

PERSPECTIVE

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Abdul Hadi Awang Enhances His Power as PAS President and Drives the Party to the Far-Right

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Abdul Haji Awang assumed the Presidency of the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) in 2002. Picture: Facebook Page of Abdul Hadi Awang.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This paper seeks to understand how Abdul Hadi Awang has used his influence since 2015 to restructure the Islamic party, PAS.
- After Nik Aziz's death in 2015, Abdul Hadi shifted the power centre of PAS to the presidency, away from the spiritual-leader (*Mursyidul Am*, the highest policymaker in PAS sitting in the Syura Ulama Council, the *Majlis Syura Ulamak* or MSU). Remarkably, this was not done through amendments to the party constitution, but via the following mechanisms:
 - (i) The president's ability to shuffle between the central committee and the MSU (revolving door concept);
 - (ii) Ulama-based ideological takeover at every level of the party; and
 - (iii) The reduced personal stature of subsequent spiritual-leaders after Nik Aziz.
- Abdul Hadi has impactfully exercised his powers as president in the following ways:
 - (i) Unilaterally deciding on strategic partnerships with first, UMNO, and then Bersatu and Perikatan Nasional (PN), allegedly without consulting with or obtaining the consent of the MSU chaired by the spiritual-leader;
 - (ii) Driving the party's narratives to the far right, and showing hard-line intolerance of non-Muslims;
 - (iii) Clamping down on internal dissent; and
 - (iv) Marginalizing Nik Aziz's family within the party.
- PN's recent electoral momentum will probably validate Abdul Hadi's tactics, overshadowing their apparent extra-constitutional breaches. However, dissent may grow stronger in PAS if (a) Abdul Hadi reconsiders the PN partnership; (b) Nik Aziz's family decides to launch more vocal opposition, and; (c) the limits on the ability of Malay votes to win Putrajaya become more obvious.

INTRODUCTION¹

It may sound incredible now, but the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, PAS, was formed in Penang in 1951 “from the womb of UMNO” as an Islamist movement.^{2 3} Little attention was paid then to the small and poor party of “religious elders and imams”; and few thought it could last.⁴

Part of the reason for this was due to the fact that during its first five years, it was led by presidents who could not mobilise the Malay-Muslim electorate and who were not taken seriously by the British authorities. Its third president, Dr Burhanuddin al-Helmy (1956-1969), reoriented PAS to become an anti-colonial leftist third force (Islamism) by establishing branches, starting in northern peninsula. The problematic Asri Muda years (1969-1982) were ridden with claims of treachery (working with UMNO in government), financial scandals (timber and land), and nepotism.⁵ Towards the end of this period, the ulama faction, consisting of Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat (TGNA) and Abdul Hadi, came to rebuild PAS from its “shattered remnants”,⁶ making it the country’s largest opposition party (by membership).

Fast forward to the present day, October 2023, and PAS is at the peak of its powers under Abdul Hadi, who assumed the presidency in 2002.⁷ Three years ago, in 2020, the party obtained power at the federal executive office for the second time, with nearly a dozen of its parliamentarians appointed to Cabinet. In the 15th general election (GE15) in November 2022, the party defied expectations⁸ and emerged as the party with the highest number of seats in Parliament. It even won in many places outside its largely conservative and rural stronghold. Winning 43 seats in GE15 was the party’s best performance in history,⁹ double its second-best results, achieved in 1999.

Less than a year after its GE15 surprise, PAS continued its streak by winning most of the 127 seats it contested in the 2023 state elections.

	Seats contested	Seats won	Winning rate
PAS			
GE15	64	43	73%
PRN2023	127	105	83%
Bersatu			
GE15	85	31	36%
PRN2023	81	40	49%
DAP			
GE15	55	40	73%
PRN2023	47	46	98%
PKR			
GE15	100	31	31%
PRN2023	58	26	45%
Amanah			
GE15	54	8	15%
PRN2023	32	8	25%
UMNO			
GE15	119	26	22%
PRN2023	108	19	18%

Table 1: Seats contested and won by PAS and other mainstream West Malaysia parties in the 15th general election and the 2023 state elections¹⁰

Now, PAS no longer sees itself as an opposition party as it had done since 1955,¹¹ but as a government-in-waiting.¹² Its haphazard alignment with the six-year-old Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Bersatu) and the small Chinese-dominant party, Gerakan, has yielded positive results. At the same time, PAS has moved further to the right as an exclusivist party.

All these vital developments of PAS happened under the presidency of Abdul Hadi. This paper explores his influence in determining the party's direction. To do that, I firstly examine the role of the spiritual-leader in PAS before dissecting how Abdul Hadi has taken advantage of the internal workings of the party. Thereafter, this paper will conclude with the implications of these changes to the party, and to Malaysian politics.

