to his victory in Hulu Kelang, despite PH-BN devoting immense attention to that contest.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING NOTE**

On 21 August, Amirudin Shari was appointed by the Selangor Sultan as Chief Minister, together with a ten-member state executive council (EXCO) – nine from PH, one from UMNO. The seven new faces in the EXCO represent a renewed coalition, but the administration has its work cut out. In the legislature, Selangor's more competitive politics will likely translate into more adversarial government-opposition relations. PN signalled such intent on 19 September,

with the appointment of Azmin Ali as opposition leader and the formation of a 10-member shadow “portfolio committee”.<sup>17</sup> PN’s all-Malay composition and ideological disposition may sharpen ethnic contestations, but the opposition’s need to tap into a broader demographic base will assuredly induce it to apply pressure on “rice bowl” and governance matters.

PRN2023 has shown that PH’s administration and political brand remain credible, and PH-BN collaboration can deliver positive results, although UMNO’s chronic weaknesses and glaring unpopularity pose questions on the coalition’s durability and its professed goal of strengthening UMNO as the contender against PN. Indeed, PN’s advance into PH’s turf gives the opposition more footholds. In the near term, Selangor’s Unity government will be occupied with delivering on the material promises of economic opportunity and social assistance. Challenges on the further horizon will soon demand decisive and effective action, including re-delineating electoral borders to redress the under-representation of urban seats and rectify the borders gerrymandered in 2018, spurring new investments, and defining multi-ethnic politics and inclusive policies. PH-BN’s capacity to regain Malay votes remains to be seen, but should not be underestimated; likewise, PN’s scope to make inroads into the non-Malay, especially Indian, electorate should not be dismissed.<sup>18</sup>

All physical roads to Putrajaya cut across Selangor. At the next general election, the road to power may well run through this state.

## REFERENCES

- Khairy Jamaluddin. 2023. Malaysia’s 2023 Elections: A Coming Clash of Coalitions in Selangor. *ISEAS Perspective 2023/61*. Singapore: ISEAS.
- Marzuki Mohamad and Ibrahim Suffian. 2023. Malaysia’s 15th General Election: Ethnicity Remains the Key Factor in Voter Preferences. *ISEAS Perspective 2023/20*. Singapore: ISEAS.
- Marzuki Mohamad and Khairul Syakirin Zulkifli. 2023. Why Perikatan Nasional May Win in Selangor. *ISEAS Perspective 2023/50*. Singapore: ISEAS.
- Ong Kian Ming. 2023a. Malaysia’s 2023 State Elections (Part 1): Projections and Scenarios. *ISEAS Perspective 2023/52*. Singapore: ISEAS.
- Ong Kian Ming. 2023b. Malaysia’s 2023 State Elections (Part 2): Campaign Strategies and Future Implications. *ISEAS Perspective 2023/66*. Singapore: ISEAS.

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> Household income levels in Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya are higher than Selangor’s, but due to them being fully urbanized and the disproportionate presence of the public sector in Putrajaya, the Federal Territories are less pertinent for comparison with Malaysia’s 13 states.

<sup>2</sup> Ong Kian Ming, “GE15 in Malaysia: Micro Data Analysis”, presentation at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute’s conference, “Malaysia’s GE-15: Capturing Hearts, Cobbling Alliances, Crafting Power”, 4-5 April.

<sup>3</sup> Bridget Welsh similarly estimated that PH received 11 per cent of Malay votes (Bridget Welsh, “A divided electorate: Preliminary analysis on ethnic voting”, *Malaysiakini*, 25 November 2022, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/columns/645661>).

<sup>4</sup> Kai Ostwald, “Malaysia’s State Elections: Surprisingly Unremarkable”, *Fulcrum* 2023/196, 18 August 2023, <https://fulcrum.sg/malaysias-state-elections-surprisingly-unremarkable/>.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Chinese voters appear to have been energised to vote against PN (R. Loheswar, “Ilham Centre survey found Perikatan’s 2R tactics scared ethnic Chinese voters to turn out in droves for six state elections”, *Malay Mail*, 25 August 2023, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2023/08/25/ilham-centre-survey-found-perikatans-2r-tactics-scared-ethnic-chinese-voters-to-turn-out-in-droves-for-six-state-elections/87209>).

<sup>6</sup> At the 2018 general election, PH won its 51 Selangor legislative assembly seats by an average margin of 16,542 votes. PH-BN averaged 20,240 at PRN2023. PAS’ sole win in 2018 had a 1,677 vote margin; PN’s 22 seats averaged 3,585 at PRN2023.