THE SPIRITUAL LEADER (*MURSYIDUL AM*) AS THE HIGHEST DECISION-MAKER

At the beginning, PAS's organisational structure was rather straightforward. Party policies were decided by the PAS Central Committee (*Jawatankuasa Kerja PAS Pusat*, JKPP), chaired by the president.¹³ Three sections (ulama, youth, and women) completed the party. The ulama council was uninfluential, holding only advisory powers.¹⁴

Everything changed in 1982 when then-PAS youth wing (*Dewan Pemuda PAS*) leader Mohamad Sabu, proposed the establishment of an ulama-led MSU¹⁵ that replicated the Iranian clerical structure under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.¹⁶ This represented a "major paradigm

shift” from PAS’s previous structure.¹⁷ The MSU was adopted as the highest decision-making body of PAS,¹⁸ giving PAS’s ulamas expansive policymaking powers.¹⁹

The MSU is a 17-people ulama body,²⁰ with people drawn from various components of the party, chosen for their expertise in Islam.^{21 22} Unlike the democratically elected JKPP, all positions at the MSU are by appointment, and at its head sits the spiritual-leader.

As shown in Appendix 1, the PAS Constitution gives enormous powers to the MSU and spiritual-leader to decide on major policies,²³ as its “final arbiter”.²⁴

Among major decisions, the most critical relate firstly to the election candidate selection powers (parliamentary and state),²⁵ and secondly to external party and coalition negotiations.²⁶ On the former, each state arm of PAS would present the list of nominees to the MSU, which would then carry out a filtering process based on character, action, and fulfilment of Islamic practices.²⁷ On the latter, the MSU was the final arbiter on whether or not to work with another party in a coalition.²⁸ Thus, whether there should be political cooperation (*tahaluf siyasi*) by PAS with others like DAP and PKR (Pakatan Rakyat), UMNO (Muafakat Nasional) or Bersatu (Perikatan Nasional) is determined by the MSU.²⁹

In contrast, Article 26 of the PAS Constitution states that the JKPP is only an implementation body to MSU’s decisions, with the president as chief implementer.³⁰

Critics have argued that the powers of the MSU and spiritual-leader are too broad,³¹ especially for an unelected body. Even though PAS insiders would rebut that and say that the MSU was accountable to the views of different party wings,³² the spiritual-leader can overrule others as he has veto powers on major decisions. The party congress (*PAS Muktamar*) is neither structurally sufficient nor effective as check-and-balance measure on the MSU and spiritual-leader.

The spiritual-leader role was best exemplified by the late TGNA,³³ who held the position for 24 years (1991-2015). As a larger-than-life scholar and the Menteri Besar (MB) of Kelantan for 23 years,³⁴ TGNA used his aura and clout to make the spiritual-leader role as powerful as the party’s constitutional powers would allow.³⁵ In conflicts between spiritual-leader and the president, the spiritual-leader’s views would prevail.³⁶ However, after TGNA, the spiritual-leader’s role was soon reduced to a “halal rubber stamp” position.³⁷

HOW ABDUL HADI SHIFTED THE POWER CENTRE TO THE PRESIDENCY

After the revered TGNA passed away on 12 February 2015, Muslim clerics, Haron Din and Hashim Jasin succeeded him consecutively (see Appendix 2). Not only were both figures not as outspoken or charismatic as TGNA, they were also neither Mentris Besar nor elected representatives for any state. In fact, the former MB of Kelantan, Ahmad Yaakob, who was slated to replace Haron Din after his passing, chose not to be elevated to spiritual-leader to avoid the burden of holding both roles. Moving forward, it will be increasingly unlikely for the spiritual-leader to also hold executive portfolios, let alone an important one such as Mentri Besar.³⁸

This is significant because the subdued personalities of the recent spiritual-leaders have meant that the in-practice power of the role has been reduced, paving the way for the presidency to assume more influence.³⁹ While the party structure remains unchanged, the leaders who came to helm the positions changed the perception and in-practice influence of these roles.⁴⁰

More than as a result of personality, Abdul Hadi's influence also benefited from the structural weakness of PAS and the convergence of conservative ideologies that he had championed.

The PAS Constitution gives the elected president a revolving-door kind of power, i.e. the ability to sit in both the implementing JKPP (elected) and policymaking MSU (appointed) instances. Article 8(4) of the PAS Constitution states that the JKPP must appoint four people to the MSU, and by convention, the president shall be appointed as one of the key MSU members.⁴¹ Under occasions where the president's personality overpowers the spiritual-leader's, the president could, if he so wishes, control the democratic and appointed fora of JKPP and MSU to push his decisions through, with the legitimacy offered by both.⁴² Due to this structural weakness, the balance of power depends on the personalities of the president and of the spiritual-leader. As will be discussed later, Abdul Hadi used this structural defect to his advantage after TGNA's death, directing PAS to implement his choices regarding external partnerships, its political position, as well as internal decisions pertaining to stifling dissent and side-lining other factions. Abdul Hadi did not make structural changes to alter the powers of the MSU and spiritual-leader; instead, he strategically bent the body to his will.

What paved the way for Abdul Hadi was the departure of his opponents and a resulting ideological convergence. The non-ulama class of PAS who dominated the JKPP up till 2015, also called the Erdogans, contested at the party elections as an informal bloc and lost. The Erdogans, who were advocates of an inclusive approach of Islam, including adding non-ulamas without Islamic scholarship to the MSU,⁴³ ⁴⁴left to form Amanah.

The Erdogans' loss and departure accelerated an ideological convergence in PAS, where the JKPP and MSU, led by ulamas, now share an exclusive view of Islam.⁴⁵ The professionals-dominated JKPP had always had conflicts with the ulama-led MSU; now, such conflicts rarely happen.

How Abdul Hadi used his powers

(i) Partnership

One of the most obvious ways where Abdul Hadi had shifted the powers to the presidency was in PAS's partnership with other parties and coalitions after TGNA's death.

The pursuit of a PAS-UMNO partnership started in 2008 after Pakatan Rakyat, a coalition with PAS, won Selangor state government for the first time. The group led by Abdul Hadi,⁴⁶ were inclined to work with UMNO in a political partnership.

This was strongly opposed by then spiritual-leader TGNA, who was furious at the group's constant courting of UMNO. He even called for a special party congress (*Muktamar Khas*) to

discuss the leadership problem, mainly whether or not to sack Abdul Hadi.⁴⁷ This resulted in an extended “cold war”.⁴⁸

Before the special party congress, TGNA wrote on his blog:⁴⁹

“[A few leaders who were problematic] would not stop actively pursuing the issue of PAS’s political cooperation with UMNO ... I strongly feel there must be a change of the most important players helming the leadership of JKPP...”⁵⁰

TGNA’s death propelled a series of critical events that shifted the situation in favour of Abdul Hadi. The Erdogans who were against PAS-UMNO partnership lost the party elections en bloc.⁵¹ A month after that, the MSU decided to sever ties with DAP, effectively dissolving the Pakatan Rakyat coalition.⁵² The earliest exploratory step on partnership with UMNO started as early as 5 January 2016, proving that the influence of Abdul Hadi and his long-term desire for a PAS-UMNO partnership had slowly taken hold.

The GE14 was an impetus for PAS to formalise its partnership with UMNO, and on 16 September 2018,⁵³ four months after the general election, the MSU was given the mandate to decide on political cooperation with the intention of protecting Islam.⁵⁴ Political cooperation between PAS and UMNO was signed on 14 September 2019; Muafakat Nasional (MN) adopted conservative and Islamic ideals.

If the PAS-UMNO cooperation was evidence of the power centre shifting to Abdul Hadi’s benefit, the party’s subsequent dissolution of MN and formation of Perikatan Nasional (PN) with Bersatu was clearer evidence of the renewed power of the presidency.

Importantly, there was a period of political partnership overlap, between August 2020 and October 2022⁵⁵ when PAS was part of the political charter with UMNO under MN, and also in the PN coalition with Bersatu. It was however the process of formalising both partnerships that truly exemplified Abdul Hadi’s powers.

The former MSU member, Khairuddin Razali, claimed that the MSU had never discussed the partnership with PN, even though matters of external partnership were the MSU’s remit under the PAS Constitution.⁵⁶ It appeared to be a decision purely made at the JKPP level, with the president as the main steer. Khairuddin also claimed that Abdul Hadi met with Bersatu president Muhyiddin Yassin, and they decided to end ties with UMNO within a week. In contrast, the MN’s chartership was finalised only after extensive consultation and engagement with every layer of the party, including the grassroots at the party congress.⁵⁷

After the dissolution of MN, Abdul Hadi explained that the reason PAS chose to go with PN instead of UMNO was because UMNO had too many “power crazy” individuals who were willing to pawn their religion;⁵⁸ at the same time, PAS’s “directionless behaviour” was cited by UMNO as its reason.⁵⁹

The PAS-UMNO partnership as MN may have been evidence of Abdul Hadi gaining influence after TGNA, but the partnership with Bersatu under PN reflected how the centre of power at PAS had shifted to the presidency, coat-tailing Abdul Hadi’s political desires. This shift in

allegiance from Pakatan Rakyat, to MN, and then PN, is a signal of PAS's pragmatism, but also evidence of Abdul Hadi's deepening control of the party.

(ii) Religious supremacy

As a personality-driven party, PAS's turn to the far right⁶⁰ reflects "Abdul Hadi's idealism".⁶¹ The main ideological difference between Abdul Hadi and TGNA was less their religious leanings (both were conservatives and wanted to establish the Islamic State), and more their approach to non-Muslims.⁶²

TGNA took a more pragmatic approach, seeing non-Muslims not as a threat to the party and Islam, but an audience to which one could preach Islam (*dakwah*) for deeds (*pahala*).⁶³ TGNA has often praised the Chinese for their economic prowess; he even mentioned a few times that he wanted to see a non-Muslim or a non-Malay Muslim convert (*muallaf*) become prime minister in Malaysia one day.⁶⁴

In contrast, Abdul Hadi's approach to non-Muslims was decidedly more exclusivist, implying that non-Muslims should not occupy prime ministership or the Cabinet⁶⁵ ("they will still end up in hell")⁶⁶, and commonly labelling non-believers as *kafir* (infidels). Abdul Hadi has also claimed that corruption givers and takers were mostly non-Muslims, besides scapegoating the Chinese-dominant party, DAP, as the biggest threat to Islam.