<sup>7</sup> John Bunyan, “Study finds one-third of BN voters switched sides to Perikatan in state elections”, *Malay Mail*, 29 August 2023, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2023/08/29/study-finds-one-third-of-bn-voters-switched-sides-to-perikatan-in-state-elections/87883>.

<sup>8</sup> The five were Sungai Ramal, Paya Jaras, Sementa, Sungai Kandis, and Morib. On the prospective impact of gerrymandering on PRN2023, see Lee Hwok Aun, “Will UMNO’s Mutant Electoral Map Bite Pakatan Harapan?”, *Fulcrum* 2023/177, 3 August 2023, <https://fulcrum.sg/will-umnos-mutant-electoral-map-bite-pakatan-harapan/>.

<sup>9</sup> It is quite typical for the challenger to outdo the incumbent in public campaign dynamism and creativity, as PH has done in previous general elections, particularly 2013 and 2018. That pattern was repeated in PRN2023. The author’s observation of the Facebook pages of both coalitions’ Selangor campaigns noted PN operating at a higher level of output and coordination, producing a much steady stream of punchy, bite-sized, and visually appealing content – both negative campaigns attacking PH-BN and positive messaging of its manifesto.

<sup>10</sup> PN’s delayed manifesto release allowed it to reference and outbid PH-BN, even in very specific items such as the allowances for mosque and surau caretakers. PH-BN promised to raise the monthly allowances as follows: imam (RM1,600), bilal (RM700), siak (RM500), nazir (RM500). PN’s offerings exceeded each of these by RM100: imam (RM1,700), bilal (RM800), siak (RM600), nazir (RM600) — and produced infographics with side-by-side comparison.

<sup>11</sup> PN pledged free 20m<sup>3</sup> of water for households with income below RM15,000 per month; PH-BN presumably would continue with the same programme extended to households with income below RM5,000 per month.

<sup>12</sup> PN’s manifestos distinctly targeted pledges including: childcare and self-employment assistance for women, a new agency to oversee minority well-being, with a focus on the Indian and Orang Asli indigenous communities, and a home ownership scheme for young first-time buyers.

<sup>13</sup> Lee Hwok Aun, “A Material Election: Will Malaysians Vote with Their Wallets?”, *Fulcrum* 2023/184, 10 August 2023, <https://fulcrum.sg/a-material-election-will-malaysians-vote-with-their-wallets/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ong Kian Ming, “Sungai Pelek good example of Harapan-BN cooperation”, *Malaysiakini*, 22 August 2023, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/letters/676512>.

<sup>15</sup> FMT Reporters, “Bersatu leader questions party’s fielding of ‘undeserving’ candidates”, *Free Malaysia Today*, 1 August 2023, <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2023/08/01/bersatu-leader-questions-partys-fielding-of-undeserving-candidates/>.

<sup>16</sup> Author’s correspondence with a political analyst, 5 September 2023.

<sup>17</sup> “Azmin made S’gor opposition leader, PN forms shadow exco”, *Free Malaysia Today*, 19 September 2023, <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2023/09/19/azmin-made-sgor-opposition-leader-pn-forms-shadow-exco/>.



<sup>18</sup> Bridget Welsh's estimates found a slight uptick in the Indian vote for PN, between GE2022 and PRN2023 in Selangor (Bridget Welsh, "A (still) divided electorate - Reflections on polls outcome: Part 2", *Malaysiakini*, 14 August 2023, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/columns/675591>).

<p><b>ISEAS Perspective</b> is published electronically by: <b>ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute</b></p> <p>30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace Singapore 119614 Main Tel: (65) 6778 0955 Main Fax: (65) 6778 1735</p> <p>Get Involved with ISEAS. Please click here: <a href="https://www.iseas.edu.sg/support/get-involved-with-iseas/">https://www.iseas.edu.sg/support/get-involved-with-iseas/</a></p>	<p>ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute accepts no responsibility for facts presented and views expressed.</p> <p>Responsibility rests exclusively with the individual author or authors. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission.</p> <p>© Copyright is held by the author or authors of each article.</p>	<p>Editorial Chairman: Choi Shing Kwok</p> <p>Editorial Advisor: Tan Chin Tiong</p> <p>Editorial Committee: Terence Chong, Cassey Lee, Norshahril Saat, and Hoang Thi Ha</p> <p>Managing Editor: Ooi Kee Beng</p> <p>Editors: William Choong, Lee Poh Onn, Lee Sue-Ann, and Ng Kah Meng</p> <p>Comments are welcome and may be sent to the author(s).</p>
--	---	---