The difference in approach was partly due to the education origin.⁶⁷ While TGNA was from the Deobandi tradition, studied in India and Pakistan, and had a more open and adaptive attitude to the world, Abdul Hadi studied in Madinah, Egypt, often regarded as the birthplace of Islamic scholarship.

What this means is that PAS's ideology is also shaped by Abdul Hadi's conservative lineage; he controls the narratives and ideology that currently undergirds the party. The MSU was used as a tool to double-down on Abdul Hadi's ideology, pushing it to ultra-conservatism.⁶⁸

(iii) Internal dissent

One of the best examples of how Abdul Hadi deals with dissent is his effective removal of Khairuddin Razali as MSU member at the start of 2022. Khairuddin was a former minister and had been an MSU member since 2013; he was appointed as its secretary in 2020. Khairuddin has been a strong proponent of PAS's partnership with UMNO, and was regarded as one of the most knowledgeable Islamic scholars at PAS,⁶⁹ more than the deputy president, Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man.⁷⁰

On 12 January 2022, Khairuddin was sacked as an executive member from the JKPP. Being a JKPP-appointed member of MSU,⁷¹ Khairuddin's membership and secretarial position at the MSU were also terminated, according to the president, Abdul Hadi.⁷² Although the official reason for Khairuddin's sacking was discipline, there was never a public statement by PAS leaders on the precise violation, nor were any disciplinary issues raised in accordance with the procedures under Article 85 of the PAS Constitution.

It was widely speculated that the reason for Khairuddin's sacking was his inclination towards the MN rather than PN,⁷³ which was contrary to the strategy pursued by Abdul Hadi.⁷⁴

Khairuddin made it clear that his sacking was unconstitutional as the power to sack any MSU member lies only with the MSU.⁷⁵ He argued that the JKPP trespassed the MSU's powers by sacking him.⁷⁶ When Khairuddin resigned on 22 February 2022, the 33-year PAS member said that he did so to avoid a constitutional crisis in PAS and to safeguard intra-party harmony, which he had threatened by maintaining that the JKPP acted outside its powers in sacking him.⁷⁷

Former PAS executive member Mahfuz Omar said that this episode symbolised Abdul Hadi's inability to deal with differences of opinion in PAS, preferring a party of "Yes Men".⁷⁸ This contrasts to Nik Aziz's PAS where dissent was rife to the point of requiring tie-breaking votes.⁷⁹

The sacking was possible because the PAS Constitution allows the president, who leads the elected JKPP, to also be part of MSU. With the combination of the constitutional clearance and the soft power he enjoyed as president, Abdul Hadi could orchestrate Khairuddin's removal even though it was extra-constitutional.

(iv) Factionalism and the marginalisation of TGNA's legacy

The tension between Abdul Hadi and TGNA was always present,⁸⁰ but this only became obvious years after the latter's death.⁸¹ The factionalism was due partly to ideological and strategic differences,⁸² but also to the natural process of a leader intending to carve out his legacy. Kelantan politics, the home state of PAS, was synonymous to TGNA, and should that trend continue and prosper, it would pose a threat to Abdul Hadi.

The first evidence was when TGNA's second son, Nik Omar, decided to leave PAS for Amanah in 2017, due to disappointment with Abdul Hadi's decision to work with UMNO, a sworn enemy of his father. Husam Musa, the former political secretary to TGNA, also left PAS a year earlier.

The gradual decline of Nik Abduh, another son of TGNA, within PAS is a good barometer of the decreasing influence of the TGNA faction. Nik Abduh lost at the 2021 party congress (youth wing), where Abdul Hadi's son, Khalil Hadi received the most votes. Nik Abduh, the two-term incumbent, was also not fielded in GE15, and the party chose Abdul Hadi's political secretary, Syahir Sulaiman, instead. TGNA faction politician Che Abdullah's nomination was also not passed for GE15.

Crucially, Nik Abduh was dropped once again for the 2023 state election. The party did not accept Nik Abduh's request to contest at one of the three state seats under Pengkalan Chepa, to enable him to look after the education institutions built by his late father. When the candidate line-up was announced and Nik Abduh was not on the list, the younger brother of TGNA, Nik Din,⁸³ recorded a video to reprimand the Abdul Hadi-aligned Mohd Amar who Nik Din said prevented Nik Abduh from contesting.⁸⁴ Nik Din had had urged voters to vote against Mohd Amar to protest against the alleged injustice.

Nik Abduh went on a two-week “fast” from politics. Although he claimed that he was not too bothered at not being fielded,⁸⁵ and his family repeatedly played the matter down, it was widely speculated that Nik Abduh had come to be further at odds with Abdul Hadi for various reasons including his preference for UMNO and his allegations about corruption at the top.^{86 87}

IMPLICATIONS OF A PRESIDENT-CENTRED PARTY AND OUTLOOK FOR PAS

Evidently, even though there no changes have been made to the PAS Constitution, the party’s power centre has shifted from the spiritual-leader to the president. The structural characteristics of PAS makes it a personality-driven party where its direction is often determined by the charisma and beliefs of the leaders. The trajectory of a subdued and non-MB spiritual-leader will likely continue, and allow the presidency to hold de facto decision-making power. A president can use his simultaneous membership in the party’s operational and religious apex agencies to legitimise his decisions.

Abdul Hadi’s decision to go with PN will likely silence dissenters especially as PAS is arguably at its electoral peak. However, in the event a rupture happens within PN,⁸⁸ going by past decisions Abdul Hadi will likely be ready to abandon any disagreeable partners.⁸⁹ In the same vein, dissent within the party will unlikely be successful, even if it originates in the highest policy body, MSU.

However, the shift may also heighten factionalism between TGNA’s faction and Abdul Hadi. The curbing of dissenters like Khairuddin and the gradual side-lining of TGNA’s family may create disgruntlement on the ground, especially in Kelantan, as many in PAS still hold TGNA dearly. The last-minute change of MB candidate,⁹⁰ low voter turnout,⁹¹ and loss of Kota Lama to Amanah⁹² could be taken as early indications of the weakening of PAS in Kelantan. Should TGNA’s family, led by Nik Abduh, continue to be cast aside, defections cannot be discounted, and that may come to present a genuine threat to the present leadership.

What is certain is that PAS will continue to move further to the right as Abdul Hadi promotes his long-standing beliefs and PN finds resonance in stoking Malay-Muslim fears. With a weak non-Muslim counterpart in Gerakan that cannot effectively challenge the anti-Muslim rhetoric, PAS will advance these narratives undeterred.

APPENDIX 1

Constitutional clause	Categories	Paraphrased descriptions of salient provisions
Article 8(1)(a)-(c)	Powers of the MSU	<p>(a) Elaborate, explain, and interpret PAS's policies and any provisions in the PAS Constitution that raise ambiguity on its meaning and purpose and to make a decision about them;</p> <p>(b) Issue instructions and orders so that the policies and decisions are followed and implemented to anyone in PAS and to monitor and protect the policies and decisions so that the intention of the Constitution is upheld;</p> <p>(c) Listen and decide on appeals of discipline presented by PAS members.</p>
Article 8(12)	Discretion of the MSU	(12) MSU can, at its discretion, make any rules to smoothen the implementation of the tasks and powers that were given and to safeguard and protect the integrity, respect, and dignity of the MSU.
Article 9(1)(a)-(c)	Powers and duties of the MA	<p>(a) Responsible as the head of MSU in exercising its powers under Article 8(1)(a), (b), and (c);</p> <p>(b) Decide and chair the MSU meetings;</p> <p>(c) Take whatever step necessary to monitor and protect the PAS Constitution, policies, and laws in the activities, movements, and administration of PAS.</p>
Article 26(9)	Decision to work with other parties or coalitions	(k) JKPP to take due consideration on partnership with other organisations that does not contradict the policy and purpose of PAS and make a decision on it after that decision has been agreed to by the MSU.

Appendix 1: Key provisions of the PAS Constitution (translated and paraphrased for succinctness and precision)

APPENDIX 2

Year	President	Year	Spiritual-leader		
1951-1953	Ahmad Fuad Hassan	1951-1987	None		
1953-1956	Abbas Alias				
1956-1969	Burhanuddin al-Helmy				
1969-1982	Asri Muda				
1982-1989	Yusof Rawa	1987-1994	Yusof Rawa		
1989-2002	Fadzil Noor	1994-1997	Nik Aziz Nik Mat		
2002-present	Abdul Hadi Awang			2015-2016	Haron Din
				2016-present	Hashim Jasin

Appendix 2: Presidents and spiritual-leaders at PAS since 1951

ENDNOTES

¹ A note about sources: Most political parties rarely indulge in sharing their internal affairs to the public, and PAS is especially private in this regard. The reliance on interviews was one of the few good means in obtaining an insight; occasionally a combination of less traditional sources of media and blogs was also used to get the fuller picture.

² PAS was only officially registered as a political party on 31 May 1955, one day before nomination day for elections, thanks to the president’s good ties with the registrar of societies then.

³ Noor, F.A. (2014) *The Malaysian Islamic Party PAS 1951-2013: Islamism in a Mottled Nation. Strategic Information and Research Development Centre.*

⁴ Noor, F.A. (2014) *The Malaysian Islamic Party PAS 1951-2013: Islamism in a Mottled Nation. Strategic Information and Research Development Centre.*

⁵ To PAS members, Asri Muda’s treachery was so deep that memory of his leadership had been wiped out from the party’s official archives and records. In Noor, F.A. (2014) *The Malaysian Islamic Party PAS 1951-2013: Islamism in a Mottled Nation. Strategic Information and Research Development Centre.*

⁶ Ismail, Y. (1980) *Bulan purnama Gerhana di Kelantan: satu Analisa politik Kelantan. Dinamika Kelantan.*

⁷ The president is elected by eligible PAS delegates at the party congress, for 2-year terms, and the position has no term limits.

⁸ PAS was traditionally regarded as a regional party with powers limited to the northern part of West Malaysia and was expected to win only approximately 10% seats of the 222 seats available in Parliament.

⁹ The 49 seats won by PAS included 6 contested by Bersatu under PAS’s flag in Kelantan and Terengganu.

¹⁰ PRN2023 comprised 6 state elections in West Malaysia (Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, Penang, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan), and might have skewed the data as these are not evenly distributed across

all the states. Nevertheless, they serve as the most recent barometer of West Malaysian parties' strengths. While PAS's data exclude Bersatu candidates contesting under its flag, Bersatu's data include associate members.

¹¹ PAS was in government in 1974-1977 and since its second foray in 2020, has increasingly seen itself as a government-in-waiting.

¹² Informal movements of cajoling government representatives to defect in Perak have taken hold shortly after the state election results. See: Ahmad, S. (2023) Memang ada Gerakan jatuhkan kerajaan negeri. *Sinar Harian*.

Source: <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/article/274317/berita/politik/memang-ada-gerakan-jatuhkan-kerajaan-negeri---saarani>

¹³ Nor, R.M. (2020) Sejarah Majlis Syura Ulamak, perjawatan Mursyidul Am. *Harakah Daily*. <https://harakahdaily.net/index.php/2020/06/22/sejarah-majlis-syura-ulamak-perjawatan-mursyidul-am/>

¹⁴ Noor, F.A. (2014) The Malaysian Islamic Party PAS 1951-2013: Islamism in a Mottled Nation. *Strategic Information and Research Development Centre*.

¹⁵ Partially stemmed from the difference of opinions between the youth wing and the president at that time, Asri Muda. In Asri's book, he said he was brought down with the slogan of "*Margh Bar Asri*" (Persian for "Death to Asri"), used by the Iranian revolutionaries to bring down the Shah of Iran in 1979. (Source: Interviews with informants).

¹⁶ The Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwanul Muslimun) had a deep influence on PAS's ideology (many of its leaders, most famously Abdul Hadi, received education from Ikhwanul) and a concept and phrase like Musyidul Am is commonly used in the Egyptian world. PAS leaders such as Bahruddin Latiff, Mohamad Sabu, and Mustafa Ali were responsible for bringing the MSU concept to PAS, from Khomeini's writings in *Wilayat al-Faqih*, which argue for ulama leadership in politics.

¹⁷ Interview with Razak Ridzuan, Deputy Youth Chief for Parti Amanah Negara and former PAS member (Zoom, 28 July 2023, 3.30PM).

¹⁸ Not to be confused with Ulama Council (*Dewan Ulama*) which is a subordinate body in PAS used to identify at an early stage those ulamas who may qualify to be part of the MSU one day.

¹⁹ Before MSU was established, the Ulama Council (*Dewan Ulama*), though having a role to play, was separated from the day-to-day and major decisions undertaken by the PAS Central Committee.

²⁰ The initial membership count was 12, mirroring exactly what was done in Iran.

²¹ Article 8(3) of the PAS Constitution, and interview with Ahmad Fathi Yusoff.

²² Expertise in al-Quran, as-Sunnah, Ijmak, and Qias is expected.

²³ MSU also carries many off-paper powers such as political strategy, party attitude and stance on important current developments. According to Abdul Hadi, this was to prevent the party from straying too far from its principles of Fiqh Muwazanah, Fiqh Waqie', Fiqh Aulawiyat, and Fiqh Ma'alat.

²⁴ Interview with Wan Ji Wan Hussin, former Selangor ulama council executive member, and currently a PKR member (Zoom, 22 June 2023, 4.30PM).

²⁵ An example of this power was shown in the MSU's decision not to field Datuk Mohd Salleh Man for the 14th general election in Penang; Mohd Salleh considered to being still too close to the DAP even after PAS had ended ties with that party.

²⁶ Interview with Ahmad Fathi Yusoff, PAS member and the researcher at the Institute of Nik Aziz's Thoughts, the official PAS think tank (Zoom, 14 June 2023, 1PM).

²⁷ Nominees would also have to swear (*baiah*) to stay loyal to the party and never betray their obligations to the people if they were elected.

²⁸ Interview with Ahmad Fathi Yusoff.

²⁹ Decided based on Islamic knowledge and state administration based on Syariah (*Siyasah Syar'iyah*).

³⁰ A good example of the hierarchical difference of the MSU and JKPP was seen in the Melaka state election in 2021. Apart from deciding on the eligibility of the state election candidates, and on what

needed to be done to ensure victory for the party, the MSU had also been delegated the power to decide on party logos and other implementation matters related to election tactics.

³¹ PAS members tried to limit the powers of the MSU and spiritual-leader in 2015 but this was resoundingly rejected.

³² Interview with Ahmad Fathi Yusoff.

³³ Interview with Wan Ji Wan Hussin.

³⁴ Interview with Ahmad Fathi Yusoff.

³⁵ During his time as spiritual-leader, Nik Aziz regularly held Q&As on matters pertaining to the party and the state during press conferences.

³⁶ An example of this was the decision on whether PAS was to partner with UMNO. In an MSU meeting where Haron Din chaired in the absence of TGNA, PAS president Abdul Hadi pushed for the partnership, but TGNA subsequently disagreed, and PAS didn't partner with UMNO throughout TGNA's life.

³⁷ Interview with Wan Ji Wan Hussin.

³⁸ Interview with Ahmad Fathi Yusoff.

³⁹ Most analysts think of PAS's changes in terms of the "TGNA era" (1991-2015) and the "Abdul Hadi era" (post-2015) even though TGNA was the MA and Abdul Hadi only the president.

⁴⁰ Interview with Ahmad Fathi Yusoff.

⁴¹ This convention was established due to the fact that the PAS president has typically been an ulama.

⁴² Likewise, for decisions where Abdul Hadi is in the minority at the JKPP, he could bring it up to MSU to overrule the JKPP's verdict. However, this is only a theoretical example, given that Abdul Hadi's loyalists fill both JKPP and MSU at the time of writing.

⁴³ Mujahid Yusof Rawa (2011) Menuju PAS Baru: Krisis, Peluang, dan Dinanisme. *Malaysian Insider*.

⁴⁴ Interview with Ahmad Fathi Yusoff.

⁴⁵ Ngah, N. (2016) Tugas Majlis Syura PAS semakin mudah – Hashim Jasin. *Beritan Harian*.

<https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/politik/2016/10/200684/tugas-majlis-syura-pas-semakin-mudah-hashim-jasin>

⁴⁶ Consisted others such as Mustafa Ali, Hassan Ali, Haron Din, and Nasharudin Mat Isa.

⁴⁷ Othman, J.S. (2009) Mukhtamar khas PAS pecat Hadi? *Malaysiakini*.

<https://m.malaysiakini.com/news/115681>

⁴⁸ Ahmad, B. (2022) Nik Aziz dan Hadi pernah perang dingin kerana kerajaan perpaduan, kata Tantawi. *Malaysia Dateline*. <https://www.malysiadateline.com/nik-aziz-dan-hadi-pernah-perang-dingin-kerana-kerajaan-perpaduan-kata-tantawi/>

⁴⁹ Othman, J.S. (2009) Mukhtamar khas PAS pecat Hadi? *Malaysiakini*.

<https://m.malaysiakini.com/news/115681>

⁵⁰ There were multiple public spats between Nik Aziz and Hadi Awang. In 2009, Nik Aziz issued a statement to ban Hadi Awang from any campaign speeches in Kelantan (Source: Interview with an informant).

⁵¹ The Erdogans left PAS and formed Parti Amanah Negara shortly after.

⁵² Notably, the MSU did not end ties with the other Pakatan Rakyat coalition partner, PKR, although this did not save the coalition from dissolution.

⁵³ A key episode that drew PAS and UMNO closer was when UMNO facilitated Abdul Hadi Awang's private member's bill to pave the way for the Islamic *hudud* implementation in 2016.

⁵⁴ Mohd, H. (2018) PAS beri mandate Majlis Syura Ulama tentukan Kerjasama politik. *Malaysiakini*.

<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/443386>

⁵⁵ PN was formed on 7 August 2020, whilst MN was dissolved on 13 October 2022. The total period of overlap was 798 days or 26 months.

⁵⁶ Amin, M.M. (2022) Keputusan Pas bersama PN tak dapat persetujuan Majlis Syura Ulama? *Malaysia Gazette*. <https://malaysiagazette.com/2022/10/25/keputusan-pas-bersama-pn-tak-dapat-persetujuan-majlis-syura-ulamak/>

- ⁵⁷ Granted, PAS insiders said that the process of consulting and engaging with grassroots members was unusual for the MN decision as most high-stakes decisions such as that are decided at the MSU level.
- ⁵⁸ Yeong, A. (2022) Hadi finally explains PAS' reason in choosing Perikatan, says Umno too hungry for power. *Yahoo News*. <https://malaysia.news.yahoo.com/hadi-finally-explains-pas-reason-052115306.html>
- ⁵⁹ Soo, W.J. (2022) PAS' lack of direction led to failure of Muafakat pact with UMNO, Ku Li says. *The Malay Mail Online*. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2022/10/16/pas-lack-of-direction-led-to-failure-of-muafakat-pact-with-umno-ku-li-says/33851>
- ⁶⁰ Mahmud, A.H. (2023) PAS and its chief Hadi Awang 'biggest amplifiers' of racial rhetoric at Malaysia polls last year: Study. *Channel News Asia*. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/pas-malaysia-election-hadi-awang-hate-speech-3528221>
- ⁶¹ Interview with Wan Ji Wan Hussin.
- ⁶² Interview with Razak Ridzuan.
- ⁶³ Interview with Wan Ji Wan Hussin.
- ⁶⁴ Bernama (2012) Nik Aziz: Non-Malay can be PM provided a Muslim. *Malaysiakini*. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/199115>
- ⁶⁵ The Straits Times (2023) Ire over PAS chief's remarks seen as implying non-Muslim Malaysians cannot be policymakers. *The Straits Times*. https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/pas-chief-implies-malaysian-non-muslims-cannot-be-policymakers-generating-anger?utm_campaign=Echobox&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&xtor=CS1-10
- ⁶⁶ Zurairi, A.R. (2023) Only hell awaits if non-Muslims lead, Hadi says in piece calling for Islamic supremacy. *The Malay Mail Online*. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/01/08/only-hell-awaits-if-non-muslims-lead-hadi-says-in-piece-calling-for-islamic/1710372>
- ⁶⁷ Interview with Wan Ji Wan Hussin.
- ⁶⁸ Interview with Razak Ridzuan.
- ⁶⁹ Khairuddin Razali was a PhD graduate at the National University of Malaysia, with a thesis entitled "Waw Particle Rhetoric in the Qur'an and its Influence on Translating the Meaning of the Qur'an into Malay".
- ⁷⁰ Interview with Wan Ji Wan Hussin.
- ⁷¹ Other appointees to the JKPP at that time were Nik Abduh and Zuhdi Marzuki. Khairuddin Razali was regarded as a long-time loyalist to PAS, including being part of the Abdul Hadi alliance that "masterminded" the ousting of the Erdogans in 2015. (Source: Interviews with a PAS informant).
- ⁷² Zolkiply, Z.I. (2022) Khairuddin digugurkan jawatan Setiausaha Majlis Syura Ulama PAS. *Berita Harian*. <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2022/02/921363/khairuddin-digugurkan-jawatan-setiausaha-majlis-syura-ulama-pas>
- ⁷³ Hasam, S.H. (2022) Khairuddin kekal tenang walau disingkir. *Berita Harian*. <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2022/02/922050/khairuddin-kekal-tenang-walau-disingkir>
- ⁷⁴ Corroborated by Ahmad Fathi Yusoff.
- ⁷⁵ Article 8(5) of the PAS Constitution states that the powers of termination of any MSU member lie with the MSU.
- ⁷⁶ Notably, before quitting the party in 2015, the Erdogans tried to propose a constitutional change to devolve the power of termination of MSU members to the body that appointed the MSU members rather than concentrating it aint the MSU only. This proposal, however, was rejected on the basis that it reduces the MSU's powers.
- ⁷⁷ Mutalib, Z.A. (2022) Letak jawatan elak krisis perlembagaan dalam PAS – Mohd Khairuddin. *Berita Harian*. <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/politik/2022/02/925567/letak-jawatan-elak-krisis-perlembagaan-dalam-pas-mohd-khairuddin>
- ⁷⁸ Mahfuz Omar claimed that this did not happen under the previous leaderships of Yusof Rawa, Fadzil Noor, and Nik Aziz.

- ⁷⁹ Radhi, R. (2022) Kegagalan Abdul Hadi urus Pendapat Dorong Khairuddin Keluar PAS? *Getaran*. <https://www.getaran.my/artikel/politik/20779/kegagalan-abdul-hadi-urus-pendapat-dorong-khairuddin-keluar-pas>
- ⁸⁰ Interview with Wan Ji Wan Hussin.
- ⁸¹ Haddasana (2023) Feqah Madani | Mengenang Legasi Almarhum Tok Guru Nik Aziz. *Facebook videos*. <https://www.facebook.com/WanJiJunot/videos/1978654085813585/>
- ⁸² Nik Aziz was more tolerant of non-Muslims and moderate parties such as DAP and PKR.
- ⁸³ Ghazali, N.F. (2023) Adik Nik Aziz seru jangan undi Mohd Amar. *Malaysiakini*. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/673684>
- ⁸⁴ Mohd Amar was the head of Pengkalan Chepa parliamentary seat.
- ⁸⁵ Abdullah, M.Y. (2023) PRN: Nik Abduh tolak jadi calon PRN Kelantan. *Utusan Malaysia*. <https://www.utusan.com.my/nasional/2023/07/prn-nik-abduh-tolak-jadi-calon-prn-kelantan/>
- ⁸⁶ Nik Abduh implied that he knew of potential corruption that happened in PAS, in the leaked “Ana tahu” (I know”) video online.
- ⁸⁷ Notably, when the late TGNA was awarded the highest civilian honour, Tan Sri, Abdul Hadi did not issue any statement of congratulations or appreciation. (Source: Interview with an informant).
- ⁸⁸ Chai, J. (2023) PAS’s overconfidence might be its undoing. *Fulcrum*. <https://fulcrum.sg/pas-over-confidence-might-be-its-undoing/>
- ⁸⁹ Deputy president of PAS, Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man, has stated the party’s wishes to rekindle the MN with UMNO.
- ⁹⁰ FMT Reporters (2023) Change of MB if PAS retains Kelantan. *Free Malaysia Today*. <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2023/08/11/change-of-mb-if-pas-retains-kelantan/>
- ⁹¹ The Star (2023) Kelantan voters wanted to hear about alternatives, says analyst. *The Star*. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/08/14/kelantan-voters-wanted-to-hear-about-alternatives-says-analyst>
- ⁹² Rahim, N.F.A. and Razali, H. (2023) PAS Kelantan dukacita terlepas DUN Kota Lama, kalah DUN Galas. *Berita Harian*. <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2023/08/1139695/pas-kelantan-dukacita-terlepas-dun-kota-lama-kalah-dun-galas>

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